

## CHAPTER 5

### *Billiken's Long Decline (1983–2019)*

The period discussed in this chapter saw political upheaval and huge social change in Argentina, as well as transformations in *Billiken* at the institutional level. The rationale for covering such a long period in just one chapter rests with *Billiken's* content, which began to lack the richness of the previous years and does not lend itself to such detailed analysis. Over this timeframe, *Billiken* became a brand that contained, as one element, a magazine, at the same time as Editorial Atlántida became a major multimedia corporation. *Billiken's* growth beyond the magazine to encompass an ever-increasing proliferation of supplements, collections and spin-off products recalls the etymology of magazine as a storehouse. *Billiken* was more than it had been and, simultaneously, less than it had been, as both the *Billiken* brand and the *Billiken* magazine were progressively emptied of, or distanced from, the narratives, values and content that had previously anchored the magazine and given it meaning.

This chapter looks at *Billiken's* long decline against the backdrop of a changing political landscape, the increased polarisation of society, and the changes in education policy as they map on to the transition to democracy, the presidency of Raúl Alfonsín, the neoliberalism of Carlos Saúl Menem's years in office (1989–1999), and through to the celebrations of the bicentenary of independence under Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, president from 2007 to 2015. During this time, Constancio C. Vigil's descendants briefly turned Atlántida into a media giant before selling out to Televisa in 2007. The convergence between politics and corporate interests was reflected in *Billiken* at the same time as the site of activity and innovation was relocated away from the magazine and towards its associated products. *Billiken's* provision of educational material, the representations of traditional gender roles, and the transmission of the narrative of Argentine history linked to the school year offer some continuities even as technology, linked to the rise of globalised culture, emerged as both a threat and an opportunity.

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### From Alfonsín to Menem: neoliberalism, globalisation and education

During the transition to democracy, contemporary reflections on Argentina's political realities were present in *Billiken* but have to be actively sought out in amongst the articles, covers, comics and advertisements dedicated to the *Smurfs*, *Pink Panther*, *Sarah Kay* and the *Annie* film. *Billiken's* first approach to the transition came from within the magazine's school content in September 1982, at a time at which Leopoldo Galtieri's successor, Reynaldo Bignone, was still attempting to postpone calling elections. A piece entitled 'Congress: Senators and Deputies' and catalogued under Social Sciences states that democracy is the government of the people via elected representatives, chosen freely by citizens through universal suffrage and a secret ballot (issue 3271, 21 September 1982). Two issues later, the social sciences content was dedicated to the vote: 'un derecho que es un deber' [a right which is a duty]. The text explains that elections have been called after seven years of military government, and that this will be the first time in 10 years that Argentines will go to the polls. As newspapers, magazines, radio and TV programmes all have started to talk about 'candidates', 'electoral registers' and 'suffrage', the article promises a refresher course on the practice of voting, and illustrates it with a simplified voting model that uses invented candidates with surnames taken from confectionary items (issue 3273, 5 October 1982).

*Billiken's* embracing of the democratic process was in keeping with the enthusiastic mood of wider society. The lifting of the ban on political parties resulted in a boom in party enrolments to the extent that one in every three eligible voters was a member of a political party. Luis Alberto Romero writes about society 'celebrating the novelty' of democracy, which was now seen as a priority.<sup>1</sup> From September 1983, over five issues, *Billiken* provided a space for children to learn more about the upcoming elections with a series on the history of political parties. The lede read:

Todos los días escuchás hablar en tu casa o por la tele de elecciones. ¡Qué lío! ¿No? Para aclarar tus dudas, desde esta semana te vamos a contar cuáles son los partidos que se presentarán a las elecciones del 30 de octubre y qué piensa cada uno (issue 3323, 20 September 1983).

[Every day you hear about elections at home or on TV. It's a mess, isn't it? To clear up your doubts, starting this week we will tell you which parties will run in the elections on 30 October and what each one thinks.]

These pages synthesised the parties' election platforms but did not offer any context to help children make sense of them. For example, the first item on the MID (Multipartidaria) Party was to demand an explanation (from whom is not

# EL VOTO:

## un derecho que es un deber

La práctica de la democracia en una república como la nuestra supone la libertad y la responsabilidad de todos los ciudadanos. El voto o sufragio, a través del cual el pueblo elige libremente a sus representantes y autoridades, es la expresión mayor de la vida democrática.

Luego de siete años de gobierno militar, el pueblo chileno se prepara para elegir a sus representantes en las elecciones municipales, provinciales y nacionales. Durante este proceso, los ciudadanos deben ejercer su derecho y su deber al votar.

### LA LEY SÍNGA PENA

Esta situación se prolonga durante más de una semana, desde el día de la elección hasta el día de la proclamación de los resultados. Durante este tiempo, los ciudadanos deben cumplir con la obligación de votar, tal como lo establece la Ley 8071, de 1912, que establece la obligación de votar para el presidente de la República y para los diputados y senadores.

### IMPERFECTAS

La Constitución de 1833 establece que el voto es secreto y obligatorio. Sin embargo, durante muchos años el sistema de votación ha sido imperfecto. Volaban pocos sufragios, el sistema de "voto cantado" obligaba a los votantes a revelar su voto públicamente. Esto favorecía el fraude y la manipulación.

### UN PODER Y UNA OBLIGACIÓN

Voto universal quiere decir que todos los ciudadanos tienen el derecho de elegir a sus representantes. Cuando son elecciones generales, las elecciones se celebran en todo el país. En un mismo día, los ciudadanos deben votar para elegir a sus representantes en las elecciones municipales, provinciales y nacionales. Este proceso es fundamental para la renovación de una parte del poder en la Cámara de Diputados, cada dos años, y en el Senado, cada tres años.

**PARTIDO POR LA MITAD**

**Candidato a Presidente**  
**JOSÉ CHIROGATE**

**Candidato a Vicepresidente**  
**RAÚL ALFAVOR**

**Candidatos Senadores**

**Miguel Bustos**  
**Rodrigo González**

**Candidatos Diputados**

**1. Néstor Cárdenas**  
**2. Susana Balletta**  
**3. Roberto Campetón**  
**4. René Merino**  
**5. Rafael Benavilla**

**Candidatos Municipales**

**1. Roberto Pocholdo**  
**2. María María de Urquiza**  
**3. Juan Pablo**  
**4. Carlos Figueroa**  
**5. Marcos Escobar**

Este es un modelo muy simplificado de lo que se debe hacer en el día de la elección. Cada partido presenta su propia boleta.

### CÓMO SE VOTA

**1** Antes de la fecha de elección, el ciudadano debe ir al Registro Civil a confirmar su lugar en el padrón electoral y a verificar que los datos sean correctos. Si hay algún error, debe ir a corregirlo.

**2** El día de la elección, el ciudadano debe ir a la mesa electoral. Allí, el presidente de la mesa le entregará el documento de identificación electoral y le explicará cómo votar.

**3** El ciudadano debe presentar su documento de identificación electoral y firmar el acta de votación. Luego, debe ir a la urna para votar.

**4** Terminado el proceso, el ciudadano debe ir a la mesa electoral y entregar su voto. El presidente de la mesa le entregará el acta de votación y le explicará cómo votar.

**5** Dentro del cuarto oscuro, el votante debe colocar una boleta en la urna. Luego, debe ir a la mesa electoral y entregar su voto. El presidente de la mesa le entregará el acta de votación y le explicará cómo votar.

**6** Terminado el proceso, el ciudadano debe ir a la mesa electoral y entregar su voto. El presidente de la mesa le entregará el acta de votación y le explicará cómo votar.

Figure 5.1: 'The vote: a right which is a duty'. Billiken, issue 3273, 5 October 1982. © Editorial Atlántida. Reproduced with permission.

clarified) about the problems suffered by the country over the proceeding years, specifically about the people disappeared for political reasons, the economic crisis and the Malvinas War. The focus on political parties only finished in November, with the election already having taken place on 30 October. Whilst children had been encouraged, by means of a footballing analogy, to take an interest by creating their own league table in advance of the elections to then see if their predictions were right, *Billiken* offered no post-election analysis and published no articles about the new president, Raúl Alfonsín from the Radical Party (issue 3325, 4 October 1983).

Alfonsín's government sought to rebuild civil society and Argentina's international standing, with a focus on democracy, human rights and peace. The authoritarian practices and discourses within the education system were overturned and efforts were concentrated on a programme of mass literacy. According to Carli, '[s]e plantea una promesa reconstructiva en los discursos de Alfonsín que incluye a los niños como destinatarios y como objeto de una reparación histórica' [a reconstructive promise is presented in Alfonsín's speeches that includes children as recipients and as the object of a historical reparation].<sup>2</sup> In the main educational initiative of the Alfonsín period, the Pedagogical Congress, discussions focussed on what education should be but no concrete measures emerged.<sup>3</sup> Under Alfonsín, family law was modernised: in 1985, women gained *patria potestad*, or joint legal custody, over their children, and divorce was legalised in 1987. Despite the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons bringing to light the details of the human rights abuses committed during the dictatorship, the military held fast to its claim that they had won the 'war against subversion'. In holding the military to account, Alfonsín, a staunch defender of human rights even during the *Proceso*, took a cautious approach, recognising that the military was still a state institution. This resulted in the 1987 Ley de Obediencia Debida [Law of Due Obedience], which held that the abuses committed by the lower ranks were as a result of carrying out orders, and the Ley del Punto Final [Full Stop Law], which established a 60-day deadline for the initiation of new prosecutions.<sup>4</sup> The political reality of the return to democracy was not discussed in *Billiken*, nor was any reflection on the dictatorship offered at this time. The main trace of the Alfonsín years in *Billiken* is in the price on the cover, which appeared in the Austral currency between June 1985 and December 1991, introduced as an attempt to halt inflation and stabilise the economy.

Civic education continued to feature in *Billiken* in preparation for the 1989 elections and, in November 1988, *Billiken* published an invented, illustrated interview with an avuncular Alfonsín, who patiently explained the democratic process to two budding child reporters (issue 3593, 21 November 1988). Hampered by economic and political problems, Alfonsín's presidency could not fulfil the hopes placed in it by civil society, which had so enthusiastically rallied around the return to democracy. The transfer of power, scheduled for



10 December 1989, was moved up to 8 July when Alfonsín resigned in recognition of his administration's inability to continue to govern amidst spiralling hyperinflation and food riots. *Billiken's* readers were offered better preparation for the 1989 presidential elections than they had been in 1983. Material under the banner of 'Democratic Education' included a focus on each of the presidential candidates published in weekly instalments, and comics by children's writer María Brandán Aráoz illustrated the voting process. Also differing from the previous elections was the attention paid to the winning candidate, Carlos Saúl Menem. Menem entered *Billiken's* pantheon of Great Men right from the time of his inauguration. Readers were treated to a pull-out poster of Menem photographed in his presidential sash flanked by the article: 'Aventuras de Carlos, el presidente', which offered three snapshots of Menem's life: naughty child, intrepid youth and accomplished sportsman (Figure 5.2).

The appearance of Menem's illustrated childhood in *Billiken* was reminiscent of the magazine's retelling of the childhoods of Argentina's founding fathers in the 1920s and analysed by Mirta Varela.<sup>5</sup> Whereas the childhoods of these 'illustrious men' were filled with noble deeds to inspire children to greatness, the piece on Menem recounts anecdotes such as when he threw all his mother's saucepans into the local stream. The section on the new president's childhood then links to his political pledges to children. We are told that he wants to improve education and children's access to technology and that his chosen minister for education has promised to listen to children's demands. The article also recalls that one of Menem's campaign phrases was 'los únicos privilegiados son los niños' [children are the only privileged ones]. The phrase is divested of its political and historical meaning here, just as when *Billiken* used it in Evita's obituary. For Menem, this phrase was no more than a useful evocation of his Peronist political identity.

A former governor of La Rioja province, Menem had emerged as the leader of the 'renewal' movement within an increasingly fractured Peronism. He was also a revisionist Peronist, however, tracing his political lineage back to General Juan Manuel de Rosas, an association that Perón had judiciously rejected in favour of placing himself within the lineage of General José de San Martín. Menem founded a *rosista* society and, as president, repatriated Rosas's body from Southampton, England, in 1989. The section in the article entitled 'Carlos, the intrepid' alludes to Menem's self-styled gaucho image by recounting his crossing of the Andes on horseback in 1974. This episode is described by Gabriela Cerruti, in her biography of Menem, as a mixture of personal quest and publicity stunt undertaken to demonstrate the need for a mountain pass to Chile.<sup>6</sup> More than identifying with the gaucho, contested but persistent symbol of Argentine national identity, Menem styled himself as a *caudillo*, evoking the strongman federalist leaders who wielded power in the provinces in the 19th century, or the 'barbarians' to Sarmiento's 'civilisation'. He specifically identified with the La Rioja *caudillo* Facundo Quiroga, whose life formed the basis for



Sarmiento's foundational text, and used this to manifest his populist credentials. Civantos argues that Menem, as the son of Syrian Muslim immigrants, also evoked Sarmiento's comparison of the gaucho to the Arab, finding therein a way of negotiating his own identity as Argentine.<sup>7</sup> The other half of the *Billiken* piece concentrates on Menem as a 'super sportsman': champion basketball player, football fanatic, tennis player, pilot and racing car driver (issue 3628, 24 July 1989). According to Hyland, Menem as sportsman was another example of his appropriation of the symbols of the nation, which facilitated 'positioning himself as the embodiment of Argentine masculine virility'.<sup>8</sup>

*Billiken*'s article not only gave the new president positive coverage, with the focus on sport and youthful adventures tailored to making him appealing and relatable to children, but also reproduced Menem's construction of the political persona he had been cultivating for years and had employed in his election campaign. Another facet of Menem's public image, not aligned to the traditional Peronist base, was that of the Ferrari-driving playboy who rubbed shoulders with the jet set, tapping into fantasies of the aspirational middle classes who could read about his exploits in *Para Ti* and *Gente*. Menem, ever seduced by the proximity to international stardom, permitted Alan Parker to film Madonna as Evita from the balcony of the Casa Rosada in the 1996 film of the Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice musical. This musical, with its anti-Peronist stance, has still never been professionally staged in Argentina and the casting of Madonna was met with anger in Peronist circles. Constancio Vigil, a director of *Atlántida* and a grandson of the original founder, brokered the first meeting between Menem and Madonna.<sup>9</sup> Menem had built his base using the popular press and, as *Atlántida* published the country's highest-selling magazines, the Vigil family was an important ally.

Romero describes how Menem transformed the presidential residence of Olivos into a 'court' with a coterie of hangers-on and became the 'caretaker of the spoils of office, which he distributed generously'.<sup>10</sup> Corruption in Menem's Argentina became so endemic that it was shrugged off with the phrase 'roban pero hacen' [they steal but they get things done], unlike the opposing Radical Party, thought to be honest but unsuited to power.<sup>11</sup> By 1990, Constancio Vigil was within the circle of Menem's friends, playing tennis with the president twice a week and even having a car space reserved for him outside the Casa Rosada, according to an unflattering article in *Noticias*, a news magazine published by rival media company Perfil.<sup>12</sup> *Atlántida* and the Vigil family benefited from the economic policies of the Menem era. The neoliberal programme of austerity and capital restructuring, proscribed by the IMF and the World Bank and known as the Washington Consensus, was the response to hyperinflation and economic collapse. It entailed opening up the economy to foreign competition and eliminating state intervention. The State Reform Law of 1989 permitted private ownership of state assets and overturned a previous law that had prohibited print media companies and limited companies from holding

radio and television licences. As Vialé, Belinche and Tovar state, '[i]t was precisely the need to forge agreement with the media owners so that they would not question his neo-liberal policy that encouraged Carlos Menem's government to change and make more flexible the media and telecommunication regulatory framework'.<sup>13</sup>

In 1990, *Telefé* (Televisión Federal S.A.) beat five other bids to win the licence for the state-owned TV channel Channel 11. The Vigil family held 28 per cent of the shares of this group: 14 per cent via Editorial Atlántida and 14 per cent via Enfisur S.A., a company held by Constancio and Aníbal C. Vigil together with another cousin, José Vercelli.<sup>14</sup> The following year, Channel 11 boasted the highest TV audience, boosted, according to Wainberg, by the Atlántida magazines promoting Channel 11's stars, to the detriment of those whose programmes were shown on other channels.<sup>15</sup> In 1990, the *Noticias* article reported that questions were being asked about the relationship between Constancio Vigil and Menem. It also included Constancio Vigil's stock reply to accusations that the Atlántida-led bid won the licence because of their friendship, claiming that it was simply because *Telefé* had offered 50 per cent more than other bidders. The article concludes by remarking how peculiar it was that the pages of *Gente* and *Somos* had hardly mentioned Menem's separation from his wife, Zulema, even though it was making headlines across the world, and even though Atlántida's magazines earned 90 per cent of revenue in sales, as opposed to advertising.

Previous chapters have examined how Atlántida leveraged the legacy of the founder, Constancio C. Vigil, to bolster the legitimacy of *Billiken*. This self-fulfilling process contributed to the creation and maintenance of the founder's legacy, placing him, if not quite within the national imaginary, then certainly within journalistic, cultural and educational circles. The barely concealed scathing nature of the *Noticias* article was centred on the idea of a moral decline having taken place in Atlántida, and of the grandsons' failed custodianship of their grandfather's legacy. Constancio C. Vigil, the article argues, may have published a photograph of Eva Perón in *Atlántida* magazine in a magnanimous gesture after Perón lifted the publishing house's paper quota but it would be difficult to find in his conduct the same opportunism exhibited by his sons and grandsons. In February the following year, a further *Noticias* article exploring Constancio Vigil's friendship with Menem pointed out that Vigil's Mercedes was registered to Atlántida employee Juan Carlos Albarracín, who, as a disabled person, was exempt from paying import duties.<sup>16</sup> By April 1991, Constancio Vigil was being prosecuted for this and resigned from the boards of Atlántida and *Telefé*, using Atlántida's magazines to publish his apology.<sup>17</sup> In April 1997, Constancio Vigil was convicted in the case of the registration of his Mercedes and received a two-and-a-half-year suspended prison sentence, as well as a ban on engaging in business activities for two years. This was upheld by the Supreme Court of Justice in November 2000.<sup>18</sup>

The introduction of the Ley de Convertibilidad [Convertibility Plan] of 1991, which pegged the peso to the US dollar, led to an initial brief reduction in



poverty levels. Following the 'tequila effect' of the collapse of the Mexican peso in 1994, however, wages fell and unemployment and poverty rose.<sup>19</sup> This led to a reorganisation of society in which sectors within the middle classes became the 'new poor', competing for resources and opportunities with the 'structurally poor'.<sup>20</sup> *Billiken* was always made for the middle-class children whose families, imagined as white and heteronormative, could afford to buy it, and the *Billiken* of the 1990s was no exception. In 1992, the level of poverty was mentioned in *Billiken* as part of the 'Extra' page featuring news items. A vignette cites a report, published in *Clarín* newspaper, stating that there are 15 million Argentines unable to buy food, and that 65 per cent of the inhabitants of Greater Buenos Aires are living in poverty. This piece of information is presented in the context of interesting miscellanea, given the same billing as other news about yerba mate production, a Greenpeace protest in Venice, and an Argentine runner coming second in the London marathon (issue 3799, 2 November 1992). *Billiken's* readers were not imagined as the children who would be left behind in the new social structures of winners and losers under neoliberalism.

The early years of Menem's first government coincided with an international re-evaluation of the place of children within society and the concept of childhood. The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was ratified in Argentina in 1990 and incorporated into the new constitution in 1994. The 1919 law concerning Patronage of Minors was only lifted in 2005, however, so two conflicting constructs of childhood held concurrent legal validity: the old model of children subject to the state and the new one of children as active subjects with rights.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the UN Convention was incorporated into political campaigns and government publications but the economic model adopted by the Menem government did not create the conditions necessary for any of the pronouncements to be translated into action. Vergara del Solar, Llobet and Nascimiento see this as characteristic of neoliberal economies across Latin America, stating that 'the implementation of the CRC has been hampered by a confrontation between a universalistic approach to rights and states with diminished capacity to provide such rights'.<sup>22</sup>

Under the Menemist reforms, the funding of education was transferred from the central government to the provinces and the City of Buenos Aires, with the National Education Ministry reduced to a planning unit designing minimum curriculum requirements.<sup>23</sup> Public schools faced cutbacks to teachers' salaries, support programmes and, in 1997, stipends for teachers to purchase classroom materials.<sup>24</sup> Adriana Puiggrós lists some of the outcomes of the failing education system during the Menem years: increased rates of desertion, four million illiterate Argentines over the age of 14, the failure to equip students with the technological education necessary for the navigation of the contemporary world, and the increasing social pressures put on schools that detracted from their educational remit. Rather than sites of learning, schools became refectories, servicing the basic needs of the most disenfranchised sectors of society.<sup>25</sup> The focal point of teachers' demands was a white tent erected in front of Congress for a hunger strike that galvanised public support. The 'Carpa Blanca'



strike lasted for 1003 days and involved 1380 teachers.<sup>26</sup> It ended only after the passing of a law in December 1999 guaranteeing that federal spending on education would increase to 6.6 per cent of GDP.<sup>27</sup> Families who could afford to do so pulled their children out of the failing public school system and placed them in private schools. The number of private schools rose to meet demand, exacerbating existing inequalities.

The public (state) school system had been established to turn out useful future citizens for the nation and Carli argues that by understanding the system solely through its homogenising and disciplinary intent, the democratising impulse behind it, which sought to give all children the same opportunities, can sometimes be overlooked.<sup>28</sup> The 1993 Federal Law of Education maintained the homogenising principles in two of the rights that framed the law: 'La concreción de una efectiva igualdad de oportunidades y posibilidades para todos los habitantes y el rechazo a todo tipo de discriminación' [The realisation of effective equality of opportunities, and possibilities for all inhabitants and the rejection of all forms of discrimination] and 'La equidad a través de la justa distribución de los servicios educacionales a fin de lograr la mejor calidad posible y resultados equivalentes a partir de la heterogeneidad de la población' [Equity through the fair distribution of educational services in order to achieve the best possible quality and equivalent outcomes from the heterogeneity of the population].<sup>29</sup> In reality, the reconfiguration of education within the logic of the market indicated a profound shift in the concept of education, and a break from the impulses behind its initial nation-building function. Arias argues that the reform 'sought a dual model in which people with average and high incomes would be able to have high educational standards whereas the rest of the population would not get adequate training for the labor market'.<sup>30</sup> As the gulf between rich and poor widened, some of the richest sectors of society accumulated even more wealth. For the wealthy, the Menem period was characterised by conspicuous consumption, facilitated by the rise of the shopping mall. That these are called *shoppings* in Argentina highlights the aspirational value of the English language for those whose kudos was measured in trips to Miami and the enrolment of their children in private bilingual schools. The rise of exclusive gated communities, known as *countries*, gave the wealthy security whilst effectively segregating them from the rest of society, their only contact with people outside of their social milieu being with their domestic staff.<sup>31</sup> The local context within which *Billiken* was made, distributed, bought and read during the Menem years was increasingly influenced by the global context.

The rise of technology had an impact on the production and consumption of children's culture, and the market-led globalisation of children's culture was encouraged by the same neoliberal policies that had enabled Atlántida to become a major player within the new multimedia landscape. Reflecting on the 1980s onwards, García Canclini argues that the growing prominence

of the cultural industries in public life coincided with an imbalance between local production and local consumption, accelerating the globalisation of cultural products. He also identifies the concurrent processes of privatisation, transnationalisation and the retreat of the state from taking accountability for public interests in social life.<sup>32</sup> This created the conditions for the rise of what Steinberg calls 'Kinderculture', or 'corporate children's consumer culture', which 'commodifies cultural objects and turns them into things to purchase rather than objects to contemplate'.<sup>33</sup>

*Billiken's* increasing promotion of commercialised children's culture during the timeframe considered in this chapter should be seen as part of a continuum that runs from the transnational consumer culture promoted in the first decades of *Billiken* to the corporatised, globalised culture of the neoliberal 1990s, and is underpinned by *Billiken's* dual construction of children as both modern consumers and future citizens. *Billiken* was transnational from the outset: the name and the first cover illustration were taken from the US, and the early publication of translated comics and stories was part of the era's transatlantic circulation of texts. A key point in the development of *Billiken's* insertion into globalised culture came in the 1970s with the integration of founder Constancio C. Vigil's characters into international comics, peaking in 1975 with 'La historieta del año' [The comic of the year], in which Vigil's El Mono Relojero and La Hormigueta Viajera joined Batman and Robin, Superman, the Pink Panther and Dany y Pompón (originally from the Belgian comic *Boule et Bill*) in a 'super comic' adventure (issue 2917, 8 December 1975). The tradition of translated literature continued from 1986 with the publication of the 'Choose Your Own Adventure' book series, first published in the US a decade earlier. This series became the Atlántida books division's most innovative children's offering and was in print for several decades (issue 3494, 30 December 1987). *Biblioteca Billiken* was relaunched in 1999 with new editions of the same titles but under the title *Nueva* [new] *Biblioteca Billiken*. Traces of the book buying campaigns of the 1930s remained: the equation of reading with a successful future life as a productive citizen persisted until at least 2003 when Atlántida's children's books division was branded as 'Atlántida mini' and with the slogan: 'para un mañana mejor, niños que leen hoy' [for a better tomorrow, children who read today].

*Billiken* had always existed within Atlántida's wider corporate ecosystem and the parent company expanded in the 1990s, becoming, for a time, one of the most powerful media companies in the country. From the 1980s, the visibility given to popular culture external to *Billiken* increased with more cover photographs and articles on films, TV shows and bands featuring a mixture of national and international stars. In the 1990s, the magazine promoted products in which Atlántida had a direct interest, for example the *Chiquititas* TV series shown on Telefé. The free gift for the first issue of 1996 was a *Chiquititas* annual and the stars of the show regularly graced the cover (issue 3964, 1 January 1996). A spin-off *Chiquititas* monthly magazine followed, published

by Atlántida as one of 150 licensed products related to the series.<sup>34</sup> In 1996, Atlántida began publishing the comic magazine *Mickey Total*, which it licensed from Disney. These were product magazines, part of larger, brand-driven trans-media universes, with a precursor to these types of magazines from within the *Billiken* 'universe' being *Marilú* from the 1930s.

Even as *Billiken* reflected the changing consumer landscape, it was identified, and promoted as, an educational magazine, as opposed to a product magazine. Some nationally generated content was retained in *Billiken* magazine, such as the comic *Piberío* by Jorge Meijide (Meiji). *Billiken* also linked itself to two towering figures of Argentine (children's) culture: María Elena Walsh and Quino's *Mafalda*. María Elena Walsh never wrote specifically for *Billiken*, but some of her stories, plays and poems occasionally featured in the magazine, with the original publisher acknowledged. One issue in 1992 boasted a board game based on a Walsh character as a giveaway (issue 3802, 23 November 1992). Quino's *Mafalda* comic had started in 1964 as a newspaper comic strip with the title character, a four-year-old girl, offering sharp, humorous reflections on social changes and political events.<sup>35</sup> In 1997, by which time *Mafalda* was long established as an Argentine cultural icon, *Billiken* started to publish a *Mafalda* comic (from issue 4029, 31 March 1997). The only original contribution that *Billiken* made to the publication of this Argentine cultural icon was that the pages were colourised.

Alongside the promotion of popular consumer culture, *Billiken* orientated its offering around what these children would need to flourish in a globalised and technologically-driven world. The Federal Law of Education of 1993 included technology and computer science along with maths, literacy and natural sciences as the 'saberes considerados socialmente significativos' [knowledge considered to be socially significant] but most public schools lacked the facilities and equipment to translate policy into practice.<sup>36</sup> That same year, *Billiken* ran a *figuritas* competition, the first prize for which was an IBM, the second a Sega Mega Drive, and the third an English-language cassette-based course. By 1995, content on computing was provided on a regular basis offering tips, troubleshooting and answers to readers' questions, with the implicit assumption that if readers did not already have access to their own computer, their life trajectories would inevitably intersect with this technology. The content on computing was placed within the main *Billiken* magazine and, as such, did not form part of *Billiken*'s explicitly educational offering, which, from 1989 was collected in separate supplements such as 'Cuadernos de investigación' [Research notebooks, 1989], 'Sabe todo (Tu revista para el cole)' [Know-it-all. Your magazine for school, 1990–1994] and 'Los grandes temas escolares' [The big school subjects, 1996]. The cover from 1996, depicted in Figure 5.3, shows how the main *Billiken* magazine had become a container for other products, with more and more content diverted from the main magazine. In addition to the long-established



**Figure 5.3:** ‘The best school material’. *Billiken*, issue 2976, 25 March 1996. ©Editorial Atlántida. Reproduced with permission.

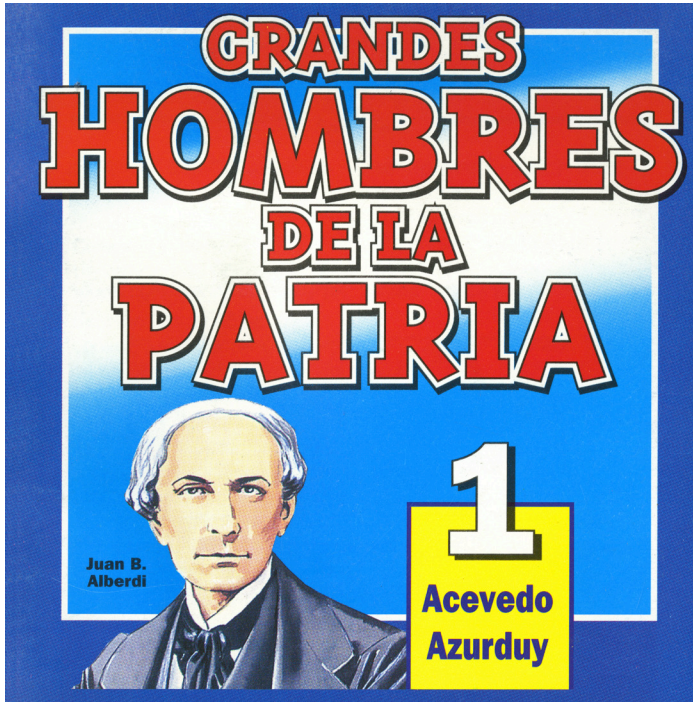
free gift, there were four supplements including school material, a games and puzzles supplement, and *Billy*, for pre-schoolers.

In 1994, with *Billiken* celebrating ‘75 años con los chicos y en la escuela’ [75 years with children and in school], some school content was integrated back into the main magazine, with pages badged as belonging to different school subjects. In addition, a collectable illustrated school encyclopaedia was launched for the start of the school year, with a ring binder and plastic dividers provided with the first instalment (issue 3868, 28 February 1994). The contents of the encyclopaedia were not provided as a supplement but as individual hole-punched pages that followed no discernible plan or structure and were labelled as ‘para ayudarte en tus tareas’ [to help you with your homework]. The encyclopaedia did not map on to the school curriculum following the units of basic content established in the Federal Law, but was adjacent to it, offering topics including Language, Maths, Famous People from Universal History, Democratic Education, Argentina, Ecology, The Universe, and Plants, Trees and Flowers. The encyclopaedia was a reworking of a strategy that *Billiken*’s editors had used before in

combining educational material with serialisation and collectability, first seen in the *fichero* of the 1960s, which followed the success of the *figuritas* collection by grouping school material onto collectable index cards. The main novelty of the 1994 initiative was that the plastic folder offered a more sophisticated solution for preservation than had been afforded by the *fichero*'s cardboard index card holder that children had to assemble themselves. Children's comments were published in *Billiken* as a way of validating this material. This was heavily mediated self-promotion but nevertheless offers concrete examples of how *Billiken*'s curriculum-adjacent reference material was being used. Silvina (12 years old) read the 'Famous People from Universal History' as if they were stories, Mercedes (nine) reported using the natural sciences material for her homework and said that her teacher was impressed, and Alejandro (10) was planning to use the ecology material for his class newspaper (issue 3897, 19 September 1994).

The 'Billikenised' version of the curriculum presented in the 1994 encyclopaedia allowed the magazine to reuse and recycle themes and materials that had been a feature of the magazine for decades, both inside and outside of the educational content. Of note is the 'Famous People from Universal History' as the latest in a long line of similar series with features on luminaries such as Galileo Galilei and Marco Polo popping up as part of a similar collection every few years. In the years preceding the encyclopaedia, the frequency of such series had increased. A 'Grandes Hombres' [Great men] comic-style series ran intermittently for a year from March 1989 and featured a wide spectrum of men from different time periods including Galileo, Magellan, Jacques Cousteau and Walt Disney. The title was modified to 'Grandes personajes' [Great characters] to accommodate Mother Teresa before reverting back to the original title (issue 3658, 19 February 1989). This was an improvement on the *Biblioteca Billiken* Green book series, in which Marie Curie had been included under 'Grandes Hombres' in 1938. In 1983, Gabriela Mistral and Argentine sculptor Lola Mora had been included as honorary men in an illustrated double spread of 'Men of Latin America' (issue 3328, 25 October 1983). The more inclusive title of the series in 1993 did not lead to more representation of leading women. The cast of characters featured in the 'Grandes personajes' series included Galileo, James Cook, Le Corbusier, Marco Polo and astronauts Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins (from issue 3825, 3 May 1993). An illustrated Marie Curie next appeared in the 1995 collectable encyclopaedia under 'Personajes de la historia universal' but had to share space with her husband who appeared in a vignette entitled 'Un gran amor' [A great love], recalling the 1964 *figuritas* album in which Valentina Tereshkova shared space with her husband and her marital status was used to contextualise her achievements (issue 3912, 2 January 1995). The trend reached its zenith in 1996 in the series 'Grandes Hombres de la Patria' [Great Men of the Homeland], which combined *Billiken*'s focus on key dates in Argentine history with the supplement trend, packaging a patriarchal nation-building discourse in a collectable format (from issue 3984, 20 May 1996).





**Figure 5.4:** ‘Great Men of the Homeland’ supplement included with *Billiken*. Issue 3984, 20 May 1996. ©Editorial Atlántida. Reproduced with permission.

In 1995, the supplement offer retained these curriculum-adjacent, serialised principles but with a narrower focus. Two supplements were offered: a Bible in a serialised children’s adaptation and an English teaching supplement. *Billiken’s* selling point was that the magazine’s role was to complement, not substitute, the education given in schools, underpinned by the ethos of *Billiken* being a bridge between school and home, and one of the key actors in a rounded, integrated education:

Comienza un año escolar con sueños, proyectos y desafíos. En cada etapa nueva de la vida es fundamental contar con el respaldo de quienes nos quieren: los papás, los abuelos, los compañeros, los maestros... ¡y *Billiken*! (issue 3922, 13 March 1995).

[A school year begins with dreams, projects and challenges. In every new stage of life it is essential to have the support of those who love us: parents, grandparents, classmates, teachers... and *Billiken*!]

Neither supplement represented new content for *Billiken* but they were spotlighted together for the first time, collectively identified as: 'nuevos e importantes materiales para hacer más eficaz y completo el apoyo que brinda a todos los chicos en la escuela' [new and important materials to make the support [*Billiken*] provides to all schoolchildren more effective and comprehensive] (issue 3920, 27 February 1995). The following week, a self-congratulatory article reflected on the success of the supplements and underscored their value: 'Sabemos que La Biblia es una obra indispensable para la formación de todas las personas ... El inglés es, sin duda, una herramienta fundamental para desenvolverse en el mundo de hoy' [We know that the Bible is an essential work for the formation of all people ... English is, without a doubt, a fundamental tool for getting by in today's world] (issue 3922, 13 March 1995).

*Billiken*'s first English teaching content had started in 1960 in the context of Argentina's opening up to the world under President Frondizi (from issue 2108, 6 June). Atlántida had previously published religious material for children, from Constancio C. Vigil's *Las enseñanzas de Jesús*, first published in 1944, to *La Biblia contada a los niños*, a children's adaptation of the Bible by Biblioteca *Billiken* regular Angela Simonini de Fuentes, which was on its thirteenth edition by 1995. Within *Billiken*, Christmas and Easter generally featured religious



**Figure 5.5:** Left: The free Bible and English courses announced on the cover of *Billiken*, issue 3921, 6 March 1995. Right: The initiatives are proclaimed 'a great success'. *Billiken*, issue 3922, 13 March 1995.

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content. This departure from the secular founding principles of public schooling stemming from Law 1420 of 1884 highlighted the decision for *Billiken* to not fully integrate with the school curriculum. The 1995 serialised Bible was by far the most sustained religious content linked to *Billiken* and reflected changes in the law. The Catholic Church had played a prominent lobbying role at the time of the Pedagogical Congress and, although the 1993 Federal Law of Education did not go as far as this contingent had hoped, it enabled Catholic perspectives to be integrated into schools. According to Torres, in his analysis of a publication edited by the council of Catholic Education, the key factor was the inclusion of the word 'integral' in the definition of the formation offered by the education system included in Article 6 of the Federal Law. As Torres explains, this implied: 'en una lectura amplia, la inserción de la dimensión religiosa –explicitada también en la ley– como elemento antropológico constitutivo de los sujetos de formación' [in a broad reading, the insertion of the religious dimension—also explained in the law—as a constitutive anthropological element of the subjects of education].<sup>37</sup>

The inclusion of the Bible supplement showed that *Billiken* was still engaging with, and responding to, changes in education policy even though the formal links with teachers and policy had long been discontinued. This engagement was, of course, in alignment with the Catholic orientation of *Billiken's* owners and, in November 1995, *Billiken* proudly announced that the magazine had been awarded a prize by the Christian Family Movement for the publication of the Bible, 'para reconocer y testimoniar a hombres, mujeres e instituciones que trabajan a diario por la unión de los argentinos' [to recognise and bear witness to the men, women and institutions that work daily for the unity of Argentines] (issue 3958, 20 November 1995). The 1995 supplements offer a good illustration of the duality that had always been at the heart of *Billiken*—a desire to embrace the future as long as it was underpinned by traditional, conservative values.

The promotional images for the supplements, seen in Figure 5.5, showed a nuclear family, represented through both photographs and illustrations, with parents fully engaged in their children's learning and making use of this valuable educational material at home. More representations of family life could be found, as ever, in *Billiken* in illustrated scenes labelled as pertaining to the school curriculum. Now badged under Social Sciences, Miguel Ángel Milanese's scenes from 1989 showed some updating of the gender assigned roles within the family from previous decades. In 1989, the father and son tackle the car washing and lawnmowing whilst the mother and daughter tend to the flowers. The mother, then seen arranging flowers, is a part-time teacher and sometimes writes poems. We are not given the occupation of the father, the main breadwinner who works outside of the house all week—reminiscent of the 'Papá sale' literacy page of 1955—but, whereas in the 1970s such a father would have been shown reading the paper whilst the mother cooks, this

father cooks on Saturdays. He does, however, make a mess in the kitchen (issue 3609, 13 March 1989). In the equivalent piece published the following year, both parents work outside of the home during the week. On weekends, the father likes to cook and busy himself with electrical jobs, and the mother helps the children with their homework (issue 3664, 2 April 1990). In 1995, Milanese again shows a family from the point of view of the jobs assigned to each family member. The father makes breakfast before he goes to work so that the mother can tend to the new baby. The siblings get along, with the girl helping her brother with his maths homework, taking on the role of little teacher. In return, he helps to fix her bicycle as 'de esas cosas no entiende' [she doesn't understand these things]. The mother's work inside the house is emphasised, with the children only realising how much she did when she was ill for a few days ('La familia: entre todos nos ayudamos' [The family: we all help each other], issue 3921, 6 March 1995).

Milanese's Social Sciences family page of 1993 was published for Mother's Day and showed two alternative models of motherhood: 'No es Batichica ni la Mujer Maravilla, pero hay que ser flor de heroína para ser mamá. Algunas son como la de Leandro, otras como la de Noelia. Y la tuya ¿cómo es?' [She's no Batgirl or Wonder Woman, but you have to be a heroine to be a mum. Some of them are like Leandro's, others like Noelia's. And yours, what's she like?]. Leandro's mother is a traditional housewife and Noelia's is in the vein of the mother from 1979 who works inside and outside of the house. This mother works as a secretary, takes the children to school, does the shopping, and cooks whilst the father sets the table. Although the page's caption presents the two versions neutrally, a criticism of the working mother can be inferred through a comparison of the final frames. Leandro's mother reads the children a bedtime story, which, as *Billiken* has spent years emphasising the value of books and reading and parents' involvement in their children's development, we can understand as a positive action. In Noelia's house there is no reading, however. The family watches television in the evenings and her mother once even fell asleep in front of the TV. The implication is that the demands of modern working motherhood are perhaps proving too much (Figure 5.6).

Mother's Day affords an annual opportunity for depictions of mothers who are consistently shown as affectionate, patient, hard-working and devoted to their families. The level of activity of mothers beyond the family varies. In 1991, an 'Identikit of a modern mother' shows a woman outside, on the go, not at home cooking or having a cup of tea brought to her on Mother's Day. The identikit format, the same one that had got *Billiken* into trouble with teachers in 1976, once again risks offence. The mother is so busy dashing around on the school run, paying the bills, and doing household chores that she is distracted and careless. She has watered a plastic plant, forgot to put the shopping away and has the car keys that Dad has been looking for in her pocket. Being a 'modern mother' here means the mother taking time for herself. Accoutrements such as the *Para Ti* magazine under her arm, the novel she has been trying to





Figure 5.6: Different models of motherhood for Mother's Day. *Billiken*, issue 3848, 11 October 1993. ©Editorial Atlántida. Reproduced with permission.



finish for six months, and the chunky mobile phone she uses to chat with her friend are implicit contributing factors to her lack of focus on the running of the family and household (issue 3744, 14 October 1991). By 2005, the 'madre' [mother] has been replaced by the more informal 'mamá'. This modern mum has got it together to become the epitome of a woman who has it all. In this new identikit she is super-fit, capable and organised. She is on the move, juggling the demands of work and family, whilst dressed in a gym kit. Her identity as a mother is central to her accomplishments: she is always on the phone organising work issues, pyjama parties, her social life with her friends, and calling her children to tell them she misses them. In her overflowing handbag are photographs of her children to proudly show to other people. She is defined by the love she puts into everything she does for her children, as depicted by a halo of floating hearts all illustrated to represent these doting actions. A car key dangling from one heart symbolises her ferrying her children around to birthday parties. There is a heart with a chef's hat for when she cooks for her children, and one with a maid's frilly apron to represent her lovingly cleaning and tidying her children's bedrooms (issue 4473, 21 October 2005). There is no visual representation of her work outside of the home in this identikit and work appears as a modern lifestyle accessory that is afforded less priority than her gym membership.



**Figure 5.7:** An image of traditional motherhood for Mother's Day. *Billiken*, issue 4005, 14 October 1996. ©Editorial Atlántida. Reproduced with permission.



Figure 5.8: 'Identikit of a modern mother'. *Billiken*, issue 3744, 14 October 1991. ©Editorial Atlántida. Reproduced with permission.



## IDENTIKIT DE UNA MAMÁ MODERNA

Trabaja, te cuida, te ayuda con la tarea, va al gimnasio, sale con amigas.  
Así son las madres de ahora...



**Figure 5.9:** 'Identikit of a modern mum'. *Billiken*, issue 4473, 21 October 2005. ©Editorial Atlántida. Reproduced with permission.

### From the end of the Vigil era to the Televisa years

Motherhood may have modernised but it was still, according to *Billiken*, the ideal destiny of young girls. The magazine's long-standing discourse around children's future potential and the default male in the imagery of the future citizen was revived from the time of Aníbal C. Vigil's death in 1994. The grandson of Constancio C. Vigil, son of Aníbal and cousin of Constancio, Aníbal had founded *Gente* magazine in 1965 and had been the executive director of *Gente*, *Para Ti* and *Billiken* during the dictatorship. By the time of his death, he had added director of *Telefé* to his portfolio. The familiar discourse of the father/founder, the institutional narrative of *Billiken*'s *raison d'être* and approach to children, is preserved in the article entitled 'Adiós a un señor que te quiso mucho' [Goodbye to a gentleman who loved you very much]. Recalling the 1989 Menem article, Aníbal's love for children and his love of sport were evoked to generate proximity to the readers. Aníbal was presented as the heir to the founder:

*Billiken* fue fundada hace muchísimos años por su abuelo, y Aníbal llevó adelante los buenos propósitos que convirtieron a la revista en tu compañera inseparable dentro y fuera de la escuela. Los dos creían con mucha firmeza que la mente y el espíritu de un chico debían crecer tanto como su cuerpo, que sólo el saber y la educación forman hombres de bien, y que hay que pasar por este mundo con bondad, respeto por el prójimo, sentido de justicia y amor por todo lo que nos rodea: los animales, las plantas, el agua, el aire (issue 3884, 20 June 1994).

[*Billiken* was founded many, many years ago by his grandfather, and Aníbal carried on his good intentions that turned the magazine into your inseparable companion inside and outside of school. They both firmly believed that a child's mind and spirit should grow as much as his body, that only knowledge and education can form good men, and that we must go through this world with kindness, respect for others, a sense of justice and love for everything that surrounds us: animals, plants, water, air.]

Pablo Colazo had been the operational director of *Billiken* for some time but, in the wake of Aníbal's death, took on more visibility. Colazo actively engaged in the preservation of *Billiken*'s foundational imprints when opening and closing his 1994 anniversary message, using founder Constancio C. Vigil's message from 1944 in which *Billiken*'s spiritual credentials are elevated and the 'vile pursuit of making money' rejected. *Billiken*, Colazo writes, may be 75 but it is still young, a childhood companion of readers as it had been for their parents and grandparents. The maintenance of the *Billiken* legacy is projected into the future: 'Nuestro mayor deseo es que cada uno de los chicos que nos leen [*sic*]

se convierta en un hombre de bien; y que cuando crezcan y sean padres, aquel *Billiken* que fue amigo de su infancia lo sea también de sus hijos' [Our greatest wish is that each one of the children who read us becomes a good man; and that when they grow up and become parents, the *Billiken* that was their childhood friend will also be their children's friend] (issue 3907, 28 November 1994). In 1997, Colazo emphasised continuity in *Billiken*'s educational credentials when promoting an English course, now in the 'audio-visual' format of a cassette and book. He wrote that *Billiken*'s dedication to providing such material has been a feature of the magazine's philosophy since 1919: 'De esa línea recta, constante, permanente, no nos hemos apartado jamás' [We have never deviated from this straight, constant, permanent line] (issue 4026, 10 March 1997).

The duality in the construction of children was also retained in these promotional discourses, with children evoked both as future citizens and agentic, active co-creators of meaning. Marketing materials for the English course read: 'Lo mejor es aprender inglés de chicos para no tener problemas cuando seamos grandes' [It is best to learn English as children to avoid problems when we grow up] (issue 4025, 3 March 1997). A collectable book on Argentina features stickers so that children can be 'partícipes directos y activos del proyecto' [direct and active participants in the project]. This recalls children's active participation in making and remaking the *patria* in the cardboard models of key historical sites, but it is the first time that this interaction with the materiality of the magazine and its associated products is explicitly linked to the formation of patriotic sentiments. The presentation of this product also encourages identification of the nation with *Billiken* whilst employing a discourse reminiscent of founder Constancio C. Vigil:

Este libro fue pensado con el corazón. Con el deseo de que padres e hijos, maestros y alumnos lo disfruten juntos, en esa corriente de afecto que genera el interés compartido. Para amar más lo que conocemos, y conocer mejor lo que amamos (issue 4036, 16 May 1997).

[This book was written from the heart. With the desire that parents and children, teachers and students enjoy it together, in that current of affection that generates shared interest. To better love what we know, and to know better what we love.]

In these messages, Colazo positioned himself in his role as director of *Billiken*, as the first non-sanguineous heir to Constancio C. Vigil, and as the custodian of the legacy. Colazo's custodianship came to an end less than a year after this message was published, when he left *Billiken* in February 1998.

The event that signalled the beginning of the end for *Billiken* as a print magazine was the launch of rival magazine *Genios* on 2 March 1998, published by Clarín and directed by Pablo Colazo. Atlántida launched a plagiarism suit against Clarín alleging that *Genios* was a copy of 'Mega', an editorial project



under development by the *Billiken* team, and that Colazo, along with other former *Billiken* employees, had taken the idea to Clarín. In an interview given shortly after his house had been vandalised and graffitied with 'traitor', 'thief' and 'give back what you took', Colazo insisted there had been no wrongdoing and stated that the first issue of *Genios* had sold out, with a print run of 400,000.<sup>38</sup> It was not until 2008 that Clarín was found guilty of unfair competition and ordered to pay Atlántida nearly 30 million pesos. Since launching with the slogan 'La revista de los niños', *Billiken* had passed through several others including 'Todo lo que te piden en la escuela', 'Una aventura apasionante', 'Siempre con vos' and 'Tan inteligente como vos' [Everything they ask you for in school, An exciting adventure, Always with you, As intelligent as you are]. *Genios*'s slogan was simply, 'La revista para los chicos de hoy' [The magazine for the children of today], implying that alternatives such as *Billiken* and *Anteojito* were now old-fashioned. *Billiken* had, in fact, been modernising under Colazo's leadership and his final appearance in the staff page as director, on 6 March, heralded the back-to-school offer of an interactive encyclopaedia. The collectable offering was comprised of a paper supplement ('Supercole') and a floppy disk with educational material ('Superclick'). The first disk contained printable *figuritas* ready for use in school exercise books in an example of using tradition as a source of innovation (issue 4078, 6 March 1998). *Genios* was so damaging to its rival's market share, not only because of its novelty but also because of its superior distribution model. It was sold as an optional add-on to the Monday issue of *Clarín* newspaper, whereas *Billiken* still relied on sales from news kiosks.

In response to the arrival of *Genios*, those in charge of *Billiken* doubled down on the legitimising discourse of longevity—much as their predecessors had done after the arrival of *Anteojito*—but with particular emphasis on the links to education. This was competitively relevant because *Genios* still followed the pattern, established by *Billiken* and later followed by *Anteojito*, of aligning itself to the school year. *Genios* was an educational, or edutainment, magazine, not a product magazine like the ones linked to specific TV shows or offering purely entertainment content. From the end of July 1998 until the end of the year, *Billiken* displayed its educational credentials in a sticker on the cover: 'Declarada de interés educativo por el Ministerio de Cultura y Educación' [Declared of educational interest by the Ministry of Culture and Education] (issue 4100, 31 July 1998). More accolades came in the year of *Billiken*'s eightieth anniversary, including a declaration of interest from the National Senate and the Presidential Secretariat of Culture, as well as recognition from the City and Province of Buenos Aires. These were proudly listed in the anniversary edition of the magazine, although the main commemorative publication was available to purchase in a stand-alone book.<sup>39</sup>

*Billiken* and *Anteojito*'s sales followed annual patterns with issues relating to key patriotic dates, with the issue closest to 25 May, the Day of the May

Revolution, regularly providing the peak. The success of the launch issue in March, for the start of the school year, would generally predict the success of the magazine for the rest of the year, hence the serialisation of supplements and collections. With a new competitor on the scene, *Billiken* invested heavily in its 1999 launch package and offered what was billed as the best school material ever given away by a magazine. This comprised a school rucksack, a collectable school encyclopaedia and a *Biblioteca Billiken* 'for the family' book collection, with one book provided every week. The slogan of the package was: 'Todo el programa escolar desarrollado en forma didáctica para los chicos del futuro' [The entire school curriculum developed in a didactic way for the children of the future]. The back-to-school package was offered in conjunction with Telefónica, which by then was in business with Atlántida. In March 1998 Atlántida had sold 60 per cent of its shares, retaining 40 per cent of the new entity AtCo (Atlántida Comunicación) together with CEI Citicorp Holdings (30 per cent) and Telefónica Internacional (30 per cent).<sup>40</sup> The resulting media conglomerate was rivalled only by Grupo Clarín and held several radio stations and TV channels, the cable television transmitter Cablevisión, one landline, one mobile telephone company and two internet providers.<sup>41</sup> The group also held the Editorial Atlántida magazines, with the notable exception of *El Gráfico*, which passed to Carlos Ávila's Torneos y Competencias. In December 1999, it was reported that the majority of AtCo was to be sold to a division of the Spanish telecommunications giant Telefónica, with the Vigil family retaining Editorial Atlántida.<sup>42</sup>

*Billiken*'s 1999 back-to-school package did win back some readers, with the average sales per issue in 1998 at 75,745, rising to 134,511 in 1999. The slogan of the collectable encyclopaedia was '100 questions for the children of 2000'. The generation of 2000, evoked by Perón and later by the civic-military dictatorship, had finally arrived, but their magazine of choice was no longer *Billiken*. In the year 2000, sales fell to 69,770 and never recovered, declining steadily to fewer than 30,000 from 2015. *Genios* became Argentina's bestselling children's magazine, pushing *Billiken* into third place behind *Anteojito*. It was, however, *Anteojito* that failed to survive the combination of the 2001 crisis and the arrival of *Genios*, closing in December 2001 after 37 years. News articles reporting on *Anteojito*'s closure quoted figures from October 2001 for the weekly average of copies sold, provided by the Argentine Circulation Verification Institute: *Genios* 72,673, *Anteojito* 33,300 and *Billiken* 26,757.<sup>43</sup>

The impact of *Genios* on *Billiken* was seen in a modest attempt to update its visuality, particularly through the use of montages of photographs and illustrations on the cover. The return of El Mono Relojero as cover star, integrated into the patriotic anniversaries and the cycle of the school year in 2001 and 2002, can also be understood as a response to the arrival of a new competitor, in that it repeated one of the strategies employed following the launch of *Anteojito*. The first time El Mono Relojero had been adapted for the magazine, in the early 1970s, was an indication of an integration approach to innovation, classified by Erdogan, Rondi and De Massis as 'reinterpreting traditional



**Figure 5.10:** El Mono Relojero returns as cover star. *Billiken*, issue 4246, 7 May 2001. ©Editorial Atlántida. Reproduced with permission.

products and production through innovation’ and one of four strategies for managing the tradition/innovation paradox which these authors plot onto a matrix.<sup>44</sup> In 2001, the return of El Mono Relojero no longer counted as innovative and within the aforementioned matrix would be a ‘revival’ of an existing tradition.

Atlántida was committed to investing in content for children and adolescents, and innovation was still taking place, but in other products in addition to *Billiken* such as the computing magazine *Billiken Compu* launched for the eightieth anniversary. Other new spin-off magazines were aimed at widening the age range of targetable consumers beyond *Billiken*’s primary school readership. *Para Teens*, under the wing of *Para Ti*, was for teenage girls to give them continuity of service when they were too old for *Billiken* and too young for *Para Ti*. The *Billy* supplement, featuring activities for younger readers, was discontinued and *La Valijita*, a separate magazine for pre-schoolers, launched in 2004. Meaning ‘little suitcase’ and shaped with a handle, this concept explicitly leaned into the idea of the magazine itself becoming a container for other products. Following Erdogan, Rondi and De Massis’s tradition–innovation matrix, instead of adopting an integration approach to innovation, Atlántida shifted to a ‘segregation’ approach when it came to *Billiken*. The ultimate expression of this came in 2000 when *Billiken*’s website was launched. This was managed

by the same external provider also responsible for the rest of Atlántida's digital provision, with no editorial oversight from the magazine itself and no engagement between the two entities.<sup>45</sup>

Atlántida publicly adopted a narrative of defiant optimism about *Billiken* in the context of the ongoing legal battle with Clarín, even as *Genios* eroded its readership. A *Gente* article from 2005 states that *Billiken* had gained a 10-point market share over *Genios* the previous year, and, even though *Billiken*'s average weekly sales had dropped 47 per cent from 1997 to 56,000, this was not as great as *Genios*'s drop from a weekly average of 213,648 to 82,000 over the same time period.<sup>46</sup> The reduction in paid circulation across both magazines was accounted for by the increased options for children's leisure time, through TV, film and the internet. As educational (or 'edutainment') magazines as opposed to product ones, *Billiken* and *Genios* shared the problem that educational material for the completion of homework tasks could increasingly be sourced, on demand, from the internet. The *figuritas*, which had sustained *Billiken* for so long and helped to embed itself in the national consciousness, were obsolete when pictures to illustrate homework could be downloaded from the internet and printed out. Product spin-off *figuritas* or sticker albums were still relevant and, in the 2000s, the stars of these albums included characters like the Chicas Superpoderosas (the Powerpuff Girls), promoted in *Billiken* as part of the magazine's partnership with Cartoon Network (issue 4506, 16 June 2006). This partnership led to developments in content such as the elaboration of comics featuring Cartoon Network characters.

The proportion of international, as opposed to local, cultural production grew with covers and articles related to international film franchises including *The Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter*, and bands such as Green Day vying for space with Cartoon Network covers. Reflecting García Canclini's observed 'asymmetry' of local versus international cultural production in the globalised context, the landscape of national children's culture was narrowing with investment focussed on the creation of products based on existing characters, rather than the development of new ones. *Billiken* bore witness to that as it featured key examples on the cover, such as García Ferré's 1999 animated film *Manuelita*, based on the song of the same name by María Elena Walsh, and the 2004 *Patoruzito* animated film. The latter was based on the character from the comics from Dante Quinterro's *Patoruzito* magazine, which ran from 1945 to 1977.<sup>47</sup> Other cover stars included the Argentine girl band Bandana, a homegrown product stemming from a globalised format. In 2001 Bandana had won the local version of the *Popstars* TV talent show that had originated in Australia and was made locally by the production company in which Constancio Vigil held a majority share.<sup>48</sup> Series two of *Popstars* was aired on Telefé, further highlighting the Vigils' prominence in the reduced circle of production and distribution of national content. Formats such as *Popstars* could be successfully rolled out worldwide because of the homogenising of global culture. Writing around this time, García Canclini states:

Sobre todo las generaciones jóvenes guían sus prácticas culturales de acuerdo con información y estilos homogeneizados, captables por los receptores de diversas sociedades con independencia de sus concepciones políticas, religiosas o nacionales. Los consumidores de diferentes clases sociales son capaces de leer las citas de un imaginario multilocalizado que la televisión y la publicidad agrupan: los ídolos del cine *hollywoodense* y de la música, pop, los diseños de pintores famosos, los héroes deportivos y los políticos de varios países componen un repertorio de signos en constante disponibilidad.<sup>49</sup>

[The younger generations in particular guide their cultural practices according to homogenised information and styles, which can be picked up by receivers in different societies regardless of their political, religious or national conceptions. Consumers from different social classes are able to read quotations from a multi-localised imaginary that television and advertising bring together: Hollywood film and pop music idols, the designs of famous painters, sporting heroes and politicians from various countries make up a constantly available repertoire of signs.]

The years 2005 and 2006 saw a peak in *Billiken's* promotion of homogenised global consumer culture to the extent that even the covers corresponding to key dates in the school calendar did not take the lead from those dates. In 2005, the issues that would normally lead with back-to-school featured Disney actress Hillary Duff and Argentine singer Diego Torres (issues 4441, 11 March, and 4442, 19 March). The issue corresponding to the May Revolution had Argentine rock band Airbag on the cover, with patriotic material confined to the *Billy* supplement (issue 4451, 20 May 2005). In 2006, supplements on the May Revolution were issued over three weeks, but the main magazine's cover images were devoted to *Chiquititas*, *The March of the Penguins* and Airbag (issues 4500, 5 May to 4502, 19 May). Also in 2006, with supplements on Independence Day now provided in the run-up to the date itself, allowing teachers and children to prepare material in advance, the corresponding covers featuring Pixar's *Cars* and *Patoruzito 2* (issues 4507, 23 June and 4508, 30 June). The cover of the issue closest to Independence Day did not mention it and led with the *Ratón Perez* animated film, a co-production between Spain and Argentina distributed by Disney, instead of an image of the Casa de Tucumán (issue 4509, 7 July 2006). For the Day of the Teacher, Sarmiento was transplanted first by Messi and subsequently by *High School Musical* (issues 4517, 1 September 2006, and 4518, 9 September 2006). The issue around 17 November had normally led with *Billiken's* anniversary, featuring variations on an image of a cake with candles on the cover; in 2005 the cover image of the corresponding issue was Daniel Radcliffe in character as Harry Potter (issue 4477, 18 November 2005). The following year, the magazine's anniversary was not even mentioned on the cover, which featured Zac Efron (issue 4528, 17 November 2006).



In 2006, Judith Gociol interviewed Mirta Varela and Paula Guitelman for an article on *Billiken*. Even whilst sustaining their criticisms of *Billiken*, both appeared to lament somewhat the changes observed in the magazine at that time. For Guitelman, *Billiken* had modernised graphically but had become impoverished in terms of content. Varela remarked on the disappearance of the moral drivers that had been present in *Billiken* previously and, highlighting Atlántida's multimedia presence, suggested that perhaps these values had been replaced by the morality of consumerism.<sup>50</sup> At the time at which the Vigil family divested themselves of Editorial Atlántida, *Billiken* was the furthest it had ever strayed from its foundational imprint.

### From the Televisa years to the centenary

Editorial Atlántida was sold to the Mexican media giant Televisa in 2007 for a reported 80 million US dollars.<sup>51</sup> In 2008, Atlántida's new management commissioned an extensive market research study to inform the strategy for the future direction for *Billiken*. This point in this history of *Billiken* magazine marks a methodological and affective shift in this book's approach: I only have access to this market study because of my working relationship with *Billiken*, which exists in tandem with my role as academic researcher. The recommendations in the market study led to a change in personnel in *Billiken* and, within this, the appointment, initially as art director, of Euhén Matarozzo, my principal contact and colleague at Atlántida. My understanding of *Billiken* from 2008 onwards has been informed by conversations with him, and, over the years, with other current and former employees of the organisation, in addition to Atlántida's current directors. This study of *Billiken* has always sought to keep the archive at the centre, maintaining the focus on textual analysis, rather than undertaking an ethnographic approach by interviewing the creators or readers of *Billiken*. The informal conversations about the transition to Televisa and beyond were not undertaken for the purposes of writing this book. Rather, they came about over the course of several years of co-created activity regarding the creation of the future direction for *Billiken* around and beyond the time of its centenary: a parallel stream of activity that I sustained alongside the historical archival research. This is the point in the narrative at which the two streams of activity converge, and at which my analysis of the history of *Billiken* is more directly informed by my personal involvement, even though my first visit to the archives did not take place until 2012 and I did not begin working with *Billiken* until 2018.

The 2008 market study's focus on the comparison with *Genios* is telling, not just because this magazine had eaten into *Billiken*'s market share to become the most successful of the school-orientated, as opposed to the product-based, children's magazines but because *Billiken* was still very much focussed on print as the main support for any future reconfiguration of the brand. Whilst

the study revealed that teachers were still recommending the purchase of a school-orientated magazine for use in class, they no longer specified *Billiken*. Interviews with teachers also revealed the growing obsolescence of school-orientated magazines, partly because of the access to material offered by the internet, but also because of the repetition of texts, themes and images year after year, which discouraged regular purchasing. The study found that schools were consulting archives of magazines from previous years, with even some old copies of *Antejito* still in use. As children themselves did not show any desire to buy the school-orientated magazines, preferring product magazines, the purchase decision-making rested with parents. Whether parents preferred *Billiken* or *Genios* depended on the values and associations they ascribed to each magazine. *Genios* was seen as the more modern, aspirational alternative that would more adequately prepare children for the future that awaited them. On the negative side, it was more consumer-orientated, with much more advertising than *Billiken*. Tradition was a major driver behind the purchase of *Billiken*. *Billiken* was positively appraised as a link to parents' own childhood memories, offering a way of reconnecting children to print culture, as an alternative to screens, and to connect childhood experiences across generations. The flip side of the nostalgia was that *Billiken* was perceived as old-fashioned: it had not kept up with the times and did not appeal to the children of the day.

Interviewees and focus group participants were asked how *Billiken* and *Genios* would be personified. The synthesis of responses underlines the alignment of tradition with being old-fashioned. If *Billiken* were a person it would be *Genios*'s grandfather, between 60 and 80 years old, or a 50-year-old man in a suit and tie. He would be a teacher, a public sector employee or a historian with a large library of books. Some respondents identified *Billiken* as an older female teacher, like the ones they had known in their childhoods. *Genios* was a female teacher, anywhere between 26 and 45 years old, or an inexperienced primary school teacher fresh out of college. Other associations for *Genios* were listed as: Bill Gates; a young, intelligent woman; Harry Potter at 28; and a 30-year-old graphic designer. This final association fitted with the most concrete proposals of the study, which outlined how *Billiken*'s graphic identity compared unfavourably to that of *Genios* and could be improved. The report places pages of the magazines side by side to illustrate respondents' comments. *Billiken*'s texts were found to be too extensive, with few resources employed to break up the text and make the reading experience more amenable. Some respondents stated that images in *Billiken* were seen as purely for illustrative purposes, whereas images in *Genios* were integrated into the text and created meaning in and of themselves. The graphics in *Billiken* were categorised as traditional with muted colours, as opposed to *Genios*'s contrasting colours and 'disruptive' typographical resources. Overall, *Billiken*'s visual presentation was found to be overly structured and undynamic. Parents appreciated *Genios*'s appropriation and improvement of content traditionally associated with *Billiken*, expressing

positive surprise that *Genios* also offered *figuritas* but noting: 'Estas figus son menos anticuadas, se renovaron' [These *figus* are less old-fashioned, they've been renewed].

The report's final recommendations as strategies for revitalising the brand were rather modest. In nearly 300 slides, only two mention the idea of moving beyond print, of adopting a multiplatform approach, and integrating social media, interactivity and content on different platforms. All of this activity was proposed in service of the print magazine, however, as opposed to advocating for a transmedia product structure. The main focus of the recommendations was concerned with how to overcome the competition from *Genios*. As *Genios* was thought of as more accessible, and aimed at a younger audience, the report identified a risk of taking younger audiences away from *Billiken*. The proposal was for *Billiken* to stay largely as it was, not risking its cultural capital by moving too far away from its identity, and to add another magazine to the *Billiken* family, *Billiken Kids*, which would bridge the gap between *La Valijita* and *Billiken*. This new magazine never materialised but steps were taken to update *Billiken*'s graphic identity, following the suggested formula of 'back to basics': 'No se trata de volver al pasado, sino de resignificar el futuro' [It's not about going back to the past, but about resignifying the future]. The new team brought in from elsewhere in the publishing house to deliver this was Gonzalo Abascal, as director, and Euhén Matarozzo, as art director. The latter, a graphic design graduate with experience working in magazines for children and young people, led the graphic transformation and took over as director two years later. *Billiken*'s new visual identity was represented by a new logo, which was meant to evoke the digital world even as the product was still resolutely tied to paper. The 'e' in *Billiken* was changed to a symbol that evoked the at sign (@), an emoji dotted the 'i', and the cloud shape was inspired by the logo for Skype, still at the vanguard of communications technology in 2009. The visual identity of the magazine was also updated with images taking a more prominent role.

The covers from 2009 onwards showed *Billiken*'s return to following the cycle of the school year. Illustrator Mauro Serafini was brought on board to implement the new concepts for the covers which portrayed the nation's illustrious men in new contexts designed to appeal to children. Sarmiento, with a magic wand and school house scarf, was reimagined as belonging to *Harry Potter*, and San Martín was drawn in a Superman pose, which recalled Alberto De Piero's Maradona cover of 1986 (issue 3471, 22 July). Belgrano was shown graffitiing the design for the flag on a wall and the Primera Junta who led the May Revolution were grouped behind an *escarapela* drawn to resemble Captain America's shield (Figure 5.11). This reimagining, and updating, of the *próceres* sought to give them renewed relevance to children.

A similar attempt at reimagining Argentina's illustrious men had previously taken place in *Humi*, the children's magazine created by the same publisher as the satirical magazine *Humor* and launched in August 1982. Even in the context

of the opening up of society during the return to democracy, *Humi*'s irreverent take on the *próceres* and patriotic events through the use of humour and caricature proved beyond the pale and the magazine closed after only two years.<sup>52</sup> Later, this approach did find wider societal acceptance. At the same time as *Billiken* was breathing new life into the *próceres*, as a way of breathing new life into itself, Pakapaka, the television channel operated by the Ministry of Education, was taking this further and in a more innovative way. In 2010, the year after *Billiken* started to renew its approach to its covers, the TV programme *Zamba* was launched on Canal Encuentro. The eponymous hero, a time-travelling schoolboy from Formosa in north-east Argentina, met Argentina's historical figures over several series of episodes. In *Zamba*, the *próceres* were humanised, turned from portraits and statues into living educational guides who patiently answered the schoolboy's many questions. The protagonist himself provided an important narrative link that gave coherence to the series of episodes. As the face of the brand, and an original child character with whom child viewers could identify, *Zamba* was a modern version of the Antejito character.<sup>53</sup>

The state investment in *Zamba* reaffirmed the continuing importance given to teaching Argentine children about the history of their country, not just in schools, but through cultural endeavours which extended beyond the classroom. Whilst the *Zamba* series was innovative in its appealing audio-visual format, in some ways *Zamba* can be seen as a continuation of Ricardo Rojas's ideas about incorporating history into children's daily lived experiences through visits to museums and the contemplation of monuments; through to *Billiken*'s early initiatives, such as historical episodes in comic strip format, designed to make the learning of history more accessible, offering a complement to more text-based school reading books; and to *Humi*'s irreverent representations of illustrious men. What differed in *Zamba*, however, was the narrative of history presented. *Zamba* was one of a suite of initiatives around the bicentenary of independence that can be characterised as historically revisionist, led by a government that promoted Argentina's claim to the Malvinas Islands with renewed vigour in the lead-up to the thirtieth anniversary of the war.<sup>54</sup> The Museum of the Bicentenary, on the site of the old customs building behind the Casa Rosada and inaugurated by President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in 2011, presented a revisionist version of Argentine history in which a political line of succession could be drawn from Rosas to Perón to Néstor Kirchner, president from 2003 to 2007 and late husband of Cristina Fernández. The museum's gift shop sold a set of Russian dolls in the descending order of Perón, Evita, Héctor Cámpora (the president who brought Perón back from exile), Néstor and Cristina.

In Fernández de Kirchner's speech on 9 July 2008, her first Independence Day speech as president, she promoted a re-evaluation of national history:

A mí me gusta recordar la historia pero no tal vez la que siempre nos contaron, la historia del *Billiken*; a mí me gusta otra historia, la historia

de los hombres y mujeres de carne y hueso, porque nuestros próceres fueron hombres y mujeres de carne y hueso que tuvieron que enfrentar luchas y oposiciones internas y fuerzas externas terribles que no querían que se declarara la independencia de las Provincias Unidas del Río de la Plata. Esa es la verdadera historia.<sup>55</sup>

[I like to remember history, but perhaps not the history we have always been told, the history of *Billiken*; I like another history, the history of men and women of flesh and blood, because our heroes were men and women of flesh and blood who had to face internal struggles and opposition and terrible external forces that did not want the independence of the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata to be declared. That is the true history.]

In a later speech, Fernández de Kirchner reiterated: 'hay que contar la historia no solamente de *Billiken*, hay que contar la historia como pasó' [We have to tell, not just the history according to *Billiken*, but the history as it happened].<sup>56</sup> Camila Perochena explains the discursive power behind Fernández de Kirchner's use of the phrase 'la historia de *Billiken*':

La frase, en su formulación simple y evocadora, sintetiza una operación política que se proyectaba con un amplio alcance. Por un lado, la batalla cultural fue una apuesta que logró, en el mediano plazo, instalar una identidad política propia para el kirchnerismo nacido de las elecciones de 2003 dentro del seno del peronismo, y una imagen de nuevo comienzo—para los prodestinatarios de su discurso político—y de punto de inflexión—para los contradestinatarios—respecto del pasado.<sup>57</sup>

[The phrase, in its simple and evocative formulation, synthesises a political operation that was projected widely. On the one hand, the cultural battle was a bet that managed, in the medium term, to install a political identity of its own, within Peronism, of Kirchnerism born of the 2003 elections, and an image of a new beginning—for the recipients of its political discourse—and a turning point—for the counter-recipients—in relation to the past.]

Fernández de Kirchner could have talked about the history taught in schools, or *mitrista* history, or 'official' history, but instead talked of the history of, or according to, *Billiken*. The intention here was doubly disparaging in identifying *Billiken* as an exponent of the opposing conservative ideology whilst seeking to undermine that ideology by linking it to a medium directed at children. The subtext was that the history provided by *Billiken* was not just incorrect but oversimplified and unsophisticated because of the public to which it was directed. The notion of children's culture as something lesser, something minor for minors, is reinforced in Spanish through the adjective *infantil*. Fernández



de Kirchner's employment of the phrase 'la historia de *Billiken*', however disparaging the intention behind it, underscores the place of *Billiken* in the Argentine national consciousness and the acceptance of this magazine's role in the amplification and perpetuation of the national history hitherto taught in school.

At the same time at which Fernández de Kirchner was seen to be reprimanding *Billiken*, the magazine was integrating some of the revisionist elements identified with her presidency, continuing the magazine's position of following educational trends and the policies of the government of the day. The date of 20 November marks the anniversary of the Battle of Vuelta de Obligado, General Rosas's 1845 naval victory over an Anglo-French fleet. This battle was a cornerstone of the revisionist position, from the 1930s onwards, that Rosas's extreme methods could be excused by his role in defending national interests against imperialist threats. From 1974 to 1976, following campaigning by revisionist historian José María Rosa, the date had been made a national holiday before the civic-military dictatorship once again displaced Rosas from ideas surrounding national sovereignty.<sup>58</sup> From 2010, when the anniversary of this battle was declared the Day of National Sovereignty and a national holiday, *Billiken* incorporated it into its own school calendar. During this period, *Billiken* had increased the presence of the Rosas era in the magazine's educational content but Rosas was never afforded the honour of a *Billiken* cover. Although Rosas was never fully included in the pantheon of *Billiken*'s illustrious men, there was more willingness to align with the new revisionist currents of the bicentenary. Covers around 20 November were dedicated to the Battle of Vuelta del Obligado, integrating it into *Billiken*'s reflection of the school calendar (see Figure 5.11b) and Rosas appeared on the cover of a supplement in the collection 'Así se hizo la patria' [This is how the homeland was made] (included with issue 4707, 30 April 2010). This collection on Argentine history, first published in 2010 and updated in 2016, featured the presidencies of Néstor Kirchner and, later, Cristina Fernández. For supporters of *kirchnerismo*, *Billiken* was on the 'wrong' side of history, not just for the version of history it had promoted but also because of the memory of Atlántida's complicity with the most recent military regime. This was thrown into relief by the policies of Néstor Kirchner's administration to overturn amnesty laws and prosecute the military for crimes against humanity.

Within *Billiken*'s updated presentation of history, the overwhelming sense is of the exercise of imagination in finding new ways to visually represent key dates on the covers, as opposed to the implementation of a consistent editorial line. The historical representations of Afro-Argentines in covers associated with the May Revolution largely reinforced stereotypes through caricaturised representations, of mainly Black women, shown as empanada sellers proffering goods that were 'hot' or too 'spicy' for high society gentlemen (issue 5122, 19 April 2018; see Figure 5.11a). In parallel, however, Afro-Argentine women were increasingly featured, mostly in a minor role, in covers dedicated to the 'Invasiones inglesas' [English [*sic*] invasions] of 1806 and 1807, in which the



**Figure 5.11a:** The *Billiken* school calendar in the final phase of the print magazine (pt 1).

Row 1 (left to right):

Back-to-school. Issue 4853, 21 February 2013.

Life in Colonial Times. Issue 5122, 19 April 2018.

The British Invasions of the River Plate. Issue 5123, 26 April 2018.

Row 2 (left to right):

The First Assembly for the May Revolution. Issue 5022, 19 May 2016.

Manuel Belgrano for the Day of the Flag. Issue 5129, 7 June 2018.

The Declaration of Independence at the House of Tucumán. Issue 5130, 28 June 2018.

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**Figure 5.11b:** The *Billiken* school calendar in the final phase of the print magazine (pt 2).

Row 1 (left to right):

San Martín crossing the Andes during the Wars of Independence. Issue 5131, 2 August 2018.

Domingo Faustino Sarmiento for the Day of the Teacher. Issue 5088, 24 August 2017.

Columbus for 12 October. The date had been renamed Day of Respect for Cultural Diversity in 2010. Issue 4936, 25 September 2014.

Row 2 (left to right):

The Day of Tradition. Issue 5134, 1 November 2018.

The Battle of Vuelta de Obligado for the Day of National Sovereignty. Issue 5099, 9 November 2017.

The start of the summer holidays. Issue 5135, 29 November 2018.

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British unsuccessfully attempted to seize control of areas in the Spanish colony of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata. The strength and success of the local resistance, unsupported by Spain, was important for the formation of the emancipatory consciousness that would lead to the May Revolution. *Billiken's* covers incorporate Afro-Argentine women into the representations of the unity of local people in supporting the militia's defence of their city at a time at which such associations were only just starting to emerge in historical revisionist currents (issues 4759, 29 April 2011, 4810, 27 April 2012, and 4966, 23 April 2015). The figure around which Afro-Argentine women's participation in the formation of the nation is centred is María Remedios del Valle, a fighter and auxiliary in Belgrano's army, previously alluded to by Ernesto Sabato in his contribution to *Billiken's* sixtieth anniversary publication. The participation of del Valle in the British invasions of the River Plate is now largely accepted as one of the landmark events in her reconstructed narrative. Although the anniversary of del Valle's death was established in Argentina as the Day of Afro-Argentines and Afro Culture in 2013, this figure, and the participation of Afro-Argentine women in the formation of the nation, has only started to gain widespread acceptance and recognition in recent years. For example, *Zamba* featured del Valle as a character only in 2021.<sup>59</sup>

With a dwindling circulation, the wider cultural impact of *Billiken's* reconfigured approach to the representation of historical anniversaries was limited. The cover from this period of *Billiken* that garnered most attention depicted the 'encounter' between Columbus and the Indigenous population as a friendly football match (issue 5093, 28 September 2017). The cover was for 12 October, the date marking Columbus's landing in the Americas, formerly known in Argentina as the Day of the Race and in 2010 changed to the Day of Respect for Cultural Diversity. The depiction of smiling faces and employment of a football metaphor led to fulsome criticism, as exemplified by the following quotation taken from an opinion piece by anthropologist Florencia Trentini:

Así, el 'encuentro de dos mundos' sonrientes en la tapa de *Billiken* vuelve a negar la muerte, el saqueo de recursos naturales, la evangelización, la esclavitud, las torturas y por supuesto el despojo territorial. Pero, peor aún, permite invisibilizar las continuidades de ese proceso hoy materializado en criminalización de referentes indígenas, militarizaciones de los territorios, violentos desalojos y represiones, presos políticos, desapariciones y asesinatos.<sup>60</sup>

[Thus, the smiling 'encounter of two worlds' on the cover of *Billiken* once again denies death, the plundering of natural resources, evangelisation, slavery, torture and, of course, territorial dispossession. But, even worse, it makes invisible the continuity of this process, which today is materialised in the criminalisation of Indigenous referents, militarisation of territories, violent evictions and repression, political prisoners, disappearances and assassinations.]



Such criticism, grounded in academic analysis of historical processes, and the continuing impact of those processes on contemporary society, descended into attacks on social media accusing *Billiken* of darker motives, right-wing bias and links to the government of Mauricio Macri (president from 2015 to 2019). A statement that Nahuel Machesich, then *Billiken's* lead editor, released on his Facebook profile was reproduced by several news outlets at the time:

La tapa no es la mejor que hicimos y la crítica es entendible, justificada y bienvenida. Hicimos la autocrítica y estaremos más atentos la próxima vez ... Somos trabajadores y le erramos. No es tan difícil y no hace falta tanta paranoia intelectual ni política. No hay un señor gerente en las oscuridades de la editorial que tiene el teléfono directo con la Casa Rosada, desde donde nos imponen las ideas de derecha y fascistas para elegir los dibujos y los títulos. Fue una equivocación en el fragor de un día de cierre. No una conspiración ideológica.<sup>61</sup>

[The cover is not our best work and the criticism is understandable, justified and welcome. We have exercised self-criticism and we will be more attentive next time ... We are workers and we made a mistake. It is not so difficult and there is no need for so much intellectual or political paranoia. There is no manager sitting in a dark room of the publishing house with a direct telephone line to the Casa Rosada, from where they impose right-wing and fascist ideas on us in our choice of drawings and titles. It was a mistake made in the heat of putting the magazine to bed. Not an ideological conspiracy.]

The controversy surrounding *Billiken's* 12 October cover, however damaging reputationally, rescued *Billiken* from obscurity even as it placed it in an unfavourable spotlight. As Trentini pointed out, many people only realised *Billiken* was still in print because of the explosive reaction to this cover online and in social media. Circulation had reduced to around 21,000 per week by this point.<sup>62</sup> The cover only received widespread attention because it had been reproduced in an article published by Infobae, the digital news site launched by Daniel Hadad in 2002. The article announced the deal that Infobae had made with Editorial Atlántida/Grupo Televisa to administer the digital content of *Gente*, *Para Ti* and *Billiken*, and featured recent examples of covers of the three magazines, including the cover of issue 5093.<sup>63</sup> Atlántida's outsourcing of digital content, instead of developing its own digital brands, continued the segregation approach taken years earlier with the development and running, first, of the websites and, subsequently, of the social media accounts by external providers. Infobae never developed a website for *Billiken*. In the meantime, *Billiken's* director was trialling new initiatives, such as the establishment of a YouTube channel and a pilot of audio-visual production based on illustrations by Milo Lockett, an artist who worked with the Atlántida books division. The company lacked the infrastructure to support and grow these initiatives, however, with the commercial department

focussed on selling pages of advertisements in the magazine with no focus on how *Billiken's* new initiatives could be commercialised.

The attempts from within *Billiken* to stem the flow of the decline proved futile when faced with the company's lack of vision for the brand, alongside the inherent difficulties brought by Argentina's magazine distribution circuit and against the backdrop of further reductions in magazine sales worldwide. Atlántida's decline was visible in the Azopardo building. In the entrance hall, a sign displaying the Atlántida brand logos alongside the Televisa logo covered the plaques in honour of Vigil and looked garishly incongruous next to the fading grandeur of the marble floors and helical staircase. In the following years, floors of offices emptied out as the company reduced in size with restructuring and sackings in 2016 and redundancies the following year with the closure of Atlántida's local editions of six Hearst Corporation magazines, including *Cosmopolitan* and *Harper's Bazaar*. In 2019, after Televisa sold Atlántida to a local private investment fund, more firings followed, leading to false reporting that *Billiken* and *Para Ti* had been shut down.<sup>64</sup> As *Billiken* magazine approached its centenary of publication, it was, as far as we have been able to ascertain, the first commercial children's magazine anywhere in the world to have the opportunity to reflect upon one hundred years of publication and to contemplate how to move beyond that milestone. It was doing so in the most uncertain of circumstances with a hugely diminished readership and staff, and as part of a newly conformed entity that was in the initial, tumultuous stages of a company-wide digital reinvention.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2013), p. 252.
- <sup>2</sup> Sandra Carli, 'Notas para pensar la infancia en la Argentina (1983–2001). Figuras de la historia reciente', in *La cuestión de la infancia. Entre la escuela, la calle y el shopping*, coord. by Sandra Carli (Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós, 2006), pp. 19–54 (p. 44).
- <sup>3</sup> On the Pedagogical Congress and educational policy in the period 1983–1988, see Cecilia Braslavsky, 'El caso argentino', in *Educación en la transición a la democracia; casos de Argentina, Brasil y Uruguay* (Santiago, Chile: UNESCO: OREALC, 1989), pp. 35–109 <<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000084235>> [accessed 17 May 2022].
- <sup>4</sup> Romero, pp. 261–63.
- <sup>5</sup> Mirta Varela, *Los hombres ilustres del Billiken: héroes en los medios y en la escuela* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Colihue, 1994).
- <sup>6</sup> Gabriela Cerruti, *El jefe: vida y obra de Carlos Saúl Menem* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2021), p. 544.

- <sup>7</sup> Christina Civantos, *Between Argentines and Arabs: Argentine Orientalism, Arab Immigrants, and the Writing of Identity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), pp. 73–74.
- <sup>8</sup> Steven Jr. Hyland, *More Argentine Than You: Arabic-Speaking Immigrants in Argentina* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017), p. 219.
- <sup>9</sup> Mercedes Funes, 'Madonna en Argentina: supo que estaba embarazada, vivió un amor apasionado y se sintió poseída por Evita', *Infobae*, 20 January 2022 <<https://www.infobae.com/teleshow/2022/01/20/madonna-en-argentina-supo-que-estaba-embarazada-vivio-un-amor-apasionado-y-se-sintio-poseida-por-evita/>> [accessed 22 August 2022].
- <sup>10</sup> Romero, p. 297.
- <sup>11</sup> Federico Rivas Molina, 'Muere el expresidente Carlos Menem, ícono de la Argentina del ultraliberalismo', *El País*, 14 February 2021 <<https://elpais.com/internacional/2021-02-14/muere-el-expresidente-argentino-carlos-menem-el-padre-de-la-convertibilidad.html>> [accessed 16 May 2022].
- <sup>12</sup> Liliana Castaño and Patricia Barral, 'El poder de Vigil', *Noticias*, 27 May 1990.
- <sup>13</sup> Patricia Viale, Marcelo Belinche and Christian Tovar, 'The Media in Argentina: Democracy Crisis and the Reconfiguration of Media Groups', in *The Media in Latin America*, ed. by Jairo Lugo-Ocando (Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education, 2008), pp. 13–28 (p. 14).
- <sup>14</sup> Bernadette Califano, 'Hacia los orígenes de la concentración mediática en Argentina', *Íconos: Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, 49 (2014), 29–48 (pp. 39–40) <<https://doi.org/10.17141/iconos.49.2014.1270>>.
- <sup>15</sup> Fernando Wainberg, 'El menemismo mediático en la Argentina de los noventa' (unpublished master's thesis, Universidad Internacional de Andalucía, 2010), p. 26 <<https://dspace.unia.es/handle/10334/201>> [accessed 16 May 2022].
- <sup>16</sup> Gabriel Pandolfo, 'El amigo del poder', *Noticias*, 3 February 1991.
- <sup>17</sup> See Constancio Vigil, 'He cometido una imprudencia' [I have been imprudent] *Gente*, issue 1340, 28 March 1991 and 'Arrepentimiento' [Regret], *Somos*, issue 757, 1 April 1991.
- <sup>18</sup> 'Condenaron a C. Vigil por el delito de contrabando', *La Nación*, 16 April 1997; 'La Corte le bajó el pulgar a Vigil', *Diario Judicial*, 9 November 2000 <<http://www.diariojudicial.com/nota/39102>> [accessed 20 May 2022].
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- <sup>20</sup> Maristella Svampa, *Los que ganaron: la vida en los countries y barrios privados* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2001), p. 15.
- <sup>21</sup> María Laura Eberhardt, 'Enfoques políticos sobre la niñez en los años ochenta y noventa', in *La cuestión de la infancia*, ed. by Carli, pp. 57–81 (p. 70).

- <sup>22</sup> Ana Vergara del Solar, Valeria Llobet and Maria Leticia Nascimento, *South American Childhoods: Neoliberalisation and Children's Rights since the 1990s* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2021), p. 3.
- <sup>23</sup> See María Fernanda Arias, 'The Role of the State in "Menemista" Argentina: Educational Politics in the Nineties', *Iberoamericana. Nordic Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 36 (2006), 65–82 (p. 69) <<https://doi.org/10.16993/ibero.183>>. See also Roberto Marengo, 'El Consejo Federal de Educación: Posibilidades y alcances del federalismo educativo (1991–2006)', in *Historia de la educación en la Argentina IX: avatares de la educación en el período democrático (1983–2015)*, ed. by Adriana Puiggrós (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 2021), pp. 48–114 (pp. 53, 83).
- <sup>24</sup> Daniel K. Lewis, *The History of Argentina*, 2nd edn (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, 2015), p. 187.
- <sup>25</sup> Adriana Puiggrós, *Qué pasó en la educación argentina: breve historia desde la conquista hasta el presente* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 2018), pp. 192–93.
- <sup>26</sup> Adriana Puiggrós, 'Dolores, tragedias y esperanzas en la educación argentina (1973–2017)', in *Historia de la educación en la Argentina IX* ed. by Adriana Puiggrós, pp. 9–46 (pp. 31–32).
- <sup>27</sup> Lewis, p. 187.
- <sup>28</sup> Carli, 'Notas para pensar la infancia en la Argentina', p. 41.
- <sup>29</sup> 'Ley N° 24.195', Articles 5f and 5g <<https://www.argentina.gob.ar/normativa/nacional/ley-24195-17009/texto>> [accessed 28 May 2023].
- <sup>30</sup> Arias, p. 77.
- <sup>31</sup> Martin Coy and Martin Pöhler, 'Gated Communities in Latin American Megacities: Case Studies in Brazil and Argentina', *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 29.3 (2002), 355–70 <<https://doi.org/10.1068/b2772x>>.
- <sup>32</sup> Néstor García Canclini, 'Industrias culturales y globalización: procesos de desarrollo e integración en América Latina', *Estudios Internacionales*, 33.129 (2000), 90–111. <<https://doi.org/10.5354/0719-3769.2000.14982>>.
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- <sup>36</sup> 'Ley N° 24.195', Article 15d.
- <sup>37</sup> Germán Torres, 'La prensa católica argentina ante la Ley Federal de Educación (1993–1999)', *Voces y Silencios. Revista Latinoamericana de Educación*, 8.1 (2017), 21–36 (p. 30) <<https://doi.org/10.18175/vys8.1.2017.03>>.



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- <sup>39</sup> *Billiken 1919–1999: la vuelta a la infancia en 80 años* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Atlántida, 1999).
- <sup>40</sup> 'El CEI y Telefónica compraron el 60% de la editorial Atlántida', *Clarín*, 27 March 1998 <[https://www.clarin.com/economia/cei-telefonica-compraron-60-editorial-atlantida\\_0\\_B1qzgykLhe.html](https://www.clarin.com/economia/cei-telefonica-compraron-60-editorial-atlantida_0_B1qzgykLhe.html)> [accessed 22 August 2022].
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- <sup>42</sup> 'Ávila logró el control de El Gráfico', *La Nación*, 19 March 1999 <<https://www.lanacion.com.ar/sociedad/avila-logro-el-control-de-el-grafico-nid131721/>> [accessed 22 August 2022]; Clarín.com, 'Telefónica se quedará con la mayor parte del grupo Atlántida', *Clarín*, 1 December 1999 <[https://www.clarin.com/sociedad/telefonica-queda-mayor-parte-grupo-atlantida\\_0\\_H1bgRQ2xAFe.html](https://www.clarin.com/sociedad/telefonica-queda-mayor-parte-grupo-atlantida_0_H1bgRQ2xAFe.html)> [accessed 22 August 2022].
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- <sup>49</sup> García Canclini, p. 92.
- <sup>50</sup> Judith Gociol, 'El largo camino de Billiken', *El monitor de la educación*, 5. 10 (2006), 42–46 (p. 46). <[http://www.bnm.me.gov.ar/giga1/monitor/monitor/monitor\\_2006\\_n10.pdf](http://www.bnm.me.gov.ar/giga1/monitor/monitor/monitor_2006_n10.pdf)> [accessed 22 August 2022].
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- <sup>52</sup> See Lucía Aíta, “La inefable HUMI”: alcances y limitaciones en las dimensiones humorísticas de una revista infantil argentina (1982–1984), in *Arruinando Chistes. Panorama de los estudios del humor y lo cómico*, ed. by María Burkart, Damián Fraticelli and Tomás Várnagy (Buenos Aires: Teseo Press, 2021), pp. 477–512.
- <sup>53</sup> On *Zamba* see María José Castro, ‘Mirando PakaPaka: una exploración analítica sobre la producción de sentidos políticos-culturales de la niñez en “La Asombrosa Excursión de Zamba”’, conference paper given at the ‘Seminario Derechos Humanos’, Centro Cultural de la Memoria Haroldo Conti (2018) <[http://conti.derhuman.jus.gov.ar/2018/03/seminario/mesa\\_38/castro\\_mesa\\_38.pdf](http://conti.derhuman.jus.gov.ar/2018/03/seminario/mesa_38/castro_mesa_38.pdf)> [accessed 18 September 2022].
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- <sup>59</sup> On María Remedios del Valle see Florencia Guzmán, ‘María Remedios del Valle. “La Capitana”, “Madre de la Patria” y “Niña de Ayohuma”. Historiografía, memoria y representaciones en torno a esta figura singular’, *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos* (2016) <<https://doi.org/10.4000/nuevo-mundo.69871>>. At the same time that Pakapaka was developing the episode of *Zamba* featuring María Remedios del Valle, *Billiken* and I were developing an episode dedicated to her life for the Great Latin American Women Project's series of animations.
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