ISABELLA COSSE

Mafalda

A Social and Political History of Latin America's Global Comic

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A Social and Political History of Latin America's Global Comic

ISABELLA COSSE

TRANSLATED BY LAURA PÉREZ CARRARA

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For Emilio and Tomás

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I began my research with the aim of understanding the relationship between family and class in the turbulent Buenos Aires of the 1960s, but I soon realized I was dealing with a phenomenon that exceeded by far that period and space. That realization led to this book, which tells the social and political history of *Mafalda*—Latin America's most popular comic strip both on the continent and in the world—and, in doing so, offers a narrative of the recent past, a past that is still present in the dilemmas faced by the region and by societies today. Undertaking research on a continental and transnational scale in Argentina is not a simple task, and neither is it easy to have the outcome of that research published in English, much less by a publisher as prestigious as Duke University Press. I am fully aware that if I have had the satisfaction of overcoming the many obstacles and challenges posed by this work it is because Mafalda opened many doors for me, because I had the support of countless accomplices (friends, colleagues, publishers, archivers, Mafalda fans) who were willing to help, and because I worked under institutional conditions that allowed me to concentrate on my research. I would like to begin these acknowledgments by giving thanks for all of that.

I conducted this study in my capacity as career researcher of the National Scientific and Technological Research Council (CONICET), headquartered at the Interdisciplinary Institute of Gender Studies (IIEGE) of the School of Philosophy and Literature, Universidad de Buenos Aires. As I write these pages, I fear for research activities in the country, as the government's science policy suffers under budget cuts and the application of business criteria to measure intellectual production. In this sense, I would like to highlight that an offshoot of an investigation—because writing a book on Mafalda was not part of my original research plan—led to a book that won the Premio Iberoamericano Book Award from the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), and which was picked up by Duke University Press to be translated and published in English, and whose appeal goes beyond colleagues and people in academia. It is a book that can interest, and even excite, a wide range of people, from my Bolivian neighborhood grocer (who carefully weighed copies of my book so I could mail them) to

the children in the "Mafalda" school in Buenos Aires where I first presented my book, to the many people in Chile, Mexico, New York, and other places who shared with me their ideas about the comic strip and their memories.

I said that the project was an offshoot because I did not originally intend to focus on the comic strip, but this research is very much connected with concerns (family history, the 1960s, memory, and the dictatorship) that have interested me since my undergraduate years at Universidad de la República, in Uruguay, and my PhD dissertation work (on family mandates in the 1960s), conducted under the aegis of the History Program at Universidad de San Andrés, in Argentina. Nonetheless, I knew that I owed myself a more thorough study on these subjects. I discussed an initial idea at a 2010 workshop titled "Laughter in History: Everyday Life, Family, Gender, and Sexualities in Argentina through Humor, 1910–2010," jointly organized by Karina Felitti, Valeria Manzano, and me (as all three of us were very interested in humor in connection with our research) and sponsored by Universidad de San Andrés, the Institute of Higher Social Studies (IDAES) of Universidad Nacional de San Martín, and the IIEGE of Universidad de Buenos Aires. The project gained strength with the feedback I received from the anonymous readers of the *Hispanic American Historical Review* (*HAHR*) when I submitted a manuscript that was a condensed version of what would become the first chapter of this book. The review process for the *HAHR* article, edited by John D. French and Sean Mannion, was also enriching. As I advanced with my research, I discussed my findings in the Program of Studies on the Middle Classes of the Economic and Social Development Institute in Buenos Aires, coordinated by Sergio Visacovsky; the Recent History Hub at Universidad Nacional de San Martín (Argentina), where I was hosted by Marina Franco and Valeria Manzano; and in the Recent History Seminar of Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), which Eugenia Allier invited me to participate in. I would like to mention in particular the members of the Group of Childhood and Family History, which I coordinate in my own institution (IIEGE), and the students in the courses I have taught during these years, in particular the students in the PhD dissertation workshop of Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (Argentina). Many colleagues in each of those spaces generously contributed their thoughts and forced me to review and strengthen my arguments. In addition to those mentioned above, I would like to thank Lila Caimari, Eduardo Míguez, Ezequiel Adamovsky, Enrique Garguin, Laura Vázquez, Marcela Gené, Florencia Levín, Mauro Pasqualini, Emilio Burucúa, Mara Burkart, Rebekah Pite, and Susana Sosenski, for listening to me and for their thoughtful suggestions.

I was lucky to have the Spanish version of this book published by Fondo de Cultura Económica, in 2014. I thank Alejandro Archain, director of the publishing house, for his unconditional support and for kindly giving the necessary permission for this version in English. I would also like to thank the publishing house's talented editor, Mariana Rey, who worked with a first-rate team. The English translation and edition would not have been possible without the unwavering support of my "gringo" friends Nara Milanich, Heidi Tinsman, Charles Walker, and Pablo Piccato, the interest of Duke University Press, and the sensitivity and insight of Gisela Fosado. While I explored the comic strip's international circulation I learned that humor is one of the most difficult things to translate, as *Mafalda*'s English translator, Andrew Graham-Yooll, explained to me. Laura Pérez Carrara, my translator and friend, took on the challenge of translating this book with intelligence and relentless logic.

Many people made this investigation possible. I turned again and again to Daniel Divinsky, director of *Mafalda*'s publishing house Ediciones de la Flor, who gave me access to his company's archive. Alba Lampón and Sergio Morero helped me enormously with their memories, material, and contacts for interviews with Quino himself and with his wife, Alicia Colombo, who was also his agent and is no longer with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with both of them at length and to finally meet them personally after years of studying *Mafalda*. As I was only able to examine part of Quino's archive—which was very important for my work—in order to complete my research I resorted to multiple other archives, large and small, specific and wide ranging. My investigation would not have had the scope it achieved were it not for the support of Patricia Reynal at Editorial Perfil's documentation center and of Claudio Martyniuk, who allowed me to consult the archives of the newspaper *Clarín*. I would also like to express my appreciation to the archivists and librarians of the documentation center of Círculo Sindical de la Prensa y la Comunicación de Córdoba, the archive of the Córdoba newspaper *La Voz del Interior*, the archive of the newspaper *Río Negro*, the documentation centers of the newspapers *El País de Madrid* and *La Vanguardia* in Barcelona, and the documentation center of the newspaper *Excélsior* in Mexico. In Argentina I would like to thank the Library of Universidad de San Andrés, the library archive of Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, the research center and libraries of Instituto Ravignani, and the IIEGE. I would also like to mention Vanessa Fuentes, who gave me access to the press material of the publishing house Tusquets in Mexico; Antonio Torres, of Club del Comic, who gave me access to his collection of magazines and invaluable toys; and Doctor Pablo Yadarola, the legal director of Department 23 of the Twelfth Federal Criminal and Correctional Court, who allowed me to

consult the criminal files on the Pallottine murders. My work would have been impossible without those sources and documents. No less important was the help and support from colleagues, friends, and relatives who provided me with material and contacts: Esther Acevedo, Paula Alonso, Martín Bergel, Paulina Brunetti, Avina Celotto, Julieta Di Corletto, Leny Durán, Ana B. Flores, Judith Gociol, Rafael Grompone, José María Gutiérrez, Micaela Libson, María Inés Loyola, and Coleta Ravoni.

The interviews I conducted were invaluable for my research. They are included in the list of sources but I would like to express my thanks here in particular to Rodolfo Capalozza, Francisco Chirichella, Norberto Firpo, Miguel García, Andrew Graham-Yooll, Pablo José Hernández, Pablo Irrgang, "Chiche" Linari, Eduardo Longoni, Rolando Sabino, Juan Sasturain, Sergio Suppo, Carlos Torrengo, Jorge Tovar, and Luis Tovar. Equally important were the readers of *Mafalda*, whom I do not identify by name so as to respect their privacy, but who shared their individual stories and allowed me to explore their subjective experience. Also valuable were the countless informal conversations and impromptu talks I held with a range of people, as well as the discussions triggered by the publication of the book in Spanish.

The research moved forward almost effortlessly. It was in itself an enjoyable experience for me, even though it had its share of obstacles and tough moments. Encountering the many readers and fans of the comic strip and the surprises that writing this book brought me has been enormously gratifying. Similarly of great value were the feedback from colleagues who reviewed the Spanish edition and the discussions at the many book presentations I gave, not just in Argentina but also in Chile, Uruguay, Mexico, the United States, and Peru. Bearing those contributions in mind, I made some changes to the original book, but the English edition is essentially the same. Also useful were the very interesting discussions I had with Nara Milanich, Heidi Tinsman, Pablo Piccato, and Elizabeth Hutchinson, colleagues I met during my time on a Fulbright-CONICET postdoctoral fellowship at Columbia University's Institute of Latin American Studies. Moreover, my contact with Paulo Drinot led me to build on some of the ideas developed in chapter 5 and to contribute a chapter to *Comics and the Past in Latin America* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017), a book he coedited with Jorge L. Catalá Carrasco and James Scorer.

My research was supported by a CONICET grant to the Multiannual Research Project "A Micro-Historical Study on Couples" and assisted by the Hada and Ruper Foundation. I was able to conduct interviews and consult newspapers and archives in Mexico City thanks to the opportunity afforded by an invitation to participate in the colloquium "Los niños, fuentes y per-

spectivas," coordinated by Delia Salazar and Eugenia Sánchez Calleja. Unfortunately, I was unable to travel to Italy and Spain, but I made extensive use of digital newspaper libraries and conducted many interviews over the telephone. I also had the determined help of Giulia Venturi in Verona, Guillermo Aquino Falfan in Mexico City, David Candami in Barcelona, and Caitlin Reilly in Washington, DC. In Buenos Aires, Inés Ibarlucia helped me put a sensible limit to my ever-growing sources, and for specific matters I had the support of Claudia Patricia Ríos in La Plata and of Cristina Fuentes in Córdoba.

With *Mafalda*, as never before, I had an object of study that met with passionate interest at social gatherings and casual meetings, prompting stimulating conversations. The full list of those who helped me is too long to include, but I would like to thank some not yet mentioned who understood (and put up with) my Mafalda obsession: Mariana Alcobre, Paula Bruno, Marcela Cerruti, Rosa Czerniuk, Verónica Devalle, Ana Rita Díaz, Christine Ehrick, Mercedes García Ferrari, Mateo García Haymes, Sandra Gayol, Patricia Gonzalez, Karin Grammático, Valeria Llobet, Vania Markarian, Daniel Mingorance, Emiliano Núñez, Camila Núñez Pérez, Sandra Olstein, Valeria Pita, Amanda Salvioni, Cristiana Schettini, Leandro Stagno, Carla Villalta, and José Zanca. I also enjoyed talking to my parents, Gustavo and Silvia, about this project as I was working on it. I valued Marta Crenzel's help, Mariana Cosse's and Isabel Larghero's enthusiasm, and the "commitment to the cause" displayed by Rafael Grompone, who was willing to lug the heavy Italian editions of *Mafalda* all the way down south to Argentina for me.

I never would have been able to turn my research into a book were it not for my husband, Emilio Crenzel. He—my representative of the anti-Mafalda public—convinced me of its importance. He discussed the key arguments of my interpretation with me, revised each and every page, and when he sensed my exhaustion, he surrounded me with loving care. My son, Tomás, was only two when I came upon him staring entranced at the image of Mafalda in the bright orange cover of the *Mafalda inédita* compilation. Today, more than ten years later, I am pleased to discover in him a sense of humor that is all his own. These pages are dedicated to them both, my treasures.

INTRODUCTION

It is impossible not to come across Mafalda in Buenos Aires. Her lively eyes are there at the port, welcoming visitors as they disembark. Tourists and locals will also see her in the heart of the city, sitting on a park bench in San Telmo surrounded by fans, and, again, in the city's busiest subway station, on a huge mural. Her image looks back at you from T-shirts, mugs, refrigerator magnets, and assorted knickknacks sold in shops in cities across Argentina, alongside items featuring national icons such as Che Guevara, Evita, and tango legend Carlos Gardel. Nobody is surprised by the fact that she is merely a cartoon character. Neither are they surprised that Mafalda and friends have become so well known outside Argentina. *Mafalda* is the most famous and popular Latin American comic strip in the world. Readers from different countries and continents have found social, political, and subjective meaning in it. It has now been translated into more than twenty languages and continues to conquer new markets and attract new readers around the globe, including in places as remote as China, South Korea, and Indonesia, with new editions still selling out everywhere. *Mafalda* has millions of followers on Facebook and the cartoon's creator receives mail from all over the world.

Mafalda was born more than fifty years ago without much fanfare. In 1964, Joaquín Salvador Lavado—already a well-known cartoonist working under the pen name Quino—introduced a new cartoon for adults in the pages of a political magazine. He never imagined then that his creation would turn out to be such an unprecedented success. The comic strip's main character, Mafalda, was a little girl from a middle-class family who was wise beyond her years and had a rebellious attitude. She lived in a small apartment in Buenos Aires, the city that served as backdrop for her adventures. Drawn with androgynous features, this brainy tomboy could be a handful for her parents, as she continuously baffled and challenged them. She caused her dad many sleepless nights with her endless queries about politics and the state of the world, and she unsettled her mom with her feminist quips, even driving her to tears. In a nod to readers, she diagnosed both parents (and grown-ups in general) as suffering from "mass hysteria." Two years after it first appeared in print, *Mafalda* was read

daily by an estimated two million people and the collections released in book format were sold out in just a few days. The comic strip's popularity quickly spread beyond Argentina. In 1969, an Italian edition with a prologue penned by Umberto Eco opened the doors to the European market. Meanwhile, in Latin America its readership continued to grow and by 1972 the strips were featured in sixty newspapers and magazines across the region. During those years it was also published in book format in Portugal (1970), Germany and Finland (1971), and France (1973). But the cartoon's fame was not limited to the printed page, as dolls of the characters were manufactured and sold in several countries; their images stamped (mostly without the author's permission) on everything from T-shirts, ads, and posters to wedding invitations; and in Paris there was even a boutique named after the main character. *Mafalda* had become a social phenomenon. Its impact had transcended individual experiences and subjectivities and entered the realm of collective identities and political and social realities, both in Argentina and outside the country. It is these meanings that are at the core of this book.

How did *Mafalda* become so popular and retain its popularity for so long? And why is it still so relevant? What social, political, and cultural meanings did it have throughout the more than fifty years since it was first published? These questions are woven together to form the fabric of this book, which tells the story of the iconic character and comic strip and the social relations, political dilemmas, and cultural and economic dimensions that explain how Mafalda and her universe came alive outside the page and why they remain so current today. These questions entail examining a number of issues that are key for understanding the recent history of Latin America, as well as contemporary history in general: namely, middle-class identities and sociocultural modernization, generational and gender ruptures, political violence and authoritarianism, the construction of a global antiestablishment sensitivity, and the dilemmas posed by recent history and collective memory. These issues provide a central thread for each chapter, but the book follows a chronological order, so that it also contains a narrative of the past half century from the unique perspective of pop culture, shedding light on a period that is critical for gaining insight into the present.

The significance that *Mafalda*'s fifty-plus years have for our present cannot be overstated. The comic strip was born at a time when young people in Latin America could still recall the struggles for political and social rights waged by the masses and when the bombings of World War II were still fresh in the minds of Europe's youth. On both sides of the Atlantic, the postwar generations were enjoying unprecedented economic growth and a remarkable expansion of their social rights. This prosperity allowed them, like no genera-

tion before, to distance themselves from the experiences of their elders. It was these young people who were behind the political and cultural upheaval of the 1960s, as they strove to realize their utopian dreams of a more just society. In Latin America, these demands—raised in the midst of the Cold War—questioned the hegemony of the United States and made it possible to imagine a new world order. The region joined the rest of the Third World in spearheading a vigorous movement. The Cuban Revolution was shaking the foundations of the Latin American left in societies where the expansion of the middle class made the historical exclusion of the lower classes all the more evident. Social and political protests spread like wildfire across a continent that seemed to be on the brink of a revolution. But that optimism descended quickly into hopelessness. The 1973 oil crisis symbolized the structural decline of capitalism and the beginning of a new era shaped by a neoliberal reorganization of the economy. The dismantling of the welfare states in Latin America was driven by ruthless dictatorships that in the Southern Cone left countless dead in their wake. The 1990s were characterized by growing social exclusion, a cult of individualism, and rampant privatization, which only recently have been questioned within a new political and social scenario.

This book explores these pivotal decades of recent history by following *Mafalda*'s tracks and, in the process, addressing issues that are key for unraveling that period in history. My premise is that the comic strip's social and political significance makes it a unique gateway into understanding the political, social, and cultural upheavals of this half century. Fully aware of the complexity of that starting point, I take an approach that regards humor as a powerful lens that enables us to gain insight into the human condition and social phenomena, in line with Mikhail Bakhtin, for whom certain essential aspects of the world can only be accessed by means of laughter.[1] Moreover, humor—what is considered funny, the comedic strategies employed, the way in which humor questions reality, and laughter itself—presupposes shared codes that require a tacit understanding between those who produce it and their audiences (listeners, readers, viewers). As Peter Berger has said, humor strengthens group cohesion, draws boundaries, and contributes to social self-reflection.[2] That was what Sigmund Freud meant when, in the bourgeois Vienna of the early twentieth century, he explained that laughing with others expressed the existence of broad psychic agreement.[3]

The social nature of humor entails assuming that what people find funny varies in time and across social settings, but also that laughter itself changes over time. Hence the challenge involved in analyzing humor produced in a historical context different from our own. As historians we must discover what is not made explicit in a joke, that is, what is implicitly conveyed to the readers

or audiences of the time in which the humor was produced. The unique social and cultural significance of *Mafalda* and the richness of Quino's comedic creation offer enormous possibilities for such an analysis. Ultimately, the historiographical aim of this book is to contribute to a social history of humor.[4] With that in mind, I take on three conceptual and methodological challenges: exploring the mutual feedback between the symbolic and the material, highlighting the intersection of the domestic and the political, and mapping national, regional, and transnational dimensions.

For the first challenge, I draw on a long tradition of studies that focus on culture as an object of analysis of social phenomena. While a discussion of the many works in this sense exceeds the scope of this book, I would like to acknowledge how this tradition informs my approach. On the one hand, my contribution poses questions about the relationship between the material and the cultural in terms of social history. In writing this history of *Mafalda* I have assumed, in line with Raymond Williams, that culture is mediated by social relations that make it possible, and that, at the same time, it constitutes a "signifying system through which . . . a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored."[5] This assumption raises two problems that I have addressed here: understanding how an artistic form emerges, and elucidating its social "mediations," meanings, and effects. On the other, I incorporate the challenges of conceiving those who read, use, and experience cultural productions as active subjects.[6] My aim was to understand the meanings and uses that my cultural object—*Mafalda*—has had over the years for various subjects, both collective and individual, and how these meanings and uses changed in each historical context. With this in mind, I set out to historically reconstruct the processes of the production, circulation, and resignification of *Mafalda*. To do that I have considered the cartoon as a representation produced by and embodied in practices and objects, which turned it into a social phenomenon that draws on materials from society but, at the same time, operates on them.

The second challenge involves understanding how family and everyday life are articulated with the political as a decisive dimension of the social. It is at that intersection that individuals establish relationships, confront others, and shape their values and customs. From this perspective, I argue that the ways in which individuals behave and conceive their family relations contain a political and ideological element inasmuch as they involve power relations (within the family and outside it) that create gender, social, and intergenerational inequalities.[7] There are numerous studies that have explored this in Latin America, where family, moral, and sexual values played a crucial role in the establishment of

social hierarchies.[8] Working- and lower-class families were in fact not contemplated in the civil codes adopted by the new nation-states in Latin America modeled on the Napoleonic Code, and they were marginalized by social norms (often associated with the middle class) that naturalized a standard family model. That standard family was formed by a legally married couple and their biological offspring, with a division of roles in which the husband was the breadwinner and the wife the homemaker. Anything that differed from that model was viewed as deviant. The antiestablishment youth of the 1960s challenged—in different ways and to various extents—certain foundations of those family mandates, thus sparking powerful conflicts over the values of the middle class and its role in Argentine society and explicitly connecting family matters with political issues.[9]

The third challenge consists in analyzing the centrality of national, regional, and global connections for understanding historical processes. In that sense, my approach is based on recognizing the historically uneven nature of such connections and the role they have played in determining the dominant position of the most powerful capitalist countries, in the context of the emergence of a transnational economy.[10] But at the same time, in line with pioneering studies on Latin America, I argue that Latin American societies had an active role in transnational dynamics, and I am interested in analyzing the complex relations established between global markets, state policies, and cultural movements.[11] These transnational dynamics, which extend far back in time, took on particular significance in the 1960s as the connections between various processes, actors, and movements expanded and the flow of goods, people, and ideas intensified. Studying cultural productions such as *Mafalda,* which emerged in noncentral countries, expressed and fed an antiestablishment sensitivity (whose global scope was evidenced by the protests of 1968), and operated independent of multinational companies, is key for understanding these dynamics.[12]

Prior studies on *Mafalda* can be grouped in one of two approaches. On the one hand, the pioneering studies by Umberto Eco (in Italy) and Oscar Masotta (in Argentina) gave way to many works that have examined Quino's conceptual humor through the lens of fields such as social communication, linguistics, and semiotics.[13] These works have focused on analyzing narrative structures, the relationship between images and text, comedic strategies, and the context in which the comic strip was produced. On the other hand, there are studies that have approached it from quite a different perspective. They have analyzed the strip with the aim of identifying what it says socially and politically. From this angle, the strip has been interpreted as a reflection of certain political moments and of

phenomena such as intergenerational relations, changes in the family, and national identity in Argentina.[14] These contributions have informed my research enormously, as have the studies on the field of humor during those years.[15] But as I read them I realized that I had an approach that was somewhat unique in that it straddled the two perspectives. My approach entails examining the link between the two levels—that of the comic strip itself and of a social reading of it—and producing a reconstruction that is purely historical and addresses in equal measure the cartoon's artistic production (including the analysis of its images) and the social nature of its production, circulation, and meaning.

My work on *Mafalda* was the result of more than six years of research that involved a thorough study of numerous primary sources. This included consulting the original versions of the comic strip published in Argentina in *Primera Plana*, *El Mundo*, and *Siete Días*, in Mexico in the newspaper *Excélsior*, in the Spanish newspapers *ABC* and *La Vanguardia*, the Italian dailies *L'Unità* and *La Stampa*, and the comics magazines *El Globo* (Spain) and *Il Mago* (Italy). I also reviewed all the compilations released in Argentina, Italy, Spain, and Mexico, and I watched the film adaptations of the comic strip. Throughout my research, I explored at length the archives held by the newspapers and magazines that originally featured the comic strip in Argentina, Mexico, Italy, and Spain. I was also given access to part of Quino's personal archive. More recently, as I worked on this English edition, I had a chance to consult new sources under the National Comic Strip and Graphic Humor Research Program of Argentina's National Library. Moreover, I consulted the archives of Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, the documentation center of the publishing house Perfil, the National Libraries of Argentina and Chile, the Library of Congress, and the Library of Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. For specific time periods, I researched other Argentine and foreign newspapers and magazines. I read numerous essays and tributes, conducted more than sixty formal interviews, and held countless informal conversations. I spoke at length with Quino and Alicia Colombo, his wife and agent, and with editors, publishers, printers, booksellers, readers, and fans who visited the Mafalda statue in Buenos Aires. I contrasted the multiple sources consulted and the facts gathered, paying close attention to the discourse characteristics of each type of source and the contexts in which the various uses and the different appropriations of the strip took place. I was especially careful to take into account the subjective nature of personal memories and how the view of the past that they evoke is shaped by the perspective one has in the present.

I applied an analytical strategy that combined a densely synchronic analysis with a long-term diachronic reconstruction, driven by the conviction

that it is possible to write a recent history that extends into the present without affecting its specifically historical perspective. If, when I started out, this was an intuitive strategy, in the course of my research it became an epistemological decision. A recent phenomenon—even as recent as a few years—can be an object of historical study because its historical nature is not determined by the number of years that have passed since its occurrence; rather, it depends on the researcher's ability to distance themselves from it. There is no positivist illusion behind these precautions. The delimitation of this history was defined by me based on a dialogue between my hypotheses and my analysis of the sources. In this sense, I would like to close this introduction by presenting the main ideas of this long-term perspective, which provides an account of the last half century structured by different issues. Each chapter is, in turn, organized around one of those issues.

The first chapter examines the birth of *Mafalda*, with Quino's preliminary sketches for an advertising campaign, and the strip's public debut in a political magazine in 1964. Through this reconstruction, I illustrate how humor offers a privileged means of gaining insight into the middle class and the process of sociocultural modernization in the 1960s. My analysis challenges simplified views that assume that the middle class leaned either to the left or the right in the country's social and political processes. Instead, I posit two ideas. The first is that from the start the comic strip was permeated by the cultural, social, and economic dynamics that characterized the mid-1960s. In particular, I argue that *Mafalda* echoed the generational and gender tensions that were shaking the foundations of Argentine society at the time, and I examine the contradictions (the impossibilities and frustrations) encountered by the middle class in the face of social modernization. The second idea is that *Mafalda* not only spoke to the world in which it emerged but also influenced that reality. I maintain that it put into circulation a certain representation of the middle class and a form of humor (employing irony) that was intertwined with the identity of the middle class. It contributed to the consolidation of that identity at the same time that it discussed and reflected on it through an unprecedented and extremely complex depiction—a heterogeneous view of the cultural values and social aspirations of the middle class that combined the everyday with the political.

The second chapter looks at the social and political divisions that gripped Argentina between 1967 and 1976, a time marked by cultural and political radicalization and increasing violence, which culminated in state terrorism. It examines the growing complexity of the strip (with the introduction of new characters and more detailed drawings) as of 1968, when it began

to be featured in the pages of the photojournalism magazine *Siete Días*. It also analyzes how the comic strip commented on and reflected the repression by the Onganía dictatorship (1966–69), which dissolved parliament, placed the public university under its authority, and stepped up censorship and moralist campaigns in a context that saw the emergence of new left-wing organizations, including armed groups, and popular movements. It then reconstructs the controversies triggered by *Mafalda* from 1969, in the heat of labor and student struggles, until 1973, when the strip bode its readers farewell while the country was still under democratic rule but in a climate of rapidly escalating political violence. Against that backdrop, it gives an account of the different interpretations that saw the "intellectualized little girl" either as a dangerous expression of youth rebellion or as a timid petit bourgeois, depending on which end of the political spectrum the critic stood. This provides insight into the unprecedented ruptures that political polarization and the rise of state violence caused in the middle class and in Argentine society as a whole. It also sheds light on the views of those who, while assuming a political commitment, were reluctant to accept armed struggle as the only solution available and, in terms of their personal commitment, to place art at the service of the revolution. Finally, it addresses the new discussions about *Mafalda* that the various actors engaged in and, especially, the new ways in which they used the strip in the context of the rising authoritarianism that would lead to the coup d'état and Quino's exile.

Chapter 3 focuses on the global scale achieved by *Mafalda*. How did this little girl from Buenos Aires become such an internationally famous figure? What does this success tell us about the place of Third World cultural production at a transnational level? I argue that the broad distribution achieved by the comic strip occurred as a result of a combination of favorable contexts, contingencies, and unique appropriations in each social space and historical moment. I address each of these aspects by looking at *Mafalda*'s arrival in Italy, Spain, and Mexico. By taking these moments as the starting point I am able to highlight the role that small cultural ventures, informal social networks, and specific individuals—with different positions and identities—played in the development of a cultural market of political antiestablishment products that operated by linking the local and global scales. This also reveals the existence of a more or less transnational body of readers who could laugh at a conceptual humor in which they saw themselves reflected, because it operated on the ruptures produced by a number of shared phenomena—including sociocultural modernization, the political and cultural radicalization of young people,

global inequalities and the emergence of the Third World, and the visibility achieved by feminist demands. This helps explain the emergence of an antiestablishment and progressive sensitivity in the 1960s and '70s and the change of direction of cultural exchanges between the North and South that made it possible for the South to supply cultural products to the North.

The fourth chapter takes us back to Argentina. Here I look at how cultural productions were resignified by state terrorism and the disappearance of activists during the dictatorship that began in 1976. It opens with an analysis of a macabre episode involving a poster—one that had become immensely popular in the country—that depicted Mafalda pointing critically at a police officer's baton and calling it the "ideology-denting stick." In 1976, after brutally murdering a group of Pallottine priests and seminarians, members of the government's repressive forces placed a copy of this poster on the lifeless body of one of their victims. This perverse co-opting recognized the antiauthoritarian political significance of the comic strip, which was also evidenced by the objections made by censors to the *Mafalda* movie that came out in 1981, near the end of the dictatorship. Despite this awareness of the comic strip's antiauthoritarianism, and while its publishers were censored, jailed, and exiled for other publications, *Mafalda* continued to be available to the public throughout the dictatorship. To understand this paradox, my analysis examines the cracks left open by the regime's cultural repression policies. The second section of the chapter centers on the country's return to democratic rule. It looks at how the relationship between political commitment and humor was redefined based on the oppositional role played by humor in the final years of the dictatorship. I argue that the comic strip's identification with the democratic creed, to which broad sectors of society adhered, renewed *Mafalda*'s widespread success. The twenty-fifth anniversary of *Mafalda* was commemorated with a widely attended exhibit and the publication of previously unpublished material, and this celebration fueled a new resignification of the strip among the public, as Quino imagined that Mafalda could have been among the country's disappeared.

Chapter 5 is devoted to reflecting on the comic strip's lasting relevance in Argentina and around the world. The past two and a half decades have been defined by the consolidation of *Mafalda's* global success in a social and cultural myth-building process. With that idea in mind, I first focus on the context of rising neoliberalism, looking at how the comic strip channeled a resistance to that order through a nostalgic echoing of the 1960s that asserted the continued relevance of that generation's utopian dreams. After examining the establishment of ritual spaces and events such as the successful "Mafalda's World" exhibit

in Madrid, I analyze the new forms of intergenerational transmission and the expansion of the comic strip's readership. Last, I reconstruct the celebrations held on the anniversaries of the cartoon and the building of commemorative spaces (squares, murals, statues) and look briefly at the use of Mexican death imagery in connection with *Mafalda* as an example of how the liminal nature that characterized the cartoon from the very start allowed it to take on specific meanings.

In the conclusion I return to the questions posed at the start and venture possible answers, arguing again that Quino's genius created an unprecedentedly powerful cultural product. The comic strip offered a philosophical and atemporal reflection on the human condition, which also operated productively on decisive phenomena of the 1960s—authoritarianism, generational conflicts, feminist struggles, the expansion of the middle classes, and the challenges to the established family order. I stress, however, that *Mafalda*'s lasting appeal is explained by the interweaving of phenomena, decisions, interventions, and concrete junctures that enabled its circulation, expansion, and resignification in different parts of the world throughout half a century. It was in that crisscrossing of random occurrences, singularities, and recurrences that this unique phenomenon emerged—a paper-and-ink creation that took on a life of its own and has become a global myth. As such it gives meaning to human existence.

As soon as I began my research I realized that my subject of study was important not only on a social level but also on a personal and affective level for a readership that at its core may be middle-class and antiestablishment but which has expanded far from that core to include different cultural and social sectors and characteristics across various generations. I also became aware of how that significance affects each and every analysis of and reflection on *Mafalda*. As a colleague warned me after I was bombarded with questions and comments when I presented a very early draft of part of my research: "If you mess with our *Mafalda*, you're going to have to answer to us." As I wrote this book, I remembered her warning. At the time, I did not imagine that I would meet with a similar reaction when speaking about *Mafalda* in New York. When that happened—at Columbia University's Institute of Latin American Studies—I was surprised once again by the cartoon's ability to mobilize a *we* that transcended its Buenos Aires roots. I now deliver these pages in the hope that they will contribute to the understanding of Latin American culture in general and of *Mafalda* in particular—of its capacity to imagine a *we* that overcomes language barriers, borders, and sociocultural differences. I hope

I have succeeded in my effort to show how at the intersection of an artist's creativity and local and global sociocultural processes, as well as multiple interventions and contingencies, a remarkable phenomenon emerged: a unique fictional character that jumped off the page and became very real for many people around the globe, taking on mythical proportions and helping them make sense of the world.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. For an analysis of later developments in this respect, see Burucúa, *La imagen y la risa*.

2 Berger, *Redeeming Laughter*, 109–222.

3 Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*.

4 For a discussion on the social history of humor, see Swart, "'The Terrible Laughter of the Afrikaner.'"

5 Williams, *The Sociology of Culture*, 13.

6 Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*; and Chartier, *Cultural History*. For a Latin American approach, see also Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation*.

7 I found the following works particularly suggestive in this sense: Rapp, "Household and Family"; and Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*.

8 There are numerous contributions in this direction. A pioneering work is Kuznesof and Oppenheimer, "The Family and Society in Nineteenth-Century Latin America." For more recent overviews, see Gonzalbo Aizpuru, *Familias iberoamericanas*; and Pablo Rodríguez, ed., *La familia en Iberoamérica 1550–1980*. Also particularly useful for my research has been Owensby, *Intimate Ironies*; and Milanich, *Children of Fate*. There is extensive literature on the subject for Argentina in particular. See Míguez, "Familias de clase media"; Nari, *Políticas de maternidad y maternalismo político*; Cosse, *Estigmas de nacimiento*; Cosse, *Pareja, sexualidad y familia en los años sesenta*; and Losada, *La alta sociedad en la Buenos Aires de la* Belle Époque.

9 See Cosse, *Pareja, sexualidad y familia*, 14–15. With respect to everyday life and politics in Argentina, see Cosse, Manzano, and Felitti, *Los sesenta de otra manera*; Manzano, *The Age of Youth in Argentina*; and Felitti, *La revolución de la píldora*. For other Latin American countries, see Tinsman, *La tierra para el que la trabaja*; and Langland, "Birth Control Pills and Molotov Cocktails."

10 Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*; and Giddens, *Runaway World*. More recently, see López and Weinstein, *The Making of the Middle Class*.

11 For an example of this perspective, see Zolov, *Refried Elvis*. On the Left and the use of transnational networks, see Markarian, *Left in Transformation*; and on mass culture, see Cosse, "Cultura y sexualidad en la Argentina de los sesenta." For an overview, see Shukla and Tinsman, *Imagining Our Americas*.

12 Fraser, *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt*; Gould, "Solidarity under Siege"; and Lumley, *States of Emergency*, 39–40.

13 Masotta, *La historieta en el mundo moderno*, 145; Steimberg, *Leyendo historietas: Estilos y sentidos en un "arte menor,"* 174–76; Latxague, "Lire Quino."

14 There are numerous studies from this point of view, including, on the political and social context, Sasturain, "Mafalda en tres cuestiones" and "Mafalda sin libertad," in *El domicilio de la aventura*, 167–77; Foster, "Mafalda: An Argentina Comic Strip," on national identity; Foster, "Mafalda: Ironic Bemusement," in *From Mafalda to Los Supermachos*, 53–64, for a somewhat different focus; Wainerman, *La vida cotidiana en las nuevas familias*, 69–71, on everyday life; and with respect to urban aspects, Fernández L'Hoeste, "From Mafalda to Boogie."

15 Vázquez, *El oficio de las viñetas*; Levín, *Humor político en tiempos de represión*; Burkart, *De Satiricón a Hum®*; and Manzano, "'Contra toda forma de opresión.'" Pioneering studies include Rivera, "Historia del humor gráfico argentino"; and Matallana, *Humor y política*.

1. MARKS OF ORIGIN

1 Quino, *Mafalda inédita*, n.p.

2 Williams, *The Sociology of Culture*, 24.

3 See Parker, *The Idea of the Middle Class*; Owensby, *Intimate Ironies*; and Adamovsky, *Historia de la clase media argentina*. For an overview of this historiography, see Garguin, "El tardío descubrimiento de la clase media en Argentina"; and Visacovsky and Garguin, eds., *Moralidades, economías e identidades de clase media*.

4 See Parker and Walker, eds., *Latin America's Middle Class*; and Adamovsky, Visacovsky, and Vargas, eds., *Clases medias*.

5 For a pioneering study, see Altamirano, "La pequeña burguesía, una clase en el purgatorio."

6 See, for example, Walker, *Waking from the Dream*, and López, "Conscripts of Democracy"; Cosse, "*Mafalda*"; and articles in Cosse, ed., "Dossier: Clases medias, sociedad y política en la América Latina."

7 See Garguin, "*'Los Argentinos Descendemos de los Barcos'*"; and Guano, "The Denial of Citizenship."

8 Germani, *Política y sociedad en una época de transición*; and Germani, *Estructura social de la Argentina*.

9 Adamovsky, *Historia de la clase media argentina.* For a similar view, see Garguin, "El tardío descubrimiento de la clase media en Argentina."

10 See, for example, Zanca, "Reseña: Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Historia de la clase media argentina*; and López, "Reseña: Ezequiel Adamovsky: *Historia de la clase media argentina*."

11 For a more in-depth discussion, see Cosse, "Clases medias e historia reciente," 13–20.

12 See the classic works by Sigal, *Intelectuales y poder en Argentina*; and Terán, *Nuestros años sesentas*. See also Plotkin, *Freud en las pampas*. For more recent