



Figures 1 and 2. Doña Petrona C. de Gandulfo (top and bottom right) and Juanita Bordoy (bottom left) on the set of the television program *Buenas Tardes, Mucho Gusto*. Courtesy of Marcela Massut.

Entertaining Inequalities: Doña Petrona, Juanita Bordoy, and Domestic Work in Mid-Twentieth-Century Argentina

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In the mid-1960s Argentina's leading domestic expert Doña Petrona and her assistant Juanita Bordoy prepared a Christmas Eve meal on the popular television program *Buenas Tardes, Mucho Gusto*.¹ In grainy black and white, the camera followed them as they deboned a turkey, prepared a meat and chestnut fill-

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1. *Las recetas de Doña Petrona*, videocassette, *Volver/Canal 13*, Archivo Dario Billani, program 28, courtesy of Canal 13. Hereafter, I refer to this program as *Las recetas* followed by the number of the program. According to documentation with the tapes, this series was

ing, stuffed it into the bird, and carefully reassembled it. In her characteristic singsong cadence and northwestern Argentine provincial accent, Doña Petrona explained that this recipe for a chilled, stuffed turkey would be ideal for Christmas Eve, as the *ama de casa* (homemaker) would not have to keep getting up to serve warm dishes, allowing “everyone in the family [to] enjoy the celebration.” While not directly mentioning the lack of domestic help, Doña Petrona further clarified that she was “referring to those families in which they make the food themselves.”²

In offering such advice, Doña Petrona demonstrated her ongoing dedication to tailoring her cooking lessons to the dynamics of Argentine society. Since the early 1930s, Petrona had built her pathbreaking career on the premise that the modern homemaker should prepare time-consuming recipes to make abundant and artful meals like those served in elite households. During the 1940s, her career took off as she expanded her audience to include not only members of a recently enlarged middle class but also members of the upwardly mobile working class, many of whom had benefited from Peronist policies since 1946.³ Yet by the time she began broadcasting on the brand-new television airwaves during the early 1950s, the Peronist dream and the Argentine economy had begun to falter. In 1952, Argentines were hit by an economic crisis, commencing a three-year cycle of crises for the rest of this and the following decade. Consequently, Doña Petrona began to highlight the economy of her recipes. Even for this Christmas feast, she decided to prepare a *pavita* (a smaller turkey) rather than the larger *pavo* because, as she explained to her viewers, it cost a third less at the market. On other occasions, she emphasized how her presumably female viewers might save not only their money but also their time, as she was increasingly aware of middle-class women’s growing professionalization during the 1960s.⁴

Even as Doña Petrona suggested her awareness that many Argentine women prepared their family’s meals unassisted, and that this represented an investment of time and interest a growing number of women did not have, she herself cooked with an assistant in the most public of settings—live on television. Appearing on the edge of the screen or beside Doña Petrona shortly after

broadcast in 1961. However, due to the presence of the host Annamaria Muchnik, who did not host until 1964, it seems more likely to be from 1964 or 1965. This is the only known existing season of this program.

2. *Las recetas*, 28.

3. For a recent, pathbreaking study of the history of the Argentine middle class, see Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Historia de la clase media argentina: Apogeo y decadencia de una ilusión, 1919–2003* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2009).

4. *Las recetas*, 26.

the introduction, Juana Bordoy, known on the program simply as “Juanita,” was always at hand. As a result of her frequent, brusque commands to Juanita, Doña Petrona developed the reputation among her viewers of being a harsh taskmaster.⁵ In turn, Juanita came to represent the archetype of the subservient domestic servant in Argentina, due to her responsiveness and loyalty to Doña Petrona. As a result, even today Argentines commonly use the name “Juanita” to refer to a friend or family member who helps them in the kitchen.⁶

Doña Petrona and Juanita’s public portrayal of a typically private relationship between a *patrona* and her *empleada* (a mistress and her maid) both shaped and was shaped by broader patterns of domesticity in Argentina during the 1950s and 1960s. As in the United States, during the fifties a growing number of domestic experts not only provided the middle-class Argentine housewife with professional advice but also held her up as an example that all women should emulate.⁷ While less glorified than the housewife, domestic servants in Argentina (as in much of Latin America) also played a crucial role in the functioning of households and in the definition of their middle-class or elite status. Both of these domestic roles experienced significant changes during this period. Domestic servants began to demand higher wages, standard employee benefits, and more respect, while middle-class women entered the labor market and the university in greater numbers. As this trend accelerated, a new generation of middle-class women began to rely to an even greater extent on maids to meet their domestic obligations. At the same time, the predominant model of domestic service in Argentina shifted from full- to part-time.

While scholars of Latin America have tended to cast the relationship between domestic servants and their employers as paternalistic, the bonds of power and affection between Doña Petrona and Juanita Bordoy, and countless other women, were arguably more maternalistic.⁸ This maternalism is reflected

5. Because most Argentines only knew Juana Bordoy as “Juanita,” I generally refer to her in this way. The history of this name is discussed later.

6. As Juanita’s sister proudly explained, “The name for a helper in the kitchen became ‘Juanita.’” To protect my interviewees’ privacy, I refer to them by their first name and last initial unless they are public figures, in which case I use their full name. “Porota” B. (Juana’s sister), Susana (her niece), María Lujan (her grand-niece), and Luis (her nephew-in-law, married to Susana), interview with author, Santa Rosa, 26 July 2004, tape recording. Hereafter, I refer to this interview as “Porota B.” and specify the person quoted.

7. For analysis of the 1950s US housewife, see Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

8. As Mónica Gogna explained almost two decades ago, scholars of Latin America tend to refer to the relationship between domestic employees and the families they work for as

by the fact that Argentina's leading domestic couple was not Doña Petrona and her husband Atilio Massut but rather Doña Petrona and Juanita. The public predominance of this particular pairing reflected private dynamics, as Argentine women (like their female counterparts elsewhere) have frequently assumed responsibility for dictating the terms of domestic work relationships to their paid female help. As these intimate and unequal domestic relationships were simultaneously challenged and made more public during the second half of the twentieth century, Doña Petrona's televised treatment of her assistant became a lightning rod for larger concerns about the changing dynamics of women's domestic and extradomestic work.

Redefining Work and Domesticity

Since the early twentieth century, most Argentines' understanding of the division of labor dictated that properly modern men should work outside the home for wages, and properly modern women should be full-time homemakers. This had not always been the case. As Donna Guy has shown, during the nineteenth century the majority of women in Argentina had described themselves to census takers as "economically active" workers, in spite of their additional responsibilities for domestic matters.⁹ However, throughout the twentieth century, around three-quarters of Argentine women consistently characterized themselves as "amas de casa."¹⁰ The development of a wage-based and mechanized economy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fostered an increasingly negative perception of women's extradomestic work.¹¹

"paternalistic"—a characterization that continues to predominate even today. See Mónica Gogna, "Domestic Workers in Buenos Aires," in *Muchachas No More: Household Workers in Latin America and the Caribbean*, ed. Elsa M. Chaney and Mary Garcia Castro (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1989), 98. In their analysis of North American and European contexts, scholars have used the term "maternalism" in a different way, mainly to describe women's political claims based on their mothering work. Lisa D. Brush, "Love, Toil, and Trouble: Motherhood and Feminist Politics," *Signs* 21, no. 2 (1996): 430.

9. Donna J. Guy, "Women, Peonage, and Industrialization: Argentina, 1810–1914," *Latin American Research Review* 16, no. 3 (1981): 65–89.

10. República Argentina, *Resultados generales del Censo de la población 1947*, prepared by Dirección Nacional de Servicios Técnicos del Estado (Buenos Aires, 1951); República Argentina, *Censo Nacional 1960*, prepared by Secretaría de Estado de Hacienda (Buenos Aires, 1963); and República Argentina, *Censo Nacional de Población Familias y Viviendas 1970*, prepared by the Ministerio de Economía (Buenos Aires, 1973).

11. See Guy, "Women, Peonage, and Industrialization"; and Jorge Francisco Liernur, "El nido de la tempestad, la formación de la casa moderna en la Argentina a través de

Petrona had confronted such sentiments when she first decided to look for work in the capital in the late 1920s. Born in 1896 to a family of modest means in the province of Santiago del Estero, Petrona followed her then boyfriend Oscar Gandulfo and his family to Buenos Aires around 1917.¹² A few years after they married in the 1920s, Petrona applied for a position as an *ecónoma* (home economist) with the British gas company Primitiva in 1928.¹³ Fifty years later, Doña Petrona remembered well how her new husband's family disapproved of the idea that she would get a job instead of fulfilling her "natural" role as a housewife. She defended her decision based on her "need" to work because, as she later explained, Oscar had suffered an accident and lost one of his two jobs as a postal worker, leaving them with only 180 pesos a month in salary.¹⁴

Need served as the only acceptable justification for women to work outside of the home during the early twentieth century, as historian Mirta Lobato has demonstrated.¹⁵ This rationale was at once especially important and perhaps not entirely convincing in a family like Petrona's husband's, whose standing depended in part upon the women's roles as homemakers. Since the early twentieth century, Argentines tended to associate respectable middle- and upper-class familial status with women who could afford to stay at home and, ideally, supervise lower-class women to assist them.¹⁶

Even as a small number of women like Petrona entered the job market in new types of professional positions during the early twentieth century, the

manuales y artículos sobre economía doméstica, 1870–1910," *Entrepasados: Revista de Historia* 13 (1997): 8.

12. According to her unpublished memoirs, which she wrote with a biographer during the late 1980s, during Petrona's childhood her mother ran a boardinghouse in the city of Santiago del Estero; her father died when Petrona was just six years old. She met Oscar Gandulfo when he came to manage the ranch she was working on and previously managing herself. Oscar Alberto Cejas, "Memoirs of Petrona C. de Gandulfo," n.d, courtesy of Marcela Massut.

13. Petrona C. de Gandulfo, "La nota que nunca tuvo," *Mucho Gusto*, May 1981, p. 7.

14. Miriam Becker, "Gracias, Petrona C. de Gandulfo," *Mujer*, 31 Jan. 1984, p. 15.

15. Mirta Lobato, "Lenguaje laboral y de género en el trabajo industrial, primera mitad del siglo XX," in *Historia de las mujeres en la Argentina*, vol. 2, *Siglo XX*, ed. Fernanda Gil Lozano, Valeria Silvina Pita, and María Gabriela Ini (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 2000), 100.

16. For analysis of women's roles in establishing the model of the middle-class family, see Eduardo J. Míguez, "Familias de clase media: La formación de un modelo," in *Historia de la vida privada en la Argentina*, vol. 2, *La Argentina plural, 1870–1930*, ed. Fernando Devoto and Marta Madero (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 1999), 21–45; and Rebekah E. Pite, "Creating a Common Table: Doña Petrona, Cooking, and Consumption in Argentina, 1928–1983" (PhD diss., Univ. of Michigan, 2007). Quotation from "Doña Petrona: El hombre puede ayudar, incluso a encerrar," *Tiempo Argentino*, 20 Mar. 1983, p. 4.

majority of employed women found themselves among the “unskilled” or “semi-skilled” labor force working for pay in private homes and factories. As in most Latin American countries, in early twentieth-century Argentina the greatest percentage of women working for wages found employment in domestic service.¹⁷ In 1914, maids and cooks accounted for almost half of all “economically active” females.¹⁸ As more working-class women left this sector for factory jobs during the 1930s and 1940s, by 1947 domestic servants represented about a third of “economically active” women.¹⁹

The background and type of work of those employed in domestic service also changed during this era, becoming more feminized, generalized, and regionally based. Despite the substantial number of men in domestic service during the nineteenth century, only half a percent of economically active men were employed in domestic service by 1947, as the number of specifically male professions like valets and gardeners diminished dramatically.²⁰ Likewise, cooks and wet nurses virtually disappeared by 1930, as the number of all-purpose *mucamas* (female maids) grew.²¹ As gender and work dynamics shifted, so did the place of origin of domestic servants. Many domestics were of African descent during the colonial and early national periods, while from the late nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries the majority came from Europe. Beginning in the 1940s, migration from the provinces and bordering countries to the capital led to new generations of primarily female domestic servants, many of whom were of mixed or indigenous ancestry.²²

While most employed women in Argentina worked for wages in others’ homes or in factories, the majority of Argentine women were considered unpaid

17. And yet, as Héctor Szretter points out, toward the end of the century the proportion of economically active women working in domestic service in Argentina dropped significantly, especially in contrast to many of its Latin American neighbors. Héctor Szretter, *La terciarización del empleo en la Argentina: El sector del servicio doméstico* (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social, 1985), 4.

18. Susana Torado, *Historia de la familia en la argentina moderna (1870–2000)* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 2003), 211.

19. Szretter, *La terciarización del empleo*, 4.

20. For analysis of this shift in Buenos Aires, see Jose C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850–1930* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1998), 247.

21. Estela Pagani, “Aspectos estructurales, tipológicos, evolutivos, y reglamentarios del servicio doméstico en Buenos Aires, 1870–1940,” in publication of papers from the III Jornadas de Historia de Buenos Aires, “El trabajo en Buenos Aires” (Buenos Aires: Secretaria de Cultura, 1988).

22. Adriana Marshall, “Inmigración, demanda de fuerza de trabajo e estructura ocupacional en la área metropolitana argentina,” *Desarrollo Económico* (Buenos Aires) 17,

homemakers. Amas de casa enjoyed not only a numerical advantage but also a symbolic one. Since the early twentieth century, advertisers, government leaders, and a small number of domestic experts (including Doña Petrona) held up the ama de casa as the feminine ideal and the glue that held society together. Juan Perón's first government (1946–55) was no exception. Even as the government granted women the vote and increased opportunities for women to work and become more educated, both President Perón and First Lady Eva Perón emphasized that caring for one's home and one's family should be women's ultimate calling. As Evita famously explained, women were "born to make homes. Not for the street."²³

A new crop of domestic experts echoed such sentiments during the late 1950s. Many of these figures made explicit their goal to publicly recognize and help "professionalize" Argentine housewives. For example, in 1956 Elena Zara de Decurgez and a group of other women created the nonprofit Liga de Amas de Casa (Housewives' League). Confronting the economic instability of the previous seven years as well as the new austerity plans put into place by the military government that replaced Perón in 1955, they sought to unite Argentine housewives to find solutions to their common problems.²⁴ In 1958, as inflation spiraled and they advocated measures to correct it, they established December 1 as the "Día de la Ama de Casa" (Homemaker's Day) in recognition of women's important work at home. Among their founding objectives, they cited the defense of a "fair price" for consumer goods and the support of efforts to provide women with a "better education for the management of their home."²⁵ This league was joined by a number of individual advice givers who published manuals and presented television shows during the 1950s that promised to help homemakers organize their time, establish a budget, and determine the daily menu.²⁶

no. 65 (1977): 3–37, as cited in Gogna, "Domestic Workers in Buenos Aires," 84. For a discussion of the relationship between slavery and early domestic service in Argentina, see Pagani, "Aspectos estructurales."

23. Eva Perón, *My Mission in Life*, trans. Ethel Cherry (New York: Vantage Press, 1953), 190.

24. For analysis of homemakers' organizing during the 1980s and early 1990s, see Jo Fisher, "Gender and the State in Argentina: The Case of the Sindicato de Amas de Casa," in *Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America*, ed. Elizabeth Dore and Maxine Molyneux (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2000), 322–45.

25. I found this information on the Web site of the Liga de Amas de Casa, accessed on 6 Dec. 2005.

26. For examples of a general domestic advice book and a cookbook published during this era, see *El libro de ama de casa* (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 1958); and Lorenza Taberna, *La*

In spite of the emergence of a new generation of competitors, Doña Petrona maintained her preeminence during the mid-twentieth century. Petrona had first stepped into the public spotlight in the late 1920s when she began cooking in front of small neighborhood crowds in Buenos Aires to show off the new gas stoves sold by Primitiva. By the 1930s she had already begun to establish herself as a new kind of national figure—the domestic expert. In addition to giving live cooking presentations, she penned her own magazine column, hosted a national radio program, and published the first editions of her extremely popular cookbook, *El libro de Doña Petrona*. Because she had successfully established herself as a culinary celebrity during the previous two decades, many eagerly invited her into their homes on television in 1952, just one year after television became available in Argentina. Petrona presented her cooking program in new or prior versions for the next ten years before settling into the women's variety show *Buenas Tardes, Mucho Gusto* in 1962.²⁷ With Doña Petrona as the show's lead home economist, it became Argentina's longest-running television program to date, remaining on air for 22 years.²⁸

Doña Petrona used television to continue to expand her fan base and further promote her already well-established cookbook. Over the course of the 1950s Doña Petrona sold over a half a million copies of *El libro de Doña Petrona*, nearly tripling her already significant production of the previous decade and helping to make it one of the three best-selling books in Argentine history.²⁹ Recognizing her importance, in 1954 the magazine *Sintonía* announced, “Many

cocina de Lorenza Taberna: Manual práctico de cocina moderna (Buenos Aires: Editorial Salus, 1957).

27. Together with her sponsors, she tried out different approaches, or at least different program titles, during this era, including: “Jueves hogareños,” “Viernes hogareños,” “Programa de arte culinario,” “Petrona C. de Gandulfo,” and “Magia en la cocina.” Because they were live and not taped, no copies of these programs exist. Jorge Nielsen, e-mail to author, 18 May 2002.

28. Annamaria Muchnik, interview by Jorge Nielsen, Buenos Aires, Jan. 2001, transcript courtesy of Jorge Nielsen.

29. Scholars and journalists have presented different opinions about where exactly *El libro de Doña Petrona* falls in terms of sales records, but all agree that it is in the top three best sellers (along with the Bible and the 1872 epic poem *Martín Fierro*, about a gaucho of the same name). See for example Florencia Ure, “Doña Petrona C. de Gandulfo, 95 años vividos en plenitud,” *Todo Chic*, 28 July 1991; Arnold J. Bauer, *Goods, Power, History: Latin America's Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 198; and J. C. Toer & Asociados, eds., *Historias del gas en la Argentina, 1823–1998* (Buenos Aires: Transportadora de Gas del Sur S.A., 1998), 27.

fans are proposing to create a Nobel Prize of Gastronomy for Doña Petrona C. de Gandulfo.”³⁰ A little over a decade later, Doña Petrona publicly claimed to have a personal file with contact information for over 400,000 of her “*alumnas*” (female students), a figure that represented more than 4 percent of the female population of Argentina.³¹

Even as Doña Petrona represented a local success story, her ability to reach and to celebrate Argentine homemakers during the 1950s had international resonance. As Argentina turned away from Europe and looked toward the United States during the mid-twentieth century, it imported not only capital and new technologies (like the television) but also cultural notions that included the idealized image of the US housewife. Petrona kept up to date on this image by subscribing to US magazines like *American Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping*. She also faithfully clipped articles by US advice expert Dorothy Dix published in the popular Argentine women’s magazine *Para Ti*.³²

Doña Petrona and others selected the parts of the image of the US housewife they wanted to endorse and tailored them to the local environment. Like her counterpart in the United States, the ideal Argentine homemaker was popularly imagined to be modern, efficient, and cheerful in catering to her family, especially her husband.³³ At the same time, she was uniquely Argentine in that she was also believed to possess the expertise to tailor her consumption in response to the frequent waves of recession and recovery that made consumption in Argentina unstable. In addition, contemporaries expected her to be more dedicated to cooking from scratch than her US counterparts. As an Argentine psychologist explained in 1963, “Deep down, [Argentine women] think that all

30. I am grateful to media scholar Jorge Francisco Nielsen, who told me that this nomination appeared in *Sintonía* in November or December 1954.

31. Radio broadcast, 23 May 1967, Rollo 306, Band 1, Pies 125–435, Archivo General de la Nación. For population figures, see República Argentina, *Informe demográfico de la República Argentina 1944–1954*, prepared by the Dirección Nacional de Estadística y Censos (Buenos Aires, 1956), 34.

32. A number of articles written by Dorothy Dix are found in a binder labeled “Carpeta 1981” in Petrona C. de Gandulfo’s personal papers; courtesy of Marcela Massut.

33. For analysis of the importance of *amas de casa* during the Peronist era, see Natalia Milanesio, “‘The Guardian Angels of the Domestic Economy’: Housewives’ Responsible Consumption in Peronist Argentina,” *Journal of Women’s History* 18, no. 3 (2006): 91–117; and María José Billorou, “El ama de casa ‘moderna’: Los mensajes de la política sanitaria en los primeros gobiernos peronistas,” *La Aljaba: Revista de Estudios de la Mujer* (Santa Rosa, Argentina: Universidad de la Pampa) 5 (2000): 145–63; and for an analysis of their role in the larger twentieth century, see Pite, “Creating a Common Table.”

this stuff is fine for North Americans, ‘who eat everything out of cans,’ but not for decent women.”³⁴

As elsewhere, in Argentina female decency related not only to patterns of domestic consumption but also to implicit class and race markers. Doña Petrona and other domestic experts presumed that the modern housewife was middle-class or, at least, a working-class homemaker with aspirations to emulate her better-off counterpart. While then as now Argentines were reluctant to speak directly about race, the ideal *ama de casa* was also popularly imagined as being both urban and of European descent. This white, full-time, urban homemaker was also presumed to enjoy regular domestic services, provided increasingly by indigenous or mixed-race migrants from Argentina’s northern provinces and neighboring countries.

Doña Petrona, who like her assistant Juanita had both European and indigenous heritage, did not address this racial dynamic directly during her career.³⁵ The Argentines I spoke with seemed genuinely confused about how they might respond to my questions about their understanding of the racial or ethnic identities of Doña Petrona and Juanita Bordoy. Many stated simply that they were *provincianas* (from the provinces), or did not answer at all. During her career, Doña Petrona’s fans seemed much more attuned to her provincial background than her ethnic one (and had little to say about either with regard to Juanita). For example, several Argentines laughingly recalled how Petrona would label an outstanding dish “*un puema*,” instead of “*un poema*” as the word “poem” is generally pronounced in and around Buenos Aires. Many associated this “mispronunciation” with Petrona’s provincial upbringing.³⁶

Even as Doña Petrona and her contemporaries sometimes spoke about region but were generally silent on race, they began to consistently discuss the perceived shortage of domestic help around midcentury. In the late 1940s Doña Petrona began to publicly recognize that some of her fans might lack a domestic servant. (Until then she had assumed that everyone had at least one maid—or at least fantasized about having one.) Modifying this expectation, in 1948 she

34. “El argentino de 1963: Un ser que se debate entre polos contradictorios,” *Primera Plana*, 11 June 1963, 28.

35. Petrona’s mother was of indigenous and Italian heritage and her father of Basque descent. Juanita Bordoy’s mother was indigenous and her father seemingly of European descent. Cejas, “Memoirs of Petrona C. de Gandulfo”; and Porota B., interview.

36. During the 1950s and 1960s, domestic employees were strongly associated with Santiago del Estero as this region sent many female migrants to the capital to work. Two contemporary articles speak this regional trend: “Un problema de nuestro tiempo: El trabajo doméstico,” *Claudia*, no. 44 (Jan. 1961); and “El drama de ser servida,” *Claudia*, no. 45 (Feb. 1961). I thank Valeria Manzano for sharing these articles with me.

added a section to *El libro de Doña Petrona* that provided suggestions on how to arrange housework with little or no domestic help, based upon US and European models. “In almost all [US and European] homes,” she explained, “housewives have organized their domestic tasks with domestic help that does not live with them or is there for only a few hours or half days.”³⁷ She asserted that their solution to the problem could be both “comfortable” and “economical,” noting that it might, in fact, be a necessity for many Argentines due to the smaller servants’ quarters in the most recently constructed Argentine apartments.³⁸

Still, whether some of her fans could count on even part-time help would increasingly be called into doubt. With the growth of industry that had accelerated under Perón, more women sought employment in factories and other extradomestic settings.³⁹ In 1959 former journalist Alicia Lobstein recognized this trend in her book *365 días sin servicio doméstico* (365 Days without Domestic Service). She began, “the maid left me once again,” and revealed that she had gone through three maids in just 15 days.⁴⁰ She went on to relate their desertion to the other opportunities available to women during this time, like factory work, that gave them more independence.⁴¹ Lobstein concluded that the modern, middle-class Argentine homemaker should be characterized by her lack of consistent domestic help.

As Petrona’s and Lobstein’s texts suggested, while elites continued to enjoy the services of domestic servants, during the mid-twentieth century many middle-class homes counted on hourly assistance or no assistance at all.⁴² The

37. Petrona C. de Gandulfo, *El libro de Doña Petrona*, 26th ed. (Buenos Aires: Talleres Gráficos Compañía General Fabril Financiera, 1948), 22.

38. For more on Peronist housing initiatives, see Anahi Ballent, “La ‘casa para todos’: Grandeza y miseria de la vivienda masiva,” in *Historia de la vida privada*, vol. 3, *La Argentina entre multitudes y soledades, de los años treinta a la actualidad*, ed. Fernando Devoto and Marta Madero (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 1999), 19–47.

39. Legal scholars and other contemporaries (such as Lobstein) made this observation. For the former, see for example Andres Julian Fescina, “Regimen juridico del servicio doméstico y su reglamentación” (thesis, Facultad de Derecho, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1956), 4.

40. Alicia Lobstein, *365 días sin servicio doméstico* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1959).

41. Carlos Zurita also makes this point in looking back at this period. Carlos Vigilio Zurita, “Trabajo, servidumbre y situaciones de género: Algunas acotaciones sobre el servicio doméstico en Santiago del Estero, Argentina,” unpublished paper, Universidad Nacional de Santiago del Estero, n.d., 3. <http://lasa.international.pitt.edu/LASA97/zurita.pdf>.

42. Isabel Laura Cárdenas, *Ramona y el robot: El servicio doméstico en barrios prestigiosos de Buenos Aires, 1895–1985* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Búsqueda, 1986); and Sztretter, *La terciarización del empleo*, 10.

shrinking number of domestic servants provides one of the rare statistical indications of this transition. Whereas census takers identified 376,572 women working as domestic servants in Argentina in 1947, they counted some 40,000 fewer women doing so in 1960.⁴³ By 1960 women working as full-time maids and cooks represented just a fifth of the “economically active” population.⁴⁴ Still, whether this drop in census numbers represents a real decline in the number of domestic servants remains an open question. Even as the quantitative evidence suggests that the number of full-time domestic servants, and the 10 percent or so of households that enjoyed their services, declined during this era, contemporaries often spoke of the shift from full- to part-time domestic work.⁴⁵ Thus, as with other statistical indications of domestic service, census figures only give us part of the picture for what has continued to be an often informal, part-time, and undocumented part of the economy.

Although the number of domestic servants remains murky, it is clear that the changing economic and legal climate shaped the parameters for negotiating new kinds of paid domestic relationships during the mid-twentieth century. As Lobstein and others pointed out, the emergence of other alternatives like factory work enabled some domestic servants to exert greater autonomy and request better benefits, like higher salaries and more time off. Homemakers accustomed to setting the terms of the relationship were sometimes forced to compete with the factories to retain their help.⁴⁶ Domestic servants’ changing legal status also heightened this climate of negotiation and uncertainty. In 1956

43. Gogna, “Domestic Workers in Buenos Aires,” 84.

44. Susana Torado shows that whereas in 1914 almost half of “economically active” women worked in domestic service and a fifth in industry, commerce, and service, by 1947 these percentages had nearly reversed. As Carlos Zurita demonstrates, this trend would deepen during the late 1940s and 1950s. See Torado, *Historia de la familia*, 211; and Carlos Zurita, *El servicio doméstico en Argentina: El caso de Santiago del Estero* (Santiago del Estero, Argentina: Instituto Central de Investigaciones Científicas, Universidad Católica de Santiago del Estero, 1983), 12–13.

45. While Gogna shows that the registered numbers of domestic servants would grow during the 1960s, Carlos Zurita estimates that only 9 percent of Argentine households employed full-time paid domestic help by 1970. Szretter finds similar but slightly higher numbers than Zurita, stating that there were around 10 domestic employees for every 100 homes from 1947 to 1970; but notes that his statistics do not include people who worked by the hour or in multiple homes. See Gogna, “Domestic Workers in Buenos Aires,” 84; Zurita, *El servicio doméstico en Argentina*, 13 and 48–19; and Szretter, *La terciarización del empleo*, 9–10. For an example of the shift to part-time work, see “Relaciones con el servicio doméstico,” *Femirama* (ca. 1963–64), 26. I am grateful to Amalia Berardone for sharing this article with me.

46. Cárdenas, *Ramona y el robot*, 115.

Argentine legislators passed Law 326, which significantly expanded the rights of domestic workers. While they had gained the right to an annual salary and an annual vacation in 1946 after Juan Perón took office, it was not until the year after he was forced out of office that full-time domestic servants gained the right to daily and weekly time off, sick leave, and financial compensation for firing.⁴⁷ It was also in 1956 that legislators passed Article 1624 of the Civil Code, which brought domestic servants and their employers under municipal and local regulations for the first time.⁴⁸ Thus, as Lobstein struggled to find a way to manage her house “without domestic service,” those working in domestic service had recently gained legal rights similar to those already enjoyed by other workers.

Nevertheless, whether domestic servants could exercise the rights they had won remained in doubt.⁴⁹ As mid-twentieth-century legal scholars pointed out, custom had long dictated this work relationship, unique in that it is not intended for profit and occurs in the “intimacy of the home.”⁵⁰ Even today, just 4 percent or so of domestic servants are registered as employees, despite the fact that their employers are now legally obligated to contribute to their retirement. As a contemporary study suggests, the majority of domestic relationships continue to be negotiated between patronas and empleadas on a personal rather than a legal basis.⁵¹

Although domestic servants’ legal status changed during the 1950s, labor laws did not cover the patronas who employed them, or other full-time home-

47. Passed in 1946, Law 12.919 was the first to guarantee domestic servants an annual salary and yearly vacation. See *Anales de la legislación argentina*, 18 Dec. 1946. Decree-Law 326/56 was published in the *Boletín Oficial* on 20 Jan. 1956. Article 9 specified that live-in domestic servants should receive the following benefits: minimum of 9 hours of rest at night; either 24 continuous hours of time off or two 15-hour periods after 3 p.m.; yearly vacation (employer can select dates); medical assistance; a furnished and “hygienic” room; a healthy and sufficient diet; and one hour per week to attend religious services.

48. Fescina argues that the lack of a strong union or organization for domestic workers had delayed the passage of this type of law, and that competition with industrial jobs spurred its passage. Fescina, “Regimen Jurídico,” 1–4.

49. Julio C. Rojas, “El servicio doméstico, regimen jurídico” (thesis, Facultad de Derecho, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1956), see especially p. 120; and Cárdenas, *Ramona y el robot*, 124–25.

50. Oscar Grinberg, “El servicio doméstico en el derecho argentino” (thesis, Facultad de Derecho, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1951), 6.

51. The statistics generated in this article were created by the Labor Ministry. Corina Courtis and María Inés Pacecca, “La operatoria del género en la migración: Mujeres migrantes y trabajo doméstico en el AMBA,” in *Investigaciones e Antropología Social*, ed. Mabel Grimberg, María Josefina Martínez, and María Inés Fernández Álvarez (Buenos Aires: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras UBA, 2008), 157–74.

makers without paid help. However, there were some rumblings for recognition and monetary compensation of homemakers' work. For example, in 1952, an Argentine law student explained that very little legislation had contemplated "the work *amas de casa* carry out in their homes" but argued that it should.⁵² On an even larger stage, First Lady Eva Perón proposed to Congress that homemakers receive a modest monthly allowance for their work, "cleaning the house, looking after clothes, setting the table, bringing up children, etc." Congress debated the bill, but it was never approved. In her autobiography, Eva Perón demurred that this issue was neither "serious" nor "urgent" but rather something she raised for people to consider.⁵³

In contrast to this reticence regarding material benefits, the Peronist government, together with the expanding ranks of private domestic experts, clearly recognized the symbolic importance of homemakers' work not only for their families but also for the nation and the national economy.⁵⁴ During the 1950s, numerous public and private figures celebrated the work of *amas de casa*, championing the idea that they deserved and needed professional training and respect. This decade generated some of the first formal declarations of the possibility that housework might be considered a professional activity both for glorified, but unpaid, *amas de casa* and their less renowned, but modestly compensated, helpers.

The 1960s: A New Model of Domestic Work?

Even as political and societal leaders had celebrated the role of the *ama de casa* during the 1950s, a number of voices began to suggest this was not women's only or necessarily best option during the 1960s. Young middle-class women spoke the loudest through their actions, as many continued their educations or sought out extradomestic employment. As a result, during this decade the number of "economically active" women increased significantly for the first time during the twentieth century, bringing women from 20 to 25 percent of the official workforce.⁵⁵ In turn, the percentage of homemakers decreased from

52. Gabriela Levi Deveali, "El trabajo de la mujer y la legislación social" (thesis, Facultad de Derecho, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1952), especially p. 136.

53. Perón, *My Mission in Life*, 192.

54. See Milanesio, "The Guardian Angels of the Domestic Economy," 108; and Pite, "Creating a Common Table," chap. 3.

55. Rosalia Cortés, *Informe sobre el Mercado de trabajo femenino en la Argentina* ([Argentina]: Subsecretaría de la Mujer de la Nación / UNICEF, 1987); and David Rock, *Argentina 1516–1982: From Spanish Colonization to the Falklands War* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985), 332.

nearly three-quarters to a little over half of the female population during the course of the 1960s.⁵⁶

Mass media outlets were both responsive to and influential in shaping new ideas—or maintaining older ones—about women’s changing roles. As Isabella Cosse has established, more progressive “vanguard” magazines directed to the upper middle classes tended to celebrate the “liberated” young woman who rejected the principal role of homemaker. In turn, more conservative publications, which were generally directed to a broader audience—such as *Para Ti*, with which Doña Petrona collaborated—continued to celebrate women’s domestic roles above all else.⁵⁷ In line with these more conservative magazines, Pedro Muchnik created a television show at the beginning of the 1960s that celebrated the work and productivity of the *ama de casa* in the home. *Buenas Tardes, Mucho Gusto* went on the air in 1962 on the new private channel Canal 13, dubbing itself “a television show for the home, made for people whose vocation is housework.”⁵⁸ According to Pedro Muchnik’s daughter and host of the program, Annamaría Muchnik, approximately one million people watched the show daily in the capital, an impressive figure considering that it represented about a third of city dwellers and the same number of households that owned a television.⁵⁹

The number of television sets and viewers had grown dramatically since Doña Petrona had appeared on the first, state-run channel in 1952. In 1959, the Argentine Chamber of Television calculated that there were 280,000 televisions in Argentine homes, with the middle class claiming the majority, or 58 percent, the lower class 26 percent, and the upper class 16 percent of the total.⁶⁰ Some six

56. *Cinco estudios sobre la situación de la mujer en América Latina*, Estudios e Informes de Cepal (Santiago de Chile: Naciones Unidas, 1982), 152.

57. Isabella Cosse, “Los nuevos prototipos femeninos en los años 60 y 70: De la mujer doméstica a la joven ‘liberada,’” in *De minifaldas, militancias y revoluciones: Exploraciones sobre los 70 en la Argentina*, ed. Andrea Andujar, Déborah d’Antonio, Fernanda Gil Lozano, Karin Gramático, and María Laura Rosa (Buenos Aires: Luxemburg, 2009), 171–86.

58. Carlos Ulanovsky, Silvia Itkin, and Pablo Sirvén, *Estamos en el aire: Una historia de la televisión en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1999), 144.

59. Annamaría Muchnik, interview with author, Buenos Aires, 22 May 2002, tape recording. One did not need to own a television to watch one. Mirta Varela explains that many Argentines watched television in neighbors’ homes, bars, and other public settings. Mirta Varela, *La televisión criolla: Desde sus incicios hasta la llegada del hombre a la luna, 1951–1969* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2005). For population figures, see República Argentina, *Censo nacional de población familias y viviendas 1970*, prepared by the Ministerio de Economía (Buenos Aires, 1973); and for television statistics, see Ulanovsky, Itkin, and Sirvén, *Estamos en el aire*, 129.

60. As cited in Andrés Carretero, *Vida Cotidiana en Buenos Aires*, vol. 3, *Desde la sociedad autoritaria hasta la sociedad de masas, 1918–1970* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2000), 180.

years later, the number of televisions had grown about sixfold, and from 1965 to 1973 the total number of sets more than tripled to over 4 million.⁶¹ This distribution reflected the development of an expanding consumer market in which members of all classes, and especially the middle sectors, had access to (if different abilities to pay for) new products like television sets.

Still, Argentines' ability to consume this new form of media (and to watch Doña Petrona and Juanita in action) was largely shaped by where they lived. Residents of Buenos Aires enjoyed the greatest access to television programming during the 1950s and 1960s, while provincial channels also began to emerge during this era.⁶² During the 1960s the majority of Argentine viewers and the prime audience for *Buenas Tardes, Mucho Gusto* resided in urban areas, including Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Mar del Plata, and Mendoza. Much like Doña Petrona's cookbook, *Buenas Tardes, Mucho Gusto* began by targeting and reaching mostly urban *amas de casas* of the middle and working classes. Pedro Muchnik presumed that these women were not only the most accessible audience but also the most interested one, especially as compared to their male peers.⁶³ Annamaría Muchnik recalls that her father originally tailored this program to "*la mujer de su casa*" (the woman in her own home), as "women were not working, but focused on domestic tasks" in 1960 when he created the program.⁶⁴

Even as the numbers of women who worked outside of the home would increase throughout the 1960s, at the beginning of this decade homemaking still reigned supreme. According to the 1960 census, around three-quarters of women defined their occupation as homemaking, as they had throughout most of the early twentieth century. As these census statistics surely undercounted women's remunerated work, they fed into the accepted wisdom that most women, as Muchnik put it, "were not working." Further, despite the Peronist emphasis on homemakers' economic contributions, this census continued to categorize such women as "economically inactive," along with students and incapacitated people. In contrast, the census registered not a single man as a

61. By 1965 there were 1.6 million television sets, a figure that grew to 2 million in 1968 and 4 million in 1973. Statistics as cited in Gonzalo Aguilar, "Televisión y la vida privada," in *Historia de la vida privada en la Argentina*, vol. 3, *La Argentina entre multitudes y soledad, de los años treinta a la actualidad*, ed. Fernando Devoto and Marta Madero (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 1999), 256.

62. Ulanovsky, Itkin, and Sirvén, *Estamos en el aire*, 391.

63. Muchnik estimated that women represented about 90 percent of the program's viewership. Annamaría Muchnik, interview with author.

64. Annamaría Muchnik, interview by Jorge Nielsen.

homemaker, characterizing the 15 percent of “economically inactive” men as retirees, students, or “in other conditions.”⁶⁵

On television, as elsewhere, Doña Petrona directed herself explicitly to female homemakers. Her show was broadcast on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays during the siesta hour when many Argentine women (and sometimes their husbands and, more often, their children) were at home.⁶⁶ The US food company Swift and the Argentine kitchen manufacturer Romulo Ruffini sponsored Doña Petrona’s segments, and she regularly showcased their products in her recipe preparations. At the opening of each cooking segment the camera panned over a collection of Swift food products and Ruffini’s Gamuza brand cutlery placed on the kitchen counter. Doña Petrona often incorporated both manufacturers’ products into her cooking lessons, taking a spoon off the counter to mix something, or making a recipe with a clearly marked can of Swift Vienna sausages or *dulce de leche* (milk caramel).⁶⁷

In keeping with her original work promoting gas stoves for Primitiva (1928–50), Doña Petrona approached her television classes not simply as opportunities to promote her sponsors’ products, but principally as opportunities to teach her alumnas. In recognition of women’s growing extradomestic interests, she also began to offer quicker recipes that she directed to specific categories of women including “young girls,” “married women who work outside of the home,” and “housewives who like to spend as little time as possible in the kitchen.”⁶⁸ Still, even as she recognized women’s growing lack of interest in cooking, she spoke most directly, most enthusiastically, and most frequently to the young women of the new generation (especially brides-to-be) about how to prepare meals. To meet the needs of this group along with others, she gave out her phone number on the air and told those living in Buenos Aires to call her with any questions.⁶⁹ She encouraged people from the provinces, especially fans in other large urban centers like Mar del Plata, Córdoba, and Mendoza, to write to her. She encouraged her students to take notes, practice

65. República Argentina, *Censo Nacional 1960*, prepared by Secretaria de Estado de Hacienda (Buenos Aires, 1963). Estudio Sur, *Potencial Económico Argentino* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Estrada, 1972), 10.

66. Blanca Cotta, as cited in Fernanda Muñoz Pace, “A los 95 años murió Doña Petrona,” *El Clarín*, 7 Feb. 1972, p. 26.

67. *Las recetas*, especially programs 1, 9, 15, 19, 23, and 28.

68. *Las recetas*, program 12.

69. Marcelo Vidales, “Maestra en la cocina y best seller nacional,” *La Prensa*, 11 Oct. 1998.

carefully, and send her their questions. She promised that “no letter would remain unanswered.”⁷⁰

Some of Doña Petrona’s viewers took their roles as students as seriously as she took her role as a teacher. A journalist for the magazine *Siete Días* explained in 1972 that “Argentine *amas de casas* take careful notes of the recipes [that appear] at the bottom of the screen and religiously follow the proposed menus.”⁷¹ A woman named Nora explained to me that her mother and aunt Teresa did just that, taking careful notes as they watched Doña Petrona on television during the 1960s and 1970s in the port city of Ingeniero White, just to the south of Bahía Blanca. Both women, she pointed out, tended “to respect the recipe,” and whether they used a recipe from Doña Petrona’s cookbook or her television program, they made an effort to follow her instructions “step by step.”⁷²

Not all women shared this level of dedication, ability, or desire to cook like Doña Petrona. This was particularly the case among poorer and more rural populations. In fact, some Argentines had never heard of her. In northwestern and northeastern Argentina, for example, I met a number of women of indigenous descent who did not know of Argentina’s most famous culinary expert. And, in the city of Puerto Ingeniero White, I spoke with a cook who had heard of Doña Petrona but began our conversation by stating, “Doña Petrona never mattered to me.” She went on to explain that she had little time or money to follow Doña Petrona while raising her brothers and sisters on the typical subsistence diet of the Argentine poor, the herbal infusion *mate* and crackers, during the 1970s.⁷³

A decade earlier, some more privileged Argentines made clear that they did not aspire to cook or be like Doña Petrona even as they could afford to do so. Specifically, as more women began attending the university (coming to represent 34 percent of all students by 1968), some female students rejected the very idea that it was their duty in life to emulate Doña Petrona.⁷⁴ One woman explained

70. Two women I interviewed (Elena T. and Teresa C.) actually sent Petrona letters and, as promised, received prompt responses. Each saved Doña Petrona’s reply for over 30 years, an act that suggests her importance in their lives. Unfortunately, the correspondence received by Petrona was eventually thrown away. *Las recetas*, 5.

71. “Mi esposa, Doña Petrona,” published interview with Atilio Massut, *Siete Días*, 17 Nov. 1972, n.p.

72. Nora L., interview with author, Puerto Ingeniero White, 21 May 2004, tape recording.

73. Stella M. D., interview by author, Puerto Ingeniero White, 19 May 2004, tape recording.

74. Catalina Wainerman, ed., *Vivir en familia* (Buenos Aires: UNICEF / Losada, 1994), 195.

to me, “In general, middle-class families had a pretty reverential adoration for . . . Doña Petrona. . . . Therefore, for the women who burst into the university in the sixties, it was necessary to get away from Doña Petrona.” She pointed out that she and her peers wanted to distance themselves from the domestic image of women that Doña Petrona promoted because it was an obvious example of the “feminine characteristics we were rejecting.” Still, she noted that she and her classmates did not wholly reject this role, thinking that as women it was still necessary to learn “how to cook something.”⁷⁵

Even among faithful viewers, some watched with little intent of re-creating Doña Petrona’s recipes at home. For example, Magdalena M., a homemaker in Buenos Aires whose parents migrated from Spain, recalled that she loved to watch Doña Petrona’s program after she acquired her first television set in 1960. She remarked that she never cooked like Doña Petrona “because her dishes were sophisticated and expensive.” Still, she explained, “I took away some things. She was very good; she was someone to see. She was someone to watch.” What Magdalena seemed to find particularly engaging was how Petrona dressed and interacted with her helper. “Did you see that she always had an embroidered apron [and was always] well put-together, well-coiffed?” she asked me excitedly. And “when Juanita was always removing everything that [Petrona] used, she would say ‘Juanita, I’m not done yet!’”⁷⁶ Like Magdalena, several other Argentines with limited means also mentioned that they watched the program more for entertainment than to learn what to cook. Some pointed to their interest in Doña Petrona and Juanita’s elegant outfits, large pearl necklaces, carefully coiffed hairstyles, and embroidered aprons. Others suggested that the drama of the relationship between Doña Petrona and Juanita was what really made the program interesting to watch.⁷⁷

“Pobre Juanita”

Doña Petrona explicitly signaled that the members of her anticipated audience were female and implicitly presumed that they embraced or aspired to middle-class patterns of domesticity. Most obviously, the class-based image that Petrona

75. Dora B., interview with author, Buenos Aires, 30 June 2004, tape recording.

76. Magdalena M., interview with author, Buenos Aires, 16 Jan. 2004, tape recording.

77. For example, during my interview with Nelly F., Isabel T., Milagros M., and Angelica H. in a poorer section of Puerto Ingeniero White, one of them remarked in response to my question about the relationship between Juanita and Petrona, “I liked it a lot, I didn’t watch [the program much] but the few times I saw it, I liked it because of the aprons they wore, and [their] hairstyles, and necklaces.”

projected was indelibly marked by the constant presence of her assistant, Juanita, and by their on-screen relationship with one another. While both Juanita and Doña Petrona's husband helped Petrona to get ready for her segments, Juanita was the one on air with her and became her most important public partner. Cook Emmy di Molina put it simply, "It is unthinkable to remember Petrona without Juanita."⁷⁸ And, indeed, articles and conversations with Argentines about Doña Petrona consistently turn to her relationship with Juanita (and rarely, if ever, to her relationship with her husband).⁷⁹

During and after Doña Petrona and Juanita Bordoy's three-decade-long tenure together on television (1952–83), people have fallen into two camps: those who thought Petrona treated Juanita fairly by soliciting her help as was only appropriate, and those who thought she treated her unfairly by ordering her around in a condescending fashion. Such reactions were influenced but not entirely determined by class standing. During my hundreds of informal conversations, 46 formal interviews, and 2 oral history workshops with Argentines who identified themselves (or would likely be identified by others) either as middle-class, working-class, or elite, some people in each category critiqued this relationship while others complimented it.⁸⁰ At the same time that their reactions seemed quite personal, it was striking that the six women I interviewed who had worked (or continued to work) in domestic service tended to express fewer negative sentiments and even to suggest that the relationship between Doña Petrona and Juanita "was very good," as one woman explained.⁸¹ In contrast, in my oral history workshops with a diverse group of people, participants hotly debated the question of whether such treatment was fair or unfair.

78. Emmy di Molina, as cited in Marcelo Vidales, "Maestra en la cocina y best seller nacional," *La Prensa*, 11 Oct. 1998, p. 25.

79. Most Argentines I spoke with were unclear about Doña Petrona's private life. Her first husband, Oscar Gandulfo, passed away during the early 1940s. She married her second husband, Atilio Massut, in 1946. In Massut, Doña Petrona gained not only a life partner but also a partner interested in helping build her career. Cejas, "Memoirs of Petrona C. de Gandulfo."

80. From 2002 through 2004, I was able to conduct 46 individual or small group interviews and two larger oral history workshops in which 40 people participated. The first was held in the middle- and working-class neighborhood of Villa Luro, on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, and the second took place in the largely working-class port city of Ingeniero White, ten hours to the south. The majority of my interviewees were older women who are now in their seventies and eighties. However, I also made a point of seeking out men as well as some younger women, who often had different relationships to cooking and to this star. Most of the people I interviewed were enthusiastic about Doña Petrona and therefore interested in speaking with me about her.

81. María E. P., interview with author, Buenos Aires, 22 July 2004, tape recording.

Even today, these two perspectives reveal themselves in the distinct ways people invoke Juanita's name in everyday domestic interactions. For example, Olga G., an enthusiastic home cook now in her seventies, explained that her cousin María B., who dislikes cooking but does not mind cleaning, has been "her Juanita" for years.⁸² While María told me she has been happy to play this role, others said that they have rejected it. Some shared that when being bossed around in the kitchen by friends or family (and, not, it is important to note, a *patrona*) they might retort, "¿Qué te crees, qué vos sos Petrona, y yo, Juanita?" (What do you think? That you're Petrona and I'm Juanita?).⁸³

Most Argentines learned about this relationship through watching the pair interact live on television for over 30 years. During the approximately 800 minutes of existing taped segments from the 1960s, Juanita aided Doña Petrona with tasks such as mixing, kneading, and cutting.⁸⁴ She also performed specific duties that Doña Petrona rarely did herself, such as putting things into and taking them out of the oven, or cleaning pans and utensils. Host Annamaría Muchnik explained that Juanita did all the preparatory work, "Petrona did not even have to say anything and it was already done. It was as if it was a surgical operation" and Juanita was the "*enfermera*" (nurse) and Petrona the "*médico*" (doctor).⁸⁵ The gendered dynamics behind this analogy are revealing, as Muchnik associates Doña Petrona with the type of power that a male doctor might hold over a female nurse. Another comparison pointed to a more commonly female-to-female relationship of power, as a fan named Dora I. explained that Petrona was the "*profesora*" (teacher), and Juanita, the very quiet "*ayudante*" (helper).⁸⁶

Such analogies were likely inspired by the fact that while Doña Petrona spoke to her viewers and to Juanita, Juanita almost never spoke. In the one existing taped season, Juanita Bordoy remains silent in all but three brief occasions, in which she speaks quickly and quietly to Petrona.⁸⁷ Even Doña Petrona

82. Olga G. and María B., interview with author, Puerto Ingeniero White, 18 May 2004, tape recording.

83. While often repeated, this phrase came directly from an interview with Marcela A. and her niece María Laura A. Marcela A. and María Laura A., interview with author, Villa de Mayo, 4 July 2004, tape recording.

84. These tapes of the remaining year of television segments, which I watched in 2002, are available at Canal 13 and are sometimes replayed on their nostalgic channel "Volver." In addition, a few programs are available on YouTube.com.

85. Annamaría Muchnik, interview with author.

86. Dora I., interview with author, Puerto Ingeniero White, 17 May 2004, tape recording.

87. In the first of these instances Juanita mumbled something inaudible; the second time, she quickly acknowledged Petrona's request; and the final time, on the aforementioned

addressed the issue of Juanita's quietness on air. During an episode in which they made a liver paté, Petrona looked into the camera and confided to her viewers with a smile, "When Juanita feels like it, she talks too."⁸⁸

Nonetheless, like many *dueñas de casa*, Doña Petrona also made it clear that she was the one in charge. Her reputation as an inconsiderate taskmaster sprung from her tendency to speak to Juanita in a bossy and brusque manner. "*Basta, eh*" (Enough, already), Petrona would say to Juanita if she wanted her to stop doing something, such as whipping cream, or "*rápido, Juanita*" (quickly, Juanita) if she wanted her to hurry up.⁸⁹ On the one episode in which Juanita actually spoke audibly to the camera, Petrona commented, "It is hot today and I do not feel like working, you should be the worker, Juanita. Isn't that right, Juanita?" to which Juanita responded "*Bueno, Señora*" (Okay, Ma'am) and resumed working as instructed.⁹⁰ On the aforementioned Christmas Eve episode, Petrona asked Juanita to stop what she was doing so that she could demonstrate where a particular bone she was removing from a turkey would be on Juanita's body.⁹¹ As always, Juanita obliged, this time with a laugh.

Over the past several decades Argentines have tended to be more critical or at least more apt to laugh at, rather than applaud, the way Petrona treated Juanita. In many conversations I started about Doña Petrona, one of the first reactions was often a smile followed by the phrase "*ay, pobre Juanita*" (oh, poor Juanita). People would often point out how Petrona ordered her around and portrayed everything as "Juanita's fault and not her [own]."⁹² For example, a woman named Elena P. remarked that "pobre Juanita" was a "martyr because Doña Petrona was a bossy one."⁹³ Television scholar Mirta Varela agreed, critiquing the manner in which Doña Petrona "mistreated" her silent helper on air.⁹⁴ Still, journalist and fellow cook Miriam Becker suggested that Petrona's personality made it imperative that she work with someone like Juanita. "Juanita was very respectful, even more than Petrona was tough," Becker continued. "It could not have been any other way for the person playing second to Petrona, because

Christmas dinner program, she asked Petrona if the marmalade had reduced enough. *Las recetas*, 10, 24, 28.

88. *Las recetas*, 16.

89. *Las recetas*, especially programs 8 and 14.

90. *Las recetas*, 24.

91. *Las recetas*, 28.

92. Hilda R., interview with author, Buenos Aires, 17 June 2004, tape recording.

93. Elena P., interview with author, Buenos Aires, 27 May 2004, tape recording.

94. Varela, *La televisión criolla*, 153.

Petrona would not have permitted a single breach of confidence.” Nonetheless, despite her strong will, Becker argued that Petrona was both “generous” and “good.”⁹⁵

In other words, those who defended Petrona suggested that her attitude toward Juanita was simply evidence of her strong personality and perhaps even part of what made her successful. A woman now in her seventies explained, “I think that a woman who made it where [Petrona] made it 40 or 50 years ago had to establish her authority in order to prevail.”⁹⁶ Interpreting the criticism of Petrona in this light, Nora L. suggested, “When [Petrona] said ‘bring me that,’ people would complain because they thought she didn’t treat [Juanita] with much kindness, but no, that was her personality.”⁹⁷ Several others remarked that if Petrona really had been so cruel, then Juanita would not have stayed with her for so many years.⁹⁸ Juanita’s relatives agreed that Petrona was just being herself and did, in fact, treat Juanita kindly. Even as she acknowledged that Petrona was “pretty bossy,” Juanita Bordoy’s niece Esther P. explained, “It was [just Petrona’s] way of being, it was not that she treated [Juanita] badly, because she loved her and she respected her and she let her make decisions.”⁹⁹

Still, for many viewers, Doña Petrona’s treatment of Juanita seemed problematic—perhaps because it touched on a larger and long-standing abuse of power in the domestic realm that had been gaining new public recognition. As growing numbers of activists, journalists, and everyday citizens began to question social hierarchies during the 1960s (and beyond), more people suggested that the traditional ways in which patronas had treated their help were no longer acceptable. For example, in assessing the contemporary “crisis in domestic service,” an author writing for the relatively conservative middle-class magazine *Femirama* during the 1960s explained, “The relationship between *amas de casa* and service personnel has changed because both of their roles have changed. The *ama de casa* of last century who ‘played mom’ with the *mucama*, along with the demanding *señora* who treated her like a slave, no longer exists.”¹⁰⁰ Of course, as Doña Petrona and Juanita’s on-screen relationship demonstrated and

95. Miriam Becker, interview with author, Buenos Aires, 10 June 2004, tape recording.

96. Debate at Museo del Puerto with author, Ingeniero White, 22 May 2004, tape recording.

97. Nora L., interview.

98. Someone made this exact point during the debate at the Museo del Puerto Ingeniero White, commenting, “I think that Juanita would not have stayed with her for so many years if she had treated her badly.”

99. Esther A. P., interview with author, La Plata, 25 Nov. 2003, tape recording.

100. “Relaciones con el servicio doméstico,” *Femirama* (ca. 1963–64), 26.

my oral histories corroborated, this type of a maternalistic, and, at times, domineering relationship did continue to exist. Further, because Doña Petrona and Juanita's relationship was so public, it could be publicly scrutinized.

Those who saw Doña Petrona's treatment of her assistant as an abuse of her power began to take Juanita's side, as they perceived it, during the late 1960s. This was something that both Juanita and Petrona recognized on some level. Juanita told her niece Susana that when Petrona gave public lectures, she would give Juanita a hard time and say, "Do you realize that they clap harder for you than they do for me?" Juanita confessed to her niece, "It makes me embarrassed, I realize that when we go in to give a lecture that people are clapping so hard for me and it makes me feel I don't know what. . . . It makes me embarrassed." Always aware of (and seemingly more comfortable in) "her place," Juanita concluded, "The star is *la señora*."¹⁰¹

As this anecdote suggests, part of what made this pair so compelling to audiences was their very different approaches to stardom. As Matilde Sánchez wrote in an article after Juanita's death in 1995 (three years after Petrona's own passing), "The airs of Petrona—married 'to a Gandulfo, who were people of a certain standing,' as she herself would define them—fit with the modesty of Juanita to perfection, almost like a pair of comedians."¹⁰² Eduardo R., who watched Petrona and Juanita on television with his family growing up during the 1960s, also highlighted the comical nature of their interactions. He recalled "sometimes you would laugh because [Petrona] treated [Juanita] so badly."¹⁰³ Similarly Elvira I. remembered that her mother "had a good time" watching Petrona and Juanita interact on *Buenas Tardes, Mucho Gusto*. Elvira explained with a chuckle that her mother would say that Petrona is really "making a scene."¹⁰⁴

Argentine children also picked up on the tension and the humor of this duo's on-screen relationship by incorporating it into the games they would play. Marta F. recalls playing "Doña Petrona" with her girlfriends in her middle-class neighborhood of La Plata during the early 1960s, when she was a small child. Now a paleontologist, Marta described how she and her friends would set up a big table in between her neighbor's chicken coop and her yard and "produce" a cooking show. She explained, "The main issue was who [got to be] Doña Petrona. There could be one or a thousand Juanitas but only one Doña Petrona." This honor was generally reserved for the oldest or most powerful girl play-

101. Porota B., interview, Susana.

102. Matilde Sánchez, "Murió Juanita, la legendaria asistente de Doña Petrona," *El Clarín*, 6 July 1995, p. 42.

103. Eduardo R., interview with author, Buenos Aires, 23 May 2002, tape recording.

104. Elvira I., interview with author, Buenos Aires, 18 June 2004, tape recording.

ing that day. Once elected, “Doña Petrona” would don an apron and a fresh flower. She would proceed to lead the show and order all the other girls—the “Juanitas”—around. Unlike Petrona, the many “Juanitas” did not wear anything special. “The funny thing is,” Marta pointed out, “we acted as if we were really on the program.” The girl playing Petrona would instruct the Juanitas to bring her the water to mix with the dirt and say, “It’s necessary to do this *quickly*, Juanita.”¹⁰⁵

In addition to showing that this group of Argentine girls clearly understood who was in charge, this anecdote also reveals how Doña Petrona and Juanita’s television presence made this pair a shared cultural referent during the turbulent period of the 1960s. When Marta spoke to her colleagues about this game, many of them said that they played it as well. A female friend who is now a member of the Argentine Congress told Marta that she played “Doña Petrona” and forced one of her cousins to be Juanita. As Marta explained, “The most important thing was to play ‘Doña Petrona’ and rope someone into being Juanita.”¹⁰⁶

Playing “Doña Petrona” not only allowed Marta and her friends to boss someone else around but also helped them, as second- or third-generation immigrants, to feel Argentine. Marta explained, “We lived in an Italian neighborhood and no one could say that they were Jewish or Spanish. Everyone wanted to be Argentine. People had to civilize themselves, to know how to eat.” As the game itself suggests, feeling Argentine was not only wrapped up in how to eat but also in how to treat presumed inferiors. Despite her own relatively modest provincial background, Doña Petrona’s cultural importance and long career in the city made her an emblem of Argentine womanhood. As Marta stated, Doña Petrona was “the image of what was the most appropriate for a woman.”¹⁰⁷ Still, as these young women and their slightly older counterparts grew up during the 1960s, they also encountered a new, younger, and less domestic model for Argentine womanhood.¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, many of them (including Marta) chose to pursue professional careers in lieu of becoming full-time homemakers. Of course, Doña Petrona was a career woman herself, even as her attention to domestic matters often obscured this reality and any criticism of it.

105. Marta F., interview with author, La Plata, 4 Apr. 2004, tape recording.

106. *Ibid.*

107. *Ibid.*

108. For analysis of this new, younger female model, see Cosse, “Los nuevos prototipos femeninos”; María del Carmen Feijoo and Marcela M. A. Nari, trans. Luis A. Fierro, “Women in Argentina during the 1960s,” *Latin American Perspectives* 23, no. 1 (1996): 7–26; and Valeria Manzano, “Sexualizing Youth: Morality Campaigns and Representations of Youth in Early 1960s Buenos Aires,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, no. 4 (2005): 433–61.

The Story behind the Screen

What was clearly open for critique was how Doña Petrona interacted with her assistant. Blanca Cotta, who had worked closely with the pair, explained that Juanita herself “would laugh and say that Petrona had a strong voice but was sweet on the inside.”¹⁰⁹ As this comment suggests, Doña Petrona and Juanita’s on-screen relationship did not reflect the entirety of their story together. The most dedicated of fans learned a few things about Juanita’s life from closely reading Petrona’s interviews. Most often, Petrona told journalists about how she was introduced to Juanita by Dr. Rosito, a friend and “prestigious” doctor in Buenos Aires. Petrona recalled that in the late 1940s, Dr. Rosito had called to tell her that he had a “gift” for her and that Juana Bordoy arrived at her doorstep soon after.¹¹⁰ This was not an improbable scenario, as most Argentine families hired domestic servants through personal contacts during the twentieth century.¹¹¹

Despite the notoriety that surrounded their public working relationship, few Argentines outside Petrona and Juanita’s inner circle realized that Juanita also lived with Petrona and served as the household’s *ama de llaves* (head housekeeper). Even as Petrona mentioned this fact in a few of her interviews, most people knew much more about their relationship on television. In fact, in addition to her televised assistance, Juanita was also responsible for the day-to-day management of Petrona’s home. The occupants of this household included Petrona, Atilio, and their son, Marcelo, Petrona’s mother and sister, as well as two “*chicas del servicio*” (female maids).¹¹² Despite the public perception of Juanita’s diminutive status in Doña Petrona’s world, in her home Juanita was frequently the one in charge. From at least the 1960s, Juanita ran the household on weekdays when Petrona went to work at the apartment she had rented in downtown Buenos Aires to test recipes and prepare for her cooking lessons. In general journalists seemed to respect Petrona’s leading role and Juanita’s supporting one to the extent that they rarely focused on Juanita and, even when they did, they mainly asked her about Doña Petrona.¹¹³

109. Blanca Cotta, as cited in Fernando Muñoz Pace, “A los 95 años murió Doña Petrona,” *El Clarín*, 7 Feb. 1992, p. 26.

110. Cejas, “Memoirs of Petrona C. de Gandulfo,” 98.

111. Other mechanisms included churches, unions, and less frequently, want ads. Gogna, “Domestic Workers in Buenos Aires,” 87.

112. Elvira P., interview with author, La Plata, 25 Nov. 2003, tape recording.

113. For example, in a 1981 edition of the magazine *Mucho Gusto* (which ran parallel to the television program *Buenas Tardes, Mucho Gusto*) the editors who interviewed Juanita mostly asked her about Petrona’s routines and preferences. See “Juanita: Una mano en la cocina y la otra en el corazón,” *Mucho Gusto*, May 1981.

Looking for more details, I spoke with five members of Juana's family who now reside in the cities of La Plata, Buenos Aires, and Santa Rosa. From them, I learned that Juana Bordoy grew up with her seven siblings in the town of Bocayuva on the western edge of the province of Buenos Aires. It was a classic train-stop town with a school, a church, and a police officer who, as it happens, was Juana's father. "And that was it. There were some neighboring houses and farmers."¹¹⁴ Juana's sister, who goes by the nickname "Porota" (Bean) explained that Juana's career began when she and her sister decided, against their parents' wishes, to work for other local families as teenagers during the 1930s to earn some pocket money. After a few years, Juana accepted a full-time job as a maid on a local *estancia* (ranch). Still, she apparently had her mind set on following some of her female friends to the capital to work and hoped to gain employment in a factory or as a hairdresser or seamstress.¹¹⁵ Instead, Juana met Petrona on a trip with her employers to the capital during the mid-1940s. According to Juana's family, Petrona liked her so much that she offered her a job with a better salary than she could make in a factory and good accommodations in her home.

For Juana Bordoy, her new nickname was evidence of the major changes to come. Having introduced herself to Petrona as "Juana," she quickly was dubbed "Juanita" by her new employer. Growing up, all of Juana's family and friends had called her "*la morocha*" (the dark-skinned girl) because of her appearance.¹¹⁶ As Juana's nephew Hector B. explained, Petrona's decision meant that, "With time, the nickname 'Morocha' disappeared, and it became [just] Juanita."¹¹⁷ The new nickname was reflective of the ways in which Petrona incorporated Juana fully into her life and family. Further, her addition of the diminutive to Juana's name was evidence of a broader maternalistic dynamic, in which patronas assumed a

114. Hector B., interview with author, Buenos Aires, 4 Dec. 2003, tape recording.

115. Juana Bordoy's relatives in Santa Rosa suggested that she was interested in working in a factory. Juanita explained in a 1981 interview that she arrived in Buenos Aires with the dream of becoming a hairdresser or a seamstress. Porota B., interview; and Cecilia Pardo, "Juanita: Una mano en la cocina y la otra en el corazón," *Mucho Gusto*, May 1981, p. 29.

116. As previously mentioned, like Doña Petrona, Juanita had both European and indigenous ancestry. Juana's mother, Natividad Maguna, was an ama de casa. Her descendants described her as a quiet indigenous woman, who was illiterate and a great cook. Juana's father had been given away as an infant by his wealthy mother, who had him (and his twin brother) out of wedlock, and he was raised by a Basque family. Porota B., interview.

117. Hector B., interview. He also mentioned that "*La Morocha*" was a prototype of the Argentine woman.

generational superiority (which might or might not represent a real age difference) that entitled them to monitor (and even to name) their help, as well as to display their motherlike affection for them. From the outset, Petrona seemed eager to hedge the line between authority and friendship with Juanita, who was about two decades younger than her. Even though she gave Juana her nickname, Petrona did not go as far as some who renamed their live-in domestic help.¹¹⁸

While Doña Petrona made clear that she was in charge, she also suggested that she and Juanita shared a similar class position, which was relatively uncommon for a patrona and her help. This treatment likely stemmed from the similarity of their upbringings and the partial erosion of rigid class stratification during the mid-twentieth century. As Juanita's nephew pointed out, both women came from relatively modest circumstances and were from the provinces.¹¹⁹ Perhaps as a result, Petrona gave Juanita the room next to her own (as opposed to the servants' room), shared meals with her, and invited her family to stay in her home when they visited Buenos Aires. Juanita's family pointed out that Petrona and her family treated Juanita well. They explained that Juanita "sat with them at the table, none of this eating in the kitchen with the *chicas*."¹²⁰ As this statement suggests, Juanita's place at the family's table reflected her esteemed position within the household. Still, Juanita was always careful never to step out of her "place," as her niece Elvira Patris de Bordoy explained in her 1995 obituary.¹²¹ She always addressed Petrona and her husband with their honorifics, "Señora Petrona" and "Señor Atilio," and used the formal *usted*, even when they later asked her to refer to them simply by their first names.¹²²

Over the 50 or so years Petrona and Juanita spent living and working together, Juanita's nephew Hector suggested that these women established "a very strong bond, not just of affection, but also of power." Now a psychiatrist who practices in Buenos Aires, he pointed out that Juanita's *place* was to serve Petrona. "Her [own] life passed by because she was at Doña Petrona's side," he explained.¹²³ Family members were not the only ones to comment that Juanita "gave her life over to Petrona." Understanding this decision more positively,

118. For example, in 2004 the photographer Sebastián Friedman, who was compiling an exhibition on domestic servants in Argentina, shared with me the story of María Concepción Álvarez being renamed "Hilda" by her employers.

119. Hector B., interview.

120. Porota B., interview, Susana.

121. Elvira Patris de Bordoy, as cited in Sánchez, "Murió Juanita."

122. Hector B., interview; and Porota B., interview.

123. Hector B., interview.

Blanca Cotta remarked that if Petrona was not such an “extraordinary” woman, that Juanita would have left her and “gotten married.”¹²⁴

As the years went by, Doña Petrona became more interested in publicly portraying Juanita Bordoy as a social peer of sorts within her circle of kinship. During the twilight of her career in the early 1980s, Petrona told journalists that over the years Juanita had become “my right hand . . . my friend, my companion [and] my sister.”¹²⁵ She also described Juanita as being like a “daughter” and a “mother” to her.¹²⁶ Her decision to publicly emphasize Juanita’s importance likely stemmed from a number of factors, including Petrona’s desire to respond to critiques that she was mean to Juanita, as well as her belief that Juanita was the most important and loyal of her friends. “[Juanita] is my unconditional friend and the most faithful and selfless of my companions,” Petrona explained in her unpublished memoirs. Even as Petrona paid Juanita for her assistance, she never described her as her *empleada* (employee or maid) during media interviews.¹²⁷ In this way, she emphasized the bonds of affection, while downplaying Juanita’s status as her employee.

This characterization echoed the tendency of other patronas to describe their domestic servants as part of “one big happy family.”¹²⁸ The ubiquitous phrase that many Argentines still use to describe their live-in help—“*es como de la familia*” (she is like family)—further speaks to the liminal position of domestic servants; they are both part of the family but also distinct from it.¹²⁹ Domestic servants have sometimes expressed this sense of fictive kinship as well. Corina Courtis and María Inés Pacecca recently explained that in characterizing a good work environment, contemporary domestic servants have frequently remarked that their employers “treat me like one more member of the family.”¹³⁰

124. Even as many people thought Juanita chose not to wed because of her loyalty to Petrona, in the early 1960s Juanita Bordoy was in fact engaged to be married. Tragically, Juanita’s fiancé died as the result of a freak accident at work. Blanca Cotta, as cited in Pace, “A los 95 años murió.”

125. Petrona C. de Gandulfo, “La nota que nunca tuvo,” *Mucho Gusto*, May 1981, p. 9.

126. Cejas, “Memoirs of Petrona C. de Gandulfo,” 39–40.

127. Petrona C. de Gandulfo, as quoted in Cejas, “Memoirs of Petrona C. de Gandulfo,” 98.

128. Cárdenas, *Ramona y el robot*, 45. Courtis and Pacecca, “La operatoria del género en la migración,” 17.

129. Photographer Sebastian Friedman has recently spoken about the tensions inherent in this phrase in interviews about his recent exposition of photographs of domestic servants and the families they work for. See for example the interview, “Algo Personal,” *Artemisa Noticias*, 14 Jan. 2008.

130. Courtis and Pacecca, “La operatoria del género en la migración,” 17.

In Doña Petrona's home, Juanita Bordoy was not only surrounded by the sense that she was part of (if still different) from her employers' family, she was also asked to carry out many familial responsibilities typically associated with an *ama de casa*. Petrona explained to journalists that while she cooked for guests herself, "Juanita is the one who manages my house and my kitchen every day."¹³¹ Therefore, in Petrona's household, Juanita embodied the model of the ideal homemaker to a greater extent than her employer. Still, in contrast to the *buena ama de casa* that Petrona revered, Juanita was not married and was paid to play this role for another woman.

Juanita Bordoy's social status both paralleled and complicated the hierarchy of domestic servants in privileged households.¹³² She had been hired to manage the house and the "chicas" but was privately treated in some ways more like a social peer than one might have expected. In public, however, Juanita was still presented as the archetype of the obedient domestic employee.¹³³ This image created a domestic allegory in which Petrona was able to raise her own class standing in comparison to the presumed lowly one of her assistant. Still, in publicizing a typically private relationship to an expanding viewing audience with a growing social conscience, Doña Petrona's televised treatment of Juanita became a subject of both contention and comedy.

Looking back, Argentines tend to disagree about whether or not this relationship was typical. For example, when I asked a group of 16 working- and middle-class women in Puerto Ingeniero White in May 2004, some responded that their relationship was not typical, while others argued the opposite. While one woman asserted that "every family was unique," another commented, "We have to try to remember that the relationship of 40 years ago was quite different from the one today. The upper class was very clear that the one below [them] was below."¹³⁴ In a separate conversation, a feminist named Hilda, who is now in her fifties, further supported this idea that in the past the privileged *ama de casa* (like Doña Petrona) unself-consciously exercised her control over her domestic help. Comparing the way her mother dominated the women who worked for her as maids, Hilda suggested that even though this power play was private, "the

131. As quoted in Blanca Cotta, "Los 100 mejores recetas de Doña Petrona," *El Clarín*, cuaderno 6, 1999, p. 132.

132. Juanita utilized the term "chicas del servicio" in her interview with *Mucho Gusto*. See Pardo, "Juanita." For an intriguing discussion of the terminology used to describe domestic help in Argentina, see Cárdenas, *Ramona y el robot*, 114–15.

133. Sánchez, "Murió Juanita."

134. Debate at Museo del Puerto with author, Ingeniero White, 22 May 2004, tape recording.

relationship between Petrona and Juanita was the most explicit” and therefore the most open for criticism.

Nevertheless, even as Hilda now describes her mother as “an exploiter from another era,” she suggests the challenges of doing better. We have “a lot more guilt than our mothers,” she explained, and therefore we try to treat the women who clean for us as “equals.” However, Hilda continued, “the guilt remains,” because these are “intimate domestic tasks” like washing the dishes and cleaning the bathroom, and because “another woman” is doing this work for you.¹³⁵ As in this case, even when Argentines recognize this as relationship of power among females, they rarely suggest that men should pick up the slack.¹³⁶ Even today female migrants arrive in the capital with the expectation that they will find employment in domestic work, “doing ‘women’s’ work for other women.”¹³⁷

Conclusion

During the mid-twentieth century Argentine women’s changing relationship to domestic work became a matter of intense public discussion and debate. During the 1950s the mainstream ideal of domesticity celebrated the idea that the *ama de casa*, who was presumed to be urban, white, unremunerated, and middle-class (or aspiring to such status), would happily and professionally take charge of caring for her home and her family. The 1960s brought a reconsideration of this ideal, as more young women who had the opportunity to do so prioritized their educations and their careers over their housekeeping and cooking skills.

Doña Petrona and other domestic experts sought to react to this shift by providing more time and effort-saving advice on the expanding mass media. Still, as industrialization had recently presented poor women with more employment opportunities, and political and economic crises became a regular facet of everyday life, fewer middle-class families enjoyed the full-time services of maids in mid-twentieth-century Argentina. As a result, during the second part of this century fewer Argentines were in a position to emulate the pattern of middle-class domesticity that Doña Petrona and Juanita had come to represent.

As more Argentines shifted to part-time domestic arrangements, some

135. Hilda R., interview.

136. Cosse points out that some journalists writing for “vanguard” magazines during the 1960s did suggest that men help with domestic duties to reduce women’s burdens. Still, the upper-middle-class audience to whom such magazines were directed likely enjoyed paid domestic help. See Cosse, “Los nuevos prototipos femeninos.”

137. Courtis and Pacecca, “La operatoria del género en la migración,” 15.

suggested that there was a “crisis” brewing with regards to domestic service. Perhaps as a result, women’s magazines began to convey to their presumably middle-class readers that they ought to respect the women they hired to help them cook and clean. For example, one journalist reminded her readers to keep in mind “that the person who helps them is not an inferior being,” but rather someone who does “work that is important, useful, and necessary.”¹³⁸ Thus, as the 1950s had celebrated the professionalization of the middle-class *ama de casa*, the 1960s brought an acknowledgment by some influential members of the middle class, including journalists, that domestic servants were professional workers as well. Not coincidentally, this recognition emerged at a time during which more young middle-class women chose to shift their attention away from the home front.

Thus, the ubiquitous critiques of the way Doña Petrona treated Juanita stemmed as much from the changing nature of daily life in Argentina during this and subsequent periods as from Petrona’s actions. Comments about Petrona’s bossiness implied that she was overstepping her bounds. At the same time, the girls who played “Doña Petrona” during the 1960s suggested that Petrona’s treatment of Juanita made them even more eager to be just like Doña Petrona. While Doña Petrona was often criticized for misusing her power over Juanita, their relationship also made their cooking segments more engaging to watch. Though some fans identified with Doña Petrona and others critiqued her or aspired to be like her, many watched because she and Juanita provided an entertaining, if unintentional, parody of a common private domestic relationship between women. Across the television airwaves, Argentina’s most famous domestic couple not only showed Argentines how to cook but also enabled them to watch and to comment upon an increasingly contested and fleeting model of middle-class domesticity.

138. “Relaciones con el servicio doméstico,” *Femirama* (ca. 1963–64), 26.