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# Images of Virtuous Women: Morality, Gender and Power in Argentina between the World Wars

*María Fernanda Lorenzo, Ana Lía Rey and Cecilia Tossounian*

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Early in 1823 the Minister for Home Affairs and president-to-be of Argentina, Bernardino Rivadavia, created the Beneficent Society and established the Awards for Virtue (*Premios a la Virtud*). In his speech at the opening ceremony of the Beneficent Society, Rivadavia claimed that the new institution should pursue 'moral perfection and spiritual work in the fair sex, dedication to industrious activities, which results from the combination of these attributes'.<sup>1</sup> This philanthropic institution, made up of women belonging to the Porteño (Buenos Aires) elite, took up the beneficent side of the state. As a true representative of the Argentine liberal tradition, Rivadavia intended to deprive the Church of its central role in charitable activities and to give a new role to *damas laicas* (lay ladies)<sup>2</sup> in taking care of other women and improving them both intellectually and morally.

This early and strong alliance between public power and the most renowned elite women had the main goal of developing civic virtues in future citizens by raising and educating them within the scope of the moral qualities these women embodied. The rules of the Awards for Virtue read,

Every prize awarded for real merits is, apart from a rigorously fair tribute, a trigger promoting social perfection. Honour, dear to public awards, generally represents much more than its intrinsic value and it is a permanent way to encourage a practical life of virtue and attempts to acquire the qualities leading to such a reward.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of social perfection had its material realisation in four different prizes: one each for moral virtue and for industry in the case of adult women and two awards for dedication in the case of orphan girls, all of

them to be financed by the national state. Eventually, the scope of these awards came to be widened, thanks to the private financial support to the institution, legacies in memory of relatives and donations meant to ratify the 'respectable name and honour' of donors. As a result, other categories of virtue and virtuous women were added to the list, such as filial and fraternal love, humility, unselfishness, marital love, outstanding tidiness and organisation in the home, poor widow shamed by her reduced social status and poorest and most long-suffering woman, among others.<sup>4</sup> All the awards reinforced what the Society saw as the intrinsic values of feminised poverty.

One of the most striking characteristics of the prizes is how regularly they were awarded. Every 26 May, in an unequivocal homage to the emancipating campaign that had culminated in the May 1810 Revolution, the Beneficent Society held its most important ceremony, the Virtue Ceremony (*Fiesta de la Virtud*); different dignitaries were invited every year. The ceremony came to a halt only during the Juan Manuel de Rosas administration (1835–52); then it continued without interruption until the Society had to accept greater governmental intervention during the administration of General Juan Domingo Perón (1946–55) in 1947. For more than 120 years, the 'ladies' in the Beneficent Society and the government formed a powerful alliance: the government acknowledged the Society's role as the moral guide of the nation and put the Society in charge of many health and welfare institutions.

However, the swift changes that took place between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries transformed the foundations and meaning of the alliance. Immigration, industrialisation and urbanisation led to the emergence of new patterns of social behaviour. This can clearly be seen in the increasing number of working women and in feminists' 'emancipation' from traditional female roles, which was reflected in tango lyrics and the language of the press. By the 1930s, many had come to the conclusion that these new identities dangerously threatened traditional morals. In this context, the moral role of elite women became the most secure guarantee supporting 'decent customs'.

On the other hand, during the 1920s and more clearly during the 1930s, there were changes in state policies of social intervention due to the emergence of the social issue in public discussion and the spread of a more scientific concept of social assistance. Gradually, the state took over popular social assistance, undermining the role that the ladies had played for a century.

This gradual process reached its peak in the period between the wars. While the Beneficent Society found that its charitable activities were being severely questioned, the moralising endeavour of rewarding virtue continued undiminished in visibility and public support. Analysing the

contradiction between these two dimensions can help explain both the changes in female identities and the new views on social assistance emerging in this period. Based on the visibility of the award ceremony in the period between the wars, this essay investigates the role of the Society in those years. In addition it interrogates how the women belonging to the Beneficent Society constructed a representation of themselves which became the hegemonic model for Argentine women. Lastly, it discusses the ways in which women from popular sectors burst into this space of bourgeois representation.

The discussion and analysis included in this article are based mainly on the photographs taken at the Virtue Ceremony at the Colón Theatre. The corpus analysed is a continuum of institutional images picturing the prize-giving ceremony – images which were published on the front page of the most important media in those years.<sup>5</sup>

### **The *Fiesta de la Virtud***

European and American historiography has extensively studied the agency of women's associations in the formation of early social policies and in the development of welfare states. The women's social movements that arose in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries throughout Europe and the United States<sup>6</sup> were mainly concerned with the needs of mothers and children, for whom they set up institutions and devised programmes. Between 1880 and 1920, states relied on the initiatives of these organisations to provide poor women and children with assistance and relief. The organisations also exerted their influence on the design and operation of welfare programmes.<sup>7</sup> From this historical perspective, what is peculiar about the Beneficent Society is that it is neither a completely private nor a totally public institution. From 1880, when state institutions in Buenos Aires acquired jurisdiction over the whole national territory, onwards, it was under the jurisdiction of the national Ministry of Internal Affairs, but it was funded by both the national government and private donations and it had no formal links with the Catholic Church.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, Argentina was one of the few countries where a voluntary association of politically active, elite women became an administrative agency of the Republican government without losing its full autonomy.

The activities of the Beneficent Society had two main channels. On the one hand, it tackled poverty and health issues among women and children from the popular sectors. It was in charge of managing the *Hospital Nacional de Alienadas* (Asylum for Insane Women), the *Hospital de Niños* (Children's Hospital), the *Colegio de Huérfanas de*

la Merced (Mercy School for Orphan Girls), the *Casa de Expósitos* (Foundling Home) and the Hospital Rivadavia, among other institutions. On the other hand, it managed two financial aid programmes for poor families. The ladies distributed aid from this 'Poor Fund' (*Fondo de Pobres*) on a monthly basis, as well as giving out the Awards for Virtue, money rewards handed over in the sophisticated annual ceremony to women who were their household's chief income earners.<sup>9</sup>

From its inception, the Virtue Ceremony was an important occasion for the Beneficent Society for several reasons. For one thing, it was the only opportunity the Society had to publicise the daily activities of the institutions it managed. Apart from the celebration, it was only possible for the Society to make statements that were published in newspapers every now and then. Besides, the ritual represented by the ceremony was the only moment when the ladies' values and beliefs shone in the public light. The catalogue of virtues that the ladies embodied, which were considered specific to their class and gender, propelled them to seek those very virtues in the lower-class women who received the awards. The ladies wanted to see those women's personal qualities reflected in the popular classes as a whole. The criterion for choosing virtuous women, established in 1823, was based on the idea that 'virtue is more meritorious and praiseworthy in women of the middle classes than in distinguished ladies, since the former lack the education and aspirations, which lead the latter to comply with the principles imparted to them'.<sup>10</sup> These virtues were embedded in maternalist discourse as an ideology highlighting women's capacity for motherhood and extending the values of care and morality to society as a whole. Several social actors have resorted to maternalist discourse, among them women's movements in the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. By extolling the private virtues of the domestic sphere, maternalist discourses legitimised the intervention of women in the public domain.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the ladies used the prize-giving ceremony as a visual display of their social role, namely, being the moral guide of the nation. Never was this role so evident, nor was its application so perfectly achieved as with the girls from the Beneficent Society's orphanages. In the 1937 Virtue Ceremony, President Carmen María del Pilar de Rodríguez Larreta pointed out,

as for the girls, I believe we should improve their education and link them to new labour patterns. Our orphanages for girls produce outstanding nurses, baby-sitters, seamstresses, hygiene workers. It is our goal to educate women who are ready to perform various tasks and support their future husbands ... In this way, we are forming the core of families built upon the communion of feelings as well as on the collaborative attitude necessary to have thriving homes. We need to turn them into useful women, for we know they will make wonderful mothers and set a good example of Christian virtues for their offspring to follow.<sup>12</sup>

In this way, each 26 May, elite ladies hosted a variety of prestigious public figures and women from popular sectors attending the ceremony to receive their prizes. Both the protagonists and the audience took part in this celebration 'uniting the rich and the poor', as defined by Inés Dorrego de Unzué in 1921:

I know that the distinguished audience listening to my words has not attended this celebration with the indifference of the public at a banal show ... Most of our guests come here every year as if they were attracted to the virtue of humble people, feeling close to our work because they share our ideals and keep careful track of our activities, almost in the need to assess them because they are considered to be part of the works of the nation.<sup>13</sup>

The press gave ample coverage to the ceremony: photographs of it appeared on the front page of the newspapers with the highest circulation in the country, such as *La Nación*, *El Mundo* and *La Prensa*, as well as in the magazine most widely consumed in the popular sector, *Caras y Caretas*. Even though their targets were different sectors of the population, these media taken together can be said to appeal to a wide urban public, increasingly eager to read and be well informed.<sup>14</sup> By the early 1930s, the print press had become modernised and in the new reading contract between readers and publishers, newspapers began to include photographs to illustrate news and to make informative texts more compact. In this context, by the end of the decade, the ladies had already appeared on the front pages. Later, in the late 1930s, the recognition of virtue was given only minor space in the overall organisation of newspapers, with a small, non-illustrated column referring to the ceremony in the society section.

Information about the photographers who took the pictures is altogether omitted in the newspapers. Besides, the captions below the photographs are highly repetitive throughout the whole decade and across newspapers, typically including the same adjectives: 'The "Awards for Virtue" ceremony was magnificent' or 'One aspect of the magnificent ceremony' and so on, followed by a list of the figures in the photograph. Articles, on the other hand, provide general descriptions of the ceremony and sometimes include snippets of the speech delivered by the Society's president or by a representative of the government, in addition to the ever-present list of prize-winners and the name of each prize.

Given their symbolic significance, public authorities who were present tended to be mentioned in newspaper chronicles,<sup>15</sup> but presidents did not appear in the photographs, thus highlighting the ladies' central position. They attended the ceremony and watched it from the 'avant scene' box assigned to the government at the Colón Theatre, the most

important theatre in Argentina, devoted to satisfying the elite's taste for opera. Earlier ceremonies had been held at less socially significant places, such as the Templo San Ignacio (Saint Ignacio Church) first or the Colegio de Huérfanas de la Merced (Mercy School for Orphan Girls) or the Politeama Theatre later (Figure 1).

Attendees also changed over time. Until 1880, they were mainly women belonging to other charitable institutions and prominent churchmen. By the 1900s, the ceremony had become more opulent. Several government officials tended to be present, beginning with members of



**Figure 1:** Politeama Theatre. Awards for Virtue Ceremony.  
Source: *Caras y Caretas*, year II, N° 35, 3 June 1899, p. 12.

parliament. Gradually officials higher up the political ladder began attending, until the late 1920s when the Head of State also began to attend regularly. The ascending level of official attendance is a measure of the increasing importance of the ceremony. As the Awards for Virtue ceremony gained in importance, other charitable institutions such as the Damas de la Caridad (Charitable Ladies) decided to have their own ceremony and awards. Even one of the most popular social clubs, the Club Atlético Boca Juniors (Boca Juniors Athletic Club) began to award prizes to meritorious and selfless men in the neighbourhood on 25 May.<sup>16</sup> By 1913, these institutions held ceremonies very similar to the ones organised by the Beneficent Society at the end of the nineteenth century.

Another important guest at the ceremony, placed in the centre of the stage, was the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Religion, present because the Society had been under the jurisdiction of this Ministry since 1908. The presence of Minister Carlos Saavedra Lamas in the photographs should also be mentioned, because his wife had a prominent role in the Beneficent Society of the city of Buenos Aires (Figure 2). Other important visitors that can be seen in the pictures are Monsignor Santiago Luis Copello, Monsignor José Fietta and Catholic Nuncio Felipe Cortesi, all of them joining in the ladies' work (Figure 3).<sup>17</sup> Further in the background of both photographs, a group of women can be seen, all dressed in indistinguishable white: they are the orphan girls and the nurses looking at the centre of the stage.

In this elitist frieze where politics and religion appear intertwined, the outstanding central figures are the Society's officers. Following the yearly customary practice, the Society's president read out a detailed account of the activities carried out in each institution managed by the Society and presented the tasks ahead. Ever-present were also the usual tribute to Rivadavia and the secretaries' reading of the proceedings describing the work of the 'ladies who visited the poor' (*visitadoras de pobres*) and the list of prize-winners.<sup>18</sup>

The choice of lower-class women for the prizes depended solely on the annual selection made by the *Comisión de visitadoras de pobres*. These ladies were minor society members who visited the homes of the candidates for the awards and checked the truthfulness of their stories, as well as inspecting how they lived. Family sacrifice, love of work and acceptance of one's own social condition were highly valued. According to the criteria established in 1823:

The real target of the awards should be virtue in poverty, focused on personal work without resources or relationships with pious people. Anyone who finds herself in extreme poverty, so as not to be a social burden, should rely upon her



**Figure 2:** Distribution of the Awards for Virtue in the Teatro Colón. Mrs Adelia Harilaos de Olmos pronouncing her speech in front of the first lady of the Republic, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Religion of External Relationships, 1932. Source: AGN. Inventory 82500.



**Figure 3:** Awards for Virtue Ceremony, 1938. Source: AGN. Inventory 157943.



own labour only and, when earnings are not enough, dispose of her belongings and accept with resignation what Providence holds: this is undoubtedly what informs the spirit of the law and it is our duty to find sublimity in moral behaviour.<sup>19</sup>

One of the poor visitors explained that she had found 'many good examples of altruism, faithfulness, modesty and self-denial, embarrassing but noble poverty, resigned misfortune and we have tried to comfort them, helping those in need and rewarding the virtuous ones'.<sup>20</sup>

In 1930, the committee reported that they had visited 553 homes and given seventy-eight Awards for Virtue.<sup>21</sup> The increasing number of prizes was a result of the ever-growing number of donations to the Beneficent Society from prominent families, which allows for an interesting reading of the elite's attitude towards 'poor women with dignity'. Most of the rich who gave away money did not do so anonymously but with the aim that some of the prizes be named after them or their relatives.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, apart from these very general references at the ceremony, in both newspaper articles and the Society's proceedings there appeared only the names of the women honoured and their corresponding prizes. This can be contrasted with prize-giving ceremonies before the Great War, when a detailed account of the women's way of living was the central part of the celebration and was later included in news articles,<sup>23</sup> usually accompanied by the relevant pictures (Figures 1 and 4).

### **The Virtue Ceremony: the old Republican ritual revisited**

For more than 120 years, the Virtue Ceremony was held in accordance with, as one of the Society's ladies put it, 'the tendencies and demands of the social environment in each age, without changing the assumptions its purpose is based on'.<sup>24</sup> In this view, what could have led to the ceremony gaining in public pre-eminence as it did in this period? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to enquire into the new role the ceremony played in the 1930s.

The years between the wars have a number of characteristics that can be applied to an analysis of the ceremony. The economic crisis and the growing conservative opposition in politics brought the era of Radical rule – which had begun in 1916 in the aftermath of the first election with compulsory secret ballot for men only, because of the 1912 Sáenz Peña Law – to an end. In September 1930, a civil-cum-military *coup d'état* brought General José F. Uriburu to power. Uriburu's rule ended in



**Figure 4:** Josefina Brisalda, Eduarda Bernal and María Bajarano. Beneficent Society of Buenos Aires. Balcarce Award for filial love, 1908. Source: Archivo *Caras y Caretas*, AGN. Inventory 263441.

February 1932. He was followed by General Agustín P. Justo, who governed from 1932 to 1938 as a result of the electoral fraud that gripped the country for more than a decade. Besides these political changes, from the late nineteenth century onwards, Argentina's social structure became increasing complex, concomitant with the growth and diversification of the country's production structure.<sup>25</sup> In the first decades of the twentieth century, this industrialisation and urbanisation process brought about new social issues related to the population's standards of living and sanitation, the emergence of workers' unions and strikes.

More to the point, in the 1920s, this social modernisation process resulted in conflicts stemming from gender differences, the new role of women and the emergence of a new female figure: the so-called 'modern woman', nourished by the visible, active presence of working women, feminists and female intellectuals in the public sphere. Simultaneously, in Argentina, as in other societies, women walking along the streets on their own, smoking and going out to dances appeared in urban spaces. They came to be associated with consumption in advertisements for household appliances and beauty and cleaning products.<sup>26</sup> The gender system was therefore reformulated to accommodate these changes, at least to some extent. This process slowed down at the end of the 1920s and came to a halt in the 1930s.<sup>27</sup>

This new feminine figure represented a moral threat to some social sectors. Many times it was associated with excesses: this woman's body oozed sexual evils and social aberration. Moral and sexual themes turned into public issues thanks to the circulation of serial romance novels, plays and women's magazine articles. Tango and *milonga* lyrics also reflected the association of female attributes with urban disorder and, many times, efforts to correct this deviant behaviour. These tango lyrics by Homero Manzi are a good depiction of moral changes:

Moralists grumble – but they're not right – that the world is turned upside down in moral matters/that women in the past, as compared to modern ones/used to be modest and all that./So, at a glance, we can accept that/ but on a closer look what we see is different/ ... What is difficult is to be *virtuous* in today's clothing<sup>28</sup>

Both popular and scientific discourses emerged at the time to control women and their bodies – an increasing number of representations warning women in particular and society in general against the dangers of sexual excesses and recommending the virtues of economy, work and providence.<sup>29</sup> An era of progressive conservatism began as regards the social roles of women an example of which can be seen in the Justo administration's attempt to reform the 1924 Law on Women's Civil Rights. The proposed

reform would have taken the country back to the moment when married women were legally considered minors, with no right to work outside their homes unless their husbands granted a permit and no right to own real estate or be members of commercial partnerships or civil associations.

As Kathleen Newman suggests, a considerable sector of Argentinean society did not accept the representations of femininity that had emerged in the previous decades. They substituted the image of a woman who kept up with the times and yet preserved an eternal, i.e. nineteenth-century, femininity. Porteño aristocratic women were the perfect example of those values and so their pictures started to appear in general interest magazines.<sup>30</sup>

In this way, moral values were safely preserved by showing what was considered lost, exposing the female virtues of poor women and especially of not-so-poor women, to public opinion. Elite women found an empty space, a slot to be filled by this functional representation of femininity, which appeared in the public sphere through their portraits and in the photographs taken at the ceremony, both published in the media.

At the same time as Porteño aristocratic women gained pre-eminence as the best representatives of Argentinean femininity, conflicting views on how to design and manage social policies emerged. In the 1930s, the good relationship that had existed until then between the government and the Beneficent Society started to crack. Through the national Secretary of Hygiene (Departamento Nacional de Higiene, established in 1880) the state had initially tackled mainly urban sanitation problems; assistance programmes had originally been delegated to the Beneficent Society. From the late nineteenth century until the 1920s, the state and the ladies performed complementary tasks.<sup>31</sup> The new era, however, brought about a change in the state's pattern of social intervention.

The relationship with the Beneficent Society started to turn from complementarity to rivalry. The incipient clash in domains can be seen in the government's criticism of the lack of organisation in the Society's assistance system and in attempts to control the association. The debate between the advocates of public social assistance and the supporters of private charity had a long tradition, but it gained momentum in those years. The staunchest critics of private charity were a group of physicians working in the public sphere known as the 'hygienists', whose opinions were based on a scientific view of social issues. Their perspective led them to criticise beneficent actions, for they considered it to be associated with Christian charity, with trying to alleviate social evils without seeking to eradicate their causes. According to the hygienists, social assistance, on the contrary, should be based on prevention and this was the role of the state. As both groups were positioned in the same sphere, the ladies and the advocates of public social assistance fought for the funds provided by the state, generally allotted to the Beneficent

Society. The first steps in the creation of a centralised social assistance system were three converging factors set into motion in the late 1920s and early 1930s: a set of laws rationalising state subsidies,<sup>32</sup> the growing number of social services provided by the doctors and nurses in public hospitals, who replaced private charity in its old responsibilities<sup>33</sup> and a series of social laws intended to meet the needs of working women.<sup>34</sup>

But even though emerging social policies included efforts to control and replace the ladies in the work they had traditionally done, this tendency did not have enough strength or consensus yet to become established.<sup>35</sup> So, the 1930s were marked by a permanent struggle for power, and it was only in the following period of the Perón administration that the welfare state came into full force. The fact that elite women managed to keep some of their old power can explain why public social assistance was a latecomer in Argentina when compared to other South American countries.<sup>36</sup>

Oddly enough, when the alliance between the state and the Beneficent Society began to crack, as the criticisms of the former about the latter's work and institutions intensified, the Virtue Ceremony reached its peak in visibility and public support. These were the years when photographs of the ceremony appeared on newspaper and magazine front pages and the attendance of the president and other high-ranking officials was mentioned in the articles.

The emphasis on the ladies' moralising role led to some degree of understanding between the Beneficent Society and the state, turning the relation into a complex combination of conflict and complementarity, only resolved with the increased intervention in the Society's affairs and its subsequent dissolution during the Peronist administration.

### **The construction of virtuous bodies**

The prize-giving ceremony can also be analysed as a fixed, performative ritual, since year in, year out, the same event was performed as a series of activities reinforced in each repetition of the ceremony. For each act, the Society ladies chose a political figure to deliver the main speech on behalf of the national authorities; every year, the Society's president reviewed the activities carried out. As the photographs show, year in, year out, the protagonists and the general public were located in a similar fashion, the four prizes provided by the government were awarded and the effort implied in the private prizes was praised.

Paul Connerton defines this kind of repetitive ritual as a 'liturgical language'. Rituals are performative – they crystallise meaning in words, gestures and postures repeated as a sequence of stereotypes.<sup>37</sup> Following this type of analysis, photographs are an apt artefact for reading the

ceremony. Since rituals are cultural forms where performance has a central role, it is in the bodily substratum that some meanings can be found.

On the other hand, as Gillian Rose writes, the concept of a photograph's *representational space* 'connects the fictive spaces of the image with the spaces of its interpretation by considering the relations between image and audience implicit in particular spatial configuration'.<sup>38</sup> The pictures analysed show the work of the Society's ladies in Buenos Aires. Apart from creating a specific image of the ladies, the photographs give information about how the popular sectors were captured by the anonymous photographer. As noted by Luis Príamo in his study of the relation between photography and private life, when photographed, individuals from popular sectors 'hand over their intimacy', willingly or unwillingly, without having much control over the forms into which their images have been captured.<sup>39</sup>

The pictures, then, are a suitable means to reconstruct the ritual and performative aspects condensed in the ceremony and to enquire into the way in which bourgeois and popular sectors are represented in them.

### **The ladies as mothers of the nation**

The prize-giving ceremony was a space where the ladies' values were enacted. The photographs show a ceremony that followed a script in which bodies were organised in a hierarchical order. All cultures express the choreography of authority in the body: power and rank can be seen in postures that reveal aspects of the relationship to others. The hierarchical organisation can also be seen in the position of all the social actors participating in the ceremony, as if they were a polyphonic choir.

In the photographs, the Beneficent Society's representatives are in the centre of the stage, their president flanked by male figures from the Church and the government. Before them lies the desk with the certificates to be awarded. These characters appear fore-grounded and considerably higher than the general public, who are excluded from the pictures' frame. In the background, there are minor social characters and low-level government officials. Behind those characters is a crowd of women: the orphan girls and the nurses. The choir-like display has a special effect. The central position is occupied by the nurses, who surround Bernardino Rivadavia's bust, with the orphans standing at both sides, as if they were a kind of internal audience on the stage, watching the parade of prize winners and authorities and, at the same time, being observed as the culminating product of the ladies' efforts as if in a game of symmetrical observation.

On the whole, the photographs reveal a role game in terms of gender. The ladies are the only female authorities at the ceremony and as such, they have a prominent place, together with the government authorities, all of them men, emphasising a clear role division. The state, then, is represented with two faces: a male one, that of the government's representatives and a female one, the ladies. By staging values such as altruism, effort and sacrifice – the values the ladies embody, which are considered inherently female – the ceremony highlights the motherly dimension of their activities. At the same time, it personifies the state in its roles of both the mother and the father of the prize winners (Figure 5).

From this perspective, the different places assigned to the characters can be seen to be arranged in a kind of female family tree constructed by the ladies in relation to those surrounding them. The lineage begins with the orphans, who will some day take part in the numerous philanthropic activities with their work and spiritual self-denial. Maybe some day they will also be rewarded for their virtues, but at the moment when the picture was taken, they symbolically represents the role of promise, the safeguard of the beneficent institution's greatness in the future. The nurses are the virtuous women of the present *par excellence*, spending their time in taking care of others. Last but not least, there are the poor, prize-winning women, the guests of honour in the ceremony, who are the symbolic embodiment of all the values distributed among the rest of the women in the event. In this sense, the ladies can be seen as the roots of this tree, transmitting the traditional values of the past to the professional women, the orphans and the prize-winning women. Taken together, these groups of women represents the past, present and future of the Beneficent Society. At the ritual's pinnacle, the Society's ladies bless the recreation of the lineage. Thus, they take on the role of moralising mothers of the nation.

### Popular-sector women as virtuous women

The photographs showing the awarding of prizes reveal the marginality of the prize winners. While there are hundreds of pictures featuring the award certificates on the authorities' desk, only three portray the women who received them. In the corpus of photographs analysed, no caption saves those women from their anonymous status. Their individual virtues are unknown. When they were called to receive their award, some of the ladies belonging to the Society's board escorted them to the place where they would get the certificate proving their virtue. Even when they were being given the award, they did not get a close-up but a long shot or profile picture (Figure 6). However, this subordinate place within the photographs,



**Figure 5:** The stage of the Teatro Colón during distribution of the Awards for Virtue, 1939. Source: AGN. Inventory 162368.





**Figure 6:** Minister of External Relationships, Carlos Saavedra Lamas giving the Awards for Virtue to two ladies in the Teatro Colón, 1933. Source: AGN. Inventory 52514.

corresponding to the ladies' prominence in the ceremony, is not a hurdle to analysing how women from popular sectors are represented. This analysis begins from the observation that the images of virtuous women play a role that is in marked contrast to other representations of working women in those years, such as the image of the heroic and long-suffering labourer and, from a different perspective, the prostitute.<sup>40</sup>

The images of working women posed a challenge, since work, the paradigmatic realm of men, was considered a threat to femininity. One of the strategies employed to offset this perception was the maternalisation of feminine working-class figures. The threat posed by a woman associated with the sphere of work was thus toned down by linking her to the maternal condition.<sup>41</sup>

It is surprising that, in contrast, the photographs of virtuous women do not include indications of their condition as actual or potential mothers. The award-holders are never accompanied by their children when they come on stage. In fact, the only children present at the ceremony are those 'saved from being an orphan' by the ladies. This is perfectly consistent with the purpose of the ceremony, for the awards are given not for motherhood or for the values associated with it, but for having overcome life's hurdles with dignity and virtue.<sup>42</sup>

While in this period, the modern woman became a disturbing figure as regards moral customs and, therefore, for the nation's future, the

ceremony represented prize winners as women who could not threaten the gender and social order, which was then reproduced successfully. How is this identity of poor but respectable women constructed in the photographs? First of all, these women can be recognised in the pictures through bodily differences denoting social differentiation. Besides, since the photographs have been taken in a de-contextualised setting, without reference to these women's daily lives, or to the tenements (*conventillos*) or districts from which they come, their otherness cannot be recognised in their spatial or social localisation. What differentiates them is rather shown in a distinct appearance as compared to the elite ladies. Prize winners are wearing simple clothes that emphasise their humble origins and their willingness to get past them, clothes that intentionally suggest sobriety and simplicity. The long shot captures the idea that their way of dressing shows some toned-down poverty rather than pauperism. Their simplicity is not expected to be diminished or transformed in order to be more in accordance with the opulence of the aristocratic space of the Colón Theatre. Thus, prize winners are represented as outside the event's magnificence. Their clothing is in sharp contrast to the elegant fur stoles, the opulent jewellery and the big hats that are part of the ladies' attire.

However, even though prize winners are clearly distinguished by the absence of overt symbols denoting their social status – an absence that consequently marks social class differences—they are trying to imitate the tastes and clothes of the matriarchs in their sobriety, identifying themselves with the ladies' values. Both groups are attired in long, dark coats covering their whole bodies and they are both wearing hats, which in those years signalled social cachet. These signs are part of representation codes of a type of femininity which confirm that these women are respectable as a group. Their bodies adhere to a rigid codification of what a virtuous woman should look like.

Some symbols, however, emphasise the differences, even when they are shared by both groups: the ladies' hats are bigger and in a highly ornate style and their coats are accompanied by furs and jewellery, elements worn moderately, if at all, by the virtuous women (see Figures 2 and 3). In this sense, Nancy Armstrong points out that 'image by image, popular photography produced a stereotypical body image that came to represent the female. Against this standard, any variation could be measured: promiscuous women, working class women'.<sup>43</sup>

The lack of information on the selection of prize winners, their living conditions and the reasons why they were chosen can be understood when their photographed bodies are analysed in the framework of the ceremony. The values rewarded emanated from the virtuous bodies, as they were constructed in these photographs, without the need to justify the selection explicitly.<sup>44</sup> The press of the period displayed the

ceremony's photographs as evidence of model bodies, which did not need to be changed because they were naturally praiseworthy. It is precisely the fact that the prizes were awarded to these women for what they were and not for what they had been in the past or could be in the future that rendered them an apt representation to project virtues (Figure 5).

In this sense, the virtuous woman can be understood as the counterpart of the representation of the prostitute. Both were public women, but the former is constructed as the epitome of the woman who, by way of persistence and effort, has managed to overcome the trials of her social background and forge a decent future for herself. The latter, on the other hand, represents the woman who has fallen prey to social pressure, lacking the necessary willpower to get out of indecency. Thus, the poor but virtuous woman emerges as one of several identities – certainly the most reassuring one – that the representation of working women can take.

The ceremony's ritual was designed to favour the prize winners' identification with the canonical virtue proposed by the ladies. This was achieved through an appropriate mixture of emotional appeal and reaffirmation of codified social norms. One of the goals of a ritual is to get some rules to be naturally accepted, making them universal and desirable. As Victor Turner suggests, in a ritual, norms and values are loaded with emotion and emotions, in turn, become nobler through the contact with social values.<sup>45</sup>

In this respect, the fact that the ceremony was held at the Colón Theatre in Buenos Aires allowed prize-winning women to enter a harmonious space, isolated from other contexts marked by the pollution of social conflict and mixture. The ladies escorted the winners to get their certificates and bowed to them, making the contrast between their magnificence and the simplicity of the virtuous women's attire emerge. The 'enacted' distance makes the theatrical nature of the event evident. The fact that the ceremony took place in a deliberately unreal scenario, within the context of conflict-free coexistence, was a means to promote the ladies' social norms and to intensify the emotional appeal to the public. The temporal reiteration of these values produced a naturalisation of those virtuous bodies, with the result that 'annoyance of moral repression turns into love of virtue'.<sup>46</sup>

### **New readings: virtue and parody**

A look at the photographs that can only recognise disciplinary discourses runs the risk of placing the representation exclusively on the side of authority. Nevertheless, this tendency can be reversed if discourses are deliberately allowed to proliferate and the meaning of the pictures is

reconstructed accordingly.<sup>47</sup> This observation raises the question of how women from popular sectors might have reacted to the prizes and the photographs of the ceremony published in the newspapers and magazines of the period. Probing into subordinate classes' representations is fraught with difficulties and it is even more so in the case of women, given the invisibility that has characterised their history. The scarcity of direct sources and testimonies makes an indirect approach and a counter-reading necessary and especially valuable. Together with photographs, other non-traditional sources can be a suitable means to accomplish this goal.

In this vein, a play published by *La Escena* magazine, entitled *Premios a la Virtud*, can be analysed.<sup>48</sup> Drama, especially the so-called *sainete* (satirical farce), was one of the genres in which popular traditions found expression. As opposed to highbrow drama and together with bullfighting, cockfighting and *pato* (a sport played on horseback), the *sainete* was part of popular entertainment in those years. One of its main characteristics was a generally sardonic and stereotypical presentation of characters.<sup>49</sup>

The plot of this play develops out of the vicissitudes of a family made up of a mother, two daughters and a son, after their economic collapse. The backbone of the play is the contrast between the sisters: one of them has been selected to be awarded the prize for her virtue, whereas the other has fallen into the disgrace of prostitution. The play is useful as a source to analyse how the Virtue Ceremony was conceived of among the popular classes. In a satirical tone, the play offers an inversion of the traditional values represented by the characters. Rosa Blanca, the older sister, the one in the 'disgraceful' trade, is in fact virtuous, for her 'sacrifice' provides for the whole family. They live on her earnings, but she is looked down upon and marginalised because she has an immoral job. The son, who is expected to take on the social responsibility of maintaining his mother and sisters after the death of the *pater familias*, is depicted as a lazy man who lives off his sister. All the characters are revealed in their true nature and their fake morals are criticised in the play.

The play's climax comes when the Society's ladies arrive at the house to meet the sister chosen for the prize. In a scene appealing to the spectator/reader's complicity, one of the ladies complains at the arrival of a photographer from *Caras y Caretas*, even though later it is found out that the ladies were the ones who called him. The ladies, who do not know about Rosa Blanca's trade and are led to believe that she is also involved in charity, insist that she appear in the group photograph, 'so that people can see how good deeds are rewarded'. Rosa Blanca agrees, reluctant at first, but later pleased with the ironic situation. In the end,

the photograph captures the ladies and the two poor but 'virtuous' sisters. Knowing that there is one daughter who 'chose a mistaken path' yet not realising that that daughter is Rosa Blanca herself, the ladies criticise her severely and praise the other daughter's virtue. After listening to the ladies' criticism for some time, Rosa Blanca cries, 'And don't you think it must be really hard for a woman born with a good nature to become bad? ... As far as I know, that daughter became a sinner to prevent her family from falling into poverty; they were hungry and hunger knows nothing about virtue'. The play ends with Rosa Blanca's rebellion against her family's disdain and her running away with Federico, her fiancé, who is an anarchist and does not care about her allegedly immoral past. As he puts it, 'it is unfair not to reward so much self-denial'.

As a parody of the norms in force, the *sainete* manages to debunk them. By mocking what virtue and the ladies' work mean, the play shows how unnatural this type of gender behaviour is. The parodic staging of what are natural norms for the ladies is used precisely to reveal their performative nature. Rosa Blanca embodies all the moral values despised by the ladies and by society in general. She symbolises the prostitute that has been labelled in other spaces as the origin of all the nation's social evils. In this play, however, prostitution is rather the painful trade of a virtuous woman. This re-signifying practice whereby the prostitute gets rid of the condemnation associated with the word and becomes the 'true' virtuous woman reveals the subversive potential of the parodic appropriation of discourse. In the process, the virtuous identity so laboriously constructed by the ladies is also dismantled. In an ironic play of symmetries, the disciplined bodies of the women portrayed by the *Caras y Caretas*'s photographer, analysed in the previous section, acquire a different meaning here. The *representational space* of this photograph has changed, since a different public now reads the same picture with new and critical eyes.

Before disappearing, every star has its zenith and the Awards for Virtue, the most important public ceremony of Porteño elite women in the years between the wars, were no exception. A few years after the period analysed in this paper, the Beneficent Society's ladies lost the position they had held secure for more than 120 years.

This article has provided an analysis of the prize-giving ceremony of the Awards for Virtue and the representation of femininity constructed by Porteño elite ladies through those prizes in the years between the wars. The photographs of the ceremony published in newspapers proved to be one of the most significant sources for the analysis.

For more than a century, the structure of the ceremony changed little. The same virtues that Rivadavia had identified in 1823 were rewarded,

the same well-known homage to the Beneficent Society's founder was paid and the same staging of the ladies' efforts was performed, with the hope that the institution had a promising future and with the emphasis on the importance of its activities for the nation's moral perfection. Throughout the nineteenth century, the state left important social assistance programmes in the hands of the Society's ladies, a process which started to be reversed in the first decades of the twentieth century. Even as the state questioned their charitable activities, the ceremony gained in renown, as testified to by the use of increasingly magnificent spaces and the presence of Heads of State. Prizes also grew in number, as a result of the increase in private donations made to the institution.

The ceremony's public visibility reached its peak in the 1930s, especially as a result of the photographs published in the media. The ladies' visual prominence in the pictures was so great that prize winners, allegedly the protagonists of the event, could barely be seen, let alone recognised. Thus, the analysis of the pictures allows for the reconstruction of the representations of femininity displayed at the ceremony.

In their role as mothers of the nation, the ladies personified a type of femininity that guaranteed the permanence of traditional moral standards just when changes in customs seemed to be threatening them. Altruism, effort and sacrifice were the values they embodied and projected onto prize winners. The Awards for Virtue were the tool to construct the representation of women from popular sectors as poor but virtuous. Such a representation, enacted in the artificial harmony of the Colón Theatre, yielded a reassuring image for the traditional gender and social order, in contrast to the disturbing representations of women that arose from the profound and conflicting social changes that characterised Argentina's social modernisation.

These other possible representations contain a potential for criticism of the female identity defined by bourgeois femininity. The image of Rosa Blanca, the virtuous prostitute, appearing in a photograph for *Caras y Caretas* with the 'beneficent ladies', is emblematic of the multiplicity of discourses that can be read from the same photograph.

## Notes

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1. In María Inés Passanante, *Pobreza y Acción Social en la Historia Argentina: de la Beneficencia a la Seguridad Social* (Buenos Aires: Humanitas, 1987), p. 11.

2. The members of the Beneficent Society, representing the elite classes, were referred to and referred to themselves as *damas*, translated as 'ladies' in this essay.
3. Government decree to implement the Awards for Virtue, Buenos Aires, 1 March 1823. In Karen Mead, 'Oligarchs, Doctors and Nuns: Public Health and Beneficence in Buenos Aires, 1880–1914' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1994), p. 152.
4. 'Premios a la Virtud', *Sociedad de Beneficencia, Memorias* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta de la Escuela de Artes y Oficios del Asilo de Huérfanos, 1911–43).
5. All the photographs analysed in this paper are kept at the Departamento de Documentos Fotográficos in the Archivo General de la Nación, Buenos Aires.
6. For the European case, see Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (eds), *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (London: Routledge, 1993); Gisela Bock and Pat Thane (eds), *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of European Welfare States 1880s–1950s* (London: Routledge, 1991). For the American case, see Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Linda Gordon (ed.), *Women, the State and Welfare* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Linda Gordon, 'Social Insurance and Public Assistance: the Influence of Gender in Welfare Thought in the United States, 1890–1935', *American Historical Review* 7 (1992), pp. 19–54.
7. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, 'Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States, 1880–1920', *American Historical Review* 95 (1990), pp. 1076–1108.
8. Religion was an important factor motivating the ladies' charitable activities, in spite of the liberal secularism that the Beneficent Society represented as an institution. For associations of Catholic women, see Karen Mead, 'Gender, Welfare and the Catholic Church in Argentina: Conferencias de Señoras de San Vicente de Paul, 1890–1916', *The Americas* 58 (2001), pp. 91–119; Omar Acha, 'Catolicismo Social y Feminidad en la Década del 30', in Paula Halperin and Omar Acha (eds), *Cuerpos, Géneros e Identidades: Estudios de Historia de Género en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Del Signo, 2000), pp. 197–227; Sandra McGee Deutsch, 'The Catholic Church, Work and Womanhood in Argentina, 1890–1930', in Gertrude Yeager (ed.), *Confronting Change, Challenging Tradition: Women in Latin American History* (Washington: Scholarly Resources, 1994), pp. 127–51.
9. Mead, 'Oligarchs, Doctors and Nuns', pp. 151–3.
10. 'Premios a la Virtud', *Sociedad de Beneficencia, Memorias, del año 1923* (Buenos Aires: Escuela de Artes y Oficios del Asilo de Huérfanos, 1923), pp. 43–4.
11. Koven and Michel, 'Womanly Duties', p. 1079.
12. 'Discurso de la Presidenta de la Sociedad de Beneficencia', *Sociedad de Beneficencia, Memorias del año 1937* (Buenos Aires: Escuela de Artes y Oficios del Asilo de Huérfanos, 1938), pp. 52–3.
13. 'Discurso de la Presidenta Inés Dorrego de Unzué', *Sociedad de Beneficencia, Memorias del año 1921* (Buenos Aires: Escuela de Artes y Oficios del Asilo de Huérfanos, 1921), pp. 43–4.
14. *La Nación*, *La Prensa*, *El Mundo* and *Caras y Caretas* make up a media corpus with different audiences and, therefore, with different ways of handling information. However, in the late 1920s and the 1930s, they significantly shared the use of images to convey news. *La Nación*, a 'periodical of ideas' founded by Bartolomé Mitre in 1870, addressed itself in the 1930s as before to the country's intellectual and economic elites. *La Prensa*, founded by José C. Paz in 1869, a pioneer in introducing printing techniques, was the most widely read newspaper in Argentina at the beginning of the twentieth century, since its readership was a mixture of different social classes. At the end of the 1920s, *El Mundo* had become one of the most important Argentinean morning newspapers. Characterised by widespread use of photographs in its daily edition, it belonged to the Heynes publishing house, which owned other large-circulation newspapers and magazines. *Caras y Caretas* (1898–1939), the first magazine to use photographs and to become a modern publication,

- was directed to a popular audience and especially to women, who were seen as potential consumers both of the products advertised on its pages and of the subjects of the articles. See Jorge B. Rivera, *El Escritor y la Industria Cultural* (Buenos Aires: Atuel, 1998); Sylvia Saïtta, *Regueros de Tinta: El Diario Crítica en la Década de 1920* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1998); Sylvia Saïtta, *El Escritor en el Bosque de Ladrillos* (Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 2000); Beatriz Sarlo, *El Imperio de los Sentimientos* (Buenos Aires: Catálogos, 1985).
15. The first President to attend the ceremony was Figueroa Alcorta in 1910 as part of the centennial of the May Revolution, accompanied by Infanta Doña Isabel de Borbón from Spain and the Chilean President, Dr Montt. During the 1910s and part of the 1920s, the presidents did not tend to attend the ceremony. They began to attend again in the late 1920s. 'Premios a la Virtud' in *Sociedad de Beneficencia, Memorias* (Buenos Aires: Escuela de Artes y Oficios del Asilo de Huérfanos, 1920–39).
  16. *El Diario*, 21 May 1933. Mead points out that in the 1910s, the ceremony organised by the Charitable Ladies was simpler and less ostentatious than that of the Beneficent Society. Mead, 'Oligarchs, Doctors and Nuns', p. 290.
  17. The presence of ecclesiastical authorities at the prize-giving ceremony is closely related to the internal changes affecting the Catholic Church in the 1920s, especially to Social Catholicism. Among other consequences, this resulted in the Church becoming more acquainted with the charitable activities of several associations of Catholic women. The Church's attempt at re-organisation included the creation of Catholic culture courses in 1922, the appearance of *Criterio*, a Catholic magazine, in 1928, the foundation of the Acción Católica in 1931 and, in particular, the creation of its Socio-Economic Secretary, conceived of as a means to meet social needs. See Loris Zanatta, *Del Estado Liberal a la Nación Católica: Iglesia y Ejército en los Orígenes del Peronismo, 1930–1943* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1996).
  18. 'Acta de Sociedad' and 'Informe de la Comisión Visitadora', *Sociedad de Beneficencia, Memorias* (Buenos Aires: Escuela de Artes y Oficios del Asilo de Huérfanos, 1911–43).
  19. Speech delivered by President Sofia Arning de Bengolea when the institution celebrated its centennial anniversary. 'Premios a la Virtud', *Sociedad de Beneficencia, Memorias 1923* (Buenos Aires: Escuela de Artes y Oficios del Asilo de Huérfanos, 1923), pp 43–9.
  20. 'Informe de la Comisión Visitadora', *Sociedad de Beneficencia, Memorias del año 1928*, (Buenos Aires: Escuela de Artes y Oficios del Asilo de Huérfanos, 1928), p. 63.
  21. *Sociedad de Beneficencia, Memorias del año 1930*, Archivo General de la Nación, file 9883/2. By way of comparison, in 1910, forty-four prizes were awarded and 800 homes were visited.
  22. In 1931, an annual \$1,000 prize donated by María del Carmen Sala de Demona in memory of her mother, a former Society president, Etelvina Costa de Sala, was to be awarded to two orphan girls from the Beneficent Society who were worthy of such a reward. See *El Diario*, 27 May 1931.
  23. Mead, 'Oligarchs, Doctors and Nuns', pp. 292–4.
  24. Speech delivered by President Sofia Arning de Bengolea when the institution celebrated its centennial anniversary. 'Premios a la Virtud', *Sociedad de Beneficencia, Memorias 1923* (Buenos Aires: Escuela de Artes y Oficios del Asilo de Huérfanos, 1923), pp. 43–9.
  25. Although population numbers had increased dramatically because of immigration – Argentina had 1.8 million inhabitants in 1869 and 7.9 million in 1914 – this growth rate came to a halt as a result of international crises. During the 1930s, the net migration balance was the lowest in the country's history since the beginning of modernisation. Economic growth, based mainly on the exports of primary goods, was also spectacular: between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, GDP increased by a 5 per cent mean annual rate. Even though the economy remained dynamic, the growth rate decreased in the years 1914–30. A new cycle began in the 1930s, when the relation



- between the rural sector and industry shifted after the 1929 crash and the Second World War. Such an economic boom, however, was never reached again.
26. There is consensus among historians as regards the progressive insertion of women into the so-called light industries (food and clothing) and into the service-producing sector in the 1920s. This decade is also marked by the height of feminist organisations, especially those devoted to the demand for women's suffrage. See Marcela Nari, 'El Feminismo frente a la Cuestión de la Mujer en las Primeras Décadas del Siglo XX', in Juan Suriano (ed.), *La Cuestión Social en la Argentina 1870–1943* (Buenos Aires: La Colmena, 2000), pp. 277–99.
  27. Kathleen Newman, 'Modernization of Femininity: Argentina 1916–1926', in UC-Stanford Seminar on Feminism and Culture in Latin America, *Women, Culture and Politics in Latin America* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 74–89.
  28. Lyrics of the tango song 'De Ayer a Hoy' by Homero Manzi (1907–51). In *Homero Manzi: Cancionero* (Buenos Aires: Torres Aguero Editor, 1979), pp. 24–5, emphasis added.
  29. See Francine Masiello, *Between Civilization and Barbarism: Women, Nation and Literary Culture in Modern Argentina* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), pp. 167–71; Dora Barrancos, 'Moral Sexual, Sexualidad y Mujeres Trabajadoras en el Período de Entreguerras', in Fernando Devoto and Marta Madero (eds), *Historia de la Vida Privada en Argentina*, vol. 3: *La Argentina entre Multitudes y Soledades: De los Años Treinta a la Actualidad* (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 1999), pp. 198–225.
  30. Newman, 'Modernization of Femininity', p. 87. The author points out that in 1926, the magazines *Plus Ultra* and *Caras y Caretas* published a special supplement on Argentinean women, where the photographs of feminists, intellectuals and actresses were replaced with rather anachronistic and static pictures featuring some of the representatives of the Porteño aristocracy in delicate poses and brandishing Argentinean traditional values.
  31. For authors who emphasise complementarity and overlook conflict, see Ricardo González, 'Caridad y Filantropía en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires durante la Segunda Mitad del Siglo XIX', in *Sectores Populares y Vida Urbana* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO (Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales), 1984), pp. 251–9, esp. pp. 256–7; Eduardo Cíafero, *Caridad y Control Social: las Sociedades de Beneficencia en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 1880–1930* (unpublished MA dissertation, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Buenos Aires, 1990), pp. 16–18.
  32. In 1932, the Social Assistance Fund (Fondo de Asistencia Social) was created to regulate the granting of subsidies; in 1933, the Government organised the First National Convention on Social Assistance; in 1940, the National Assistance Roll (Registro Nacional de Asistencia) was created; and in 1944, the Social Assistance Direction (Dirección de Asistencia Social) was instituted under the jurisdiction of the Labour and Welfare Secretary (Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social). See Emilio Tenti Fanfani, *Estado y Pobreza: Estrategias Típicas de Intervención*, vol. 1 (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latina, 1989), pp. 72–4.
  33. The first social assistance programmes including maternal services were provided by the Maternity Institute of the Rivadavia Hospital, under the jurisdiction of the Beneficent Society, in 1928. See Cíafero, *Caridad y Control Social*, pp. 167–211.
  34. Maternity benefits, which were first regulated in 1934, were a \$200 subsidy for working women payable only to mothers themselves. Women were also entitled to free medical assistance during delivery. The money came from the compulsory quarterly contributions of both working women and their employers. In 1937, the National Direction of Maternity and Infancy was established, with the aims of creating shelters for single mothers, health-care centres and kindergartens and supervising all the institutions devoted to the protection of mothers and children, except for those under the jurisdiction of the Beneficent Society.
  35. This can be seen in the National Direction of Maternity and Infancy's failure to control the institutions under the jurisdiction of the Beneficent Society, a victory the ladies won

- after pressing the government hard. See Donna Guy, 'La Verdadera Historia de la Sociedad de Beneficencia', in Barbara Potthast and Eugenia Scarzanella (eds), *Mujeres y Naciones en América Latina: Problemas de Inclusión y Exclusión* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2001), pp. 249–69, esp. p. 261.
36. Christine Ehrick, 'Affectionate Mothers and the Colossal Machine: Feminism, Social Assistance and the State in Uruguay 1910–1932', *The Americas* 58 (2001), pp. 121–39, argues that Argentina's Beneficent Society's power was stronger and longer-lived than that of its Uruguayan counterpart, which favoured the growth of the Battlist state and the emergence of an early welfare assistance system.
  37. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 43.
  38. Gillian Rose, 'Engendering the Slum: Photography in East London in the 1930s', *Gender, Place and Culture* 4 (1997), pp. 277–300, esp. pp. 277–8.
  39. Luis Priamo, 'Fotografía y Vida Privada 1870–1930', in Fernando Devoto and Marta Madero (eds), *Historia de la Vida Privada en la Argentina*, vol 2: *La Argentina Plural 1870–1930* (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 1999), pp. 275–299, here p. 276.
  40. Omar Acha, 'Catolicismo Social y Feminidad en la Década del 30', p. 200.
  41. Gillian Rose analyses photographs of slums which depict women doing the household chores or posing for the camera, surrounded by their children and relatives. This can be read as a form of domestication and feminisation of the sphere of daily life. See Rose, 'Engendering the Slum', pp. 277–300.
  42. According to Karen Mead, prizes did not appeal specifically to mothers for they could also be awarded to daughters and sisters, a striking selection pattern if considered in the wider context of maternalist discourse in the 1930s, which emphasised the importance of the mother–child dyad as the foundation for the nation's future. See Karen Mead, 'La Mujer Argentina y la Política de Ricos y Pobres al Fin del Siglo XIX', in Omar Acha and Paula Halperin (eds), *Cuerpos, Géneros e Identidades* (Buenos Aires: Editorial del Signo, 2000), pp. 31–59, esp. p. 50; Mead, 'Oligarchs, Doctors and Nuns', pp. 158–9; Marcela Nari, *Las Políticas de la Maternidad y el Maternalismo Político: Buenos Aires 1890–1940*, (unpublished PhD thesis, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2000), pp. 181–3, 201.
  43. Nancy Armstrong, 'Modernism's Iconophobia and What it did to Gender', *Modernism/Modernity* 5 (1998), pp. 47–75, here p. 51.
  44. Griselda Pollock analyses several representations of working women and points out that, as a new type of disciplinary technology, photography led to the development of a discourse linking truth to vision. Thus, degradation and immorality became visible in the physical bodily appearance. Griselda Pollock, 'With My Own Eyes: Fetishism, the Labouring Body and the Colour of its Sex', *Art History* 17 (1994), pp. 342–82, here p. 362. Opposing values, such as morality, can also be seen in the body.
  45. Victor Turner, *La Selva de los Símbolos: Aspectos del Ritual Ndembu*, tr. Ramón Valdés del Toro and Alberto Cardín Garay (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1999).
  46. Victor Turner, *La Selva de los Símbolos*, p. 33.
  47. Pollock, 'With My Own Eyes', p. 15; Rose, 'Engendering the Slum', p. 2.
  48. Ulises Favaro, 'Premios a la Virtud (Awards to Virtue)', *La Escena* (Buenos Aires) 3 (1920), n.p. The play was first put on by the Muñio-Alippi Theatre Company at the Buenos Aires Theatre on 30 July 1920, n.p.
  49. Jorge Lafforgue, *El Teatro Argentino* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1979), pp. 83, 87.