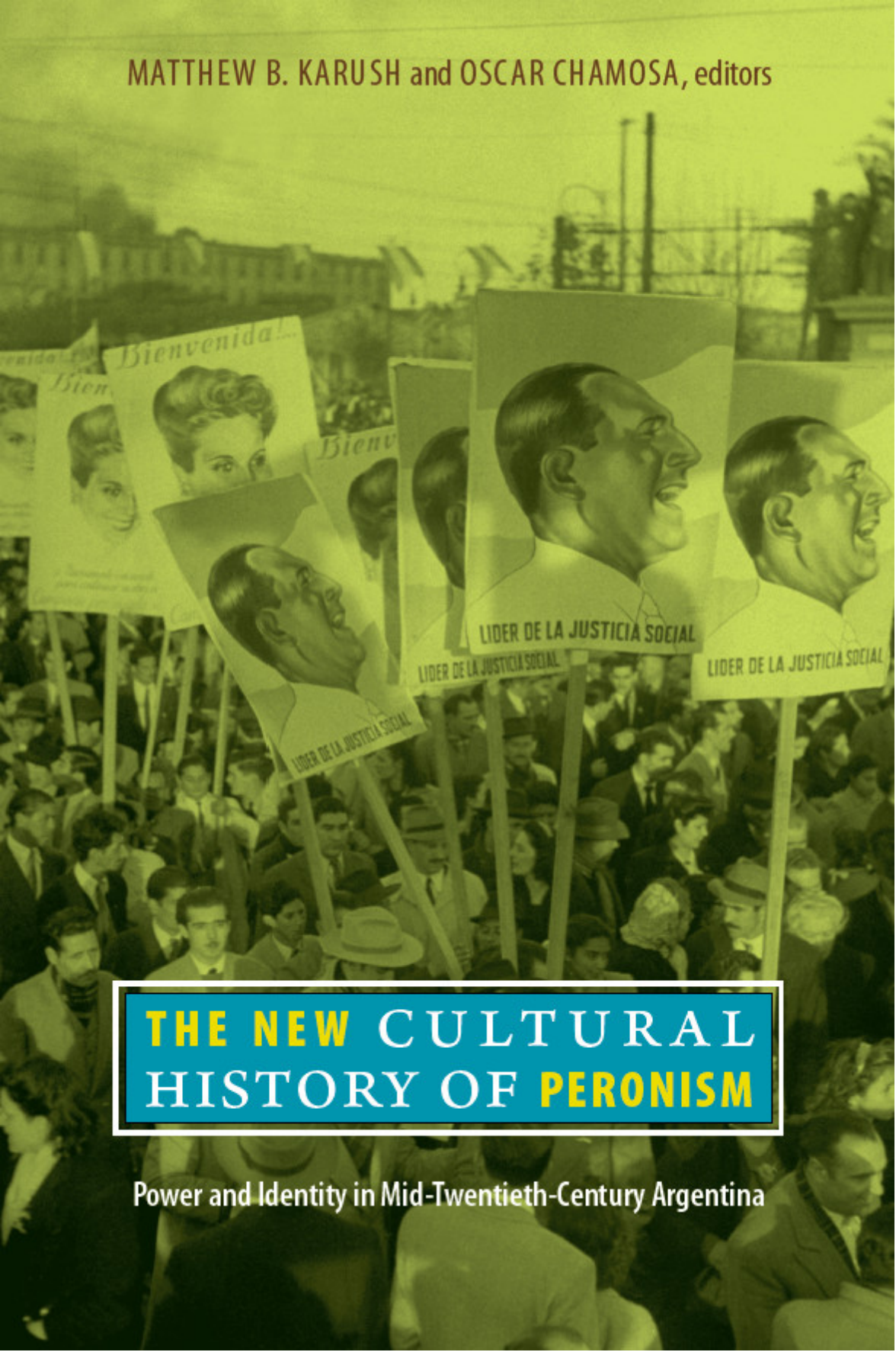
MATTHEW B. KARUSH and OSCAR CHAMOSA, editors



THE NEW CULTURAL HISTORY OF PERONISM

Power and Identity in Mid-Twentieth-Century Argentina

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This project began as a panel on Argentine cultural history at the meeting of the Southeastern Council of Latin American Studies in San José, Costa Rica, in 2007. As we editors exchanged e-mail messages in the months leading up to the conference, we realized that we had stumbled upon an important historiographical trend: a generation of young historians of Argentina had begun to produce exciting new work on the cultural aspects of the Peronist experience. Informed by recent trends in Latin American historiography, this research had the potential to transform our understanding of the period from 1946 to 1955, in many ways the key turning point in Argentine history. Since this new interpretation-in-progress was the work of several historians working independently, an edited volume seemed the best way to have these scholars engage in a dialogue and to introduce their work to a broad audience.

We would like to thank all the contributors to this book for their willingness to participate in an extremely productive process of give and take. We are grateful as well to Valerie Millholland at Duke University Press for her enthusiastic support of the project and for an unending stream of good advice. Both the University of Georgia and George Mason University provided research and travel support, and a "Creative Award" grant from George Mason University funded the translation of the three chapters originally written in Spanish. Beatrice D. Gurwitz produced excellent translations of these chapters under some very demanding time constraints. Two chapters were previously published in Argentina: chapter 6 in Anahi Ballent, *Las huellas de la política: vivienda, ciudad, peronismo en Buenos Aires, 1943–1955* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2006), and chapter 7 in Mirta Zaida Lobato, ed., *Cuando las mujeres reinaban: belleza, virtud y poder en la Argentina del*

siglo XX (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2005). By allowing us to republish these chapters, Mirta Lobato and Anahi Ballent helped us to present a more inclusive view of scholarship produced in North American and Argentine universities. John Chasteen and Mark Healey served as conscientious and creative readers for the press; their many useful suggestions improved the book immeasurably. We are also grateful to a third reader who served anonymously. Finally, we thank Alison Landsberg and Patricia Richards for their ideas and their inspiration.

Matthew B. Karush and Oscar Chamosa

INTRODUCTION

As we write this introductory essay, current events in Argentina have revealed yet again the enduring relevance of Peronism. On 10 December 2007 Cristina Fernández de Kirchner was sworn in as Argentina's thirty-fourth constitutional president, the second woman to occupy that office and the seventh Peronist. Returns from the previous October's general election show that Fernández's ticket lost in high- and middle-income urban districts, secured a strong advantage in the industrial belt and secondary cities, and won by a landslide in small towns and rural communities across the country. Despite Argentina's pronounced political instability over the last sixty years, these results suggest that underlying patterns of electoral preference have remained remarkably stable.[1] Peronism's most recent resurgence indicates that the movement is much more than the cynical electoral machine dismissed by many political analysts during the 1990s, when Carlos Menem engineered the party's embrace of neoliberalism. Not only has Peronism retained its electoral power, but many of its central images and rhetorical moves remain staples of political discourse. Throughout the winter of 2008 a conflict between the government and the agricultural sector dragged on for four months, producing massive street demonstrations, roadblocks, strikes, lockouts, and angry debates in the press and the National Congress. President Fernández denounced farmers who opposed her government's increase in the export tax as greedy enemies of the poor, while her pro-farmer foes charged her with trampling on democratic institutions. The verbal virulence of both camps shocked the country with words that seemed to have been taken directly from the political playbook of 1945.

Of course historians hardly needed current events to remind them of Peronism's significance. Virtually all accounts of Argentina's modern his-

tory have identified the first Perón regime, from 1946 to 1955, as the critical turning point. Latin America's prototypical populist government mobilized the nation's growing working class behind its project for rapid industrialization and corporatist political organization. Channeling export earnings into the industrial sector and into the pockets of workers, Perón transformed Argentina's economy, its social structure, and its political culture in ways that continue to shape Argentine reality. Unsurprisingly this experience has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention; certainly no other period in the nation's history has been the object of so much study. Nevertheless key questions remain. For decades the prevalence of top-down approaches and of certain forms of economic determinism inhibited an understanding of working-class, Peronist identity. Later works used classic social history methodology to illuminate the perspectives of rank-and-file Peronists, but they tended to oversimplify the interaction between popular consciousness and state action. With this book we hope to demonstrate the potential of a theoretically informed cultural history to chart a course that avoids these pitfalls and to produce a richer understanding of Peronism.

Like Luis Alberto Romero, the authors collected in this book view the struggle unleashed by Perón's rise to power as a "cultural conflict." Notwithstanding Peronism's initial attempts to build a multiclass alliance, the regime developed a deeply polarizing appeal that divided Argentina into two irreconcilable subcultures. But Romero describes the conflict as cultural in order to minimize it. In this view the dispute between Peronists and anti-Peronists was "cultural" rather than "real"; since Perón did not expropriate the means of production, fundamental interests were not at stake.[2] By contrast, we are more inclined to accept Tulio Halperín Donghi's assessment that the advent of Peronism amounted to a "social revolution . . . under the aegis of the Peronist regime, all the relations between social groups were suddenly redefined, and to see that, it was enough to walk the streets or ride a streetcar."[3] As Halperín suggests, the Peronist transformation was radical enough to sow the seeds of the brutal and seemingly unending conflict that marked the decades after Perón's fall. To define this process as cultural is not to downplay its significance but to reframe it as an object of historical inquiry.

Such a reframing implies the inclusion of new topics—such as commercial culture and ethnic identity—as well as the use of new methods.

Inspired by recent approaches to the cultural history of Latin America, the chapters that follow highlight the system of symbolic representations that transformed the collective identities of vast portions of the Argentine population. Yet they situate this cultural development within the process of state formation. In other words, this is a cultural history that is simultaneously a political history. It illuminates Peronism first by locating it in the longer sweep of Argentine cultural development: without downplaying the regime's innovations and impact, this book reveals how existing values, ideologies, practices, and traditions shaped the Peronist experience. Second, the book reconsiders the interactions between the regime and ordinary Argentines, revealing the mediating role of the capitalist marketplace and avoiding the facile binarism of resistance or domination. The chapters that follow show Peronist and anti-Peronist identities to have emerged from the complex negotiation between dynamic cultural traditions, official policies, commercial imperatives, and popular perceptions. By attending to this multilayered process, the book exposes the unintended consequences, contradictions, and ambivalences that have characterized Argentine populism.

In this introduction we begin by describing the emergence in recent decades of cultural approaches to the history of Peronism. Social history, Marxist ideological analysis, the "linguistic turn" in historical scholarship, gender studies, and finally cultural studies have debunked the determinist certainties of earlier structural approaches, even as they have expanded the scope of historical inquiry beyond labor politics and official policy. Next we will describe the methodological innovations of recent Latin American historiography, the "new cultural history" that we seek to bring to bear on the case of Peronism. In so doing we will further specify the precise contribution of this book to the study of Argentina's most important decade.

PERONISM STUDIES: FROM MODERNIZATION THEORY TO CULTURAL HISTORY

The academic study of Peronism began with the works of the sociologists Gino Germani, Torcuato Di Tella, and Miguel Murmis and Juan Carlos Portantiero, who sought to explain why the working class followed Perón and to define the political system that resulted.[4] Writing in the 1950s, Germani embraced the modernization theory then in vogue,

explaining Peronism as a product of the asynchronies produced by the transition from a traditional to a modern society. According to Germani, Peronism recruited most of its initial following from among the industrial workers who migrated to Buenos Aires from the countryside in the decade before 1945. These workers were rapidly adjusting to an urban and industrial milieu but still belonged to a traditional society and were physically and culturally separated from the older, more self-conscious working class.[5] The new migrants sought to advance their political and economic claims by supporting an authoritarian project that resonated with their traditional values. Germani, an avowed anti-Peronist himself, emphasized the irrationality of the pre-modern masses who he claimed constituted the bulk of Perón's constituency. Di Tella strengthened this account by adding a different element: the support of the middle cadres of institutions such as the army, the press, academia, and the church. According to Di Tella these dissatisfied members of the intelligentsia found in Peronism a movement opposed to the status quo that satisfied their aspirations for upward mobility.[6] The presence of these middle cadres helped to explain some of Peronism's ideological ambivalence. However, once economic development allowed the middle class to meet its expectations, these sectors abandoned the class alliance.

Writing in 1971, Murmis and Portantiero examined the actions and organization of labor unions in the pre-Perón years to refute some of Germani's generalizations.[7] They found that much of the so-called new working class had already been incorporated into the labor union structure, and they argued that both internal migrants and established urban workers supported Perón not because of an atavistic attachment to authoritarianism but rather out of a rational calculation of their class interests. When Perón became secretary of labor in 1943 he encountered a well-organized working class long accustomed to negotiation with the state. He responded with a series of significant measures that advanced the interests of labor unions in concrete and measurable ways. In this context labor's responsiveness to Perón's overtures made perfect sense. Murmis and Portantiero turned Germani's modernization paradigm on its head: workers' decisions to support Perón were an expression not of their irrational traditionalism but of their class consciousness.

Despite their differences Germani and the revisionists shared a pro-

nounced structuralism. Both accounts depicted Peronism as the result of a particular pattern of economic development rather than of a dynamic and contingent political process. Beginning in 1969, with the publication of Félix Luna's careful chronological reconstruction of the events of 1945, a new generation of historians paid closer attention to the complex conjuncture opened by the military coup of 1943.[8] This approach proved extremely fruitful, culminating in Juan Carlos Torre's *La vieja guardia sindical y Perón,* which stressed the contingency of Perón's dealings with labor as well as the key mediating role played by the existing union leadership.[9] According to Torre, union leaders recognized the danger of supporting an authoritarian project, but they saw little alternative given the extreme hostility to social reform that characterized the opposition to Perón. Torre's work complemented an extensive literature on the labor history of the pre-Perón era, which traced many of labor's strategies and predispositions to the struggles of the 1930s.[10] In a sense this new scholarship followed Murmis and Portantiero in describing organized labor's actions as rational, but not, as those authors had suggested, because they corresponded to workers' objective class interests. Rather, the working-class embrace of Peronism only made sense within the extremely fluid conjuncture of Argentina in the 1940s.[11]

From a very different perspective, the Marxist political theorist Ernesto Laclau also began to chip away at the economic determinism that had shaped earlier interpretations of Peronism. Seeking to define "populism" in general and Peronism in particular, Laclau criticized Germani and Di Tella for reducing the phenomenon to the political expression of a particular class or class alliance. Instead, he argued, class discourses are always articulated with cultural "raw materials" that have no necessary affiliation with any class. Populism occurs when these elements—what Laclau called "popular-democratic interpellations"—are presented as oppositional to the ideology of the dominant bloc.[12] In contrast to European fascism, Peronism empowered workers against the ruling class, and it did so by drawing on and rearticulating available discursive elements. Peronism's hostility to liberal democracy, for example, was not the product of traditional authoritarianism but the result of the crisis of the 1930s, in which the historic articulation between democracy and liberalism had been severed. Thus by 1945 Peronism could present liberalism as an

ideology linked to elite class interests, while offering workers a more socially defined democracy, together with industrialism and nationalism, as an "antagonistic option" against the oligarchy.

In an early critique of this interpretation, Emilio de Ípola accused Laclau of focusing excessively on the "conditions of production" of Peronist discourse while overlooking the "conditions of reception." In so doing Laclau had implied that Peronist discourse constructed its subject —the Peronist working class—and denied any agency to workers themselves. De Ípola argued that the production and reception of discourse must be situated in its historical context. Much as Torre and other labor historians would do, he stressed the dynamic relationship between Perón and the unions from 1943 to 1946. In particular he emphasized the union leadership's failed attempt to retain a margin of autonomy from Perón's vertical leadership. It was the defeat of the "worker's populism (*populismo obrero*)" represented by the Labor Party that made possible Perón's national-capitalist version of populism.[13] In this way de Ípola accepted Laclau's focus on discourse but sought to make it less abstract by bringing politics back into the analysis.

By the late 1980s the classic structuralist accounts of Peronism had therefore been largely discarded in favor of studies that focused either on politics or on discourse. Labor historians had demonstrated that workers' support for the Peronist project reflected the strategic decisions of a union leadership in a rapidly changing political environment rather than a particular pattern of economic development. Meanwhile, Laclau and de Ípola had uncovered the importance of Peronist language: any explanation of rank-and-file Peronist identity needed to attend not just to the actions of union leaders but also to a longer discursive history. This attention to language, part of the larger "linguistic turn" in historical scholarship, prompted a shift in Peronism studies from socioeconomic analysis toward an emphasis on discourse.[14] Juan Perón's speeches, and Eva's to a lesser extent, previously dismissed as mere pandering, now attracted serious analysis. Beyond the presidential couple, scholarly attention extended toward a wide range of discursive production, including that of the opposition and of intellectuals of both camps. Most of these works combined a new attention to the linguistic aspects of speeches and written texts with the more traditional methods of intellectual history.

Still, these various approaches to politics and to discourse, focused as they were on intellectuals, government officials, and union leaders, shed very little light on what Peronism meant for workers. It would fall to the historian Daniel James to initiate serious analysis of this question. James's *Resistance and Integration* (1988) signaled an important departure from earlier scholarship.[15] Set in the larger chronological frame of 1946 to 1976, the book charts the interactions of the state and organized labor during the period, but it also devotes attention to the lives and actions of the Peronist rank and file. Drawing on a wide range of sources including personal testimonies and newsletters of local, often clandestine Peronist organizations in the industrial belts of Buenos Aires and Rosario, James reconstructs the "structure of feelings" that informed the behavior of Peronist workers in the face of repression. The book's examination of workers' initial support for Perón has been particularly influential. Instead of reexamining the political calculations of union leaders, James explores why Perón's rhetoric and political style appealed to the rank and file. Without denying the existence of a Peronist ideology, he highlights the performative aspects of Peronism, which included not only Juan and Eva Perón's speeches from the balcony of the Casa Rosada but also demonstrations, strikes, and, after the fall of Perón in 1955, acts of sabotage and other clandestine operations.[16] In a way James's bottom-up approach resurrected the pioneering research carried out during the 1960s by the sociologist Julio Mafud and the anthropologist Hugo Ratier, who had been interested in the constitution of a Peronist subjectivity.[17] James's emphasis on popular reception reinvigorated the study of Peronist discourse and revealed for the first time the enormous potential of a "culturalist" approach to the history of Peronism.

A recent summary of research on the "democratization of welfare" in the Perón years by Juan Carlos Torre and Elisa Pastoriza reminds us of the revolutionary impact of the regime, as the working class enjoyed dramatically expanded access to education, tourism, housing, and entertainment.[18] Following James, Torre and Pastoriza stress that although this transformation was engineered by the state, it was decisively influenced by rank-and-file workers, who were anything but passive recipients of official largesse. However, to date very few studies have emulated James's innovative reconstructions of popular reception. Rosa Aboy's

study of Peronist housing policies, which uses oral history to assess individuals' responses to the houses they received from the regime, is an important exception.[19]

Since the earliest studies, scholars have recognized the importance of mass culture in preparing the terrain for Perón's political success and in communicating the regime's political message. Di Tella, for example, carved out a key role for radio and the cinema in creating a "revolution of rising expectations" that in his view yielded widespread support for populism: "The mass media raise the levels of aspiration of their audience . . . Yet economic expansion lags behind . . . with expectations soaring high above the possibilities of satisfying them."[20] De Ípola stressed the enormous success of Perón's discursive techniques and argued that scholars needed to pay careful attention to the communicative strategies of Perón and his team.[21] Once again, though, it was James who demonstrated the political significance of Perón's rhetoric, paying particular attention to his use of popular culture.[22] Perón borrowed liberally from the nineteenth-century epic poem *Martín Fierro*, as well as from tango lyrics and popular expressions in *lunfardo*, the "disreputable" argot of Buenos Aires, to make himself understood by his blue-collar audiences. Though many critics of Peronism saw this rhetorical strategy as condescending demagoguery, James found in it the seeds of an enduring Peronist identity. Likewise, in his more recent work James has pointed to the importance of popular melodrama in shaping the working-class consciousness that would prove so receptive to Peronism.[23]

The study of the Peronist propaganda machine has produced a growing and increasingly nuanced body of literature. The personality cult around Perón and Eva, the politicizing of the school curricula, the profusion of official advertising on the radio, in newsreels, and in printed media, as well as the regime's efforts to shape the contents of movies and radio programs, are among the practices that have drawn the most attention.[24] Within this literature the works of Mariano Plotkin and more recently Marcela Gené stand out. Plotkin's *Mañana es San Perón* carefully examines Peronist textbooks as well as the crucial role of the Eva Perón Foundation in generating support for the regime, but perhaps its most important contribution is its emphasis on the construction of Peronist power through massive political rituals.[25] A case in point is the annual October 17 celebration, the commemoration of Peronism's foundational

moment in 1945, when Perón was ousted from his multiple offices in the military government, briefly detained in a military facility, and restored to power after massive demonstrations by workers. Though October 17 is a favorite theme in Peronist historiography, Plotkin shifts the spotlight from the historical episode to the political history of the public commemoration, showing, among other things, how the state wrested control over the meaning of the celebration from grassroots Peronist organizations such as the Labor Party and the unions. Plotkin describes October 17 as an annual ritual of communion between Perón and his followers, as important in consolidating both Perón's leadership and Peronist identity as the original act being commemorated. For her part, Gené offers a thick description of the visual representation of workers in Peronist propaganda.[26] Gené reveals that the propaganda machine was not limited to the state but involved other actors, including the Peronist Party, the labor unions, and the sympathetic media. Against the naïve notion that propaganda is only employed by totalitarian regimes, she demonstrates how Peronist publicists borrowed from Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, especially in the crucial area of labor iconography.

Recent scholarship has pushed the study of Peronism in interesting new directions. Particularly noteworthy is a long-overdue corrective to the excessive focus on the national government and its policies. A new crop of studies on provincial Peronism reminds us that Peronism was born in the industrial corridor encompassing Greater Buenos Aires and La Plata, and that any study of the movement's origins and development should start there.[27] Expanding the geographical scope even farther, several scholars are now laying the groundwork for a truly national assessment of Peronism. These historians reject the image of the Argentine interior as a politically empty place that merely implemented policies designed in Buenos Aires.[28] Gustavo Rubinstein, for instance, shows how the rapid rise of the Sugar Workers' Union in Tucumán consolidated the Peronist presence in the interior and revolutionized the electoral politics of a province traditionally dominated by the planter elite. But far from being a docile labor branch of a centralized regime, sugar workers did not hesitate to go on strike against Perón's explicit orders when their interests conflicted with the agenda of policymakers in Buenos Aires.[29]

In addition to this geographic expansion, perhaps the most exciting recent development in Peronism studies is the widespread incorporation

of gender as an analytical category.[30] While the prominent role of Eva Perón and the political role of women have long preoccupied historians, it is only recently that scholars have begun to focus on how Peronism may have reshaped gender roles and representations. In these new studies historians have found little evidence of a radical challenge to existing patriarchal norms. In fact the expansion of welfare during Peronism increased the burden on women by increasing their obligation to provide services and reinforcing their role as objects of state control. For example, Karina Ramacciotti and Adriana Valobra have demonstrated that Peronist health policies appropriated both traditional Catholic constructions of female domesticity and the modernizing discourse of hygiene in an effort to turn mothers into unpaid agents of a male-dominated public health system.[31] Although the best of this scholarship is sensitive to how women's demands prompted and conditioned state responses, it has fallen again to Daniel James to explore more fully the ways working-class women made sense of Peronism's gendered discourses. His *Doña María's Story* uses the life history of one Peronist activist to produce a rich account of the complex interactions between Peronist gender representations and the consciousness and practices of women.[32]

Despite the recent advances in Peronism studies, there is a great deal more to be done. The structural determinism of earlier scholarship has been largely discarded, and scholars now appreciate the contingent political dynamics that helped shape the movement in its early years. Likewise, historians now recognize that Peronism's impact cannot be reduced to its economic effects; the regime's discursive innovations helped produce new identities that have shaped the course of Argentine political history. Yet while the study of Peronist rhetoric and representations has grown increasingly sophisticated, most scholars continue to conceptualize the encounter between the state and the masses in reductive ways. The explorations of Plotkin, Gené, and others into what might be called the "cultural policies" of the Perón regime represent a crucial line of inquiry given Peronism's unprecedented use of these techniques to generate political support. But the production of discourse involves more than the intentions of policymakers. Juan Perón's political imagination, like that of any historical actor, was enabled and constrained by the cultural material available to him in the time and place in which he lived. At the same time, as James demonstrated twenty years ago, the study of

official policy needs to be complemented by careful consideration of how rank-and-file workers understood Peronism. Under the influence of classic social history methodology and of Gramsci's understanding of hegemony, the dominant approach tends to reduce the role of subordinate groups to either resistance or acceptance. Workers in particular are still usually treated as a group with an objective class interest that the historian can deduce, and any transformation of their identity is generally attributed to Perón's top-down project. In other words, both the production and reception of Peronist discourse, to borrow de Ípola's formulation, need to be approached in more subtle ways. Popular consciousness is not determined by interests that are in some way prior to discourse, nor is the state an autonomous and omnipotent actor, able to shape popular identities as it wishes. Cultural history can and must reconceptualize this encounter.

Outside the field of history Peronism has long raised questions about the complex interconnections between culture and politics. Laclau, for example, used Peronism to generate a larger theory about how culture and class operate in political discourses. More recently the movement has continued to provide rich material for theoretical innovation. The sociologist Javier Auyero has examined Peronist networks in a shantytown in Buenos Aires in the 1990s to generate a new approach to the problem of clientelism.[33] Auyero treats the relationship between patron and client as a cultural phenomenon, emphasizing the production of meaning in addition to the exchange of favors. Similarly, the political scientist Pierre Ostiguy has studied Peronism to examine the role of culture in the process of political identification, positing a framework in which positions and identities are defined by the intersection of the axis of high culture and low culture with the left-right political spectrum.[34] As a result of the diffusion of Laclau's work, Peronism continues to occupy an important place in cultural studies as well. John Kraniauskas, for example, has found in the novels of Manuel Puig suggestive insights into the connections between melodrama and Peronism, particularly in the role played by Eva Perón.[35] But if these nonhistorical approaches to Peronism have produced theoretical innovation, their contributions have been weakened by their reliance on relatively simplistic historical accounts. Lacking sustained engagement with archival materials from the period, scholars in cultural studies have tended to produce simplistic

interpretations of early Peronism. Not only can a new cultural history of Peronism provide a more satisfying account of this crucial period in Argentine history, but it can also provide the basis for more successful theory building.

THE NEW CULTURAL HISTORY

The phrase "new cultural history" by now has various referents. Lynn Hunt's *The New Cultural History* (1989) took stock of the influence of Foucault, Geertz, LaCapra, and others on contemporary historians of the United States and Europe. The essays in the book explored the promise and pitfalls of approaches that stressed the importance of language or discourse.[36] Ten years later a special issue of the *Hispanic American Historical Review* announced the arrival of "Mexico's New Cultural History." In this iteration the phrase indicated above all an effort to reconceptualize the political agency of marginalized actors; the dominant influences were Gramsci, subaltern studies, and the larger "linguistic turn" within the historical profession.[37] In fact this reconceptualization has not been limited to Mexicanists. Over the last fifteen years or so it has begun to transform the historiography of Latin America as a whole, even if its impact among historians of Argentina has been somewhat less pronounced.[38] By bringing to bear the methodological and theoretical insights of the new scholarship on the study of Peronism, we hope to demonstrate that this new approach to cultural history can transform our historical understanding of the period.

While this rich new scholarship resists any simple gloss, Steve Stern has usefully summarized its major innovation as "a transition from studies of 'politics and society' to studies of 'politics and culture.'"[39] The former approach, dominant among Latin Americanist historians writing in the 1970s and 1980s, explored popular agency as shaped by economic and political structures. Among studies of Peronism, James's *Resistance and Integration* is perhaps the best example of this approach. By contrast, the new work moves away from the model of "history from below," disavowing any attempt to locate the uncontaminated consciousness of subordinate groups. In Stern's words, it asks "how people constructed their political imagination *within* the process of state formation."[40] Informed by sophisticated cultural analysis, it understands individual subjectivities as culturally constructed and treats politics as an arena involv-

ing identities produced simultaneously from above and below. Rather than view the agency of subalterns as motivated by some set of objective interests that the historian can discern, it envisions these actors as engaged with multiple discourses in a struggle over meaning. It avoids imposing the simple framework of domination and resistance, opting instead for a more dynamic understanding of "hegemonic processes." In the best cases this approach also avoids the seductive pitfall of easy triumphalism, by exploring how culture constrains, as well as facilitates, individual agency.

Inspired by the recent historiography this book aims to do more than simply endorse the inclusion of cultural topics in studies of the period. As we have described, the study of Peronist cultural policy is already fairly well developed. Many of the chapters in this book contribute to this important project, describing for example the regime's sponsorship of folk music and beauty contests. Yet the cultural history proposed here goes beyond an analysis of official policy. As in the best recent scholarship on Latin American history, we conceive of cultural history as a way of studying politics. Our goal is to reimagine the encounter between the masses and the state. We hope to move beyond a voluntarist understanding of the state by revealing how large cultural and commercial processes shaped specific policies. At the same time, we do not intend to reconstruct an autonomous grassroots perspective. Argentines did not simply resist or adopt Peronist identities created for them by the regime. Nor did they manipulate the symbols and images provided by Peronism in defense of existing, socially determined interests. Rather, they constructed their own identities and interests through their engagement with the Peronist project, even as they pushed and pulled the regime's ideology in new directions.

While this book is not a comprehensive history of Peronism, it does touch on many of the central issues raised by the Peronist experience. Our emphasis is on the first Perón presidency, from 1946 to 1955, but one chapter considers the origins of the regime while two others explore Peronism's transformations in subsequent years. The book examines the experience and agency of women, indigenous groups, middle-class anti-Peronists, internal migrants, architects, and academics, in addition to those of urban, male workers. They assess not only class-based identities but also questions of race and gender. But although they cover a

broad range of topics, each chapter explores the nexus between the state and popular consciousness and conceives of these two spheres as mutually constitutive. While popular consciousness is both enabled and constrained by official ideology, the converse is also true.

In her chapter on the image of the "cabecita negra"—or "little blackhead"—an insult directed against internal migrants to Buenos Aires, Natalia Milanesio examines the discursive praxis through which anti-Peronists stereotyped their enemies. Middle- and upper-class opponents of the regime produced these stereotypes in response to two related threats: the massive invasion of the city by migrants from the interior and Peronism's challenge to traditional hierarchies. Milanesio explores the mechanisms through which opponents of the Peronist project elaborated a new identity in dialogue with official ideology. Analyzing the cultural conflict fought over attire, manners, and comportment, she reveals the struggles over meaning that took place in the streets, as Peronists and anti-Peronists used available categories to make sense of a world in flux. Like Milanesio, César Seveso explores how individuals made sense of and responded to a time of rapid change and rising anxiety. His chapter uses the history of emotions to illuminate the moment of Perón's overthrow in 1955. Facing the end of an era that they experienced as utopian, Peronists confronted the coup and the ensuing repression with shame and humiliation, emotions that paralyzed many in the short term. Eventually, however, memories of these emotions facilitated the recuperation and reinvention of Peronism's original heretical message.

The chapter by Mirta Lobato, María Damilakou, and Lizel Tornay explores one element of the Peronist regime's massive propaganda machine: the annual coronation of a Queen of Labor on May Day. The authors analyze photographs and accounts from the period in conjunction with a series of interviews they conducted with the queens themselves. The result is neither a vision of Peronist cultural practice as simply imposed from above nor the recuperation of an uncontaminated grassroots perspective. On the contrary, the chapter, a newly translated excerpt from a recent book, provides a sense of the deep contradictions—the opportunities and constraints—that Peronism provided to these young women. This chapter exemplifies the gendered aspects of Peronist discourse, which dramatically recentered women in the national community.

Several of the chapters approach the dialectic between the state and the masses by examining a third register located somewhere in between, namely the capitalist marketplace. In these accounts Peronism emerges as the product not only of a give and take between official ideology and popular consciousness but of a larger cultural process shaped by attitudes and values disseminated in commercial culture. Here too this book follows trends in Latin American historiography, which has recently generated several sophisticated studies of the intersection between mass cultural capitalism and national politics.[41] Matthew Karush's exploration of Peronism's roots in the melodramatic mass culture of the 1930s suggests that commercial dynamics shaped the development of populism in Argentina even before the emergence of Juan Perón. From this perspective the consciousness of Peronist workers cannot be reduced either to official ideology imposed from above nor to a particular pattern of economic development or labor politics. Rather, mass culture disseminated certain discursive elements among popular audiences that the Peróns were able to repackage toward their own ends. Likewise, Oscar Chamosa's examination of folk music reveals that the popularity of this genre was the result of the complex interplay between official policy, market pressures, and consumer preference. His exploration of the commercial appeal of folk music reveals that national identity was not simply a unilateral creation of the state, nor could the regime control its meanings. Folk music retained its popularity and symbolic power for Peronists and anti-Peronists alike.

Like Karush and Chamosa, Eduardo Elena explores cultural history at the interface between state, market, and masses. His analysis of the cultural politics of the Peronist magazine *Argentina* reveals the way the capitalist marketplace constrained the ideological maneuvers of Peronist intellectuals. Building on his earlier work on Peronism and consumption, Elena's essay highlights the limits of Peronism's cultural populism in matters of taste.[42] Like Elena, Anahi Ballent takes a novel look at Peronist aesthetics. Ballent's chapter, taken from her recent book on Peronism's architectural policies and practices, examines the various construction projects associated with Eva Perón and demonstrates how these buildings helped constitute Evita's political iconicity. Taken together, the chapters by Karush, Chamosa, Elena, and Ballent situate the radical ruptures of Peronism within longer-term cultural continuities. Popular melo-

drama, *hispanista* versions of national identity, and bourgeois aesthetics, as well as rustic and neoclassical architectural styles, represented established elements of the Argentine cultural milieu before the emergence of Peronism. Rather than build the New Argentina from scratch, the regime redeployed these existing elements, transforming them for its own ends, but also producing a series of unintended consequences.

Among the more fascinating insights produced by this new cultural history of Peronism is an appreciation for the centrality of race in Peronist and anti-Peronist representations. Diana Lenton's chapter offers the most explicit analysis of Peronism and racial identity. She analyzes the "malón de la paz," a protest in Buenos Aires in 1946 by indigenous groups from the interior provinces Salta and Jujuy, to track the complex interaction between popular action and state policy in producing an indigenous political identity. The racialized aspects of the Peronist experience are visible as well in Milanesio's chapter on anti-Peronist stereotypes and in Chamosa's examination of folklore, which offered an alternative to Argentina's dominant white culture. Since official Peronism did not include race as an explicit component of its project, historians have tended to overlook its significance. Together these chapters reveal some of the ways that race did in fact structure the lived experience of Peronism.

What emerges most clearly from this new cultural history is a picture of the deep contradictions that characterized Peronism. Peronism toppled class hierarchies, yet often upheld bourgeois respectability and aesthetics. Its heretical message aimed to mobilize the masses, yet its efforts to institutionalize itself led to an official ideology that emphasized discipline and good manners. It embraced the *cabecitas negras* of the interior and promoted folk music as an alternative to the white nation envisioned by Argentine liberals. Yet Peronists, like conservative nationalists before them, stressed the Spanish roots of Argentine folk music, thereby reinscribing whiteness. Peronist nationalism was often at odds with the regime's promise of a comfortable, modern lifestyle—a promise largely fulfilled through foreign imports. If populism, as Laclau defined it, occurs when "popular interpellations" are directed against the dominant power bloc, then the contributors to this book suggest that this political strategy unleashes a complex process marked by contradiction, ambivalence, and conflict. These contradic-

tions were the unintended consequence of Perón's appeal, and they reveal the cultural constraints within which the regime operated. Given the resilience and continuing power of Peronism in contemporary Argentina, a historical examination of these tensions is as urgent today as it was fifty years ago.

NOTES

1 República Argentina, Poder Judicial de la Nación, http://www.pjn.gov.ar.
2 Luis Alberto Romero, *Breve historia contemporánea de la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994), 157–63.
3 Halperín Donghi, *La larga agonía de la Argentina peronista*, 27. The translation is ours.
4 Comprehensive surveys of the literature on Peronism include de Ípola, "Ruptura y continuidad"; Buchrucker, "Interpretations of Peronism"; Plotkin, "The Changing Perceptions of Peronism"; see also the reaction to de Ípola's review by Jorrat, "Reflexiones sobre un balance de las interpretaciones del peronismo," and de Ípola's response in the same issue.
5 Gino Germani, *Política y sociedad en una época de transición* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1962).
6 Torcuato Di Tella, "Populism and Reform in Latin America," *Obstacles to Change in Latin America*, ed. Claudio Veliz (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 70–78.
7 Murmis and Portantiero, *Estudios sobre los orígenes del peronismo*.
8 Félix Luna, *El 45: Crónica de un año decisivo* (Buenos Aires: J. Alvarez, 1969).
9 Torre, *La vieja guardia sindical y Perón*. On this historiographical trend toward an emphasis on the "conjuncture" see Adelman, "Reflections on Argentine Labour and the Rise of Perón."
10 Key works include Horowitz, *Argentine Unions, the State, and the Rise of Perón*; del Campo, *Sindicalismo y peronismo*; Tamarin, *The Argentine Labor Movement*. For a recent summary of the scholarship on Peronist unions see Doyon, "La formación del sindicalismo peronista."
11 Proving that in the case of Peronism old conflicts are never truly resolved, Di Tella has recently taken issue with the views of Torre and many others, while resurrecting some aspects of Germani's long-discarded thesis. See Di Tella, *Perón y los sindicatos*.
12 Laclau, "Towards a Theory of Populism."
13 de Ípola, "Populismo e ideología," 946.
14 Buchrucker, *Nacionalismo y peronismo*; Sigal and Verón, *Perón o muerte*, 72–

74; Bianchi and Sanchís, *El Partido Peronista Femenino*; Plotkin, "La 'ideología' de Perón"; Walter, "The Right and the Peronists."

15 James, *Resistance and Integration*.

16 Also influential in this regard was James, "October 17th and 18th, 1945."

17 Mafud, *Sociología del peronismo*; Ratier, *El cabecita negra*.

18 Torre and Pastoriza, "La democratización del bienestar."

19 Aboy, *Viviendas para el pueblo*. See also Aboy, " 'The Right to a Home.' "

20 Di Tella, "Populism and Reform in Latin America," 49.

21 de Ípola, "Populismo e ideología," 951.

22 James, *Resistance and Integration*, 22–25.

23 James, *Doña María's Story*, 255.

24 On Perón's mass media policies see Ciria, *Cultura y política popular*; Sirven, *Perón y los medios de communicación*. On the expropriation of the newspapers see Cane-Carrasco, *The Fourth Enemy*. Several popular histories catering to a broader audience have also treated this subject. See for example D'Arino Aringolli, *La Propaganda Peronista*; Foss, "Selling a Dictatorship."

25 Plotkin, *Mañana es San Perón*.

26 Gené, *Un mundo felíz*.

27 See Aelo, "Apogeo y ocaso de un equipo dirigente"; Rein, "Preparando el camino para el peronismo"; Lobato, *La vida en las fabricas, trabajo, protesta y politica en una comunidad obrera*.

28 Silva, "Las políticas económicas y sociales del primer peronismo y sus repercusiones"; Kindgard, "Procesos sociopolíticos nacionales y conflictividad regional"; Healey, *The Ruins of the New Argentina*; Macor and Tcach, eds., *La invención del peronismo en el interior del país*.

29 Rubinstein, *Los sindicatos azucareros en los orígenes del peronismo tucumano*.

30 Guivant, *La visible Eva Perón y el invisible rol político femenino en el Peronismo*; Franco and Pulido, "¿Capitanas o guardianas del hogar?"; Di Liscia, *Mujeres y Estado en la Argentina*; Di Liscia and Rodríguez, "El cuerpo de la mujer en el marco del Estado de bienestar en la Argentina"; Ramacciotti and Valobra, eds., *Generando el Peronismo*; Milanesio, " 'The Guardian Angels of the Domestic Economy.' "

31 Ramacciotti and Valobra, " . . . *plasmar la raza fuerte* . . . Relaciones de género en la campaña sanitaria de la Secretaria de Salud Pública de la Argentina (1946–49)," *Generando el Peronismo*, 19–64.

32 James, *Doña María's Story*.

33 Auyero, *Poor People's Politics*.

34 Ostiguy, "Peronism and Anti-Peronism."

35 Kraniauskas, "Political Puig." For other cultural studies approaches that have highlighted the affinities between Peronism and mass culture see Beasley-

Murray, "Peronism and the Secret History of Cultural Studies and the Substitution of Culture for State." Tandeciarz, "Romancing the Masses."

36 Hunt, *The New Cultural History*.

37 See the essays collected in Gilbert Joseph and Susan Deans-Smith, eds., *Mexico's New Cultural History: ¿Una Lucha Libre?,* special issue of *Hispanic American Historical Review* 79, no. 2 (1999).

38 Classics of this new literature include Joseph and Nugent, eds., *Everyday Forms of State Formation*; Florencia Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Recent works of Argentine history that deploy similar strategies of cultural history include de la Fuente, *Children of Facundo*; Salvatore, *Wandering Paysanos*.

39 Stern, "Between Tragedy and Promise," 41.

40 Stern, "Between Tragedy and Promise," 41. The emphasis is ours.

41 See for example McCann, *Hello, Hello Brazil*; Joseph, Rubenstein, and Zolov, eds., *Fragments of a Golden Age*.

42 Elena, "Peronist Consumer Politics and the Problem of Domesticating Markets in Argentina."

Matthew B. Karush

POPULISM, MELODRAMA, AND THE MARKET

The Mass Cultural Origins of Peronism

> Our doctrine is simpler. I can now explain it with an example given to me by five boys in Paraná. Our doctrine embraces that first great humanitarian principle. They were in the port, and one of them had no boots. From on board, we threw him five pesos, which fell into the hands of one who was well-dressed. The four boys who witnessed the scene said: "No, that's not for you; that's for him, who's barefoot." And the boy gave the five pesos to the barefoot kid. This is our doctrine; we want one of those great gentlemen (*grandes señores*) to learn how to give to those who have no boots. We want that one day those who have everything sympathize with their fellow man, so that there are no more barefoot people and so that our children learn to smile from the moment they are born.
>
> JUAN PERÓN, 10 FEBRUARY 1946[1]

> You don't charge for such things. You do them for free, or you don't do them.
>
> LUIS SANDRINI IN THE FILM *CHINGOLO* (DEMARE, 1940) AS THE HOBO CHINGOLO, REFUSING COMPENSATION FOR HAVING SAVED THE LIFE OF A MILLIONAIRE'S SON

As historians have long recognized, Peronism cannot be understood on purely instrumentalist grounds. The movement's transformative impact on Argentine politics as well as its impressive longevity reflect the fact that it provided workers with much more than a higher standard of living; it offered them both an identity and a convincing interpretation of the society in which they lived. Thirty years ago Ernesto Laclau argued that the power of Peronism lay in its ability to mobilize already existing cultural elements and rearticulate them in defense of the class interests of Argentine workers. For Laclau, "populism starts at the point where

popular-democratic elements are presented as an antagonistic option against the dominant bloc."[2] Yet we still lack a cultural history of these "popular-democratic elements," a convincing account of the ideological transformations that made Peronist consciousness possible for Argentine workers. In the now classic first chapter of his history of Peronism, published in 1988, Daniel James laid the essential groundwork for this project. Stressing Peronism's "heretical" meanings, James revealed how the movement enabled workers to contest traditional cultural hierarchies.[3] Historians now need to revisit the period before 1943 to uncover the cultural elements that provided the discursive material out of which this heretical appeal was built; they need, in other words, to write the cultural prehistory of Peronism.

Since most Peronist workers were not union members before the advent of Perón, any such prehistory will have to look beyond the realm of organized labor. A handful of scholars have called attention to Perón's debt to the tradition of popular melodrama, visible for example in his tendency to draw on the language of the tango.[4] This insight reflects a much deeper, more pervasive indebtedness. Peronism was built in large part out of discursive elements made available by the commodified mass culture of the previous period. The 1920s and 1930s saw the explosion in Argentina of mass culture on an unprecedented scale: it was in this period that the radio, the cinema, spectator sports, and mass-circulation journalism transformed daily life. Thanks to the recent work of scholars in cultural studies, anthropology, film studies, and other disciplines, we know a great deal about the cultural products disseminated by the new media. Tango songs, soccer, domestic films, the popular press, and pulp fiction have all been the object of sustained research and analysis.[5] Nearly all these mass cultural forms appropriated the generic conventions and narrative strategies of Argentine melodrama, a literary tradition with roots in the late nineteenth century. In this chapter I trace the connections between the melodramatic mass culture that thrived on the radio stations and movie screens of the 1930s and the political appeals crafted by Juan Perón in the period between 1943 and 1946, when the movement took shape. The focus here will be on the radio and cinema of Buenos Aires, since so much of Argentina's mass culture was produced there and introduced to the rest of the country by radio networks and cinema distributors.

My attempt at a cultural prehistory of Peronism is not a tautological quest for precursors. While the pervasive mass culture of the 1930s must have had a dramatic effect on popular consciousness, this effect was multivalent. It did not lead inevitably to any particular political outcome. Moreover, Perón did not simply adopt a philosophy already formed in the mass culture of the previous period. Rather, in the specific conjuncture opened up by the coup of 1943, Perón was able to appropriate discursive elements that circulated in mass culture and refashion them into a powerful political appeal. These existing elements represent what Laclau referred to as "the residue of a unique and irreducible historical experience."[6] They helped determine the universe of the possible within the political arena of the 1940s. Recognizing the central role of mass culture in producing this discursive universe sheds important new light on Peronism. Although the cinema, radio, and the press experienced significant government intervention during the 1930s, the content of mass culture reflected the logic of the marketplace rather than any official ideology. As this chapter will demonstrate, commercial imperatives —in particular the need to compete with North American imports like jazz and Hollywood movies—reinforced the heretical meanings implicit in Argentine melodrama even as they encouraged conformism and the quest for individual upward mobility. Both the powerful appeal of Peronism and its internal contradictions reflect its origins in mass culture. Populism in Argentina was not merely a byproduct of industrialization or a reflection of labor politics; it was also the outcome of a particular pattern of mass cultural development.

THE MELODRAMATIC TENDENCY IN EARLY PERONISM

Historical analyses of Peronist rhetoric have stressed the essential binarism at its heart. Juan and Evita Perón explained their political project through a series of basic oppositions: national versus antinational, pueblo versus antipueblo, workers versus oligarchs. The logic that the Peróns used to make these distinctions between us and them was always deeply moralistic; by opposing sacrifice to egotism, austerity to frivolity, solidarity to treachery, and hard work to idleness, Peronism depicted class struggle in essentially moral terms. Perón frequently denounced the exploitation of the working class, but he described it as part of a historic contest between good and evil.[7] In a speech before the railroad workers