

## Presentation. *Paths, Detours, and Connections: Consumption and Its Contribution to Latin American History*

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**Abstract:** Despite the increase and variety of historical literature in the region in the last decades, the history of consumption, as a proper area of study, has received only modest scholarly attention from Latin American historians. With the aim of contributing to the emerging literature on the subject, this essay illustrates the relevance of studies on the history of consumption for a better and novel understanding of Latin America's social, economic, and cultural past. It does this: 1) by revisiting the lessons learned from the first debates in the historical literature on consumption; 2) by examining recent developments in the history of consumption in Latin America, and; 3) by identifying future challenges for consumption studies.

**Keywords:** *consumption, historiography, Latin America (Thesaurus); consumer society (Author).*

### Presentación. *Caminos, desvíos y conexiones: el consumo y su contribución a la Historia de América Latina*

**Resumen:** A pesar del incremento de la literatura histórica de América Latina en las últimas décadas, la historia del consumo, como área de estudio, ha recibido poca atención por parte de historiadores de la región. Con el objeto de contribuir a la literatura emergente sobre el tema, este ensayo busca ilustrar la relevancia de los estudios del consumo para una mejor y novedosa comprensión de los procesos sociales, económicos y culturales de historia de América Latina. Lo anterior: 1) revisando las lecciones aprendidas de los primeros debates de la literatura histórica sobre el consumo; 2) examinando los recientes estudios históricos sobre el consumo en América Latina; e 3) identificando los desafíos de los historiadores de hoy.

**Palabras claves:** *consumo, historiografía, América Latina (Thesaurus); sociedad de consumo (Autor).*

### Presentação. *Caminhos, desvíos e conexões: o consumo e sua contribuição para a História da América Latina*

**Resumo:** A pesar do aumento da literatura histórica da América Latina nas últimas décadas, a história do consumo, como área de estudo, vem recebendo pouca atenção dos historiadores da região. Com o objetivo de contribuir para a literatura emergente sobre o tema, este ensaio procura ilustrar a relevância dos estudos do consumo para uma melhor e inovadora compreensão dos processos sociais, econômicos e culturais da história da América Latina. Isso será feito por meio: 1) da revisão das lições aprendidas dos primeiros debates de literatura histórica sobre o consumo; da 2) análise dos recentes estudos históricos sobre o consumo na América Latina; e da 3) identificação dos desafios dos historiadores de hoje.

**Palavras-chaves:** *América Latina, consumo, historiografia, sociedade de consumo (Thesaurus).*

## Introduction

The decades since the 1980s have witnessed an unprecedented surge in new topics of research on Latin American history.<sup>1</sup> The democratic transition of the region in the last twenty years of the twentieth century, the increase of postgraduate programs in the social sciences in Latin America in the last four decades, and the diversification of academia with the rise of new fields of specializations are some of the reasons that explain this transformation. Despite the growth and variety of historical literature on the region, the history of consumption has received modest scholarly attention by Latin American historians.<sup>2</sup> The aim of the essay is to contribute to this emerging literature by illustrating the relevance of consumption studies for a new and better understanding of Latin America's social, economic and cultural past.

We wish, therefore, to highlight the most exciting routes that scholars of Latin America can navigate by studying men and women's desire, acquisition, use, and disposal of goods and services from an historical perspective. Equally, we wish to show how research on consumption could benefit from the questions posed by existing studies of Latin American societies. In the following pages, we (1) revisit the lessons learned from the initial debates in the historical literature on consumption, (2) examine recent developments in the history of consumption in Latin America, and (3) identify some of the challenges that lie ahead for historians of consumption.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Historiographical debates: Lessons learned from the first historical literature on consumption***

Consumption has been central to debates over the nature of modernity, capitalism and contemporary culture. Not surprisingly it has also been the subject of major scholarly attention since the end of the nineteenth century. For Werner Sombart, Emile Durkheim, and Thorstein Veblen consumption was a critical force behind modern capitalism and the social structures produced by it.<sup>4</sup> By 1940s scholars of the Frankfurt School of social research, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, drawing on Marxist theories of alienation in the workplace, saw the consumer as a passive individual subjected to mass-production industries, marketing and advertising.<sup>5</sup> Although

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1 *The Oxford Handbook of Latin American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

2 On this, see Fernando Rocchi, "Consumption in Latin America." *Oxford Handbooks Online* (2017): s/p. doi: dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935369.013.14

3 See also Frank Trentmann, Introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1-22, and at length, Frank Trentmann, *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, from the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (London: Allen Lane, 2016).

4 Werner Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967); Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Free, 1996), and Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994). See also: Colin Campbell, "The Sociology of Consumption," in *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies*, edited by Daniel Miller (London: Routledge, 1996), 95-124.

5 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deceptions," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 41-72.

in the 1960s some scholars —notably W.W. Rostow<sup>6</sup>— celebrated consumption for promoting choice and liberty, strong critiques persisted. Vance Packard and Herbert Marcuse proclaimed that consumerism was a form of social control.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile Jean Baudrillard argued that the consumer society was a semiotic and totalizing system and consumption, a “systematic act of the manipulation of signs”.<sup>8</sup> Although by the 1970s a more positive view of consumption was taking place in the social sciences —particularly in anthropology and cultural studies— historians had yet to integrate consumption into their research agenda.<sup>9</sup>

It was not until 1980s that historians turned their attention to the history of consumption. This new scholarship, which approached the subject in a more nuanced and often positive light, had two points of departure. One, looked for the “birth” of the consumer society in eighteenth-century England; the other, focused on “mass consumption” and modern retailing since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Europe and North America.<sup>10</sup> The first project was launched by Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb with their book on *The Birth of a Consumer Society* (1982), which argued that a consumer revolution took place in eighteenth-century England.<sup>11</sup> Historians then centred their attention on when and why a growing proportion of the population was eager and free to consume new “necessities.” Their concern was not by any means solely or primarily quantitative. Changes in consumption patterns were studied to figure out not only how many commodities were being consumed but by whom, when and why.

These historians’ search for the origins of a consumer society was part of a wider debate over the origins of industrial capitalism. By endorsing the market as the prime motor of economic development, historians sought to offer as counterweight to the supply-side analysis of eighteenth-century economic growth that so far explained the Industrial Revolution.<sup>12</sup> The new lines of inquiry were well represented in the publication in the late 1980s and early 1990s of studies such as Lorna Weatherill’s *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain* (1988), Jean-Christophe Agnew’s *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theatre in Anglo American Thought 1550-1750* (1986), Carole Shammas’s *The Pre-industrial Consumer in England and America*

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6 W. W. Rostow, *The Process of Economic Growth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).

7 Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (London: Penguin, 1957) and Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man. Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1964).

8 Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 25.

9 Great examples of this contribution are Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (London: Lane, 1978) and Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London/New York: Routledge, 1979).

10 John Brewer, “The Error of Our Ways: Historians and the Birth of Consumer Society” (www.consume.bbk.ac.uk, Working Paper No. 012), June 2004.

11 Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

12 Jean-Christophe Agnew, “Coming up for air: consumer culture in historical perspective,” in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, edited by John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993), 19-39.

(1990), and T. H. Breen's influential articles about American and the consumer revolutions of the late eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

On the other side of the spectrum were historians concerned with mass consumption and the diffusion of "consumerism."<sup>14</sup> Scholars within this group explored the liberating and oppressive aspects of consumption practices and spaces and questioned, in particular, the impact of commercial culture on notions of femininity and masculinity. The methodological antecedents of this line of inquiry were closer, however, to social history and gender studies<sup>15</sup> than to anthropological studies of exchange and theories of culture adopted by the historians of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Britain mentioned above.<sup>16</sup>

Although these studies' focus on "mass consumption" was different from those searching for the "birth of the consumer society," they were also interested in understanding the consolidation of the modern consumer society, especially through the emergence of retailing and the department store. Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears' seminal volume *The Culture of Consumption* (1983)<sup>17</sup> tried to show how consumption became a hegemonic "way of seeing" —echoing Antonio Gramsci— and to invite historians to look at the powerful individuals and institutions responsible for conceiving and enforcing it. Not surprisingly the emphasis here was on advertising, the development of mass-market magazines and the industrialization of space.<sup>18</sup> Other works followed their lead, including, most notably, Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (1985), Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (1994) and Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (1998).<sup>19</sup>

Research that followed either of these two approaches to consumption undoubtedly enriched historians' knowledge of the material conditions of past societies, the dynamics of marketing and

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13 Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1970* (London: Routledge, 1988); Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theatre in Anglo American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Carole Shammas, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), and T. H. Breen's two influential articles, "An Empire of Goods: The Anglicization of Colonial America, 1690-1776." *Journal of British Studies* 25, n. ° 4 (1986): 467-99 and "'Baubles of Britain': The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century." *Past and Present* n. ° 119 (1988): 73-104. Also see T.H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

14 Amongst many works on this subject see Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 2001), and Gary S. Cross and John K. Walton, *The Playful Crowd: Pleasure Places in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

15 A partial exception was historians of advertising who drew on cultural analysis.

16 Douglas and Isherwood, *The World of Goods*.

17 Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

18 For a comprehensive exploration of this literature see Lawrence B. Glickman, "Bibliographical Essay," in *Consumer Society in American History: a Reader* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 399-414.

19 Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Boock, 1994), and Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

retailing the importance of the “luxury debates,”<sup>20</sup> and above all, the extent to which the greater circulation of goods enabled the middle class to shape their social identity.<sup>21</sup> Still, as Brewer, Ben Fine and Frank Trentmann have pointed out, both projects also had major limitations.<sup>22</sup>

Regardless of their point of departure, historians of consumption tended to emphasise different aspects of “modernity”. While some stressed processes of modernization —such as industrialization and urbanization—others explored the development of the modern self. This meant that dynamics of consumption were measured against scholars’ quite different criteria and definitions of modernity, that were often based on an idealised divide between the “traditional consumer” and the “modern consumer”, with the latter associated with individualism and the former with reciprocity.<sup>23</sup> Inevitably, historians were constantly pushing back the “birth” of the consumer society; the moment “modern” practices of consumption came to light.<sup>24</sup>

This fixation on pinpointing the “modern” birth of the subject had major implications for how historians understood consumption. Since the focus was on commercialization, it limited historians’ awareness of the complexity and diversity of consumption practices and neglected many forms, places and meanings of consumption. It left research open to the charge of over-emphasizing practices that looked modern, and overlooking those that were seen to be traditional —such as barter, street markets and peddlers. It also tended to ignore the coexistence of both forms of exchange in the same place and time. Furthermore, since both 1980s projects were strongly influenced, in one way or another, by the American model of the post war “affluent society,” research on the consumer society in the past thus took place in an interpretative framework in which the United States was the model and telos of contemporary developments. Therefore, studies of the second half of the twentieth century focused on the export of the American model to Europe and other regions of the world.

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20 Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

21 Historians’ growing interest in the history of consumption was consolidated in the publication of the three linked volumes that resulted from the project “Culture and Consumption in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century” (1989-91). The first volume published was John Brewer and Roy Porter’s *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993) that served as evidence of the extent to which historians had embraced studies of consumption. A good share of the contributors overturned many of the assumptions that ran through Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of the Consumer Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). Jean-Christopher Agnew and Colin Campbell argued that the rise of consumerism in the eighteenth century could not be explained simply in terms of social emulation or greater purchasing power. Lorna Weatherill’s essay raised questions as to how legitimate it was to speak of a consumer revolution at all at this stage in time, while John Styles cautioned historians about the use of terms such as “mass consumption” and “consumer society” in eighteenth-century studies.

22 Amongst many of the strong criticisms of McKendrick’s thesis see: Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold, “Consumerism and the Industrial Revolution.” *Social History* 15, n. ° 2 (1990): 151-79. doi: dx.doi.org/10.1080/03071029008567764. See also Brewer’s, “The Error of our Ways.”

23 Arjun Appadurai had stressed the problem with these conceptual divisions a few decades earlier in his work *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). In the introduction to that work, Appadurai urged scholars to reconsider the dual division between pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of production and consumption in their analyses, since such dualism entailed the schematic idea of a calculating Western individual on the one hand, and a gift-giving, cooperative non-Western individual on the other. Indeed, the picture was much more complex than that because, as Appadurai and others before him insisted, it is possible for “modern” and “traditional” traits to coexist in any given society. The meaning of a commodity and the cultural value of its exchange will thus depend on the type of object being exchanged, the people that exchange it, and the reasons why they decide to do so.

24 For instance, Christopher Dyer, *An age of transition? Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Such a focus ignored the parallel development of indigenous consumer cultures in other parts of the globe. With some exceptions — this perspective is still prevalent today.<sup>25</sup>

The critique of the first wave of historical studies of consumption had important implications for studies outside the “West.” As Craig Clunas, an art historian specialising on China’s material culture noted, the “world” of goods that the historical literature on eighteenth-century consumption was dealing with was a rather European or imperial British sphere of goods, and not a global one.<sup>26</sup> This Western perception undermined the applicability of the history of consumption for students of other regions. The criticism here was not that historians were interested in the West, but that if they wanted to claim anything “specifically western” in their studies, they ought to look outside the West to make such a claim — as Peter Burke stressed.<sup>27</sup> The lack of historical attention to other regions was also criticised by anthropologists working on studies of cross-cultural consumption, who complained about the “little serious attention paid to the construction and reconstruction of culture through consumption outside of ‘Western history,’ such as in colonial Africa or in the recent history of Latin America”.<sup>28</sup>

Several lessons emerged from the critique of this early wave of historical consumption studies. First, the search for the “birth” of the consumer society became a sterile pursuit. Since it rested on a linear narrative that assumed an almost inevitable transformation of western — and non-western — societies into consumer societies, it tended to obscure the complexity and diversity of experiences of consumption. The growing recognition of the symbolic, social and creative character of consumption played a fundamental role in the greater recognition of such diversity. A second lesson was that historians have come to acknowledge that there is no such thing as an individual, self-sufficient “modern consumer,” nor a “traditional consumer” incapable of satisfying its own selfish needs. Various social and political processes are interwoven in every type of consumption practice in “modern” as well as “pre-modern” times. People have and continue to consume for a variety of reasons: to show their place in society, to meet their own needs, build social relationships, or to reinforce individual and collective identities.<sup>29</sup> Historians today are increasingly aware that sharp divisions between types of consumers obstruct their ability to understand the variety of consumer practices and cultural and social motives of consumption.

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25 Frank Trentmann, “Crossing Divides: Consumption and globalization in history.” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 9, n.º 2 (2009): 187-220. For recent historiography that follows American influences in one direction see, for instance, Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through Twentieth-century Europe* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

26 Craig Clunas, “Modernity Global and Local: Consumption and the Rise of the West.” *American Historical Review* 104, n.º 5 (1999): 1503, doi: doi.dox.org/10.2307/2649347

27 Peter Burke, “‘Res et verba’: Conspicuous Consumption in the Early Modern World,” in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, edited by John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993), 163.

28 David Howes, “Introduction: Commodities and Cultural Borders,” in *Cross-Cultural Consumption: Global Markets, Local Realities*, edited by David Howes (London: Routledge, 1996), 9.

29 Various methodological approaches have served historians to understand the motivation of individuals and the needs for consumption. For consumption, status and social stratification, see: Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, and Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984). For the social and cultural meanings of exchange see Douglas and Isherwood, *The World of Goods*, and Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*.

Thirdly, questioning the belief about the pervasive power of consumption and its capacity to erode identities has been particularly important for historians writing outside the West. For example, scholars have come to appreciate that the consumption of foreign goods—in particular American goods—did not always amount to an act of resistance, let alone surrender to Western values. More than before, there is now a greater recognition of the active, creative, strategic and critical reception of American goods by other societies.

From the vantage point of Latin American historians, the greatest contribution of critiques of the first studies on consumption, without a doubt, was the call to think about the place of other regions in the history of consumption and to question consumption as an essentially or exclusively Western phenomenon. New histories and geographies of consumption include excellent works on China, India and Africa.<sup>30</sup> The last decade has seen an expanding literature on the global flux of commodities. More and more scholars are today concerned with making connections between consumer societies in different settings and regions. These new perspectives have started to “de-centre” the American narrative.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, by focusing not solely in the act of acquiring goods in the marketplace but what happens with the objects after they are bought and the spaces and consumption activities themselves, recent historical research on consumption, has extended the scope of the subject. Historians have explored the social importance of shopping, the political dimension of consumption, the consumer as citizen, the place of consumer practices in the shaping of gender, class and racial identities, the impact of consumer movements, and the social and cultural significance of various practices, such as eating, reading, saving, collecting, and even, stealing. The agenda is still growing and presents great opportunities and great challenges.

### ***Starting points, meeting points: Recent developments in consumption and history in Latin America***

As in Europe and North America, consumption in Latin America has long been an object of interest to anthropologists, economists, and sociologists. Historians of Latin America, by contrast, have lagged behind. Still, there were some promising directions. And although today “consumption in Latin American historiography is incipient, small, fresh and full of challenges and opportunities” in the words of Natalia Milanesio, “it is a nonconformist newcomer rather than an overpowering ‘colonizing force.’”<sup>32</sup>

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30 On China see: Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), and his *Empire of Great Brightness: Visual and Material Cultures of Ming China, 1368-1644* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007); Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Karl Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2004); and Frank Dikötter, *Exotic Commodities: Modern Objects and Everyday Life in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). On Africa: Timothy Burke, *Lifeguard Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Jeremy Prestholt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the Genealogies of Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

31 Trentmann, Introduction, 7 and for an alternative narrative now, Trentmann, *Empire of Things*.

32 Natalia Milanesio, *Workers go Shopping in Argentina: The Rise of Popular Consumer Culture* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 10.

Latin American and Atlantic historians have contributed the history of the early modern period by studying the European consumption of goods originating in the New World. Studies on sugar, coffee, chocolate, bananas and cotton have followed their consumption, although mainly outside Latin America. A seminal work here was Sidney Mintz's work *Sweetness and power* (1985). More recent studies of global commodities include that of John Soluri's on bananas, Marcy Norton's on chocolate and tobacco, and Sven Beckert's on cotton.<sup>33</sup> Like their peers in Europe, historians of Latin America have explored the emergence of department stores and advertising; a good example is Steven Bunker's recent contribution, *Creating Mexican Consumer Culture in the age of Porfirio Díaz* (2014).<sup>34</sup> Debates over consumption, consumerism, and US imperialism have also attracted the attention of several historians, including Ricardo Salvatore and James Woodward with their work on Argentina and Brazil. Julio Moreno's *Yankee don't go home!* (2003) is an eye-opening study of US business, consumption, and nationalism in twentieth-century Mexico.<sup>35</sup>

Instead of offering a comprehensive outline of the historiography of consumption in the region we want here to draw attention to research on consumption that has been especially dynamic in Latin America and underline its potential as well as its limitations. Latin American studies of consumption have had to deal with three main obstacles. First, the emphasis on export-led models of development in social and economic histories —particularly for the nineteenth century— has led to a prioritization of production over consumption. Second, there is the widespread if problematic idea that Latin America is and has been a region of poor people and peasants, not consumers.<sup>36</sup> An third, there is the common assumption that Latin Americans, in their search for modernity and civilization, wanted to “emulate” foreign tastes and practices —whether European or American. This accounts especially for the disproportionate interest in upper-class consumption.<sup>37</sup>

Similar to what happened with supply-oriented studies of eighteenth-century Britain, economic historians of Latin America gave priority to export-centred frameworks of analysis to explain Latin America's economic development in the nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup> This, in turn, led historians to focus

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33 Sidney Wilfred Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985). See also, John Soluri, *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); Marcy Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures: A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), and Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Knopf, 2015).

34 Steven Bunker, *Creating Mexican Consumer Culture in the Age of Porfirio Díaz* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014).

35 Julio Moreno, *Yankee don't go home!: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

36 Milanesio, *Workers Go Shopping in Argentina*, 10.

37 Jeffrey D Needell, *A Tropical Belle Époque: Elite Culture and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and William Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

38 Among the studies that maintain this position, see: Enrique Cárdenas, José Antonio Ocampo, and Rosemary Thorp, *The Export Age: The Latin American Economies in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Houndmills/Basingstoke/Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000); Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America* vol. 4 (London: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Victor Bulme-Thomas, Jonh Coastworth, Roberto Cortes-Conde, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of Latin America* vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and Victor Bulmer Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).



on production and exports, and overlook domestic consumer practices. This framework of analysis has been so pervasive, that it continues to dominate commodity histories in Latin America.<sup>39</sup>

The new turn to imports was pioneered by Benjamin Orlove and Arnold J. Bauer in their edited volume *The Allure of the Foreign: Giving Importance to Imports* (1997) and Bauer subsequent *Goods, Power and History: Latin American's Material Culture* (2001).<sup>40</sup> As Fernando Rocchi has pointed out, these works appeared almost two decades after consumption studies took off in Europe and North America.<sup>41</sup> Bauer's contribution, in particular, amounts to an important synthesis of Latin America's material culture from the pre-Columbian era to the twentieth century.<sup>42</sup> Both Bauer and Orlove's works expand the scope of the subject beyond luxury consumption and the emulation of foreign practices. Their publication has stimulated a fresh interest in the region in the history of dress, fashion, and food.<sup>43</sup>

In contrast to earlier studies of exotic foods and colonial systems of provision, consumption studies in Latin America since the 1990s have paid more attention to national narratives than transnational connections. Argentina and Mexico, in particular, have attracted scholarly attention. These studies have benefitted from the critique and learning prompted by the first wave of historical consumption studies discussed earlier, in particular, making researchers appreciate the relative autonomy of regional consumption spaces and practices. A good case in point is Regina A. Root's *Couture and Consensus: Fashion and Politics in Postcolonial Argentina* which highlights the active, creative rather than passive role of fashion consumers in independent Argentina.<sup>44</sup> Instead of telling a story of the uncritical emulation of foreign customs, Root shows not only that dress in the first decades after Independence allowed patriots to distance themselves from the Spanish past, but demonstrates how a new politics of clothing emerged in a newly independent nation.

The older paradigm of emulation and the uncritical adoption of parameters of foreign consumption has further been challenged by Manuel Llorca-Jaña in his recent work on Britain's exports of textiles to the Southern Cone and by Ana María Otero-Cleves in her study of the consumption

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39 Amongst the works worth citing are Steven Topik, Carlos Marichal, and Zephyr L. Frank, *From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy, 1500–2000* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), and Paul Gootenberg, *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

40 Arnold J. Bauer and Benjamin Orlove's edited volume *The Allure of the Foreign: Imported Goods in Post-Colonial Latin America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), and Arnold J. Bauer's, *Goods, Power and History: Latin America's Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

41 Rocchi, "Consumption in Latin America."

42 Paul Gootenberg for instance considers that by covering all of Latin America, Bauer's work depicts a common consumption culture in the region and, by so doing, overlooks "the insularity of regional patrias chicas until the twentieth century." Paul Gootenberg, "Review: Goods, Power, History: Latin America's Material Culture." *Journal of World History* 14, n. ° 4 (2003): 561-63.

43 See, Rebecca Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador Food, Race and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

44 Regina A. Root, *Couture and Consensus: Fashion and Politics in Postcolonial Argentina* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

of foreign machetes and textiles in nineteenth-century Colombia by the popular sectors.<sup>45</sup> Both authors show that European exporters needed to take into account Latin American consumers' specific demands and preferences. They challenge the idea of emulation as the primary motive of consumption and show that European and North American manufactures paid considerable attention to the Latin American market in the nineteenth century.

The emphasis on the political nature of consumption has further helped to put the subject at the centre of the historical discussion in Latin America.<sup>46</sup> Of course, Latin American historians had previously touched on consumption as a means to explore broader subjects, such as racial categories, tourism, business culture, and business history, but rarely as a subject in its own right.<sup>47</sup> Since 2000, by contrast, historians across the globe began to examine directly the political organization of consumers, the definition of consumer rights,<sup>48</sup> the creation of a civic culture around consumption, and the emergence of the citizen-consumer. In her *Consumers' Republic: the Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (2008), Lizabeth Cohen shows how mass consumption during the New Deal became about more than shopping, a means for Americans to exercise their citizenship. In Latin America, scholarship has also produced important literature recognizing this powerful connection. Eduardo Elena's work *Dignifying Argentina: Peronism, Citizenship, and Mass Consumption* (2011)<sup>49</sup> and Natalia Milanesio's, *Workers Go Shopping in Argentina: The Rise of Popular Consumer Culture* (2013) are prominent examples. While Elena explores the intersection of populism, mass consumption, and the redefinition on national citizenship in Peronist Argentina, Milanesio studies the mid-twentieth-century transformation of Argentina's market culture to reveal how growing sectors of the population became active consumers. This recent connection between politics and consumption in Latin American studies has been stimulated further by the opening of Latin American markets since the 1970s and by globalization.<sup>50</sup>

The focus on the connection between politics and consumption can enhance our knowledge of class dynamics, processes of state formation, civil society, and social movements in nineteenth-

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45 Manuel Llorca-Jaña, *The British Textile Trade in South America in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) and Ana María Otero-Cleves, "Foreign Machetes and Cheap Cotton Cloth: Popular Consumers and Imported Commodities in Nineteenth-Century Colombia." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 97, n. ° 3 (2017): 423-56.

46 Frank Trentmann, "Beyond Consumerism: New Historical Perspectives on Consumption." *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, n.°3 (2004): 391, doi: dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022009404044446

47 Good examples are: Marie Eileen François, *A Culture of Everyday Credit: Housekeeping, Pawnbroking, and Governance in Mexico City, 1750-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Lauren Hutchinson Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Brian Philip Owensby, *Intimate Ironies: Modernity and the Making of Middle-class Lives in Brazil* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Micol Seigel, *Uneven Encounters: Making Race and Nation in Brazil and the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

48 Ellen Furlough, *Consumer Cooperation in France: The Politics of Consumption, 1834-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); and Landon R.Y. Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism: the National Consumers' League, Women's Activism, and Labor Standards in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

49 Eduardo Elena' *Dignifying Argentina: Peronism, Citizenship, and Mass Consumption* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

50 From a cultural studies perspective, see Néstor García Canclini, *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); from the viewpoint of anthropology, see Maureen O'Dougherty, *Consumption Intensified: The Politics of Middle-class Daily Life in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

and twentieth-century Latin America. These processes, which have occupied social and political history of Latin America for decades, can now be studied from a new perspective. Recognition of the desire and drive of a diverse population to participate in the market, not just as members of the labour force but as consumers broadens our understanding of race, gender, and citizenship.<sup>51</sup> In turn, it encourages a creative dialogue between economic history and social and cultural history; a dialogue that Latin American historians have been calling for some time.<sup>52</sup> Topics that have been studied almost to the point of exhaustion by Latin American scholars —such as nationalism— are being revitalised by studies of consumption.<sup>53</sup> For the study of liberalism and political economy in the nineteenth-century —greater attention to consumption could stimulate a conversation between intellectual and cultural history.

The study of a wider range of spaces of consumption and their relationship with the construction of new identities in Latin America can deepen our understanding of everyday practices and connect studies of consumption with those of Latin American urban history. A lot of research remains to be done on the relationship between consumption, space and the environment. Finally, —greater attention to consumption can also broaden the study of topics that are well established in historiography, such as research on childhood and youth.

### **Future challenges of studies of consumption**

It seems almost natural that the meeting point for scholars of consumption is transnational and global history. In the introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, where he discusses new questions and fields of research, Frank Trentmann calls for a greater emphasis on the diversity of regional experiences in studies of both transnational circulations of goods and globalization. Clearly, for this enterprise to be fruitful it has to be done in light of Latin America's and other region's capacity to transform, question, and change the course of transnational exchanges and global connections and not as an “add-on” to an existing narrative. As we have argued in the first section of this essay the model of the “consumer society” has been more harmful than beneficial. Greater appreciation of the diversity of connections will enable us to understand the fragmented, non-linear, and heterogeneous nature of consumer societies. This call also invites historians to recognize the diversity of practices in the Latin American context. There are limited insights from studying Latin America as a whole. Its diversity has to be recognized without falling into solid national narratives either. What unites and what differentiates Latin Americans should be of interest of students of consumption in the region.

The other three fields for future research singled out by Trentmann are public consumption, temporal and spatial meanings, and material use.<sup>54</sup> The role of the state in systems of provisions —ranging from food subsidies to pensions and welfare services— makes for a fertile field of study. When it comes to Latin America, however, the last two fields are perhaps of particular interest.

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51 Otero-Cleves, “Foreign Machetes and Cheap Cotton Cloth,” 456.

52 Gilbert M. Joseph, ed., *Reclaiming the Political in Latin American History: Essays from the North* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

53 See, for instance, the variety of perspectives on nationalism and consumption in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

54 Trentmann, Introduction, 9-20.

One of the greatest contributions of anthropology to the study of consumption has been an invitation to see objects as vehicles of social life —and to analyse their symbolic and communicative function and meaning. Goods and the access to (or lack of) them construct meanings and create identities. A closer study to Latin American societies —past and present— can thus show the extent to which impediments to the access goods augment significantly the cultural and political value of a given object.

By defining consumption in relation to scarcity, Latin American historians could challenge long-established characterizations of the consumer society, and remind scholars that consumption does not equal affluence and does not only take place in rich countries. What has been seen as a set of economic limits by earlier scholars could be reclaimed and re-evaluated by historians as they explore how “luxuries,” “necessities” and “foreign” goods were flexible than often assumed in societies with fewer resources and greater constraints on consumption, such as Latin America.<sup>55</sup>

We need a more nuanced understanding of the life cycles of objects in “non-affluent” as well as “affluent” societies —and the meanings and values they carry. Regardless of time and space, historians of consumption should investigate the diverse forms of knowledge, associations, and identities that objects evoke for individuals and societies. There is a lot that remains to be found out about the forces that inscribe social meanings to certain commodities and obscure others.

Finally, we need to explore in greater depth the relationship between materiality and consumption practices. As historians we must not forget that things have functions as well as meanings. Materiality is a part of social practices. In Latin America, scarcity has meant that the utility and materiality of goods played a critical role in shaping consumption practices and the meanings of goods. Humans and things depend on each other, in Latin America as anywhere else. For historians, this material fact is the meeting and the starting point for future studies on consumption.

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