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ABOUT LASA2012

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Congress Theme

A number of Latin American countries already are celebrating, or soon will celebrate, the achievement of 200 years of national independence. The bicentennial commemorations represent not only an opportunity to convey and promote a sense of national unity based on collective accomplishments, but also an occasion for political, intellectual, and cultural reassessments of the past and present. In general, they are characterized by more complex views of the meaning of the revolutionary wars and of the scale of the social, economic, and human costs of nation-building and modernization, especially in relation to indigenous and other subaltern populations. The result of this reconsideration is a relatively more diverse and inclusive notion of collective identity—one that takes into account the coexistence of many different (at times antagonistic) ethnic, sexual, and social histories. Although deep social inequalities still persist, the celebrations also coincide with an unprecedented period of democratic rule. The bicentennials offer an excellent opportunity for a multidisciplinary discussion about the multiple ways of constructing the past and forecasting the future; the new meanings of "independence," "revolution," and "national identity;" the role of Latin America in the new global economic order; and the transformative power and limitations of democratic institutions in Latin America's third century of national independence.

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From Crochet to Home Economics

The Introduction of Modernity to the Mexican Home

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Abstract

The theories of scientific management developed in the United States by the end of the Nineteenth century began to penetrate the Mexican household until the late 1930s. Both, the leftist and rightist press advised women on cleaning, cooking and washing according to the latest theories, however, the discourses on modernity each one presented to their readership were very different, either of promotion or rejection of a modern way of life.

The Second World War had a strong impact on such messages, especially in rightist magazines such as *La Familia*. During the after-war period, while the idea of a modern house was not challenged any longer, it was neither promoted. The contents turned mainly to morals and religious values leaving to advertisement the role of introducing technology to the house and educate the public in that sense.

The attitude towards technology differed in each case; while the radio and the telephone threatened the traditional way of life, there was no opposition to the refrigerator or the electric stove. The arrival of processed foods defied again the traditional way of life, leaving women with spare time to devote to their personal appearance, promoted as well through the advertisement of beauty products. The aim of the paper will be to analyze the evolution of the discourses held by the media targeted mainly at women, regarding the introduction of technology and efficiency to the Mexican home, and the place of women in society from the 1930s to the 1960s.

Keywords: Home economics, female magazines, modern architecture, Mexico, technology

From Crochet to Home Economics: The Introduction of Modernity to the Mexican Home

Magazines and newspapers have played an important role in the shaping of a modern society. From the advertisement of home appliances to the qualified advice in techniques of housekeeping, women had been especially targeted both, by the political right and left, as vehicles of transformation of the way of life, the former as promoters of tradition and the latter as agents of change. In many cases architects found in women the best allies in their endeavor to design the modern home. In Germany, for instance, Bruno Taut recognized such alliance in the title of his book *Die neue Wohnung. Die Frau als Schöpferin*, (*The new home: the woman as creator*) in which he supported the theories of scientific management, first developed in the United States. By the second decade of the twentieth century, other architects such as J.J.P. Oud were already designing according to the principles of efficiency leading to a significant reduction of space as in his *Weissenhofsiedlung* houses. Most of the time architects moved at a different pace than the rest of the society as they anticipated change; however, they were not always successful in transmitting their weltanschauung to the rest of the population.

The theories of scientific management were first introduced to the domestic environment by Christine Frederick in 1912 with the publishing of her articles in the *Ladies' Home Journal*. A year later, her book "*New Housekeeping: Efficiency Studies in Home Management*" appeared. After hesitations and tests on the applicability of the

efficiency methods at home, following the example of industry, she proposed new and more effective techniques for cooking, cleaning and the spatial distribution of the rooms that became fundamental to modern architecture. With the advancement of technology, the growing concern for hygiene and the economic pressures to reduce the deficit in housing, modern, standardized schemes were adopted around the globe mainly during the interwar period, and Mexico was not an exemption.

The question of efficiency began to penetrate the Mexican household until the 1930s, advising women, both through the rightist and leftist press on how to maintain a healthy, well-organized environment at home. For instance, in 1938, the leftist newspaper *El Popular* published in its section devoted to the working woman examples on how to arrange fruits and vegetables in order to preserve them longer and save space in the kitchen. Other suggestions related to the management of the house included handicraft projects for the reuse of wooden boxes that could be transformed into furniture. The rightist approach, instead, emphasized cleaning by proposing specific schedules for different activities, from the daily care of bathrooms to the weekly vacuuming of curtains and tapestry. According to the female magazine *Mujeres*, the only way to make cleaning less overwhelming was “to make it in an orderly and efficient manner” following some recommendations:

For that, it is convenient to spend some moments studying an order and some procedures that would allow saving time and effort. It is necessary, mainly, to avoid routines and formulas learned during the youth that can easily be superseded thanks to the modern technique that, luckily, has come to help the housewife.

Cleanliness, order and method, here's the slogan that would allow housework to stop being a burden and become, if not a pleasant experience, at least as lightest and less annoying as possible.¹

The use of home appliances as the vacuum was encouraged, leaving the broom as a supplement for unreachable corners. Other recommendations related to hygiene dealt with homemade remedies for stain-removal and washing. Moreover, little steps towards efficiency were suggested, such as having the necessary products at hand in order to make a better use of time:

Before proceeding with deep cleaning, foresee having all the utensils and products needed at hand in order to avoid steps and tiredness. Ensure the bench or ladder to be used to climb. Try to alternate a heavy and exhausting chore with a lighter one. Having all the cleaning utensils at hand and at an adequate height can save plenty of time and effort, as opposed to having them on the floor, in disorder and disarray.²

One of the main concerns, both of housewives and architects as well was hygiene. In 1932, probably influenced by the 1929 CIAM (Congrès International d'Architecture

¹ “Consejos para conservar la casa y el ajuar”, *Mujeres* #196, June 15, 1967, p.39

² *Idem.*, p.40

Moderne) conference held in Frankfurt under the topic *Wohnung für das Existenzminimum*, a competition for the design of the minimum housing unit was launched in Mexico. Juan Legarreta's winning entry divided the house into three different modules isolating the kitchen from the living room and incorporating a bathroom into the house. Having the proper facilities at home would enhance the precariousness in which most of the Mexican people lived. When asked about the state of Mexican architecture a year later, he simply expressed the urgency to solve the poor conditions of housing, mocking those preoccupied by aesthetics: "A people who live in shacks and round-rooms cannot SPEAK architecture, - we'll do the houses for the people, - aesthetes and rhetoricians, die you all! - You'll have later your discussions."³ Legarreta's disregard for aesthetics did not prevent him from using functional features as symbols of progress in his housing estates, as was the case of the water tank that was brought to the front façade, just as Juan O'Gorman did some years before in Diego Rivera's house. As Legarreta, O'Gorman became a strong advocate of functionalist architecture, defending, in the *1933 Talks on Architecture* the need of hygienic spaces and the use of technology to achieve them, especially following the criticism of his school projects of the previous year. He wrote:

Are we going to think in artistic environments or pleasant and spiritual aspects of the building? When what is needed with urgency is hygiene: hygiene of the body and of the intelligence. Big windows that will provide a lot of light and many showers, and these are called Swedish or Nordic, without analyzing the problems and without knowing the environment.

(...) Architecture will have to internationalize for the simple reason that man every day universalizes more and more. Isn't this the role of education? Isn't this the role of industry? Thanks to these factors, in Mexico we can have the comfort and real well-being that technique provided us with. Wishfully we had more education and more technique, even if they were Swedish or German. Efficiency at the lowest cost, isn't it an international necessity? (Sociedad de Arquitectos Mexicanos 2001)

Not only did O'Gorman stress the need of Mexican architecture to internationalize, but to incorporate technology as indispensable to enter the modern world. Efficiency at the lowest cost was the imperative and old habits had to be abandoned. Magazines were also aware of the change and many of their authors nostalgically regretted the replacement of such old customs. The typewriting machine was preferred over the sewing machine, since it was, "in addition to a means to make a living, the perfect excuse to run away from home, to escape from among those four walls in which the existence of those other little women of thirty years ago consumed themselves."⁴ Conservative writers made their readers aware of the decay in values and abandonment of the home by women that began to leave the house, not only to work but to enjoy their spare time or participate in political and cultural activities that were formerly limited to men. In order to understand the reactions of such

³ Juan Legarreta, in Noelle, L. (ed), *Pláticas sobre arquitectura 1933*, Cuadernos de arquitectura #1, CONACULTA-INBA, México, 2001, p.3

⁴ *La Familia, revista de labores para el hogar*. Second year, no. 20, August 1933, p.8

contributors, it is worth to quote in extent an article on the participation of women in politics published in *La Familia* in 1937:

(...) I know a woman that is always at conferences about the social order, whose abandoned and dirty house, forced her patient husband to leave her, because whenever he got there, exhausted from work, he found the burner off, the beds undone since the morning, and the kids, dirty, shaggy, and spoiled having been all day long running in the streets...

Instead, this woman spoke in front of a group of impassioned feminists making the brilliant panegyric of the modern woman born 'to shape peoples and empower those weakened by oppression...'

Of course the auditorium, composed mainly of other women without brains, was enthusiastic, ready to develop a wide program of feminine progress...

The Mexican woman was always attached to her home. From distant countries came her fame of being an honest and devoted wife. When speaking of our women, men praised to the skies their kindness, their domestic virtues and their maternal love.

(...) And the houses? Now the maids touched also by the progresses of human equality, demand higher salaries and conditions that are becoming very expensive for the not so wealthy. The housewives, instead of preparing themselves for the defense of their homes are getting to the streets ready to dispute men the rights that nature had conferred them, no matter who they have to upset.⁵

While the conservative press prevented women from leaving the house and provided them with clear instructions on domestic matters, the left presented a very different approach to the management of the home. Instead of relying on the mere ability of the wife to manage the house according to the knowledge passed from one generation to the other, domestic labor had to be professionalized in the figure of the social worker. Alfredo Saavedra exposed in the magazine *Senda Nueva: revista popular de orientación*, published by the Secretariat of Education, the relevance of the social worker:

Social work refers, among other aspects, to the orientation the woman has to receive at home. It is the woman's training in her limited home environment on domestic economics, hygiene, dietetics, small industries. Thanks to the activity of the social worker a bad-oriented house concerning the distribution of salaries, the way to conduct a healthy lifestyle or in the making of little chores can be redeemed, to learn how to care for a child in a practical manner, [and] the technique of a simple, economic, nutritive and efficient alimentation (...).

The social worker is, therefore, the woman's ally in her own house. The social worker has to go and provide the helpless woman with the assistance

⁵ *La Familia*, January 1937, p.86

needed to be a good housewife, to be self-sufficient in saving children from moral and physical misery.⁶

After completing her studies, the social worker was expected to be able to train working women on issues relevant to the family's wellbeing, targeting especially the women in rural environments that were unable to acquire the basics of housekeeping otherwise. The teaching of the social worker would depend, mostly, on the National Polytechnic Institute, established in 1936 to widen the educational offer for the underprivileged and give them a technical training as an alternative to the professional studies offered by the National University.

The Polytechnic was the product of important changes in the educational system. During the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) socialist education was imposed in the entire school network, forcing private schools to implement the official curriculum, including, in urban schools, courses in home economics. Despite the fact that such orientation in education lasted officially until 1945, during the presidential period of Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946) the socialist emphasis was practically abandoned.

Meanwhile, the debate surrounding the place of women continued to be exposed in the press. On the one hand, the right sustained that the new times had corrupted the good habits of women, leading them to the recklessness of their families as Rosario Sansores, a contributor to *La Familia* noticed. When comparing the old times with the new, she acknowledged the benefits of the telephone that did not exist fifty years before, but regretted the loss of old customs. She criticized those women who “throw themselves to the streets sometimes with no reason, just for the pleasure to hang around window-shopping in front of the great department stores,”⁷ praising at the same time those ladies who stay at home: “The house where the housewife remains has a delicious and tender charm. The servants are kinder. Everything breaths comfort and cleanliness. The food is always ready on time and well seasoned.”⁸

On the other hand, centrist magazines advised its female readers to stay at home whenever the circumstances allowed it, yet recognizing this optimal state was not the case for many ladies who had the necessity to work in the outer sphere. Writing for the magazine *Paquita*, Joaquín Cacho García made another distinction, this time between life in the capital and in the provinces. He expressed a deep concern for the prejudices against those women which are compelled to work or live in an urban milieu. In a more balanced assessment of the different conditions women have to face, while praising the virtues of life in the country and the values of the woman “who lives and reigns in such privileged emporia of chastity, consideration and silence,”⁹ he noted that those were the product of their circumstances, as opposed to the urban woman who has to adapt to the pace of the big city. He wrote:

⁶ (*Senda Nueva*, 2nd year, #24, January 1938, p.p.31,36)

⁷ *La Familia*, February 1938, p.70

⁸ *Idem*.

⁹ Joaquín García Cacho, “Frente a frente: capitalinas y provincianas”, *Paquita* #33, January 6, 1939, p.47

Thus, for the provincial women – particularly those from El Bajío – gifts, graces and virtues gather to their merit in an extraordinary manner, in violent contrast to the women who live in the capital, deprived of their aptitude for homely functions by the supposition that they unfailingly yield to the invitation to dissipate by the recreation inherent to the metropolis. However, this light judgment runs as valid, and whoever emits it does not notice that by doing so, reduces the virtues of the provincial woman because it makes her merits stand, more than on their own, on circumstantial matters.

It is undeniable, in fact, that there are notorious differences between those from the capital and the provincials, but that does not signify to diminish one or the other. They are simply different.¹⁰

He continues then with an account of the difficulties urban women have to face in order to survive in the city:

Women from the capital, as integral members of a great center of activity, have forcefully to adapt to the rhythm of the big city, due to a biological principle of acclimatization to the environment; and, if they do not, they will be rejected and displaced by it. A milieu of work and struggle forces them to confront a crude reality detached of contemplation and illusions. But this necessary disposition to face the requirements of life, does not invalidate in any way their femininity, but perhaps it refines it when they abandon the office or the workshop for marriage, since these women, that first and foremost are women, are naturally anxious to consecrate themselves to acts that are specific and exclusively theirs.¹¹

Changes in the way of life were also reflected in the shape of the house; architects were not always attuned with the demands of society, particularly those of the upper and middle classes. While the architectural avant-garde strived for standardization, abstraction and multi-functionality of spaces in the house, conservative views in the general media opposed to them. Certain stereotypes of the traditional and the modern house effective during the interwar period can be deducted from articles in the conservative media. While the former was warm, cozy, clean, intimate and friendly, the latter was impersonal, cold, abandoned, standardized, vulgar, rude and small. Moderate positions, instead, depicted the modern house in a more balanced way. For instance, in “Cuando la casa es pequeña”, [When the house is small], the author describes how the proper arrangement of furniture and the use of certain colors can provide a family with all the comfort needed:

This space that serves at the same time as kitchen and dining room fulfills all the comfort a small family needs with its little furnishing. The electric stove, the refrigerator, the table, chairs and other stuff have a matt whiteness that contrasts with the bright color of the linoleum or of the curtains.

¹⁰ *Idem.*

¹¹ *Idem.*

The modern kitchen is an entire laboratory. For that reason all of its furniture, as well as the curtains, have to be white or of a light color. The little tables nailed to the wall that can be folded letting the lid to open up, are very practical since they can be taken away easily when not in use.¹²

Another important distinction between old and new had to do with gender. The traditional house was charged with a feminine touch, while the modern was imbued with masculine characteristics. The custom, especially among well-to-do girls, to hang birdcages in the patio was widely used in the media as an example of love, care and good manners. Boyfriends courted their mates by presenting them with beautiful and exotic birds whose squeak as well as the scent of flowers transformed the space into a womanly atmosphere : “The birdcages in the corridor gave the [house] its character, it was the homey femaleness, the modest, the working, the humble, dressed up with the potted flowers and singing through the crystalline gorge of the birds.”¹³ In the modern house, instead, the unbearable noise of the radio filled the space with a masculine touch. Xavier Sorondo looks at it nostalgically in his 1935 article:

Nothing is more romantic than those nightly trills! Today they would appear anachronistic and absurd beside the noise of the radio...

The truth is that birds are nowadays out of tone. The modern little houses, first of all, have no space to hang the birdcages, and then, the agitation of modern life and, most of all of its different orientations, does not allow ladies to lose their time cleaning dirty boards and filling casseroles with turnip flowers. The morning hours are not enough to dye their hair or to silver plate their nails.

Is new better? Maybe, but, wasn't it nice and meaningful this fundamentally feminine gesture of taking care of the humble straw birdcages?¹⁴

The noises created by the products of modernity, as described in the conservative magazines, not only disturbed the serenity of the house, as the radio, but increased the pace of daily life, generating stress and a negative effect on the ears and the nervous system. In order to measure the impact on the mental health of the individuals exposed to them, “scientific studies” were conducted giving way to the most extreme reactions. For instance, Dr. Alfonso Millán published in the magazine *Hoy* in 1937 his article “La Vida Moderna y la Higiene Mental” [“Modern Life and Mental Hygiene”] in which he initiated a crusade against the radio supporting his ideas on such studies:

All of these [noises] produce, apart from the necessity to hurry, that on its own is enough to exaggerate the spending of our nervous energy, a new excitation, that of our ears stunned by all those noises. At the same time, humans walk less and have a sedentary life that is not precisely adequate to the harmonious development and necessary functioning of their organs.

¹² *La Familia*, January 1937, p.42-43

¹³ Sorondo, X., “La afición por los pájaros”, *Revista de Revistas*, Año XXIV #1287, 13 de enero de 1935

¹⁴ *Idem*.

Besides, our environment has imposed on us, in a deadly manner, this other product of modern life that is called the radio. (...) The typical Mexican “*diablito*” would help the radio to function to its full intensity in the houses, with the consequent traumatism of its inhabitants and the complete ignorance about the disastrous effect of such constant irritation of our nervous system. Moreover, the radio works without any consideration for the little ones, the newly born, the kids, etc. that arrive in an infernal world full of noises (...)¹⁵

Millán’s attack on radio went even further departing from his supposed scientific approach to enter the realm of personal ideology. Besides the effects of sound, he complained about the content of the programs that were of “unsubstantial music, from an aesthetic point of view, and full of depressive or exciting suggestions for our affectivity, favoring the development of bad taste and ignorance (...).”¹⁶

Criticism such as Millán's on the content of programs was not limited to the radio; other media like the movies or even the printed press were attacked as corruptors of the morals, leading, by the end of the 1930s to a revision of their messages. Although most of the female magazines published during the interwar period were targeted at the upper classes, their editorial lines and contents differed significantly. While *La Familia*, the most rightist oriented of such publications was fundamentally a catalog of crochet knitting, others like *El Hogar* tried to present a more intellectual content, including serialized novels, mainly from foreign authors, that lasted for some months.

As the Second World War approached, the main emphasis of magazines and newspapers and their advice to women radically changed. The leftist newspaper *El Popular* stopped publishing its column for women in order to give full coverage to the latest developments in Europe while the chief editor of *El Hogar* resigned her position to let more knowledgeable people take control of the journal in such difficult times. In fact, the need to stress spiritual values among the people was emphasized in both sides of the political spectrum, having, of course, different explanations for the moral decay of modern society. A. Reyes Soley, when analyzing the prevailing “artistic chaos” in his 1939 article for *El Popular*, blamed for the loss of spirituality, the incapacity of people to adjust to the speed of modern living. He wrote:

The artistic chaos in which we live is even more notorious for the pre-war generations, since history, being at the mercy of the technical advancement, has since a few years ago, completely broken apart with the traditional way of life. Those generations, used to move to the pace of the 'stagecoach,' need to accommodate to the fantastic speed of the airplane. Our spiritual life is poor because we cannot adjust to the demands of modern life yet; we neither know how to take advantage of the excellence that it gives us. (...) We live, unwillingly, in two contradictory worlds, spiritually old and materially modern.¹⁷

¹⁵ Millán, Alfonso, “La vida moderna y la higiene mental”, *Hoy* #13, May,22 , 1937, p. 26

¹⁶ *Idem.*

¹⁷ *El Popular*, April 3, 1939, Sec. 1, p.3

In the case of *La Familia*, the change was even more notorious. By the end of the war, the publication became a strong promoter of Catholic values. Religious images began to appear in the magazine's cover and index page, while opinion articles became very limited. Even Rosario Sansores stopped writing her critical essays and restricted her contributions to cheesy poetry. Now, the editorials insisted, the role of women became as important as ever. Not only did they have the entire responsibility for the cohesion of the family, but of the education of the future generations, instilled with the moral values needed to heal the wounds of war.

Personal care was also an important aspect magazines got involved with, where the changes after the war were significant. Especially meaningful during the thirties was the insistence on a healthy diet and exercise, advising frequently on how to achieve a lean figure, which included exercises that could be performed at home directed at specific problematic areas of the body. Moreover, up-to-date medical recommendations on the adequate diet appeared in every issue, such as feeding children with sugary products in order to provide them with the necessary energy to grow healthy.

This emphasis on diet and exercise seen during the thirties was soon to be replaced with other ways to look healthy and young. By the end of the Second World War, as a means to reactivate the economy, many cosmetic products were advertised in magazines as easy remedies for a better look. Articles suggesting sporting activities diminished as tips on the right make-up increased, distinguishing between the adequate looks for work and those for the evening. In the same sense, fashion had also to adapt to the new reality of many women, designing more comfortable clothing especially for the office.

Despite the fact that Mexico played a very marginal role during the war, its consequences were felt in the house. Beside the new emphasis on values and education, the most pragmatic aspects of daily life were also affected. The import of appliances or the supply of raw materials to produce them in the country presented important delays. Telephone wiring, for example, took long periods of time becoming almost impossible to get a line. The telephone and telegraph company justified their incapacity to meet the demands of its clients:

In reality, the end of the armed struggle only shortens the waiting time. The production of materials and telephonic equipments that is actively developing is still insufficient to satisfy the demands of all solicitants everywhere. This, together with the difficulties and delays in transportation, imposes on us restrictions that would not be totally eliminated but after a while.¹⁸

Advertising became an important part of publications by the mid-forties. Beauty products occupied most of the publicity, yet, home appliances were also widely announced, having its producers the need to educate the public in its use, for instance, electrical companies such as General Electric or Westinghouse, explained the public how electricity works at home and the need to hire an architect to design the proper power supply system

¹⁸ *La Familia*, February 15, 1946, year XVI, #264, p. 61

that would allow houses to incorporate all the commodities of modern life, and liberate women from the burden of housework.

During the postwar period modernity was no longer contested, though, there was still a sense of nostalgia for the traditional home. In architecture, the cold modernism found an alternative in classical decoration, as pointed out in *Fémina* in 1946:

A new will oriented towards the search for styles, a different science that wants to revive the repertoire of forms and traditions of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, constitutes the current tendency in the decorative matter in modern homes.

Rhythm in line, color harmony, noble arrangement of spaces, quiet luxury, beautiful works of art, paintings, hand-painted fabrics, sculptures, thousand of objects chosen with a subtle, delicate taste, create now the true ambience of a house.

How different it is to the cold, graceless forms of functional furniture. In such instruments of geometric lines, one could find but a material function so strange to the human being as to his moral life. It was the submission of man to the machine from which he suffered a tyrannical ascendance.¹⁹

Social aspects related to the advancement of women in the working place were also reconsidered in rightist magazines. The professional gains of previous decades appeared to be futile since there was not enough demand for employment; thus, professional women had to accept, frustrated, less qualified jobs, in spite of their ability or knowledge. It was, therefore, better to return to the traditional place of the woman at home, leaving the man the role of the provider. In *La Familia*, Henri DuPont wrote about such a case:

Some days ago I heard two mothers discussing, not without some concern, about the future of their daughters - totaling five between both. The two oldest 'graduated', one as chemist and the other as medical doctor (...). Everybody praised them at the time of their graduation. Then these things were less common than nowadays and that gave pride and satisfaction to their families.

It was 1926 and in those days all the roads seemed to be easy and wide. Women had started to fully enjoy the economic liberty brought by the war and even the most prudish applauded what was considered a feminine conquest (...)

And here the complaints begin: It was not worth to study all those years (...)! The two mothers sighed as they reflected that the two youngest will follow a very different path. Enough with curiosity, enthusiasm and pretentions. (...) the will to be independent should not be exaggerated to the point of converting women in collectors of useless diplomas.

(...) It is better for women to give in to men that place and limit themselves to 'useful' things. It is therefore clear that the girls, after finishing

¹⁹ *Fémina*, July 1946, year 1, #2

the 'Normal' school, will follow courses on domestic economics and some social assistance.²⁰

During the fifties tradition was defied again by technology. In 1950 the first television channel began to operate, followed by two more in the next two years. As in the case of the radio, the television also raised harsh criticism from the conservative sector, especially for its contents that were not adequate for all kinds of public. In 1952, Fidiás wrote in the magazine *Femenil*:

A censorship in television is not only necessary but totally indispensable to remedy all the abuses that have been occurring... No... we are neither puritan nor are we frightened with anything, but we have to understand that the television has to be of a higher moral than cinema... Why? The reason is simple; the television gets to the core of the house... In cinema, when a movie is a little bit distasteful, we simply do not take our children to see it; with the television is different. The machine is in our own home, some of our children already know how to operate it, and therefore, they can sometimes watch inconvenient shows.²¹

The modern way of life finally dominated Mexican society by the sixties. The consumption habits changed and supermarkets began to replace the long-established market to the extent that, by the end of the decade, they covered about 20% of regular spending in Mexico City, with very good expectations of growth. New products as the wrapping plastic film contributed to maintain healthy practices in these establishments, while at home, precooked and canned foods facilitated the labor in the kitchen, leaving women more time to engage in other activities.

Having a maid at home, as noted in the magazine *La Mujer de Hoy*, was becoming more difficult, since other working opportunities were becoming available for underprivileged girls; instead, home appliances were recommended as much as the family could afford them. In addition, the role of the male at home was also challenged by the new times; while the woman transformed the way of life through habits, it was the man who performed the practical changes in the house through manual work. Few publications covered specific male interests such as cars and technology. In 1947, *Popular Mechanics* began circulation in translation to Spanish, however, it did not reflect the reality of Mexican men. In its pages, the magazine instructed husbands on how to repair or build cabinets, furniture or even entire houses in order to satisfy the taste of the wife. A clear example was the article "Cocina Fascinante" ["Fascinating Kitchen"] in which Mr. Molay transforms the kitchen of his house:

With painting and wallpaper plus the accessories of the modern kitchen and a great amount of ingenuity, the antiquated and inefficient kitchen of Mr. Bernard S. Molay's home in Chicago, has been transformed into a comfortable

²⁰ *La Familia*, May 15, 1950, year XVIII, #359, p.27

²¹ *Femenil*, #41, May, 1952, p.16

working room [painted] with a cherry color, where it is unnecessary to kneel, bend, or make any effort.

The transformation was the work of Mr. Molay and a friend, having as an advisor Mrs. Molay.²²

The appraisal of architecture changed not only through these kind of individual interventions to make it functional, but through the image the media promoted. Movies began to use the modern model of the glass box to depict success, as the setting of the wealthy. Romantic scenes of patrons in love with their servants took place in the modern houses of El Pedregal, sending the message of social aspiration and equality. The images of the *existenzminimum* of the twenties were no longer the sole option within the modern movement. Architecture was purged of its former ideological content, allowing the privileged to adopt its abstract volumes as symbols of the new epoch. The clear glass volumes and ample spaces designed under the international style ceased to be seen with contempt to become the new aesthetic ideal.

As for the women, the emphasis on personal care, fashion and good housekeeping continued to shape the upper echelons of society, mainly through the conservative media. Nonetheless, important steps towards the social development of women were taken, such as the right to vote acquired for the first time in the 1955 elections that was widely covered by the press. Magazines on both sides of the ideological spectrum were, undoubtedly, fundamental arenas in the development of the Mexican female culture of the twentieth century.

²² "Cocina Fascinante", *Mecánica Popular*, First year, #2, June 1947, p.53