Santa Evita: The Mother of the Descamisados: An Analysis of the Rhetoric of Eva Peron

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"I have only one valuable possession; it is held in my heart, it burns in my soul, it abides in my flesh, and aches in my nerves: it is the love for the people and Perón."

Eva Perón
October 17, 1951

By
Gabriela Andrea Masut

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Abstract

Santa Evita: The mother of the descamisados is an analysis of the rhetoric of Eva Perón, her ability to deliver a public communication primarily focused on the descamisados (shirtless ones), represented by the poor men, women, and workers of Argentina. By wrapping her rhetoric with personal imagery and ritual symbolism that alleged the Peronist doctrine, Eva Perón successfully cemented those social classes to her own right, identifying herself in the figure of a descamisada to secure devotion from them and legitimize her political role.

This thesis uses myth criticism as a methodology applied to the ideology of Peronism. The premise of the study is that Eva Perón climbed the political ladder by combining the ability to persuade and identify herself with the poor Argentine public through her Peronist rhetoric to legitimize her leadership position. She was driven by the desire to speak against elite cultural forms, thus emphasizing the value of Peronism and the rights of her people. Through her rhetorical ritual, Eva Perón attained political power in support of Juan Perón’s government, placed the descamisados into the political arena, and guaranteed her power for their support. Of greater importance, her rhetoric has served to legitimize “Evita” as a powerful communicator for the descamisados, elevating herself as the mother of the nation, a virginal “saint” icon for the shirtless poor.

If there was any hope for the descamisados in the Argentina of the 20th century, it fell upon Eva Perón’s mastery of communication to instill passion of the masses. She spoke with words of justice and love through her rhetoric, identifying herself as a simple woman with a proletarian laboring image. It was, in fact, the Peronist demand that gave Evita not only a good cause to fight for, but also allowed the shirtless poor to identify
with her in ways they had not realized. Because of Eva Perón’s mythical performances, the Argentine people demonstrated support for national unity. Above all, the rhetoric of Eva Perón has functioned as an empowering symbol for the descamisados and served as a unifying force in the political ritual for legitimizing the Peronist myth.
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Introduction

There was once a woman whose stirring and emotional communication changed the destiny of the Argentine nation forever. Eva Perón, well known as “Evita,” created herself using Peronist rhetoric that gained the love and respect from the descamisados, the shirtless poor, and placed her husband General Juan Domingo Perón in the Argentine presidency.

Illegitimate, born into poverty on May 7, 1919 in Los Toldos, a small village in the province of Buenos Aires, Eva María is one of five children of Don Juan Duarte, a traditional rancher from the city of Chivilcoy, and his mistress, Juana Ibarguren (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 12). At the time, Argentina was a country of European immigrants, particularly Spaniards, Italians, and French, who belonged to a large middle class (Ortiz, 1995, p. 8). But also, there were the elite of society, the oligarchy, who owned the majority of the land in the country. As a servant in the home for wealthy landowners, the powerful people who ruled Argentina, Eva first witnessed the injustices toward the poor and the working class. As she states in her autobiography, “…the fact of the existence of the poor did not hurt me so much as the knowledge that, at the same time, the rich existed” (1978, p. 6). A feeling of resentment toward Argentina’s upper class became her major strength for all the things Eva Perón achieved in life.

In 1935, Eva, still a young girl, left the depressed Argentine provinces to go to Buenos Aires (Ortiz, 1995, p. 27), a busy city full of hope, where she became a radio and film actress. Driven by the strength of her ambition and desire, she ingratiated herself to make key connections with powerful people to further her career. The Minister of Communications, Lieutenant Colonel Aníbal Imbert, managed most radio stations in
Argentina at a time when the media was severely regulated by a military government (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 15). It was through Eva’s close ties to Colonel Imbert that she began an acting career in Buenos Aires, reaching a significant national exposure that caught the eye of the emerging political authority of the new Argentine regime, the army officer Juan Perón.

It is generally agreed that Eva Duarte first met Juan Perón on January 22, 1944, at a charity event given for the victims of an earthquake, which almost destroyed the small city of San Juan situated in the northwest of Argentina (Crassweller, 1986, p. 128). The relief effort was handled by Perón, head of the Department of Labor at the time (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 15). It was, in fact, their first meeting that allowed Eva to emerge as the key figure in Perón’s strategy, beginning a historical relationship.

The year 1945 witnessed the political victory of Juan Perón in Argentina. By this time, Perón had reached the highest power within the military government and held three administrative positions: Vice President of Argentina, Minister of War, and Secretary of Labor and Social Welfare (Ortiz, 1995, p. 104). However, 1945 was also the year of increasing opposition toward Perón from several sectors within the army ranks. “Fearful that his popularity among the working class would catapult him into elections planned for 1946, they had him arrested in mid-October and carted off to prison on Martín García Island just off shore from Buenos Aires” (Wynia, 1986, p. 58). It was at this moment in history when Eva Duarte became an essential element in the Peronist regime, although it was not perceptible at the time. From then on, she was on the lookout on Perón’s behalf, following the leader “like a shadow” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 64).
One of the most remarkable aspects about Eva Perón was the zeal with which she cemented her public communication. She mingled romantic ideals with political messages through her speeches; her rhetorical performances allowed her to infuse the Peronist ideology to the Argentine crowds, particularly the poor men, women, and workers, so as to win over their support. Under this mythological ritual the symbolic term of descamisados (shirtless ones) was established. According to Crassweller, the word shirtless stands for class derision; it was first used by the “better-born as a denigration of the rough-bred types who milled about on that famous day with happy indecorum” (1986, p. 176). In addition, Juan Perón saw, through this word descamisados, the possibilities to link the regime to the followers (Crassweller, 1986, p. 176). Eva Perón then strongly embraced this term through her rhetoric to guarantee the power of Perón’s government and gain the devotion of her people who loved her like a “saint” and were deeply loyal to her.

In this sense, Eva Perón integrated herself like few ever had – as a powerful connection to the popular masses. She claimed to be a descamisada, emphasizing through her impassioned speeches that her mission is to help the poor, as she had experienced in her own childhood as part of the voiceless social class. “I cannot accustom myself to poison,” Eva proclaims in her autobiography, “and never, since I was eleven years old, have I been able to accustom myself to social injustice” (1978, p. 8). “That is why I scream until my voice goes hoarse, and until I lose my voice, when the indignation I carry within me bleeds into my speeches, each time stronger, almost like a wound of the heart” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 254). Above all, her public performances allowed her to emerge from private life into the public realm. Truth be told, Eva’s public speaking was a
significant instrument in the shaping and maturing of the new “Evita,” the charismatic and mystical orator whose emotional communication conquered the hearts of her *descamisados*.

Once Juan Perón was released from prison and the army officers in power defeated, Eva Duarte became his second wife. On February 24, 1946, Perón was elected president of Argentina with her help, now transformed into Eva Perón (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 16). They fused power to create a new Argentina under the ideology of Peronism. As for Evita, she became an emotional link between Perón and the hopes of the *descamisados*, leading the public arena in the country and changing the course of Argentine history forever.

This thesis examines parts of several discourses from Eva Perón’s years in power most representative of her short performance in Argentine politics. Particularly, it shows how Eva evoked Peronist ideals in her rhetoric to build a new Argentina primarily focused on elevating the lower class. From the balcony of the *Casa Rosada*, the “Pink House” in Buenos Aires, Eva Perón created a platform from which to communicate the doctrine of Peronism to her *descamisados*, the powerless class in Argentina. Through her nationalistic speeches, Eva bonded the shirtless poor with love, dignity, and power, performing the role of a common woman and wife, despite her political position.

Thus, Eva Perón is the key architect of the Peronist cult. She campaigned with her husband, making speeches only in the name of Perón. At the same time, she maintained the traditional mother figure that made her rhetoric distinctive. Perhaps without Evita’s rhetorical ability, she would not have achieved political legitimacy. She overwhelmed the message in such a persuasive way that she was consecrated a “saint” by the shirtless poor.
Her enemies, however, considered Eva a “whore” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 160), “Perón’s mistress,” and “...a national Argentine headache...” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 208). Above all, Eva Perón would be remembered even today as the woman who rose from the most humble of backgrounds to become the political and revolutionary first lady image in the twentieth century.

Eva Perón’s critics argued that “she did well very badly and evil very well” (Krauze, 1997, p. 36). The aim of this study is not to judge the historical and political views that made Eva Perón’s life paradoxical. But rather to reveal through an analysis of her public communication how Evita’s rhetoric evolved into a Peronist drama to enhance political legitimacy. She was determined to combine cultural symbolism with personal imagery to legitimize her political role. As Ortiz remarks, “Eva knew people...She was able to probe hearts, to reorganize true loyalty or the temptation to betray” (1995, p. 65). Through her persuasive discourse people might have felt the fanaticism of Eva toward the cause of Peronism. In this sense, an analysis of Eva Perón’s rhetoric releases fragments of a past that only her own words could describe.

Although scholars have long been familiar with the public image of Eva Perón throughout the years, there is still a lack of historical accuracy regarding her life. De Elia and Queiroz, for instance, declares that “in the wake of the Liberating Revolution of 1955, the leaders systematically destroyed documents and photographs of Eva and Juan Perón, and those who secretly retained them risked arrest” (1997, p. 19). The fact that many documents have been restricted and damaged is revealed in this study. Certainly, it limits the fidelity of the analysis due to the inadequate and incomplete information about Eva and Juan Perón and the creation of Peronism in Argentina. Taking into account that
many historical facts may never be completely known or understood, it affects the purpose of scholarly inquiry. As Ciria emphasizes:

The life histories of Juan Domingo Perón (1895-1974) and his second wife, María Eva Duarte de Perón (1919-52), are still in need of serious scholarship and critical analysis, not only at the biographical level but also regarding the relationship between their lives and Argentina’s contemporary history. (Burchett, 1985, p. 4)

Rather than implementing a framework that views Eva Perón’s political role in Argentina, which commonly portrays her as a “saint” for her followers but a whore for her opponents, or describing how the media has created a controversial image of Evita’s personality throughout the world, or even studying Juan Perón’s rhetoric to achieve national leadership, this study rests on how Eva Perón creates a public identity with the *descamisados* through her rhetoric by representing Peronism.

Indeed, an analysis of how Eva Perón integrated the ideology of Peronism in her speeches to create political legitimacy is a justification for this thesis. Lacking the minimal tools for sophisticated political and public presentations, as an orator with such eloquence and vigor, she could have been considered fanatical. As Ortiz explains, “Evita made speeches, invoking Perón using the vocative case, as one uses with God...” (1995, p. 226). By performing “…the expectation of familiar words…” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 153) while at the same time “…repeating the sentence she would dwell on until her death: ‘I am but a woman’” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 152), Eva Perón was able to invigorate the crowds from the balcony of the *Casa Rosada* in Buenos Aires, dominating the podium in a patriarchal country where “…only a few women grasped language” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 152).

With this in mind, this thesis contributes to the field of mass communication as a manifestation of the value of cultural symbolism in public speaking, and the use of
rhetoric as a persuasive device for symbolic action and political leadership. By examining her rhetoric in its biographical, social, and political context, this study reflects on how Eva Perón's message has served as the primary vehicle in the process of creating a new national vision in Argentina founded on the doctrine of Peronism. By doing so, this thesis provides a better understanding of the historical-critical perspectives of Peronism in the Argentina of the 1950s. More importantly, it increases one's appreciation for Eva's communication to the Argentine populace.

Above all, this thesis looks at Eva Perón's mastery in combining Peronist symbolism and political ritual in her rhetoric to attach her image to the descamisados and direct their political response to support the Peronist government. Because of her charismatic public performance, Eva Perón, the driven force in the political action, became the most powerful female figure in Argentina of all time. Hence, for those scholars familiar with the rhetoric of Eva Perón, this study is more appealing and different from the available research. Certainly, her personality is larger than life, a woman who elevated the ideology of Peronism through her rhetoric. In the final analysis, this study of Eva Perón is relevant to the reader interested in cultural symbolism in public communication influencing political power.

Over the years, scholars have written several research studies as well as doctoral-level dissertations and master-level theses based on Eva Perón. In considering this thesis, readers notice that this is not a biography of Eva Perón, nor is it an examination of the mythology that commonly surrounds Eva's personality, neither is it a political analysis of her role in the Peronist regime and Argentine history. This study unveils how Eva Perón,
a dynamic public communicator, primarily focused on the poor men, women, and workers of Argentina to win their devotion for the Peronist cause.

As such, this thesis does not evaluate the recordings, plays, films, and lyrics based on her life since they have not proven to be relevant source materials to undertake this rhetorical analysis. In this context, this study directly relies on the preservation of Eva Perón’s rhetoric as the most important vehicle in revealing how she identified with the Argentine audiences and legitimized her leadership position. Special mention should be made concerning the greater part of research materials incorporated in this study, which is derived from Spanish original sources. Indeed, readers will notice that the literal English translations of the Spanish works are grammatically inaccurate and particularly challenging for scholarly assessment. To some degree, this limitation can affect the purpose of this thesis by its difficulty in understanding the true meaning of sentences and descriptions. Many quotations have minor flaws in grammar and translations, yet understandable in their overall meaning.

Also important to comment on is that this study does not evaluate Eva Perón’s private life and political role in the Argentina of the 1950’s as portrayed by the mass media over the years; nor does it focus on the symbolic metamorphoses that Eva Perón underwent from the private realm, as a woman with no voice in politics, to the public realm, as a political active leader in Argentina, to endorse her political image and identity. Moreover, this thesis is neither designed to examine Eva Perón’s contribution to human rights in Argentina, particularly in the civil women’s movement, female suffrage, equal opportunities in the workplace, and higher education for women; nor is it a cultural study analyzing the institutional efficacy of the political phenomenon of Peronism in
Argentina under the Juan Perón's government. Likewise, this thesis does not aim at documenting either the military attaché or the political ties of Peronism toward the Nazi Germany organizations, nor to disclose Perón's secret collaboration with the Nazis to find refuge in Argentina during the wartime.

After all, this is a rhetorical study of Eva Perón, focusing on how she created a distinctive brand of public communication by subscribing to the ideals of Peronism in order to capture the enthusiasm of the Argentine people, direct their zeal to the Peronist regime, and therefore achieve political legitimacy.

Review of Literature

The academic literature on Peronism in Argentina is colossal at present but when focusing on the figure of Eva Perón, it is not surprising to find a scattered and commonly unavailable collection of primary sources. The appearance of Eva Perón was to be a crucial event in the history of Argentina, but there are still conflicting opinions on what her role truly was. Generally, studies on Argentine politics during the Peronist government have been found under the name of President Juan Perón. In the case of Eva Perón, usually she was studied either from a biographical viewpoint or as a second political figure of Peronism.

In this context, a plethora of books, newspapers, and magazine articles deal with Juan Perón, as president of Argentina, and the social and economic impact of his regime in the country's development. Andersen (1993), Crassweller (1986), Goñi (2002), Rock (1987), Romero (2002), Whitaker (1964), and Wynia (1986) are examples of vast works based primarily on how Juan Perón took Argentina in his hands to rise as the political leader. Only Blanksten (1953) includes a section on Eva Perón within a wide work on
Perón and the ideology of Peronism. In this case, the author depicts a compassionate portrait of Eva’s private life, but without mentioning the myth that has been developing and growing through the years since her death.

In general, available literature about Eva Perón includes two popular biographies created to provide historical facts of her private and public life. Such examples are Evita, First Lady: A Biography of Eva Perón (Barnes, 1978) and Eva, Evita: The Life and Death of Eva Perón (Montgomery, 1979). These two works, written by journalists with experience in Argentina, offer an interesting well-balanced view about the life of Eva Perón with many details not found in related studies.

From these biographies, scholars have produced other works derived from the available information on Eva Perón’s background. One example is the collection of chronicle photographs by Argentine journalists De Elia and Queiroz (1997). This work represents a plentiful source of pictorial documentation based on Eva Perón’s life with the purpose of emphasizing Evita’s wardrobe as a significant factor in the construction of her public style. Another example is the study written by Argentine journalist Ortiz (1995). The author devotes great attention to examine the mythology of Evita as a woman who transformed herself into a “saint” of the poor to become a legend throughout the world.

An additional interesting work is presented by Taylor (1979), in which the author studied the creation, causes, and history of Eva Perón’s myth after her death. Moreover, the biography written by Eva Perón’s sister, Erminda Duarte (1972), is designed to praise Eva’s image during her life while the study written by Martínez (1997) is intended to reconstruct the story of the corpse of Eva Perón to Santa Evita.
Ultimately, although all of these scholars’ biographies represent useful studies for the researcher interested in historical material about Eva Perón, none of them has focused on the role of Eva Perón as a communicator. One study, however, by Fraser and Navarro (1981), attempts to demythologize the figure of Eva Perón by disclosing the factual elements in her myth. Additionally, the authors devote most of their attention to Evita’s political performance, emphasizing her skills as a propagandist, and her ability to manage the poor in exchange for their veneration. Nevertheless, this is not a study of Eva Perón’s rhetoric to enhance political legitimacy.

Some other works recount Eva Perón’s political stance during the Peronist regime. Main (1980) presents an unsympathetic analysis of Eva’s life by stressing the reaction of the Argentine aristocracy surrounding her figure, whereas the study written by Martínez (1986) credits Eva Perón as the head of the left wing in Argentina. Additionally, Santander (1985) reveals the early contacts of Juan and Eva Perón with the Nazis, and accused them of being Nazi agents.

Further, the work by Hollander (1974), deals with Argentine women’s participation in politics throughout the years. But this study stresses the role of women’s progress as part of the political integration process, not directly the role of Eva Perón as a symbol for the poor women in Argentina. Lastly, Zabaleta (2000) has analyzed the role of Eva Perón in constructing the political principles of Peronism, but the author presents Evita only as a political figure rather than as the leading communicator for the masses.

Eva Perón herself is the author of two autobiographies. *Evita by Evita: Eva Duarte Perón Tells Her Own Story* (1978), is the English translation of Eva’s official autobiography *La Razón de Mi Vida* (1953) [The Reason of My Life]. Although this book
does not describe Eva Perón’s life, it provides an impassionate insight into the doctrine of Peronism and reveals how Eva portrayed her image to the world. In My Own Words: *Evita* (1996), the first English translation of Evita’s manuscript *Mi Mensaje* (1987) [My Message], written on her deathbed, apparently represents the last words of Eva Perón to the Argentine people, full of Peronist dogma and religious beliefs.

A limited collection of relevant primary sources relies on Eva Perón’s published speeches, lectures, essays, and messages. Particularly, it is noteworthy to include in this rhetorical study printed copies of Eva’s speeches from the magazine “La Fogata Digital,” as well as from two Websites: “Mundo Peronista,” and “PJ Partido Justicialista Provincia de Buenos Aires.” Additional printed material from the “Mundo Peronista” Website focuses on six classes dictated by Eva Perón in 1951 to her students at the *Escuela Superior Peronista* [Peronist Upper School].

Some published information on Eva Perón’s biography though insightful, does not prove to be significant for this thesis. This available source of information does not reveal how Evita dominated the podium through her rhetoric by invoking a sentimental ritual rooted in the doctrine of Peronism to achieve and sustain a political role in Argentina. Such is the case of recent documentary films that give limited insight into public opinion to Eva Perón’s researchers (Parker, 1996). This is also the case of periodical articles retrieved from the leading daily Buenos Aires newspaper: “Clarín,” as well as from the Official Eva Perón Website: “Evita Perón Historical Research Foundation” that include testimonials and interviews from people who declared to have personal relationship with Eva Perón but which the veracity of the information is difficult to judge objectively. Finally, publications from the second most respected daily newspapers in Buenos Aires
“La Nación” have proven to be highly partisan about Perón’s government and appeared irrelevant for this study.

Several theses and dissertations have dealt with the public image of Eva Perón on both printed media and film adaptations. For example, the thesis by Spaderna (2002), analyzes news sources to show how the media manipulated public opinion to create a negative image of Eva Perón. Yet, this study is an illustration of Evita’s controversial life portrayed by the media rather than a study of her role as a communicator. The dissertation written by Burchett (1985) describes how Eva Perón transformed her identity from Eva María Ibarguren to Santa Evita, creating a political image as a saintly mother of the Argentine working class. But this study focuses on the rhetoric of Eva Perón in the process of her identification and transformation, not directly on how she conveyed Peronist ideals in her rhetoric to achieve political leadership. Only one thesis by Steiner (1989) focuses on Eva Perón as a communicator by analyzing the speech she delivered on October 17, 1951 from the balcony of the Casa Rosada in Buenos Aires. Yet this work is constructed under the Burke’s Pendant as the method of study, not on myth analysis intended to show how Eva Perón performed Peronist rhetoric to persuade the poor men, women, and workers of Argentina and attain a political position of power.

All of these scholarly studies are worthy contributions to the increasing body of works on Eva Perón, and they serve as the principal vehicle through which the communication of Eva Perón is viewed in this thesis.

Theoretical Perspective

Fundamental to any study analyzing the rhetoric of Eva Perón is the inquisition of how an uneducated woman who lacked the tools for sophisticated political
communication held national leadership in the Argentina of the 1950's. One has only to consider Evita’s ability to capture the admiration of the Argentine people to appreciate the degree of loyalty that they have placed on her. She was a politically active woman, a leading orator who was able to identify herself with the crowds through evoking Peronist symbolism to achieve political legitimacy.

This thesis employs myth criticism to provide an appropriate theoretical framework from which the rhetoric of Eva Perón can be analyzed. By using historical and critical research theories on myth, it explains how the mythical dimension represents an important instrument in the process of performing a rhetorical ritual to reinforce the political decision-making and reach political leadership. In this context, this thesis examines how Eva Perón integrated a persuasive political imagery in her discourses that reflected the Argentina tradition. Indeed, by laying deep emphasis on cultural myth with which the Argentine people were able to identify, Evita elevated her political position. This trend allowed her to bond the *descamisados* with Peronism.

The challenges to either define the real meaning of myth or understand the need for myth in contemporary society has been a concern of scholars since antiquity. Much of the literature on traditional cultures has studied myth in more classical accounts. In fact, myth, a term of Greek origin, is usually defined as a "'fable,' ‘tale,’ ‘talk,’ or simply ‘speech,’” (Eliot, 1990, p. 14). Myth, thus, is related to primitive and legendary narratives that alluded to the association with ordinary and supernatural beings, and which is understood to comprise universal motifs. As scholar Mircea Eliade states:

*Briefly stated, it is my opinion that for members of archaic and traditional societies, myth narrates a sacred history, telling of events that took place in primordial time, the fabulous time of the "beginnings." Myth is thus always an account of a "creation" of one sort or another, as it tells of how*
something came into being. The actors are supernatural beings, and myths disclose their creative activity and reveal the sacredness (or simply the “supernaturalness”) of their work. (Eliot, 1990, pp. 22-23)

French scholar Roland Barthes, however, provides a different interpretation concerning the importance of myth. His book entitled *Mythologies* (1972) offers a compilation of semiotic studies regarding contemporary myths immersed in the cultural French life. Yet what Barthes conceives by myth is contained in the essay, which is appended within the larger work under the name *Myth Today* (1972, pp. 109-159). Within this essay, Barthes is primarily concerned with providing the theoretical basis for the interpretation of cultural signs. Particularly, Barthes looks at how cultural symbolism is implemented by dominant society to convey its political values and ultimately to naturalize such values and its ideological meanings in order to influence the masses. In this regard, Barthes attempts to disclose, define, and critique myth as a powerful feature of the French cultural society.

Based on this line of analysis, Barthes proposes the idea that myth is historical rather than timeless or universal. In his words,

...one can conceive of very ancient myths, but they are no eternal ones; for it is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and the death of mythical language. Ancient or not, mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the ‘nature’ of things. (1972, p. 110)

He further advances Ferdinand de Saussure’s theories to systematically describe myth as a language that focuses on a “semiological” system (1972, pp. 113-114). According to Barthes, “*myth is a type of speech*” (1972, p. 109) that “transforms history into nature” (1972, p. 129), and makes speech appear innocent in the sense that it is naturalized (1972, p. 131). In other words, “...myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural
justification, making contingency appear eternal” (Barthes, 1972, p. 142). Thus, in Barthes’s view, “myth is depoliticized speech...which is not that of explanation but that of a statement of fact” (1972, p. 143). As he explains,

In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics...it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depths, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves. (1972, p. 143)

“For the very end of myths,” Barthes concludes, “is to immobilize the world: they must suggest and mimic a universal order which has fixated once and for all the hierarchy of possessions” (1972, p. 155).

Bruce Lincoln provides another interesting point concerning the nature of myth. In his 1989 study entitled Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification, Lincoln underscores the function of discourse in the construction of modern society. As he states,

...discourse of all forms – not only verbal, but also the symbolic discourses of spectacle, gesture, costume, edifice, icon, musical performance, and the like – may be strategically employed to mystify the inevitable inequities of any social order and to win the consent of those over whom power is exercised, thereby obviating the need for the direct coercive use of force and transforming simple power into “legitimate” authority. (1989, pp 4-5)

Certainly, Lincoln recognizes the role of symbolic discourse without neglecting the role of force in the preservation or disintegration of society (1989, p. 3). As he explains, “yet discourse can also serve members of subordinate classes...in their attempts to demystify, delegitimate [sic], and deconstruct the established norms, institutions, and discourses that play a role in constructing their subordination” (1989, p. 5). In this sense, we can
understand discourse as a powerful instrument of communication that can be used to shape meanings and cause effects.

Thus, Lincoln defines myth as “a mode of discourse” (1989, p. 21) “...that possess both credibility and authority” (1989, p. 24). By authority, Lincoln means that the truth contained in the narrative of myth is “paradigmatic,” being at the same time a “model of” and a “model for” modern society (1989, p. 24). What Lincoln infers by myth in fact involves a narrative that contained legitimacy for itself but it is also believed as reliable by members of society. In this regard, myth according to Lincoln, can be seen as a mode of discourse that may be used “much in the manner of ancestral invocations or, alternatively, in that of revolutionary slogans” (1989, p. 21). In fact, “whether...a discourse succeeds...ultimately depends on whether a discourse elicits those sentiments out of which new social formations can be constructed. For discourse is not only an instrument of persuasion...but it is also an instrument of sentiment evocation” (Lincoln, 1989, p. 8). Certainly, Lincoln adds, “it is through these paired instrumentalities – ideological persuasion and sentiment evocation – that discourse holds the capacity to shape and reshape society itself” (Lincoln, 1989, p. 9). In the latter, myth for Lincoln should be recognized as an authoritative device for evoking sentiments that potentially could be used into the complex systems of society in order to mobilize social groups, incite either social cohesion or change, and therefore produce a sociopolitical change.

Since Eva Perón’s strategy of identification with the Argentine public was primarily for advocating revolutionary discourses that perpetuate the ideals of Peronism, thus conveying national identity, a theoretical perspective based on Peronism should also be considered in this study. “‘Peronism will be revolutionary,’” Eva often yelled in her
speeches, "'or it will be nothing'" (Andersen, 1993, p. 27). To better understand the political, economic, and social circumstances that allowed Eva Perón to perform such an aggressive nationalistic rhetoric, it is fundamental to provide a basic definition of what Peronism was in Argentina in the 1950s, a time when the movement reached its peak.

In general, scholars have identified the phenomenon of Peronism, or Peronismo, with Juan Domingo Perón, for whom the doctrine was named. Peronism, defined by Perón himself, is "an innovative political synthesis that he boasted was neither capitalist nor socialist, neither authoritarian nor liberal democratic" (Wynia, 1986, pp. 52-53). But historian Robert Crassweller goes further in this interpretation of Peronism to distinguish four elements that appear interconnected and which serve to better understand the phenomenon of Peronism. These components, according to Crassweller, are "authoritarian corporatism," "populism," "nationalism," and finally the "caudillo" theme (1986, pp. 222-223).

Such a perspective drawn by Crassweller leads us to recognize Eva's rhetorical technique to have an impact over the masses. She supplemented in fact, something special to the doctrine of Peronism, her impassioned rhetoric. By claiming populist and nationalistic ideals in her speeches, Eva Perón was unmatched at driving the adoration of the masses toward the strong central authority of the Argentine nation presided by President Juan Perón. As Joseph Page's Perón biographer declares: "'She complemented him exquisitely, her violent rhetoric enabling him to play the unifier, her contact with the people freeing him for more elevated matters of state, her manipulation of the bureaucracy shielding him from unpleasantness of imposing discipline'" (Andersen, 1993, p. 27). Above all, it was perhaps Eva Perón's personal style, her charisma as an
orator, which allowed her to capture the loyalty of the masses and rise as the legitimate leader in the Peronist government.

This thesis explores how Eva Perón combined political ritual and cultural symbolism through her rhetoric to create identification with the Argentine people, particularly with the poor men, women, and working class. Since the mythical dimension has proved to be a powerful instrument for creating culture and social forms, this study demonstrates how Eva Perón overwhelmed the message with Peronist mythology to provide a rallying scenario for followers and legitimize her political role. It is at this point that both Barthes and Lincoln’s conception of modern myths becomes significant. With this in mind, myth criticism applied to Peronism provides theoretical structures and interpretive frameworks to undertake the Eva Perón’s rhetoric.

Preview of the Chapters

This thesis is organized by using a sequence of chapters with complementary subtopics within the chapters. The introduction is constructed. The second chapter focuses on the socio-political and economic background in Argentina between the 1940s and the 1950s. This section displays the fundamental framework that helps to analyze the basis under which Juan Perón rose to power and created the political and social movement of Peronism.

The third chapter gives Eva Perón’s historical background. Particularly, it describes her evolution of life from her early beginnings until her death. This subject matter reveals how Eva Perón transformed her identity and created her compelling image of spiritual mother of the Argentine nation.
The fourth chapter presents a thorough overview of the method of analysis that provides an appropriate theoretical framework to study her rhetoric; that is, myth criticism applied to the ideology of Peronism.

The fifth chapter is devoted to analyze Eva Perón’s rhetoric, particularly on describing her public communication on Peronism to create a social identity with the Argentine people, primarily with the lower class. In this regard, this section includes parts of Eva’s autobiography *Evita by Evita: Eva Duarte Perón Tells Her Own Story* (1978), some pieces of her rhetoric, and several speeches that proved to disclose how Eva Perón performed a political ritual and legitimized her position as the mythical symbol in the Perón’s government. Her six lectures dictated to her students at the *Escuela Superior Peronista* [Peronist Upper School], reveal how Eva Perón wrapped her messages with Peronist morals and cultural symbolism to attain political legitimacy. Of equal importance, this study focuses on the public addresses on January 27, 1947; September 23, 1947; December 16, 1949; May 4, 1950; and July 17, 1951 from the balcony of the *Casa Rosada* to the poor women of Argentina since they demonstrate how Eva made herself one of those women to win over their support. The public addresses delivered on June 26, 1948; May 1, 1949; October 17, 1949; May 1, 1950; October 17, 1950; May 1, 1951; and October 17, 1951; embody Eva’s alliance with the poor men and working class from the balcony of the *Casa Rosada*. In this case, the analysis discloses how Eva efficiently attached those social classes to her own right to guarantee her political action. Furthermore, the public address delivered by Eva Perón from the *Avenida 9 de Julio* in Buenos Aires on August 22, 1951, along with the subsequent dialogue between Eva and the Argentine people, display historical accounts of the period in which Eva Perón was
offered the position of vice president of the Argentine government. With this in mind, highlighted is the speech on national radio when she officially resigned to this position on August 31, 1952. These two public addresses are relevant pieces of rhetoric, particularly in crediting “Evita” as the powerful Peronist messenger to the descamisados. Finally, the last public address that Eva Perón delivered on May 1, 1952, to the Argentine people from the balcony of the Casa Rosada elevated her as the spiritual mother of the nation. Her last will written from her sickbed and read by an official speaker on October 17, 1952 following her death, admits “Evita” to sacred myth.

The sixth and final chapter includes a synthesis and conclusion.
Peronism, or Peronismo is attributed to one man: Juan Domingo Perón, the initiator of significant political and social change in Argentina. His personal ambition was to create a "'New Argentina' founded on 'social justice, political sovereignty, and economic independence'" (Rock, 1987, p. 262). Committed "to break the oligarchy's grip on the nation" on behalf of the urban working class (Wynia, 1986, p. 51), Perón moved the country toward the populist and nationalist direction. He was determined to win allegiance from organized labor to use it for the state's advantage as well as for his own (Wynia, 1986, p. 52). To achieve such a goal, Perón devoted himself to raise the standard of living for the poor, the so-called descamisados, "the proletarian lump who now for the first time became an effective force in Argentine public life" (Whitaker, 1964, p. 104).

It was his political philosophy and its application to the Argentine nation that differentiated Perón from his peers. In fact, "the idea of building a stronger nation using bold and popular leadership to mobilize people and resources was quite appealing to him and seemed to be exactly what Argentina needed at the time" (Wynia, 1986, p. 54). In this sense, Perón was successful in creating an innovative political, economic, and social movement around his persona that appealed to the lower class of Argentina, giving his name to the movement that supported him. What Peronism was, for sure, came much in the form of politics "that was impatient with complexity and suspicious of foreigners and oligarchs and one that revered the descamisados (shirtless ones), as Perón called his masses" (Wynia, 1986, p. 51).
It is not difficult to recognize why a political synthesis like Peronism, which was designed to be compliant to the needs and interests of the nation’s proletariat, had reached vast power in Argentina during the twentieth century. As Wynia states:

It meant a great deal to the working class, not just because they had so long been denied respect, but also because it was obvious that their inclusion within the government meant that they, as a political force, would attain the power needed to guarantee their remaining at the center of national politics thereafter. (1986, p. 58)

Surely enough, “no labor movement in Latin America has become stronger or more contentious than Argentina’s” (Wynia, 1986, p. 51), or political maneuvering became more powerful and aggressive than that of Juan Perón. “Even scholars are not certain about the politics he practiced, some finding it fascist in character [due at some level to his respect for the Italian regime of Benito Mussolini], others simply caudillismo in modern dress, and some an innovative version of populist democracy” (Wynia, 1986, p. 52). But the followers of Perón almost never regretted his style of transforming the nation. They would perhaps remember Perón as a man driven by his compassion and fervor to help the poor, a leader for the descamisados, determined to mark a rupture with the past in exchange for a host of political, social, and economic privileges.

The Eve of Peronism – 1940’s

Argentina in the 1940’s was a divided country in terms of political life, economy, and social organization. In politics, reality reflected the many variations of leadership policies. On the one hand, there was a liberal radical wing represented by Roberto Ortiz, who “was neutral but benevolent toward England and France” at the outbreak of World War II (Whitaker, 1964, p. 100). On the other hand, the national democratic faction to which Ramón Castillo belonged, moved in the opposite direction from his predecessor’s
liberal policies concerning the position of Argentina toward the war, “first hardening its
neutrality and then giving signs of benevolence toward the Axis” (Whitaker, 1964, p. 101). Finally, a significant bloc composed of nationalists like Perón was “proclerical,
anticommunist, and sometimes anti-Semitic, and supported a corporate state. Many, as
well as being strongly anglo-phobic, were still more stridently anti-American” (Rock,
1987, p. 244). In this sense, this group of new nationalists was determined to “resist
American pressure, preserve neutrality, arm the nation, and promote military
independence by encouraging industry” (Rock, 1987, p. 247). Therefore, the 1940s was a
time for dramatic change in the political making of Argentina, and Perón would find in it
a new political career.

As for the economic issues confronting Argentina in the 1940’s, the Depression of
the 1930’s and World War II brought significant changes in the labor sector, which was
left without representation for its rural interests. The situation became even worse when
“ominous rumors were circulating of new military conspiracies and of communist
infiltration of the now divided labor movement” (Whitaker, 1964, p. 101). During this
time, “the country found itself insolated, increasingly captive to nationalist propaganda”
(Rock, 1987, p. 245). “At issue was whether Argentina should limp along, mixing a little
more industrialization with continued reliance on the export economy, or devote far more
public and private resources to industrialization” (Wynia, 1986, p. 38). Nationalists “were
now arguing openly and publicly that Argentina should produce whatever manufactured
goods it could not import and the arms it needed…” (Rock, 1987, p. 245). Certainly, the
alternative of prompting import substitution industrialization and extending it to
manufacturing armaments contributed to the steady expansion of the armed forces and to
the rising influence of nationalist principles in its ranks. "It was from among them that
Colonel Juan Perón later emerged, taking the initiative away from his colleagues by using
the support of the working class to put his notions of nationalism and populism to work in
1946" (Wynia, 1986, p. 38).

Social problems were not less significant in the 1940's. The disparities between
classes, once tolerable, reached its higher point with the world depression and the
political and economic changes brought on by industrialization and modernization of the
last years. "The problem had become mostly economic and social, rather than political,
and its source was the great and always growing disparity between center and periphery"
(Crassweller, 1986, p. 92). The new industries flourished primarily in Buenos Aires while
the small towns and the rural environment were worlds apart (Crassweller, 1986, pp. 92-
93). The railroad linked the provinces to the capital but not to each other, so farmers were
having little contact with their neighbors, sharing no common social community and no
cultural values (Crassweller, 1986, pp. 92-93). This situation raised fears and resentment
among social classes, which were increasingly becoming separated worlds with opposite
realities. The disappointed and homeless periphery had soon fallen to the new nationalists
like Perón, who had always preserved the traditional provincial values of a past that
remained the political culture of the rural caudillo society, and who now had found their
way to attach these provincial grievances to his own political interests.

On the one hand, there was the oligarchy in the Argentine society of the 1940's,
"a ruling class of agrarian entrepreneurs, who believed that Argentina was theirs to
dispose of as they wished" (Wynia, 1986, p. 39). Its members, primarily represented by
"the rich, educated, and cosmopolitan," were "elitist to the core, convinced of their
superiority to those beneath them socially, and were always willing to go to great lengths
to protect their privileges" (Wynia, 1986, p. 39). The Argentine upper class, on the other
hand, had incomes derived also from the land, but “there was always room for others who
made fortunes in real state, banking, and trade” (Wynia, 1986, p. 39). They lacked the
superiority of the elite class, and their economic disputes over governmental policies
were quite common, particularly in terms of “tariff policies, commodity prices, and trade
strategies” (Wynia, 1986, p. 39). The conflictive situation between the oligarchy and the
middle class changed when the society’s growth caused by industrialization and
immigration forced a wide political consensus vital to political stability (Wynia, 1986, p.
40). They chose instead to solidify their social division “and increased middle-and-lower
class resentment of their exclusion from politics” (Wynia, 1986, p. 40), something that
the nationalist-populist Juan Perón would later exploit to support his political movement.

The Argentine society in the 1940’s was shaped by the middle class as well,
which never held much cohesion as a social and political force (Wynia, 1986, p. 40).
However, they had grown rapidly, becoming larger and ethnically diverse as a result of
the industrialization and the fluent immigration during the 1920’s (Wynia, 1986, p 42).
Within time, they have learned to live by the existing rules in such an elitist environment,
reshaping society along bourgeois and more moderate lines (Wynia, 1986, p. 40), and
becoming “an essential part of the nation’s power structure,” (Wynia, 1986, pp. 42-43),
something that the oligarchy and the upper class have soon made certain of. The last
social group, the lower class, primarily was integrated by working members that have
grown rapidly with the immigration and industrialization phenomena, changing its
composition and its ranks in the Argentine politics, and creating an immense base for
mass mobilization (Wynia, 1986, p. 43). Laborers were later incorporated into unions led particularly by Europeans immigrants who “brought their proletarian ideologies with them” and “began forming to defend working-class interests” (Wynia, 1986, pp. 43). The fact that labor had organizations eager to mobilize them had left room for the populist Juan Perón, who found an opportunity to provide vitality to his political movement.

Above all, the political, economic, and social crisis of Argentina in the 1940’s brought new relevance to understanding the significance that the socio-political movement of Peronism reached in Argentina and the metamorphoses this movement had undergone since Juan Perón’s leaped to power.

The Rise of Perón, 1943-1945

The revolution of June 4, 1943 was the event that marked the growing power of Juan Perón since his increasing visibility in Argentina’s political affairs. By the time, Argentina was a dictatorship regime ruled by the “Grupo de Oficiales Unidos, the Group of United Officers, or the GOU, as it was generally termed” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 98). This organization was conceived by “a secret society of officers banded together as a nucleus within the army to work for certain shared objectives” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 98), and among whose was the emerging political leader Juan Perón. The military members of the government seemed unanimous on the two principles that should govern the new regime: “anticommunism and ‘economic sovereignty’” (Rock, 1987, p. 248). In these actions, the new leaders set the character for the military regime: “authoritarian, antiliberal, messianic, obsessed with establishing a new social order, and avoiding the chaos of Communism that, they thought, was an inevitable consequence of the war” (Romero, 2002, p. 92). By combining “the masses with the military, and authoritarianism
with democracy,” they silenced political unrest and social protest (Whitaker, 1964, p. 104).

Juan Perón’s central political step, the mobilization of the working class, began to emerge in November 27, 1943, time in which he was named head of the National Labor Department in Buenos Aires, a body initially created to collect information on labor affairs and arbitrate strikes (Rock, 1987, p. 253). Under Perón, the department was soon transformed into a Secretaría de Trabajo y Bienestar Social (Department of Labor and Social Welfare), a place that contributed the most to Perón’s political triumph (Romero, 2002, p. 93). Hence, “Perón now turned to labor, the unions, the strikes, and his role as defender and protector of the working class” (Rock, 1987, p. 253). His strategy was simple but successful. Rather than repressing organized labor as previous governments had done, Perón devoted himself to tying links with labor leaders, incorporating them into ruling circles for recognition by the state and for political participation (Wynia, 1986, p. 55). To accomplish such a goal, Perón made use of his invaluable strong personality to further “his two main steps to political power, which were first to mobilize a manipulable [sic] labor force and then to procure the armed forces’ acceptance of labor as an ally in a regime that would replace the dictatorship” (Whitaker, 1964, p. 112).

Perón’s personal approach toward the military government and labor was echoed in the name of “‘harmony of classes,’ ‘distributive justice,’ and ‘humanizing capital,’”...emphasizing that “repression would lead to a ‘rebellion of the masses,’ and urged instead that the state lead a ‘peaceful revolution’” (Rock, 1987, p. 257). He proceeded to rebuild the divided and weak Confederación General de Trabajo (General Confederation of Labor), or generally termed CGT, the one important national labor
organization established since 1930, to his own political interests (Crassweller, 1986, p. 119). Thus, “Perón solidified his ties with labor by securing for them government decrees that guaranteed the members of responsive unions retirement benefits, social security programs, paid vacations, and the like” (Wynia, 1986, p. 58) Additionally, he decreed the payment of a bonus of one month’s salary, well-known as *aguinaldo*, to be a requirement from all employers to their workers. As Whitaker states, “no matter that it was already an established custom, widely practiced, to pay such bonuses; Perón was the one who made the payment obligatory and universal, and this was his Christmas present (*aguinaldo*) to the workers” (1964, p. 115). In December 1943, Perón was granted the title of *Primer Trabajador Argentino* (Argentina’s Number One Worker) by one of the largest unions’ leaders (Rock, 1987, pp. 253-254).

Above all, the Department of Labor and Social Welfare came to symbolize the place that gave birth to Peronism since it represented the first contact Perón had with the working class. From that day, the workers formed a single force with Perón. He did not only reward them with a stream of enactments, but also gave them a sense of dignity in a time when “their exclusion from politics by the ruling oligarchy and maltreatment by their employers” were common trends among the workers (Wynia, 1986, p. 56). “Perón then developed the practice of dealing only with those unions recognized by his secretariat [department] as possessing full legal standing,” the so-called *personería gremial* (Rock, 1987, p. 254). Thus, little by little Perón “drew one union after another from its old ideological stance to a new, pragmatic one that put them under the supervision of an increasingly paternal state” (Wynia, 1986, p. 58).
On the political front, late 1943 marked a time of crisis in foreign relations. The central issue, as since the 1940's, referred to the neutrality policy of Argentina and its interactions with the United States (Crassweller, 1986, p. 106). Since this political stance, the relationship between the United States and Argentina fell into a hostile and frigid impasse (Crassweller, 1986, p. 108). The worst did indeed happen when plots were rumored that “Nazis and Fascists operating a Berlin-Buenos Aires axis were trying to take over the continent” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 111). The United States now became greatly concerned with this development, “attributing it to retribution on the part of pro-Axis officers headed by Perón” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 113). The crisis ended with the diplomatic break of Argentina with Germany in late January 1944 and the abandonment of the neutrality policy toward the war (Crassweller, 1986, pp. 112-113). Rejections and oppositions rose immediately in the GOU. “Many refused to believe the published explanation that the break had been caused by the discovery of a German spy network, attributing it instead to capitulation in the face of United States pressure” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 112).

It was clear that Perón would take advantage of the internal tensions within the GOU to pursue his own political advancements. “On May 1, 1944, Perón held the first of the great May Day labor rallies in the Plaza de Mayo” in Buenos Aires to honor the labor organizations, stating publicly that “this was only the first stage...and the fight for social justice would go on, at whatever cost, until victory had been won” (Whitaker, 1964, p. 115). It was a clever move on the part of Perón since union leaders were preparing to protest against the government’s authoritarian ways, while at the same time they received an invitation from him to join with the government in a demonstration of patriotism.
(Wynia, 1986, p. 57). On June 10, 1944, Perón delivered a sensationalistic speech with words interpreted as a “vote of confidence in Hitler’s armed forces and the totalitarian system” (Whitaker, 1964, p. 117). As he declared,

…it made little difference to Argentina whether the Axis or the Allies won the war, and that Argentina’s legitimate national aspirations could be realized only by her own efforts and through a combination of diplomacy, military power, and ‘total’ organization of the nation. (Whitaker, 1964, p. 116)

As such, Perón’s speech, particularly the use of the term “total,” came to symbolize “totalitarian designs at home and pro-Axis sympathies abroad” (Whitaker, 1964, p. 117).

To be sure, “the discourse was received abroad with alarm, particularly in the United States, where it soon assumed a prominent position among the arguments…” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 125).

During this period, there were “accusations that Argentina had become a refuge for escaped Nazis” (Rock, 1986, p. 258), and some diplomats concentrated on Perón’s figure, attacking him as a “fascist demagogue” (Rock, 1987, p. 258). The new American ambassador’s arrival to Argentina on May 19, 1945, was an unfortunate event for Perón. Spruille Braden was “totally dedicated to democratic principles, holding all variants of totalitarianism, whether of the right or of the left, in equal abomination” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 140). Thus, he became Perón’s public enemy. He intervened openly, delivering “several inflammatory speeches in Buenos Aires, deliberate attempts to prime the military government’s opponent into an all-out rebellion” (Rock, 1987, p. 259).

Convinced that the military colleagues were “‘bred by the Nazis’” (Wynia, 1986, p. 59), Braden criticized the government for its “totalitarian domestic policies” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 141), and assailed Perón of being a “Nazi agent” (Romero, 2002, p. 98).
“Perón’s response was dramatic and forceful,” Romero states (2002, p. 98). “His slogan ‘Braden or Perón’ added a second antinomy to the campaign and capped the process of fashioning the bloc of popular nationalism capable of confronting what remained of the popular front” (Romero, 2002, p. 98).

A political explosion was imminent, and the GOU now focused on Perón’s political image. Truth be told, “Perón’s position within the regime itself was not secure, for he was still only second in command…and many of his military associates had as much aversion as any civilian oligarch for Perón’s program of social revolution” (Whitaker, 1964, p. 118). On October 8, 1945, the Army applied pressure on him to resign as Vice President, Minister of War, and Secretary of Labor (Romero, 2002, p. 96). On October 13, Perón was arrested by a military group led by General Eduardo Avalos, “commanding officer of the big Campo de Mayo garrison on the outskirts of Buenos Aires,” and exiled to the island of Martin Garcia, a traditional place in the Plata for political prisoners (Whitaker, 1964, p. 118). Just before his departure, on October 10, Perón was allowed to deliver a national radio speech from his Department of Labor to a mass of about 70,000 Argentine workers, who gathered in the streets in front of the Ministry (Crassweller, 1986, p. 161).

In the streets, in front of the Department, and among the workers was Eva Duarte, listening at every word that Perón uttered in his discourse. “It was the first time she felt the heat of the crowd admiring Perón” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 112). Perón’s speech “was one of his best” according to Crassweller (1986, p. 161), combining the plea with a review of the work of his Ministry and with a populist-nationalist tone:

“And now, as a citizen, departing from his public duties and leaving this building which has such pleasant memories for me, I want to express once
more the firmness of my faith in a perfect democracy, such as we understand here. Within that democratic faith we have taken our indomitable and incorruptible position against the oligarchy. We believe that the workers should rely upon themselves, and we affirm that the emancipation of the working classes lies in the individual worker. We are pledged to a battle that we will win because history is advancing in that direction. One must have faith...we will prevail in one year or in ten, but we will prevail. For that task, which is sacred for me, I place myself as of today at the service of the people.” (1986, p. 161)

In the last section of his speech, Perón announced to the masses that “he had signed two decrees: a salary raise and the introduction of a ‘fluctuating, vital and minimum’ wage that would be fixed to the cost of living” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 112). Then, as if warning the masses to be prepared for war, he invoked for order and said: “I ask you to respect public order so that we may follow our triumphant march; but, if one day, it becomes necessary, I will ask you to fight”’ (Ortiz, 1995, p. 112). He concluded with a sentimental touch, “I am not going to say good-by [sic]...because from now on I will be among you, closer than ever” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 162).

The year 1945 was a political victory for Juan Perón. By this time, he had gained significant support from labor leaders in Argentina and his departure “left a political stalemate and a growing power vacuum” (Rock, 1987, p. 260). His speech incited labor protests, which now turned into political action. On October 17, 1945, Perón’s followers organized a mass demonstration, launching a campaign to release him from prison (Rock, 1987, p. 260). Among them was “Eva Duarte, Perón’s youthful and glamorous mistress” (Rock, 1987, p. 260). It was then when “thousands of workers suddenly took to the streets and began marching toward the presidential palace” (Rock, 1987, p. 260). From the Plaza de Mayo, this “‘spontaneous’ demonstration by a horde of workers [began] shouting ‘Bring back Perón’ and threatening to tear Buenos Aires apart if they were
denied” (Whitaker, 1964, p. 118). At this show of power, and “faced with the alternative of either yielding or firing on the demonstrators and quite possibly starting civil war, Perón’s military foes gave in and brought him back in triumph the same day” (Whitaker, 1964, p. 119). Within days, presidential elections were announced for February 1946 (Rock, 1987, p. 260).

On the night of October 17, Perón, now released, delivered a speech to the crowds from the balcony of the Casa Rosada, the House of Government facing the Plaza de Mayo. “Half a million people were there, some have said. Perhaps they were between 250,000 and 300,000” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 169). In a fifteen-minute speech, he “spoke of peace and construction, of faith in the future, of dignity” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 169). Perón later linked patriotism and nationalism to brotherhood, stating that “‘to love one’s country is not to love its fields and houses but to love one’s brothers’” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 169). In the last section of his speech, he expressed his love and devotion for the working class, emphasizing that “‘upon the brotherhood of those who labor we must construct in this beautiful land the unity of all Argentines’” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 169). Perón continued to announce that his decision to refuse reinstatement to his positions was proof of his indestructible liaison with the workers. In his words, “‘I have resigned from the army in order to help revive the almost forgotten civilian tradition of Argentina and join with the sweating, suffering mass of laborers who are building the greatness of this nation’” (Whitaker, 1964, p. 119). Perón concluded his speech by urging the masses to leave quietly and get back to work, as he would also do thereafter (Whitaker, 1964, p. 119).
The discourse itself, embedded with nationalistic values, religious sentiments, and popular aspirations, symbolized a significant political resurgence for Juan Perón. “The event was an act of public and almost mystic communion between leader and followers, on a scale whose equal does not come to mind” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 170). Perón returned to the center of power, but now as an official candidate for President of Argentina. On February 24, 1946, he triumphed in the elections by a landside; votes were equivalent to at least 52.4 percent of the total electorate (Crassweller, 1986, p. 181). “It is generally agreed that this surprising victory was won largely with descamisado [italics added] votes…” (Whitaker, 1964, p. 120). Perón also gained support for the Partido Laborista (Labor Party), which embraced the working class and union sector (Rock, 1987, p. 260). Also supporting his party were several nationalist sectors, which were reunited in the Alianza Libertadora Nacionalista (Nationalist Liberal Alliance), as well as a minor faction of the Radical Party, or so-called Unión Cívica Radical, and some clerical groups (Rock, 1987, p. 260).

Essential to Juan Perón’s victory in the presidential election in 1946 was the emotional, intense religious waves generated on October 17, 1945 that continued to echo. Yet “what was decisive about the October events was not so much in the numbers of the crowd...as in its composition, markedly working class” (Romero, 2002, p. 96). They were more united than ever, marching to the “Plaza de Mayo, the country’s symbolic center of power, thereby appropriating a public space and making a demand that was immediately political but that also had profound social consequences” (Romero, 2002, p. 97). Greatly enthusiastic about his policies, “they decided the crisis in Perón’s favor, inaugurated a new way of participating in politics through social mobilization, defined an identity, and
won their political citizenship, sealing at the same time an enduring alliance with Perón” (Romero, 2002, p. 97). After all, it was General Juan Perón who did the organizing and politicizing of the working class against the leading oligarchy, and Argentina labor has remained powerful to this day. Yet it was “Eva Duarte (not yet Eva Perón) . . . one of the organizers” of the October’s counter-revolution, some have said (Whitaker, 1964, p. 118). They were the workers that she had rallied in a populist show of support for Perón.

Beyond the political magnitude of the October events, an almost sacred symbolism and legitimizing image was covering the real scenario. It was, in fact, the day of October 17, 1945, which gave birth and currency to the symbolic theme of the descamisados (Crassweller, 1986, p. 176). The term was first applied to the “shirtless” popular masses of the Playa de Mayo by Perón’s enemies as an “opprobrious epithet” (Whitaker, 1964, p. 119). As Crassweller explains,

“Shirtless,” in its literal meaning . . . was loaded with class disdain, for proper attire in public was one of the deep and hitherto unchallenged values of the Argentine civilization. Anyone appearing in public in less than tie and jacket, regardless of heat, was at the very least a boor and a clod. As for cooling one’s feet in a public fountain, it was unthinkable, worthy of a descamisado. (1986, p. 176)

Perón fully embraced the term descamisados as a “badge of honor” (Whitaker, 1964, p. 119), a word that so clearly would draw an almost holy liaison between leader and followers. “Yet for the workers, the idea of the descamisados was positive; it was an appropriation of and a reified meaning for the pejorative term, which became an integral part of Peronist working class identity” (Romero, 2002, p. 119). Thus, this word and the October events were freed of literal restraint and elevated into the realm of faith, where they have remained ever since. Above all, the event of the October 17th, 1945, thereafter named Día de la Lealtad (Loyalty Day), and designated an official Peronist holiday.
(Rock, 1987, p. 285), signaled the birth of the descamisados, the audience of the working class that Perón had mobilized.

General Juan Domingo Perón had won the elections, but the ideology of Peronism was yet to be shaped. There was a woman in the history of Argentina, however, a figure that would guarantee the Perón's supremacy over the Argentine people. “This dynamic, captivating, magnetic, but also mercurial and vindictive woman wielded power that was never defined nor formalized, and which was therefore often unchecked and unlimited” (Rock, 1987, p. 287). That, many have known, was Eva Duarte de Perón, recognized to all as “Evita,” a woman who “was absorbed in people and human relationships within a framework of fanatical devotion to Perón that held dominion over all else” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 207). Surely, she was successful beyond measure in “…playing the role of the humble companion of the greatest man Argentina had ever known” (Wynia, 1986, p. 63), solidly bonding the popular ambition of Perón and the hunger for dignity of the shirtless poor. “She had in fact become their spiritual chief of the descamisados [italics added], and she used her headship to transmute the descamisados’ [italics added] political support of Perón into a cult, so that they would idolize him as she herself did” (Whitaker, 1964, p. 113). Under her personal touch, the concept of labor and the underprivileged were elevated as the new faith of the nation, changing the face and the soul of Argentina, and certifying the national-populist movement of Peronism as the predominant political ideology in the country for years to come.

Even today the Peronists of Argentina would perhaps never forget Eva Perón, a woman whose heart always was with the humble, placing them into political life and speaking of their rights as a hope of the rewards always wished for by the working class.
Her mission was to help the poor men, women, and working class, performing her cause with such a fanaticism as if she were predestinated to the will of these people. As she claims in her autobiography, "here I am. I want to be of some use to my people" (1978, p. 111). The poor people of Argentina embraced her as one of their own. She was, above all, "Evita," the woman who "served as a symbol and a myth in the Peronist movement" (Rock, 1987, p. 288), and who was "too Peronista" (Perón, 1978, p. 39) until her death.
Eva Perón-The Woman

It is almost impossible not to fully appreciate the presence of Eva Perón in the Argentine politics and the role she played in the cult of Peronism. "'She supplied the magnetic current that linked the leader to his [masses], that infused Peronism with soul, that lent a unique quality to the charismatic glow of the conductor,'" Perón biographer Joseph Page writes (Andersen, 1993, p. 27). She was no doubt the key architect in the Peronist movement, the woman who secured the ideology of Peronism as a powerful political force in Argentina ever since. As De Elia and Queiroz states, "Eva would be the emotional link between the masses and their leader, the human face of politics, the guarantee that they would stay on course" (1997, p. 16).

Perhaps, Evita's devotion for Juan Perón made her join his doctrine of social justice and battle for the cause of Peronism, becoming the most fanatical colleague in the creation of a new Argentina. In fact, the official marriage of Eva and Perón would prove how valuable she was to Peronism. As Rock declares:

"Her marriage to Perón exemplified the greater marriage between the leader and his followers, for she was an iconic image of the elevation of the descamisados to power and status, and a romantic vision of the pilgrimage of the internal migrant from the wretchedness and squalor of the pampas village to the glamour of the metropolis. (1987, p. 288)"

Under her charisma, Peronism was born as the new belief for the descamisados, the poor men, women, and working class of Argentina. Above all, Eva Perón became the spiritual force who turned out to be the providential personification of the well being of the Peronist state and the shirtless poor. As De Elia and Queiroz assert:

"Ultimately, she came to be known as the "Bridge of Love," who devote her life to the task of conveying the people's hopes to the President; yet at
the same time she conveyed to the people the President’s demand of unconditional loyalty to the Peronist cause. (1997, pp. 16-17)

To believe that Eva Perón was driven by the vocation of helping the poor would explain the reason for her words and acts. “I, a weak woman, after all, never imagined that the serious problem of the poor and the rich would one day knock so directly at the door of my heart, claiming my humble efforts for its solution in my country,” Eva declares in her autobiography (1978, p. 11). In fact, the idea that the poor existed because the rich could not cohabit in Eva’s personality. “There were many more poor than rich in the spot where I spent my childhood,” she claims in her memoirs, “but I tried to convince myself that there must be other places in my country and in the world where things happened otherwise” (1978, p. 12). It was perhaps Eva’s humble origins that made her yell her grief through her speeches when witnessed the injustice suffered by the poor at the hands of the oligarchs, as if her mission were helping all those in need and change their destiny. “It was my form of relief, my liberation; and relief, like freedom, often tends to be exaggerated, above all when the oppressing force is very great,” she explains in her autobiography (1978, p. 12).

Although Eva Perón died in 1952, her myth still continues to foster Argentina. “Over the years the popular cult to Evita has persisted, reached immense proportions, and remained intact despite attacks and efforts to demythologize her,” De Elia and Queiroz affirm (1997, p. 19). Her death elevated her to “‘the spiritual leader of the nation’” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 12). “Behind her she left an interesting amalgam of grief, guilt, mythology, celebration, and despair as her friends and her enemies sought to adjust to an Argentine world devoid of her central presence” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 247). Truth be told, “Evita” symbolized the hope for a better future for some Argentines, primarily
for her *descamisados*. To others, however, Eva Perón was a “prostitute, ...although it had no basis in fact” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 134). Indeed, “the working class, identifying with her humble background, felt an almost religious veneration for her; the middle and upper classes rejected her as an ambitious opportunist at war with established values,” De Elia and Queiroz remarks (1997, p. 12). After all, Eva Perón changed the course of Argentine politics and left an historical heritage. “More than the romantic legend of a beautiful young woman adored by the people, more than a heroine whose tragic death came too soon, Evita was a political and historical reality that forever changed Argentina” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 19).

**The Child**

History tells that Eva Duarte de Perón was born Eva María Ibarguren on May 7, 1919, in a small Argentine village in the province of Buenos Aires called *Los Toldos*, on the edge of the vast Argentina pampas (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 12). The youngest of three sisters and one brother, she was the fifth child of a mistress Juana Ibarguren and a local landowner Juan Duarte (Crassweller, 1986, p. 129). The fact that Eva “was considered not only an illegitimate child, but worse yet, a child born of adultery” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 11) was perhaps the root of her feeling of indignation when faced with social injustice. “Her baptized name was Ibarguren, but neither her mother nor any of the other children ever used it, preferring Duarte” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 129). Such an event was not easy to forget in Evita’s life; neither was the year 1920 when her father Juan Duarte abandoned her to return to his legitimate family and wife in the small neighboring village of Chivilcoy (Crassweller, 1986, p. 130). As Ortiz explains,
...Evita insolated herself. Like all humiliated souls, she was torn between the solidarity of her clan and the shame of belonging to it. Her temperament was also torn: joyful and whimsical at home, withdrawn as soon as she crossed its threshold. (1995, pp 7-8)

Yet it was not until 1926 when Eva Duarte truly felt the cruel reality of illegitimacy and social disgrace. It happened at her father's funeral in Chivilcoy, when she and her family were refused to attend the funeral by the lawful family (Crassweller, 1986, p. 130). It is believed that this event of social rejection “was decisive in Evita’s evolution” (Crassweller, 1986, p, 130).

In 1930, Eva and her family moved to Junín, a neighboring city in the province of Buenos Aires twenty miles away from Los Toldos (Crassweller, 1986, p. 130). During the 1930’s, Argentina was a country of European immigrants, and a “stretch of land equal to Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland combined, was owned by 1,804 landowners,” the rich people of the country, the so-called oligarchs (Ortiz, 1995, p. 16). They lived lavishly, six months at the estancia (ranch) and the other six in Paris (Ortiz, 1995, p. 17) while transforming Buenos Aires, the capital, into a cosmopolitan and classy metropolis, which soon became known the “‘Paris of South America’” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 14). Contrasting the glamour of the city, “the 1930s were also years of great unemployment, poverty, and hunger in the capital, and many immigrants from the interior were forced to live in tenements, squalid boardinghouses [well-know as conventillos] and in outlying shantytowns that became known as villas miseria” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 14).

Living in the interior of the country without land and with no male head of the family, Eva’s family found refuge in a small house in the center of Junín, and had to work to keep the house and put food on the table. The only solution for them to survive
was hosting and cooking in their own home for the local oligarchs. This is where Eva Duarte made her first contact with the powerful people who managed Argentina. “They spoke of politics in low and distinguished voices, ...wiping the corners of their lips with napkins,” and the young Eva “…would spy on them from the kitchen, curious as to what one had to do to be considered ‘classy’” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 20). That is how Evita’s personality became more troublesome and confusing during her years in Junín. “She hated the town of Junín” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 21) and the life her family was forced to live, serving meals in the home of the rich because there was not a restaurant in the town (Crassweller, 1986, p. 130). “She observed her mother’s and her sister’s efforts with a suspicious eye and chose to conform to her own rules. She was too proud to bend in this adaptation crusade, which she knew was bound to fail” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 21).

The humble roots in Los Toldos tell much about Eva Duarte de Perón. Her sister Erminda’s memoirs, entitled My Sister Evita, recount that on the Kings Day, the young Eva wanted a beautiful doll desperately, and she asked the Three Kings, Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar to bring it to her. Eva’s wish was granted; her mother had found the doll in the village general store but with a broken leg. The next day, she explained to Evita that the doll had had an accident and had fallen from Gaspar’s camel (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 14). Her sister Erminda recalls, “‘what our mother didn’t tell you was that the doll had cost almost nothing...precisely because it was damaged. What she said instead was that the Kings had brought the doll for you to take care of.’” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 14). It was, in fact, Eva Duarte’s first experience during her childhood being the recipient of a mission. “Evita tenderly loved this broken creature that, like her, was missing something vital in her life” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 14). This moment was a crucial
event in Eva’s early life in Los Toldos that would shape “her later role as a champion of the poor and working classes” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 14).

Although life improved for Eva Duarte while living in Junín, attending elementary school there, she still “wanted to be somebody else” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 20). As a student, Eva is remembered by one of her teachers as “…a self-absorbed child with an intense inner life, great sensitivity and great vulnerability” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 130). One of her schoolmates described her “soft but with the soul of a leader” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 21). Still feeling the social rejection from her classmates “because of an unfair perception of her mother’s reputation” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 130), Evita became a mixture of charisma and fear, caring yet dictatorial. “She had dreamy and piercing eyes, serene and nervous gestures. She would later evoke whole litanies of opposite terms. Saint and whore, adventurer and militant, frivolous and martyr…” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 21). But for now, she remained faithful to the dreamer she also was. Yet the options for the young Evita in Junín were unpleasant: serving meals in the home for the rich, “a low-level job or, in Eva’s words, the ‘inevitable domestic slavery’ of marriage” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 14). Instead later she joined the theater group in Junín, where she was given a small part in a school play. After that experience, Eva dreamed of freedom, becoming a great actress, and leaving Junín forever.

Many biographical versions recount the story about Eva Duarte’s departure from Junín in search for a better future for her. The most celebrated is the one told by her sister Erminda, which recalls that her mother Juana agreed to accompany Evita to audition for the National Radio in Buenos Aires, where she stayed at the home of her mother’s family friends (Ortiz, 1995, p. 25). Yet the most convincing legend involves the tango singer
Agustín Magaldy, who was performing at the local theater in Junín. He found the young Eva waiting for him in his dressing room, begging to take her to Buenos Aires with him (Ortiz, 1995, pp. 26). More objectively, among the different versions, the fact is that she left Junín and arrived to Buenos Aires on January 2, 1935, at fifteen years old (Ortiz, 1995, p. 27). Thus Eva Duarte left her mother and sisters “without funds, without friends, and totally devoid of either experience or prospects” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 131). But she was determined to follow a dream, remaining faithful to the real person she was: a dreamer, who already knew in her early years what the strongest passion of her life would be. “It would not be waiting for love, but rather the anticipation of a show about to begin” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 23).

The Actress

A strong sense of character, great ambition, and driving illusion were the aspects that moved just a little provincial girl to Buenos Aires, a city full of promises and hope. As Crassweller explains,

Then began the years of cheap, gloomy little rooms in dismal down-at-the-heels lodging houses, bit parts with theatrical companies whose ties to solvency were tenuous even in the best of days, predatory directors whose habit was to sleep and forget... extended unemployment, the trickle of money sent back to the family in Junín, and the struggle against rumor and humiliation. (1986, p. 131)

These were times of many lonely nights for Eva Duarte, “wandering with an empty stomach and holes in her shoes” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 38) and a sense of discouragement growing in her heart. It is believed that Magaldy introduced Eva to the director Joaquín de Vedia and the actor José Franco, for her first small part in a comedy play called La Señora de Pérez (The wife of Pérez) starring Eva Franco, a leading Argentine actress.
(Ortiz, 1995, pp. 32-33). This was the beginning of minor acting roles for Evita, many of which were “either silent parts or the...anonymous and voiceless entity...” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 34). In fact, Eva “had neither the adequate vocabulary, nor the correct pronunciation, nor striking, clear beauty that would have replaced the eloquence” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 31).

In 1936, Eva Duarte was hired by Pepita Muñoz, a theatrical company that allowed her to go on tour through the interior of the country (De Elia and Quiroz, 1997, p. 14). That same year she got the part of Catalina in an adaptation of a Lillian Helman play called Las Inocentes [The Innocents] (Ortiz, 1995, p. 35). But these performances were nothing better than silent or anonymous roles. Eva’s discouragement became even worse; there was no play, no work, no hope for her, moving back and forth to different places, with so many dreams falling apart. “While not an exceptionally talented actress or particularly successful, she acted in theater of all kinds, appeared briefly in a few films, modeled for commercial photographers, and endured long periods of unemployment” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 14). According to Crassweller, “some remembered her in these years as hard and ruthless; more recalled her gentleness” (1986, p. 131). Above all, “friends who knew her at this time recalled her as withdrawn, serious, exceedingly thin, and not very pretty, although they all mentioned...her perfect skin” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 15).

Although it might be true that Eva Duarte had been tented by specific lovers who would reward her with better parts in the theater, survival and starvation can be powerful reasons to allow someone to trade favors. The young actress Eva was not above that and “she had a pursuit and a career that took priority in her life” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 38). For her,
men “were not an end, they were a necessary means” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 38), and she was determined to sacrifice herself in order to reach her dream; an artistic career in which she could make her name known. The cruel misery and humiliations of these years never defeated Evita in reaching her goal. As Ortiz explains:

During her artistic period, each of her lovers was chosen with one specific objective, to get a part. The others, the ones she had to find when she had no prospects of work, served only to allow her enough time to find a new play or a new film. (1995, p. 38)

These experiences were thus sharpening Eva Duarte’s strengths and shaping a basis for her later accomplishments (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, pp. 14-15). She was becoming not only a strong woman, but also one who cared for her family, especially for her brother Juan, the only man she truly loved in these times (Ortiz, 1995, p. 40). Life put a new struggle on her path, and Eva found herself selling the few possessions she had acquired and return to the conventillos again to pay her brother’s debt from jail after he took some money from a bank from where he worked (Ortiz, 1995, p. 41). Far from being a fragile woman breaking down in tears, she remained steadfast, helped her brother, returned to the poor boardinghouses, and kept her promise to not return to Junín. “‘I will come back later,’ she said, ‘but only after I succeed’” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 38).

Eva Duarte’s hardships ended in 1939, when she finally “found her metier: soap operas, broadcast on the radio” (Crassweller 1986, p. 131). Certainly, “radio was a popular passion in the 1930s and had a huge audience. It was also the medium that allowed Eva to shine” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 15). During these times, Eva Duarte co-directed her own acting company in a historical drama entitled Los jasmines del ’80 (The Jasmines of ’80) according to De Elia and Queiroz (1997, p. 15). The soap opera was especially written for radio by Héctor Pedro Blomberg, a renowned novelist whose
nationalist ideas belonged to the Argentina’s popular culture of the nineteenth century caudillo Juan Manuel de Rosas and whose historical plays were usually placed during the Rosa’s dictatorship (Ortiz, 1995, p. 41). In the same year, Eva performed a series of Blomberg’s soaps broadcasted by Radio Prieto (Ortiz, 1995, p. 42). It was during this time when Evita “…successfully threw herself into her radio career by allying herself with a writer whose ideas foreshadowed those of Peronism” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 41).

In this setting, Eva Duarte made her way as an actress of radionovelas (radio soaps), performing in top radio stations such as Radio El Mundo and Radio Argentina (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 15). “Through her voice, she came into contact with millions of listeners” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 15). The central themes of the soaps were typically a Cinderella story, the melancholic legend of a “young, poor, pretty, tender, pure, and unfortunate girl,” who eventually, “due to her beauty, but more so to her kindness…overcame the social barriers” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 43). “This was a dream role for Evita” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 43), a performance that seemed to emulate her own story. “Both the pathos of the dramas she acted in, as well as the emotional intensity that would be amply demonstrated in the future, explain her swift success” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 15). According to Ortiz, “her voice was high-pitched and trembling, painful and honest. It was childish, clumsy, and unrehearsed, a plain voice that resembled her listeners’ voices” (1995, p. 43). Despite the fact that “the oligarchs laughed at her because Eva never possessed the keys to the language…” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 22), she later settled into the balcony of triumph, the Casa Rosada, delivering a striking rhetoric that garnered love and adoration from the poor, the only ones who “had the right to call her Evita to her face” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 38).
The revolution of June 4, 1943, brought revolutionary changes to Argentina politics and to radio (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 15). With the GOU at the front in the Argentine politics, the new military government was determined to “‘stabilize’ the country by giving it back its forces, its morale, and its Christian and national values” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 50). Following this line of thinking, “broadcasting was regulated, pessimistic plots in radio dramas were discouraged...and it became necessary to obtain a permit from the Postal and Telecommunications Bureau for each program” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 15). Whether it was destiny or just a matter of luck, Oscar Nicolini was one of the bureau members, a man from Junín whom Eva knew well (Ortiz, 1995, p. 52). This contact was crucial for Eva Duarte in pursuit of her goals. Her ties to Lieutenant Colonel Aníbal Imbert, director of the Communications Bureau, now became very close, and gave Eva the opportunity to finally rent her own apartment and sign a contract with Radio Belgrano (Ortiz, 1995, p. 54). As De Elia and Queiroz state:

Prophetically, Imbert even procured for her the starring role in a new series based on the lives of the famous women in history – Mme. Chiang Kai-shek, Queen Elizabeth I, Isadora Duncan, Sarah Bernhardt, Catherine the Great – in which she would perform until she ended her artistic career in favor of a political one. (1997, p. 15)

Performing the role of such great personalities was a dream that came true for Eva Duarte. “In Evita, the queen cohabited with more impoverished personalities, but the queen was there nonetheless; it always had been,” Ortiz remarks (1995, p. 54).

By the beginning of 1944, Eva Duarte was considered a radio star with “‘the highest salary ever paid by Argentinean radio’” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 77). As one of the founders of the Radio Association of Argentina (ARA), whose purpose was to “‘defend the interests of Argentinean radio’s workers’” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 54), Eva built herself into a
radio career while securing a path to the military government. To be a radio voice for the rights of the workers “was a perfect harmony of both Eva’s own anger (‘...because there were certain humiliations she would not accept’) and the new ideas she was already seizing in midair” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 54).

*The Day Eva Duarte Met Juan Perón*

On January 15, 1944, an earthquake almost completely devastated the old town of San Juan, situated in the Cuyo region, 600 miles west of Buenos Aires (Crassweller, 1986, p. 128). Thousands of people were killed and a tremendous call for aid for the victims was made to the entire nation. Perón organized the benefit through the Department of Labor (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 15). The ARA was one of the organizations that held an artistic festival on January 22 at Luna Park Stadium to benefit the injured (Ortiz, 1995, p. 56), and Eva Duarte helped solicit assistance as a spokesperson of this radio association (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 15). That day, Perón welcomed each actor with a handshake (Ortiz, 1995, p. 56). By most accounts, that was the official day in which Eva Duarte and Colonel Juan Perón first met, although some agreed that they were introduced a few days earlier at a party (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 15). In her autobiography, Eva describes the meeting with Perón as “‘my marvelous day,’”...and “the beginning of my real life” (1978, p. 17).

There are many versions of the way Eva Duarte found herself seated next to Perón at the charity festival. Beyond the stories, the important aspect is that Eva remained with him through the entire event, and left Luna Park with him at the conclusion of the benefit. “From that moment of initial contact until her death eight years later, she fervently devoted herself to him and *la fe peronista* - the Peronist faith – that he embodied” (De
Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 15). Although the differences in years – Juan Perón was forty-nine and Eva was twenty-four – they had a lot in common (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 15). As Ortiz explains,

Perón was looking for a young, cute woman who would look good on his arm... For other reasons, he was also looking for someone who was affiliated with radio; how sweet if one unique woman possessed both criteria. More than ever, Eva was looking for a man with power, and in Argentina... this could mean only someone in the military. (1995, , p. 54)

Perhaps, Eva was waiting for a man as strong as Perón to finally find her father figure that could alleviate the weakness and sadness cemented in her heart since her own father abandoned her. Truth be told, Eva “followed him effortlessly, like a sparrow dancing around a bull” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 57).

During the first years, Juan Perón and Eva Duarte lived in a small apartment located in Arenales and Coronel Díaz streets in Buenos Aires as a general and mistress (Ortiz, 1995, p. 62). But Eva would advance into politics matters step by step, listening to the “compromising political conversations that took place in front of her in the Arenales apartment” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 64). She “was loyal, no matter what” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 65), always ready and alert on Perón’s behalf. In his memoirs, Bonifacio del Carril, a writer and politician, recalled the first time he met Eva in the apartment (Ortiz, 1995, p. 63). In this meeting, as told by Carril, Perón introduced Eva by stating, “‘it is incredible how well she knows people. She has a nose for politics’” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 63). Perón then said, “‘Evita is very capable. No one knows how to use the cupping glass the way she does.’” Politicians read between the lines: ‘Mind your own business. I’ve found my confidant’” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 63).
Over the next months, Eva Duarte’s acting career changed gradually. She continued with her work at *Radio Belgrano*, the serial of famous women’s biographies, an afternoon radio play, in addition to morning talks since June 1, 1944, which promoted the principles of the revolution of June 4, 1943 (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, pp. 15-16). The morning series was her first political debut with a radio play written by Francisco Muñoz Aspiri, which already integrated the “exalted tone and the demand for justice that would characterize all of Evita’s public performances” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 15). In May 1944, Eva Duarte became president of the ARA; and now “with the prestige she enjoyed as the established paramour of the most powerful man in the country, she was offered a movie contract for a major film, *La Cabalgata del Circo*” (The Circus Rider) according to De Elia and Queiroz (1997, p. 16). The movie was directed by Mario Soffici, starring Libertad Lamarque and Hugo del Carril (Ortiz, 1995, p. 78), and marked the first transformation of Eva Duarte to be materialized on her physical public appearance, for which she became blonde to perform the role. From now on, “Evita would polish and refine her personality,” allowing the golden color of her hair to become the “virtual halo that Peronist propaganda would often evoke” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 79).

*La Pródiga* (The Prodigal Woman) by the San Miguel Studios immediately followed in its stages of filming; a movie that captivated Eva, and the first film in which she was seen in a starring role (Ortiz, 1995, pp. 91-92). She played the character of “a repentant sinner who devotes herself to charitable acts. The little people consider her to be semidivine and call her ‘*La Señora,*’ ‘the mother of the poor,’ ‘the sister of the afflicted’” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 92). By the time *La Pródiga* was finished, Eva was the wife of presidential candidate Perón, and the movie was never released in Argentina since “it was
not tolerable for the President’s companion to show herself on a movie screen, no matter how touching she was” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 93). “This was only one of many instances of the Peróns’ pressure on the media during their years in power” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 16). It is conceivable that at the time, Eva Duarte would have not imagined that the woman she played in fiction would become a reality in the years to come, neither would she never expected “that this would be her last role – at least in the cinematic realm” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 93).

Despite the status enjoyed by Eva Duarte because of Perón, she “remained what she had been, the actress who was also the mistress of the high official” during 1944 and about half of 1945 (Crassweller, 1986, p. 133). Yet, Perón and Eva began to appear together in public affairs, and “were already beginning to present themselves as the major communication manipulators they would become” (Ortiz, 1995, pp. 82-83). By this time, Perón held a powerful position within the military government, but opposition from the Army colonels toward him and his public collaborator Eva had reached its highest level.

As De Elia and Queiroz state:

They were annoyed by his increasing prominence among them, and further provoked by the continual presence of his very vocal, very visible companion, who stood not behind him, which would have been socially acceptable, but beside him, sharing both his interests and his struggles in a confluence of two uncommon personalities who realized that they complemented one another. (1997, p. 16)

For her part, Eva Duarte was adapting to the country’s situation, but most importantly, she was learning. “Her education was primitive and entirely unequal to the demands of this new life in the center of power” (Crassweller, 1968, p. 134). But Eva was determined to be a fast learner. “Her technique at the beginning was simple. She listened to Perón, adsorbed everything he said, and then infused it with her own passionate emotion”
Eva was now at the center of the conflict. "She was moving in the direction of hierarchies, motivated by a desire to shake off the life she had deserted" (Ortiz, 1995, p. 46). At the same time, Eva was becoming a different person. As she claims:

"From now on, I will have a dual personality. On the one side, I am the actress to whom you can give her poufs, lamé, feathers, sequins. On the other, I am what the Big Shot wants me to be, a political figure..." (Ortiz, 1995, p. 83)

Almost simultaneously, Eva Duarte’s transformation into a political figure had begun to materialize.

The Lover

According to some, Eva Duarte did not do anything at all during Perón’s imprisonment; nor did she participate in the movement’s preparations. According to others, she did everything, rising as the “heroine behind the October events that brought Perón to power” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 117). It is true that “Eva never explicitly confirmed or denied that she helped orchestrate the mass movement to the Plaza de Mayo” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 16). But “at the same time, given her character and all that was at stake at this critical juncture, it is difficult to imagine her completely passive” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 16). For now, “she wanted only to save her man...” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 117). Perhaps, she was also moved by her love to Perón. In her autobiography, Eva recalls her strong emotions for Perón during his imprisonment in religious terms: “At every blow I thought I would die, and yet at every blow I felt reborn. Something rough, but at the same time ineffable, was that baptism of pain which purified me of all doubt and of all cowardice” (1978, p. 26). As if committed to Perón and his doctrine, Eva
furthers in her memoirs: “Since that day I think it cannot be very difficult to die for a cause that one loves. Or, simply, to die for love” (1978, p. 26).

More objectively, “Evita did what she could” to release Perón (Crassweller, 1986, p. 166). As Eva declares in her autobiography:

I rushed into the streets looking for friends who might still be able to do something for him. Thus, I went from door to door...I wandered about all the districts of the great city...As I went down from the proud and rich districts to the poor and the humble, doors began to open more generously, with more cordiality. Above, I had found only cold, calculating hearts, “prudent” hearts of “ordinary men” incapable of thinking or of doing anything out of the ordinary; hearts whose contact brought me nausea, disgust and shame. This was the worst of my Calvary about the great city. The cowardice of the men who could have done something and did not... (1978, pp. 25-26)

The fact that “Evita knew few union leaders” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 121) allowed her to look for support and “legal assistance” (Cassweller, 1986, p. 166). “That is how she efficiently accomplished the work that Peronist propaganda would later attribute to Eva after her death” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 121).

Finally October 17, 1945 had come. “In the background, hour after hour, the great city heard only the shuffle and murmur of the columns of marching workers, coming together, breaking apart, seeking information, moving restlessly, penetrating every interstice, probing, looking for Perón” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 167). There were children, men, women, countless workers who began moving toward the center of Buenos Aires by crossing the Riachuelo Bridge, “the little stream turned drainage ditch that separates the city from the industrial suburbs and towns to the south” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 167). They were “...simple people...[who] followed no one’s orders to shrike. Instead, they started a revolution” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 122). But “they offered no challenge or ill will to the police and received none” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 167). They just moved on toward the Plaza de Mayo,
“shouting their demand to see Perón, wading occasionally in the elegant fountains and pools for relief from the heat of the humid spring day, now pressing together, now flowing outward as more thousands were deposited by strange tidal forces” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 167). Above all, “…their lips mouthed for the first time, ‘Viva Perón’” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 122). Within hours, Eva Duarte and Juan Perón were on their way to the Casa Rosada with a halo of victory.

As the windows leading to the main balcony of the Casa Rosada were opening up, Perón appeared to the crowd and passionate exclaimed, “I would like to hug you all from the depths of my heart just as I would my mother”’ (Ortiz, 1995, p. 128). The emphasis upon motherhood, in Perón’s words, can be recognized in the patriarchal tradition of political discourse, as if he were giving a sort of direction to the workers that was in some way tutelary in spirit; guidance that Peronists would later attribute to the name of Eva Perón as the mother of the Argentine nation. In this October day, the leader of the people was born, the setting to contact the people, the balcony of the Casa Rosada became established, and the word descamisados “would, from now on, designate the Peronist people” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 126). Yet also “Eva was ‘born’ on that day, ‘like Venus from the sea,’ as one of the courtesans would later say” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 123). In fact, Eva “was already becoming a necessary element in the Peronist ritual” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 123) and “although the people did not think of her as a revolutionary, they did think of her” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 123). Above all, “if Eva had been ‘born’ on that day in 1945, it was thanks to the people who, by saving her man, saved her too” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 123).

Indeed, Eva had said it thousands of times in her memoirs: “I shall never forget the 17th of October, 1945. That day I was paid in advance for all this that I am doing now” (1978,
Eva really thought that she owed everything to Perón and the crowds that saved him; she acknowledged this debt with the people and wanted to repay it. As she asserts in her autobiography:

I feel I am paying a debt of love! That is why...I will go on striving, even to laying dawn my life, if it becomes necessary. Because a debt of affection such as I owe the people can never be paid in full expect with one’s life. (1978, p. 126)

According to the official version, five days after October 17, Juan Perón made Eva Duarte his second wife in a secret civil ceremony in Junin on October 22, 1945 (Ortiz, 1995, p. 133). The religious ceremony was held on December 10 at 8:25 p.m. in a small church in the city of La Plata in the province of Buenos Aires (Ortiz, 1995, p. 134). "There was no publicity of any kind. What there was, instead, was a bit of tampering with the official documents, since many of the statements in the marriage record were at variance with known facts" (Crassweller 1986, p. 171). The night of October 18, the Eva María Ibarguren’s birth certificate disappeared from Los Toldos registry; it was not only destroyed but also replaced by a false document (Ortiz, 1995, p. 132). "The forged birth certificate presented by Evita on her wedding day stated that she had been born in Junín on May 7, 1922" (Ortiz, 1995, p. 132). Additionally, the document had changed "Ibarguren for Duarte," and it also reversed her names, so that for the years to come until her death the name "María, the virginal name, would now precede that of the world’s first sinner," Eva (Ortiz, 1995, p. 132).

There was no doubt that the reason for Eva’s Duarte birth falsification had to do with "her desire to appear in the records as having been born legitimately" (Crassweller, 1986, p. 171). Thus the illegitimate Eva María Ibarguren, born in Los Toldos in 1919, introduced by her family as Eva María Duarte, yet known as Eva Duarte, the actress,
transmuted into the legitimate María Eva Duarte, born in Junín in 1922, to be recreated María Eva Duarte de Perón, the wife of the President of Argentina.

The marriage of Eva and Juan Perón marked the end of a past of humiliations and a new beginning for her. “To an illegitimate daughter, this meant being reborn. She whispered the words that she had never before uttered, ‘Thank you’” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 123). From now on, “the most important task was to eliminate the old Eva. The radio recordings, films, and publicity photos all had to disappear” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 136). Her last movie, La Próvida, still unreleased, was never shown, and was given to her as a gift (Crassweller, 1986, p. 172). This film, with which Evita had fallen in love since the start, would now remain in her memoirs as her first leading role and her last. The actress became a part of the old Eva. “Deep inside, she knew only too well that Argentina’s most triumphant woman was a failed actress” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 136). Nevertheless, Eva left her acting experiences far behind to begin a political career that would raise her to the pinnacle.

La Presidenta

Once Perón became President on February 24, 1946, Eva already held significant political power on her own, enjoying a large network of connections with the Army and the labor unions (Rock, 1987, p. 286). After the leader himself, she was the government’s most captivating and vivid figure. “As first lady she sought with energy and ruthlessness to enhance her power” and soon defined and developed her function in the Peronist government (Rock, 1987, p. 286). “From that moment on, her redefinition of herself was made in relation to Perón, who, as the helmsman, could turn the demands of the working class into reality” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 16). As for Eva’s position in power, she
performed “the role of the intermediary, the visible link, between the president and the millions who were the basis of his political power” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 205).

Ultimately, Eva Perón came to be known “in the role of a providential Madonna, the Dama de la Esperanza, ‘Lady of Hope,’ or Abanderada de los Humildes, ‘Standard-Bearer of the Poor,’” the woman who devoted her life to the Peronist cause (Rock, 1987, p. 288).

Soon after the presidential inauguration Eva Perón assumed a significant function in running the Peronist government, digging into labor and social issues (Crassweller, 1986, p. 205). Her immediate place of operations was the post office, now commanded by her friend and Minister of the Post Office and Telecommunications, Oscar Nicoloni, where Eva received delegations of workers and attended their requests in organizing unions and in creating better conditions of life (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 17). On September 23, 1946, Eva moved her office to the Department of Labor and Social Welfare, now converted into Ministry of Labor and Welfare, holding the same office for Perón since 1943 (Ortiz, 1995, p. 150). There Evita performed her task in a more official way, “increasing the pace of her consultations with union delegations, her informal giving and bestowals, her role as the people’s ambassador to the bureaucracy” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 205). In her autobiography, Eva explains the reasons that made her centered her social works in the Department:

I went to the Secretariat [Department] of Labor and Welfare because it was easiest for me to meet the people and their problems there; because the Minister of Labor and Welfare is a working man, and “Evita” gets on with him frankly and without bureaucratic red tape; and also because it was there I was offered the requisite means for commencing my work. (1978, pp. 71-72)
There was no doubt that the Ministry embodied for Eva “a symbolic place since this was where Perón had created his power base” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 17). By this time she also began to visit “factories, schools, hospitals, unions, athletic and cultural clubs. Her energy was superhuman” (Ortiz, 1996, p. 152). These were the moments when Eva felt helpful to Perón’s cause. As De Elia and Queiroz explains:

She began early in the morning, when she attended to the most urgent cases at the Presidential Residence; then she would go to the Secretariat [Department], where she received petitioners and trade unionists, and did not leave until she had spoken to every person waiting to see her. (1997, p. 17)

In this context, Eva was performing her role with such energy that it could be considered fanatical. Certainly, “all accounts agree concerning her fierce dedication and genuine interest in the problems they brought to her, the generous amount of time she spent with each person, and her unpatronizing courtesy and cordiality” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 17). The political persona of Evita was clearly founded.

By 1947, Eva Perón acquired the newspaper Democracia and converted it into a Peronist propaganda medium (Rock, 1997, p. 286). The newspaper devoted heavily to pictorial coverage of Evita’s social life, particularly her appearance “at gala events at the magnificent Colon Opera House in gowns that were becoming famous in their own right” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 206). In the eyes of her enemies, Eva was transforming herself, changing from the humble child and mistress to the First Lady of Argentina. “The transformations she underwent at this time also manifested themselves in her physical appearance. Her hair was dyed blonde and pulled back tightly from her face” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 17). As if adjusting to new requirements, she became “obsessed with self-presentation and daily went to work dressed in smart designer suits and elegant
jewelry” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 17). But this behavior raised criticism and captured the attention of the oligarchy, who “continually questioned Evita’s motives for lavish expenditures on her formal wardrobe” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 17). Eva repeatedly responded to the critics in her memoirs by saying, “I like looking nice more among my own than before strangers...and that is why I wear my best finery when I attend to the desmanisados” (1978, p. 207).

In this sense, 1947 has revealed an insatiable Eva Perón, a woman greatly seduced by glossy jewels. Still, it was also the year of the tender, fragile, and insecure Evita. As Ortiz explains:

A series of different Evitas, innumerable Evitas began to emerge, one after another – frivolous Evita, greedy Evita, manipulative Evita, Evita who dreads blunders, insolent Evita who shows off to hide her fear, sensitive Evita, the protagonist of a beautiful story. (1995, p. 157)

Although Eva enjoyed her new role as First Lady of Argentina, she never forgot the early years she spent in the little village of her childhood. As she recalls in her memoirs:

Ever since I can remember, all injustice has hurt my soul as though something were stabbing it. Memories of injustices against which I rebelled at every age still rankle. I remember very well how sad I was for many days when I first realized that there were poor and rich in the world... (1978, pp. 5-6)

Above all, 1947 marked the time in which “Evita was acquiring the status of a genuine celebrity” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 206). Now, as First Lady, Eva got a platform of power to realize her dreams, for instance, “to represent Argentinean women in Europe” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 161).

The royal trip to Europe came in the form of an invitation to Perón from General Francisco Franco of Spain who was eager to build trade relations with Argentina, one of the most prosperous nations at the time (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 17). For such an
invitation, “Mrs. Perón had to look ravishingly beautiful and rich” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 165).

Thus, Eva arrived in Madrid on June 8, 1947, where Franco welcomed her like visiting royalty, awarding her with the Spain’s highest decoration of the “Grand Cross of Isabella the Catholic” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 18). For Evita, this was the royal spectacle that she had always dreamed of. As Crassweller states:

> Then began the panoply, the receptions, the slow progressions by automobile through lanes of cheering hordes, the tossed flowers, the speeches from balconies overlooking vast historic plazas, the gifts, the fireworks, the decorations awarded, the visits to cathedral and bullfight and tomb that filled the sixty-four days Evita spent in Europe, in Spain, Italy, Portugal, France, and Switzerland. (1986, p. 206)

According to De Elia and Queiroz, “the entire tour was punctuated by visits to working-class neighborhoods and institutions engaged in social action” (1997, p. 18). But “Peronism’s adversaries have always said that Evita’s trip was more of a smoke screen than a rainbow” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 187). Allegedly, “its true goal... was to deposit the fabulous fortune inherited from the Nazis into Swiss banks” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 187). Yet, it was not until July 14, 1972, “that an Argentinean magazine, Ultima Clave, published a report regarding this charge. Its conclusions were never confirmed” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 187).

On her way back to Argentina, Eva Perón visited Brazil and Uruguay, where she was received with posters and signs that addressed her role representing women (Ortiz, 1995, pp. 202-203). Finally, on August 23, 1947, Eva arrived to the Port of Buenos Aires, where the Argentine crowds welcomed her with reverence (Ortiz, 1995, p. 203). It was a glorious moment for Eva Perón. “The royal tour was for the most part a fine success, and it was certainly a distinct element in shaping and tempering of the new Evita” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 206). Although Eva “would continue to attend to protocol and to observe the rituals of statecraft,” it was the time for her to start “her other new career, that
of social work and involvement in labor and politics" (Crassweller 1986, p. 207). From now on, only the social work mattered, which in Eva’s hands “became another powerful propaganda tool” (Rock, 1987, p. 287).

According to Ortiz, the Fundación Eva Perón (Eva Perón Foundation) was officially established on July 8, 1949 (1995, p. 222). The primary goal of the foundation was, in Eva’s words, “to fill in gaps in the national organization”’ (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 18). As the single founder; given the “sole authority for life in matters of organization, and ‘...the widest powers afforded by the Senate and the Constitution’” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 209), Eva Perón was enjoying the right to execute her decisions. “She supervised each project – during construction and in its operation – and she visited all of them frequently, often accompanied by foreigners who were traveling through the country” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 18). Within time, the foundation became a “‘store of delights’ of enormous proportions” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 223). As Crassweller explains:

Its assets exceeded $200 million. It had 14,000 permanent employees, including thousands of construction workers and a staff of priests. It acquired for distribution to the poor fantastic amounts of supplies, such as 200,000 cooking pots, 400,000 pairs of shoes, 500,000 sewing machines. (1986, pp. 209-210)

As such, the foundation was subsidized through laws passed by the Congress (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 18) as well as through contributions and donations that came from labor unions, Evita’s strongest power base, and the CGT (Crassweller, 1986, p. 210). In this context, “Evita insisted that everything be done on a grand scale, even (and especially) projects intended for the poorest recipients” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 18). Hence, the foundation grew massively within time. As Crassweller declares:
Twelve hospitals, with the best equipment available anywhere, were built. A thousand new schools appeared. There were clinics, medical centers, homes for the aged, convalescent centers, a home for girls who had come to Buenos Aires looking for work, transit homes for those needing temporary shelter, student cities, children’s homes, including a famous Children’s City built to the scale of its inhabitants, with small markets, a church, public buildings, a bank that issued script, streets, houses, and dormitories for hour hundred and fifty particularly disadvantaged children.

(1986, p. 210)

It seems clear to perceive the Peronist and personal appeal of Eva Perón embedded in the works of the foundation. On her behalf, “the foundation also built the Barrio Presidente Perón, a development with six hundred new houses just west of Buenos Aires, and it built Evita City, a planned community with 15,000 homes” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 210). Each one of these constructions, “just as in every home inaugurated by Evita,” had shown “the attention to detail” in every step of the project, implying “a kind of perfectionism that bordered on obsession” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 224). In Ortiz’s words, it was “‘Evitist’ architecture” (1995, p. 223). Above all, Eva’s personal practice can be understood as “a return to the people of what they were rightfully entitled to” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 211). In her autobiography, she writes:

It is not philanthropy, nor is it charity, nor is it alms, nor is it social solidarity, nor is it benevolence. It is not even social welfare, although to give it a more nearly appropriate name I have called it so. To me it is strict justice. (1978, p. 121)

Upon expressing these words, Eva particularly attempted to emphasize that “her programs did not represent charity, which she despised almost as much as she did the oligarchs” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 211). In fact, for Evita, charity is a word used by the oligarchs as “an ostentation of riches, and power to humiliate the humble,” as she explains in her memoirs (1978, p. 122).
Despite the enormous social activity of the foundation, Eva Perón was at the same
time significantly involved in politics. Due to the power she held in the Peronist
government at the time, Eva was elevated as “the natural spokesperson and defender of
women’s rights, which were now intimately tied to changes in the labor sector” (De Elia
and Queiroz, 1997, p. 18). July 26, 1949, marked the time of Eva Perón’s most powerful
liaison with women on a political stance, which efforts between the woman and the
political system had come to be one (Ortiz, 1995, p. 245). Since 1947, Eva was strongly
committed to the women’s cause, and her political efforts were accountable to the law
that granted the right for women to vote for the first time in Argentina’s history on
September 23, 1947 (Ortiz, 1995, 209). There are some contradictions regarding this
accomplishment at the hands of Eva Perón, since various bills were already launched in
the Argentine Congress long before Eva’s proposal (Crassweller, 1986, p. 211). In any
case, “it was a cause that Evita had made her own ever since Perón had assumed office
and the legislation was linked to her name” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 18). For a
humble woman, as Eva was, it had meant the most important political struggle in the
history of the country.

Now Eva Perón focused her endeavors on encouraging political organization
among women, thus creating the Peronist women’s party, which was compounded by
“twenty-three delegates, helped by dozens of sub-delegates,” and assembled with two
missions: “to recruit members and to unearth feminine personalities capable of becoming
deputies” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 248). The women’s organization, however, was not conceived
to be independent of Perón’s cause. As Eva asserts in her autobiography: “We are united
by the great objectives of the Peronista doctrine movement. And there is only one thing to
separate us: we have an objective of our own, and that is to redeem woman” (1978, p. 193). In fact, “the women’s party extended the foundation’s arm, for the census allowed them to control the country home by home,” which proved to be an effective tool for the Peronist government in providing “lists of the names, habits, and ideas of every individual” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 249). “Very soon the number of voters was more than doubled, and in May 1950, there were more than 807,000 women registered in Buenos Aires, 60,000 more than the number of men” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 212). Above all, the political efforts of Eva Perón ended in the presidential election of Juan Perón for a second term in Argentina in June 1952. There was no doubt of the political eminence of Evita in the Peronist government by 1950, “endorsing a reality that was impossible to hide: Eva had power” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 252).

In 1951, there were rumors that Perón would select Eva as his vice president for the 1952 elections in Argentina (Crassweller, 1986, p. 238). This decision was strongly supported by the labor unions and the CGT, which expressed to Perón “the vehement desire’ that Evita be part of the ticket” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 263). In a patriarchal country where women had never been actively involved in political affairs and always maintained a low profile, this event upset some sectors of power. “There had been no female vice president (let alone president) in any country in the hemisphere, and as her opponents saw this, that norm was under threat from this dreadful woman, a ghastly and intolerable thing” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 238). Perón’s opponents, primarily the Army, found the idea inconceivable. A communiqué circulated by one on the sectors of opposition states:

“The wife of the president had been imposed on us; she dictates orders, her presence is annoying to military men, she handles two thousand million pesos [italics added] without control from anyone, she resorts to intrigue with the army, she does not conceal her hatred against army
officers and proclaims that the CGT is the real army of the government.” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 238)

But “Perón had never worried about the army’s reactions. On the contrary, he had played with fire” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 266).

Despite the conflicting panorama, a spontaneous open town meeting known as *Cabildo Abierto*, the second in Argentina’s history following the historical event of May 25, 1810, was arranged by the CGT in support of the Peróns’ political ticket (Crassweller, 1986, p. 239). They set the date August 22 to declare their respective candidacies (Ortiz, 1995, p. 263). At the event, Perón and Eva delivered speeches from the balcony of the *Casa Rosada*, surrounded by chants from the millions of people who urged Evita to accept the nomination. In the eyes of the military, however, the announcement of Eva’s candidacy was “scandalous,” but also had a rational foundation, “if Evita were elected Vice President, and if Perón died before her, she would take over the Argentinean presidency...And she would review the troops...” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 266). It is believed that Eva’s decision at that moment of accepting; or on the contrary, refusing the candidacy was made by Perón based on the pressure from the Army to initiate a revolution (Crassweller, 1986, p. 241). Finally, the motives would have also been the Eva’s mortal illness, attributed to uterine cancer by doctors in 1950 (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 19), which may have influenced her decision. But this premise lacked strength since “the detailed knowledge of the illness that they possessed at that moment, and the intuitions they derived from that knowledge, are unknown” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 241).

What is known, however, is that on August 31, 1951, Eva Perón declined the nomination of her candidacy as vice president in a national radio broadcast (Crassweller, 1986, p. 241). From now on, Eva would never gain another opportunity for the vice
presidency; neither would she be the same person. “She was at once the glittering ceremonial showpiece who acted the part of a monarch and yet the coarse, venomous demagogue or feminist crusader who instigated the destruction of oligarchy and privilege” (Rock, 1987, p. 288). Yet for Peronists, Evita was the woman who bonded the descamisados to the Perón government. Nobody else could perform that role with such persuasiveness and fanaticism than her. “As one Peronist slogan put it, Perón cumple, Eva dignifica: through him achievement and accomplishment; through her its ennoblement and beatification” (Rock, 1987, p. 288). In the days that followed Eva’s resignation, no strength remained since her illness was devastating her body. This time nobody could encourage her to fight on. It was the time for her to lie in bed and die.

Santa Evita

By the time cancer was diagnosed, Eva Perón chose not to rest but to keep working loyally for her husband’s government. “One senses that Evita was acutely aware that she had little time left to complete what she saw as her mission, and it drove her to work herself even harder” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 19). Determined to campaign for Perón for his second presidential term, Eva spoke for the last time to the descamisados from the balcony of the Casa Rosada on May 1, 1952 with religious words that made her even more impassionate. “A week later, on her thirty-third birthday, she received from Congress the title of Spiritual Leader of the Nation” (Jefa Espiritual de la Nación) according to Crassweller (1986, p. 245).

On June 4, 1952, Perón had a total triumph in the presidential election for a second term in Argentina. “The governorships of all the provinces went to Peronists. The entire Senate was Peronist, and in the Chamber of Deputies the Peronist majority was 135
to fourteen” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 242). As if fighting violently against the pressure of
time, Evita joined Perón in the inaugural ceremony for his presidential term. “Eva could
hardly stand up straight. But for this last role, she did not want to be sitting next to a
standing Perón” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 272). This public event was her last as it was the end of
her political career. On July 26, 1952, at 11 a.m. Eva Perón fell into a final coma. At 3
a.m., Father Benítez managed the religious ritual. Finally, at 8:25 p.m. she stopped
breathing. A minute later, her death was officially announced through national radio,
“and Argentina entered a new era” (Crassweller 1986, p. 246).

The entire nation fell into a great state of mourning. Eva’s body was on public
display in the hallway of the Ministry of Labor for thirteen days. “Dressed in a white
shroud and Argentina’s blue and white flag, she was laid to rest in a clear glass casket.
Between her fingers, they placed the rosary beads given to her by the pope” during her
trip to Rome in 1947 (Ortiz, 1995, p. 278). The building was covered with flowers and
surrounded by thousands of people in line to see her body. As Ortiz explains:

For thirteen days, Argentina’s heart stopped beating. These were also
“Peronist days,” but of an opposite sign. The rain did not stop falling, as if
the weather blended in with the sorrow. The line of visitors stretched in a
zigzag under a roof of umbrellas and newspapers for almost two miles.
The people waited for ten long hours, frozen, starved, and sick. (1995, pp.
278-279)

“On the 9th of August, the coffin was placed on a gun carriage and hauled by thirty-five
union members to Congress, where the honors for a head of state were accorded”
(Crassweller, 1986, p. 246). The casket was then taken to the CGT earthquakes, where
Eva’s body would find a shelter until a monument on her name was about to be
constructed, “...for her last wish was to be laid to rest among the workers” (Ortiz, 1995,
p. 279). To keep Eva Perón with certain symbolism of eternity, her body was embalmed
in an entire year of work by a well-known Spanish specialist (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 19).

Without Eva Perón’s charisma to link the masses to the leader, Perón was overthrown in the Revolución Libertadora (Liberating Revolution) on September 16, 1955 (Ortiz, 1995, p. 281). A new military regime took control, and he was forced to exile to Spain (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 19). Death, however, did not let Eva rest in peace. Her body was stolen from the CGT and its location remained unknown for sixteen years (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 19). In a secret operation, she was moved to a military building in the center of Buenos Aires. She was buried in a small cemetery in Milan, Italy, lying under a simple headstone, engraved with a false name (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 19). In 1971, Evita’s body was brought back to Perón at his home in Madrid, Spain, completely damaged, and mutilated (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 19). As Ortiz describes, “...her nose was almost completely sunken in, the nasal septum fractured; her neck practically severed; a finger on her hand, cut off; her kneecaps, fractured; her chest slashed in four places...” (1995, p. 300). Finally her body was sent back to Argentina in 1974 when Perón ruled again (Wynia, 1986, p. 63). Since 1976, Eva Perón rested in the Duarte family vault placed in the well-known Recoleta Cemetery in Buenos Aires (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 19). People no longer stood in line to see her, but a kind of mythical presence, bounded in love and zeal, still flared in the hearts of her followers and haunted those who reviled her.

This is how Eva Perón lived and died; “the ‘Lady of Hope’ and the ‘Spiritual Chief,’ in death became ‘Martyr of the Descamisados’” (Rock, p. 1987, 307). Behind her she left a message of love for the humble that kept alive her myth. “Above all, perhaps,
she left a large space and no successor” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 247). Her name still resonates today on Broadway and on silver screen. “Her achievements remained in the memories of her people and in the streets of her nation, even though her name was officially erased for two decades” (De Elia and Queiroz, 1997, p. 19). Now her rhetoric lives on in history.
Roland Barthes presents his view about myth stating, "myth is a type of speech" (1972, p. 109). It does not imply that all language is mythical speech, rather it is established in a form of communication (Barthes, 1972, p. 109). As he puts it, "...myth is a system of communication, that it is a message" (1972, p. 109). Further, "...myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form" (Barthes, 1972, p. 109). Then, "since myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse" (Barthes, 1972, p. 109). However, he explains, the nature of a myth is defined not "by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no 'substantial' ones" (1972, p. 109). Myth, in other words, can be understood as a mode of communicating concepts and ideas. This way of conceiving myth is not limited to oral speech according to Barthes. It includes photography, films, reporting, shows, and publicity (Barthes, 1972, p. 110). Yet speech of this nature does not work with unfamiliar concepts but rather with meanings whose value is recognized by common consciousness. Barthes states:

Mythical speech is made of a material which has already been worked on so as to make suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of myth (whether pictorial or written) presuppose a signifying consciousness, that one can reason about them while discounting their substance. (1972, p. 110)

Therefore, myth is a type of speech that relies on pre-fabricated standards.

Above all, Barthes argues that myth is a language that focuses on a "semiological system" (1972, p. 114). He advances Saussure's theories to describe the nature of myth. As Barthes states, "...semiology postulates a relation between two terms, a signifier and a signified" (1972, p. 112). While the signifier is the mental image, the signified is the
concept (Barthes, 1972, p. 113). The sign is then the tangible entity, the relation between concept and image (Barthes, 1972, p. 113). Considering that the linguistic and mythical systems contain the same elements – the signifier, the signified, and the sign – the signifier can be viewed from two sides in myth: the final term of the linguistic system, or the first term of the mythical system (Barthes, 1972, pp. 116-117). In this context, Barthes proposes an alternative of identification to describe his analysis of myth. He calls the signifier as meaning in the first system. He prefers to think of it as form. Signified means concept, and sign means signification (1972, p. 117). This alternative of naming, as Barthes concludes, is all “better justified since myth has in fact a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us” (1972, p. 117).

From here Barthes implies that myth “is a second-order semiological system” (1972, p. 114) to methodically reveal the manner in which signs are transformed into myths and concealed their true purposes. Barthes writes:

That which is a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second. We must here recall that the materials of mythical speech (the language itself, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects, etc.), however different at the start, are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth. (1972, p. 114)

So myth takes the meaning of the sign from the linguistic system and transforms it into a signifier for its intention, thus generating a second order of signification. The created sign; that is, the “final term of a first semiological chain” turns into the signifier of the second-order semiological system, or the “…first term of the [mythical] system which it builds and of which it is only a part” (Barthes, 1972, pp. 114-115). What Barthes aims to do by this representation of mythology is to expose how myth takes the meaning from the
linguistic system and struggles to conceal itself under what Barthes calls the “language-object” (1972, p. 115). In myth, Barthes explains, two semiotic systems intertwine. Language-object builds its own system, and myth, called “metalanguage,” a second language in which “one speaks about the first” (1972, p. 115). Thus, myth covers up itself in the language-object, making one see in it “only a sum of signs, a global sign...” or the final term of the semiotic system (Barthes, 1972, p. 114).

As meaning, the signifier of the myth already postulates a rich signification derived from experiences, ideas, and knowledge during the course of history. “As a total of linguistic signs,” Barthes explains, “the meaning of the myth has its own value, it belongs to a history...is already complete, it postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions” (1972, p. 117). Guided by myth, the form put the knowledge and ideas of the meaning that is not immediately essential to the myth aside. Thus, “the meaning leaves its consistency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letter remains” (Barthes, 1972, p. 117). Yet the meaning does not lose any significance or its innate value, for the form of the myth should be able to foster in the meaning and still hide there if necessary. Barthes explains that meaning is like the form of an “instantaneous reserve of history, a tamed richness” (1972, p. 118). The form must constantly be rooted in meaning for its nutriment and hide within. After all, “it is this constant game of hide-and-seek between the meaning and the form which defines myth” according to Barthes (1972, p. 118).

Once this empty meaning finds the concept; that is, the signified of myth, it experiences a new flow of history and knowledge that is embedded in the myth (Barthes, 1972, p. 119). But this knowledge is somewhat biased since it corresponded to a certain
understanding of reality (Barthes, 1972, p. 119), for it the concept is considered an unreliable resource of information. As for the latter, the concept is the functional motive behind the myth, “it is defined as a tendency” (Barthes, 1972, p. 119). From here, Barthes states, “we can say that the fundamental character of the mythical concept is to be appropriated” (1972, p. 119). This appropriation is yet easy to accomplish, for the concept “has at its disposal an unlimited mass of signifiers” (Barthes, 1972, p. 120). It means that the concept “often does nothing but re-present itself” (Barthes, 1972, p. 120). So “there is no fixity in mythical concepts,” Barthes further remarks: “they can come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear completely” (1972, p. 120).

The same as the sign in the linguistic system, the signification of myth is the correlation of the first two terms mentioned above; that is, form and meaning. However, Barthes asserts, “we must note that in myth, the first two terms are perfectly manifest (unlike what happens in other semiological systems): one of them is not ‘hidden’ behind the other, they are both given here…” (1972, p. 121). While the form supplies for the spatial understanding on the linguistic meaning, the concept, however, “it is a kind of nebula, the condensation, more or less hazy, of a certain knowledge” (Barthes, 1972, p.122). Evidently, “the relation which unites the concept of the myth to its meaning is essentially a relation of deformation,” Barthes claims (1972, p. 122). In fact, the concept literally distorts “but does not abolish the meaning; a word can perfectly render this contradiction: it alienates it” (Barthes, 1972, p. 123). This distortion is thus accumulated in the concept, “which uses it like an ambiguous signifier, at once intellective and imaginary, arbitrary and natural” (Barthes, 1972, p. 123). In addition, Barthes proposes that the deformation of the mythical signification not only corresponds to the
functionality of the concept but also refers to the nature of the alibi; that is, the absence of something in a place that is believed to be and its presence is somewhere else. Therefore, “‘I am not where you think I am; I am where you think I am not’” (Barthes, 1972, p. 123).

Taking this into consideration, Barthes suggests that “myth is a type of speech defined by its intention…much more than by its literal sense…” (1972, p. 124), so the intention of the myth is its essential force. Yet it is hidden, “somehow frozen, purified, eternalized, made absent” by its literal meaning, so that the signification “appears both like a notification and like a statement of fact” (Barthes, 1972, 124). In this context, Barthes emphasizes the importance of motivation in the mythical signification. As he puts it, “motivation is necessary to the very duplicity of myth: myth plays on the analogy between meaning and form, there is not myth without motivated form” (1972, p. 126). Conversely to language, in which the signifier appears as arbitrary, Barthes remarks that “the mythical signification…is never arbitrary; it is always in part motivated, and unavoidably contains some analogy” (1972, p. 126). He further explains:

Motivation is unavoidable. It is, none the less [sic], very fragmentary. To start with, it is not ‘natural:’ it is history which supplies its analogies to the form. Then, the analogy between the meaning and the concept is never anything but partial: the form drops many analogous features and keeps only a few…One must even go further: a complete image would exclude myth, or at least would compel it to seize only its very completeness…But in general myth prefers to work with poor, incomplete images, where the meaning is already relieved of its fat, and ready for a signification… (1972, pp. 126-127)

One of Barthes’s examples of mythical speech is a picture on the cover of the magazine “Paris-Match,” which depicted a black soldier with his French uniform saluting
the national flag (1972, p. 116). The photograph apparently portrayed a literal meaning of a young black soldier in the act of giving a French greeting. Yet Barthes states:

All this is the meaning of the picture. But, whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors. (1972, p. 116)

As seen in Barthes reading, the photograph is immersed in a semiological system, changing between two orders of meaning. The first-order meaning is just the image depicted in the photograph: “a black soldier is giving the French salute” (Barthes, 1972, p. 116). This is the “signifier” according to Barthes, which is already composed by the signs of the language (1972, p. 116). The second-order meaning, however, refers to the ideology of the unified French society. This is the “signified,” that is, “a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness” (Barthes, 1972, p. 116). Finally, “there is a presence of the signified through the signifier” (Barthes, 1972, p. 116). Whereas the photograph had a first literal meaning of a simple French citizen who is serving in the army, the second-order or mythic meaning has turned the picture into a statement of fact, therefore, to symbolize the ideological system of the French society. In others words, the mythic dimension has deformed a historical image into a naturalized meaning. Barthes then reads myth as a double system that holds within it an everlasting alibi. As he declares: “Myth is a value, truth is no guarantee for it; nothing prevents it from being a perpetual alibi: it is enough that its signifier has two sides for it always to have an ‘elsewhere’ at its disposal” (1972, p. 123).

According to Barthes, there are three ways to perceive myth. The first way simply involves focusing on the empty signifier (Barthes, 1972, p. 128). This is the style of the
myth producer; that is, the journalist or the novelist, who simply searches for a form in which to lay a concept (Barthes, 1972, p. 128). As he puts it, “I let the concept fill the form of the myth without ambiguity, and I find myself before a simple system, where the signification becomes literal again…” (1972, p. 128). In other words, this is the level where the reader of myth is not seeking for ambiguity but rather for the fact of the subject matter. For instance, “the Negro who salutes is an example of French imperialism, he is a symbol for it” (Barthes, 1972, p. 128).

The second way comes by decoding the myth through centering on the full signifier (Barthes, 1972, p. 128). This is the literary critic; the mythologist who understands the distortion and intentionally seeks to look at the things myth is trying to hide (Barthes, 1972, p. 128). In Barthes’s words,

...I clearly distinguish the meaning and the form, and consequently the distortion which the one imposes on the other, I undo the signification of the myth, and I receive the latter as an imposture: the saluting Negro becomes the alibi of French imperialism. (1972, p. 128)

Finally, the third way of perceiving myth is by focusing on the mythical signifier (Barthes, 1972, p. 128). This is, in fact, the consumer of the myth, who tends to knowledge myth as obvious. In his words,

...if I focus on the mythical signifier as on an inextricable whole made of meaning and form, I receive an ambiguous signification: I respond to the constituting mechanism of myth, to its own dynamics, I become a reader of myths. (1972, p. 128)

Barthes implies that the picture becomes vague if looking at the whole meaning. Readers of the myth experience its intentional meaning and its truth. For instance, “the saluting Negro is no longer an example or a symbol, still less an alibi: he is the very presence of French imperialism” (Barthes, 1972, p. 128).
Another way of perceiving myth is to understand that the first type makes the intention evident while the second type uncovers the truth (Barthes, 1972, p. 128). In this setting, both modes of focusing one’s attention are “static, analytical; they destroy the myth” (Barthes, 1972, p. 128). According to Barthes, “the former is cynical, the latter demystifying” (1972, p. 115). On the contrary, the third way is “dynamic, it consumes the myth according to the very ends built into its structure: the reader lives the myth as a story at once true and unreal” (Barthes, 1972, p. 128).

Myth, above all, “hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion” (Barthes, 1972, p. 129). The myth-consumer recognizes myth as if natural. As Barthes puts it, “it is not read as a motive, but as a reason” (1972, p. 129). This places myth into a natural status, allowing room for justification. In Barthes words, “myth is speech justified in excess” (1972, p. 130). He proceeds to explain this justification in the following way:

…the naturalization of the concept, which I have just identified as the essential function of myth, is here exemplary. In a first (exclusively linguistic) system, causality would be, literally, natural...In the second (mythical) system, causality is artificial, false; but it creeps, so to speak, through the back door of Nature. This is why myth is experienced as innocent speech: not because its intentions are hidden - if they were hidden, they could not be efficacious - but because they are naturalized. (1972, p. 131)

For the myth-consumer, the shift of history into nature is so powerful that the effect of the myth neglects the alternative for rational inquisition. “In fact, what allows the reader to consume myth innocently is that he does not see it as a semiological system but as an inductive [natural] one” according to Barthes (1972, p. 131). Therefore, “myth is read as a factual system, whereas it is but a semiological system” (Barthes, 1972, p. 131).
While presenting a critical method for the study of modern myths, Roland Barthes's most significant thoughts rely on how myth functions in modern society. It seems worthy to note that much of Barthes's insight was into the cultural bourgeois society, so his analysis of the nature of myth is constructed upon his notion of the dominant ideology of the bourgeoisie. Indeed, Barthes's major concern is to disclose the latent mythological meanings of the signs surrounded on many aspects of people's social life. In other words, Barthes attempts to expose the fictitious reality of myth to privilege a more truthful understanding of contemporary society.

As stated earlier, Barthes's interpretation of myth focuses on the idea of a socially constructed reality that sustains dominant contingents of power and ideological values experienced by people in everyday life as universal and natural truths. This can be perceived as that in the cultural bourgeois society in Barthes’s view. Since myth is all about naturalizing cultural signs embedded in popular society, Barthes attempts to analyze how the dominant bourgeoisie constructs an image of reality to maintain its power and encourage its ideology.

In this setting, myth can be seen as the propagation of mass culture upon the world. In Barthes’s use, myth functions as ideology that preserves the capitalist society. As he puts it,

I am not forgetting that since 1789, in France, several types of bourgeoisie have succeed one another in power; but the same status – a certain regime of ownership, a certain order, a certain ideology – remains at a deeper level...as an economic fact, the bourgeoisie is named without any difficulty: capitalism is openly professed. (1972, pp. 137-138)
Thus, myth proclaims the bourgeois culture as the dominant class, and therefore reinforces the omnipresent nature of the bourgeois ideology. Barthes claims,

...in a bourgeois culture, there is neither proletarian culture nor proletarian morality, there is no proletarian art; ideologically, all that is not bourgeois is obliged to borrow from the bourgeoisie. Bourgeois ideology can therefore spread over everything and in so doing [sic] lose its name without risk... (1972, p. 139)

Indeed, Barthes sees the hegemony and influence of the bourgeoisie to be so powerful that “...it makes its status undergo a real ex-nominating operation: the bourgeoisie is defined as the social class which does not want to be named” (1972, p. 138).

Barthes further asserts that the bourgeois ideology is all widespread, appearing in “our press, our films, our theatre, our pulp literature, our rituals, our Justice, our diplomacy, our conversations, our remarks about the weather, a murder trial, a touching wedding, the cooking we dream of, the garments we wear, everything...” (1972, p. 140). Above all, myth is a representation of norms, “which the bourgeoisie has and makes us have of the relations between man and the world” (Barthes, 1972, p. 140). As a result, the ideology of bourgeoisie is experienced as part of everyday life, suggesting a picture of the world in which members of society are reunited in a single social class. As Barthes states, “the fact of the bourgeoisie becomes absorbed into an amorphous universe, whose sole inhabitant is Eternal Man, who is neither proletarian nor bourgeois” (1972, p. 140). Simply, the bourgeois myth appears apolitical, ahistorical, and therefore natural and universal. “It is as from the moment when a typist earning twenty pounds a month recognizes herself in the big wedding of the bourgeoisie that [myth] achieves its full effect” (Barthes, 1972, p. 141). The result is an image of reality that absorbs the historical meaning to create a natural image of reality. “And this image has a remarkable feature: it
is upside down,” Barthes remarks. “The status of the bourgeoisie is particular, historical: man as represented by it is universal, eternal” (Barthes, 1972, p. 141).

The bottom line in Barthes’s theories focuses on the role of myth in bourgeois society. As he explains:

If our society is objectively the privileged field of mythical significations, it is because formally myth is the most appropriate instrument for the ideological inversion which defines this society: at all the levels of human communication, myth operates the inversion of anti-physics into pseudo-physics. (1972, p. 142)

This associates “just as bourgeois ideology is defined by the abandonment of the name ‘bourgeois,’ myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things…” (Barthes, 1972, p. 142). In other words, what materializes to have a natural implication is, in fact, conditional on history itself. Barthes states:

What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a natural image of this reality. (1972, p. 142)

Myth as ideology lived in daily practice. Central to his analysis is that people are immersed in a world of signs that survive in society by continually converting bourgeois ideological norms into natural truths.

The Politics of Myth

Myth is therefore “depoliticized speech,” according to Barthes (1972, p. 143) because it has historical meaning as well as a natural rationale that makes “contingency appear eternal” (1972, p. 142). This is what brings the real power of myth and which allows people to identify with a continual nucleus of values propagated by the myth itself. For instance, Barthes reminds us the photograph of the black soldier in uniform
saluting the French flag. In this case, he explains, "...what is got rid of is certainly not French imperially...it is the contingent, historical, in one word: fabricated, quality of colonialism" (1972, p. 143). Thus, myth aims at disguising meanings and concepts of their historical and political content. Political here means "...the whole of human relations in their real, social structure, in their power of making the world..." (Barthes, 1972, p. 143). As a result, the historical dimension of the bourgeois society becomes naturalized and accepted beyond politics. This action is accomplished through a simplified and depoliticized interpretation of society rooted in myths.

It would be erroneous to claim that myth denies things according to Barthes (1972, p. 143). Conversely, myth shows meanings and forms as statements of fact. Barthes states, "...its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification..." (1972, p. 143). In other words, myth does not neglect the political but rather purifies the social and political life of society. Myth is then depoliticized speech because it attempts to construct a society without inconsistency and ambiguity, in which meanings have the appearance of being natural and universal. The reason why this can be done is because humans, in Barthes's views, "depoliticize according to their needs" (1972, p. 144). At this level, Barthes conceives a realm that is placed apart from the production of myth. He asserts:

There is therefore one language which is not mythical, it is the language of the man as a producer: wherever man speaks in order to transform reality and no longer to preserve it as an image, wherever he links his language to the making of things, metalanguage is referred to [as] a language-object, and myth is impossible. (1972, p. 146)

In this sense, Barthes proceeds, "revolutionary language" is speech that is "meant to reveal the political load of the world: it makes the world; and its language, all of it, is
functionally absorbed in this making” (1972, p. 146). Such speech can be seen as “... initially and finally, political, and not, like myth, speech which is initially political and finally natural...” (Barthes, 1972, p. 146). Thus, Barthes concludes, “if myth is depoliticized speech, there is at least one type of speech which is the opposite of myth: that which remains political” (1972, p. 145).

In keeping with this analysis, Barthes goes on to delineate the difference between myth on the political left and on the right. As he claims, “myth is on the right” (1972, p. 148) because it is better at manipulating mythological imagery. Conversely, there is no way for myth to be on the left because its language is rooted in political action (Barthes, 1972, p. 145). In fact, myth exists on the political left only when the left disposes of revolution and accepts to cover itself, “to hide its name, to generate an innocent metalanguage and to distort itself into ‘Nature’” (Barthes, 1972, pp. 146-147). Revolution then can never be mythological according to Barthes (1972, p. 146). As he puts it: “The bourgeoisie hides the fact that it is the bourgeoisie and thereby produces myth; revolution announces itself openly as revolution and thereby abolishes myth” (1972, p. 146).

Maurice Bloch, concerning the ritual concept, has developed a comparable line of thought to that of Roland Barthes on the nature of myth. As Bruce Lincoln states,

...like Barthes, Bloch located a nonmystified and potentially revolutionary mode of thought and discourse within the experience of productive labor, and here, of course, they both follow Marx. This they dialectically oppose to another mode of thought and discourse that serves only to mystify and thereby perpetuate the sociopolitical status quo: This latter category they locate in myth (Barthes), ritual (Bloch), and ideology (Marx). (1989, p. 6)

In this sense, both Barthes and Bloch place myth and ritual in the opposite direction to the forms of revolutionary speech of productive labor. By following Marx, they both
advance the parameters of discourse and the categories of thought by focusing on two inversely correlated forms; that is, mystification and labor (Lincoln, 1990, p. 7).

In the latter, Barthes's theories of myth may be seen as revealing how the dominant bourgeois society yields a static view of the world with its mythologizing. Myth then succeeds because it obscures the historical and political dimensions of popular culture to privilege a natural order of society. “This is because myth is speech stolen and restored” according to Barthes (1972, p. 125). He then applies the term “language-robbery” (1972, p. 131) to show how myth lives under artificial pretenses. Eventually, this serves to convey and perpetuate the dominant bourgeois ideology. Barthes states,

Thus, every day and everywhere, man is stopped by myths, referred by them to this motionless prototype which lives in his place, stifles him in the manner of a huge internal parasite and assigns to his activity the narrow limits within which he is allowed to suffer without upsetting the world... (1972, p. 155)

Only revolution can then take away the conditioned stagnant situation of bourgeois myths from modern society and its language.

Above all, myth for Barthes is not an illusion of reality commonly defined in ancient cultures and popular talk. Rather, concepts and meanings are redefined. It is, in his words, a “metalanguage,” which allows myth to appropriate the historical content of image and shows a fictitious version of reality. From here, Barthes proposes a strategy against the historical distortion carried by the dominant myth of the bourgeoisie. As he writes, “...the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify [sic] it in its turn, and to produce an artificial myth: and this reconstituted myth will in fact be a mythology” (1972, p. 135). As if inciting such challenges, he asks the reader, “since myth robs language of something, why not rob myth?” (1972, p. 135). This is, in fact, the central
powerful nature of myth as a living creature immersed in the word under an innocent and natural appearance to achieve its purposes. In this context, Barthes recognizes the authority of myth in its ability to be appropriated but also the hegemonic ideological effects in the world thereof.

The Discourse of Myth

Having pointed out the significant contributions of Roland Barthes to the study of myths, a great deal can be said in recognition of Bruce Lincoln’s theoretical work. In his study, Lincoln centers his interests on the social and political dimensions of myth and ritual and their corresponding application in modern society. In the broadest sense, he focuses on issues of discourse, practice, power, conflict, and the construction of social groups. Particularly, he explores the ways in which myth and ritual can be used to keep societies together while at the same time pull apart a society and recreate it. More importantly, Lincoln examines the role of symbolic discourse and its force in constructing society. In this sense, he presents a viewpoint based on how diverse forms of delivered communication can be used for the creation, preservation, or reconstruction of society. Ultimately, he attempts to reveal the power of discourse, not only as an instrument that informs and organizes society but also as a narrative tool that can be implemented to create social groups and disintegrate them.

To start with, Lincoln proposes a definition of myth that has its roots in society itself. As he states:

For *myth* most precisely signifies, in its pejorative and condescending usage, a story that members of some other social group (or past era) regard(ed) as true and authoritative, but that the speaker and members of her of his group regard as false. (1989, p. 24)
Lincoln conceives myth as a narrative that is acknowledged in human society as authoritative, meaning by this as being true in itself and taken as a credible model for social groups (1989, p. 24). "That is to say," Lincoln remarks, "a narrative possessed of authority is one for which successful claims are made not only to the status of truth, but what is more, to the status of paradigmatic truth" (1989, p. 24). In other words, it is when a story is accepted as a social paradigm for the past, present, and future of community that it can be placed on the realm of myth. When recognized as narratives authorized by society, they begin to function as social patterns for human behavior, fusing groups of people under common standards while providing at the same time a model of society in which they may identify their preferences or reconstruct their social patterns. Above all, stories reach the category of myth in society by the manner in which people in the different aspects of their lives employ them.

Following with this line of analysis, Lincoln situates the political nature of myth in the realm of discourse and force, which can be used to create, deconstruct, and re-create society (1989, p. 3). As he explains: "Together, discourse and force are the chief means whereby social orders, hierarchies, institutional formations, and habituated patterns of behavior are both maintained and modified" (1989, p. 3). Hence, myth can be understood as a form of discourse that not only narrates alternative realities of society but also helps to propagate political concepts and ideologies for purposes of social cohesion and change. As Lincoln asserts:

Thus, myth is not just a coding device in which important information is conveyed, on the basis of which actors can then construct society. It is also a discursive act through which actors evoke the sentiments out of which society is actively constructed. (1989, p. 25)
This set of observations leads us to consider that society in Lincoln’s understanding is an artificial construction held together under common and shared points of reference by sentiments depicted from discourse. In his words:

And like all synthetic entities, a society may either recombine with others to form synthases larger still, or – a highly significant possibility ignored in most Hegelian and post-Hegelian dialectics – it may be split apart by the persisting tensions between those entities that conjoined in its formation, with the resultant formation of two or more smaller synthases. (1989, p. 11)

From here, we can perceive that the political nature of myth relies on its potential to elicit sentiments that can serve to mobilize social groups into particular structures and allude to the opportunities of maintaining or altering these formations by claiming authority and truth in itself. “Ultimately,” Lincoln remarks, “that which either holds society together or takes it apart is sentiment, and the chief instrument with which such sentiment may be aroused, manipulated, and rendered dormant is discourse” (1989, p. 11). Above all, whether a discourse is successful eventually depends on its ability to forge symbolic communicative bonds between people and society through the sentiments it elicited. As Lincoln concludes, “it is through these paired Instrumentalities – ideological persuasion and sentiment evocation – that discourse holds the capacity to shape and reshape society itself” (1989, p. 9).

As these sentiments change within time and history, the shape of society also manifests a change in its social and political formations. It is when sentiments educed from the past help to constitute the bonds and borders of society. As Lincoln puts it, “the mechanism that accomplishes such redefinitions is the recollection of specific moments from the past – those associated with different apical ancestors” (1989, p. 20). In this setting, myth is much more a form of discourse that recounts different episodes of the
past through ancestral invocations and revolutionary slogans in Lincoln’s views (1989, p. 21). In practice, and given a particular social situation, both ancestral invocations and revolutionary slogans are capable of not only to mobilize social groups but also to produce a sociopolitical change.

An illustration of this statement appears in the writings of Leon Trotsky concerning the events of the Spanish Revolution (Lincoln 1989, p. 17). Here Lincoln cites how Trotsky “...repeatedly impressed on his comrades the value of slogans as a means to accomplish great things” (1989, p. 17). In fact, Trotsky envisioned in slogans the quality to induce a revolutionary action. His words delivered in 1931 during the Second Republic in Spain proved the confidence he relied on the value of revolutionary slogans:

> We have few forces. But the advantage of a revolutionary situation consists precisely in the fact that even a small group can become a great force in a brief space of time, provided that it gives a correct prognosis and raises the correct slogans in time. (1989, p. 17)

Thus, in Trotsky’s views, revolutionary slogans function to reconstruct traditional social forms and create new ones. As Lincoln remarks, “…by giving voice to the deeply felt but officially unacknowledged aspirations of those who are marginalized under existing social structures, even the tiniest party can mobilize a large, unified, and active following” (Lincoln, 1989, p. 18).

Above all, we may perceive that ancestral invocations work on society as much in the way as slogans in a revolutionary event. Yet special mention must be made in regard to the fact that while Trotsky’s slogans tend to be directed to the future, ancestral invocations take placed in the past (Lincoln, 1989, p. 20). According to Lincoln, we
might here consider the sociopolitical mechanism of mythic discourse that is not only limited to stories in the past but in the future (1989, p. 38). He states,

Yet there are other myths...that are set not in the past but in the future, a mythic future that – like the mythic past – enters discourse in the present always and only for reasons of the present. What is more, such myths may well be (and have often been) contested territory as competing segments of society seek to appropriate them and turn them to their own interests, be those interests the preservation of the status quo or the reconstruction of society in some radically new form. (1989, p. 38)

It is then worthy to perceive how interests of stories from the past may also be a struggle for the shape of society in the future.

As for a story of the past that contributes to the interests in the present, Lincoln mentions the "Myth of the First Cattle Raid," which functions to a large extent in the form of ancestral invocations and revolutionary slogans (1989, p. 21). The myth recounted the tribal relationships between the Nuer and the Dinka, two neighboring communities immersed in conflictive integration. The Nuer were the people who considered cattle as the principal good of production and wealth and whose relations with the Dinka were inconsistent due to the repeatedly theft of their cattle on great scale (Lincoln, 1989, p. 21). As recalled by Evans-Pritchard,

"Nuer and Dinka are presented in this myth as two sons of God...who promised his old cow to Dinka and its young calf to Nuer. Dinka came by night to God’s byre and, imitating the voice of Nuer, obtained the calf. When God found that he had been tricked, he was angry and charged Nuer to avenge the injury by raiding Dinka’s cattle to the end of time.” (Lincoln, 1989, p. 21)

The story, beyond its functionalist interpretation of intertribal relations, can be seen as a "reflection of the political relations between the two peoples," as Evans-Pritchard assesses, a story that "calls forth a familiar, if temporarily latent, level of social integration" (Lincoln, 1989, p. 21). One has just to imagine the feeling of resentment
experienced by the Nuer when looking at the Dinka driving another cow through the village. “To them it was grotesque” since it was in fact “...contrary to what had been ordained by God” (Lincoln, 1989, p. 21). Above all, this story alludes to the myth of ancestral invocations, which serves to mobilize sentiments of identification and cohesion among these social groups while at the same time elicit those of antagonism and isolation. “These sentiments – above all those of internal affinity (affection, loyalty, mutual attachment, and solidarity) and external estrangement (detachment, alienation, and hostility) – constitute the bonds and borders that we reify as society” according to Lincoln (1989, p. 20).

In the latter, the Nuer-Dinka’s myth can be recognized as evoking stereotypical sentiments to legitimize social actions. Given a particular problematic situation, individuals could appropriate “that piece of the past – real or imagined, familiar or novel – that could best serve them as an instrument with which to confront and reshape their present moment” (Lincoln, 1989, p. 28). More importantly, “individuals who feel attached to the same moment of the past...can thereby be brought to feel attached to each other” according to Lincoln (1989, p. 23). Such a particular narrative has to make a truthful claim in a symbolic and motivating manner to bond people to society under shared referents. Lincoln concludes:

In this sense the authority of myth is somewhat akin to that of charters, models, templates, and blueprints, but one can go beyond this formulation and recognize that it is also (and perhaps more important) akin to that of revolutionary and ancestral invocations, in that through the recitation of myth one may effectively mobilize a social grouping. (1989, pp. 24-25)

From the examined examples, we may perceive how myth has been used frequently and effectively into the complex dynamics of society through the evocation of
sentiments in order to preserve the status quo or incite some radically new social form. Indeed, Lincoln describes three different methods in which myth can be strategically implemented by people to accomplish such goals. Firstly, “they can contest the authority or credibility of a given myth, reducing it to the status of history or legend and thereby deprive it of the capacity to continually reconstruct accustomed social forms” (Lincoln, 1989, p. 25). Secondly, “they can attempt to invest a history, legend, or even a fable with authority and credibility, thus elevating it to the status of myth and thereby make of it an instrument with which to construct novel social forms” (Lincoln, 1989, p. 25). Finally, “they can advance novel lines of interpretation for an established myth or modify details in its narration and thereby change the nature of the sentiments (and the society) it evokes” (Lincoln, 1989, p. 25). Myth, in other words, is a powerful medium at the hands of those who are seeking to convey ideologies through mythic discourse.

Ultimately, myth is an authoritative form of symbolic discourse whether verbal or narrative, and whatever its temporal course. As Lincoln puts it, myths are authoritative and truthful narratives “…that draw the future into the present as were earlier made regarding those narratives that do the same for the past” (1989, p. 49). Unlike Barthes’s analysis that locates myth on the political right as better in appropriating mythological symbolism, Lincoln contests “…to discredit any neat and simplistic formulation that would reduce myth to a tool of the right and the right only” (1989, p. 49). Reasonably, as Lincoln puts it, “…it seems best to observe that the dominant discourse – including mythic discourse – in any age is the discourse of the dominant class” (1989, p. 49). Indeed, this is the claim Barthes made in his mythological study; that is, the phenomenon
of the dominant bourgeois mass culture imposed upon the popular culture of working-
class people. Yet, Lincoln remarks:

This does not mean that other groups are without their discourses and
without their myths, not that they are incapable of appropriating the myths
and discourse of the dominant class, which they may also refashion and
employ to telling advantage. (1989, pp. 49-50)

Clearly, myth is what robs authority or credibility to provide narratives that enclose the
required persuasive power to reach general acceptance among the members of society in
its purposes of maintaining or reworking social structures. The impact of myth in society
eventually depends upon how mythic narratives claim paradigmatic truths within time.

Myth of Peronism

Based on the significant works proposed by Roland Barthes and Bruce Lincoln,
myth can be recognized as a symbolic powerful tool that can be activated through
narratives or pictures to act upon people’s consciousness. Particularly, the way Barthes
conceives myth as a language that struggles to turn historical content into ideological
naturalization in order to construct its system of rhetoric provides a line of analysis that
serves this study of Eva Perón. In fact, myth in Barthes’s conception allows the reader to
perceive not only how dominant cultural values and historical beliefs can materialize as
timeless, self-evident, and true for the receiver of the myth, but also how audiences can
interpret and perceive myth innocently.

So, in this case, myth functions in Eva Perón’s rhetorical performances to
reinforce the sociopolitical ideology of Peronism, and ultimately, to promote and validate
her political position of power. Clearly, the myth of Peronism aims at fulfilling the
emotional needs of the Argentineans in the 1950s, primarily the poor, which were quite
affected by a long tradition of denials from the dominant oligarch class. From here, the concept of Peronism could have an array of meanings and forms. But for the purpose of bonding the urban poor with the Peronist ideology to win over their support, the historical meaning of Peronism is to be emptied. Combined with a particular mixture of symbols and motives, it produces a new signification. In this sense, the myth of Peronism successfully depicts a message that is simply an alteration of reality. The myth-consumers, the descamisados, are scarcely conscious of the powerful action of myth as a legitimating political process. As a result, the myth of Peronism is naturalized and its message undeniable beyond measure for the poor men, women, and workers as if no other interpretation of meaning is liable for them. It is thus clear that Peronism functions as a language that produces a symbolic method of representation, which is, in fact, mythical in a depoliticized sense. In this context, Eva Perón performed the Peronist myth in her rhetoric to identify with the descamisados and gave legitimacy to her political power.

The political nature of myth developed by Lincoln provides a significant basis to study Eva Perón’s rhetoric as well. Lincoln’s approach to myth as a form of symbolic discourse used to elicit sentiments are paralleled to the strategies and tactics of public communication delivered by Eva Perón to mobilize the Argentine people to revolutionary action through the emotional evocation of the Peronist myth. In the quest for exerting political power through its discourse, the Peronist myth engages in developing symbolic forms of language to identify with its followers. By alleging ancestral invocations of past nationalist and populist leaders as well as persuasive revolutionary slogans, the Peronist myth offers alternative realities through its narratives that serves to disintegrate the social
elite dominated by the Argentine oligarchy and re-create, in effect, a society based on the interests of the shirtless poor. The fact that its discourse is invested with sentiments, values, and morals that correlate with the respective social concerns of the lower class has contributed to Peronism its political power and myth status. By virtue of its claims of truth, the myth of Peronism has inspired its followers, thus symbiotically bonding them together into new social patterns. At the same time, it provides points of reference for common identity. In this sense, the mythical narratives of Peronism can be understood as a social construct, which succeed in legitimizing its political authority by igniting sentiments of passion from the lower social group. Clearly, by combining discursive instruments in her rhetoric that has sustained Argentina’s traditional culture, Eva Perón was able to reconstruct society into an active force for the national integration of labor and the poor who had been on the outside, mobilize and persuade these audiences to take political action, and legitimize her leadership position in the Peronist myth.

Ultimately, mythical speech is a powerful form of persuasion that can be integrated in different spheres of public and political life, not just to reinforce traditional ideals of the past, but simultaneously to open new lines of interpretation particularly relevant for future applications. In fact, societies have been using mythic narratives throughout the years to create, preserve, and transmit their cultural values. In this context, myth in relation to Eva Perón’s rhetoric has served her to perpetuate the ideology of Peronism, convey national identity among the Argentine poor people, and attain political legitimacy. Considering that myth exists in diverse forms at different times, presenting particular variations that rely on the specific needs of the society, it seems important to understand the concept of Peronism in Argentina at a specific time in its history that
began in 1943 and reached its highest point by 1950. Certainly, this thesis examines the crucial components that made the ideology of Peronism distinctive.

In the broadest sense, Peronism, or Peronismo, was a form of economic, social, and political government in Argentina that acquired the name of the man in office, Argentine President Juan Perón. “In its most abstract and colorless presentation,” Andersen states, “most observers agree that [Peronism] was a mixed bag of nationalism and social welfarism, articulated politically in a strong leader and structurally in a strong central authority” (1993, p. 27). For this thesis, however, the best definition of Peronism in Argentina was proposed by Robert Crassweller, whose approach has preserved the essential core of the movement at that moment in its history. “Peronism, then,” in Crassweller words, “may be defined roughly as an authoritarian populist movement, strongly colored by Catholic social thought, by nationalism, by organic principles of Mediterranean corporatism, and by the caudillo traditions of the Argentine Creole civilization” (1986, p. 223). Drawing on this interpretation of Peronism and its place in Argentine politics, Crassweller distinguishes four significant correlated elements that help to explain its ideology.

As for the first component of the Peronism movement, Crassweller identifies the principle of “authoritarian corporatism” (1986, p. 222). As a result, Peronism became the authority’s instrument for political consolidation, emphasizing the idea of a central state imposed over all sociopolitical and economic sectors (Wynia, 1986, p. 61). The major function of this government relied on controlling and supervising the political process while at the same playing the role of intermediary between capital and labor interests to solve conflicts by more or less authoritarian methods. In the process of shaping the
central state, Peronism might have adopted the character of European fascism, moving by its aspiration to substitute the oligarchy’s liberalism with authoritarian corporatism (Wynia, 1986, p. 67). Certainly, employment legislation was one of the major premises applied by the Peronist government to ensure political recognition of trade unions and labor organizations. Thus, “workers’ basic rights were guaranteed by the Constitution, whose provisions included the ‘right to work,’ which implied a state commitment to full employment, and the rights to ‘just pay,’ retirement, education, and access to ‘culture’” (Rock, 1987, pp. 262-263). In return for the laws of employment protection, workers provided political support to Peronist policies in exchange. This line of thought, as Romero puts it, “implied a reconstructing of democratic institutions and a subordination of constitutional powers to the executive branch, where the leader resided, whose legitimacy was derived less from these institutions than from the popular plebiscite” (2002, p. 108). It was, in fact, “military concepts” combined with “‘strategic commands’” that outlined Peronism (Wynia, 1986, p. 61). The tactic of authoritarian corporatism, fully integrating labor interests into the state control to organize and mobilize the working class was one of the fundamental pillars that shaped Peronism as a myth.

The second and one of the most important components of the Peronist ideology is populism in Crassweller’s view (1986, p. 222). Usually, the political phenomenon of populism has been viewed by scholars as part of a cyclical change in Latin American growth (Friedl, p. 6). In fact, the Great Depression, industrialization, and immigration, largely from European countries, appeared as major events that brought significant changes in Latin America’s political, economic, and social life. In this regard, Kenneth M. Roberts argues in his 1996 article entitled Neoliberalism and the Transformation of.
Populism in Latin America: the Peruvian Case (p. 85) that the phenomenon of populism “was linked to a transitional stage between traditional and modern societies” (Friedl, p. 14). In the case of Argentina, for instance, the 1940s signaled a considerable influx of migration from the poorer provincial farms to the city of Buenos Aires, where humble workers were seeking for jobs helplessly and living under precarious standards. It was under this critical scenario that ruling political elites were discredited by worker groups, which credited them with the responsibility for the eventual breakdown of the economy (Friedl, p. 13). This political context left room for the emergence of new military authorities and populist leaders, whose personal ambition and good timing led them to align themselves with a concerned working class and exploit this alliance against the dominant Argentine oligarchy.

It is interesting to observe that the rise of populism during this time was also defined as directly associated with the exclusion of certain groups in the political arena. Friedl related populism to “the failure of the old political elites to prevent a massive disaster as a result from the depression, and because of their unwillingness to incorporate vast parts of the population into politics” (p. 13). The fact that workers were among the social groups that most strongly resented the old political elite, primarily because of their lack of political recognition, helped to explain the political triumph of Peronism in Argentina in the 1950s as well as its conception as a popular movement. As Walter Little explains:

Peronism was supported not by marginal groups but by the overwhelming majority of the common people who had been systematically excluded from the exercise of the political rights to which their social importance entitled them by the resistance of those middle and upper-class groups that had already become powerful in Argentine society. (Burchett, 1985, p. 55)
Considering the situation at hand, Michael L. Conniff explains in his 1999 book *Populism in Latin America* (p. 4) that the phenomenon of populism was greatly encouraged by "colorful and engaging politicians who could draw masses of new voters into their movements and hold their loyalty indefinitely, even after their deaths" (Friedl, p. 14). In this setting, one might think of Eva Perón as one of the most prominent and contemporary examples of populist leaders in Argentina in the 1950s. Through her emotional rhetoric, she was able to climb as the binding force between the Peronist government and the *descamisados*, and legitimize her political position.

Therefore, it is possible that these political, social, and economic events had helped to reconstruct society and social groups, creating an incipient working class targeted by populist candidates of the time. Personal performances within the electoral campaign allowed them to drive the masses to their movements and attain political authority. It was, in fact, the emergence of this new mass of workers, as Conniff (1999, p. 4) explains, "... which gave some populist a decidedly pro-labor image" (Friedl, p. 15).

Thus, personal styles of populist leaders with "great intellect, empathy for the downtrodden, charity, clairvoyance, strength of character," as Conniff puts it (1999, p. 5), distinguished and placed them apart from their peers (Friedl, p. 17). Conniff asserts that a "mass hypnotic state united leader and followers" (1999, p. 5), and that these distinctive traits of populist leaders "...in the eyes of the followers, empowered them to defend the interests of the masses and uphold national dignity" (1999, p. 4), allowing them to win support over the masses (Friedl, p. 17). In this context, charisma is the most significant quality, which allowed populist leaders to capture the hope of the masses and produce social change in society. It can be considered that Eva Perón's populist rhetoric
is the most distinctive personal quality that let her touch the Argentine hearts and gain political support from the poor men, women, and working class, like no populist leader, not even her husband Juan Perón. Therefore, populism was an essential pillar that built the myth of Peronism.

The third vital element of the doctrine of Peronism is nationalism, according to Crassweller (1986, p. 223). The myth was firmly rooted in nationalistic achievement, thus transforming into a pseudo-ideology characterized by a pragmatic amalgam of industrial progress and social reform. Strongly opposed to the symbols of economic imperialism, primarily from the United States and Great Britain, Peronism signaled them as the enemy. A highly emotional sense of patriotism was thus embedded in the Argentine nation through the Peronist discourse, becoming the most powerful symbol of national unity. In the end “the emotional nature was the one that gave the quasi-religious or spiritual tilt to [Peronism’s] values, and the emphasis on abstractions such as justice, dignity, pride” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 185).

With such line of thinking, “...sectors of the economy once in foreign hands – railroads, power plants, and telephones – became wholly ‘Argentine,’” according to Rock (1987, p. 263). A more forceful approach was needed to lead the battle against economic imperialism from Great Britain and the United States. It was, in fact, the launch of a nationalist strategic growth that Peronism fulfilled by implementing state control over exporting goods and resources, imposing populist macroeconomic policies, negotiating labor relations, building up manufacturing, and increasing import substitution industrialization to guarantee economic autonomy (Wynia, 1986, p. 64). “This anti-imperialism turned out to be a rhetorical weapon and a formidable political position...”
Romero explains (2002, p. 88), becoming the hegemonic political concept that shaped the ideology of Peronism. No doubt, nationalism became the ideological framework that gave meaning and form to the Peronist myth.

It is not surprising that this nationalist sentiment was firmly strengthened by Roman Catholic beliefs as well as by Spanish inherent values. It ensured the continuing Peronist political authority as a proclamation of cultural prestige and pride. As Crassweller explains:

This was reinforced by [Peronism's] strong evocation of the indigenous Argentina, of the spirit of the aborigines, and of the valued gifts of the civilization that “...under the protection of the Cross was brought to us by the cavaliers of Spain. The fusion of the two cultures...has given to [the Argentine] people a human sense of life that may well be compared to the classical Greek and Latin, superior to those by reason of having sifted their essences through the magic Christian redemption.” (1986, p. 188)

An amalgam of religious principles, historical concepts, and Hispanic values had fostered the Argentine nation from the discourse of Peronism to create an everlasting enchantment for its followers:

“Since the days of our independency we have accepted no other culture that the Spanish culture we inherited...For us the Race is not a biological concept. For us it is something purely spiritual. It constitutes the sum of the imponderables that make us be what we are and impel us to be as we ought to be by reason of our origin and our destiny...For ourselves, the Latins, the Race is a style. A style of life that teaches us to live by practicing the Good, and to know how to die with dignity...History, religion and the language place us on the map of western and Latin culture, through its Hispanic sources, in which heroism, nobility, asceticism and spirituality reach their most sublime proportions.” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 233)

In due course, “...through nationalistic impulse and psychological heritage, Argentina had come to see itself as the counterweight in the south to the United States in the north and as the natural leader of the Latin American nations” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 106). In
this new crusade, "the enemies of the nation were no longer immigrants," Romero explains, "...there were the British and the 'sell-out' oligarchy," along with the Americans (2002, p. 88). Peronism was converted into a national doctrine. It, in fact, backed the Roman Catholic dogma and restored the central state that brought the nationalist Peronism nature, which dominated the Argentine sociopolitical thinking in the 1950s. As the inspiring lyric of the Peronist March conveys, "'unite in the love of God,'" gathered "'at the foot of the sacred flag'" (Romero, 2002, p. 112).

The final and fourth component in the Peronist ideology is the caudillo theme, according to Crassweller, a crucial element that allowed Peronism "to touch the hearts of millions on dimly discerned levels of psychological intimacy" (1986, p. 223). In general, the phenomenon of caudillism has its origins in military tradition. Thus, caudillo, a word from Castile, is commonly associated with a charismatic leader whose political actions and rules depend exclusively on one leader. As a journalist of the London’s Times explains,

"...A Caudillo is a leader with a personal following. A programme, doctrine, or ideology is not essential; but a Caudillo must have great personality and be different from other men. He needs courage, audacity, good looks, kindness to the poor, understanding of working-class psychology, and an atmosphere of mystery, though not all these qualities are essential." (Crassweller, 1986, p. 223)

Such is the ideology of Peronism, distinctive, with a personal appeal, and much more related to its time in Argentine history, able to combine past and present in its political discourse with a traditional insight representative of the priorities predestinated for future actions (Crassweller, 1986, p. 224).

Like the other principles of Peronism, this concept of caudillism is a significant component, for it defined the aspiration of a conductor aiming at the selection of
guidelines and alternatives in pursuit of a strong political leadership. Such a pursuit requires a charismatic strong leader, whose spirit of prosperity and compromise were reflected in the entire process of political conduction. As Crassweller puts it, “the word conducción [meaning conduction] implies leadership, plus the function of the teacher and, by way of metaphor, that of the leader of the orchestra” (1986, p. 230).

In making this point, Crassweller further asserts that there are three elements in the process of defining the word conduction; that is, “the Conductor himself, the helpers who work under him and with him, and the mass that is to be led” (1986, p. 230). As for the first element, Crassweller explains:

The Conductor must be born for the task, he must have been anointed, in [Peronism’s] favorite phrase, with the Sacred Oil of Samuel. He is much more than a mere Caudillo, for he is a creator as well as a leader, an artist more than a technician. (1986, p. 230)

Concerning the second element, Crassweller declares that “the helpers of the Conductor are essential, but of a lesser order, being executors of his work rather than creators” (1986, p. 230). As for the mass of people to be guided, Cassweller concludes,

...an unprepared, ignorant mass must be made organic through moral and intellectual preparation that teaches it how to be led, yet it must have some initiative of its own, since every man who is led must also lead himself. (1986, p. 230)

Given this quality and design of the masses, the Peronist ideology sought to establish a relationship between the conductor and its people that centered on the symbolic loyalty from followers toward its doctrine, and on the substantial benefits of the population as an instrument of social control. In fact, for Peronism, “the mass of followers...was to be valued generally not for its intrinsic worth but for its power of reaction as a mass...” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 230).
Only one leader prevailed in the eyes of Peronist followers, the solitary image projected in the popular crowds proclaiming that hope and fight would replace a long tradition of neglected privileges. In this sense, the Peronist ideology entailed strong elements of passion and mysticism in its discourse. Basing its legitimacy on powerful instruments, such as the use of an emotional rhetoric and invocations to past charismatic leaders, Peronism elicited sentiments of political fanaticism among its followers. As such, its discourse frequently recited *gaucho* (Argentine cowboy) heritage and showed respect for the old Creole values, particularly exemplified in the image of Juan Manuel de Rosas, a *caudillo* of the past who symbolized the popular identification with the Argentine people. These traditional political performances allowed the poor masses to identify themselves with the virtues of their leader, loyally believed on his discourse, and obeyed his orders without question. After all, these motives and values gave the Peronist myth the natural appeal to continue influencing and shaping human behavior.

All of these components of Peronism appointed by Crassweller have unveiled significant and emotional machinery with which Peronism built its political program. Yet a fifth and unavoidable element should be considered to truly understand this ideology in Argentina during the 1950s, the so-called *Justicialismo*, or Justicialism. The term, derived from “social” and “justice,” was created as the official philosophy of Peronism in 1951 by Raúl Mende, a Jesuit seminarian who became the planning minister in the Peronist government (Crassweller, 1986, p. 227). Thus, this doctrine “reflected the inspiration of *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, together with a whiff of Hegel,” according to Crassweller (1986, p. 227). As he puts it, “*Justicialismo*: a doctrine whose object is the happiness of man within the society of mankind through the harmonizing of
material, spiritual, individual and collective forces, appraised from the Christian standpoint” (1986, p. 227).

In this regard, Peronism can be described as a philosophy, which combined personal leadership with elements of a doctrine of social justice, designed to harmonize the needs and interests of all the individuals, particularly the urban poor. As such, “its goal was the ‘organized community,’ in which, under the guidance of the tutelary state, conflicting interests would be brought into harmony” (Crassweller, 1986, pp. 227-228). What was particular, as Romero emphasizes, was the idea of social action embraced by the Justicialist doctrine of Peronism (2002, p. 116). This is understood because Peronism “…railed against the rich, attacking their ostentatious wealth…and their affection for the British, feeding the descamisados (shirtless masses) on the illusion that they were taking control of the country from its richest members” (Wynia, 1986, p. 60). In this setting, Justicialism integrated the thoughts of a leader and his community, becoming a constitutive doctrine of both Peronism discourse and the new rights of working people. “‘Social justice’ was thus culminating a century-old process in the integration of Argentine society and the identity that was constituted around that concept simultaneously strengthened class identity and integration with the state” (Romero, 2002, p. 116).

It seems important to perceive that the virtues of Justicialism also served as an ideal framework for Peronism in terms of foreign and economic affairs. By advocating a strong anti-United States and anti-British policy, Peronism integrated the concept of a “Third Position” in its discourse, which gave form to the new national Argentina unified
in a political program that centered its efforts on the social justice of the nation. As Rock explains:

What [Peronism] called *la tercera posición* - 'the third position' - was among the first of the doctrines of nonalignment, an attempt to achieve effective national sovereignty on a foundation of independence and equidistance from the two rival world power blocs. (1987, p. 264)

The essentials of this concept were associated with the perception of social injustices experienced by popular sectors, for it Justicialism became the ideology to suit the actual needs and circumstances of working people and contribute to the process of developing a national central state. As Whitaker concludes,

“Third Position” meant a compromise between totalitarianism and unfettered free enterprise, and abstention from any foreign commitment that would deprive Argentina of freedom of action...and “Justicialism” connoted primarily social justice at home, though international affairs too was understood. (1964, p. 133)

When considering the impact of the social, political, and economic changes in Argentina during the era of Peronism, it becomes clear why the working class fought so loyally on behalf of Eva Perón. The idea of reconstructing a new Argentina deliberately by a popular leader, the *caudillo*, and politically structuring a strong central government combining nationalism and social justice principles to mobilize popular masses to social action was quite alluring to the ideology of Peronism at the time. “Justice, sovereignty, welfare, emancipation, harmony, progress - such were the myths of Peronism and the keywords in its discourse,” Rock explains (1987, p. 264). More importantly, they were the strongest symbols that gave meaning and form to the myth of Peronism, and set the political direction of Argentine history in the 20th century.

In conclusion, the myth of Peronism served the spiritual growth of the Argentine nation. It was, in fact, Eva Perón, master of passionate rhetoric, who strengthened the
emotional ties of the popular masses to the Peronist ritual. A sense of affinity and compromise with past charismatic caudillos was evoked often in the discursive style of Peronism. In this setting, Eva Perón’s rhetoric was perceived as a political and social reform on a national level for the urban poor and working class, a focus on dignity, integrity, and pride, and a call for renewal of an old tradition of neglected rights. Through her discourses, filled with revolutionary words that echoed national values and sentiment of hope for the humble, the Argentine society was actively reconstructed. In this sense, the myth of Peronism succeeded in causing a powerful psychological impact upon the Argentine society that served its purpose for cultural reinforcement and political legitimacy.

In the latter, Eva Perón’s rhetoric allowed the ideology to be accepted as a true paradigm, holding both credibility and authority among the Argentine people, primarily the descamisados, and achieving the status of myth. Thus, Peronism is naturalized, and its effects, perhaps, will never be forgotten. Even today, Peronists hold on to their conviction that a way to a better future can be found if Argentina returned to the ideology of Peronism once more. Clearly, the myth of Peronism still feeds the people’s faith with promises of prosperity successfully delivered through Eva Perón’s rhetoric. Therefore, myth criticism theories, particularly the set of ideas proposed by Roland Barthes and Bruce Lincoln, along with their application to the ideology of Peronism, provide an appropriate perspective to undertake this study.
The Rhetoric of Eva Perón

Eva Perón spoke inaccurately and was devoid of self-confidence during the early years of her public communication. Her first political speech for Perón’s campaign was, in fact, awkward and ineffective. Ortiz recounts the first time that Perón assigned her the task of speaking to a mass of women who had rallied to support the leader (1995, p. 140). During that time, Juan and Eva Perón relied upon the assistance of Muñoz Azpiri, a speechwriter who supported the political team. So Eva asked Muñoz to write a speech for her to be memorized and delivered to the female audience in the Luna Park Stadium (Ortiz, 1995, p. 140). On February 4, 1946, Eva Perón performed as an orator for the very first time. In Ortiz’s words, “she packed her first weapons to disastrous results” (1995, p. 140). Eva arrived at Luna Park two hours late, and the female audience, struggling in a hot environment, was enraged and intolerant (Ortiz, 1995, p. 140). Ortiz asserts:

These women wanted Perón, and they were not the type to keep quiet when the colonel’s wife tried to “deliver a message” in her best soap opera style. Evita tried to raise her soft voice above the racket, but it was useless. (1995, p. 140)

Once Eva Perón became First Lady of Argentina, she assumed an active political role in her husband’s government, taking charge of labor matters, and speaking constantly to the masses. Robert Crassweller explains:

Within a year or so after the first election, Evita had developed into a highly effective platform speaker, capable of impromptu eloquence and an emotional empathy that ran through crowds like an electric discharge. She did this by ignoring the jargon of politics and speaking instead from her heart, the source of her personality and being. It was effective because it was authentic and reflected the experiences and concerns of her hard formative years, which were the lot of so many of those who listened. (1986, p. 212)
This would prove that, due to her strong spirit and charisma, Eva was completely involved in the creation of her own rhetoric. This time her voice was meant to be heard. “Later her voice would become rough, violent, and authoritarian, …” Ortiz remarks (1995, p. 140). It was only later on that Peronist women identified with Evita and loved Perón vicariously through her (Ortiz, 1995, p. 141).

Eva Perón’s speech documents provided interesting insight into the political and communication ritual she performed in Argentina during the 1950s. Therefore, the manuscripts are used as texts for analysis. Specifically, this chapter describes how the Argentine people, primarily the poor men, women, and working class, have adhered to the Peronist ideology, largely due to certain rhetorical and aesthetic methods that Eva implemented. Myth analysis is used to study her rhetoric, and particular attention is given to identifying the Peronist elements she adopted in order to communicate her message and achieve political leadership.

“*My Life for Perón*”

In the autobiography’s prologue, as generally seen in most of her rhetoric, Eva emphasizes the great significance of Perón in her life:

I was not, nor am I, anything more than a humble woman... a sparrow in an immense flock of sparrows... But Perón was, and is, a gigantic condor that flies high and sure among the summits and near to God. If it had not been for him who came down to my level and taught me to fly in another fashion, I would never have known what a condor is like, nor ever have been able to contemplate the marvelous and magnificent immenseness of my people. (1978)

Evidenced in Eva’s words, her conversion from “sparrow” to “condor” was attributed to Perón. She was contrasting the powerful condor that Juan Perón represented compared with herself, the little and fragile sparrow. By identifying with the small sparrow, she
gave to the common people a sense of connection, identifying herself as one of the people, setting herself apart from Perón's identity. “But I do not forget, nor will I ever forget, that I was a sparrow, nor that I am still one,” she states in the preface of her memoirs (1978). Thus, Eva Perón created this comparable imagery to describe her nature to the ordinary people by invoking easily recognizable familiar words for them.

It is important to highlight in Eva Perón’s rhetoric her determination to serve the traditional role of submissive and loyal wife to her husband, Juan Perón. In her autobiography, which was fully devoted to Perón, Eva asserts, “I would be disloyal to my people if I did not speak of him...I have already received from him all I could hope for - much more than I deserve” (1978, p. 45). Perón’s presence in her life was felt as a kind of liberation, as if he were healing her feelings of weakness and smallness:

Because sometimes, thinking to be useful to him, I do something unusual that turns out to be wrong. But he always forgives me. He has been able to reconcile “slavery” and liberty in me. As a woman I belong to him utterly...I would not take one step if I did not think it was in accordance with his wishes; and yet I feel as free as I have ever wished to be. (Perón, 1987, pp. 164-165)

The imagery in this passage reveals Eva’s devotion for Perón; a mystical yet self-condemning love. “I am nothing,” a voice inside whispered to Perón ...‘but I can be you, become you, and serve you’” (Ortiz, 1995, pp. 61-62).

Part of Eva Perón’s rhetoric is the negative and positive aspects that surrounded her personality, which made her a paradoxical woman and sometimes difficult to understand. Within her autobiography, she claims: “Many persons cannot understand the circumstances which have made my life what it is. I myself have often pondered on all this that is now my life” (1978, p. 3). Eva continues to portray herself in her memoirs with words of her “sharpest-tongue critics” as “a superficial woman, uninstructed,
common, unacquainted with the interests of her country, remote from the sorrows of her people, indifferent to social justice and with nothing serious in her head…” (1978, p. 3).

Later in her autobiography, she describes a feeling that disturbed her life since her childhood:

I felt, even then, in my innermost heart, something which I now recognize as a feeling of indignation. I did not understand why if there were poor people there must also be rich ones, nor why the latter’s eagerness for riches must be the cause of the poverty of so many people. (1978, p. 8)

This statement clearly reflects that the conception of injustice was never completely understood by the young Eva Perón, yet she could feel the harmful effects of social discrimination upon people, a feeling that would have been expected from a woman whose early years were full of misfortunes. It was, in fact, this critical situation experienced in her life that allowed Eva to assume a significant part in the social fight for her country. Thus, these pieces of rhetoric symbolize Eva’s attempts to unveil her memories of injustice as the major reasons that drive her spirit and actions in her actual life and transform her into a woman fanatically devoted to the cause of the poor. As she states in her autobiography:

Perhaps that is why I can never say why I feel pained by injustice, and why I have never been able to accept it as a natural thing, as the majority of men accept it. Still, even if I cannot understand it myself, it is certain that my feeling of indignation at social injustice is the force which has led me by the hand…and that it is the final cause explaining how a woman who in some people’s eyes sometimes seems “superficial, common and indifferent,” can decide to live a life of “incomprehensible sacrifice.” (1978, p. 9)

The passage above shows the conflicting aspect of Eva Perón’s character; a woman who was more troubled with the fact that the privileges enjoyed by the rich were the cause of the injustices suffered by the poor. In her opposition’s perspective, Eva Perón was the
ignorant and indifferent woman to social causes; at the same time, she was the woman who devoted her life to the homeless. "I saw her kiss lepers," declares Father Benítez, Eva’s private confessor, "people with tuberculosis, cancer...I saw her take people in rags in her arms and catch their lice" (Ortiz, 1995, p. 234). Ultimately, it is this controversial image, often surrounded by mystery, which has kept Eva Perón’s myth alive ever since.

In order to gain insight into the progression of Eva Perón’s rhetoric from a common woman’s background to the leader and communicator in Argentina during the 1950s, one should consider the role that Juan Perón has played in her early development. In fact, Eva claims in her autobiography that many lessons she learned in life were credited to the “teachings” she “received freely from Perón” (1978, p. 4). In her words:

I remember, for example, how he went on teaching me his doctrine, showing me his plans, acquainting me with the great problems of national life; and how he made me distinguish between what was possible and impossible, the ideal and the practical. (1978, pp. 45-46)

Above all, Eva did not only consider Perón as a great teacher but also as a superior presence in her life, comparing him with great philosophers in the history of humanity. “I think that Perón resembles more another class of geniuses, those who created new philosophies and new religions,” she states in her memoirs (1978, p. 172). “Nobody except Perón shows humanity a new path, giving it new hope,” she further concludes (1978, p. 173).

As for Eva’s feelings and thoughts toward Perón, it is not surprising to perceive in her rhetoric that she described them publicly in obvious religious words. “It was not that she claimed divinity for Perón,” Crassweller states, “...but her expressions eventually
drew so heavily on metaphors of divinity and Christ that she clearly had come to regard him as a being apart” (1986, p. 216). In Eva’s words,

I will not commit the heresy of comparing him with Christ…but I am sure that, imitating Christ, Perón feels a profound love for humanity, and that it is this, more than any other thing, which makes him great, magnificently great. (1978, p. 172)

The symbolism in this passage can be read as an epideictic speech. In fact, much of Eva’s rhetoric can be interpreted as a hymn of holy praise about Perón. This is not surprising since the Argentine religion at the time, like most Latin American societies, was dominated by a strong faith in Catholicism, and Eva Perón, although unpretentious in her religious practices, was believed to be “Roman Catholic” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 216). “I know that God Himself fills the heavens,” she asserts in her autobiography. “But God, Who could not imagine Heaven without the Mother He loved so much, will forgive me if my heart cannot imagine it without Perón” (1978, p. 165). Incorporating religious thinking, therefore, appears as an essential philosophy in Eva Perón’s rhetoric. In fact, these religious convictions, mingled with the zealous love for Perón, play an important role in how Evita communicated the Peronist ideology to the Argentine people. Above all, this saintly symbolism created by Eva herself, commonly branded as a traditional woman and wife, the weak and small sparrow, and sensitive to the homeless became an essential part for the conception of her myth. From now on, she, “woman,” became a mythical figure instead of remaining a human being, creating the image she needed to transform the fantasies of the poor into Peronist facts.
Because I am Peronista

In order to understand Eva's relationship with Perón and the Peronist cause, one should first recognize the nature of her love for Perón and the transformation of this feeling into extreme devotion within the years to the point of fanaticism. According to Crassweller, "there are few proofs that have survived" when attempting to analyze her veneration for Perón "since Evita was not given to letter writing and the recollections of others are partisan and fragile. However, one authentic source does remain, written under circumstances that strongly suggest its sincerity" (1986, pp. 214-215). Thus, Crassweller recalls the night of June 6, 1947, when Eva Perón, sitting in her section of the boarding plane to Europe, broke into tears (1986, p. 215). For a woman with little experience of political protocol, the task of representing Peronism and Argentina to the world was a significant step in her life because she was concerned and afraid to be apart from Perón. According to Ortiz, "Evita was not nervous only about Juancito [Perón]. She was nervous about her own awkwardness, too. And her stage fright was intensified by the fear of death....Besides, her past was following her" (1995, p. 170). It was in this moment, Crassweller recounts, when Eva “reached for pen and paper and with little regard for syntax and punctuation poured out her heart to Perón in a rush of desperation and love:"

Dear Juan,
I am very sad to be leaving because I am unable to live away from you, I love you so much that what I feel for you is a kind of idolatry, perhaps I don’t know how to show what I feel for you, but I assure you that I fought very hard in my life with the ambition to be someone and I suffered a great deal, but then you came and made me so happy that I thought it was a dream and since I had nothing else to offer you but my heart and my soul I gave it to you wholly but in all these three years of happiness, greater each day, I never ceased to adore you for a single hour or thank heaven for the goodness of God in giving me this reward of your love, and I tried at all times to deserve it by making you happy, I don’t know if I achieved that, but I can assure you that nobody has never
loved you or respected you more than I have. I am so faithful to you that if God wished me not to have you in this happiness and took me away I would still be faithful to you in my death and adore you from the skies; Juancito, darling, forgive me for these confessions but you have to know this now I am leaving and I am in the hands of God and do not know if something may happen to me...you have purified me, your wife with all her faults, because I live in you, feel for you and think through you...

(1986, p. 215)

Taking this letter into account, it is believable that Eva was devoted to Juan Perón as her husband and the man in her life, not just the political man in the Argentine presidency. As Crassweller puts it: “The final words were rich with meaning, for Evita did live in Perón and think through him” (1986, p. 215). Such strong feelings might be considered too idealistic to many people, principally to those from a different culture. It is not surprising to perceive how Eva Perón’s sentiments and practices turn to the transcendental within time. “I have said that Perón is my illumination, my sky, that he is the very air, that he is my life. But I have not only said it; I have acted accordingly” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 216). These words clearly reveal Eva Perón’s commitment to the ideology of Peronism. As she asserts in her autobiography:

That is why I am and shall be Peronista until my dying day: because Perón’s cause exalts me, and because its productiveness will continue forever in the works I perform for him, and live in posterity after I am gone. (1978, p. 41)

This passage unveils that the rhetoric served as a source of propaganda for the Peronist government. In fact, most of her speeches and writings to the Argentine people during the 1940’s and 1950’s have expressed her devotion to Juan Perón’s political agenda. For instance, Eva presented Perón as the “Leader” in her autobiography (1978, p. 27), emphasizing that “...it is Perón’s greatness....which makes me what I am, fervently and fanatically ‘Peronista’” (1978, p. 39).
Above all, it was the Peronist passion with which Eva Perón articulated her public communication that served to reinforce her political legitimacy in the Peronist government and Argentine society. This mythical symbolism is reflected clearly in the book entitled *Historia del Peronismo*, [History of Peronism], which encloses the Eva Perón’s lectures at the *Escuela Superior Peronista* [Peronist Upper School], “a school where students were trained to go forth and work in Peronist causes” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 215). The first class dictated by Eva Perón dated March 15, 1951, in which she discusses the history of Peronism with her students and summarizes it to only two most important personalities: “the genius and the people,” in Eva’s words, “Perón y los *descamisados,*” [Perón and the shirtless ones] (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/clasesevita.htm).

Within the introduction of the lecture, Eva refers to the significance of Juan Perón in her life since the first day of their meeting: “Para mí la vida empieza el día en que mi camino se encontró con el camino del general Perón, día que yo siempre he llamado con orgullo ‘mi día maravilloso’” [For me, my life started the day when I crossed paths with General Perón; a day that I have always recalled with pride ‘my wonderful day’]. Eva then defines herself “as a woman and as a Peronist,” and later “an Argentine woman, the eternal sentinel of the Revolution,” committed to be “the hope within our movement in order to be able to collaborate with the patriotic and cyclopean work of our Leader in the construction of a nation founded on social justice, economic independence, and political sovereignty” (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/clasesevita.htm).

This passage shows how Eva Perón integrated the political, social, and economic visions of Peronism through her rhetoric as the confirmation of her public authority
among the students. Within the lecture, Eva refers to Perón as a resource of light, “…it is necessary to look for the light in other factors: in the people and in the Leader.” She continues praising Perón in her speech, referring to him as a “conductor,” “our grand Leader,” “caudillo,” “teacher,” “guide,” “patriotic,” “Leader of nationalism,” “a sincere and honest man,” “a governor” that can speak with “the sincerity of an apostle.”


In the last section of the lecture, Eva Perón refers to the poor eloquence of her public communication: “For me it is a little difficult to present here the figure of our great conductor, because I only have the eloquence of a simple woman, a woman of the village” (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/clasesevita.htm). In contrasting her ordinary rhetoric, she concludes by emphasizing her significant role in the Peronist government:

Perhaps I can do it because all of you, the Peronists of the Homeland, know full well that Eva Perón, being Eva Perón, is one and the same with Perón: where Perón is, Eva Perón is there. In these eight years of my life next to the Leader, I have not done more than take his heart, interpret it, get to know it, and bring my thoughts to the comrades who fight for the same ideals. (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/clasesevita.htm)

On Mach 29, 1951, in her second class, she refers to Peronism as a superior ideology, establishing an analogy of the doctrine to “Columbus” and “Christ” to therefore empathize that “many times, when men love to the point of sacrifice, they are more heroic.” She then states that “a superior man is able to love to the point of sacrifice” and contrasted “the mediocre and common men to the superior men” by citing Elliot: “‘Los mediocres – dice Elliot en su libro ‘El Hombre’ – son los enemigos más fuertes y más poderosos de todo hombre de genio,’” [The mediocre - Elliot states in his book, ‘The Man’ - are the strongest and the most powerful enemies of all men of spirit]. For this reason, Eva
concludes, “I aspire that every Peronist be a superior man.” Finally, Eva elevates “the humble men of our Homeland” as “superior men of our Homeland” because “they saw Perón and believed in him” (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/clasesevita.htm).

Within the lecture, Eva Perón discusses the contributions of the greatest philosophers in human history, such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle to the ideology of Peronism:

From Sócrates - the humble philosopher of Athens – Peronism has taken the desire that men should be just and good; like Sócrates, Peronism preaches equality and brotherhood between the men and respect for the laws, and aspires to only one class, which we call the working class. From Plato and Aristotle we reject the concepts of classes and of slavery that they accepted, but, on the contrary, we accept their greatness contribution: their high concepts of justice as a fundamental virtue of men who live in society and, like them, we believe in and maintain the doctrine and practice that the spirit is superior to the material. (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/clasesevita.htm)

From this piece of rhetoric, we can perceive how Eva Perón not only integrated Peronist morals in her rhetoric, but also how she elevated the doctrine to the level of superior essence. “She vehemently believed in her husband’s intelligence,” Ortiz states (1995, p. 258). It would explain the mythical idealism with which she embraced her Peronist message.

In the last section of the lecture, Eva Perón recognizes the Christian root of the ideology of Peronism by alluding to Perón’s words:

Perón has said that his doctrine is deeply Christian and has said many times that his doctrine is not a new doctrine; that it had been announced to the world two thousand years ago, that many men have died for it, but that it is perhaps not yet been crystallized for men. (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/clasesevita.htm)

Eva traces a parallel between the doctrine of Peronism and the Christian doctrine. “I do not intend to make a comparison between the figure of Christ and that of Perón,” Eva
says, “but we must remember something that Perón said not so long ago” (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/clasesevita.htm). By citing Perón, Eva asserts:

“We have not only seen in Christ God, but also we have admired him as a man. We love Christ not only because he is God; we love him because he left to the world something that is eternal: the love between men.”


In this sense, Eva concludes, “I think that if there is a man who loves mankind, if there is a humble, generous and extraordinary man within his simplicity, it is General Perón”

(https://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/clasesevita.htm). Clearly enough, the expressions of Eva Perón in this passage, heavily rested on symbols of spirituality and mysticism, proves that she saw in Perón a superior human set apart from the ordinary men on earth.

On April 5, 1951, in her third class, Eva Perón proposes two major conclusions to her students in order to gain insight into the essentials of Peronism:

(1) That no extraordinary man can be omitted from consideration as a precursor of our Peronist movement.

(2) That Peronism has taken the best of philosophers and leaders throughout human history. (https://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/clasesevita.htm)

Eva then credits her statement by declaring that “Peronism not only has achieved these accomplishments,” it has also contributed to the greatness of the Argentine nation. In Eva’s words, “no nation has been as happy as Argentina at this moment, thanks to Perón and his doctrine.” She then apologizes to the students for her rhetorical redundancy: “You will pardon my long prologue; I cannot resist the temptation to speak of the General”


In the last section of her lecture, Eva Perón proceeds to recognize the “two fundamental elements” that made Peronism a distinct movement in human history: “the people or the masses” and “the Leader.” Eva defines the people as comprising “three
characteristic conditions;" that is, "social conscience," "social character," and "social organization." She then describes "the Leader" by praising Perón, who taught to the Argentine masses, the "three great objectives: social justice, economic independence, and political sovereignty." Finally, Eva concludes, "for this very reason, Perón is great...because he had provided us with a doctrine" (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/clasesevita.htm).

On April 12, 1951, in her fourth class, she emphasizes to her students that "the three great loves of a Peronist are the people, Perón, and the Homeland," and identifies Perón as the "people." For this reason, Eva remarks, "Peronism, which was born on the 17th of October, is the first real victory of the spirit of the people over the oligarchy." She continues by defining the spirit of the oligarchs: "For me, it is the eagerness for privilege, selfishness, arrogance, vanity, and ambition." Eva then exemplifies the oligarch spirit instilled in the bourgeois French society of the 1789s, and declares that "the bourgeoisie exploited the reality of the hungry and destitute people." That is why, Eva proceeds, "we prefer to remember three words that were the motto of the French Revolution: Freedom, Equality, and Brotherhood, three beautiful words that the French intellectuals spoke in a delightful way, but did little to act upon" (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/clasesevita.htm).

In contrasting the French Revolution to the Peronist Revolution, Eva proclaims: "Our movement is very serious, because we have a man, General Perón, who is sacrificing his life to provide us with a consolidated doctrine so as to place it into our hands the Justicialist flag." For this reason, Eva explains, "the virtues of the people are generosity, sincerity, unselfishness, and humility," prevailing over the selfish oligarch.
class. In fact, Eva continues, “Peronists never say ‘I,’ he who does is not a Peronist. Peronists say ‘we.’” This is the ultimate reason why “the oligarchy of the 17th of October, the one that we defeated that day, for me, is dead,” Eva concludes (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/clasesevita.htm).

On April 19, 1951, in her fifth class, she highlights that “the history of Peronism, like all historical epochs, has its actors, its causes, and its scenes.” The actors of the Peronist movement are summarized by Eva as “General Perón and the people.” The causes are identified as “a force integrated by Perón” in order to “liberate us from imperialism and from fraud” (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/clasesevita.htm). In this setting, Eva recalls the economic position taken by Peronism in order to save the Argentine nation:

Colonel Perón had to fight for economic independence and for social economy....Perón is not anti-capitalist, nor is he anti-communist: Perón is a Justicialist....Perón based his beliefs on Justicialism, that is to say, on the happiness, the greatness, and the sovereignty of the Homeland....Perón decided to save his people from two evils: Capitalism of the past and Communism of the future....What we have today is a different system that Perón calls Justicialism, but that history, unquestionably will always be united with the name of Perón and it will be called as the children, the humble, and the workers of the Homeland name it: Peronism. (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/clasesevita.htm)

Later in the lecture, Eva refers to “the oligarchy,” “imperialism,” and “the international monopolies” as the “three forces,” or “three distinct forms” of the same “capitalism” in which system “it is normal to exploit the people.” She then contrasts Peronism to capitalism by identifying the creation of “social justice,” the so-called Justicialism of Juan Perón, as an attempt to “achieve economic independence.” In this sense, Eva states, Justicialism can be seen as “a ray of light and hope for all the proletarian homes that have lost their faith in their governors, faith in themselves, and the
high values of the Homeland.” In fact, Eva accentuates, the doctrine of Justicialism not
only gave the proletariat material benefits, “but also dignified them, and the exaltation of
man by man is priceless.” In defining capitalism and social justice, Eva concludes:
“Capitalism has its end in money. Perón’s Justicialism has its end in mankind”

On May 10, 1951, Eva Perón dictates her sixth and last class to her students of the
Peronist Upper School. She introduces the lecture by describing “the revolution of the 4th
of June” as “the theatre curtain has been lifted over the developing scene, one of the most
remarkable events in the history of the world” (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/
classesevita.htm). She then differentiates the causes of Peronism from the causes of the
revolution of June 4:

…if we wish to distinguish between the causes of Peronism from those of
the June revolution, we would have to say: the causes of the June revolution
are simply political; the causes of Peronism were also political, but
fundamentally economic, social, and patriotic.  
(http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/clasesevita.htm)

For this reason, Eva concludes, “we Peronists must never forget the people...because in this
way we have fulfilled the doctrine of General Perón” (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/
Evita/clasesevita.htm). The last words of Eva Perón were intended to praise once more the
figure of Perón as the leader of the Argentine nation:

Perón delivers, the workers have said with great intuition, and this was what
the people needed...General Perón has won over capitalism and
communism...Perón suppressed imperialistic action. Now we have
economic independence...Perón is the Homeland, Perón is work, and Perón
is well-being...Perón, for me, who have analyzed him profoundly, is
perfect...there is not, nor will there ever be a man like Perón.
(http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/clasesevita.htm)
Therefore, Eva Perón’s rhetoric has conveyed not only the feelings she claimed to be true toward her husband Juan Perón, but also her beliefs toward the Peronist cause, which made clear the central place that the Perón ideology played in Eva’s public communication in order to legitimate her political role. As Eva asserts in her autobiography:

“Yes, I am Peronista, fanatically Peronista!” But I would not be able to say which I love most, Perón or his cause, for to me it is all one and the same thing, it is all one love; and when I say in my speeches and in my conversation that Perón is the nation and is the people, I do no more than prove than everything in my life is sealed by one single love. (1978, p. 42)

Of equal significance was the incorporation of religious elements in her rhetorical ritual that were particularly familiar in the Argentine culture. Crassweller documents what Eva states:

“Perón is the visage of God in the darkness, and above all in the darkness that afflicts humanity in this moment.” Just as the Christians in ancient Rome died for Christ, “We, who love Perón more than anything, are going to die for Perón, because we are not defending a personal thing, but a national cause,” since Perón was the nation. (1986, pp. 216-217)

Thus, when looking for mythical imagery to analyze Eva’s rhetoric, the name Perón was delivered obsessively through her public speaking, a rhetorical strategy that allowed Evita to successfully bond her people to the Peronist regime.

It is then believable that Eva was fanatically devoted to Perón and his cause. Her delirious emotions would prove this statement. She encouraged Perón to become the leader of the Argentine people, primarily the poor men, women, and the working class. Yet she was aware that, in turn, she would legitimize her political position. “It goes without saying that Argentinean newspapers did not dare call her ‘the woman behind the throne,’ the woman President, or much less, a whore” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 160). In essence,
Eva performed the role of a mediator. “Later, she would define this role herself through a stronger image: ‘I am a bridge connecting Perón to the people. Cross over me!’” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 165). She would engage in many different mythical forms to achieve political power, becoming anything else but Perón’s shadow, as he admittedly “spent the rest of his life obstinately repeating, as if to convince himself, ‘Eva is my shadow’” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 59). In fact, as Ortiz asserts, “…when we consider a woman who became a man’s light, who willingly transformed herself into his shadow, and who, guessing that the light was disturbing him, decided to turn herself off and die, the story loses all banality” (1995, p. 59).

In a political framework, Eva Perón turned from character actor in a play to becoming the symbol of power that changed the style of politics in Argentina in the 1950’s. Her role was to communicate the ideology of Peronism to the Argentine people. With all the signs of adoration from the descamisados, and the cruel abhorrence manifested by the rich, Eva Perón was relied upon to deliver the message. She transformed herself into a Peronist myth, the image of the eternal social warrior of the poor. With her continual alluring to the value of Peronism in her rhetoric, Eva Perón materialized as the figure of sainthood in the eyes of the descamisados. In the latter, this magical Peronist representation allowed Evita to transmute from the mythical image of the traditional and loyal wife to the sacrificial mother of the Argentine nation. It was at this time that the myth of Eva Perón began to grow beyond measure, and she took advantage of this scenery to develop her image into a succession of diverse myths that allowed her to conquer the Argentine hearts through her rhetoric.
Eva Perón – The Messenger

Eva Perón’s rhetoric was a combination of personal and political motives to boost political legitimacy. In order to achieve such a goal, Eva first had to legitimize her political position. She did so in relation to Perón, president of Argentina and leader of the people. As she recalls in her autobiography:

This is a fundamental condition, and is directly related to my decision to handle the role of wife to the President of the Republic in a manner different from any President’s wife who had preceded me. I could have followed in the old pattern. I want to make this very clear, because people have also wished to explain my “incomprehensible sacrifice” by arguing that the drawing rooms of the oligarchy would have been closed to me in any event. Nothing is further than this from all reality, nor more remote from all common sense. I might have been a President’s wife like the others. It is a simple and agreeable role: a holiday job, the task of receiving honors, of decking oneself out to go through the motions prescribed by social dictates. It is all very similar to what I was able to do previously, and I think more or less successfully, in the theater and in the cinema. As for the hostility of the oligarchy, I can only smile. And I wonder: why would the oligarchy have been able to reject me? Because of my humble origin? Because of my artistic career? But has that class of person ever bothered about these things here — or in any part of the world — when it was a case of the wife of a President? The oligarchy has never been hostile to anyone who could be useful to it. Power and money were never bad antecedents to a genuine oligarch. The truth is different. I, who had learned from Perón to choose unusual paths, did not wish to follow the old pattern of wife of the President...I had to have a double personality to correspond with Perón’s double personality. One, Eva Perón, wife of the President, whose work is simple and agreeable, a holiday job of receiving honors, of gala performances; the other, “Evita,” wife of the Leader of a people who have placed all their faith in him, all their hope and all their love. A few days of the year I act the part of Eva Perón; and I think I do better each time in that part, for it seems to me to be neither difficult nor disagreeable. The immense majority of days I am, on the other hand, “Evita,” a link stretched between the hopes of the people and the fulfilling hands of Perón, Argentina’s first woman Peronista — and this indeed is a difficult role for me, and one in which I am never quite satisfied with myself. There is no need for us to speak of Eva Perón...On the other hand, it is interesting for us to talk about “Evita,” not because I feel at all vain about being she, but because those who understand “Evita” may find it easy afterward to understand her decamisados, the people themselves, who
Examining this memoir provides an answer of how Eva Perón defined her leadership position. In order to identify herself as the wife of the president of Argentina, Eva sanitized her name and legitimized her persona. Through her rhetoric, she accomplished this by creating Evita as a pure, mothering symbol of the Argentine nation. As she declares in her autobiography, “the truth is that, without any artificial effort, at no personal cost, as though I have been born for all this, I feel myself responsible for the humble as though I were the mother of all of them…” (1978, p. 62). In recognizing the metamorphosis of her identity as an honor, yet as a strong responsibility, Eva further claims,

Do not think...that “Evita’s” work comes easily to me. Rather, it always turns out to be difficult, and I have never felt quite satisfied in that role...And in any case, it is certainly as Eva Perón that I interpret an ancient role which other women in all ages have already lived; but as “Evita” I live a reality which perhaps no woman has lived in the history of humanity. (1978, p. 63)

Once established her public image as Eva Perón, wife of the president, and as Evita, mother of the nation, she had to define the symbolic role she portrayed. To do so, Eva first placed Juan Perón as the leader of Argentina to therefore guarantee her own position in the political arena. “I chose to be ‘Evita’...so that through me the people, and above all the workers, should always find the way open to their Leader,” Eva states in her memoirs (1978, p. 55). To reach political legitimacy, Eva performed a public communication that was based on the censure of the oligarchy and the empowerment of a lower social group of which she was also a part of. As she explains in her autobiography:
When a street-urchin calls me “Evita,” I feel as though I were the mother of all the urchins, and of all the weak and the humble of my land. When a workingman calls me “Evita,” I feel glad to be the companion of all the workingmen of my country and even of the whole world. When a woman of my country calls me “Evita,” I imagine myself her sister, and that of all the women of humanity. And so, almost without noticing it, I have classified in these three examples the principal activities of “Evita” relating to the humble, the workers and women. (1978, p. 62)

Given the importance of these three crucial sources of power; that is, the poor men, women, and the working class, Eva Perón gradually extended her political influence within the Peronist government through her rhetorical skill. “She was the perfect populist propagandist, thriving on the adoration of the masses,” Wynia states (1986, p. 62). Thus, the mythical symbol of Evita was born:

To her followers, she was Evita, a selfless woman who worked tirelessly to improve the lives of workers, destitute women, and needy children, totally dedicated to the downtrodden because she was born poor like them, and so committed to them that she sacrificed her life on their behalf. To her enemies, however, she was only an ambitious actress, a trollop who rose to the top by using countless men, a hypocrite interested in money, jewels, and luxurious clothes, and vengeful woman intent on accumulating power to make Argentine society pay for the shame heaped upon her because of her background. (Wynia, 1986, p. 62)

Eva Perón’s major political activity began at the Department of Labor and Social Welfare; a mythical place where she made real contact with the people and their labor problems. “I want the Secretariat [Department] always to be something like home to all the Peronistas of my country,” she states in her autobiography (1978, p. 131). Her political work was accompanied by a strong passionate rhetoric, which often recalled Peronist revolutionary slogans to mobilize her audience to social action. “‘To a Peronista there is nothing better than another Peronista,’” Eva asserts in her memoirs (1978, p. 133). This expression tells a great deal of the authority Eva Perón wielded at the time.
While she was gradually speaking to the crowds, Eva was revealing her ability to touch hearts. As Ortiz remarks:

All she had to do was repeat her leader's words and the words of those around her. She had no other words, but with these words, she would weave miracles. She would take these words and make them own, and she would succeed in hypnotizing the crowds with extremely poor and unusually vapid verbal baggage....The litany-speech. Out of her mouth, this passionate hammering would become fascinating and throbbing like a savage rhythm. (1995, p. 153)

This was a considerable step for a woman in a patriarchal country, where to manage the platform was daring and uncommon at the time. Thus, the radiance of Eva Perón's words began to reveal the path of a mission that she performed until her death.

She declares in her autobiography,

Until the last day of my life I want to fulfill the great task of opening new horizons and paths for my descamisados, for my workers, for my women....That is my vocation and my destiny. That is my mission. (1978, pp. 207-208)

It was, in fact, Evita's rhetoric, uttered on behalf of Perón's authority and created to convey his Peronist ideology that made this mission happen. Her public communication, a revolutionary mixture of authoritarianism and Peronism, commitment to social change, cultural symbolism, and Catholicism gave Evita an aura of mystique that left no doubt of her strong commitment to the cause of Peronism. There was myth-making as well as history embedded in her discourses, for Eva Perón was concentrating on the concept of Peronism as the force of social justice in the name of the underprivileged. Diverse myths can be inscribed around her persona. For now, the character of her myth adopted the form of a simple woman in her ability to construct herself in the political body for attaining Argentine female suffrage.
A Debt of Justice with Women

One of Eva Perón's crucial projects was inspired by her strong commitment to improve the lives of women and their role in Argentine politics. This mission was adjusted to the political demands of Perón. She states in her memoirs:

Millions of men have faced, as he has faced, the ever more acute problem of woman's role in humanity in this afflicted century; but I think very few of them have stopped, like Perón, to penetrate it to its depths. In this, as in everything, he showed me the way. (1978, p. 178)

In this context, Eva credited Perón and his Peronist cause for encouraging her to join the women's movement in her country: "I realize, above all, that I began my work in a woman's movement because Perón's cause demanded it," she asserts in her autobiography (1978, p. 178).

In essence, Eva Perón worked tirelessly to bring women into political and public life in Argentina. However, "...her goal was never their [women] 'liberation' as understood by feminists today" according to Wynia (1986, p. 63). In fact, Eva wanted women to support their husbands as she did. Crassweller explains:

She had no use for the feminist leaders of her time because they were anti-Peronist. She was not interested in feminist theories. She believed that a women's movement should devote itself to the cause of a man, and that women should not be deprived of their right to a domestic existence. (1986, p. 212)

In this setting, it seems obvious to perceive through her writings that women for Eva Perón were understood in the traditional nature of wife and mother. As she claims in her memoirs,

...the first objective of a feminine movement which wishes to improve things for women – which does not aim at changing them into men – should be the home. We were born to make homes. Not for the street. Common sense shows us the answer. We must have in the home that which we go out to seek: our small economic independence – which
would save us from becoming women with no outlook, with no rights and with no hope! (1978, p. 184)

Still, Eva Perón’s insight into feminism can be recognized more as the achievement of customary womankind than as a sex-identity matter. “She encouraged political activism among women, but insisted that it not come at the expense of their [sic] fulfilling their duties to their husbands” (Wynia, 1986, p. 63).

Having experienced first hand since childhood the social injustice women faced throughout Argentine history, Eva Perón used her rhetoric to persuade Peronist men to reconcile a woman’s need to be a wife and mother with her need for economic independence. As she proclaims in her autobiography,

Nobody will say that it is not just for us to pay for the work which, even if it is not seen, demands the efforts of millions and millions of women whose time, whose lives, are spent on this monotonous but heavy task of cleaning the house, looking after clothes, laying the table, bringing up children, etc...Economic independence and technical progress should be used in behalf of her rights and of her freedom, without losing sight of her marvelous status as a woman...In this way many women would be saved from the delinquency and prostitution which are the fruits of their economic slavery. In this way the prestige of the home would be saved and kept really sacred as the foundation stone of humanity...To bring about that day, and that Justicialism in all its aspects may be a reality everywhere, the woman’s movement of every country and of the whole world must unite. A woman’s movement organized in a world without social justice would be of no value to us. (1978, pp. 186-188)

The passage above shows how Eva Perón captured one of the major components of Peronism with her rhetoric; that is, the idea of a nation constructed under the spiritual morals of Justicialism; a doctrine created by Perón for the freedom of the country and put into action through Evita’s words. “The first thing I had to do in my country’s woman’s movement was to solve the old problem of woman’s political rights,” she declares in her memoirs (1978, p. 181). Firmly holding political and public authority among some
Argentine women, Eva Perón performed this task with dominance and determination. Thus, Evita's rhetoric became not only the voice of Perón but also the voice of the Argentine women.

Still in a "timid voice," as she describes in her autobiography (1978, p. 111), Eva Perón spoke again to the women of the nation on January 27, 1947. In her speech, Mensaje a la Mujer Argentina [Message to the Argentine Woman], she proclaims that the project for women's suffrage was about to be a reality. Eva introduces the speech with a tribute to all the women who are united with her around the flag of Peronism in the fight for the cause (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm):

Women of my country, companions:
I believe that we already speak the same language of faith, and we cherish the same hope of improving the future of our Homeland. I believe that we are each day more united, more intimately bonded together through our parallel destiny. I believe that, from day to day, here and there, in the factories or in the furrows, in the homes or the classrooms, the magnetism increases uniting us in an immense block of women with equal aspirations and even restlessness. I believe that, finally, we have acquired the clear concept that we are not alone, nor insolated, but on the contrary, we are united by solidarity around a common battle flag. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

The passage above expresses Eva Perón's commitment to the fight for political and civic rights of the Argentine women. She continues the speech by identifying each woman of her audience, while preserving the traditional mothering symbolism in a certain emotional female style:

I know each of my companions. I know you, the strong-willed women who revealed themselves in all of its magnificent desire. I know your fights, I know your reactions, I know your dreams. It pleased me that you understood the language of the new social justice that attracted the men, and you ardently applied to your group. I also know you, the descamisadas of the 17th of October, the activist women of the Homeland that refused to waver, nor give yourselves up. I observed you in the streets. I followed your restlessness. I shook with you, because my fight is also the
fight of the heart of the women who at the moment of pressure, are next to their man and their son, defending them devotedly. Yes, defending the family table, and the right to a destiny less hard. Defending in summary, everything that a woman must defend: her blood, her bread, the roof over her head, and her dreams. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

This piece of rhetoric is of great importance because Eva Perón can be recognized no longer as just a woman in the present but as a woman of the future. In fact, she talked about equality, dignity, freedom, and social justice, all values that the poor men, women, and workers were denied. In this context, Evita proceeded to praise all the women who remained faithful to the cause of Peronism and continued to fight for the new social justice in Argentina, the Justicialism that the Perón ideology had advocated since its foundation. More importantly, this section of Eva’s speech is an example of the physiological symbiosis between the leader in the caudillo tradition and the popular aspirations of his people. Through her words, Eva recalls the October occasion as an example of loyalty and natural response from its followers of the powerful leader Perón.

It is important to remark that in this 1947 speech, Eva Perón’s words were particularly targeted to the ordinary women, those in the lower social class, intended to reach the poor women who lived in the deprived Argentine provinces:

I also know you, physically far but close in feeling, the women of our small farms and villages of the interior. You also play your part, and deserve to defend it. You also knew how to encourage your people, and the result of your lengthy and glorious sacrifice is the notion that you now live under the protection of labor laws that have rejuvenated your heart and your farm. You also had the right to smile, like any other women, who in this opulent earth knew how to risk everything, always, and at all times. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

By aligning herself in the portrait of an ordinary person who was familiar with fighting against social prejudices, Eva Perón created herself into the myth of the women of the
Argentine nation, identifying her persona with the female audience: “I know my companions, yes. I myself am the people. My heart beats with the masses who suffer, work, and dream” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm). Eva continues her discourse by speaking as the wife of the president of Argentina while, at the same time, emphasizing that her position did not make her forget her social duties as an Argentine woman:

Just as the destiny made me the wife of General Perón, your president, it also made me acquire that parallel notion of what it means to be the wife of Colonel Perón, the social fighter. It is not possible to be the woman of the president of the Argentineans, and not be the woman of the first Argentine worker...Protocol would have permitted, the customs of our country, the path of least resistance, inertia, vanity, satisfaction, the temptation to ignore all that is below. Nobody would reproach me for being only the wife of General Juan Perón, forgetting my social duties. But my heart prevented it. The example of an inflexible conduct prevented it. General Perón’s passion for work, his luminous faith, and his constant concern for his people would have reproached me. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

Such personalized exaltation toward Juan Perón is another important element found in her rhetoric. Once more, this fragment of rhetoric exposes the caudillo element integrated in the ideology of Peronism. Therefore, Eva’s words can be understood as defining her role as wife and a woman of Argentina while praising Perón, the real leader-caudillo of the people. Particularly, she establishes a clear distinction between the image of Eva Perón and that of the Argentine woman through her rhetoric. She created the myth of Eva Perón to be recognized in the eyes of her people in a social protocol, proper for the wife of the president. Yet, it was in the myth of a common woman, the social worker of the Argentine people, with which she truly identified her role.

By enmeshing her image, Eva Perón firmly attracted the female audiences, becoming the mythical force in their sociopolitical rights:
For this reason, I am with you. For this reason, I will be next to those who succumb. For this reason, my companions, my social actions will be high and mighty, just as the wounds and the needs of this noble and warm nation where I was born. I do not have any vanity nor ambition, except to serve, to be useful, to take upon me the restlessness of the millions women, who now have a clear sense of their duties and a real notion of their rights. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

From the paragraph, it is possible to portray Eva Perón as the image of a woman with a mission: to help other people, primarily the poor members of Argentine society, as she herself was in her childhood. Indeed, most of Eva’s rhetoric can be understood as reflecting this social condition, for it can be argued that she drew from the hard experiences of her childhood for her own benefit to reach political legitimacy. Thus, Eva’s mission of serving the homeless was strongly stated in her rhetoric. This is appreciated in the following piece of her 1947 speech:

To serve the “descamisados,” the weak ones, the forgotten ones, means to serve – indeed – those whose homes know pressure, helplessness, and bitterness. From the hatred, the delay, or the mediocrity, we find hope, the will to fight, restlessness, strength, and a smile. The home that determined Colonel Perón’s popular triumph could not be betrayed by Colonel Perón’s wife. You yourselves, spontaneously, with that warm tenderness that distinguishes comrades in the same fight, have given me a warrior’s name: “Evita.” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

Addressing herself as the image of Evita, she proclaims: “I prefer to be ‘Evita’ instead of the wife of the President, if calling me ‘Evita’ remedies something in any home of my Homeland” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm). After all, the image of Eva Perón as the wife of the president of Argentina served “Evita” to build a significant communication role in the administration of the new nation.

The last section of Eva Perón’s speech is devoted to emphasize that “a woman must take political action” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm).
In order to prove her statement, Eva’s words recall some of the situations in the history of Peronism where women have successfully shown their maturity and will to be incorporated in the political system:

The Argentine women have surpassed the period of civil tutelage. She who turned out to demonstrate in Plaza de Mayo on October 17th, the one who made her voice heard in the factory, in the office and at school; she who, from day to day, works next to men within all the range of activities of a dynamic community, cannot be only the spectator of political movements...The Argentine Women have matured in their feelings and their will. The Argentine women must be listened to, because the Argentine women managed to be included in political actions. We are in their debt. It is unavoidable then to restore equality of responsibility. The women who crossed long distances on foot to affirm their will next to men, the descamisadas who turned each home into a bastion of revolutionary exaltation, the heart that sustained without falling nor going back on the movement, the triumph of the people on February 24th could not be forgotten by the men who anointed their representatives in that historical civic fight.

(http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

This fragment unveils how Eva Perón, by recounting two of the most important events in the history of Peronism - the great October in which the people had marched to support the leader, and the election of Perón to the Presidency of Argentina – mythically linked the women’s cause to the doctrine of Peronism. No doubt, Eva Perón’s rhetoric became essential to the triumph of Peronism in the Argentina of the 1950s.

Eva continues her speech by defining the right to vote as the most powerful event in the social life of the Argentine women:

The feminine vote will be the weapon that will make our homes, the supreme and inviolable collection of public conduct. The feminine vote will be the first and the last appeal. It is not only necessary to elect, but also to determine the result of that election...Your vote will be the shield of your faith. Your vote will be the testimony of your hope for a better future. The legislators know this companions. It is important to remind them so they will not forget. That is one of our daily fights, friends, now that we know each other better and we are united across the country,
The passage above is worthy of analysis. Eva's powerful words give proof that the world was not made up of only men; in fact, women had important roles in creating the new nation. Women were not allowed to play a role in public policy nor in politics. However, Eva broke all the policies on behalf of Juan Perón and guaranteed her place in the political and public arena.

The last words in her speech give evidence of Eva Perón's strong compromise to end social prejudices that have long forbidden women to participate in Argentine politics:

The wife of the president of the Republic, who speaks to you, is not — in this sense — more than a simple Argentinean, the comrade Evita, who is fighting to vindicate the millions of women unjustly pushed aside from the most important aspect of our conscience: the will to choose, the will to watch from the sacred enclosure of her home the wonderful march of her own country. This must be our goal. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm).

Although this speech was well received by the lower class of the Argentine society, Evita's words caused resentment from the aristocracy. Much of this feeling came in the form of disgust, particularly by Socialist women, toward the political actions undertaken by Eva concerning women's suffrage. "They have fought for this cause for decades, but it was an entirely different thing to have the vote awarded to such a vulgar person" (Ortiz, 1995, p. 153), as Eva Perón was identified by these women.

This matter came to a head at the 1947 European tour in which Eva Perón represented Argentina and the ideology of Peronism to the world. In a speech to honor Evita, the Minister of Labor, José María Freyre declared her as the "'most accomplished representative' one could have dreamed of and the 'archetype of the Argentinean woman, who shows her personality not with a peacock's vanity, but as the incarnation of an
exquisite femininity’” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 168). These words were offensive to the Conference of Socialist Women, which published a report stating that “Socialist women do not feel represented by this woman” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 168). In spite of the harsh critique of her political and public image, Eva Perón took control and acted.

Once she arrived to Spain, Eva embodied herself in a speech that combined the old Hispanic tradition and Peronist symbolism, a particular “aesthetic that was close to being mistaken for a nationalist soap opera” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 164). From the balcony of the Palacio de Oriente [Oriente Palace] in Madrid, where the meeting was held (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/espa..htm), the Argentine First Lady read a speech written by Muñoz Azpiri, where the tone and style were integrated as the affirmation of her devotion. As Ortiz explains,

Her speech…was a summary of all the familiar places in her motherland as well as a tribute to Isabel the Catholic, “she who was the closest to God, during Spain’s sacred times, when being close to God meant: to fight and to pray.” (1995, p. 175)

By looking at the crowds, which was estimated to be “forty thousand according to Marysa Navarro” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 176), Evita proclaims:

I know that my presence does not fulfill your longings. You had hoped to be visited by General Perón, who in the bitter hours of your nation appeared to the world battling along side the forces of Spain, with the courage of a well bread son who fights entirely for his mother… (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/espa..htm)

With these words, the crowds began yelling, “‘Franco and Perón!’” Ortiz declares (1995, p. 175). Eva then states: “‘General Franco…is now feeling the same emotions that Perón felt when he was cheered by the descamisados’” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 175). It seems clear from this passage that Evita was relating Peronism to the Hispanic culture, emphasizing that Perón and Franco were united by the same historical values that had long served
civilization. On June 15, Eva Perón spoke again to the Spanish crowds, but this time her speech, once more written by Muñoz Azpiri, was particularly directed to women. Embedding herself in intrepid words, she describes the era as the "'century of victorious feminism'" (Ortiz, 1995, p. 178).

During a press conference in Italy, Eva Perón reiterated her pledge for the women’s cause. "'My name,' she said, 'has become the rallying cry for women around the world. It is time for men and women to have equal rights'" (Ortiz, 1995, p. 185). On August 10, Eva attended the "Inter-American Conference for peace and security of the continent" held in the capital of Brazil, Rio de Janeiro (Ortiz, 1995, p. 202). The city enthusiastically welcomed her with giant posters and slogans that proclaimed: "'To the Brazilian woman who fights, just like the Argentine, next to her people for a future of justice, of work and of peace'" (Ortiz, 1995, p. 202). A similar greeting was given to her by the Uruguayan authorities in the capital city of Montevideo. This time, the posters in the streets identified Eva as an "'...Uruguayan woman'" (Ortiz, 1995, p. 202).

After her arrival to the port of Buenos Aires on August 23, Eva Perón delivered a speech to the Argentine crowds by alleging the familiar words of "'love,' ‘corazón’ [heart], ‘message of peace’" (Ortiz, 1995, p. 203). In a voice filled with tears, she emphasizes, "'on Monday, I will be among you again, ready to work'" (Ortiz, 1995, p. 203). These words marked the time in which Eva Perón transformed herself into the mythical new woman of the Peronist regime. "'Now. Right away. We are trying to live a revolution,'" she claims to the crowds (Ortiz, 1995, p. 208). On behalf of Perón, she became the active force that made the women’s suffrage happen.
In the speech, *Anuncio de la Ley del Voto Femenino* [Announcement of the Law of Feminine Vote], delivered on September 23, 1947, “to an enthusiastic crowd called by the CGT,” Eva Perón presents “law 13010, which granted women the right to vote” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 209). From the balcony of the *Casa Rosada*, “in a still shrill and nervous voice” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 209), Eva claims:

Women of my Homeland:

I have received at this moment from the hands of the Government of the Nation the law that consecrates our civic rights. And I am receiving it, before you, with the certainty that I am doing it in the name and representation of all the Argentine women. I feel, jubilant, my hands shaking at the contact of the laurel that proclaims the victory. Here it is, my sisters, summarized in the sparse form of a few articles, a long history of fight, setbacks, and hopes. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/ peronismo.htm)

This speech, along with her success in having the law passed, caused irritation from the elite Socialist women. As Ortiz explains:

Alicia Moreau de Justo, their role model, had graduated as a doctor at a time when for a woman to study was quite an achievement. She was dignified, lucid, and independent woman, who had not been molded by her husband. (1995, p. 153)

Clearly, those were all attributes that Eva Perón did not fill in the eyes of the socialist group of women. Besides, “…Julieta Lanteri, Carmela Horne de Burmeister, Alicia Moreau de Justo, Luisa Berrondo, and the sisters Tcherkoff,” among others, were just some names of women who had truly fought for suffrage in different periods since the 1900’s (Ortiz, 1995, p. 209). Indeed, “…the last bill presented by this group had been approved by Susana Larguía and Victoria Ocampo in 1938” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 209).

Despite Eva Perón’s words, which alleged that she represented “all” Argentine women, it is clear to see that these elite women did not identify with her at all. Truth be told, much of Evita’s rhetoric was directly created to blame the elite’s grip on the
Argentine society for a long decade that banned rights for the lower social class, which made it, in fact, impossible for these women to believe that she was acting on behalf of their social group. Eva’s denunciation toward the rich is obvious in the following portion of her 1947 women’s speech,

We have broken the old prejudices of the defeated oligarchy...The maneuver against our people, against women, increased our faith. It was and is the faith we put in God, in the future of the Homeland, in General Perón, and in our rights. Thus, we stripped the mask of the false apostles to put an end to the anti-democratic farce.

(http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

This statement proves that the rhetoric of Eva Perón was not entirely directed to all the sectors of society, especially to those in the elite. Additionally, “it was not certain that she knew the details of the ‘long history of struggles’ she mentioned” in her speech according to Ortiz (1995, p. 209). In fact, as Ortiz further states, “this was a history that dated back to September 1900, when Cecilia Grierson, the first female doctor in Argentina, founded the Women’s Council after having discovered that the law prevented her from practicing her profession” (1995, p. 209). In the end, Eva Perón’s rhetoric was intended to link the historical struggles of Argentine women to her husband’s government. As Eva explains in her speech:

This last thing, which translates into the victory of women over the lack of understanding, negations and created interests of the repudiated houses, is our national awakening, which has only been possible with the realm of justice, recovery, and healing of the Homeland, which stimulates and inspires the work of the government of General Perón, leader of the Argentine people. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

This fragment exemplifies that Eva Perón’s public speaking was, far above all, embodied in the spirit of Peronism rather than in the women’s suffrage. As a statement of fact, Evita’s words were meant to provide continual support for Perón’s regime. Through
her speaking engagements, she repeatedly utters the name of Perón as the leader and driving force in the realization of women’s suffrage: “And we will vote with the conscience and dignity of women, who have reached the age of civic maturity under the liberating government of our head and leader, General Perón” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm). As if urging the female audience to vote for Perón, Evita concludes her speech with these powerful words: “With him and with the vote, we will contribute to the perfection of the Argentine democracy” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm). In this context, Juan Perón was the first beneficiary; for thanks to her rhetoric, he won the second election in 1952, “due in large part to the women” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 271). Thus, “the Argentine voted, no longer asking themselves if this right was any less precious because it came from an ignorant actress” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 154).

Another address, Acto organizado por la comisión Auxiliar Femenina de la Confederación General del Trabajo en el Teatro Colón [Ceremony organized by the Women’s Auxiliary Commission of the General Confederation of Labor of the Colon Theater], dated December 16, 1949, focuses on women workers. In the first part of her speech, Eva Perón devotes her words to recognize the work of the CGT’s feminine branch of the Peronist Women’s Party:

Comrades of the Secretary of the CGT:
First of all, I want to thank the General Confederation of Labor, and especially its female commission, which has graciously given me the opportunity to express my feelings so closely related to my constant action on the behalf of the humble and proletarian classes of the country...I take advantage of this opportunity to clarify that I have not forgotten any women who have worked, who work and who will work for the cause of Peronism because I have always tried to be a bridge between the people and General Perón. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)
This rhetoric shows how Eva Perón created a political symbolism to identify with her people. She first defines herself as the intermediary between the needs of the Argentine people and the hands of the leader. Then, she portrays herself as a woman whose political actions favored the descamisados, the proletarian class of society. Later in the speech, Evita refers to Perón as the “insigne líder” [famous leader] and identifies herself in the image of the “humble descamisada, whose circumstances placed her next to the famous leader of the Argentine workers in our Homeland’s magnificent hour” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm). Clearly, Eva Perón used Peronist rhetoric to achieve political legitimacy.

Evita’s next words in this 1949 address were devoted to praise the women who were part of the Peronist movement:

This is how I have dreamed and wanted this Peronist Women’s Movement, to be a movement of humble women, in whose honest glance one can see purity in their intentions, health, and generosity; a movement of working women dignified by daily tasks, sanctified by the sacrifice of dedicating themselves to the home and to the Homeland with deep and everlasting love; a movement in which flesh and spirit generate the spirit and the flesh of the people that is the spirit and the flesh of the Homeland itself. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

From the fragment above, it seems obvious to perceive that Eva Perón’s women’s party was born on personal contact, and the only virtues Evita searched for were loyalty and fanaticism. “But she chose the ignorant ones, women who would never overshadow her” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 249). Her following words describe the women’s movement in the style of connecting the ideology of Peronism to nationalist principles:

Our movement is, by definition, the movement of the people, of the Homeland, because in the end, the Homeland and the people are the same. Peronism is the Homeland, and for this reason, there will never be a place in this movement or in the ranks of its leaders for the privileging of any
class because this would mean the death of the Peronist Movement. 
(http://www.pj bonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

Upon proclaiming these words, Eva Perón establishes a method in her rhetoric that appears to be a plethora of patriotic and populist symbols toward the ideology of Peronism. Ultimately, this method unveils the myth-building performed by Eva that allowed her to attain political victory. Thus, Evita threw Peronist mystique into her rhetoric in the style that was commonly found in charismatic populist leaders. As Eva’s words demonstrate:

For this reason, we have a doctrine that is eminently popular; for this reason, General Perón governs with the people and for the people; for this reason, every day he breaks the closed circles of an oligarchy that sells out the Homeland. (http://www.pj bonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

As stated earlier, the oligarchy’s destruction was an important element incorporated in Eva’s rhetoric, an essential tool for the magnetism of the *descamisados* to her political action. The following words in her 1949 women’s address prove this statement:

Already the Argentine people have gotten tired of a so-called dominant minority that constitutes the crudest oligarchy, and who wants to govern them. They are the ones who sold the Homeland to the foreigner! They, who submerged the people in the worst disgrace and dishonor, and stole the last thing that a citizen must not lose: hope! They, who destroyed the people’s identity! (http://www.pj bonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

The above rhetoric discloses Eva Perón’s parallel between oligarchy and capitalism with the intention of contrasting these ideals to Peronism, which values identified with the popular needs of the Argentine people. As Evita puts it: “The Peronist government is not and cannot be a government of elites. For this reason, Perón is with his people....The
only way to govern the people is to approach the people. That is what has made Perón”

As a poor woman who had witnessed the injustices suffered by her family since her childhood due to the enrichment of the oligarchy, Eva Perón was determined to reverse this situation. So she alluded to her poor beginnings through her Peronist rhetoric to have an effect over her *descamisadas*, the poor women. As she strongly broadcasts in her speech,

> In our women’s movement, firstly there will be the *descamisadas* because they are the people...How could I not desire to fight tirelessly so that that feminist movement that comes to support Perón does not fall into the hands of those who betrayed it... (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

It was, in fact, Evita’s humble roots, which allowed the poor women to identify with her. In order to legitimize her leadership position in the movement, Eva defines herself in her speech as the “…flag-bearer of the Peronist Women’s Movement.” For this reason, she continues, “I cannot carry; I refuse to carry any other flag that is not the flag of the people” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm).

Eva Perón’s following words highlight the fundamental values under which the women’s movement was instituted, which, in fact, were not other than the morals of Peronism:

> Our movement, which is identified by the feelings and the thoughts of our people must have the same ideals, the same doctrine, and the same purity as the people. Its ideal: the greatness of the Homeland. Its doctrine: Justicialism. Its purity: the pure honor. For this reason, the Peronist Movement is made of the people who do not have any other leader than General Perón. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)
From this point of view, Homeland, Justicialism, and a sense of dignity were all Peronist symbols that Eva masterly integrated in her rhetoric to persuade female audiences. Evita continues the speech by identifying the doctrine of social justice deep-rooted in the Peronist Women’s Movement. “For this reason,” Eva continues, the Argentine people “see a firm hope for peace and work that fills their need for justice, so often forgotten by many leaders” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm).

Eva Perón used idealistic language in her rhetoric. She presents General Perón as godlike. In her public speaking, she alludes to his high ideals and dreams that lead his contingent toward the objective of greatness for their Homeland. This sense of romanticism was associated with Eva’s conviction that Perón is a superior man who can make a difference for Argentina: “Sometimes I think that Perón has stopped being a man like others; that Perón is the embodiment of an ideal. The Peronist women’s movement must contemplate and spread this belief” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm).

An additional interesting aspect of Eva Perón’s rhetoric is the Latin element with which she fused her words. In this speech delivered to women, Evita referred to Alexander the Great with reverence:

I prefer to continue being what so many times the descamisados have called me: The Lady of Hope. Just like Alexander the Great responded when the generals asked him after a great conquest: “what do you keep for yourself? For me I keep hope,” I request of the descamisados of the Peronist nation to reserve for me the hope of being the sister, the friend of all the descamisados of the Homeland, ready to encourage, to heal a wound, to go to the aid of any sister or brother in need. Leave for Evita the hope and let us all fight for the same ideal, for General Perón, and our Homeland. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)
By citing these words, Evita established a very neat distinction between the Evita in the present and the Evita she wants to be in the future. She was “Evita,” as the descamisados called her, a term that no other social class had the right to use; but she also would like to be “Evita,” the Lady of the Hope, who fought vigorously for the ideals of her people. Thus, Eva built herself into the myth of the providential woman that served as the iconic image to reinforce her position in the Peronist government, and therefore, legitimize her power over the descamisados.

The personal and emotional approach that Eva Perón reflected in her rhetoric was hardly criticized by her opponents. As witnessed in her 1949 speech: “Opponents say that this is fanaticism, that I am a fanatical of Perón and of the people, that I am dangerous because I am too sectarian and too fanatical when it comes to General Perón and the descamisados of the Homeland” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm). Eva answers these accusations by affirming them freely and openly that her fanaticism was the doorway to the distribution of justice for the lower class. As she states in her speech:

I answer them with Perón: fanaticism is the wisdom of spirit. What does it matter if one is fanatical in the company of martyrs and heroes? I answer yes, I am a fanatic for Perón and the descamisados of the Homeland.

Finally, the Peronist women’s movement, just like the Argentine people, only has one leader: Perón. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

Surely, to communicate fanaticism and romanticism among the followers was a central motive of her rhetoric. American journalist Philip Hamburger reports, “in Argentina everything is about love, love, love...Constantly, crazily, passionately, nationally Perón and Evita are in love” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 226).
In the *Discurso sobre Civismo ante el Partido Peronista Femenino* [Speech on Civic Rights to the Peronist Women’s Party], delivered on May 4, 1950, as a special event in honor of Eva Perón sponsored by the Peronist Women Party in Buenos Aires, Evita challenges her listeners to join her in her fanaticism: “Let us sacrifice ourselves; we do not have to think about schedules nor about anything else. We are fighting to be or not to be part of the Homeland.” As if demanding a response of action from the female audiences, Eva proclaims, “we have the enormous responsibility of understanding, elevating, bringing to practice, and crystallizing the dreams and the eagerness of our Leader, General Perón” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm).

In this speech, Eva Perón also discusses her role in the Peronist women’s cause by recognizing the hardships of this position:

When I accepted the immense responsibility from the National Assembly of Women to preside over this movement, I did it because I desired, and desire to try to unite all the Peronist women, and to direct the extraordinary force of Peronism toward creative forces, dignified and powerful sources toward the patriotic spirit of the Peronist doctrine. The responsibility is huge; I did not ignore it, but accepted it. I want all of the women of the country to know, one more time, that Eva Perón loves all Peronists incredibly and all equally...I want to be, for the Peronist women, like a mother, a sister, who tries to understand them, to help them, and to encourage them to understand and help themselves...

(http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

A similar declaration of concern toward starting the women’s movement can be seen in Eva’s autobiography, where she declares, “I confess I was a little afraid the day I found myself facing the possibility of starting on the ‘feminist’ path” (1978, p. 179). But then Eva justifies this feeling in her memoirs by advocating once more the greatness of Perón and his cause. As Eva remarks:

I believe that Perón and his cause are sufficiently great and worthy to receive the total offering of the woman’s movement of my country. And,
further, all the women of the world may support his Justicialism; for with it, surrendering themselves for love of a cause which is that of humanity, they will increase in womanliness. (1978, pp. 40-41)

After all, this is the reason why the women’s movement should also support Perón’s cause in Eva’s view.

Finally, in La Mujer Reserva Moral [The Woman Reserves Moral], delivered on July 17, 1951, Eva Perón explains the reasons that brought her to fight for the women of Argentina:

_Because I saw that women had not been taken into account, neither materially nor spiritually, and because I realized that women were a moral and spiritual reserve, I aligned myself with all the women of my country to struggle persistently with them, not only for our vindication but also for the vindication of our homes, our children, and our spouses._

(http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/muj.htm)

Time passed, and Eva Perón repeated over and over to her followers the familiar phrases of devotion to the ideology of Peronism and obedience to the leader. It is probable that Eva believed in her husband’s doctrine. However, it is also plausible that she shadowed her own achievements in Perón prominence to secure her political role in the Peronist government and the hearts of her people. It is also possible that her notion of feminism was confined to the image of a compliant wife to her husband. “And yet,” as Crassweller puts it, “she did more to bring women into public [and political] life in Argentina than a large army of feminists could have done...” (1986, p. 212). Thus, Eva Perón has given a place of dignity and privilege to the women of Argentina through her rhetoric, primarily the poor women. For Eva, it would have meant fighting a social battle on her own right, for the rich grip of society did not belong to her.

Through her words, Eva Perón gave authority and longevity to her own myth. It was, in fact, Evita’s rhetoric that made Argentina’s Peronist values spread all over the
world, a call to renewal and fight for the rights of her *descamisadas*, the humble women. Even more interesting are the different images that Eva conveyed to legitimize her political position and gain the love of the Argentine public. She created her image in the myth of the dutiful wife to be identified by the female audience as a traditional woman born for the home and for the demands of their husbands. This myth was even reinforced by her political struggles for women’s suffrage, an attempt that opened the door to their political participation for the first time in Argentine history. Eva Perón then built her image in myth to distinguish her position as the wife of the president from her role as the humble woman devoted to fill the needs of her people. Indeed, she defined this myth with her desire to be a sister and friend to all of her country’s *descamisadas*. In the end, her succession of images served to create and foster her myth of a Peronist woman with which she identified her actions, life, and soul. She portrayed herself as the flag-bearer of the Peronist cause; a mythical image that allowed her to reach political legitimacy and triumph over the Argentine women. Ultimately, Eva Perón’s mythical character served to transform herself into an immortal icon, not only for the women of her country, but also for her *descamisados*, the poor men and workers of Argentina.

*A Voice for the Descamisados*

The *Plaza de Mayo* and the balcony of the *Casa Rosada* allowed Eva Perón to deliver her speeches to the Argentine people with an official aura even though she claimed no other legal title than that of “Evita,” the humble woman at the side of the shirtless poor. “To me the working men and working women are always, and above all, *descamisados,*” Eva proclaims in her autobiography (1978, p. 79). It is believable that she did what she could to vindicate their rights, a task that she performed with passion until
her death. In her memoirs, Eva defines the concept of *descamisados* with emotional words:

The *descamisados* are all those who were in the Plaza de Mayo on the 17th of October, 1945...those who in happy columns, though ready for anything, including death, marched that unforgettable day along the Avenida de Mayo and by the diagonal avenues leading to Government House and silenced the oligarchy...those who all day long clamored with shouts for the presence of the absent and captive Leader...That is why to me a *descamisado* is he who feels himself of the people...that he feel[s] himself to be of the people, that he love[s] and suffer[s] and enjoy[s] with the people...In the second place, they are an integral part of the people: of [those] people whose cause won my heart many years ago. And in the third place, they are the powerful forces upholding the scaffolding on whose framework the very building of the revolution is erected. The *Peronista* movement could not be defined without them....That is why each worker is also to me a genuine *Peronista*: the best of all the *Peronistas*, because he is also “the people,” and in addition a *descamisado*. (1978, pp. 79-81)

These words reveal a woman who constructed herself into the myth of the *descamisados* by alleging her humble experiences since her childhood. Her claims allowed her to be recognized by the poor, who, like her, were left in disgrace and misfortune by a privileged class. This myth, above all, provided Eva Perón with the opportunity to identify her political ambition with the social needs of her people.

From then on, Eva devoted herself to help her *descamisados*. “So, little by little, she came up with the idea to heal them, like a psychologist, by awakening their desire” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 158). This idea materialized by creating her own foundation, which focused on providing social support to marginal sectors of Argentine society. As Ortiz explains:

Her foundation would rest solely on this principle: to give luxury to the poor so that they would learn to desire. “You must want!” she would say. “You have the right to ask!” That is the fundamental reason for the hatred she would arouse. Throwing meager things to the poor like the patron ladies did was fine, but filling them with desire was not. (1995, p. 158)
These words reveal the status and power that Eva Perón placed on the poor. This power was manifested in the expensive and sophisticated houses that were built for the humble, which underscored Eva’s determination to grant the humble with the right to live decently. As Father Benítez puts it, “the luxurious atmosphere that reigned [sic] in these homes astonished….the latest in a long line of French philanthropists, who had come to visit the homes with Eva” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 226). As if explaining the reason for such lavishness, Eva declares: “When the rich think of the impoverished, they think of impoverished desires.’ She added that she did not intend to act this way and, on the contrary, would give them all their own part of the dream” (Ortiz, 1995, pp. 226-227). Truth be told, “the poor always asked her for less than they needed, so she gave them more. To have them love her? No doubt. But also to heal her soul” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 232).

In this context, Eva Perón was revolutionary. “No one had done this before her, not for the poor, not for the rich” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 223). She had experienced the feeling of being insulated from the world, living in a country dominated by oligarchs who never understood her misery. Clearly, “these riches were not hers; she did not distribute her own money” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 232). “As for the ‘humble,’ she immediately put them at ease with a natural courtesy, acting as a woman of the people who just happened to get lucky and wanted to share her luck with others, to restore, repair, forgive” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 231). She did so through her rhetoric as well, often emphasizing her willingness to save the poor from discrimination. “Those people,” she claims, “are my work. I am nothing, my work is everything” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 231). By giving legitimacy to her feeling, Eva proceeds to explain in her autobiography the reasons of her strong rhetoric, “…because I know the personal tragedies of the poor, of the victims of the rich and the powerful
exploiters of the people....my speeches often contained venom and bitterness" (1978, p. 118).

The emotional side of Eva Perón toward the poor was characterized in her sister’s memoirs, Erminda Duarte, in the following way:

...Eva did not shed a tear when she found out she was going to die. But she cried when she returned to Argentina and announced that she was going to devote her life to the poor. She cried when she christened the homes for the elderly. She cried when faced with the destitution of the inhabitants of a village in the Andes, and she ordered that a town be built for them on the same spot, a small pretty town called Las Cuevas. When she left her bed to go visit the children’s homes for the last time, she cried at their neglect. She cried only for that which was constructed or deconstructed. She was moved only by her task and her mission and the realization that the works wouldn’t survive her. (Ortiz, 1995, p. 180)

Perhaps, Eva Perón felt that way about social injustices experienced by the poor. What is, in fact, believable is that her real power emerged on the day she devoted her life to performing this social task. This is evident in the following paragraph of her autobiography:

While I wrote these lines I asked General Perón: “Have I kept the promise I made you when I returned from Europe, when I offered to help you so that the Christianity of your doctrine should be carried out in works of social welfare?” His reply was more than generous: “Without your help I could have done nothing. You have taught us to build with love!” To me this is not a reward, but glory itself. (1978, p. 151)

From now on, only her social cause mattered to Eva Perón, a task that absorbed longer hours of incessant work, and part of her ill wealth. In her speech delivered to the City of Lomas de Zamora, Province of Buenos Aires, on June 26, 1948, at the inauguration of the works for the provision of water, Eva affirms that justice has arrived for the poor men and workers:

This work of economic and social accomplishments has been carried out thanks to these shirtless ones, whom the oligarchy had wanted to offend
by calling them descamisados, but who instead dressed in the clean shirt of sacrifice and honesty for the Homeland.
(http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

As seen in the passage above, Eva refers to the term descamisados with words of dignity and integrity, as if they were the good people of the Homeland in contrast to the evil oligarchy. Later in her speech, Eva defines the oligarchs as “malos Argentinos” [bad Argentines] and “malos hijos” [bad children], while she calls her descamisados “lo mas puro de la nacionalidad” [the purest of nation]. For this reason, and in the name of Peronism, Eva requests of her descamisados “do not forget the damage that has been made by those bad Argentines. I, like a good Argentina, do not forget it…”

Eva Perón continues her speech by affirming that the works of the social foundation she had the honor and privilege to preside over was also presented in this celebration: “In this way, the social aid has equipped the Lomas de Zamora hospital with an ambulance and will provide this city with the necessary vehicles to clean its streets”
(http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm). Eva goes further by thanking God, Perón, and her descamisados for making the social work a reality:

Let us thank God because in these moments, when the world struggles with outrageous problems, He has sent us Perón…And I, a woman of the people, thank God because General Perón and the descamisados have given me a great opportunity to feel happy when I bring a little joy to those who have not been favored with fortune, when I bring a little justice to those to whom it has been denied for so many years.
(http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

It is clear to perceive from the above passage the presence of Christian doctrine in Eva Perón’s words. In fact, the majority of the social service undertaken by Eva was built upon this religious mystique as an essential element in the ideology of Peronism. ““Our
doctrine must be Christian and humanist; but in a new way; in a way which I think the world has not yet known,” Eva writes in her autobiography (1978, p. 150). “In substance it was simply social Christian doctrine,” Ortiz remarks. “…It was a simple doctrine, easy to retain, and conceived to seduce the people…” (1995, pp. 137-138). Advocating to Christian ideals, connected with social justice from Peronism, was crucial for Eva’s rhetoric to persuade her *descamisados*. The last words of her speech witness:

> You can have the security and tranquility that while General Perón is in power, the Nation’s social justice and happiness will be well defended and will assure the well-being of the *descamisados*.

(http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

On May 1, 1949, Eva Perón was called by the GGT to deliver a speech to the *descamisados* gathered in the Plaza de Mayo in commemoration of El Día del Trabajador [The Day of the Worker]. Speaking from the balcony of the Casa Rosada, Eva refers to the occasion in a popular appeal:

> This is the 1st of May of Peronist time, the 1st of May of happiness and joy in all the Argentine workers homes of the Nation….This is the 1st of May in which the workers have banished all foreign flags to raise the blue and the white one, the most beautiful of the flags, ours, the Nation’s….the 1st of May of the proletarian celebration….For this reason, this 1st of May is the 1st of May that must be an example in the revolutionary world.

(http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

Her words were directed particularly to the Argentine workers who over the years have paid tribute to General Perón. During the speech, Eva identifies Perón as “…the leader of the workers,” “…the leader of the Nation itself,” and “…the first Argentine worker.” She continues the speech by comparing Argentina without Perón and the new Argentina with Perón. Before Perón, as Eva proclaims, “the lips of the people, which were meant for smiling, through the inertia of the despotic and oligarchic governments only knew the hatred and negativity.” But now, “in our Nation, the 1st of May is a song about life, hope,
and smiles” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm). In challenging the opposition, Eva exclaims with a tone of irony:

There still exists the incredulous who ask themselves, why are there so many Peronists in Argentina? There are Peronists by popular origin. The people shouts: One’s Life for Perón. Yes; One’s Life for Perón, because if he were missing, we would have fewer hours dedicated to national progress and to the happiness of the humble homes of the Nation. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

It is also evident that the imagery of Argentine symbols, combined with the morals of Peronism were integrated in Eva’s rhetoric. In this May 1949 speech, Eva alludes frequently to the colors of the Argentine flag and its hymns as legitimating emblems of the political power of Peronism:

Today, the Argentine workers do not recite any more than a hymn, the national anthem, and they only chant to General Perón, the producer, the visionary, the patriot, who with his dreams hoisted social justice...In our nation foreign hymns are no longer recited, only ours is sung, and foreign rags are not hoisted while we carry the immaculate blue and white flag. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

On October 17, 1949, Eva Perón delivered another speech to the poor assembled at the Plaza de Mayo for the occasion Día de la Lealtad [Day of Loyalty]. From the balcony at Casa Rosada, the symbolic place for her public performances, Eva uttered the words that became a fixed signature in her introduction, and essential to her identification with the masses: “Mis queridos descamisados de ayer y de hoy, mañana y de siempre” [My dear descamisados of yesterday and today, of tomorrow and always] (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita6.htm).

In the first part of her speech, Eva recalls the historical events that embedded the October occasion with an aura of religiousness, and that gave birth to General Perón as the leader of the people:
Four years ago, from this same balcony and in front of this same multitude of people, one man was consecrated, our dear Colonel Perón...Four years ago, this historical plaza was founded again in its longing for justice, in its longing for well-being, and in its firm determination of freedom. Four years ago, my dear descamisados, the shout at the Open Town Meeting was epitomized by the support of the people, under the protection of a firm will, which is the will of our Argentine people...This is the pure origin of our Leader...He did not come from the combination of a political committee. He is not the product of the distribution of benefits. He did not know, he does not know, nor will he never know of the conquest of desires but through the pure path of justice. That is the root of the existence of the 17th of October. This is its certificate of birth. (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita6.htm)

This rhetoric proves how Eva Perón bestowed legitimacy upon the Peronists of Argentina through her public addresses. She refers to Peronism as “the popular faith,” and urges the audiences to follow her in her quest because “...in our days, to be a Peronist is a must.” For this reason, Eva says, “I am Peronist” (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita6.htm). She continues the speech by explaining the origin of her Peronist style and determination:

I am Peronist by national conscience, popular origin, personal conviction and enthusiastic solidarity and gratitude to my people, vivified and enacted once again by the renaissance of its spiritual values and the accomplishments of its ruler, General Perón. (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita6.htm)

Thus, her rhetoric was one of Peronist mysticism. By integrating personal and Peronist symbolism, she made herself part of the Argentine people. She constructed her image in the Peronist myth while representing the descamisada for their well-being.

The same is observed in the familiar elements that Eva Perón combined in her public speaking. Without doubt, she spoke with words from the old Hispanic-Argentine tradition as an attempt to give voice to the proposed Peronist Argentina. This is obvious in the last section of her speech where Eva Perón recalls the historical events of the Independence of Argentina and relates it to the Peronist cause:
Only in his way the epic of the war for liberation of the continent was possible, when the Argentine cowboys, the *descamisados*, followed the high inspiration of General San Martín, who carried the flag of freedom and self-determination to the beaches of the Pacific. And only in this way our second and definitive liberation was possible, when the Argentine workers, united in a single block around Colonel Perón, proclaimed on a day like today and in this historical place that their old enemies, oligarchy and imperialism, no longer had anything to do with this new Argentina, which marched once more behind its conductor. (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita6.htm)

This fragment intended to show that capitalism and imperialism were ideals set apart from the Argentina envisioned by Peronism. In fact, Eva refers to the *gaucho* tradition as an attempt to link the doctrine of Peronism to Juan Manuel de Rosas, a *caudillo* of the interior provinces whose image was reminiscent of nationalism for some Argentines since the 19th century. Because the preservation of national life is one of the pillars of Peronism, Eva’s rhetoric served to empower the culture of interior provinces and destroy the capitalist culture professed by the oligarchy.

Her last words in this October 1949 address were meant to attach the ideals of Peronism to the Argentine society to therefore legitimize her leadership position. She guarantees to her *descamisados* that “...the Peronist flag won’t ever be struck.” For this reason, Eva continues, the popular masses are making this October day “...their cult, their law, and their flag.” Ultimately, as Eva explains in her speech, this is the reason why “...there is but a single shout: ‘One’s Life for Perón!'” (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita6.htm). By speaking, feeling, and acting in accordance with the Peronist myth, Eva Perón was able to raise fervent sentiments from her *descamisados*, the poor men and workers, and manage those emotions as a force of support for the Peronist government.

In the year that followed the celebration of the First of May, Eva Perón delivered a speech from the balcony of Casa Rosada to honor the day when the Argentine workers
once more reunited in the Plaza de Mayo. In this speech, she refers to the May 1950 occasion as the day “...in which we come to reaffirm with our presence that General Perón and the people are one and the same.” She then speaks of Perón using holy words: “For us, Perón is sacred, he is our Homeland, and we would give our lives for Perón gladly and willingly” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm).

Later in the speech, Eva Perón defines the Peronist ideology with an appealing style:

Peronism is not learned nor is it proclaimed, it is felt and understood, Perón has said. It is a condition of faith; it is born from the analysis of the deeds which explain its causes and consequences; it is a dynamism made into history; it is conscience made justice, which claims the humanity of our days; it is work, it is love, it is sacrifice. It is, in sum, born from the hope that was absent in the Homeland, and that today the people with a thousand voices proclaim fervently. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

Thus, with emotional rhetoric, Eva spoke about sacrifice, love, justice, and hope; all powerful words that allowed her to capture the heart of the poor men and workers. In this setting, Eva Perón’s rhetoric can be considered revolutionary. She was determined to instill Perón’s ethics in the Argentine nation no matter the consequences of her actions. Through her speeches, usually Eva was tempted to express herself in words of hate when identifying her enemies, the rich oligarchy, while distinguishing them from her descamisados, to whom she had continually showed her emotion and thoughts. Love then was something easy for her to use when describing devotion for her people. In this speech, Eva declares her pride for having the “the two greatest distinctions any women can aspire to: the love of the humble and the hatred of the oligarchs” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm). Now, performing as the official voice of Perón’s government, Eva was spreading this feeling of abomination toward the enemy
publicly and openly, as if trying to purify the sociopolitical life of the country by
denouncing those “selfish governments” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/
peronismo.htm), as she often termed the oligarchy.

“I think I was born for the revolution,” Eva states in her autobiography (1978, p.
163). She further declares, “…it was necessary to keep the revolutionary fervor kindled
in the people” (1978, pp. 54-55). Eva believed in the Peronist revolution, and she
performed revolutionary rhetoric to persuade her audiences to follow her belief system.
The fanaticism, the sectarianism she frequently admitted to through her writings and
speeches, gives credence to this statement. This sense of extremism, commonly mixed
with her charisma and romantic mystique, is apparent in the last words of her address at
the 1950 May Day:

I want you to see in this woman, workers of my Homeland, a loyal and
sincere friend who does not mind to burn her life and her youth in the
holocaust of such a great cause as is the cause of the people...
(http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

On October 17, 1950, Juan and Eva Perón delivered speeches “before more than
one million persons gathered in the historic Plaza de Mayo” according to Burchett (1985,
p. 80). The occasion was reminiscent of the Day of Loyalty commemorated yearly in the
Peronist calendar. Juan Perón was the first speaker in the event. He introduced the speech
by announcing the “twenty fundamental truths of Justicialism,” the so-called doctrine of
Social Justice (Burchett, 1985, p. 80). His last words were devoted to introducing Eva
Perón:

Mi gratitud no puede dejar de nombrar a esta mujer que ustedes y yo
llamamos con el mismo nombre: EVITA. Si hoy le hago pública mi
gratitud es solamente porque sé que ustedes no me perdonarán que dejase
de hacerlo. (Burchett, 1985, p. 80)
[My gratitude will not allow me to omit naming this woman that you and I call: EVITA. If today I made public my gratitude, it is only because I know that you would not forgive me if I did not do so].

After his words, it was evident that Eva’s eminent image had a great effect upon her *descamisados* and the Argentine nation by 1950. She was no longer “…the shadow of his superior presence,” as Eva repeatedly claims in her memoirs (1978, p. 78). In fact, she reconstructed herself in the myth of the “shadow,” always empathizing that she was “nothing” when identifying her image with Perón to therefore establish a rhetorical method for her political purposes. Surely, the term “nothing” was clustered with creative mystique rather than negative imaginary, for this word came to reflect a simple woman only to be filled with the duties, visions, and love for Peronism.

Surrounded by the multitude, Eva Perón opens her speech from the balcony of the *Casa Rosada* by proclaiming the triumph of Peronism over the years:

*We are today, as we wanted to be on that evening of October 1945, a free nation with justice and sovereignty. The people, who by following their conductor, rearranged the economy, dignified men, rescued women from political negativity, and created the most perfect social democracy of contemporary history.* (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita5.htm)

The rhetoric above describes how Eva integrated the poor men, women, and working class in the same type rhetoric to elevate her role of public mediator in the Peronist myth and therefore reach political leadership.

The last words of her speech were distinctly devoted to contrast, as Eva puts it, the “greatness of our present against the smallness of our past.” In this passage, Evita specifically affirms the social works of her Foundation as proof of the triumph of Peronism over the oligarchy. In her words, “we jubilantly demolished the dark orphanages to raise the white and happy walls for the City of Children, the home schools,
the hospitals... With our Justicialist broom we swept the farms and small villages and elevated the labor districts..." Eva concludes, "we demolished charity and raised solidarity as a work of justice..." Eventually, as Eva Perón’s final words emphasizes, this is "the social meaning of the descamisados" (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita5.htm).

During the yearly commemoration of El día del Trabajador [The Day of the Worker] on May 1, 1951, Eva Perón delivered a speech from the balcony of Casa Rosada primarily focused on her three social groups to attain political legitimacy. Speaking in a beseeching voice to the poor men, women, and working class congregated in the Plaza de Mayo, Eva proclaims:

I want you to give me the authority and the absolute wonderful and eternal power of all the workers, of all the women, of all the humble, in other words, of all the descamisados... I want you to authorize me to say in a few words, with little eloquence, what you feel, what you want me to say on this wonderful day from the workers to General Perón and to the people. (http://www.pj bonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

This paragraph gives proof of the supreme power that Eva has given the descamisados through her words. In fact, the exaltation of the descamisados as well as affirming Perón as the leader of Argentina, guaranteed her own confirmation as a public communicator and leader. In Eva’s words,

...you, and only you can ignite my words, the infinite force that I want to have, that I would wish to have, to say to the leader, to say to the world, to say to the Homeland, how the workers follow and love Perón. (http://www.pj bonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

The same zeal and eloquence manifested in Eva’s words to express veneration of her descamisados and their Peronist leader was applied to condemn the oligarchy, whom Eva refers as the “eternal enemies and traitors of the Homeland” (http://www.pj bonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm). Her determination is evident in her rhetoric to eradicate
the upper social class from Argentine society. She did so by combining a roughness and intolerance in her words while, at the same time, identifying herself as a simple woman, rather passionate, but above all, a Peronist: “I do not have eloquence, but I have heart; the heart of a Peronista and a descamisada, who had suffered from the bottom with the people and who would never forget, no matter how high she raises” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm). From this passage, we can perceive how Eva Perón related her image to the myth of the poor women. Indeed, she utilized psychological methods on the poor descamisados by recalling her childhood in an attempt to remain in their eyes as an ordinary woman who grew among the Argentine miseries instead of the powerful person she had become. It was an effective method of identification, which helped Evita to wield such great power over her people until her death.

In the last section of her May 1951 address, Eva Perón reconstructed herself as the sacrificial and virginal myth, offering her life to the hands of the descamisados and Perón:

If I have the option to choose between all the things on earth, I would choose between all of them the infinite grace to die for the cause of Perón, which it is to die for you. Because I too, like the working companions, am able to die and finish my existence in the last moment of my life with our shout of war, with our shout of salvation: One’s Life for Perón! (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

This passage infers a eulogy. It sounds like a woman who is eager to die if it means elevation and salvation for her people, the nation, and Perón. Indeed, Eva built in the myth of the heroine to adulate her people first, and perhaps, ultimately, to raise her own image as an immortal myth.

On August 22, 1951, the Argentine people were met by the CGT in an event organized to proclaim “la Fórmula de la Patria Perón-Evita” [the Formula of the
Homeland Perón-Evita] for the following presidential election to be held in Argentina in 1952. The ceremony was planned to “request Evita to accept the candidacy to the vice presidency” (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/renunciamiento.htm). In the speech, *Cabildo Abierto del Justicialismo* [Open Town Meeting of Justicialism], Juan and Eva Perón were joined to speak to the people “on a stage raised on the *Avenida 9 de Julio*, in front of the Ministry of Public Works” (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/renunciamiento.htm). It was her first speech not performed on the symbolic balcony of the *Casa Rosada*, the House of Government that faced the historical *Plaza de Mayo*.

According to Ortiz, it was “...fearied that the traditional square would not be big enough to hold the crowds” (1995, p. 263). For this reason, the CGT instead chose the *Avenida 9 de Julio*, well-known today as the widest in the world. “Room was needed to stage Evita’s passion,” Ortiz remarks (1995, p. 263).

The magnitude of the throng was imposing, according to Crassweller, which was estimated to “range from 175,000 to a million ...a panorama of a spectacle with flags and banners and sky-writing planes overhead” (1986, p. 239). It was all about a mythical and spiritual union event between the *descamisados* and the leaders of Argentina, Eva and Juan Perón. As Ortiz states:

> The undulation of the flags, the raised arms of the human throng, the plane that wrote “CGT, Perón and Evita” in the sky, the voices of the button, poster, and souvenir salesman were all part of the ritual. It was a perfect Peronist day, a day to celebrate the new faith. (1995, p. 264)

Above all, it was the day in which Eva Perón resigned to the vice president candidacy.

According to Ortiz, “at five o’clock, Perón walked on the stage, followed by various ministers and workers. But without Evita” (1995, p. 264). Perón then spoke to the crowds and accepted his presidential candidacy, emphasizing that “he would do what the
people wanted” (Crassweller, 1968, p. 239). After Perón’s words, and considering the fact that “Evita was not present” for the Cabido Abierto, according to Crassweller (1986, p. 239), José Espejo, the general secretary of the CGT, took the microphone and “announced that they would go look for her” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 264). “A few minutes later, she appeared and was applauded. She was dressed in black, with a bare head, and was very pale” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 264). Upon Eva’s presentation at the podium, the people “exploded in the most frenzied shout in history, as an explosion of joy that was possible to elevate her to the skies looking for God and putting her on his side” (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/renunciamiento.htm). Immersed in this magical environment, Espejo introduced the speech and commemorated the occasion by proclaiming that “the people had united in an open session, just as they had on May 25, 1810, when Argentina began its revolutionary war” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 264). It was now time for Eva Perón to begin her rhetorical show. In a gesture of strength, as if she were recovering from a weakness, “Evita had changed her paleness for a pink fire.” She then “raised her arms” toward the sky (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/renunciamiento.htm). This gesture of open-hands, deeply symbolic in Catholic Argentina, advocated the myth of the Virgin Mary and her willingness to be embraced by the people. This imploring image was perceived as a manifestation of Eva’s benevolence toward the descamisados, which gave her image a halo of sanctity and purification that served to elevate her myth beyond boundaries.

The August 1951 discourse was unlike Eva’s first presentation when she was disregarded by the female audience on February 4, 1946. This time, a more confident and determined Eva Perón “improvised a touching and incendiary message” (http://www.
lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/renunciamiento.htm), without mentioning her nomination for the vice presidency. In her familiar style of relating with her people, Eva alludes to the historical May 25, 1810, in which the people “had met to ask what it was all about.” In associating the May historical event with Peronism, Eva continues the speech by emphasizing that the people who unite today “in this Open Town Meeting of Justicialism” know that it was about “the destiny of the Nation…and know that justice and freedom can only be found by having General Perón at the bow of the ship of the Nation” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm). With these powerful words, the multitude responded: “‘Con Evita, con Evita’” [With Evita, with Evita] (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/renunciamiento.htm).

From the passage above it seems easy to identify that Eva Perón has acquired authority in her public communication over the years. Certainly, this ceremony of the Cabildo Abierto, along with the October 17 and the May 1 events are all interesting examples of the power held by Eva as an orator. She imposed her charismatic feminist style and gained the right to speak in a country where women were not allowed to do so. Of equal importance was the nostalgia combined with nationalist and revolutionary symbolism with which Eva Perón created her message. Her rhetoric was filled with words of lovemaking for Perón and her people, but words of frenzy and hatred toward the oligarchy. Speaking directly to Perón, Eva proclaims: “My general: we are ready - the people and the vanguard of the descamisados - to finally be done with the intrigue, the calumny, the defamation, and the merchants who have sold out the people and the country” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm). Eva was conscious of the powerful effects of her rhetoric, especially in linking the people to Perón’s
government, so she combined her strong personality with a Peronist revolutionary mythic quality to attain such goal. "A stranger who did not understand Spanish would have thought this woman was speaking of an insurrection," Ortiz explains (1995, p. 264). Surely, her rhetoric was one of revolutionary symbolism combined with fanaticism for Peronism.

A common aspect found in her public speaking was the incessant gratitude that Eva expressed to her people: "I do not know how to repay your affection and trust that the people have bestowed on me," she exclaims in her speech. Evita was determined to pay back their gratitude. In her words: "I will always do the will of the people." The last section of her 1951 address was dedicated to relating her actions to the name of Perón, "I have not done anything, Perón is everything. Perón is the Homeland..." (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm).

Up to this point, the people did not interrupt her speech. After Eva's words, Perón took the stage and "spoke of the 'strong and virtuous' people," when a yell from the crowd silenced him: "'Speak, Evita!'" (Ortiz, 1995, p. 265). This action shows that Eva Perón was no longer the woman behind the leader but the real power of the Argentine nation. The scene changed, for the masses left their passive role and became the active force of participation in the event. Surprised by the fervent reaction of the crowds, "Espejo took the microphone to signal that Evita still had not said anything about her candidacy. He added that the CGT wanted an answer by the next day" (Ortiz, 1995, p. 265). But the crowds immediately requested "'No, Not tomorrow! Now!'" (Ortiz, 1995, p. 265). Thus, "without plan or preparation for what happened, the entire high command
of Peronism now struggled to improvise a response to the staggering spontaneity of the evening and to contain it” (Crassweller, 1968, pp. 239-240).

In this setting, Espejo said to Eva, “Madam, the people requests that you accept its position…” (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita2.htm). The microphone was thus handed to Eva Perón, who gave a passionate dialogue to the thousands who were expecting an undeniably “yes.” She begins her response with a modest appeal:

I request to the General Confederation of Labor and to you, by the affection which unites us, by the love we feel for one another, that you give me at least four days to make such an overwhelmingly important decision in the life of this humble woman. (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita2.htm).

The frenzied crowd immediately refused the answer, “Not…no. General strike!. Let’s go on strike!.” “Comrades…comrades,” Evita constantly says to the people, as if she were trying to calm them: “I am not resigning from my place in the struggle. I am resigning from the honors…” In seeking to convince the crowds to accept her decision, and perhaps, ultimately, struggling to convince herself, Eva proclaims: “Don’t you think that if the vice presidency were a position and I the solution I would have answered yes already?” (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita2.htm).

Eva Perón attempted to explain the reasons for her posture but the crowds seemed not to care about her excuses. Her hesitation about the position was seen with displeasure. They urged an immediate answer from her. Finally, Eva responds:

Comrades: by the affection that unites us, I request please do not make me do which I do not want to do. I ask this of you as a friend, as a comrade…when has Evita deceived you? When has Evita not done what you wished? I request only one thing of you: wait until tomorrow. (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita2.htm)
Continual signs of love and devotion from the audience followed Eva’s words: “This has taken me by surprise,” she claims, “never in my heart of a humble Argentine woman did I think that I would be able to accept this position...Give me time to announce my decision to all the nation on national radio” (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita2.htm). After a few minutes, “Evita came forward, tears streaming down her face, her voice sunken to a rough whisper... (Crassweller, 1986, p. 240). Finally, she proclaims to the crowds: “In the words of General Perón: I will do what the people say” (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/renunciamient.htm). These were her final words and the end of the open assembly.

This 1951 address can be considered her most important triumph over the descamisados, the poor men, woman, and workers. The emotional deluge of the people on her behalf revealed Eva Perón’s great significance as an orator. She combined Peronist and Argentine symbols to bond her people to the leader with a mastery that was not perceptible in her earlier speeches. By enacting a nationalistic ritual through her communication, Eva continually secured the power of the Peronist government and legitimized her political role in Argentina. The public performances in this speech acquired a Christ-myth style, which was reinforced with Eva’s articulation of religious words and prayerful symbolism. Above all, this speech reflected her rhetorical quality in terms of improvisation. Although she had a speechwriter, Muñoz Aspiri, Eva evolved in such an emotional way through her rhetoric that it was believable that her words came from her mouth spontaneously. Primarily, her personal ambition for rhetoric was intended to conquer the hearts of the poor men, women, and working class by performing the Peronist myth.
Nine days later, on August 31, 1951, Eva Perón delivered a national radio speech, expressing her resignation to the vice presidential nomination:

I want to communicate to the Argentine nation my irrevocable and definitive decision to resign from the honor with which the workers and the township of my Homeland wanted to bestow on me in the historical Open Town Meeting on August 22nd. (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita2.htm)

Eva continues the speech by explaining the reasons of such a decision:

In the first place, invoking my dignity as an Argentine and Peronist woman, and bounded by the love for the cause of Perón, my Homeland, and my people, I declare that this decision arises from the depth of my conscience, and for this reason, it is totally free and has all the fortitude of my final will. (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita2.htm)

The emphasis that Eva Perón placed on declaring that she was the only judge in her choice can be interpreted as an attempt to show, perhaps, that her resignation was not Perón’s decision. In fact, her next words were intended to highlight that after her dialogue with the people on August 22, an event that, in Eva’s words, “they never forget my eyes and my heart,” she realizes that “I should not have to exchange my position in the struggle in the Peronist movement for any other position” (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita2.htm). Her last words refers to the only ambition she had in life:

I did not have then, nor have I at this moment, more than a single ambition, a single and great personal ambition: that the people would say about me, when they write the wonderful chapter, which history will surely dedicate to Perón, that there was a woman next to Perón who dedicated herself to the President and the hopes of the people, that woman was the one the people called affectionately “Evita.” This is what I want it to be. (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita2.htm)

By the end of the speech, “August 31 was designated as Eva Perón Day forever” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 241). The significant allegation of emotion and sacrifice in Eva Perón’s rhetoric seems evident. The passage above reads as if she had reached the climax.
in her life, yet, at the same time, as if she had also arrived at the final point, for she was
dying, and this time, nobody could save her. It is said that Evita fainted after her dialogue
with the people on August 22nd (Ortiz, 1995, p. 266). Father Ramírez declared that it was
because of the pain spread in her body: “She had not stopped feeling as if something was
piercing her stomach, needles” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 266). For the time being, the country
began to suffer on her behalf. As Crassweller explains:

The full attention of the nation was to be turned on the sickbed of the First
Lady in the next eleven months, for her long death was the event of the
era, a public dying, a political fact of the highest importance. (1986, p.
243)

Meanwhile, “honors and awards and recognitions of every kind had been pouring in upon
Evita for some time, adding to the emotional electricity of the time” (Crassweller, 1986,
p. 243).

On October 17, 1951 Juan and Eva Perón delivered speeches for the annual
celebration of the Peronist Loyalty Day. The occasion was devoted to Eva Perón, termed
from now own, “Día de la Lealtad a la compañera Evita” [the Day of Loyalty to our
comrade Evita] by Perón and the people (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita4.htm). As
usual, Juan Perón was the first speaker, whose words raised as a hymn of praise toward
Eva, thanking “this incomparable woman for every instant” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 268). “For
the first time in his life, Perón covered her with elegies in his speech,” Ortiz remarks
(1995, p. 268). At the conclusion of his speech, Perón awarded “a special medal for her,
for her embodiment of ‘...the highest qualities which a true Peronista can demonstrate,
those of renunciation and abnegation’” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 241).

Eva was standing by Perón’s side, with tears rolling down her pale face. “Dressed
in a dark gray suit, as if in mourning herself” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 268), she took the
microphone. “When she wanted to speak, not a word came from her mouth” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 268). Eva attended the ceremony after a day of resting in her sickbed. Holding strength in her heart, “in a voice hardly audible” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 244), she takes the microphone once more and says: “This is a day of great emotion for me...I would have never missed this appointment with my people on this 17th of October.” She then alludes to her ill health by saying, “it does not matter to me if I must leave the shreds of my life on the side of the road” (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita4.htm). Upon uttering these words, Eva was imbedding her image with sacrificial symbols, as if she were recreating herself in the eyes of the mourner, surrendering her life for the good of the nation.

The following words focus on thanking the CGT, Perón, the people, and the country for the honors and distinctions granted to her. Yet, she immediately attributes her triumphs to Perón, as if she were performing once again the traditional myth of the loyal wife, submissive to her husband: “Nothing that I have; nothing that I am; nothing that I think is mine: it is all Perón’s” (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita4.htm). Eva continues her speech by reasserting her connection with the people and Perón while, at the same time, elevating her own achievements in the capacity of intermediary as a manifestation of her love for her people:

...I will not say that I do not deserve this, yes, I deserve it, my general. I deserve it for one single thing, which is worth more than all the gold in the world: I deserve it because all that I have done was for the love of this country. (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita4.htm)

In sacrificing herself for the love of the Peronist cause, she proclaims in a messianic voice: “If this country requested my life, I would give it singing because the happiness of a single descamisado is worth more than my life” (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita4.htm).
The rhetoric of this October 1951 address adopted a frenetic tone, for she knew she was counting her days and her goals were not yet accomplished. She made several references to her illness during the speech, which served her to revitalize and legitimize the myth of Peronism. “I am thankful, finally, companions, for all your prayers for my health.” She then expresses her desire to keep working for the Peronsit cause: “I hope that God hears the humble people of my Homeland, so that I can soon return to the struggle and continue fighting with Perón, for you, and with you, for Perón until the death” (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita4.htm). It seems obvious that the combination of religious and political elements integrated in her rhetoric was a smart strategy to reinforce the political value of Peronism among the *descamisados*.

In the last section of her speech, Eva Perón encloses a public plea to the Argentine people, urging them to remain loyal toward Perón and his cause:

> Today, I request, companions, a single thing: that we all swear, publicly, to defend Perón and to fight for him until the death. Our oath should be shouted for an entire minute so that our shout will be heard around the world: One’s Life for Perón. (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita4.htm)

These words show that Eva was determined to preserve Peronism in Argentine politics. To reach this goal, she elevated the *descamisados* to the head of power and placed her own enemies, the rich, on their lookout:

> The danger has not passed. It is necessary that each Argentine worker watch and does not fall asleep, because the enemies work in the shadow of the treason, and sometimes they hide behind a smile or a lending hand. (http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita4.htm)

It is clear that the rhetoric matched Eva’s personal intentions. The following words are filled with the persuasion needed to remain present in the minds of the *descamisados* as the mandatory task to accomplish in life: “For this very reason, the victory will be ours.”
We must attain victory sooner or later, whatever the cost, and whoever may fall”
(http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita4.htm). The zeal and passion with which Eva Perón cemented her rhetoric has kept her myth alive over the years.

The last section of Eva’s speech unveils the mythical symbolism she created around her persona to ensure her political legitimacy in Argentina:

I have only one valuable possession; it is held in my heart, it burns in my soul, it abides in my flesh, and aches in my nerves: it is the love for the people and Perón...I never wanted nor do I now want anything for myself. My glory is and always will be the shield of Perón and the flag of my country, and although I may leave shreds of my life along the road, I know that you will take up my name and wave it aloft like a victory flag.
(http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita4.htm)

This piece of rhetoric is worthy of analysis. In fact, it reveals the mythic character of the heroic leader that Eva Perón communicated to the followers to attain political legitimacy. Here Eva is saying that she would give her body, blood, and life for her people. Such body imagery, particularly in Catholic religion, is reminiscent of the figure of Christ who sacrificed his life to save humanity. In this context, Evita places her image next to Christ, showing to her descamisados that she is renouncing her physical condition in order to resurrect the forces of the country. At the same time, Eva instills strong male imagery, casting herself in the myth of the courageous war soldier who is always willing to fight for his nation. Thus, Eva Perón made of her rhetoric a mythical instrument that allowed her to achieve her political goal.

The last words of her speech reveal once more the significant mythic ingredient:

...I would like to tell you many things, but the doctors have prohibited me to speak. I leave you my heart and I say to you that I am sure of you, as it is my desire that I will soon be in the struggle, with much more force and love, to fight for my country, which I love as much as I love Perón.
(http://www.lafogata.org/evita/evita4.htm)
This passage proves how Eva Perón took any opportunity to mention her disease, as if she were trying to arouse compassion from her followers in showing them her weakness but, at the same time, manifesting her courage to remain steadfast in the fight for the Peronist cause.

Although this October 1951 speech marked the end of her active role in politics, Eva Perón rose as the secular heroine, whose impact on the mind and spirit of her supporters still reverberates in the air of Argentina. The mythical character of her Peronist rhetoric became even more zealous on her behalf as the cancer increased. After all, only death can give myth the status of eternity, for Eva was living in such a divine atmosphere, recreating her image in the weeping Virginal icon to speak of reality through imagery. Such rhetorical symbolism filled an emotional space in the Peronist government and Argentine society. Above all, Eva Perón’s rhetoric served to reinforce her role as the mythical bridge between the people and Perón and achieve political legitimacy for herself.
Conclusion

This thesis proves that Eva Perón created herself into a mythical figure to legitimize her political position of power in Argentina during the 1950s. From the balcony of the Casa Rosada, the presidential residence facing the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, Evita established a symbolic place to perform her role of the emotional intermediary between the Peronist government and the hopes of the descamisados, the voiceless lower class of Argentine society. Above all, this study showed evidence of the rhetorical evolution of Eva Perón from a common humble woman, who maintained a traditional mother figure, to the leading voice of the Peronist government and the virginal “saint” for her followers. This thesis clearly reveals how Eva Perón embodied Peronist ideology in her rhetoric to identify herself with the Argentine people, primarily the poor men, women, and working class, win their political loyalty, and therefore, attain political legitimacy.

If the impact of communication is measured by the power to transcend reality and achieve the status of an immortal myth, then Eva Perón must be considered as the most powerful mythical figure of the 20th century. Motivated by the ambition to become an historical figure, Eva evolved first as an actress, then as wife of President Juan Perón, and finally as a leading communicator. Over the years, she gained access to the political arena and became a new character: “Evita,” the reassuring voice for the descamisados; the poor men, women, and working class. Through her rhetoric, a revolutionary fusion of Peronist symbolism and cultural imagery, Eva spawned an assortment of myths to persuade her audiences to take action. Surely, the implications of her ritualized political narratives became the driving force for the creation of “Evita,” the symbol of the most effective
communicator in Argentina of all time. After all, charisma and well-chosen words served to establish her leadership role for her *descamisados* and legitimize her character as the real power in the Peronist government forever.

In this setting, myth criticism has indeed demonstrated how Eva Perón became the symbolic canon of authority in Argentina during the 1950s through her Peronist rhetoric. By implementing the theoretical myth studies proposed by Roland Barthes and Bruce Lincoln, this thesis has shown how the mythic aspect played an important role in performing a rhetorical ritual to legitimize a leadership position. Particularly, the analysis on myth undertaken by Barthes has unveiled the power of mythical speech in creating an image of reality and disseminating its ideological meanings to influence social groups. In combining mythical elements in her narratives, Eva Perón then was able to give meaning to diverse forms of Argentina’s social life, transforming history into Peronist natural facts that served her to persuade myth-consumers and influence their political decision-making. Additionally, the line of thought proposed by Bruce Lincoln has particularly emphasized the authority of political narratives to maintain, restructure, and destroy social identities through evocative sentiments and revolutionary slogans. In this case, mythical speech has helped Eva Perón to distinguish between traditional ideologies and reconstruct them on a common belief based on the ideology of Peronism. Above all, mythical speech does not just serve Eva to consolidate and restate cultural traditions of the past, but also to propose new ways for interpretations particularly significant to present and future situations.

Clearly, myth criticism applied to the ideology of Peronism has provided an appropriate theoretical framework for this rhetorical study of Eva Perón. By integrating
the four essential values of Peronism signaled by Crassweller; that is, authoritarian corporatism, national symbolism, charismatic populism, and cultural imagery of the caudillo tradition, Eva perpetuated a national mythical vision of the Argentine society through her rhetoric and even re-defined this myth according to the political circumstances. The same was true regarding Evita’s rhetorical representations of the doctrine of Justicialism blended with Hispanic and Catholic ideals, which allowed her to convey an atmosphere of dignity and justice that gained confidence and credibility from the shirtless poor and established her figure to the status of myth.

As wife of President Juan Perón, Eva acquired a podium of power for her political transition from Eva Perón, First Lady of Argentina, to “Evita:” the emotional bridge linking Perón with poor men, women, and workers. By performing Peronist rhetoric for political identity with her audiences, Eva became the symbol of the descamisadas, the poor women, who for the first time in Argentine history exercised their electoral vote. While acting with a natural concern to social matters, another mythical element materialized in Eva’s character. She recreated herself in the image of the laboring coworker allied to Perón, elevating her role as the mythical benefactor of the poor and laborers. Her rhetorical passion, always emphasizing her humble heritage and her love for Perón, became a kind of religion that raised her as the spiritual mother of the nation. After all, Eva Perón personified the myth of Peronism from the balcony of the Casa Rosada to legitimize her leadership position.

Over time, Eva Perón’s cult became the focus of several critics, not only in Argentine society but also worldwide. Her political and public distinction was often framed in the figure of a controversial woman throughout the media of the time, in which
truth and myth were juxtaposed. In the 50s, a British ambassador described her as “a vain and facile woman” (BBC News, 2001). The Washington Post defined Eva as “fascist, or at least a crypto-fascist, who shared her husband’s admiration for Mussolini’s Italy and Hitler’s Germany and especially Franco’s Spain” (Robinson, 1997). In an article published by the Argentine newspaper Clarín, Eva Perón was portrayed by an historian as “a tough orator whose audience would have not been surprised to hear the echo of León Trotsky’s message come from her lips” (Donghi, 2002). In other words, Eva Perón’s message was one of Peronist propaganda. As she clearly reveals in her autobiography: “I do not deny that my work helps to consolidate the enormous political prestige enjoyed by the General, but never have I subordinated love to self-interest…and still less when it is a matter of the love of my people” (1978, p. 148).

Despite the ambiguous mythical imagery that generally surrounded her life and words, Eva Perón identified herself as a simple woman determined to improve the life of the descamisados, the shirtless poor of Argentina. By providing a caring hand that materialized in creating the Eva Perón’s Foundation for charitable causes, she elevated the dignity of the humble. Her social and political actions were generally accompanied by a strong emotional rhetoric that reached unprecedented devotion from the descamisados but growing resentment and qualms from her opponents, the middle and upper classes. In this context, Julio Bárbaro, an intellectual of Peronism, refers to her public speaking as “the greatest discourse of hatred that one has ever known” (Guagnini, 2002). In fact, the social humiliations she had experienced as a child played an important role in the rhetoric of Eva Perón, becoming the major motives of such strong words at the sight of injustice. As Bárbaro further states:
“Hate came from her roots, hate for what she had experienced and still experienced. Hate for her own pain and for that of other people, which led to a shared feeling. In this sense, the speech was far from rational, it was passion. But it astonishes after a long time the rationality of that passion...There was no double speech, she spoke as if it were her absolute essence. The character and the person were identical.” (Guagnini, 2002)

Usually there was a piece of drama within Eva Perón’s public performances, successfully performed by her skills as an actress. In comparing her rhetorical style in political ritual, Alberto Borrini, a journalist specializing in communication subjects, asserts in the Clarín newspaper, “like Ronald Reagan, Eva Perón arrived in the political arena after practicing her weapons of interpretation...” (Guagnini, 2002). Above all, Eva Perón had a natural talent for influencing audiences, acting in the style that would raise her effectiveness like few others. Most likely, she was inspired by her true love for the descamisados, and mostly, for her husband and man in office, Juan Perón.

In her myriad discourses, Evita has often emphasized to her people that all the praise should focus on Perón. By reading her memoirs and speeches, one can perceive without a doubt how much she loved her husband, as if she were always willing to sacrifice her life for him. “It is - I admit it - that I have stopped being myself and it is he who exists in my soul, owner of all my speech and my feelings, absolute owner of my heart and of my life,” Eva states in her autobiography (1978, p. 39). It was also important in her rhetoric to show devotion to Perón’s regime, inciting publicly the poor men, women, and working class to join forces to defend the leader from the oligarchy, the eternal enemy of the nation. Her ability to perform emotional Peronist rhetoric overcame the cultural chauvinism of the Argentine aristocracy and empowered the political and moral status of the descamisados, the lower class of society. By any measure, Eva
Perón’s rhetoric is the most outstanding example of how political narratives influence decision-making and legitimize a position of power.

Without a doubt, Eva Perón’s rhetoric was filled with persuasive political symbolism that reflected the Argentine culture to reinforce the myth of Peronism among her descamisados. In a national radio Christmas speech delivered on December 1951, Eva spoke with idealistic words conceived to dramatize her determination to continue fighting for the Peronist cause. As Eva puts it, “until the last breath that life will gives us” (http://www.lucheyvuelve.com.ar/Evita/navidedad51mensaj.htm). But her body became the cruelest enemy in battlefield. In February 1952, “…further tests confirmed that cancer was present and spreading. This time there was no room for hope” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 244).

On May 1, 1952, Eva Perón struggled to deliver her last speech at the annual Labor Day celebrations. Crassweller described the rhetorical scene in the following way:

On May Day she revived enough to walk without assistance onto the balcony of the Casa Rosada, and she spoke for the last time to the descamisados, with intensity in which love and hate and frenzy and religious adoration were compressed into the most intense light, a laser beam enveloped in a votive candle. (1986, p. 245)

Eva began the speech with the most violent words ever, referring to the enemies of Peronism as the “traitors inside and out, who in the dark of the night want to leave the poison of their serpents in the soul and the body of Perón.” In an attempt to intimidate her enemies, she states: “I ask God to not allow those insects to raise a hand against Perón” because “watch out for that day!” On that day, Eva further says, “we will do justice by our own hands” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm). She later proclaims:
On that day, my General, I will go with the working people, I will go with the women of the country, I will go with the descamisados of the Homeland, and we will not leave a brick standing that is not Peronist. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

Although she was pale and weak, Evita was determined to make her voice reverberate stronger than ever among her people, as if she were taking the last opportunity to build herself in the Peronist mystique of the courageous heroine in battle.

As Eva’s words unveil:

I am again in the struggle, I am again with you, like yesterday, like today and like tomorrow...I am with you to be the bridge of love and happiness that I have always tried to be between you and the leader of the workers. (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm)

The last words of her speech combines guilt, despair, and a profound grief, “there is still much pain to mitigate; it is necessary to heal many wounds,” Eva utters, “but we are the people, and I know that...we are invincible because we ourselves are the Homeland” (http://www.pjbonaerense.org.ar/peronismo/peronismo.htm). At the end of the speech, there was no forcefulness left in her. “Perón was holding Eva up by the waist. They left the balcony together” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 272). Later, he describes this event in his memoirs with words of trepidation: “‘In the room, the windows closed...one could still hear the voice of the people calling for her. One could also hear my breath. Evita’s was imperceptible. In my arms, there was nothing left but a corpse’” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 272).

Eva Perón appeared for the last time in public on June 4, 1952, at the inauguration of Perón’s second term of presidency (Crassweller, 1986, p. 245). It was a legendary day for Eva. “‘She had just given this triumph to her husband and her people’” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 273). It was, above all, the day in which Eva Perón became the legitimate power of the Peronist government. “Despite her weakness,” weighing only eight-two pounds at the
time, “she constantly waved to the crowds, never resting her arm” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 272).

Eva was determined to perform the leading role she worked so hard to achieve over the years, for it was her last occasion to build her mythical image to legitimize her political position. Crassweller describes how the fragile figure of Evita succeeded in remaining publicly as the vital force of Peronism:

A framework of wire and plaster was devised, to prop her up, and with this and a triple dose of a painkiller and a fur coat now so large for her that she was almost lost in it, she made it to the Casa Rosada... (1986, p. 245)

In less than a month, Eva’s body was officially announced dead at 8:25 p.m. “Whatever the actual time, Eva did not die at 8:25 P.M. But that was the time of her marriage to Perón, and it was the time she chose for her death” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 277). This is a central element in the character of Eva Perón, for all about her life and death served to transform her image into a Peronist icon, and ultimately, an immortal legend.

During her last weeks, Eva Perón wrote Mi Voluntad Suprema (My Last Will), which was pronounced following her death from the balcony of the Casa Rosada by an official speaker at the Loyalty Day memorial on October 17, 1952. “Much of the language was vividly reminiscent of the woman who had been Peronism’s great missionary to the people, and for the hour at least, her passions and dreams and hates and loves lived again” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 247). Within this manuscript, which can be considered her last message to the Argentine society, Eva Perón speaks with the familiar words of devotion when referring to Perón and her people:

I want to live eternally with Perón and with my people. This is my absolute and permanent desire and it will be therefore my last will of my heart when my hour arrives. Where Perón is and where my descamisados are, is where my heart will always be, to love them with every ounce of my life and with all the fanaticism of my soul.

(http://www.emancipacion.org/libros_revistas/MiMensaje.pdf, p. 18)
Later in the manuscript, Eva uses a religious style, while mixing love and hate at
the same time:

I will be with them, with Perón and with my people, to fight against the
traitorous and perfidious oligarchy, against the cursed race of the
exploiters and the dealers of humanity. God is the witness of my sincerity.
He knows that the love of my race, which is the race of my people,
consumes me. (http://www.emancipacion.org/libros_revistas/
MiMensaje.pdf, p. 18)

This passage encloses the essential dimension of the rhetoric of Eva Perón. In speaking
openly of social class, she identifies the Peronist people as the pure and genuine group
against the oligarchy. She would later defend her social posture in her autobiography
through the invocation of love: “I am ‘socially resentful,’” Eva claims, but this
resentment “…does not spring from any hatred. Only from love: from the love of my
people, whose suffering has opened forever the doors of my heart” (1978, p. 141).

A significant passage of Eva Perón’s last will refers to the luxurious jewels that
served her mythical role of First Lady of Argentina. “My jewels do not belong to me,”
Eva declares, “most of them were gifts from my people” (http://www.emancipacion.org/
libros_revistas/MiMensaje.pdf, p. 19). This rhetoric can be interpreted as a voice of
reproach from Eva Perón to her accusers, who frequently accused her for her lavish style
since she claimed to be the symbol of the poor. Even her friend and personal assistant
Lillian Guardo was stunned by the “greed of her powerful friend” who “concluded that
for Evita, jewelry was reassurance, visible proof that she was loved. Jewels calmed her as
food calms others” (Ortiz, 1995, p. 156). Eva justifies her actions by asserting, “‘the poor
like to see me be beautiful…They do not want to be protected by a poorly dressed
woman. You see, they dream about me. How can I let them down?’” (Ortiz, 1995, p.
Later in the document, Eva offers all the jewels and honors she received during her political career to the sole benefit of her people. As she states,

...like gold endorses the currency of some countries, my jewels are the endorsement of a permanent credit that will open the banks of the country for the benefit of the people in order to construct houses for the workers of my Homeland. (http://www.emancipacion.org/libros_revistas/MiMensaje.pdf, p. 19).

In the last section of her will, Eva Perón apologizes for her mistakes in life with an emotional tone,

...I want to let the people know that if I have committed errors I have committed them for love, and I hope that God, who has always seen my heart, will judge me not for my errors or for my defects, nor for my many sins, but for the love that consumes my life. (http://www.emancipacion.org/libros_revistas/MiMensaje.pdf, p. 19).

These final words reveal the mythical fusion with her descamisados: “I was born from the people and suffered with them. I have the body and the soul and blood of the people. I can do nothing better than to surrender myself to the people” (http://www.emancipacion.org/libros_revistas/MiMensaje.pdf, p. 18). As Ortiz puts it,

Hers were not words but cries.... She spoke without beating around the bush, but not without rhetoric. From their veracity and sincerity, her words could have become a prophet’s. But a scream is not language. Her cancer spoke for her. (1995, p. 274)

No other female figure has been able to fill the historical pages of Argentina with such mythical passion as Eva Perón. After her death, “…one of the Argentine trade unions soon petitioned the Vatican to declare her sainthood” (Crassweller, 1986, p. 247). Eva never achieved the canonization from the Vatican, but she was already a “saint” in the minds of her descamisados. The mythical character of Eva Perón still survives in her rhetoric. Her words have taken a legendary magnitude, changing in meaning and form to reconstruct a natural version of history. Her personal ambition to be placed somewhere in
the history of Argentina was accomplished. She will be remembered as the woman who evolved into a mythical passionate communicator to create a national identity in Argentina founded on the ideology of Peronism.

In the final analysis, this thesis has shown that Eva Perón performed a Peronist rhetoric that was unparalleled in winning the loyalty of the descamisados and linking their support to the Peronist government. Despite the fact that Evita lacked the political instruments for stylish public speaking, she performed the role of orator with such fluency that she not only placed her husband in the Argentine presidency for two consecutives terms but also legitimized her political position in Argentine politics for many years to come. In considering the magnitude that Eva Perón’s rhetoric has reached in Argentina during the 1950s, where women did not have power nor voice, one can easily perceive how this study has contributed to the mass communication field. It was, in fact, Eva Perón’s emotional public speaking, always emphasizing her poor beginnings and her love for Juan Perón that have proved the significance of rhetoric as a symbolic instrument to legitimize a political performance.

Although this thesis seems to be challenging to readers, particularly in dealing with scholar research materials whose literal translations from Spanish into English were grammatically inaccurate, which made it difficult to understand, the message of Eva Perón was not hindered by the translations, and her rhetoric was successfully conveyed. By doing so, this study has provided a thorough research of the biographical, social, and political contexts of Eva Perón’s rhetoric that served to enhance the reader’s appreciation of language as a potential tool to capture and manipulate peoples’ imagination. Such a perspective allows us to value Eva’s use of mythical speech as the major vehicle to ignite
passion from potential audiences that served her to create a symbolic identification with her *descamisados* and legitimize her leadership role.

Above all, this thesis has confirmed that the rhetorical magic of Eva Duarte de Perón still perpetuates in the history of Argentina. Through her voice and proceedings, Eva accomplished several goals during her short time of political performances. She recreated herself from the humble woman of *Los Toldos*, the former actress who was often accused of manipulating lovers to obtain central parts, and was criticized on stage for having inaccurate pronunciation and a tongue that slipped, to become “Evita,” the mother of the nation and a “saint” for her people. Although she never attained an official position in the Peronist regime, Eva Perón became the most powerful mythical woman in Argentina ever. She gained a platform of power in a patriarchal country to fight for the rights of the poor men, women, and working class. Her words became the driving force for the destruction of the oligarchy’s grip on society and the elevation of the *descamisados*, the poor men, women, and workers, as the real power in Argentine society.

From all of these circumstances, Eva Perón’s rhetoric has emerged as the forceful symbol that gave authority and credibility to the Peronist myth. For those who have adored her, today she is still the suffering woman who became a providential “saint” by example. For those who have despised her, she lives in their memories as the devious woman who used men to attain her ambitions of power and reprisal. In the final judgment, this thesis has truly proven that Eva Perón’s rhetoric established the ideology of Peronism in Argentine politics forever, elevated her name as the legitimate power in
the history of the country, and achieved a mythical dimension of immortality that transcends reality and time.
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