

# The Critical Aesthetics of Disorder: A Porteña Crisis of Size

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"Gordas" by Argentine Cartoonist and Performance artist, Diana Raznovich.  
This cartoon inspired this paper.

Argentina was invented as a nation in constant flux between "civilization and barbarism." This mannequin vision of identity is extensively detailed within Domingo Sarmiento's historical novel *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism*. In it Sarmiento presents the dilemma of Argentine identity as one that wrestles with barbaric tendencies, to be or not to be savages. He explains that the natural despotism and ignorance of the natives is directly responsible for Argentina's economically and culturally deprived state. He goes on to attribute these circumstances to the "mixing of the races", Spanish miscegenation with indigenous peoples (Sarmiento 2009). Sarmiento's legacy continues to shape Argentine culture in a way that equates "civilization" with European-ness and "barbarism" with its "other." As Argentina matured, European-ness became tantamount with *porteño*<sup>1</sup> identity, which looks white, thin, and urban. This aesthetic represents the epitome of civilization. To this day, barbarism is visually juxtaposed as rural, dark, and fat.

My use of the word “invention” as opposed to “imagined” is to accentuate the Argentine nation building project as distinct from the rest of Latin America. Within Latin American scholarship, Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities” prevails in discussions on nationalism and modernity (1991). Yet, it is limited when applied to the Argentine case. Unlike Anderson’s notion of the nation, Argentina was invented through (not despite) inequality and exploitation (224).<sup>2</sup> I build on Nicolas Shumway’s theorization on this process by exploring what he calls Argentina’s “mythology of exclusion” (Shumway 1993: xi). By examining the social dimensions of bodies within postmodern Argentina, I seek to reveal how they are loaded with ideals, anxieties, racial biases, social status, and national identity. In Buenos Aires, bodily style is not limited to “just fashion” (Turner 1994). On the contrary, it is especially context-dependent, indicating the layered and controversial “tastes” of *la patria* (the nation).<sup>3</sup>

In Argentina, contemporary notions of progress originate within the whitening projects of the nineteenth century. In this work I propose that the imprints of these colonial modernization projects are still visible on the *porteña* body. Fundamental to my theorization is anthropologist Terrence Turner’s understandings of the “semiotic representation of the natural human body.” He explains that:

...cultural treatment of the body remains in contemporary societies an index of fundamental cultural notions of personal identity, agency, and subjectivity. These notions in turn proceed from the schemas of processes through which the cultural actor is formed to the social appropriation of the living and its interaction with the ambient object world. It is true of culture that its overt semiotics forms of bodiliness, from fashion in clothing to ideas of physical health and beauty, afford profound insights into its fundamental categories, as well its system of social values (Turner 1995: 148)

For this reason I examine the *Porteño* fashion industry alongside a pervasive Barbie culture. Mary Frances Rogers argues that this culture takes “feminine appearances and demeanor to unsustainable extremes.” She identifies Barbie culture as one of “emphatic femininity,” which I argue, in national discourses, speaks directly to the social currency of the *porteña* aesthetic (Rogers 1998: 14).

My aim is to describe the *porteña* body, in correlation to the Argentine social body and illuminate how both mirror a “language of symptoms” (Frank 2010: 33). I believe that *Porteña’s* embody the national crisis of identity. Francine Masiello, in her work *Between Civilization and Barbarism: Women, Nation, and Literary Culture in Modern Argentina* (1992) synthesizes the role of women in the formation of the nation through her examination of literary and journalistic texts written by and about women since Sarmiento. Such representations, which investigate the “symbolic insinuations of women into the national masculine imagination” provides the lens I use to read cultural symbols, such as the fashion industry (Masiello 1992).

I seek to pose the possibility—instead of arguing the fact—that following the economic crisis of 2001, the fashion industry purposefully tightened its grip over

*porteñas* (women who live in Buenos Aires Capital). Given the historical relationship between female bodies and crisis within Argentina, I address the semiotic prowess of “emphatic femininity” as a complicated version of “*poner el cuerpo*” (to put the body on the line as a form of resistance.) To *poner el cuerpo*, within the protest lexicon of Argentina implicates the gendered significance of “the material bodies in the transformation of social relations and history.” Barbara Sutton traces how during Argentina’s latest economic crisis, women’s bodies became embattled sites that were and continue to be actively engaged in the “construction of new society and new forms of embodied womanhood” (Sutton 2007: 129). This phenomenon originates in the foundational service of *porteña* bodies to the invention and preservation of Argentina’s simulacrum of modernity.

I present the anorexia epidemic, as well as the recent production of an obesity epidemic, as symptoms of a volatile modernity. I reinterpret the European standard of beauty as a direct rejection of *Latinization* (a cultural identification with the rest of Latin America.) I do not pretend to give a comprehensive review on the vast work on racial formation in Buenos Aires, the Argentine crisis, or on the fashion industry. Rather, against the backdrop of the growing poverty, unemployment, and hunger within Argentina, I question how and why *porteñas* continue to be seen as Argentina’s best representation of “European modernity.” However, in order to analyze the relationship between Argentine crisis and size, which is crucial to my analysis, I will first histori-size *porteñas*.

### **Herstori-SIZING Argentina**

“While Argentina’s recurrent crises obviously have many causes and explanations, I can’t help sensing that the competing myths of nationhood bequeathed by the men who first invented Argentina remain a factor in the country’s frustrated quest for national realization” -Nicholas Schumway, *Inventing Argentina*

European immigration was necessary to convert the city of Buenos Aires into the “Paris of South America” (Scobie 2002). Ironically, many of the immigrants that came to Argentina were actually peasants. Back in Europe, they were socially and economically disenfranchised. Sarmiento himself, noted father of the modern Argentine nation, said that these immigrants were considered “backwards.” For this reason, many were motivated to make a better life for themselves in Argentina. En route to the Southern Cone, they automatically entered a higher social status with legal benefits. For example, Article 25 of Argentina’s constitution privileges European immigrants by not “restricting, limiting, nor taxing” them. This amendment legally guaranteed, that Europeans (and by extension European-ness) had a higher probability of success within Argentina.

At this time, fashion played a key role in masking European backwardness. Regina Root writes, “As the immigrant discarded those fashions that marked this predominantly rural background, like the *boina* and *alpargata*, he adopted the

coat and tie" in Buenos Aires. The *boina* and *alpargata* would then migrate to rural Argentina, and become symbols of gaucho (peasant) fashion.<sup>4</sup> This change in fashion signaled the beginnings of a transforming cityscape, a primitive gentrification if you will. Gentrification, in my overly simplified definition, occurs when the so-called "gentry class" and their interests (re)locate into an urban community and as a result, long-time residents (natives) are displaced. This is what exactly happened when Buenos Aires was transformed from a provincial village to a materialistic urban center, as noted in Lucio Lopez's 1884 social novel, *La Gran Aldea: Costumbres Bonarenses* (Lopez 2007).

Donna Guy writes, specifically about the booms of 1884 to 1889, that "Fashionable stores, cafes, restaurants, and banks soon dotted the elegant downtown, adding to the glamour and glitter of this apparently opulent capital," thus earning Buenos Aires its reputation as the Paris of South America (Root 2004: 373). Consequently, as put forth by Scobie (2002), these displays of affluence were crucial in creating geographic and social boundaries between *porteños* and *bonairenses* (those who live in Buenos Aires province). The residuals of this early gentrification are still visible in the current city structure where European architecture, boutiques, cafes, and bodies continue to dominate the public sphere.<sup>5</sup>

In *La Bolsa* published in 1891, novelist Julian Martel captures the feel of nineteenth century Buenos Aires, writing that it turned into a place "where the employee could dress like his millionaire employer" (Root 2004: 375). The ability to pass as affluent, albeit fraudulently marked the epoch of "materialist wealth" that would later characterize *porteño* culture. For example, when Argentina adopted the U.S dollar as its national currency, this move fraudulently restyled the Argentine economy as first world. Prior to the economic collapse of 2001 and as a result of former president Carlos Menem's 1991 convertibility plan, which pegged the *peso* to the dollar, Argentina passed as a "stable" and "successful" nation. In the 1990s, hyper-consumerism allowed even the poorest of *porteños* to buy popular brands such as Nike and Diesel (Rosatti 2006).<sup>6</sup> The performative act of "passing" haunts and drives *porteño* identity, while simultaneously commodifying it.

The *raison d'être* for ushering in millions of European bodies into the city of Buenos Aires was that eventually they would reproduce Argentine citizens. These bodies were both subjects and objects of action that "dressed up" Buenos Aires capital. In this way, *porteñas* became vessels of modernity (Vannin and McCright, cited in West 2002). The "fashionable" female body was more and more policed and shaped for distinction. An example of this is evident in the 1870 comeback of the corset. It stayed in vogue until the beginning of the twentieth century. This oppressive vestment had dramatic consequences that reshaped the bodily proportions of *porteñas*, shrinking the average waist from 63-70 centimeters to 43-50. *Porteñas* adopted the fashions of France, England, and Italy as a means of proclaiming national betterment (Root 2004: 376). Normative femininity was reinforced through these costumes of Western progress. In the same way as today, fashion enforced dominant beauty standards. The standards remain "thin, young, white, manicured, and sculpted" (Sutton Fall 2007: 136)

Victor Turner notes that “the natural or artificial surfaces of the body,” such as clothes, can be construed as signs of the cultural boundary connecting the self or person with the social and natural object world (Turner 1974). *Porteña* fashion during this time enabled the establishment of social categories and the delineation of political loyalties (Barthes 1967: 249). For example, if you did not dress in European fashion, you were labeled as rejecting progress (as envisioned by Domingo Sarmiento). As such, you were a spectacle of barbarism, and an enemy of the nation (Moreira et al. 1992: 171). What you wore was indicative of how you saw yourself within the Argentine nation. *Porteña* fashionistas embraced the European flare, even if in doing so they had to endure pain, like with the corset. This was her social obligation (Root 2004: 364). This is the originating circumstance that would place *porteñas* at the “grip of very strict powers” that according to Foucault, impose “constraints” and “prohibitions” of and through their bodies (Foucault 1984). To reference another concrete example where fashion and crisis are inextricable from *porteñas*, I turn to Alejandra Oberi’s work on women in detention centers during the Dirty War. She notes that “the military expected these women to use makeup, to wear dresses and skirts instead of jeans, to exhibit a docile demeanor and to generally comply with normative femininity” (Sutton 2007: 137). This life or death makeover let “subversive” women “pass” as good citizens.

### Blackening History

“When songstress Josephine Baker visited Argentina in the 1950s she asked the biracial minister of public health Ramon Carillo, ‘Where are the negroes?’ to which Carillo responded laughing, ‘There are only two—you and I.’” (Hisham 2002).<sup>7</sup>

There is a tendency within the Latin American imaginary to accept Argentina’s origins as predominantly European. History books as well as family genealogies by and large commence with the disembarking of Europeans into the port city of Buenos Aires. Octavio Paz, offers a genealogy of Latin America’s origins in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1961) stating “Mexicans descend from the Aztecs, Peruvians descend from the Incas, and Argentina’s descend from boats.” Responding to Paz, Argentine intellectual Marcos Arguinis in *The Excruciating Appeal of Being Argentine* (2002) states that “There wasn’t another Latin American country so determined to welcome people as ours.” The City of Buenos Aires literally welcomed “Europeans” into Argentina and gifted them with immediate (white) privilege. Public and private narratives of Argentina as a white nation mutually constitute each other.

A 1973 article in *Ebony* magazine questioned the disappearance of blacks from Argentine history, “what happened to Argentina’s involuntary immigrants, those African slaves and their mulatto descendants who once outnumbered whites five to one, and who were for 250 years an important element in the total population, which is now 97 percent white?” (Aidi 2002). During the period of national consolidation, blacks were deemed a social problem by the dominant groups in power. Their visible

presence challenged the European façade Argentina was attempting to construct.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, multiple “un-blackening” projects were deployed throughout the city of Buenos Aires to physically and historically displace blacks from Argentina. Many scholars of Afro-Argentine historiography have attempted to account for the “disappearance” of this group through theories that allude to disease, displacement, and war. In my opinion, in order to access the “black genocide,” it is necessary to revisit the phenomenon of passing.

During the wars of independence, afro-Argentine women did not fight in wars, while their male counterparts, as historian Ysabella Rennie notes, were readily put by the government on the frontlines. Argentine sociologist Gino Germani uncovers how racist immigration policies conveyed the newly formed nation’s chief mission, “to modify substantially the composition of the population” in order to “Europeanize the Argentine population” and “produce a regeneration of races.” This explains how inter-marriage is clearly related to the lack of black men. Afro-Argentine women were forced by circumstance to intermarry, or in the least their bodies were used to reproduce mulatto (*porteño*) babies. Argentine historian Mariano Bosch wrote in 1941 that Italian men had “perhaps an atavistic preference for black women” (Aidi 2002). Eventually their mulatto babies were able to “pass” as white. These Lamarquian processes directly account for the dwindling number of blacks and the massive passing phenomena of mulattos for whites (Andrews 2004). In 1869, the proportion of the national population who were of African origin was registered at 26.1%, in 1894, it was 1.8%. After 1869, no longer did black populations appear on the Argentine census (Andrews 2004: 6, Casper and Moore 2010: 21). Fashion aided women of Afro-Argentine descent in passing. If they dressed in the latest fashions and contoured their bodies, their socioeconomic prospects greatly improved (Healy 2006: 115). This is another reason why European beauty became a national standard tied to Argentine modernity.<sup>9</sup> Fashion provided a means to convey mobility, geographic, social, and race (Moreira 1992: 174). Back then, clothes and time could eventually camouflage black origins. Today, clothes accentuate European ideals of beauty.

I recognize that historically, throughout Latin America, blacks experience a problematic citizenship that delimits rights and visibility (Andrews 2004). However, I suggest that in Argentina, the discontinuation of blacks as a recognizable social group is a unique phenomenon. It is so pervasive and internalized within Argentine culture that it has inflected onto scholarship, which reproduces and institutionalizes these views. Anthropologist Alejandro Frigerio at the Universidad Católica de Buenos Aires suggests, “People of mixed ancestry are often not considered black in Argentina, historically, because having black ancestry was not considered proper. Today the term ‘negro’ is used loosely on anyone with slightly darker skin, but they can be descendents of indigenous Indians, middle Eastern immigrants” (Aidi 2002). Black in Argentina is a social condition, rather than a perceptual category. No greater example of this exists than in the vernacular term *cabecita*, which means “black head.” It is a racialized category that refers to a sector of Argentine society that is synonymous with “barbarism.” The term appears in the 1940s with the formation of a provincial

working class that migrates to the city of Buenos Aires in search of economic opportunities and stability.<sup>10</sup> While *cabecitas* are foil to *porteños*, I will not address this specific history in this paper. I feel it merits a separate one.<sup>11</sup> Also, my point with regards to anxieties over afro-Argentines origins, especially as lived by *porteñas*, is a concerted effort to give a counter narrative to the dominant discourses of Argentine racial formations.

### The Booty Politics of the Fashion Industry

“Whenever you idolize something, you magnify it...We [Argentines] don’t want to culturally identify with the rest of Latin America, so we fixate on some elements of European and U.S societies—like thinness and fashion—and take them very, very seriously”-Elizabeth Goode de Gama, leading Argentine Child Psychologist<sup>12</sup>

The residuals of the colonial un-blackening projects continue to shape the booty politics of the fashion industry. My use of the term “un-blackening” as opposed to “whitening” is a decentering strategy. The language used to describe what is deemed beautiful, important, reasonable, valuable, civilized, and modern are weighed down by significations of white supremacy. These ideas are then circulated through institutions and industries of culture, which reinforce and police them (Yancy 2000: 157). This understanding of whiteness as dominating begs for the introduction of blackness into nuanced discussions of Argentine national identity and crisis. This is of particular saliency when blackness within contemporary Argentina is overwhelmed by notions of *Latinization* and barbarism.

Paula Brufman, a “formerly white” Argentine in the United States brings this point home. “I was surprised when in the US, people, especially Latinos, told me that I was not white but Spanish” (Aidi 2002). In Argentina, racism is not evident in the same way as it is in the United States. I do not measure them on a scale of better or worse, instead I suggest that racism in the United States is visibly obvious, whereas in Argentina, racism is embedded in discourses of modernity and size. Omi and Winant argue that, “racial ideology and social structure... mutually shape the nature of racism in a complex, dialectal and over-determined manner” (Omi and Winant 1989: 137). The *porteño* fashion industry’s racism against fat bodies is one that is complicated by normative practices which manufactures femininity in a way that seeks to “emphasize, exaggerate, and create differences...” (Sutton Fall 2007: 136).

With the advent of European expansion into the Americas, according to Sander Gilman in *Making the Body Beautiful* (1999), “describing the forms and size of the buttocks became a means of describing and classifying the races. The more prominent the more primitive...” (Mendible 2009). In contemporary Argentina, a big butt still has an ostensibly racialized connotation of “primitive” and “barbaric.” Psychiatrist Mabel Bello, head of the Association against Anorexia and Bulimia claims “makers of one-size fits all-use pre-adolescent models buttry to sell it to everyone, so



many adolescent girls struggle to fit into the top fashion brands” (Miliken, 2009). It is safe to say that the absence of what can be perceptually identified as clothes that cater to a “big butt” articulate that the social body lacks racial diversity. This is the crux of the *porteño* fashion industry’s booty politics. To simplify, Jennifer Lopez, at the Bonds Street gallery, would find it impossible to buy a pair of skinny jeans that fit.<sup>13</sup>

The Argentine fashion industry reproduces the hegemonic (booty-less) Barbie ideal, which I will later unpack. Today, this ideal, is meant to differentiate *porteñas* from the popular Latina body. The significance of this distinction is rooted in history and has heightened since the 2001 economic crisis.<sup>14</sup> Argentina no longer can pass as a first-world country. Prior to defaulting on its IMF loans and having a total of five presidents in two weeks, Argentina did not (publically) recognize a social or historical commonality with the rest of Latin America. Nor did Argentina openly subscribe to the “third world” category.<sup>15</sup> Given the relationship of the *porteña* body with Argentine national identity, it is conceivable to view the slender (anorexic) *porteña* as a protesting body against *Latinization* (Sutton 2007).

A big butt is synonymous with *Latinidad* (Mendible 2009). My *porteña* mother-in-law made this clear to me in one of our family gatherings. Gossiping about an Argentine woman who had lived in Miami for a “really long time,” she described her in the following way, “She is practically Cuban... she even has the big ass.” In another conversation she explained to me, that after living in Miami for five years, she was adapting, even “getting a big ass.” The symbolic resonance of a “big butt,” within *porteño* culture conveys barbarism, and barbarism is entangled with *Latinidad*. The seriousness in my mother in-law’s expression while confessing her assimilation into Latino culture suggested that she never viewed herself as Latina, despite her socioeconomic background in Argentina (poor).

Latino studies scholar, Myra Mendible offers her own experiences about growing up in Miami, Florida to discuss the derogatory stereotypes surrounding a big butt. In a place like Miami, which is populated by Latinos from all over the Americas, often Argentines make it a point to distinguish themselves through their bodies, especially women (Maldonado-Salcedo 2004). The popular Latina body is endowed with curves and a booty that celebrates and even romanticizes the mixing of races. Or at least, this is what the Latina body and all of her *Dangerous Curves* articulates through popular media to the rest of the world (Molina-Guzman and Valdivia 2004; Molina-Guzman 2010). Icons like Jennifer Lopez and in particular her derriere symbolizes the colonial encounters, which according to popular opinion did not occur in Argentina. The majority of Argentine history textbooks and mediascapes exalt the “alluvial society” born out of European immigration. This is done while simultaneously relegating native indigenous peoples to pre-history and making blacks invisible within official accounts of the nation. This move intends to delegitimize the visual presence of ethnic diversity within *Porteño* society.<sup>16</sup>

Myra Mendible comments that “Non-Western women were (are) associated with the ‘lower regions’ of the body and characterized in terms of their abundant backside,” because “the U.S-Mexico border marked a figurative divide between Northern Mind and Southern body, rationality, and sexuality, domestic and foreign” (Mendible 2009). This view explains the meaning of a big butt within Argentina. The



relationship between “the exotic” and “butts” is discursively why Argentine fashion does not cater to curvy women.<sup>17</sup> A big butt on an Argentine woman evokes a black past that problematizes the vision of Argentina as European and modern (especially when compared to the rest of the region.)<sup>18</sup>

### A Genealogy of Barbie Jeans

“Genealogy...its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body”- Michel Foucault<sup>19</sup>

True to its history, *porteño* fashion remains the most cutting-edge in Latin America. It continues to be up to par with the latest European trends. Nonetheless, it is noticeably unaccommodating to *porteñas* size 8 and above. These size outlaws must shop at a store that carries “special sizes,” and are given only given matronly and dated options. Cultural institutions like the fashion industry are thus given the power to socially penalize size outlaws.

In an article written by Kelly Hearn for *Christian Science Monitor* (2005), she asks in regards to fashion-savvy Argentina, “Which came first, thin women or tiny sizes?” Tiny dress sizes can be found in abundance within fashionable shops and boutiques. In a beauty-conscious Argentina, curves blatantly exclude women from wearing the latest fashions. Ivanna Villanucci, in Kelly’s article states that “When you go into a store and find an extra large, you know that it is really the equivalent of a medium or even a small based on European or American standards,” suggesting that Argentine sizes are like no other. Women who do not fit into the “tiny sizes” as a result of the fashion industry dominant standard of beauty feel marginalized, ugly and frustrated. Argentine fashion designers prefer to manufacture “one size fits all.” In this way, they ensure that their clothes can only be worn by the right bodies. In Buenos Aires, size is crucial to being in style. It is believed that if you have Barbie (European) genes, you can buy the latest jeans.

In the city of Buenos Aires, physiologists and fashion designers agree that young girls aspire to look like Barbie. She is the feminine ideal. Barbie is of tremendous social import when viewed against the backdrop of a late capitalist Argentina (Motz 1983: 131-132). In 2008 *The Independent Guardian* ran a story about the world’s first Barbie store opening in Buenos Aires. The story stated that in Buenos Aires, like nowhere else in the world, Barbie was “not just a toy for sale.” In fact, she is a “life style...” The story recognizes that in Argentina women are notorious for obsessing and “demanding the unattainable from themselves in appearance.” Quoting Ramiro Mayol, producer of the highly successful Broadway-style musical revue, *Barbie Live*, he says “Every Argentine woman wants to be Barbie...” For this reason, it is only fitting that “The World’s first Barbie store” would come to “the land of the living dolls.” Fascinatingly, this store did not actually sell the Barbie dolls; it sold every accessory and costume necessary for mother and daughter to pass as real-life Barbies (Scheltus 2008). What capital does Barbie hold within the cultural milieu of *porteño* society?

Barbie is perfectly proportioned. She has blonde hair and blue eyes. She is always presented as happy because she not only is surrounded by her male equal, Ken, but she enjoys many commodities, most notably an extensive wardrobe of the latest fashion trends. While little *porteñas* are learning to dress Barbie, they simultaneously aspire to be her. To live and look like Barbie in Buenos Aires increases your chances of socioeconomic stability by either offering more employment opportunities or by ensuring the snagging of a “good” husband who will provide (lavishly). Either option, by traditional *porteño* culture, equals success. “The tyranny of slenderness” as lived in Buenos Aires capital is one that can be connected to Barbie (syndrome). Karen Goldman writes that throughout the years the makers of Barbie, Mattel, have only diversified her superficially. Her body size has remained consistent in proportions, while occasionally her hair color or skin tone, for special (“other”) versions of herself, are darkened (Goldman 2009: 265).<sup>20</sup> The parallels between Barbie and *porteñas* are countless.



Billboards. Buenos Aires, Argentina. Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo, 2010.

### Size Outlaws and Anorexia: Fitting In

The fashion industry is faulted by the media and the Buenos Aires City Council for breeding the anorexia epidemic. Buenos Aires has the second highest rate of anorexia in the world. However, to fault the fashion industry alone is to ignore, or rather, deviate attention from, the insidious Barbie culture of which the fashion industry is just one exemplar. Building on Foucault, cultural studies scholar Susan Bordo in

*Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (1993) argues that the problem of slender femininity and anorexia, cannot be divorced from multi-media and familial discourses on body size, they produce “female bodies and subjectivities as battleground sites” that are “constantly in the grip of...cultural practices” (142). In a sense, anorexia is perpetuated through the relationships between multiple social spheres and institutions that reinforce and contradict each other.

Maria Luisa Rijana, from the University of Buenos Aires Aesthetics’ Clinic explains that a significant number of women today are “neurotic” because of the contradictions inherent in the Barbie-culture. She states:

They [Argentine women] want to imitate certain bodies or faces; they visit the surgeon with a photo of a celebrity but their expectations have nothing to do with their real lives. This group generates the most chaos because it ambitions a perfection non existent with surgery or any possible treatment...  
(*Clarín*/UTC 2009)

Additionally, Rijana exposit that overweight women are “punished” for not being thin. Size outlaws are excluded from the latest fashions, denied certain jobs, and are unfit for romance. The Director of the Buenos Aires Clinic for the treatment of anorexia and Bulimia, Psychiatrist Mabel Bello says that the women, who are being treated for eating disorders, reply when asked what they want to be in life, “thin—this is their life’s project” (Valente 1995).

Neomi Aumeves, head of the Women’s Directorate in the Buenos Aires Government states that the relationship between “thin” and “good presence” has provoked discriminatory practices. She explains that when a job ad says “good



“Seeking a waitress with good presence.” Melissa Maldonado-Salcedo, 2010.

presence essential,” it means they want a “skinny girl.”

Size outlaws by default have bad presence (Sutton 2007: 137). Aumeves grieves for young girls because competence is not essential for upward social mobility (Davidson 1997). Being thin is imperative for success. In 1995, it was estimated that “30 percent of Argentines were dieting and 60 percent of those are doing so to maintain a desired weight. Moreover, 43 percent of Argentines consume low-calorie foods” (Valente 1995). These numbers have increased disproportionately with women (especially *porteñas*.) In 2009, *Clarín*, released the findings of a poll that stated 90% of women felt overweight at some point in their lives, independently of how much they weighed (*Clarín/UTC*). While the media alone cannot be blamed for women feeling insecure about their body images, it does reinforce dominant attitudes towards size outlaws. This ethos contributes to “low self-esteem by promoting slenderness as the pathway to gaining love, acceptance, and respect while at the same time reflecting a trend in society to demonize fat” (Anonymous). Not even the prettiest and thinnest of women can escape this fate.



*Solange Magnano, former Miss Argentina 1994, died after undergoing gluteoplasty. Image courtesy of “Te extrañamos Solange Magnano” Facebook page.*

## Feeding Anorexia

“When people are mentally scarred, they look for physical pleasure. It’s good for their self-esteem...”-Dr. Enrique Giliardi<sup>21</sup>

In 2010, I finally came across an all you can eat buffet (*diente libre*) in Buenos Aires.<sup>22</sup> Located near the Pink House, on Avenida de Mayo, this buffet far exceeded my expectations. This place was like no other. A hole in the wall, equipped with a full barbeque grill (*asador*) for all types of red meats, poultry, and cheeses. It also had many cold and hot pasta stations with a plethora of salads to choose from. More importantly, no caloric notices in sight. After my third trip back from the buffet table, I had my head up long enough from my plate to notice that mostly everyone at this buffet was Peruvian, Bolivian, Asian, or obese.

I asked the waiter if this buffet was popular, taking notice of the clientele and its tourist location, “Places like these are for people who want to go out to eat, but want to feel comfortable doing it.” The owner, Jose “El Chino” (the China Man) is a Korean immigrant who confessed that his restaurant is just a place for “everyone else who isn’t anorexic” (Jose 2010).

Frequently the adjectives of “thin”, “good presence” and “beautiful” are interchangeably used in *porteño* culture because they mean the same thing and consequently evoke similar images of femininity. Being fat and ugly, in *porteño* culture, means you are handicapped (physically and socially.) In 2007, Gonzalo Otalora, author of the best selling novel *Feo* (Ugly), publically challenged these stereotypes and labels. Otalora proposed a series of laws to the City Council that would provide a “beauty tax” with grant subsidies to “ugly people.” The law also requires that in a given company, 30% of employees are ugly (Goldman 2007). These measures would in the least make the non-beautiful happier.

Paradoxically, the government of Argentina says that 40% to 45% of anorexic patients suffer from depression (Argentina 2010). Psychologist Alfredo Moffat states that “since the (Eurocentric) ideal can’t be reached, women get depressed by thinking that they won’t be accepted” (Valente 1995). Are they accepted? In the city of Buenos Aires, as my partner explained to me, “it truly is easier to be poor than fat,” especially after the crisis (Alvarez 2010).

The one industry that actually improved in the midst of endless economic and political crises was the beauty industry. Women got face lifts, liposuction, implants, and joined gyms in droves in order to make sure they fulfilled their national obligation to remain the prettiest. Also during this time the rates of anorexia increased. In a *Guardian* article that tries to untangle the relationship between the recent economic crisis and beauty, Sophie Arie writes that in Buenos Aires “while protest graffiti fights with the names of discredited presidential candidates, another message part of a supermarket campaign is plastered on car windows giving people something positive to think about ‘Argentine women are the prettiest in the world’” (Arie 2002). Against this backdrop, it seems reasonable to suppose that these pressures feed anorexia.

In 2004, the popular *rock nacional* group, Arbol released the song “Chica Anorexica” (Anorexic girl). The song marries anorexia with modernity. The lyrics situate the anorexic girl as both product and producer of Argentina’s backwards modernity. Her individual body is a “socially informed body,” to use Bourdieu’s (1977) expression. The lyrics note that she is the norm, and for this reason, no one notices her dangerously thin proportions. Her “self fashioning” and “self-narration” is lived through the ritual of not eating or binge eating. These pathologized indicators go undetected because she is “beautiful.”

Arbol troubles this notion of beauty, by contrasting the beautiful anorexic girl against the surroundings of poverty and hunger. They dispute the *porteño* definition of modernity:

Anorexic girl walks down the street  
She has not eaten in two, three, four days  
I laugh at you, I go and cry  
So many people who are hungry and you go vomit  
These modern young people...  
I fell in love with a small skeleton  
She looked so good that I could not tell  
She talked to me all night about love and did not eat a bit of rice (Arbol 2004)

This song addresses Argentina’s sense of barbaric modernity, and illuminates how it is lived through the female (*porteña*) body. Rather than quantifying anorexia as a “fashion-model syndrome,” which conjures up images of stardom and *cheto-ness* (*cheto* is a local term used to describe someone of the latest trends), the anorexic girl is everywhere and nowhere.

The Argentine Governmental website affirms that anorexia predominantly affects the demographic of 12 to 30 years of age. Of this age group, 95% are women. However, while listing several possible causes for anorexia that range from a genetic predisposition to the preverbal “fashion-model syndrome” as it is so often called, the “official” position on anorexia is that it comes out of the individual’s “failure to adapt socially.” For this reason, the anorexic “attempts to compensate by way of a series of pathological behaviors that are linked to nutrition and an excessive obsession with one’s individual body, linked to the said socio-cultural pressures.” The government website also says that the onset of this disorder “always” commences with “dieting,” which most *porteños* already do (Argentina 2010). Most restaurants in Buenos Aires have menus that detail the caloric value of each item (including that of water). Also, fast food establishments offer a “light option.” This is all part of what is known as, “*La onda light*” (the light style). It basically ensures that consumers are reminded that “lighter” substitutions are available.<sup>23</sup>

This *onda light* has aggravated body anxieties in an image conscious Argentina. It has blurred the lines between “normal” and “extreme” food behaviors through “social isolation...the cutting of food into small portions...the wearing of loose clothing” (Argentina 2010). If you were to add up the calories of three light option meals, they would equal far less calories per day (healthy) women should



consume. The *onda light* campaigns indicate a panoptic modality of power, emerging from a capitalist economy, where consumption is inextricable from status (Foucault 1984: 211). The phrase, “you are what you eat,” translates into *porteño* culture as “you are what you don’t eat.” To overeat, has grave consequences, therefore *la onda light* polices your consumption.

In a conversation between Argentine designer Benito Fernandez and publicist Maria Juni, Benito recalls an instance in which a mother with two fraternal daughters goes shopping at one of his boutiques. One of the daughters was thin and the other was not. The mother continued to shop for the thin daughter, and did not allow the other daughter to try on clothes. He thought to himself, this girl (the fat one) is going to go crazy. He saw this moment between mother and daughter, as one between society and the non-thin *porteña*, in which her inability to fit into her family and clothes reminds her that “if you are fat you will not have a boyfriend, no sex, you will not go out, you will not be successful in life...basically, you’re a failure” (Romer 1996).

According to Bourdieu, sociopolitical “distinction” can be seen within bodies because they manifest social capital. Body size therefore confers class “taste” and “taste” is an agentive force that can be described as “an embodied incorporated principle of classification.” Also, it “reveals the deepest dispositions of the habitus”. A slender (booty-less) body, using Bourdieu’s analysis, explicates how the Argentine fashion industry, gatekeepers of national material culture, “reproduce...the universe of the social structure” which is Eurocentric and alienating of diversity (Bourdieu 1977).

### **Seeng Anorexia**

Susan Bordo (1991) argues throughout her work that “for anorexics, [the slender ideal] may have very different meanings.” She suggests that anorexia may not be as oppressive as perceived, “it may symbolize, not so much the constraint of female desire, as its liberation from a domestic, reproductive destiny” (Bordo 1991: 103). This theory is complicated when viewing the *porteño* case because of the Catholic relationship between womanhood and motherhood. Numerous testimonies from Anorexic women reveal that motherhood is a constant aspiration. It is part of the pre-packaged Argentine dream of happiness. Also, it is a woman’s patriotic duty to reproduce (Taylor 1997). Therefore anorexia does not necessarily conflict with becoming a mother. Take the case of the Diaz family. Rebecca Diaz carried her child to full term. Sadly, her daughter was born quadriplegic from complications stemming from her anorexia. Her doctors and family alike did not perceive Rebecca was anorexic. Rebecca laments, “I ate the way I always ate. I did not think I had a problem...” (Rosatti 2010). Neither did the institutions charged with surveilling her bodies; they saw no apparent grounds for concern.

Foucault writes that a reality of the modern and postmodern world is that individuals no longer will need to depend on the physical manipulations by centralized authorities in order to create socially disciplined bodies. Instead, ideas of what would constitute sickness and health for example would create norms in which individuals would self-watch and self-correct (Foucault 1984: 155). In the case



of anorexia, the line between sickness and health that generate certain norms are tenebrous. Subsequently, the signs essential to diagnose this eating disorder often pass as “normal behaviors,” within *porteño* culture. Many expecting mothers carry children to full term, and only when complications arise do the doctors detect that the mother was anorexic.

Bello attributes the problem of blindness as a symptom of a “sick” culture. In Buenos Aires, “six out of ten commercials feature bodies and food” (Hoshaw 2008). The cosmetic companies, gyms, and all other beauty-enhancement industries profit from the loss of self-esteem of women. *Porteñas* are acculturated from a young age to see body-obsessions as natural. Many mothers pass this obsession to their daughters and shame them into the right size. *Porteñas* are constantly reminded (publically and privately) that they must remain thin at whatever cost.

“Aren’t you ashamed of that body?”  
-Dieting commercial in Argentina<sup>24</sup>

### **Buying Real Copies: Laying Down the Law**

In Buenos Aires, the city legislature introduced Size six laws in response to the allegations that fashion designers discriminated against women who were not thin (enough). As a result (fashion) police officials walked around shops with measuring tape in hand, ensuring that the ubiquitous one size fits all was done away with. Designers had to now manufacture six sizes, Small through XL (numbered 0-5). The law explicitly states that the obligatory sizes all designers should make are 38-50. They must be tagged accordingly. The law was adopted in 2001 but it took more than four years for it to be implemented. Presently designers and boutiques remain resistant to this decree. Many were fined for noncompliance. In fact, *Clarín* published that 70% of the commercial centers still did not carry big sizes. Moreover, 80% of the tags on the clothes did not abide by the law, as confirmed by the Buenos Aires Ministry of Production (Debesa 2010).

Designers alleged that it cost less to pay the fines than to fabricate bigger sizes. Designer brands prefer manufacturing smaller sizes and making their plus size cut off to be 38-42. In this way they secure their designs cater to the ideal woman. Some other excuses for not making bigger sizes are that bigger sizes devalue designs. Also, some designers have gone as far to say that there are no available patterns for bigger body sizes. As a result, it is very difficult to consolidate sizes because there is no existing anthropomorphic analysis on the Argentine woman. Many companies claim it would be an economic burden to comply with this law. Plus size manufacturers ridicule this pretext, saying a few more centimeters of fabric have no real adverse (economic) impact (Soraci 2010).

As someone who frequently shops for clothes in Argentina, I find that size 5 is seldom found in *porteño* boutiques. It is mysteriously sold out. This can mean one of three things: either, most women are buying size 5 in order to hide their anorexia

with bigger clothes (a noted symptom according to the Buenos Aires government). There is a real need for bigger sizes because of bigger bodies, or many designers are not making bigger sizes in order to ensure that their designs continue to look good on the right bodies. It probably is a sordid combination of these three possibilities. The city of Buenos Aires's legislature published at the end of 2009, that it revamped the Size six law and it is now called the *porteño* size law. This new and improved version of the law now obligates manufacturers to make and commercial centers to carry, 8 sizes: 36 to 50.

These measures are a contentious issue because it faulted the fashion industry for the anorexia epidemic. Carmen Ferrari, a popular designer stated, "these girls (the average shopper) are raised in families where the mother, the father, and the siblings live in anxiety about their bodies, about not getting fat, about looking young and attractive, and they communicate contempt for those who don't follow this mandate" (Valente 1995). The fashion industry blamed the overall culture and its "mechanics of power." In modern *porteño* culture, female bodies are subject to this disciplining power way before acquiring purchasing power (Foucault 1984: 173). For this reason the fashion industry argues that size laws are counterproductive. Carmen Ferrari further states that, "This won't solve anything...people who want to be thin will find ways to do it." She, like many other designers, believes that the fashion industry only represents the larger culture (Davison 1997).

These size legislations, despite their best efforts, ignore the black-market for fashion. After 2001 most (working-class) people shop at *ferias*, which are massive (debatably legal) flea markets. They operate much like a mall, an illegal one if you will. These shops are located largely on the outskirts of the city and are managed by migrant non-*porteños*. These *ferias* are not necessarily subject to size laws, since they are not subject to the city of Buenos Aires's legislature nor do they sell "really real originals" of anything.

A retail seller from *feria La Roque* explained to me that most of the clothes sold at these *ferias* are cheaper "reproductions" of the latest fashion trends. The competing stalls offer "real copies" and "copies of real copies." "Real copies" are an exact reproduction that can pass as an original. What happens is that many times, the workers who make the original clothes at these factories in the city of Buenos Aires stretch the fabric or take/steal the remaining fabric in order to reproduce extras. They then sell them at a cheaper price at *ferias*. The "copies of real copies" are duplicate designs, made with cheaper materials that can look "real" until you wash or wear it for a prolonged period of time. The "realness" fades fast on these clothes, and by default, conveys faster its counterfeit nature. *Ferias* have been instrumental in allowing girls to buy into the latest trends, at a reduced rate. They are interesting because they support the fashion industry's contempt against size laws and prove that *porteño* culture is above the law.

Daniel Rosatti is a clothes cutter for multiple fashion designers in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He has immediate access to all of the "in style" patterns that eventually worn by *porteña* fashionistas. He reproduces and assembles the same

patterns, in bigger sizes, to sell on the weekends, at *La Feria*. Daniel shares that, "All these *gordas* (fat girls) come to my stall...I guess they enjoy looking like they fit in." These women, in his view, become "real copies" of *porteñas*. I visited Daniel's stall at *La Roque* in 2007 and observed that the clothes he sold were basically sizes that in the United States would be tagged Medium and Large... at most. In 2010, when I returned to visit his stall, I noticed that not much had changed. I know first hand (sadly) that the largest plus size available was the equivalent to an American size 8. Daniel's mother, Mercedes, also manages a clothing stall at *La Roque*. She distinguishes her clientele by saying, "I sell clothes for older women, because they have trouble finding clothes that fit well. My clothes are for ladies who are usually grandmothers" (Rosatti 2006). When I visited Mercedes's stall in 2010, she told me that business was slow. Many of the women, who used to shop at her stall were now buying smaller sizes. In essence, *La Feria*, as a shopping space is welcoming but it too disciplines and regulates body size with its merchandize. Sales people in certain Buenos Aires boutiques will tell you, "Don't come in, we don't have your size." If you do not fit into "one size fits all," *La Feria* welcomes you.

### Deviations of Size

The international media has criticized *porteño* culture for the rampant anorexia epidemic. Compelled to take action, Argentina deviated the world's attention to a brewing obesity epidemic. Argentina has a history of diverting international attention from their national problems. For example, the 1978 World Cup, deviated attention from the military dictatorship that systematically disappeared youth and "subversives." Menem's "first world" economic policies, deviated attention from how implausible it was that Argentina could withstand dollarization. The 2001 default on IMF loans that lead to the economic crisis deviated attention from how the banks fled with "the people's money." And to add to this list, Argentina's hailed 2008 Obesity Law, deviated attention from the anorexia and bulimia epidemic that eats away at *porteñas*.

The Obesity Law recognized "obesity" as a disease. In the same legislation, it also recognizes anorexia and bulimia as disorders that should be covered by insurance. Unanimously passed in the Senate, this regulation allows equal coverage for the disorders of overeating and not eating (anorexia). In addition to the health insurance stipulation, it also seeks to treat the construction of unhealthy body images. The entire legislation ignores the role family plays in instilling harmful ideas about the body. Instead it focuses on school nutrition initiatives that institutionalize *la onda light*. The Obesity Law establishes that "nutritional education programs are taught in all school levels" and a warning that "overeating is bad for your health" should be included during advertisements of unhealthy food..." This provision is proof of a deviating tactic, whose objective is to "thin out" the entire population and control consumption. What is more, the law stipulates that "the publications of diets or weight-loss methods without medical consent are prohibited". The media claimed that this legislation would benefit the provinces of Argentina in particular.

Dark, male, and obese bodies were used to visualize the headlines that stressed the importance of this measure. It was the Argentine version of the “biggest loser” that inspired the obesity law.

The discourse of slenderness framed this law in the media by stressing how it will have a modernization effect in the provinces. This crisis of size is inextricable from notions of modernity and is a residual of the colonial experience, breeding what Wolf calls “a dark vein of self-hatred, physical obsessions, terror of aging, and dread of lost control” (Wolf 1991: 10). While anorexia and obesity as medicalized disorders emerge from the same perverse system of control, their social implications within *porteño* culture are quite distinct (Frank 2010: 45). The story of obesity is one of male barbarism that lives in rural Argentina. Interestingly, obesity is also said to be a “first world phenomenon.” For this reason, Argentina now claims that this is their crisis of size. This is not to say that obesity is not a serious problem, but by no measure does it rival the anorexia and bulimia epidemic in Buenos Aires.

There is a common misconception that overweight individuals are more widespread in modern industrialized nations. Nonetheless anorexia does not seem improbable in the context of the city Buenos Aires because, as argued by Bordo, the relationship between hyper-thin bodies and hyper consumption are much more linked within advanced capitalist economies that are reliant on bodies that desire to be all they can be. These particular bodies then communicate that they *belong* to a modern society (Bordo 1991, Swedland and Urla 2009: 140). Essentially, the obesity law is a masterful public relations campaign that takes away international attention from the ultra-thin *porteña* and spreads beyond Buenos Aires the “tyranny of slenderness.” Legally, the obesity epidemic outweighs anorexia, while also feeding it.

## Conclusion

*Porteño* fashion has the value of opening up a space for us to think relationally about putatively separate spheres in order to critique the often buried, if formative, linkages between them that reveal the crisis of size. The crisis of size is historically rooted in distorted notions of what is deemed civilized and what is barbaric. *Porteño* culture is haunted by the anxiety of revealing black origins, of appearing less European, and of becoming Latin American. This anxiety has fashioned a neurotic panoptic culture within Buenos Aires capital that punishes all bodies that do not support Argentine narratives of modernity.

The various legislations created to monitor the fashion industry are tragically limited and counterproductive. *Porteñas* must conform to the dominant European ideal or it will immediately affect their quality of life. My approach in this work is to blacken Argentine history, explore the social dimensions of the Barbie culture, and critique the recent legislation. I relate all this to the political economy of desirable bodies within Argentina. Additionally, I chronicle the conditions and circumstances that permit the anorexic *porteña* to become visible or invisible within *porteño* culture.

In this paper, I advocate that in order to properly diagnose the crisis of

size, it is critical to contextualize a distorted national identity. Also, it is important to identify the agents of distortion, which I search for in the media, the fashion industry, and within the general public sphere. Unable to establish a clear definition of what locally constitutes anorexia, I emphasize the interlacing of clinical symptoms and cultural norms. I argue that many of the women in the city of Buenos Aires live with the symptoms associated with anorexia, however their extreme behaviors are normalized by the culture. Lastly, I look at the changing discourse surrounding anorexia, which is now strategically besieged by discussions of obesity. By connecting anorexia to obesity, a supposed first-world problem, Argentina refuels the delusion of prosperity and modernity that differentiates it from the rest of Latin America. Also, I suggest that all of these discourses on the body are implicitly racialized because of Argentina's historical engagement with blacks. As the country continues to feel the impacts of socioeconomic decline, the porteña will continue to embody the (racialized) aesthetics of disorder. She is compelled to "*poner el cuerpo*" in order to fulfill her social responsibility, to reproduce Argentine modernity. As a result, the watchful disciplining gaze was, is, and will always be on her (booty/body.)

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<sup>1</sup> *Porteños* are the inhabitants of Buenos Aires

<sup>2</sup> Anderson argues that the nation is "always conceived as deeply, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 1991). In his view, nationalism surpasses the lived experiences of inequality and exploitation. My point is that the invention of Argentina was possible through the creation of social differences bound to "civilization and barbism."

<sup>3</sup> In Spanish, nation as a word is gendered female. Performance theorist Diana Taylor gives an in-depth account of how ideas of *la patria* engender hypermasculine spectacles of power, such as dictatorships, during times of crisis (Taylor 1997).

<sup>4</sup> *Boinas* are berets. *Alpargatas* are canvas and rope sole shoes. Both are typical of *gauchos* (Argentine cowboys) who live in the pampas region (Saulquin 2009: 51).

<sup>5</sup> *El Riachuelo* or *Rio Matanza* is located in the South region of Buenos Aires. It is one of the most polluted rivers in the entire world since 1811 with some of the poorest neighborhoods on its shores (Rocha 2005). This contaminated frontier demarcates provincial Buenos Aires from Buenos Aires capital which continues to be Argentina's economic, industrialized, commercial, and cultural hub.

<sup>6</sup> (Shumway 1993: 1) According to Performance theorist Diana Taylor, who expands on Shumway's work, Argentina's perpetual state of crisis comes out of the (gendered) affect of "civilization and barbarism," marked in the tendency to conflate the feminine with all the unwanted groups such as blacks, indigenous groups, "*cabecitas*," etc. (Taylor 1997: 37). I contextualize the *porteña* crisis of size based on these understandings.

<sup>7</sup> Baker's performance was reviewed in the Argentine media as "monkey music."

<sup>8</sup> This story of "dark bodies" representing a social problem repeats itself with *cabecitas*.

<sup>9</sup> Historian Paula Brufman adds that, "There is a silence about the participation of Afro-Argentines in the history and building of Argentina, a silence about the enslavement and poverty." She posits that this denial and disdain for Afro-Argentines reflects the racism of an elite that still sees Africans as underdeveloped and uncivilized. In 1999 Afro-Argentine, as a real-time social category, reappeared for the first time after thirty years. Prior to this, the afro-argentine population was solely referred to as "black" (Aidi 2002).

<sup>10</sup> *Cabecitas* living in the provinces of Buenos Aires self-identify as *Bonairenses* (which means from Buenos Aires province) and they often culturally distinguish themselves from *porteños* (who are from the City of Buenos Aires.) *Porteños* are stereotyped as arrogant, ostentatious, racist, and haughty, while people from the Provinces (within and outside of Buenos Aires) are known to be "good people" and humble, despite being deemed less modern.

<sup>11</sup> Another paper topic I plan to pursue, that will focus on Peronism will production of Evita Peron as the Argentine Barbie. I do not wish to ignore nor downplay the significance of this era, especially when it pertains to dark, rural bodies (*cabecitas*). However, in this work I am concerned with exploring the social dimensions of *porteña* bodies, post the economic crisis. Which I believe this national spectacle is responsible for garnering scholarly interest in "racializing" the Colonial "whitening projects."

<sup>12</sup> (Faiola 1997).

<sup>13</sup> Galería Bonds Street is located at 1670 Santa Fe in Buenos Aires. It is a trendy Shopping mall that caters to a young poteno fashionistas. It is a congregating space for young *Porteños* who exhibit the in-style signifiers of Argentine youth culture.

<sup>14</sup> In the 2001 animation, *Barbie can be sad*, Argentine director Albertina Carri, cast a dark (Hispanic looking) Barbie to be the servant of the white (hegemonic) Barbie. She did this to underscore power relations throughout the region (Goldman 2009: 264).

<sup>15</sup> Rejecting the "third world" category, and instead identifying as a "country en-route to development" (*Un país en vías de desarrollo*) was a distinguishing marker of former president Carlos Menem's neoliberal policies. He sought to modernize Argentina in a way that made it competitive with the global markets.

<sup>16</sup> European bodies were spatially brought into sight, as crucial accoutrements to the French architecture and narrow streets. All other bodies were displaced from public view and interest. Sweeping modernization projects throughout Argentine history are haunted by “black” displacement and invisibility.

<sup>17</sup> The music video for “*La Argentinidad al Palo*” by Argentine rock band Bersuit Vergarabat lists all of the idiosyncrasies that are indicative of Argentine identity. A main image in the video is of a white, presumably *porteña* woman who looks like Brigitte Bardot but whose big (white) butt is on an altar.

<sup>18</sup> During the economic decline that led to the crisis of 2001, a growing interest in Afro-Argentine identity has reappeared within historical narratives and the media. This is also due to the mass migration of *cabecitas* outside of Argentina, which challenge the popular image of Argentines being monolithically “white.” Not to mention, Argentines in the United States are considered Latinos.

<sup>19</sup> (Foucault 1984: 83)

<sup>20</sup> “Latina Barbies” and the recently introduced curvy Barbie, “My Scene” Barbie are not carried by most, if any, Argentine toy stores.

<sup>21</sup> (Arie 2002)

<sup>22</sup> In Buenos Aires these buffets are called “*tenedor libre*.” In the spirit of my blackening endeavors, I choose to use “*diente libre*.” This is how it is called in Cordoba, Argentina (where part of my family is from.)

<sup>23</sup> The *onda light* is said to adversely affect the national economy, because there is a decline in red meat consumption.

<sup>24</sup> (Romer 1996)

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