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Women's magazines and socioeconomic change: *Para Ti*, identity and politics in urban Argentina

Mónica Farías*

Department of Geography, University of Washington, Box 353550 Smith 408, Seattle, WA 98195, USA

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Popular media plays an important role in the production and reproduction of hegemonic cultural norms, as well as in the construction of class and gender identities. Periods of economic crisis generate struggles over ways of understanding social reality that can destabilize or reinforce different identities. The media often plays an important role in the reconfiguration of identities. Expanding on these ideas, I conduct a discourse analysis of a women's magazine to examine how popular media reflected and influenced shifting gender and class identities in Buenos Aires, Argentina between 1995 and 2008, a period of major socioeconomic change. By drawing attention to supposedly 'non-political' actors and spaces, I argue for expanding the range of sites we investigate in order to make sense of changing class and gender subjectivities during times of socioeconomic crisis.

Keywords: Argentina; socioeconomic crisis; middle-class; popular culture; gender

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Introduction

In 2001, Argentina underwent a major socioeconomic and political crisis. Years of economic recession and a profound sense of political disillusionment reached a point of no return when, in early December, the government imposed restrictions on bank withdrawals and froze savings accounts. Those who had enjoyed a certain degree of economic comfort suddenly saw their spending capacity reduced and their savings at risk. With no money circulating in the streets, economic transactions were reduced to the indispensable, severely affecting people who received salaries in cash or who made a living from tips or begging (Dinerstein 2003).

On the night of December 19, a popular rebellion erupted in Buenos Aires. Thousands of people took to the streets, defying the 'state of emergency' that had been declared earlier in the day by the President Fernando de la Rúa. In the following weeks, new collective organizations emerged – soup kitchens, neighborhood assemblies, and community gardens – many of which cut across differences in class, race, and gender. Social divisions seemed to weaken while solidarity actions abounded, as demonstrated by the support of some middle-class sectors for workers taking over bankrupt factories and for the unemployed workers' movement (Grimson 2008; Adamovsky 2010).

Despite the initial euphoria, these mobilizations soon lost much of their energy. The economic and political situation slowly normalized, and most such alliances faded away during 2002 and 2003. The middle class, for the most part, abandoned the streets. A number of studies have attributed the decline of the protests to changes in the political situation, as well as to the intrinsic characteristics and fragmentation of the new

*Email: fariasm@uw.edu

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organizations (Pousadela 2011; Rossi 2005 among others). Some have also pointed to importance of the political elites' divisive rhetoric. By identifying 'good' and 'bad' citizens, they aimed at driving a wedge between different sectors of society that were momentarily united by the crisis (Adamovsky 2010; Svampa 2007).

According to Adamovsky (2010), newspapers and TV news played a crucial role in this 'divide and conquer' strategy by identifying two types of protesters. On the one hand, there were 'neighbors' participating in non-violent demonstrations, banging their pots and pans, and specifically identified as 'middle class'. On the other hand, there were those who attacked public buildings, looted stores, and confronted the forces of public order. The media thus contributed to the reproduction of old middle-class prejudices and stereotypes about the poor, often described as violent and unruly.

Despite the relevance of this latter approach, there is little research on the relationship between media, politics, and middle-class identities during the socioeconomic crisis of 2001–2002 (c.f. Wortman's 2007). Although there is some literature about women's roles during the crisis (Sutton 2010; Briones et al. 2003; Andujar 2005), as well as representations of women in the media (Bontempo 2011; de la Torre 2011; Roca 2003; Pite 2013), there is an absence of research that connects women's lives during the crisis to what are often seen to be non-political sites, such as popular magazines. However, magazines help to mediate information about the world to their audiences and provide people with a framework through which they make sense of their daily lives and understand their place in the world (Dittmer 2010). At the same time, popular media often produces and reflects hegemonic norms and values, which are presented as 'common sense' (Carter and Steiner 2004). Importantly, this 'common sense' also includes codes of behavior that subsequently come to shape social interactions (Nettleton 2011).

In this article, I draw on feminist scholarship, particularly feminist research on popular media, to explore the connections between magazines and the dynamics of popular mobilizations and cross-class alliances before, during, and after the Argentine 2001–2002 crisis. I do so by looking at the women's magazine *Para Ti* and the way it presented the relationship between women, politics, and public space. I argue that in spite of significant changes in women's activities and roles, and regardless of the magazine's apparently progressive gender politics, values of middle-class femininity remained largely unchallenged. Thus, the magazine reinforced 'class' as a fundamental category of identity and helped to set limits on potentially transformative cross-class encounters.

The article is organized as follows. In the next section, I review work that explores the role of popular culture in shaping ideas about class and gender, paying particular attention to research on women's magazines. In section III, I explore the formation of middle-class culture in Argentina, focusing on depictions of white, middle-class domesticity, and the fragmentation of middle-class alliances. I also introduce the magazine *Para Ti* and explain the research methods I employed. I then conduct a discourse analysis to show how the magazine constructed an image of the appropriate role of women in politics and the public space. I conclude by reflecting on the implications of this case study for wider debates within geography regarding economic crisis, political subjectivities, and popular culture.

Popular culture, identity, and women's magazines

Socioeconomic crisis and changing class positions

According to Gramsci, crises are 'conjuctural' moments in which the structural contradictions of a social formation become evident (Gramsci et al. 1972). Gramsci argued that economic forces, and also 'class prestige' and the 'inflammation of sentiments of

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independence', can rupture the equilibrium and lead to new historical realities. Thus, periods of capitalist crises encompass struggles over different ways of understanding social reality that destabilize identities, challenging or solidifying class categories (Lawson 2012).

Particular attention has been paid to the repositioning of some sectors of the middle class during times of socioeconomic change. There is a growing body of ethnographic research paying attention to how these changes have transformed middle-class relations with the state, public space and politics, and also how they relate to subaltern sectors (c.f. Cohen 2004; Fernandes and Heller 2006; Jeffrey and Young 2012). This work has shown that crises can strengthen social boundaries as middle-class people continue to try and separate themselves from poor others. But they might also prompt a critical view of the structural forces that produce poverty and lead to new alliances and social movements (Farías 2015).

This literature focuses on traditional political spaces, such as public squares, workplaces, and educational institutions. However, feminist scholarship has drawn attention to how our understanding of socioeconomic and political events must include subjects, scales, and sites that have traditionally been left out of scholarly analysis (Nagar et al. 2002). Feminist political geographers have long pointed to the misleading separation between 'home' and 'work' and to the ideological work performed by the identification of the home with femininity, the private, and the non-political (Domosh and Seager 2001; Marston 1995). One such site that was often considered non-political is popular media.

Popular culture as a political site

Popular culture was not regarded as a key site for the production and reproduction of cultural norms until Gramsci's concept of hegemony was introduced into the field of cultural studies in the 1960s (Storey 2003). Also inspired by Foucault's ideas about representation and power/knowledge, institutions of popular culture became important sites for studying the production of social meaning and practices (Sharp 1996). Popular media produces and reproduces certain values, attitudes, and identities, transmitting images that eventually become 'conventional wisdom' (Myers, Klak, and Koehl 1996) and providing frames of interpretation so that daily events and experiences 'make sense'. For instance, Sharp's (1996) work on *Reader's Digest* magazine during the Cold War and Dittmer's (2010) work on the comic *Captain America* after 9/11 are both examples of the workings of popular culture in relation to the construction of national identities.

Surprisingly, little attention has been paid to popular media directed specifically at a female audience (c.f. Carter and Steiner 2004). Fifty years ago, Friedan's (1963) work showed how the media shaped women's lives and identities by reproducing certain images of the ideal housewife in the US – what she called 'the feminine mystique'. Friedan connected the apparently innocent content of women's magazines to the political economy of the postwar years. Women's magazines played a role in turning women into ideal housewives who found self-realization and a sense of identity through domestic consumption.

As Gill (2007) has noted, women's magazines change over time adjusting their topics according to transformations at the social, economic, and political level. One such adjustment was the way magazines responded to second-wave feminism in the 1960s. Wolf (1991) argues that as women broke down gender roles releasing themselves from the 'feminine mystique', a new discourse emerged to reorient women's consumption. The 'beauty myth', as Wolf called it, was also about reproducing male power by disciplining women's behavior and dividing women by breaking down linkages between generations.

McRobbie (2009) also claims that idealized representations of femininity in popular media work to generate divisions between women. Based on an analysis of two British TV programs, McRobbie argues that the media generates and legitimates forms of class antagonism by affirming middle-class norms of appropriate behavior and publicly scorning those who dress or speak differently. This sends a message that poor woman should try to imitate middle-class women. Importantly, McRobbie argues that these forms of female 'symbolic violence' redraw class divides and mirror the individualistic and meritocratic ideology of wider society.

One important way in which women's magazines communicate ideological positions is by presenting, usually in the same issue, seemingly contradictory statements (Gill 2007). Gill argues that these 'inconsistencies' might not be problematic when dealing with a skin-care treatment or clothing, but can be of concern when it comes to discussing issues such as sex or marriage. Apparently contradictory statements might in fact work toward the same end, in which case the contradictions, more than being the result of a sloppy editorial line or reflecting women's 'contradictory' lives, actually conceal a more coherent ideological position.

In the case of Argentina, Bontempo (2011) examines the origins of the women's magazine *Para Ti* in the 1920s and 1930s as a novel product that targeted the Argentinean middle class. She argues that the contents of the magazine – fashion, love stories, and cooking recipes – were organized and articulated around the ambiguous concept of the 'modern woman'. To be modern meant to live in the present and know what was 'innovative' and 'contemporary'. However, *Para Ti* never questioned the home as the proper place for women. Instead, 'modernization' was conflated with the 'professionalization' of housework, including child-rearing. Women still performed traditional gender roles but in a 'modern' way.

As these examples show, there is a considerable body of research about women's magazines as sites of identity production through particular representations of femininity and domesticity in the US as well as in Argentina. However, there is an absence of scholarship on how women's magazines have contended with socioeconomic crisis and articulated new kinds of identities. Identities are contextual, resulting from the articulation of different discursive processes mobilized at particular times. Paying attention to popular culture during times of crisis can contribute to our knowledge on the formation of class and gender identities and shed light on the implications it has for political action.

Middle-class femininity in Argentina

According to Adamovsky (2010), the social category 'middle class' was used as a political tool since the early twentieth century by elites in order to create fractures within an increasingly combative working class. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the deepening of capitalist relations and the arrival of millions of migrants greatly impacted Argentina's economy and demographic structure. Cities grew rapidly, particularly Buenos Aires, which absorbed nearly 30% of the total of the migrant population (Devoto 2007).

These rapid changes gave birth to the 'modernization myth' according to which, in the first decades of the twentieth century, Argentina had become more urban, wealthier and, thanks to a sustained process of upward social mobility, more middle class too. Even though Argentina has always been a racially heterogeneous country with a diverse population in terms of income, occupation, and access to resources and services, Argentineans have traditionally thought of themselves as predominantly white and middle class, culturally and racially closer to Europe than to the rest of Latin America (Adamovsky 2010).

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Being a 'middle-class nation' implied that most of the population had access to a certain standard of living that entailed economic well-being. Beyond being able to consume certain goods, such as cars or perfumes, this meant a model of domesticity in which food preparation and consumption occupied an important place (Pite 2013). Around the mid-twentieth century, the urban middle-class woman became a key actor in the process of constructing a national imaginary of modern Argentina by adopting new fashions and hairstyles, new technologies for the home and also by expanding household consumption (Pite 2013). Mass media, including women's magazines like *Para Ti*, had an important role in promoting the 'professionalization' of housewives by encouraging them to learn about home economics and assuming motherhood as a national 'duty' (Bontempo 2011).

During the 1960s, the heterosexual and patriarchal family started to be questioned by the eruption of new political and cultural ideas (Feijoó and Nari 1996). The image of Argentina as a middle-class country of abundance also began to wane during the dictatorship of 1976–1983. The implementation of austerity measures and the growing concentration of economic power affected the material conditions of the middle class, which had remained relatively constant until the 1970s (Torrado 2007). The subsequent democratic governments in the 1990s pushed these measures forward, intensifying the 'fragmentation' of the middle class (Lvovich 2000). This accelerated a process of impoverishment, expressed in the term 'the new poor' (Minujín and Kessler 1995) while a large number of the middle class grew increasingly hostile toward politics and the ruling political class (Levitsky and Murillo 2003). This discontent reached its peak at the end of 2001 when a popular rebellion drove the President out of the House of Government.

The crisis of 2001 made widespread poverty visible in undeniable ways. People who met to protest in the streets and parks realized that their situation could not be explained simply as the result of their own individual choices. Amidst economic hardship and political instability, thousands of people from different social backgrounds devoted time, energy, and hope to build spaces of solidarity and collective alternatives to the dominant political project. The years of 2002 and 2003 witnessed unprecedented levels of mobilization and political participation and were marked by new and intense encounters between the poor and some sectors of the middle classes, such as neighborhood assemblies, community kitchens, and recuperated factories. Many members of these organizations were women, some of whom were stepping into public political action for the first time (Sutton 2010). Adamovsky (2010) refers to this moment, when symbolic and physical borders between classes became blurred and people manifested a strong desire for popular unity, as a process of *desclasificación* (declassification).

However, the encounters across difference that characterized the aftermath of the crisis eventually began to lose power. A discourse of *inseguridad* (insecurity) began to emerge, which depicted Buenos Aires as having become an endangered place, surrounded and stalked by violent inhabitants – usually poor and dark skinned – of Greater Buenos Aires (Svampa 2007). In this way, and to a large extent successfully, social and spatial boundaries were redrawn, suggesting that the mobilizations of 2002 and 2003 had not dramatically changed people's political subjectivities or achieved the *desclasificación* of the sectors involved.

Methodology

In the following section, I present an analysis of the women's magazine *Para Ti, todo lo que le interesa a la mujer* (*PT*),[1] to explore how it worked to challenge or reproduce class and gender identities during the crisis. I chose this magazine based on two criteria: its

continuity and its popularity among urban middle-class women. The magazine has been in publication since 1922. During the period under study (1995–2008), between 40% and 50% of its sales took place in Buenos Aires (Instituto Verificador de Circulaciones, Buenos Aires). The magazine targets women with a certain purchasing power, as evidenced by its price and the fact that 40% of its pages are advertisements (Roca 2003).

While the articles in *PT* mostly cover topics such as fashion, beauty, lifestyle, decoration, dieting, food and health, I focused on the less numerous articles and interviews that explicitly dealt with women in relation to party politics, grassroots organizations and public space.[2] The fact that these topics are usually absent suggests an apparent lack of interest from the magazine's readership. Therefore, when they are present it can be revealing to ask why and how this is the case. That is, the absence of these topics as well as their presence are seen within, and put in dialogue with, the context of other prevailing topics as well as the social context from which the magazine constructs its discourse (Rose 2001).

I conducted a discourse analysis of the magazine to determine the underlying assumptions in its text and how it tried to order and shape its readership's relation to the world through the re-creation of particular images (Tonkiss 1998). I looked at depictions of women in politics and women who work in paid jobs, paying attention to how they reproduced or diverged from traditional discourses of middle-class femininity and domesticity. The questions that guided my analysis were: how did women relate to formal politics according to *PT*?; how were current political and economic affairs talked about?; what was women's place in the public/political space?; how were women's rights and duties toward the public conceptualized?

I examined a sample of 36 issues covering a span of 13 years divided into 3 periods of 3 years each: 1995–1997, 2001–2003, and 2006–2008 – before, during, and after the crisis of 2001–2002. These periods represent three distinctive moments in the recent history of Argentina in which I could identify continuities and ruptures on the representations of women, politics, and the public space. For each year, I looked at the first issue of January, April, July, and November or the closest available if the issue was missing or could not be accessed. In this way, I looked at four issues for every year coinciding with the beginning of a new season. I decided to do so based on a preliminary exploration of a larger sample of the magazine that determined that content such as issues addressed and the products and services offered changed according to a seasonal pattern. Comparing how the same topic was addressed over time – e.g. where and how to organize the family's vacation – provided important insights into how the magazine interpreted the socioeconomic and political situation as the crisis unfolded and receded. Women's magazines change in conjunction with new material realities and, in spite of their apparent contradictory messages, they shape and respond to women's concerns at a particular time (Wolf 1991). I show how *PT* reproduced ideas about class, femininity, and domesticity in a way that posed challenges to cross-class alliances.

Women, politics, and the public space in *Para Ti*

Before the crisis (1995–1997)

In this period, the magazine seems to address a married – or soon to be married – woman. Articles on couple's issues and motherhood abound: having a second child at 40, caring for the teeth during pregnancy, and raising confident kids are some examples. The articles that did not explicitly make reference to the marital status of women were those related to bodily image. Striving for a thin, youthful, and attractive body is necessary to gain men's

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approval and love (de la Torre 2011), and a key factor in 'securing' a husband. Articles about young female entrepreneurs avoid references to marriage, probably because in these cases women are still considered too young to settle down. These articles reflect an editorial line that assumes marriage and motherhood to be desirable, natural, and the ultimate achievement in women's lives.

Throughout this period, the differentiation between single and married women is accompanied by the distinction between public and private spaces. This latter differentiation is evident in the way the magazine approaches formal politics. These articles – of which there were only a couple – implicitly assume that public space is associated with work and politics, while the home is the private space of family life, only tangentially touched by politics.

For instance, in the article titled 'Women in the front line', women's relation to politics appears to be mediated by their husbands. The article describes the lives of five women married to well-known politicians, and focuses on how these women cope with being married to a public figure, even though at least two of them also had a profession. It describes the countless things women do in order to sustain their husbands' political activity, ranging from providing moral support and taking care of the house and children, to organizing their briefcase and looking after his personal image. Some of these women do charity work but none of them claim to be involved in politics. The fact that they had rejected propositions to serve in a political office is seen as something positive. Women's interest in politics is recognized, but their passion does not necessarily imply a commitment to action. It is an interest rather manifested 'desde el llano' – 'from an ordinary place' – (*PT*, 6 February 1995).

That the space of politics is not seen as a 'natural' environment for women is also reflected in an editorial titled 'Women protagonists' about the results of the legislative election of 1997 in the province of Buenos Aires. On that occasion, the candidate of the party known as *La Alianza* defeated the candidate of the *Partido Justicialista* (official name of the Peronist party). According to the editorial, the election represented a historical day, not only because *La Alianza* won in a traditionally Peronist district, but also – and more important – because the two leading candidates were women. The editorial rightly indicates how unusual it is to see women leading any party's list of candidates. However, it does not reflect on the possible causes of this apparent change in gender roles, such as the relatively new 'Women's Quota Act' that required that women comprise at least 30% of any party's total candidate pool. Instead, it remarks that these 'two women, two mothers, two wives, and two former house-wives are changing the face of politics'. The editorial neither calls attention to the relevance of this fact for women's participation in politics, nor does it comment on the possible breakdown of barriers that precluded women from entering the masculine space of politics. Instead, it celebrates the importance of these changes for politics because,

> [the candidates] proved that women can do politics with a feminine style. They showed that we don't need to repeat models that are strange to us or to imitate men. Regardless of the results, we hope that the characteristics that make us different to men – sensitivity, honesty, strength, and generosity – finally will come to stay in politics and turn it into something more humanitarian (*PT*, 3 November 1997).

The examples above depict women as the moral and emotional structure of the heterosexual family. The 'characteristics' that the magazine ascribes to women resonate with traditional stereotypes of women carrying out reproductive labor in the home and also acting as the spiritual center of the family (Domosh and Seager 2001). Thus, the private space of the home is assumed to be the realm of women, reflecting and reasserting the ideal

of domesticity predominant throughout the twentieth century, with private and public spaces clearly differentiated in gendered ways.

This gendered division of space also becomes apparent in the way the magazine addresses paid work. Regardless of several references to women's integration to the labor market, including some that insinuate a crisis of traditional models of domesticity, priority is given to examples of women successfully developing careers in the country or overseas. In all these cases, creative, educated, and childless women are presented as happily working in fashion design, decoration, or handcraft making.

Contrasting with the entrepreneurial success of these women, the only other article that addresses paid work outside the house is about women who are forced to enter the labor market because their husbands are unemployed. These women are stressed, worried, and obviously less happy than the women in the previous examples. Rather than successfully developing a career, they are employed in a low white-collar job. The article titled 'He does not work, she works double' explains that, for these women, working outside the house implies an extra burden. Unlike in the past, when the husband 'looked after everyone', now the woman '[c]omforts and takes care of her husband, talks to her children, juggles family finances to make ends meet, hides the problems from her friends and, on top of that, looks for ways of getting extra money' (*PT*, 4 November 1996).

These two models of working-women – the young, fashionable, bright, and single entrepreneurial woman, and the wife and mother who has no other choice but to leave the house in order to pay the bills – reflect and reaffirm the ideal of female domesticity in which public and private spaces are well differentiated and gendered. The young entrepreneur enjoys public life in 'the meantime', until they get married, more out of pleasure than need. On the other hand, the working mother goes out to intervene in an emergency but might return to be a housewife as soon as her husband finds a job.

During the 1990s, unemployment rates and job instability increased, while incomes deteriorated, disproportionally affecting the working class and the low middle class (Minujín and Anguita 2004). During most of that decade, women augmented their participation in the labor market, although they did so for lower wages and in worse working conditions than men (Sautu 2000). At the same time, the 'Women's Quota Act' opened up more possibilities for women and clearly signaled a shift in long-established gender roles. In spite of these important facts, *PT* approached the new scenario from a conservative perspective. When women engaged with politics and/or went out to work in a paid job, it was assumed that they were still enacting their 'primary' identity of mother and/or wife.

During the crisis (2001–2003)

During 2001–2003, both the tone of the articles and the actual contents seem to be more embedded in the ongoing economic crisis and the changing social agenda. Constant references to the socioeconomic situation encourage the readership to connect their lives to what is happening beyond the home and make sense of their reality within a rapidly changing context. There are articles providing advice on how to go on holidays, shop for groceries, and entertain friends with a low budget, which indicate an awareness of the struggles that a large part of the middle class was enduring. Other articles more explicitly connect private and public life by referencing how domestic dynamics are changing as the economy deteriorates and the political climate becomes embittered. There are references to young adults living at their parents' house in the face of an unstable labor market, and to high levels of insecurity as a result of a 'crisis in values, extreme poverty and inadequate

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legislation' (*PT*, 2 November 2001). The editorial line of the magazine is more engaged with the downturns of socioeconomic life that threatened middle-class homes.

The magazine explicitly states that in this scenario, women gain an unusual prominence in the public arena, partly, because 'women's values' – a sense of justice, honesty, and moral strength – are needed during a crisis to produce positive change for society. During 2001, protests and mobilizations had increased exponentially, reaching a peak in the summer of 2001–2002 (Seoane 2002). The political situation was delicate and chaotic, as was evident in the rapid succession of two Presidents after the resignation of President de la Rúa. At the same time, women participated in great numbers in the protests and had very active roles in the various political organizations helping to build new political spaces and spaces for solidarity (Chejter 2004).

The precarious political situation and the protagonist role that women had in the protest are evident in an article titled 'Women are giving birth to a new Argentina'. The interviewer asks national legislator Elisa Carrió if the pan-banging during the manifestations in 2001–2002 symbolized the new power of women, given the fact that the pan is 'an object of a private and traditionally feminine space' (*PT*, 4 January 2002). Carrió asserts that women have much to contribute to the changes taking place in the country because women 'give birth, so they know when to push to get things done'. This metaphor illustrates the association of women's 'natural attributes' and 'intrinsic values' with their political relevance for the nation in times of crisis, a recurrent topic over the different issues.

During this period, several interviews with women in public office account for the important and supposedly 'special role' women have to play in the future of the country. One example is an interview with a senior official in the Department of Health, Graciela Rosso. In the face of an outbreak of respiratory diseases, the interviewer accompanies her to visit a children's hospital, and remarks on the attention she pays to a mother's grief: 'Graciela Rosso listens to her, with red eyes. The same eyes mothers have after nights of high fever and fear'. The article then explains that Rosso is a mother of five, and quotes her asserting that '[a] woman adds sensibility to things [...] the way we [women] address public policy differs from men's. That is why it is important that there are more women in the government' (*PT*, 4 July 2003). 'Sensibility' is one of the qualities celebrated about women, and it is strongly connected with women's caring role in the home. The lack of explanation as to why it is that women address public policy differently from men, and the constant references to Rosso as 'a mother of five' feeds into discourse about the caring role women have in their families.

At the same time there is a more general acknowledgment of women working for social change in different kinds of political spaces. For example, the article 'Women are stronger in the crises' (*PT*, 6 July 2001) interviews two working-class women who pushed to organize the laid-off workers of the factory where their husbands worked, took it over, and put it into production again, pointing to certain strengths women supposedly have when it comes to dealing with difficult situations. 'What woman has not been a businessman in her house?' asks one of the interviewees, highlighting the resourcefulness of women who improvise and use their expertise in home economics to run a factory. It is unusual to find articles about working-class women in *PT*; however, it appears that the crisis brought women fighting for social change in their own spaces closer to each other, regardless of their class belonging.

The magazine reflects the complexities and changes of the time: economic crisis, political instability, and corruption. It was a time when women with previous histories of activism, as well as others with no past political experience, were joining the struggle and making their actions visible. *PT* echoed this and provided insight into women's activism in

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party politics, institutions, and grassroots organizations. Affirming that women's presence in senior positions in the government, or in the microlevel of organizations such as 'neighborhood assemblies' was necessary for the emergence of a 'new Argentina', implied a repositioning of women within a hierarchical and gendered social structure in which men had been in charge of directing the destiny of the country. These articles seemed to point to – and welcome – a breaking down of gender barriers as women stepped outside the house to become involved in public life and politics, transforming gender roles, and modifying gendered spaces. Importantly, it also indicated a *desclasificación* or blurring of class borders as the magazine suggested that 'all' women, regardless of their class belonging, had something to contribute to in order to rebuild the country and help it out of a critical point.

However, as we have seen in the examples above, the presence of women in the public space and in politics is always referred to in the context of the vicissitudes of the socioeconomic and political crisis. The magazine conveys the idea that women who stepped outside the home did so because they had to, not because they tried decisively to break with traditional gender expectations. Women's interventions at that critical point were considered necessary because the crisis endangered women's private spaces and their families and because they seemed to have certain 'characteristics', 'values', and 'attributes' that made them key agents for navigating the storm. According to *PT*, the 'characteristics that makes us [women] different to men' were still rooted in traditional ideas of femininity (*PT*, 3 November 1997).

In addition, although *PT* refers to 'women's characteristics' in general, omitting any mention to class differences, class borders are still in place. In the article about the working-class women taking over the factory, the case is seen as worth mentioning because these women overcame their own limitations and difficulties, as the following quote reveals: '[n]ot having finished primary school hasn't been an impediment to get some qualifications and come up with a strategy'. Ultimately, these working-class women's determination and strength of character during hard times conformed to aspirational ideas of self-improvement appropriate for middle-class women.

At the same time, even if the borders of the public and private spaces were less clear than in the previous period, and even if sometimes the magazine attempted to explicitly recognize the mutual interdependences of both spaces, the conflation of women with the home remained largely unaltered. Women's political and public identities were always mediated by their identities as 'mothers' or 'wives', whether that was because being a mother prepared them better for the job or because they had to go out to fight for or protect their families. *PT* still considered 'mother' or 'wife' to be a woman's primary identity. For instance, in the article 'Women are stronger in the crises' (*PT*, 6 July 2001), one of the women who helped take over the factory mentions that her husband was upset that she would not be just a housewife anymore. However, she justifies herself by saying that regardless of the new activities she carries out, '[i]t is not as if we'd abandoned our roles as mothers and grandmothers!'.

After the crisis (2006–2008)

During this period, women's involvement with politics is not longer so evident. There is a noticeable silence regarding women in the public arena that 'withdraws' women from political spaces. At the same time, the magazine shows a renewed interest in issues around consumption and professional women in the world of fashion, whereas there is an increasing concern with *inseguridad* that endangers people's lives and homes. Both the

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absence of articles about women working in politics or in social organizations and the abundance of references to an unsafe society reflect a redrawing of the borders between the public and private spaces.

By 2006 President Néstor Kirchner, elected in 2003, had taken a decisive turn toward implementing redistributive measures and strengthening safety nets for the poor. These measures were continued by Cristina Fernández, whose critique of the more conservative aspects of the Argentinean middle class earned support from those who saw her as a role model to many progressive women, and scorn from those who argue she is determined to use the resources at her disposal to increase her political and economic power. I contend that Fernández, as well as the women aligned with her politics, represented a model of womanhood that grew distant from the middle-class ideals and values constructed by *PT*, and that the magazine reacted by redrawing the borders between the public and private spaces.

Undeniably, women had entered political and public space in new ways and *PT* negotiated this tension by offering contradictory narratives about women's engagement with politics and social justice, while at the same time avoiding any strong statement about women's role in formal politics. For example, in a series of articles about famous Argentinean women, there is one dedicated to the first woman medical practitioner in the country, also a passionate defender of women's rights, a political organizer, and the first woman to run for office at the national level in 1919. According to the article, 'she didn't fight in vain because she set up the bases for all the other women that followed her path' (*PT*, 30 June 2006), an assertion that acknowledges the presence of women in politics.

However, in the same issue there is another article titled 'I am grown up' in which the author narrates how her life used to resemble 'a student's assembly [...] where every exchange of ideas seems to be a life or dearth issue'. Now, because she is a middle-aged woman, she has become intolerant to violence and less prone to passionately engage in arguments, to some extent insinuating that organizing politically had become a synonym for violence. Furthermore, she avoids TV programs in which 'politicians endlessly repeat themselves in nonsense discourses', and instead prefers to watch 'some of the good chefs of the *Gourmet* channel who show something they do know how to do' (*PT*, 6 June 2006). According to this article, passionate debates and ideas about changing the world are not of concern for grown-up women. At the same time, it provides a simplistic and negative reading of the political which is assumed to be either students' assemblies or 'nonsense discourses', to which the only other option is the comforting escapism of a cable-channel with international *chefs* and expensive restaurants.

These apparent contradictory narratives about women and politics were condensed in the coverage of the Presidential election of 2007 in which Cristina Fernández became the first directly elected woman president in Argentina. On that occasion, two other candidates were women. *PT* comments on the event in an article suggestively titled 'Dressed to vote' that states: '*PT* accompanied the three women candidates in the day of the election to show the "*politically correct*" *look* in an election in which *they* were the trend' (*PT*, 2 November 2007. Emphasis in the original). The fact that the first two places were won by women demonstrated that women's presence in formal politics was neither temporary nor rare anymore. However, allusions to women's 'natural' values or characteristics are neither present, nor are there any mentions of women's potential for sociopolitical change.

Along with this silence on women and social and political work, another way in which the magazine 'removes' women from the public sphere and contributes to the redrawing of borders between public and private spheres is by providing an image of Buenos Aires as an increasingly dangerous space in which the only 'safe' place to be was the home. In almost

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every issue there is one reference to *inseguridad,* that is, the feeling of being constantly under threat of random physical harm: murders, rapes, breaks-in, kidnappings, etc. Even though the ones who suffer the effects of urban violence the most are the poor, the middle class, and elites took ownership of the *inseguridad* discourse, which, in general, tends to conflate poverty with crime (Auyero and Berti 2013).

In this narrative of *inseguridad*, places are characterized as 'safe' or 'unsafe' and people as 'good' or 'prone to commit crime', although not always in an explicit way. In an interview with a man whose son had been murdered in a wealthy neighborhood of the city, he says 'Every time your kid goes out, you ask him where he is going . . . And if he says he is going to a birthday party in Ortiz de Ocampo and Figueroa Alcorta [Recoleta], how could I imagine that he will go to buy a Coke two blocks away and get killed by a gang?' (*PT*, 14 April 2006). Recoleta is one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in Buenos Aires, and naturally thought of as a 'safe' place. If we follow this logic, we should assume that a poor neighborhood is not a safe place.

A similar characterization takes place with people. In an article about a wealthy couple charged with child sexual abuse, the author of the article emphasizes that the couple had a stable marriage, a beautiful daughter, good jobs, and an expensive house in a gated community, 'every thing they needed to have a "happy and normal" life' (*PT*, 2 November 2007). Again, this couple conformed to an ideal of family that was difficult to associate with crime. In fact, some of the solutions suggested to deal with the wave of crime are to extend schooling hours and to 'socially integrate the marginal sectors' (*PT*, 6 April 2007). These interventions – eradicating a slum, 'integrating' marginal people – link crime to poverty and suggest a set of solutions that ultimately understand poverty as the result of individual's actions (O'Connor 2001).

In spite of all the alarming news about *inseguridad* that depicted the public space as dangerous and threatening, there were cases in which people who had been victims of *inseguridad* decided get together and take action. This was the case for a woman whose sister had been murdered and who decided 'to get involved and fight for a better society, because we cannot longer live locked up or feeling paranoid' (*PT*, 6 April 2007). However, without a discussion about the connections between these peoples' misfortunes and the structural factors that produce marginality, most of the solutions focus on individual actions, whether that be finding protection behind the walls of a gated community with private security or conducting a private investigation in order to send criminals to jail.

Both the 'withdrawal' of women from political activities and the image of a dangerous Buenos Aires had the effect of 'sending' women back to the home. Politics and social change seemed no longer to be a women's concern, even though the fact that the country's new President was a woman testified to the opposite. The new concerns put forward by the magazine were those related to the safety of the family in an increasingly dangerous city, in the face of a government apparently unwilling to take the matter into its hands. The redrawing of these separated spheres – public and private – also implied a reinforcing of class borders – a *reclasificación* – that seemed to have become more permeable during the peak of the crisis.

Conclusion

In this article, I conducted a discourse analysis of the women's magazine *PT* in order to examine popular media discourses about women, politics, and public space during a time of great social change in urban Argentina. Popular media plays an important role both reflecting and constituting gendered class subjectivities (Carter and Steiner 2004;

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Storey 2003). By looking at these media, we can learn much about how representations of middle-class femininity change over time (Gill 2007; Bontempo 2011), in this case, during a period of socioeconomic crisis. Even though popular magazines are not usually seen as overtly political, they help to produce and reproduce discourses that shape the way people understand their place in society and act upon it.

I have argued that *PT* played an important role in articulating gender and class subjectivities by addressing what constituted women's affairs, and by framing women's actions and relation to politics and the public space in particular ways. Although *PT* continued to prioritize its traditional topics such fashion, beauty, family, and decoration during the crisis, it also introduced new topics related to current affairs that apparently indicated a rupture with traditional ideas of middle-class femininity, particularly between 2001 and 2003. However, *PT* never quite abandoned its strong class bias that dictated women's proper place in the world. In fact, the seemingly contradictory discourses that the magazine presented during the crisis are part of a coherent ideological position that became clear again in the last period analyzed when *PT* reaffirmed the home as a woman's place.

By examining *PT* over a period of 13 years, with the socioeconomic crisis of 2001 at its center, I argue that the magazine consistently constructed an ideal type of reader, establishing naturalized female spaces and activities in opposition to 'public' or 'political' spaces. *PT*'s apparent progressive representations of women – barely noticeable during 1995–1997 and then more overtly manifested during 2001–2003 – remained rooted in traditional models of middle-class femininity and domesticity.

Throughout the whole period (1995–2008), the magazine continued to speak to an idealized readership of middle-class wives and mothers taking care of the household. Even in the cases in which the magazine emphasized the participation of women in the masculine sphere of politics, it did so by stressing women's 'inherent values' that would supposedly bring a more 'humane' component to those spaces. Furthermore, even when the magazine acknowledged that the material situation of many women was far from the ideal of the stay-at-home mother, it neither questioned nor addressed the huge disparities among women. Instead, *PT* sought ways of homogenizing – and unifying – an increasingly fragmented middle class by establishing and reinforcing an idealized model of domesticity.

In spite of dramatic changes in socioeconomic conditions, 'class' remained a powerful referent of inclusion and identity. Throughout the three different periods under study, I perceive certain adjustments in class borders and gender roles, particularly with the weakening of class borders during 2001–2003 when the magazine addressed women from different backgrounds who were working for social change, in formal politics or in grassroots organizations. It even did so when it looked to the working-class woman who took back the factory out of desire for self-improvement. However, these actions were always explained in terms of values and attitudes that made women 'special'.

Furthermore, during 2006–2008, there was a re-inscription of middle-class femininity that reinforced class and gender ideologies. This way, the process of *desclasificación* initiated during the socioeconomic crisis was rendered incomplete. Women were 'removed' from the public sphere by avoiding references to their role in social and political work so evident during the crisis while at the same time reinforcing conspicuous consumption habits. They were also 'removed' from the public and political space by the *inseguridad* discourse that criminalized poverty and assumed the only safe place was the middle-class home. Thus, marking out and separating public and private spaces revitalized a traditional model of domesticity and femininity centered in the home and indifferent to the political and social world redrawing symbolic and material borders between classes.

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I contend that we need to expand research on sites coded as 'private/female/apolitical' where ideas of class and gender intersect in powerful, but not always obvious, ways. The 'private' sphere represents an important site of class and political identity formation with broad implications beyond its perimeters. Women's magazines should also be seen as political sites whose discourses, representations, and assessments about events and facts, have actual material effects.

This analysis is limited to the extent that it only focuses on women's magazines, leaving out other forms of popular culture that are also important in shaping identities. More research is needed on the role of popular culture in the formation of gender and class identities in order to further understand its implications for the durability of alliances between the middle class and the poor. Future research could benefit from other methods such as interviews or focus groups in order to better understand how readers receive the information presented in the magazine and how it informs their practices.

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Notes

1. 'For you, everything that interests a woman'. All translations of quotes from *Para Ti* are mine.
2. Whenever I mentioned 'politics', it should be understood as 'formal politics', without being it to the detriment of a broader understanding of what constitutes the 'political'. That is, the way people or groups of people exercise power in particular places and across scales (Kofman 2005).

Notes on contributor

Mónica Farías received her BA in Geography at the University of Buenos Aires and her MA in Geography at the University of Washington where she is currently a doctoral candidate. Her research interests lie in urban inequalities, class formation, social movements and everyday cultural practices in Argentina.

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ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS

Las revistas para mujeres y los cambios socioeconómicos: *Para Ti,* identidad y política en la Argentina urbana

Los medios populares juegan un rol importante en la producción y reproducción de las normas culturales hegemónicas, así como en la construcción de identidades de clase y género. Los períodos de crisis económica generan luchas en las formas de entender la realidad social que pueden desestabilizar o reforzar las diferentes identidades. Los medios a menudo juegan un rol importante en la reconfiguración de identidades. Desarrollando estas ideas, llevo a cabo un análisis de discurso de una revista de mujeres para analizar cómo los medios populares reflejaron e influenciaron las cambiantes identidades de género y clase en Buenos Aires, Argentina, entre 1995 y 2008, un período de gran cambio socioeconómico. Centrando la atención en los actores y espacios supuestamente "no políticos", abogo por una expansión del rango de sitios que investigamos para entender las cambiantes subjetividades de género y clase durante los períodos de crisis socioeconómica.

Palabras claves: Argentina; crisis socioeconómica; clase media; cultura popular; género

女性杂志与社会经济变迁：*Para Ti*流行杂志、认同与阿根廷城市中的政治

大众媒体在霸权文化常规的生产与再生产、以及阶级与性别认同的建构中，扮演了重要的角色。几个时期的经济危机，促成了可颠覆或强化不同身份认同的社会现实理解方式之斗争。媒体经常在重构认同上扮演重要的角色。我在这些概念上进行扩展，对 一 本女性杂志进行论述分析，以检视阿根廷布宜诺斯艾利斯的大众媒体，如何在1995年到2008年这段主要社会经济变迁时期，反应、并影响变化中的性别与阶级认同。我透过引发对于据称是"非关政治"的行动者和空间的关注，主张我们需扩张探讨的场域范畴，以理解社会经济危机时期，改变中的阶级与性别主体性。

关键词：阿根廷; 社会经济危机; 中产阶级; 流行文化; 性别

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