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## Article

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economic sociology\_the european electronic newsletter

## Provided in Cooperation with:

Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPIfG), Cologne

*Suggested Citation:* Luzzi, Mariana; Wilkis, Ariel (2018) : Financial repertoires in the making: Understanding the US dollar's popularization in Argentina, economic sociology\_the european electronic newsletter, ISSN 1871-3351, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPIfG), Cologne, Vol. 20, Iss. 1, pp. 18-26

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/193157>

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# Financial repertoires in the making: Understanding the US dollar's popularization in Argentina

Mariana Luzzi and Ariel Wilkis

At the beginning of May 2018, after the Federal Reserve Bank had announced an increase in the benchmark interest rate, Argentina experienced a currency crisis that the central bank was unable to quell. As a result, the value of Argentina's currency, the peso, fell nearly by 8 percent in one day against the US dollar, a devaluation noticeably higher than those experienced by other Latin American countries. For several days, in what has become a regular event over the past few decades, journalists eagerly discussed the peso-dollar exchange rate, which also had a prominent place in the news. In one prime time current affairs program, a journalist observed that during the first week of May, 3 percent of Twitter exchanges in Buenos Aires had included the word "dollar," a percentage equivalent to that of New York City.

Although surprising, this statistic on social network exchanges is indicative of a tendency already noted by other sources: According to studies published by the US Treasury more than ten years ago, Argentina was the third country worldwide in terms of its holdings of the US currency, after the United States and Russia (US Department of Treasury 2006).

Even then, however, this did not represent a new trend. Since the mid-twentieth century, the dollar has progressively become a relevant unit of account in Argentina's economy and a fundamental component of the payment infrastructure (Maurer 2015) of various markets, not only those tied to international trade but

also others, such as the real estate market. At the same time, the US currency has been gradually incorporated into the financial repertoire (Guyer 2004) of both companies and households, permeating multiple practices of savings, investment, credit, and debt.

When, and at what pace, did this expansion of the US dollar occur in Argentina? What channels or mediums enabled this expansion? In this article, which draws on the tradition of the sociology of money, we propose to bring novel elements into the fold in order to help answer this question.

Since the publication of Viviana Zelizer's pioneering work in the mid-1990s (Zelizer, 1994) and, in the case of anthropology, works that appeared even earlier (Bloch and Parry 1989), both sociologists and anthropologists have offered in-depth explorations of the myriad ways in which people use money. Researchers have established significant connections in personal relationships, institutional contexts, and money transfers (Zelizer, 2005; Guyer, 2004, Maurer, 2006 Fourcade, 2011; Wherry, 2008; Luzzi, 2015; Wilkis, 2017). In *The Social Meaning of Money*, Zelizer reveals the diverse uses and meanings of money, focusing on the processes of earmarking and differentiating between monies, although without examining the acceptance of currency unification around the US dollar. The question of the role of institutional and cultural mediation that helped to make certain currencies more legitimate than others—and fostered certain ways of using these currencies—is thus absent from Zelizer's approach to the sociology of money. In other words, Zelizer takes for granted certain processes that

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require a profound examination in order to understand monetary practices that are never entirely self-initiated. In this work, we aim to expand on the questions of the sociology of money in order to address the sociohistorical process that allowed the stabilization of ordinary financial repertoires based on the articulation of local and foreign currencies, in Argentina, the peso and the US dollar (Luzzi and Wilkis, 2018).

In our view, the expanded use of the dollar in Argentina is part of a repertoire of financial practices that has become increasingly more intricate and complex since the mid-twentieth century. We will speak of the "popularization" of the dollar to refer to this pro-

cess. As we understand it here, this popularization entails the interaction of two different dynamics: The increase in the number of social groups that have adopted these monetary practices and the dissemination of the interpretative frameworks that lend legitimacy to such practices. Based on this definition, we argue that towards the end of the 1950s, the dollar started to integrate the financial repertoires of social groups that had previously had only scarce contact with financial and exchange markets. To a great extent, this process depended on the gradual construction of the US currency as a pop culture artifact, that is, as something familiar, easy to decode, and capable of providing cognitive, emotional, and practical guidance to people from different social and economic backgrounds.

Although the process we analyze extends over several decades, in this work we focus exclusively on its initial phase, which we have dated from 1958 to 1962. Both economic and political factors influenced our dating of the period, as these were years in which a limited democracy was reinstated in Argentina and important economic reforms were made, including the reorganization of the financial system, the opening up of the market to foreign investment, and the first IMF intervention in Argentina. At the same time, the period that we study here is characterized by a gradual liberalization of the currency market nearly three decades after the first currency exchange controls were implemented. In addition, there were two major devaluations, one at the end of 1958 and the second in the first half of 1962, introducing an economic dynamic that would continue until at least the middle of the next decade.<sup>1</sup>

Our research is focused on a corpus of news articles and advertisements published in national newspapers and economic and financial journals between 1958 and 1962. Working with a series of previously identified periods, we compiled information and analyses on economic policy, exchange market dynamics, and inflation; at the same time, we gathered advertisements that refer to the dollar either in the prices published or in the sales pitch. In this analysis, the press is viewed not only as a relevant source of information but also as a venue for legitimizing new entry points and ways of participating in the “exchange business.” At the same time, the press is seen as an important agent for the popularization of this business, as it helps integrate new social groups.

Our analysis is developed as follows. In the first section, we focus on the transformations noted in the media coverage of the exchange market at moments of intense economic and political turbulence. The media analysis reveals new ways of narrating and forming opinions that gradually become frameworks for inter-

preting and endorsing both the legal and illegal “exchange business.” The second section focuses on the way in which discussions of the economy and advertisements from the period incorporate references to the US dollar, even in relation to processes unrelated to foreign trade or the exchange market. This will help show how the US currency gradually became a device used by a range of social groups acting in diverse contexts. Finally, the conclusion reevaluates the analyses presented in the previous sections in view of what we refer to as the first popularization of the dollar in Argentina in the twentieth century.

## Media coverage of the exchange market: Expert knowledge and everyday life

I believe that all of us have become financiers for a very specific reason. Think about it like this: when a guy used to have some money put away, he would open up a little factory or shop, he'd buy some land and raise chickens or plant tomatoes—those things people do in poor countries. Here, though, everything is different. You've seen San Martín Street, where the exchange offices are located: Everyone is outside staring at the board. Workmen, masons, field hands, tailors, musicians, artists. Guys who used to work hard have now become economists and they're all standing there with a bundle of money. As soon as the exchange rate changes up on the board, they push their way into the office. One calls out, “Give me three dollars.” Another says, “Give me four dollars.” They run out and go into another exchange office and before they go home that day, they've sold their dollars. They spend the whole day doing that, buying and selling, and when they get home, exhausted, they collapse onto the couch, pull out the money and count it, and say, “Honey, honey, get this! I made 14 bucks today without doing a thing!”

(Tato Bores, comedy sketch on the program *Siempre en domingo*, Channel 9, broadcast on August 30, 1962)

Tato Bores was a famous Argentine comedian who joked ironically about Argentina's politics and economy in a weekly show he hosted for decades. This comedy sketch from 1962 was the first time he had addressed what would become a regular topic on his program. After describing the peso's recent devaluation and the liberalization of the exchange market, he provided his audiences with a novel image of themselves, ironically characterizing “all Argentines” as “financiers” who followed the fluctuations in the peso-dollar rate on the boards outside the exchange office.

In this brief skit, Bores brought into the public eye a change from the beginning of the decade, which would increasingly take hold in the years to come.

This change was the gradual incorporation of the US dollar in the repertoire of Argentine financial practices and its establishment as a benchmark that was increasingly intelligible, in both economic and political terms, for broader sectors of the population.

The situation had been quite different in previous decades. In the debates and conflicts surrounding the first exchange control measures adopted at the beginning of the 1930s, the world of foreign currency was almost exclusively related to the relations between economic elites and the state. The incidence of other social sectors, such as immigrants, who sent remittances to their countries of origin, was not deemed relevant for public debate. A decade later, the situation remained virtually unchanged.

The comedy sketch cited above can thus be viewed as evidence of a new relationship between popular culture, financial practices, and the exchange market that had begun at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. It was a relationship that would blossom in the decades to follow. More specifically, the sketch can also be understood as an expression of the monetary pedagogy (Neiburg, 2006) that gave broad swathes of the population a foot in the door and participation in the exchange market beginning in the 1960s. This economic pedagogy helped to integrate the US dollar in the financial repertoire of agents with little experience in this universe. These lessons, and more generally, the devices that guide, prepare, and train the agents to move within the new borders of financial markets (Preda 2009), will be the topic of the following section.

### New journalism and “la City”

By August 1962, when the Tato Bores comedy sketch aired, newspaper readers in Buenos Aires were becoming familiar with the landscape of “la City.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, at the end of the 1950s, the peso-dollar exchange rate had been added to the cover of local newspapers, as the progressive liberalization of the exchange market took place and the exchange rate started to show sharp oscillations. As these transformations occurred, the day-to-day movements of the exchange market became a regular topic in the media. In fact, over the following decade, media outlets no longer limited their coverage of the dollar to charts in the Business section but also began to publish stories on exchange market transactions and their outcomes in the style of New Journalism. A group of recurring actors appears in these pieces, though their prominence in the stories varies over time. These include the large public banks that buy or sell large quantities of currency; the Industrial Bank (Banco Industrial), which guarantees imports; and meat and/or grain exporters, which liqui-

date or withhold the amounts corresponding to their sales abroad. In these cases, the protagonists are major players on the market, generally with some relationship to the state, who operate with what was referred to at the time as *dólar giro* or *dólar transferencia* (the dollar at an exchange rate negotiated via banks). There is, however, another character who plays a smaller part and is more commonly found in the exchange offices operating with the *dólar billete* (cash). This minor character, who makes a small percentage buying and selling currency, is involved in what is known as *especulación hormiga* or *pequeña especulación* (two-bit speculation). Always a male figure during this period, he is someone who seizes on the opportunity to do business at times of currency turbulence, such as amendments to exchange market regulations or a sudden devaluation of the peso, or during political upheavals, when members of the economic team and/or high-ranking officials are replaced.

The launch of the Stabilization Plan (Plan de Estabilización) in December 1958 during the country's first major negotiation with the IMF undoubtedly marked a turning point in national media coverage of the exchange market. After several months of dollar jumps, the government's decision to eliminate all foreign exchange controls after a thirteen-day freeze on exchange operations was not only widely covered in the press, but also reported on in a whole new way. For the first time, news on the exchange market was not just a series of numbers, but instead compiled images and feelings tied to this market. In photographs, crowds are seen pushed up against the glass windows of exchange offices in downtown Buenos Aires, some anxious to see the peso-dollar rate and others eager to complete a transaction. The expectation overshadowed not only the visuals but also the tone of the articles:

When exchange market transactions resume this morning, after nearly a two-week freeze imposed in order to give the system a chance to adapt to the distressing reality of Argentina's economy today, the country will feel its heart beating to the rhythm of the numbers constantly changing up on the board. The meticulous clatter of the switchboards in the nerve center of the money business and the murmuring crowds pushing their way into the exchange offices will offer a glimpse of the initial reaction to the myriad and complex elements involved in attempting to reconstruct the Argentine peso after nearly three decades in which it languished beneath the guise of government controls and contrived exchange rates. (*La Nación*, 11/1/1959)

Two days later, there are three recurring elements in the photographs published in the principal Buenos Aires newspapers. These are the crowds on the main

thoroughfare of “la City,” accentuated through overhead shots; the pedestrians pushing up to the windows of the exchange office to look inside; and the desks teeming with clients inside the offices. With the exception of panoramic shots that show the boards outside the offices and the crowds in front of them, the photographs are generally close-ups that emphasize the attitude of the people elbowing their way over to the windows and desks. These are generally men dressed in suits, often wearing hats, presumably office workers. The photographs reveal the avid interest in the fluctuating exchange rates on the board; the apprehension in the questions posed to the exchange office workers; and the enthusiastic chatter between strangers standing in front of the offices.

In terms of the way the customers are described, both of the papers surveyed describe them as small-time speculators:

There was confusion on the sidewalk of San Martín Street, the street where the small-time, controversial speculators often gather; there was hope among the economists in the highest echelons of government; and there was expectation and calm in the field of high finance. The dollar talked numbers and at the end of the business day, it stood at AR\$66.60 according to the BNA, AR\$66.20 for countries with bilateral trade agreements, and AR\$68.80 at the desks of the exchange offices. (*La Nación*, 13/1/1959)

At 12:15 pm the people had already overrun the offices of the exchange agencies. The demand of the small investors (or should we say *especulación hormiga*?) far exceeded the capacity of the personnel. There are a growing number of employees to respond to the requests. At 67! At 68! At 69! ... The people standing at the back push forward to avoid losing their place in line. (*Clarín*, 13/1/1959)

Throughout the 1960s, this type of description can be found in the press in response to any oscillation in the exchange market, engendering a particular type of story with its accompanying images. In April 1962, for example, a new devaluation would bring the photographs from San Martín Street back onto the front pages. As in the pictures published three years earlier, groups of men in suits are again crowded in front of the exchange rate boards. In some close-ups, the anxiety on their faces is apparent.

The recurring images of the office windows and exchange rate boards underscore the sense of apprehension and expectation created by the successive reopening of the exchange markets after the announcement of major changes to market regulations. But they also draw attention to a figure who will become increasingly common: The curious onlooker. The fact is, it is difficult to believe that all those crowded outside

the office windows are potential buyers or sellers of foreign currency. The crowd undoubtedly includes some regular exchange office customers, but there are also passers-by and office workers interested in seeing the exchange rate for themselves, and in bearing witness to the market's fluctuations. The exchange market is thus more than an arena in which specific transactions take place; it is gradually transformed into a spectacle in which the US dollar exchange rate plays a starring role. In these years, the exchange market ceases to be an impenetrable universe inhabited only by knowledgeable players, such as state and corporate actors, and opens up to the newly arrived “pocket economists” (*economistas de bolsillo*). On the other hand, the US dollar exchange rate becomes a number comprehensible to an ever-increasing public, a figure meaningful not only to those who deal in currencies but also the simply curious.

It is possible to posit, then, that a new exchange market narrative was consolidated during this period. In this narrative, currency becomes more than just numbers, unfolding in a series of texts and images that provide the average reader with familiar references for what was once expressed solely as a figure on a chart. The stories and photographs that now accompany the numbers furnish a landscape in which exchange market transactions can be situated. Although not all these transactions take place in the same location, the exchange offices of “la City” gradually become the setting par excellence for foreign exchange. At the same time, these representations help put a face, or at least a body, on these market players, allowing corporate actors to be distinguished from those who play only bit parts. Finally, these narratives provide insight into the mechanisms that make these transactions possible, using multiple resources—especially written descriptions of sounds—to describe technical devices and procedures; for example, the “clatter of the switchboards” conveys that the dynamics of supply and demand are expressed not only on the boards but also—and above all—via telephone, connecting actors in different locations.

This often prosaic tale of the workings of “la City” is employed especially at moments of crisis, which are, on the other hand, those deemed important enough as stories to include a photograph as part of the coverage of financial activities. Such media stories play a central role in allowing readers to internalize certain economic practices, the sites at which these practices take place, and their actors. In this regard, the media provides what could be referred to as lessons in finance that will take different forms in the mass media over the years.

In addition to the New Journalism stories, another type of reporting involved newspaper columns

written by specialists whose names appeared beneath the text, thus emphasizing their status as an authorized, recognizable voice. Although the newspapers did not introduce these columns all at once, they began to appear in course of the 1960s; before this, such columns had appeared exclusively in economic journals, which were also popular during these years. In the first half of the 1960s, the Business section of the Sunday edition of the newspaper *Clarín* would incorporate two regular columns, entitled “Dólar” and “Circulante” (“Dollar” and “Circulation”). Facing one another on opposite pages, both had a similar structure, were edited by a well-known expert, and began with statistics that were published weekly. In the case of “Dólar,” the column began with a chart showing the exchange rate of the US dollar over the past week, which was always the reference period of the article. The “Circulante” column began with a small graph entitled “Where does our money go?,” which specified how money in circulation was currently distributed between government, private activity, currency reserves, and “other.” The two columns provided summaries of indicators viewed as key to understanding the ups and downs of the national economy; at the same time, both reveal a desire to provide a relatively broad readership with statements by an expert, as seen in the regular reference to statistics and the use of strikingly technical vocabulary. These columns often reveal the tension between an urge to deftly critique the technical measures adopted by the teams that were replacing one another in rapid succession at the Ministry of the Economy, on one hand, and the desire to make the secrets of the workings of specific markets comprehensible to the average reader, on the other. Thus, in addition to technical-political descriptions, the “Dólar” column often included practical explanations of the mechanisms most frequently mentioned, although not explained, in the more cursory daily coverage of the exchange market in the daily news.

In Thursday's edition of *Clarín*, we have already explained one of the mechanisms used by speculators to protect their interests. This is the so-called currency future, a type of contract in which the seller agrees to sell the currencies to the buyer at expiration. (*Clarín*, 3/6/1962)

It's important to stay on top of the exchange market, especially because transactions on this market often involve speculation. During the trading hours on Monday, many transactions were done using a technique known as “merry-go-round dollar” (*dólar calesita*), in which a purchase is made at one price and then a sale at a higher price. This transaction can be repeated as many times as the exchange rate rises and yields incalculable profit margins. (*Clarín*, 1/7/1962)

In summary, both the New Journalism stories on the exchange market, as well as columns written by experts contribute to the gradual configuration of an ever-increasing space dedicated to economic affairs in the country's top print media sources. This opening up goes beyond the increase in the quantity of information or its positioning, both of which can also be seen in the same period, and involves a progressive transformation of the approach to such news. Once reserved for the “business world,” foreign exchange market news is expanded to incorporate other potential readers, including “curious onlookers.” As opposed to (major) market players, these are the people who have just begun to read the Business section because of what it says not only about the economy, but about national political life.

### From the Bolsa Negra to the Parallel Market

The entry of the exchange market into daily news stories is accompanied by other transformations in the way the media reported on foreign currency, including a shift in the depiction of the illegal foreign exchange business.

At the beginning of the 1930s, the first foreign exchange controls rapidly led to an illegal currency market that rarely made the news. Referred to as the *bolsa negra*, this black market appeared in the Crime section from time to time until the end of the 1940s, but only when the authorities successfully managed to intercept and/or temporarily disband the networks that kept the market running. While denouncing the abuses and the unscrupulous nature of the *bolsa negra*, these news items also reveal the dynamics of this illegal business. It was always constructed on intricate connections with the formal exchange market and the state, as revealed by the figures arrested in each sting operation, including forex brokers, bank employees and managers, exchange office owners, and public officials from different departments.

Starting at the end of the 1950s, the tone of these narratives about the illegal market changed. The illegal market was no longer a dark, hidden universe described in disparaging tones. Instead, it was a sphere connected and relevant to the exchange market, particularly with regard to the benchmarks it provided. Thus, even before the liberalization of the exchange market in October 1955 (and also before the freezes on all exchange transactions that preceded each overhaul of the regulations), the rates of the US currency on what was now referred to as the “parallel market” or “collateral sector” would be essential for assessing the value of the dollar once the official market reopened. In the days after Frondizi's Stabilization Plan was announced, the press reported on events as follows:

Though official transactions have been suspended, there were clear signs that the parallel market is thriving, especially in the positions liquidated at month end, which were generally done at between AR\$66 and AR\$67 pesos per dollar on Tuesday and Wednesday. Yesterday, *this vigorous sector within the currency business* continued operating, though to a limited degree, and most of the transactions were carried out at a selling price of between AR\$68.50 and AR\$69 pesos. (*La Nación*, 4/1/1959; authors' emphasis)

A similar observation was made years later, a few days before the first issue of government bonds:

Given the confirmation that no activity was to take place on the holiday, an attempt was made to develop a collateral market for transactions. The dry runs were limited to the exchange of limited quantities of currency and in general, the price agreed to for the exchange did not exceed AR\$124 per US dollar.

Although the volume was small, these street rehearsals served to show that it is possible to exceed the maximums of the US dollar exchange rates reached on Friday. (*Clarín*, 3/7/1962)

This change in the depiction of the illegal market accompanied the consolidation of its transactions, which generated the need to explain its workings to the average reader. The normalized depiction of the parallel market as an often vigorously active part of the exchange market, whose legitimacy goes unquestioned by the press, takes place progressively over the course of the decade. At those times when access to the official market was limited to certain transactions, the newspapers focused more on the illegal market, and went so far as to publish the exchange rates from both markets daily.

If we think about the popularization of the dollar in Argentina as a process that takes shape over time, we can see how it reflects macroeconomic dynamics and political trends, and a series of practical and symbolic mediations. The changes in the media coverage noted here undoubtedly played a key role in this process. As we will see below, these transformations apply not only to the exchange market but also to the way in which the print media incorporates references to the dollar in other stories.

## Using the dollar to talk about prices

At the end of 1958 and the beginning of 1959, in a context marked by a major devaluation and the liberalization of the exchange market, a national paper came up with a novel way of referring to the hike in prices of basic household items such as beef. On the cover of

December 17, 1958, one of the highlighted stories was summarized as follows: "Tenderloin: US\$ ... In Buenos Aires, the price of a kilo of tenderloin is pitted against the dollar exchange rate. Yesterday, on the butcher's price board, tenderloin cost AR\$60. On the exchange rate boards, the dollar closed yesterday at AR\$67.30. Tenderloin had gone up AR\$30, while the dollar has risen AR\$4.60 in the past 48 hours," (*Clarín*, 17/12/1958). At the end of that year, the government implemented a series of measures aimed at stabilizing the economy and putting a brake on inflation. One such measure was the liberalization of the foreign exchange market, preceded by a freeze on all transactions from December 30 to January 12. A few days before that date, in a text box on the cover with a list of different items whose price was climbing, the connection between tenderloin and the dollar was made yet again: "The most recent dollar exchange rate—before the recent economic changes—was AR\$69. We wanted to remind you of that because it's likely that today, beef will break the peso-dollar barrier and enter a new orbit: the beef-dollar" (*Clarín*, 12/1/1958).

By drawing this parallel between the value of the US currency and the price of a beef cut in order to highlight the rise in prices, the daily *Clarín* reveals yet another dimension of the dollar's first popularization in Argentine society. We have analyzed how the coverage of the foreign exchange market was done in a way that allowed it to become familiar to increasingly broader segments of the population. The series "Tenderloin-dollar" (*Lomo-dólar*) reveals how the US currency became a reference not only for forex experts and *especuladores hormigas*, but for housewives as well. While the coverage of the foreign exchange market gradually turned "la City" into a familiar setting—no longer the distant realm of the elite—this series moves the dollar outside its usual habitat of the foreign exchange office, bringing it into the sphere of the household and the decisions of homemakers. By using the dollar to gauge the value of beef, the US dollar enters into daily life and becomes part of family budgeting. In response to the rise in the cost of a kilo of tenderloin, which had become as expensive as the dollar, consumers could choose a more economical item, such as fish.

For this reason, this series also contributed to building "familiarity" with the dollar; its exchange rate could now be decoded by a broader public. In the context of the end of the 1950s, this way of presenting the rise in the price of household goods such as beef carries a lesson: By noting that the price of tenderloin can climb as high as the dollar, it helps convey the "exorbitant" rise in prices.

The "*lomo-dólar*" series thus provides insight into the way in which this currency begins to function



as an “artifact” that allows for interpretations and calculations that go far beyond currency exchange. Naturally, the popularization of the dollar entailed two parallel processes. As the foreign exchange market became increasingly familiar, the uses of the US currency also began to exceed this sphere. We will now analyze these two facets of the first popularization of the dollar's uses by examining a set of print advertisements that ran during the same period. According to Caras-sai (2014), the 1960s was a decade of explosive growth in advertising in Argentina, which provides particular insight into the making of a modern-day mass media apparatus. In this section, we will examine these advertisements by considering their ability to assume—and to perform—financial repertoires in which the dollar occupies different roles for different agents, both on and beyond the foreign exchange market.

The contrast with the period 1930–1955 serves to highlight the changes that occurred at the end of the 1950s. In those years, the few ads that include references to foreign currency were run by foreign exchange offices, and the dollar does not stand out from among the other currencies. This style of advertisement contrasts with the kind that took up a full page in the paper on December 18, 1958, in which a construction company with branches in three cities of Argentina is offering lots on credit in the beach town of Mar del Plata, the country's principal holiday destination (*Clarín*, 18/12/1958).

The ad consists of three panels in which a man appears with a hat and cane accompanied by three different images: a dollar bill, a peso bill, and a bird's eye view of a lot. Between the end of the 1950s and the 1970s, building and buying real estate on Argentina's coast was promoted as a strategy to protect the value of one's money in a context of growing inflation and a financial system with few appealing investment options (Corso 2014). This ad, then, offers potential investors the chance to purchase land in Mar del Plata and suggests they consider the price of the US dollar as a benchmark; it thus promotes a calculation that allow a reader to conclude that buying a lot is the best investment, the sure way to “save your money from devaluation.” In a pedagogical tone, the advertisement explains to the prospective buyer that “you and the dollar have a close relationship.” In this way, the dollar becomes a benchmark for the equations of even amateur investors, besides promoting the use of the dollar outside the realm in which this currency was most commonly used for transactions.

Another series of newspaper and magazine ads from the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s are indicative and contribute to the dollar being accepted as a benchmark for goods outside foreign trade or the currency market. At the end of the 1950s,

the cost of airline tickets began to be published in dollars. In February 1958, an ad by Cinto Chilean Airlines promoted round-trip flights to New York for US\$420 and to Miami for US\$345. A year later, an Aerolíneas Peruanas ad run in the same newspaper announced: “To Mexico. The shortest route. The cheapest fare. US\$432 round trip. Ask your travel agent.” It is likely that the package tours brought the cost of traveling down, benefitting middle and upper class consumers; in July 1962, an ad for the agency Viajes Salvatierra promised a “grand tour” to Europe where a traveler could spend “128 unforgettable days” for US\$1,695. The ad also mentions a “dream tour” to the Orient for “64 unforgettable days” at a cost of US\$3,250; a “Pan American jet” would fly the passengers to their destination for this tour. The advertisements of financial institutions also began to incorporate references to the dollar during the 1960s. For example, in the context of the reopening of the foreign exchange market in April 1962, ads were run to try to bring in potential customers with foreign currency. Banco Popular Argentino appealed to them as follows: “If you have foreign currency in Argentina or abroad, get a GOOD INTEREST rate.” Months later, the same bank ran another ad in the same paper but in the following terms: “DON'T TAKE YOUR FOREIGN CURRENCY ABROAD. Collaborate with national recovery and get profitable interest rates on your deposits” (*Clarín*, 15/7/1962).

As with the series “*lomo-dólar*”, all of these ads contribute to making the US currency a benchmark in the national economy. Whether for real estate or tourism, for the purchase of a lot in Mar del Plata or a trip to the United States, Europe, or the Middle East, or for bank investments, the dollar gradually became a compass, allowing Argentines to navigate the universes of different transactions.

## Final considerations

The changes noted between the end of the 1950s and during the following decade in the way the media covered economic topics had an impact on the language, themes, and figures that helped to redefine the borders of the foreign exchange market in Argentina. The print press and advertisements during the period, as shown here, contributed to making the dollar a benchmark for heterogeneous markets and diverse publics. The media became the setting for a campaign of a veritable money pedagogy that provided frameworks for interpreting and evaluating the dollar as a key to maneuvering new incidences of economic turbulence.

During the years examined here, a novel relationship began to unfold between popular culture, financial practices, and the exchange market. The



making of the dollar into a general point of reference in the economy by the press, advertising, and also television thus fosters a consideration of popular culture's role in establishing the US currency as a resource in the financial practices of diverse social groups. This is done through a historical process of economic socialization and the establishment of financial repertoires that are socially produced and culturally significant.

The understanding of this initial phase of the dollar's popularization in Argentina required us to go beyond the observation of money uses and differentiation as analyzed by Zelizer. In the case studied by the author, a single currency (the US dollar) issued exclusively by the US federal state had legitimately achieved dominion over US territory. Zelizer's analysis of the use of this currency by individuals and households thus begins by accepting the currency itself as a given, without delving into the cultural and institutional me-

diations that enabled its acceptance. The understanding of the popularization of the dollar in Argentina, in contrast, brings the need for another approach. The interpretation we proposed here involved analyzing the way in which the US currency was established—in public culture and in ordinary financial repertoires—as a competent currency that served as a supplement to the national currency (the peso).

Through this contribution, we have shown that the scope and interpretative capacity of the sociology of money can be expanded when focusing not only on the multiple uses and meanings of money, as proposed by Zelizer, but also the cognitive operations that make such practices possible, as well as the cultural and institutional mediations that help build their legitimacy. It is our hope to have contributed in this work to this new objective within the sociology of money.

## Endnotes

A first version of this text was presented at SASE's 2018 conference at Doshisha University, Kyoto. The argument developed is part of a broader investigation into the social and cultural history of the uses and meanings of the US dollar in Argentine society. This research has funding from the National Agency for Scientific Promotion (Argentina). We thank Clara Hernandez, Joaquin Molina, and Juan Arraras who participated as research assistants in the press archive work.

- 1 In 1955, a military coup overthrew the government of President Juan D. Perón (1946–1952; 1952–1955). Three years later, new elections marked the restoration of a limited form of democracy. The Peronist party was banned from participating in these

elections and the armed forces exercised a good degree of control over all of the democratically elected administrations of the period (Cavarozzi, 2009). In terms of the economy, this was a period characterized by recurring crises in the country's balance of payments, attributed to what some authors have referred to as unbalanced production structures (Diamand, 1972; Bresser Pereira, 2008).

- 2 The Buenos Aires financial district has been commonly referred to as "la City" since the end of the nineteenth century, reflecting the historical British influence on Argentina's economy (London's financial district is still known as "the City").

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