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Eva Peron: Political Domination through Love, Rhetoric, and Feminism

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Introduction

Maria Eva Duarte de Perón is more than “Peronism’s First Lady” or the real woman behind Madonna’s theatrical debut in Weber’s “Evita.” The conditions of Argentine society during Eva Perón’s political career created the perfect incubator for the beginnings of feminist expansion. By praising tradition while promoting gender equality, Eva Perón created an approach to feminism that appeals to working-class women, her *descamisadas*. Despite being active in politics for only six years (1946-1952), Eva Perón’s impact on Argentine feminism remains profound today because of her rhetorical mastery.

Though much of the scholarship surrounding Eva Perón’s feminism ultimately deems her a “non-feminist,” I contend Eva Perón’s “moral reform” feminism was powerful and had a significant impact on Argentine feminism. My research frames Eva Perón’s rhetorical choices in a first-wave feminist context unique to Argentine culture. To complement this, I have plotted Eva Perón’s feminism on a map of Argentina by marking important speech locations and specifying unique rhetorical appeals from each speech catering to her audience. This spatial visualization will aid future scholars in understanding Eva Perón’s manipulation of rhetorical appeals to achieve her feminist impact in the historical context of her political career.

Eva Perón’s political career began with her intimate relationship with Juan Perón. On June 4, 1943, Juan Perón’s *Grupo de Oficiales Unidos* (the Group of United Officers), commonly known as the GOU, overthrew the sitting president in favor of a self-installed military regime focused on anticommunism, nationalism, and economic growth.¹ The GOU appointed Juan Perón as their Secretary of Labor, and Perón thrived in this position by supporting unions and politically mobilizing the working-class in his favor.² In 1944, Colonel Juan Perón and Maria Eva Duarte de Perón met for the first time at an event funding Colonel Perón’s “massive relief campaign” aiming to rebuild the earthquake-destroyed San Juan.³ The pair married in 1945 before Juan Perón would win his first presidential term in 1946.

Together, the couple invented Peronism (or “*peronismo*”), “a political identity (not an ideology or a form of populism) that has varied through the decades depending on the specific national context.”⁴ Scholars continue to debate whether Peronism is populism, but my research will utilize the assumption that it was/is a populist movement. To achieve their goal of a “*Nuevo Argentina*” (“New Argentina”) founded on social justice and eradicating the oligarchy, the Peróns mobilized Argentine workers with nationalist ideals.⁵ The first wave of Peronism (1946-1955) ended when Eva Perón died from uterine cancer in 1952 and Juan Perón’s second

¹ Gabriela Andrea Masut, “Santa Evita: The Mother of the Descamisados: An Analysis of the Rhetoric of Eva Peron.” *Lynn University: SPIRAL*, October 2006, 34.

² Robert S. Jansen, “Populist Mobilization: A New Theoretical Approach to Populism.” *Sociological Theory* 29, no. 2 (2011), 88.

³ Mark Alan Healey, “The Fragility of the Moment: Politics and Class in the Aftermath of the 1944 Argentine Earthquake.” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 62 (2002), 50.

⁴ Daniel Rueda, “Is Populism a Political Strategy? A Critique of an Enduring Approach.” *Political Studies*, vol. 69, no. 2, 2020, 171.

⁵ Masut, “Santa Evita: The Mother of the Descamisados: An Analysis of the Rhetoric of Eva Peron,” 22.

presidential term (1952-1955) succumbed to a military coup.⁶ Following the military coup that ended Peronism, military regimes seeking “precisely to prevent the possibility of a return of Peronism to power” ruled Argentina until 1973 when Juan Perón was re-elected as president.⁷ Following Juan Perón’s death in 1974, his third wife and Vice President Isabel Martínez de Perón took over the presidency (becoming the world’s first female president) until a military coup overthrew her on March 24, 1976.⁸

Peronism as a political ideology is highly studied because of its range, spanning “the full arch from fascist right to radical left,”⁹ as well as its “stability, and the ability to face crises.”¹⁰ Despite its adaptability, Peronism almost always relies on charismatic leaders, populism, and “an us-versus-them rationale.”¹¹ Under Peronism, leaders are enabled by a “radical theory of democracy, according to which popular enthusiasm . . . provides the leader with legitimacy.”¹² Though this relationship with the Argentine working-class has often been used for “good” by Peronist politicians, the “traditional view in the United States [is] that Peronism in the post-war era was fascist.” This perspective was most likely a result of Cold War-induced anti-Latin American sentiments, distracting Americans from understanding what Peronism truly was: “a progressive nationalist movement whose populist ideology stressed the equality and dignity of the working-class.”¹³

Eva Perón’s love for the working-class and her desire for their enfranchisement is evident in the rhetorical choices in her speeches. Eva Perón’s strategic rhetorical choices along with her charisma created a distinct style only she could orate.¹⁴ In her fiery speeches, Eva Perón would refer to the working-class as “*descamisados*” (shirtless ones), a term that “was first used as an anti-Peronist insult and then recuperated with a positive spin by Peronists.”¹⁵ The *descamisados* “lived vicariously through her challenge to their class enemy,” meanwhile “she was considered ruthless and arbitrary” by those whom her speeches attacked: the Argentine oligarchy.¹⁶ By the end of her political career, Eva Perón created a distinct rhetorical style and “transformed herself into a Peronist myth, the image of the eternal social warrior of the poor.”¹⁷

⁶ Leigh Courtney, “Goodnight and Thank You, Evita: The Sexualization of Eva Peron in Popular Culture and Its Implications.” *Articuláte* 15 (2010).

⁷ Daniel James, “The Peronist Left, 1955-1975.” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 8, no. 2 (1976), 275.

⁸ David C. Jordan, “Argentina’s Military Government.” *Current History* 72, no. 424 (1977), 57.

⁹ Kurt Weyland and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Populism: A Political-Strategic Approach.” *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, November 6, 2017, 54.

¹⁰ Juan M. Abal Medina, “Peronism Back in Power in Argentina: Economic Crisis and Political Stability.” *Latin American Policy* 11, no. 1 (2020), 150.

¹¹ Samuel Gregg, “Understanding Pope Francis: ‘Argentina, Economic Failure, and the ‘Teología Del Pueblo.’” *The Independent Review* 21, no. 3 (2017), 363.

¹² Jordan, “Argentina’s Military Government,” 58.

¹³ Nancy Caro Hollander, “Si Evita Viviera.” *Latin American Perspectives* 1, no. 3 (1974), 42.

¹⁴ Masut, “Santa Evita: The Mother of the Descamisados: An Analysis of the Rhetoric of Eva Peron,” 109.

¹⁵ Michael Goebel, “Between Co-Optation and Opposition: Peronism, Nationalism and the Politics of History, 1943–55.” In *Argentina’s Partisan Past: Nationalism and the Politics of History*, DGO-Digital original, Liverpool University Press, 2011, 83.

¹⁶ Hollander, “Si Evita Viviera,” 53.

¹⁷ Masut, “Santa Evita: The Mother of the Descamisados: An Analysis of the Rhetoric of Eva Peron,” 124.

Research Statement

My research will analyze Eva Perón's rhetorical choices and how they contribute to the type of feminism I believe she subscribed to: "moral reform" feminism. Eva Perón lived through feminism's first wave (1800s-early 1900s) which tackled issues of "family, motherhood, chastity, prostitution, birth control and the double standard of morality."¹⁸ The second wave did not begin until the mid-1900s with the 1963 publication of Betty Friedan's novel "The Feminine Mystique" as the women's liberation movement began.¹⁹ Today and since the 1990s, "third wave" or "choice" feminism which advocates for giving "women choices and not pass[ing] judgment on what they choose" has become mainstream.²⁰ According to modern feminist standards, Eva Perón would most likely not be considered a feminist because of her messages of domesticity and subservience to one's husband. I believe Eva Perón's feminism follows 20th-century Uruguayan doctor and moral reformist Paulina Luisi's definition:

Feminism is "demonstrating that woman is something more than material created to serve and obey man like a slave, that she is more than a machine to produce children and care for the home; that women have feelings and intellect; that it is their mission to perpetuate the species and this must be done with more than the entrails and the breasts; it must be done with a mind and a heart prepared to be a mother and an educator; that she must be the man's partner and counselor not his slave."²¹

Moral reform feminism does not "attempt to make structural changes" like modern-day feminism hopes to in dismantling gender roles.²² Eva Perón did not advocate for gendered structural change in Argentina as "her goal was never their [women's] 'liberation' as understood by feminists today."²³ Instead, Eva Perón sought to be a model for working-class wives, encouraging them to challenge tradition while being subservient to their husbands.²⁴ Even though "Peronist feminism was not profoundly radical enough to totally challenge the established role of women," studying it is important since it was powerful enough to mobilize previously disenfranchised working-class women towards political and social empowerment.²⁵ Today, Peronist politicians embrace feminism as part of their fight for human rights in *all areas except* the "legalization of abortion" which remains a lively fight for Argentine feminists likely because of Catholicism's prevalence in Argentine culture.²⁶

¹⁸ Alix Kates Shulman, "Sex and Power: Sexual Bases of Radical Feminism." *Signs* 5, no. 4 (1980), 590.

¹⁹ Shulman, 591.

²⁰ R. Claire Snyder-Hall, "Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice.'" *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 1 (2010), 255.

²¹ Paulina Luisi, "Acción Femenina" (1917) Montevideo: El Siglo Ilustrado. Volume I, Nos. 2-6, 48.

²² Cynthia Jeffress Little, "Moral Reform and Feminism: A Case Study." *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 17, no. 4 (1975), 387.

²³ Gary W. Wynia, *Argentina: Illusions and realities*. Holmes & Meier, 1993, 63.

²⁴ Courtney, "Goodnight and Thank You, Evita: The Sexualization of Eva Peron in Popular Culture and Its Implications," 19.

²⁵ Hollander, "Si Evita Viviera," 55.

²⁶ Lynn M. Morgan, "Reproductive Rights or Reproductive Justice? Lessons from Argentina." *Health and Human Rights* 17, no. 1 (2015), 139.

Eva Perón's political career became her legacy and at the time of her death, she was considered a "saint" by her followers (fellow moral reform feminists) and a "whore" by her opponents (including more radical feminists).²⁷ Endless judgment from outsiders haunted Eva Perón throughout her life. Eva Perón was born out of wedlock into a lower-class family, which would later keep her out of Argentina's most prominent women's organization, the Beneficence Society (*Sociedad de Beneficencia*).²⁸ Eva Perón treated these negative perceptions as her motivation to prove her opponents wrong. Eva Perón fought for Argentine women's suffrage (eventually passed on September 23, 1947) and founded the Female Peronist Party, the third *equal* part to the Peronist Men's Party and the General Confederation of Labor.²⁹ Eva Perón founded the Female Peronist Party in 1949 to create an autonomous space for women to politically participate without their husband's opinions.³⁰ Eventually, Eva Perón went on to establish the *Fundación Eva Perón* (FEP or Eva Peron Foundation), a privately and publicly funded organization staffed largely by female workers that "took a leading role in welfare by the early 1950s, not only managing housing and healthcare projects but also offering direct assistance to needy populations."³¹ Because of her incredible work during her lifetime, Eva Perón is still lovingly known as "Evita" or as the people's friend, "*compañera* Evita."³²

Eva Perón's legacy matters. Eva Perón created a unique and highly-personalized rhetorical style only she could portray because of her genuine love for the Argentine working class.

Literature Review

Unfortunately, despite Eva Perón's legacy as a champion of Argentine history, most of the literature surrounding her life "includes references to her sexuality, her womanhood, or the objectification of her body."³³ As one of the first prominent female politicians in a nation still abiding by traditional gender roles, the association between Eva Perón and hyper-sexuality can be sadly expected. I aim to get away from this harmful association and instead focus on another topic present in the literature surrounding Eva Perón's life: debunking the "Evita myth" and returning a sense of reality to the story of her life. When historians tell Eva Perón's story, they tend to maintain her "Cinderella story" in which she was magically taken from poverty into a life of fame, glamor, and philanthropy. In Eva Perón's "Cinderella story," her Prince Charming was not Juan Perón, but instead 36-year-old tango singer Agustín Magaldi who reportedly swept Eva away to Buenos Aires when she was 15 years old. However, "historians have produced considerable evidence that Magaldi never visited" Eva Perón's hometown that year. In reality,

²⁷ Masut, "Santa Evita: The Mother of the Descamisados: An Analysis of the Rhetoric of Eva Peron," 6.

²⁸ Hollander, "Si Evita Viviera," 52.

²⁹ Hollander, 48.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ Eduardo Elena, "New Directions in the History of Peronism." *Estudios Interdisciplinarios De America Latina y El Caribe*, vol. 25, no. 1, June 2014, 20.

³² Hollander, "Si Evita Viviera," 52.

³³ Courtney, "Goodnight and Thank You, Evita: The Sexualization of Eva Peron in Popular Culture and Its Implications," 15.

Eva migrated alone to the capital city seeking work during the global Great Depression.³⁴ Women migrating alone was the norm, “for every 50 men who migrated, 100 women migrated” to Buenos Aires in the 1930s.³⁵ After establishing a career as an actress primarily on the radio, Eva Perón married military man Juan Perón in 1946. Although the reality of Eva Perón’s life is equally as interesting as her myth, it is often hidden underneath layers of embellishment; thanks to historians’ active choice to perpetuate this myth contributes to harmful stereotypes of female power and sexuality.³⁶

Criticisms of Eva Perón appeared well before her death. The 1940s Argentine elite were some of Eva Perón’s most fervent opponents, believing her to be “aggressive, emotionless, and subversive of the ‘healthy’ relationship between the sexes.”³⁷ The elite, full of big-business owners and their wealthy wives “believed that Argentina was theirs to dispose of as they wished,” relying on outdated, discriminatory practices which Eva Perón sought to dismantle.³⁸ Furthermore, an influx of immigrants from rural Argentina or outside nations to Buenos Aires “increased middle-and-lower class resentment of their exclusion from politics.”³⁹ These opposing populations, the immigrants and the elite, existed in the same space while fighting for vastly different goals: maintaining corrupt traditions versus embracing revolutionary change. Eva Perón took the side of revolutionary change for the working-class, her *descamisados*, but some thought her visions for change to be too tame. For instance, “many long-standing suffragists viewed Evita as a power-hungry demagogue” and believed she fought for suffrage for more Peronist votes rather than for equality.⁴⁰ After all, the Female Peronist Party leader was Juan Perón, and he had “total authority to modify or to nullify decisions of the Party.”⁴¹ Ultimately, during the first Peronism (1946-1955), roughly one-third of Argentines opposed Peronist rule.⁴²

The remaining two-thirds of Argentines supported Peronism wholeheartedly. Peronism dignified a previously underprivileged population of Argentines by uniting with the Peróns in “a single force.”⁴³ Today, Argentine leaders still utilize Peronist tactics, blending populist political theory and populist rhetoric. Though a 70-year-old political tradition, Peronism remains a contested topic in scholarly research because of its adaptability.⁴⁴ Since most of the research questions asking why Peronism had such a strong pull on the masses have been answered, researchers have moved to address why Peronism has had such a lasting impact. Scholars have determined the best way to answer this question is through analyzing Peronist subcultures of

³⁴ Courtney, 16.

³⁵ Hollander, “Si Evita Viviera,” 44.

³⁶ Courtney, “Goodnight and Thank You, Evita: The Sexualization of Eva Peron in Popular Culture and Its Implications,” 16.

³⁷ Courtney, 22.

³⁸ Wynia, *Argentina: Illusions and realities*, 39.

³⁹ Wynia, 40.

⁴⁰ Gregory Hammond, “Suffrage in San Juan: The Test of Women’s Rights in Argentina.” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 28, no. 1 (2009), 13.

⁴¹ Hollander, “Si Evita Viviera,” 51.

⁴² Elena, “New Directions in the History of Peronism,” 22.

⁴³ Masut, “Santa Evita: The Mother of the Descamisados: An Analysis of the Rhetoric of Eva Peron,” 29.

⁴⁴ Elena, “New Directions in the History of Peronism,” 17.

“partisan myths, symbols, and rituals deployed to generate active support.”⁴⁵ The real challenge in studying Peronist subcultures is consciously working “to trace unseen connections between categories such as class, gender, region, and culture.”⁴⁶ In doing so, scholars studying Peronism have worked to turn away from focusing on the same over-studied figures: “male, urban, and unionized working-class and top state officials.”⁴⁷ I hope to add a new intersection to Peronist studies by addressing moral reform feminism’s appeal to working-class women. Women who felt comfortable in their traditional roles would be more likely to embrace feminist changes under a movement that they felt comfortable with. With more women on her side than other radical movements of the period (such as Argentine socialists), Eva Perón achieved gradual structural changes to realize her vision for a New Argentina that embraced gender equality.

Eva Perón’s feminism was not entirely conservative, but it is certainly unlike what feminism has shaped itself into today. I argue Eva Perón strove for any feminist cause that sought the betterment of the majority of women, making her a true feminist. Today, Argentine feminists involved in the highly controversial abortion debate support its legalization past 14 weeks of gestation and have sought to widen their movement’s appeal under the slogan, “women’s rights are human rights.” Modern Peronists, such as current president Alberto Fernández, are largely against the feminists’ perspective. In addition to banning abortion past 14 weeks in 2020, Peronist President Fernández “cut funding for the sexual health program, slowed the delivery of contraceptives through the Ministry of Health, and halted dissemination of a hospital protocol for post-abortion care.”⁴⁸ Peronism does not always reflect feminism’s best interests, further supporting Eva Perón’s unique status as a feminist champion.

Eva Perón’s feminism followed traditional values as framed by the author of Argentina’s Constitution, Juan Bautista Alberdi, who “argued that a woman ‘completes her most noble mission’ within the home.”⁴⁹ Eva Perón saw the Argentine family falling apart after being crippled by poor socioeconomic conditions created by the oligarchy for the past decades. To resolve this, Eva Perón’s feminism “focused much more on women’s welfare than legal rights and went hand in hand with much talk of traditional family values.”⁵⁰ By adopting moral reform feminism as her primary mission, Eva Perón worked on initiatives that brought “public attention Eva Perón absorbed community spaces for women called *unidades basicas* (“Basic Units”) under the Female Peronist Party to create a sense of fulfillment and collective spirit among Peronist women.⁵¹ As Peronist feminist Delia de Parodi (the first woman in the Argentine national House of Deputies to be elected as its Vice President) stated in 1970, women’s empowerment under the first Peronism was “the revolution in the revolution.”⁵² Though modern standards deem “the

⁴⁵ Elena, 24.

⁴⁶ Elena, 31.

⁴⁷ Elena, 28-29.

⁴⁸ Morgan, “Reproductive Rights or Reproductive Justice? Lessons from Argentina,” 139.

⁴⁹ Hammond, “Suffrage in San Juan: The Test of Women’s Rights in Argentina,” 6.

⁵⁰ David Bushnell, “Philatelic Feminism: The Portrayal of Women on Stamps of Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, and the United States (1893–2006).” *Women’s Studies* 40, no. 7 (September 21, 2011), 387.

⁵¹ Hollander, “Si Evita Viviera,” 48.

⁵² Hollander, 44.

Peróns' failure to challenge traditional sex roles" as their fault in achieving revolutionary change, I argue that it was Eva Perón's *embrace* of tradition that allowed her to create a nuanced version of feminism that appealed to the masses. Eva Perón's feminism was not conservative, it was smart, and so was she for knowing her audience.

Methodology

To understand Eva Perón's visions for social change in Peronism's "New Argentina," I analyzed the rhetorical devices and appeals she created in her speeches. Eva Perón's fiery tone and loving, emotional appeals define her unique rhetorical character.

Eva Perón is known for her rhetorical mastery and orature. Despite the undeniable association between the "Evita" name and powerful speeches, there remains no accessible, common transcript log of Eva Perón's speeches available online. Spanish transcripts of her speeches are only easily accessible if they are one of her most famous works, such as the 1951 "Speech to the Descamisados." While conducting preliminary research, I was lucky enough to discover a PDF document compiling Eva Perón's speeches in original Spanish text.⁵³ Finding peer-reviewed translations of any of Eva Perón's speeches is a virtually impossible task. Therefore, I took the time to translate the Spanish text so I would have options of speeches to choose from for my rhetorical analysis. I chose to translate as many speeches as possible to improve the accessibility for English-speaking scholars studying Eva Perón's speechwriting. Since the PDF document was made up of scanned speeches in their original format, I was unable to 'copy and paste' the Spanish text and put it into an online translator. Thus, I manually transcribed each speech, then put that transcription into an online translator to receive the English translation. I used Google Translate as my primary translator, and also Bing/Microsoft Translator as a secondary translator when the first translation was grammatically flawed or incoherent. I have made both the original Spanish text and English translation of 25 speeches available on my website⁵⁴ to improve the accessibility of studying Eva Perón's rhetoric for both English and Spanish speakers.

Since I am not a native Argentine Spanish speaker, I could not understand some of the cultural language within Eva Perón's speeches. Despite this, I believe I understood the messages Eva Perón conveyed in her speechwriting. A previous scholar analyzing Eva Perón's rhetoric described using translations in their research, arguing "the message of Eva Perón was not hindered by the translations, and her rhetoric was successfully conveyed."⁵⁵

When deciding which speeches to translate out of those included in the PDF, I chose 25. I chose these final 25 speeches either if (1) the speech title had something to do with feminism, or if (2) the speech was delivered in a unique location. This method assured the most accurate analysis of Eva Perón's rhetorical appeals to feminism and how it changed over time or varied depending on location. I only included 12 out of the 25 speeches for my rhetorical analysis. The other 13 speeches were included exclusively for my spatial analysis of Eva Perón's feminism. I

⁵³ Link to PDF of original Spanish speeches: <https://bcn.gob.ar/uploads/Obra-completaEva-Peron.pdf>

⁵⁴ Link to my website: <https://sites.google.com/view/descamisadas/home>

⁵⁵ Masut, "Santa Evita: The Mother of the Descamisados: An Analysis of the Rhetoric of Eva Peron," 192.

wanted to limit the number of speeches included in my rhetorical analysis as much as possible to ensure thorough results. I chose the 12 speeches to be included in my rhetorical analysis by analyzing the speeches for repeated rhetorical strategies. Once conducting a preliminary analysis, I decided on the final speeches by picking those with common rhetorical strategies but different claims. I applied David Jolliffe's Rhetorical Framework (Figure 1) to conduct my rhetorical analysis. This method reworks the traditional rhetorical triangle backward: starting with the rhetorical situation and ending with rhetorical devices. Using this framework, I analyzed each speech for its thesis and then began to analyze for rhetorical devices applied to develop the thesis. Since I was analyzing historical speeches, this framework would work best because it prioritizes considering the rhetorical situation before analyzing rhetorical strategies. Working around a presentist bias allowed me to understand the full scope of Eva Perón's feminist speeches for her context: a post-war Argentina still operating under traditional gender roles.

Jolliffe's Rhetorical Framework Diagram

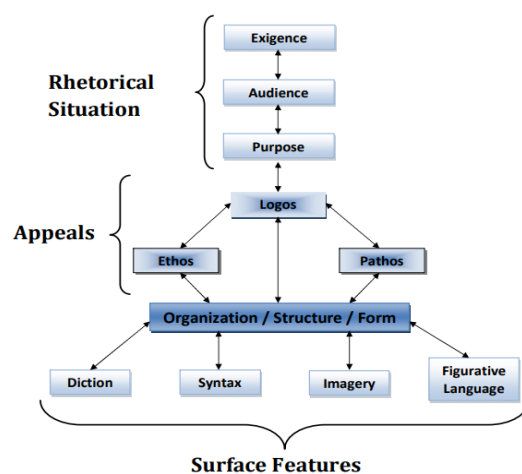


Figure 1⁵⁶

I decided to include a spatial visualization to further contextualize my rhetorical analysis. To achieve this, I used StoryMaps, an online application that allows users to place text and images on an interactive map. I created two maps visualizing my findings: (1) a map of 5 speeches delivered outside Buenos Aires, and (2) a map of 12 speeches delivered inside Buenos Aires. Since some of my translated speeches were delivered at an unknown location or delivered by radio, I could not include all 25 speeches in my final StoryMaps. For the speeches I did know the location, I mapped them in chronological order to take the viewer on a journey of Eva Perón's political career. I included the speech's English title, a quote representing the speech's thesis, and a quote representing a rhetorical appeal on each speech's plot point. Creating this spatial visualization traced common rhetorical patterns across Eva Perón's speechwriting; for example, I found appeals to credibility were used most often in speeches delivered outside of Buenos Aires. I envision these maps as a starting point for audiences interacting with my

⁵⁶ Link to image used for Jolliffe's Rhetorical Framework diagram:
<https://www.cusd80.com/cms/lib/AZ01001175/Centricity/Domain/8219/jolliffes-rhetorical-framework1.pdf>

research. Hopefully, after interacting with the maps, audiences will feel motivated to read the speech's full text on my website.⁵⁷

My rhetorical analysis of Eva Perón's speechwriting is *my* analysis and audiences may interpret her rhetorical strategies as contributing to something different than what I argue. After all, rhetorical analyses are subjective. My research places Eva Perón's rhetorical choices in a first-wave, moral reform feminist context. I have analyzed each speech to determine how its appeals contributed to Eva Perón's feminist message.

Additionally, my speech translation process leaves room for error. Since I had to manually transcribe each speech, I could have missed some words or punctuation included in the original text. When I could not read a word due to smudging or misprinting, I left highlighted ellipses in the original text and translation to notify the reader of the discrepancy. At times while transcribing the original text, I used Google Docs' grammar or spell check functions as suggestions appeared. This could have led to the insertion of words or punctuation not included in the original text. Ultimately, my transcription may have been inaccurate leading to an inaccurate translation. And because I used online translators for my translations, my translations may be grammatically incorrect, mistranslated, inaccurate for mid-century Spanish, and/or missing important cultural or political references. Ideally, I would have asked multiple native Argentine Spanish speakers to translate each speech to ensure grammatical and cultural accuracy. This was not feasible for my research, but I would encourage future scholars to take this step to develop the translations' accuracy.

I hope my translations and rhetorical analysis findings will encourage future research regarding Eva Perón's speechwriting. One of the main questions I have yet to answer is whether Eva Perón did write her speeches. For the basis of my research, I have assumed that she did since there is little information available suggesting otherwise. Eva Perón did have a speechwriter, Francisco Muñoz Aspíri, but researcher Gabriela Masut, who conducted a rhetorical analysis of Eva Perón's speechwriting, argues Eva Perón spoke "in such an emotional way through her rhetoric that it was believable that her words came from her mouth spontaneously."⁵⁸ The question surrounding Eva Perón's speech authorship is still largely unaddressed and unanswered, leaving the potential for future research.

My research findings, StoryMaps, and website create a foundation for future researchers to use as their translation and rhetorical analysis sources. I hope future researchers improve upon my initial findings so that the study of Eva Perón's rhetorical mastery becomes a robust, scholarly field.

Results: Rhetorical Analysis

Introduction

Eva Perón created a legacy of moral reform feminism in Argentina through her profound, unique rhetorical style. Eva Perón primarily appealed to her audiences through the main appeals

⁵⁷ Link to my website: <https://sites.google.com/view/descamisadas/home>

⁵⁸ Masut, "Santa Evita: The Mother of the Descamisados: An Analysis of the Rhetoric of Eva Peron," 175.

of *pathos* (emotion), *logos* (logic and reasoning, and most importantly *ethos* (credibility)). Eva Perón's clever selection of rhetorical choices left her audience of beloved supporters reassured in their dedication to both her persona and her cause. Eva Perón appealed to credibility frequently, most likely because, being a woman, she had to "work overtime" to establish her credibility among male politicians. Eva Perón earned her credibility (*ethos*) by establishing the "Evita" name, emphasizing her humility, appealing to Argentine family values and religious traditions, and using her husband's credibility for herself. Eva Perón's love for her *descamisados* was genuine, strengthening her emotional (*pathos*) appeals in her usage of hyperbolic, revolutionary, and imperative speech. Eva Perón appealed to logic (*logos*) by building logical frameworks such as equating herself to all Argentine people and through a "fate vs. destiny" motif throughout her speeches. However, Eva Perón's speeches sometimes included logical fallacies such as "us vs. them" logic and fear tactics. Eva Perón demonstrated her rhetorical mastery when blending the three rhetorical appeals in a line of speech. Eva Perón used this method when speaking to what she was most passionate about: her *descamisados* and feminist nationalism.

Being a skilled orator, Eva Perón had an acute awareness of who her audience was and was not. As a Populist movement, Peronism relied on the support of the majority; and in 1940s Argentina, this was the working-class (the *descamisados*). Eva Perón spoke to large crowds of *descamisados* as if she were speaking to an intimate group of old friends or her sisters. In her own words, Eva Perón described knowing "the *descamisados* of October 17, the woman of the reaction of a people that did not want to give up or surrender."⁵⁹ Eva Perón's fierce hatred of the oligarchy reinforced her appeal to the *descamisados*. In her autobiography, Eva Perón dismissed her opponents' opinions, citing that opposition to Peronism did not exist or that opponents were a "class of narrow souls who cannot conceive of generosity, nor of love, nor of faith, nor even of hope, as realities," making their opinions irrelevant.⁶⁰ Audiences took action following Eva Perón's words and rewarded her with unwavering loyalty. Audiences felt so closely bonded to Eva Perón and the "Evita figure" that they would opt to hear her speak rather than her husband. On one occasion following the nomination of Eva Perón for Vice President before her resignation, an audience member interrupted Juan Perón's speech "when a yell from the crowd silenced him: 'Speak, Evita!'"⁶¹ Eva Perón had a devotion to bettering her audience's lives because they represented her childhood. Eva Perón devoted herself to women's empowerment throughout her political career, seeking a new Argentina built for her *descamisadas*.

Rhetorical appeals to credibility (Ethos)

Eva Perón prioritized establishing credibility because of her status as a female politician in a nation that abided by the "traditional view of the Latin American woman: that of a female preoccupied with sin and salvation and with no interest in the world outside the home or increased rights for her sex."⁶² As a 20th-century Argentine woman (who was also

⁵⁹ Eva Perón. 1947. "Message to the Argentine Woman." Transcript of speech delivered on January 27, 1947.

⁶⁰ Eva Perón. *My Mission in Life*. New York: Vantage Press, 1953, 107.

⁶¹ Alicia Dujovne Ortiz. *Eva Peron- A biography*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996, 265.

⁶² Little, "Moral Reform and Feminism: A Case Study," 386.

illegitimate-born, a former actress, and in a position of power), Eva Perón could never naturally receive the same respect her husband did as a hypermasculine, respectable military man.

Today, most Argentines and the rest of the global population recognize Eva Perón as “Evita.” Eva Perón described the context surrounding her name as, “only the people call me “Evita.” ... Men of the government... who call on me usually address me as “Señora”... they see in me only Eva Perón.”⁶³ Despite the myth and misconception surrounding the “Evita” name, it has left a legacy of love because of Eva Perón’s embrace of the title. Eva Perón’s appreciation for the name is prevalent in two speeches from the summer of 1949. In a July 1949 speech to the women’s assembly of the Peronist Party (later the Female Peronist Party), Eva Perón’s imperative speech, directing her audience to “see in me, in *compañera* Evita, not the wife of the President of the Nation.”⁶⁴ By embracing the “Evita” name, Eva Perón assured her audience she preferred their company rather than being around those who only saw her as the First Lady. Further, Eva Perón made her preferences regarding her name clear in her 1949 May Day speech when she spoke plainly to her audience, “I prefer to be Evita, before being the wife of the President.”⁶⁵ The “Evita” name indicates immense respect, yet Eva Perón remained humble throughout her political career despite endless praise from her *descamisados*.

Eva Perón downplayed her powerful status and instead appealed to humility in her speeches. Eva Perón delivered her last Loyalty Day speech in 1951 and stressed her unimportance: “I’m not important because of what I’ve done; I’m not important because of what I’ve renounced; I’m not important because of what I am or have.”⁶⁶ Instead, Eva attributed her importance to “the love of this people.”⁶⁷ As long as the *descamisados*’ love enabled her credibility, Eva Perón opted to downplay her own. Eva Perón maintained the *descamisados*’ respect since they believed she lacked any for herself. In one of her first speeches addressed to the Female Peronist Party in March 1950, Eva Perón referred to herself in the third person, “it doesn’t matter if Evita is ugly or pretty,” detaching herself from the “beautiful, power-hungry man-eater” myth and preserving an image of pure humility; continuing the line with an antimetabole delivering a metaphor for beauty, “beauty is not in the face, it is in the soul.” Eva Perón wrote repeatedly of her lack of self-admiration, assuring the public she was a humble woman worthy of their respect and political support.

Eva Perón further worked to earn her audience’s respect (unlike previous Argentine oligarchal politicians who thought themselves “above” earning the working class’ respect) by speaking to shared cultural beliefs: Catholicism and traditional family values. Eva Perón’s choice to refer to her followers as *descamisados* “would draw an almost holy liaison between leader and

⁶³ Perón, *My Mission in Life*, 63.

⁶⁴ Eva Perón. 1949. “Speech by Mrs. Maria Eva Duarte de Perón in Today’s Session of the Women’s Assembly.” Transcript of speech delivered in Buenos Aires, Argentina on July 29, 1949, 143.

⁶⁵ Eva Perón. 1949. “Speech by Mrs. Maria Eva Duarte de Perón at the Ceremony Held Today in Plaza de Mayo.” Transcript of speech delivered at Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, Argentina on May 1, 1949, 97.

⁶⁶ Eva Perón. 1951. “Speech delivered on October 17, 1951 before the people gathered in Plaza de Mayo to celebrate Loyalty Day” or the “Speech to the Descamisados.” Transcript of speech delivered at Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, Argentina on October 17, 1951.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

followers,” developing her saint-like, pious image.⁶⁸ Eva Perón’s September 1947 speech following the announcement of Argentine women’s suffrage aimed to direct women towards their holy “high mission” in the home.⁶⁹ In the speech’s second section describing the fight for suffrage, Eva Perón applies parallel structure in writing, “it was and is the faith placed in God, in the future of our country, in general Perón, and in our rights. Thus we stripped the false apostles of their masks.”⁷⁰ The parallel structure created in this line instructs Eva Perón’s audience to prioritize what she believes is most important to Peronism’s success: following tradition while embracing social change. Additionally, in referring to those against women’s suffrage as “false apostles,” Eva Perón carefully places herself on the righteous, holy side of the fight. And later in the speech, Eva Perón refers to women as “missionaries of peace.”⁷¹ Eva Perón’s references to religion in this speech are an attempt to prove women’s suffrage is a success in God’s eyes. Here, Eva Perón sought to convince opponents to put their faith first and embrace the new law. Perhaps Eva Perón’s frequent allusions to religion attempted to overcome her past as an illegitimate child and former actress, as well as her controversial status as a woman in power.

In one of her first political speeches, Eva Perón built parallel structure appealing to credibility by emphasizing her desire to be “closer to those who suffer, closer to those who ask, closer to those who work hard in the daily battle for the bread of their husbands, their mothers, and their children.”⁷² Eva Perón wrote often of her dedication to preserving the dignity of the Argentine home because she knew speaking to a highly sensitive and personal subject such as family would win the people’s respect. In a May 1950 speech regarding women’s civic rights, she further described her goals for Argentina to become “a great family; the family that General Perón covets” and her aspiration “to be for Peronist women like a mother, like a sister, who tries to understand them, help them and make them understand and help each other.”⁷³ Eva Perón wrote Argentina as a family, and herself and Juan as its parents. Eva Perón’s dreams for this “great family” appealed to her status as a respectable woman. 1940s Argentines may not have respected a woman who sought to become “the ruler of a great nation,” but they surely would respect a woman who sought to become “the mother of a great family.”

In addition, Eva Perón gained respect as a female politician seeking feminist change in a traditionalistic nation by repeatedly thanking her husband, President Juan Perón, for her success. Eva Perón wanted her audience to perceive her as “a woman who was dedicated to bringing to the President, the hopes of the people,” as she remarked in her official resignation from public service.⁷⁴ In one of her last public speeches in August 1951, Eva Perón used chiasmus:

⁶⁸ Masut, “Santa Evita: The Mother of the Descamisados: An Analysis of the Rhetoric of Eva Peron,” 36.

⁶⁹ Eva Perón. 1947. “Announcement of the Law of Feminine Vote.” Transcript of speech delivered on September 23, 1947, 51.

⁷⁰ Perón, 1947. “Announcement of the Law of Feminine Vote,” 50.

⁷¹ Perón, 1947. “Announcement of the Law of Feminine Vote,” 52.

⁷² Eva Perón. 1946. “A Vibrant Message to the Argentine Woman Addressed by the Wife of the President of the Nation.” Transcript of speech delivered on October 9, 1946, 16.

⁷³ Eva Perón. 1950. “Speech on Civic Rights to the Peronist Women’s Party.” Transcript of speech delivered in Buenos Aires, Argentina on May 4, 1950.

⁷⁴ Eva Perón. 1951. “Eva Perón’s official radio resignation.” Transcript of speech delivered via radio on August 31, 1951.

“everything I think about, that everything I possess does not belong to me: it belongs to Perón, because he gave me everything.”⁷⁵ By applying a syntactical manipulation of “everything,” Eva Perón modeled the level of subservience a traditional Argentine woman should adapt. Though Eva Perón’s frequent nods to Juan Perón may seem alarmingly anti-feminist or self-demeaning according to modern standards, they make sense considering her career choice in the time and Argentine culture. Eva Perón operated in unconventional circumstances that motivated her to make unconventional rhetorical choices to maintain credibility.

Rhetorical appeals to emotion (Pathos)

As a woman following traditional standards of femininity, Eva Perón’s rhetorical skill extended to appeals to emotion. The most common emotion associated with the “Evita” name is unconditional love. Eva Perón defined love as “giving oneself, and to give oneself is to give one’s own life.”⁷⁶ Eva Perón showed love to *all* Argentines (given they were Peronists; and according to Eva Perón, every Argentine was a Peronist) regardless of class. Eva Perón preferred her lower-class followers, almost as if they were her favorite child in the great Argentine family. As she framed it in a speech to the Female Peronist Party: “the smaller the more I want them. The one that seems most insignificant to you is the one that is closest to my heart.”⁷⁷ Eva Perón’s preference for those of lower classes is not shocking considering Eva Perón’s personal lower class background.

Abnormal, and at times hyperbolic, displays of love are common throughout Eva Perón’s speeches. Eva Perón wrote of sacrificing her life out of love in her most famous work, the “Speech to the Descamisados,” when she hyperbolized, “if this people asked me for my life I would joyfully give it, for the happiness of one *descamisado* is worth more than my entire life.”⁷⁸ The number of hyperboles connecting love and sacrifice in Eva Perón’s speeches lead one to deduce that these hyperboles may have been literal. Eva Perón worked tirelessly to repay the debt she owed to the workers for putting her in power. Since Eva Perón’s ultimate mission was achieving moral reform feminism throughout Argentina, her speeches directed to her beloved Argentine sisters included hyperbolic, sacrificial speech most frequently. In a 1950 speech at the Female Peronist Party headquarters, Eva Perón asserted she would sacrifice “her life for the sake of the greatest ideal, such as the happiness of the *descamisadas* of the Homeland.”⁷⁹ Thus, realizing her vision for Argentine women was Eva Perón’s greatest motivation. Eva Perón dramatized the importance of women’s involvement in the movement, else the movement’s

⁷⁵ Eva Perón. 1951. “Speech delivered on August 22, 1951 in the Popular Assembly on 9 de Julio avenue that became the Open Council of Justicialism.” Transcript of speech delivered at 9 de Julio Avenue in Buenos Aires, Argentina on August 22, 1951.

⁷⁶ Perón, *My Mission in Life*, 69.

⁷⁷ Perón, 1950. “Speech on Civic Rights to the Peronist Women's Party.”

⁷⁸ Perón, 1951. “Speech delivered on October 17, 1951 before the people gathered in Plaza de Mayo to celebrate Loyalty Day” or the “Speech to the Descamisados.”

⁷⁹ Eva Perón. 1950. “Speech Delivered by Mrs. Eva Perón at the Ceremony Held at the Headquarters of the Female Peronist Party, in the City of Paraná.” Transcript of speech delivered in Paraná, Entre Rios, Argentina on March 2, 1950, 182.

“failure would be that of the entire nationality.”⁸⁰ Eva Perón’s greatest want was to inspire the beginnings of an Argentine feminist revolution, so her deployment of fear tactics and hyperbolic speech was a definite way to assure the *descamisadas* would follow her directions. After all, the *descamisadas* owed plenty to Eva Perón because of her social welfare initiatives.

Eva and Juan Perón took the “long way” to power: populism, taking time to gain each worker’s vote and undying loyalty along the way. Peronist expansion was a revolution for both Argentine history and the people. Eva Perón developed this lingering revolutionary spirit by selecting rebellious, freedom-fighting diction in her political speeches. In her 1947 speech following the announcement of female suffrage, Eva Perón passionately wrote, “we embroidered the colors of the country on the liberating flags of half a continent! We sharpened the ends of heroic lances that defended national sovereignty against invaders!”⁸¹ Eva Perón’s repetition of “we” put her directly with the workers who rallied for Peronism, despite her being one of the individuals who received power as a result of the revolution. Additionally, her choice of metaphors comparing the workers’ fight to the national flag or swords contributes to patriotic imagery. Overall, Eva Perón’s revolutionary diction in this line rallies her audience towards the same patriotic fervor they felt during the original Peronist revolution of 1945. Later in 1949, Eva Perón’s rhetorical choices seemed to turn away from revolutionary calls to action as she urged her audience to proceed “not with their hands clenched or with a gesture of rebellion, but with joy and clapping their hands.”⁸² However, since this 1949 celebrated May Day with a laudatory tone, it is not surprising that Eva Perón did not include her typical fiery rallying cries. Eva Perón’s careful application of chiasmus in this line seeks to change her audience’s way of thinking into a pacifistic mindset. Later in her iconic 1951 “Speech to the Descamisados,” Eva Perón revoked her previous call for peace and went back to her original revolutionary calls stating, “I know that you will pick up my name and will carry it to victory as a banner.”⁸³ Eva Perón’s choice of personification giving her name the ability to be flown as a banner not only gives her name revolutionary power but further credibility. In sum, Eva Perón’s revolutionary speech appeals to the emotions her audience felt while marching on October 17, 1945, fighting for Juan Perón’s reinstatement. By referencing these genuine emotions in her speechwriting, Eva Perón makes the reality of achieving her political goals (including moral reform feminism) possible with the audience sharing in her mood.

Further, Eva Perón appealed to the emotions of her audience in her speeches by giving them direct instructions as to how to be better followers. In a 1947 speech titled “Message to the Argentine Woman,” Eva Perón told her audience, “the woman must affirm her action. The woman must choose. The woman, the moral spring of a home.”⁸⁴ This speech described Eva Perón’s image of the new Argentine woman: (1) strong, (2) politically empowered, and (3)

⁸⁰ Perón, 1949. “Speech by Mrs. Maria Eva Duarte de Perón in Today’s Session of the Women’s Assembly,” 145.

⁸¹ Perón, 1947. “Announcement of the Law of Feminine Vote,” 51.

⁸² Perón, 1949. “Speech by Mrs. Maria Eva Duarte de Perón at the Ceremony Held Today in Plaza de Mayo,” 93.

⁸³ Perón, 1951. “Speech delivered on October 17, 1951 before the people gathered in Plaza de Mayo to celebrate Loyalty Day” or the “Speech to the Descamisados.”

⁸⁴ Perón, 1947. “Message to the Argentine Woman.”

united with other women in a common force.⁸⁵ Eva Perón's choice of anaphora in repeating "the woman" at the beginning of each line creates powerful delivery and drives her speech's message into the memory of her audience. In her 1950 speech at the Female Peronist Party headquarters, Eva Perón manipulated syntax with a chiasmus instructing women, "they must be tolerant, because we must tolerate to be tolerated."⁸⁶ In using chiasmus, Eva Perón is seeking to change her audience of women's thinking from being tolerant of men out of tradition to being tolerant with the purpose of achieving more respect. Eva Perón's application of instructions to her audience demonstrates her respect and trust in them. By building this mutual respect, Eva Perón was free to use emotional appeals without coming across as demagogic or overly-emotional.

Rhetorical appeals to logic and reasoning (Logos)

The most common line of reasoning in Eva Perón's speeches is that she is equal to the people and is therefore fighting alongside them in their struggle for social justice. And since Eva Perón's most passionate social fight was achieving moral reform feminism, she claimed she too felt the struggles of Argentine women. In her 1947 "Message to the Argentine Woman" speech, Eva Perón reasoned "my fight is also the fight of the heart of the woman."⁸⁷ In her speeches, Eva Perón often places herself in fights that are not her own. By diminishing her status as a powerful woman, Eva Perón does not appear to audiences as if she has a "savior complex." Her audience becomes less skeptical of her involvement in their social struggles and more willing to embrace her assistance. In establishing this line of reasoning, Eva Perón is able to take credibility for her followers' achievements since according to her logic- they would also be her achievements. In a 1951 speech to Peronists, Eva Perón strengthened her logic by writing, "I have always wanted to be confused with the workers, with the elderly, with the children, with those who suffer, working side by side, heart to heart."⁸⁸ By repeating "with the" and applying parallel structure at the end of the line, Eva Perón creates a rhythmic pattern that puts both herself and the people as the subjects of the sentence and "working" as the action they are doing together. In doing so, Eva Perón is reassuring the people that they are not alone in their fight for social change since she is fighting alongside them. Significantly, Eva Perón equated herself with the people she loved the most, her *descamisados* ("shirtless ones"). In her 1949 May Day speech, Eva Perón included herself with the *descamisados* in writing, "we, the *descamisados*... want them to live to see the reality of General Perón."⁸⁹ Eva Perón envisioned the fight for Peronism as one that she, a fellow *descamisado*, would work tirelessly to achieve.

In addition to Eva Perón's choice of equating herself to her audience, she also appealed to logic and reasoning by frequently analogizing fate and destiny. As a believer in destiny, Eva Perón wrote, "I think that if anyone finds himself suddenly carried to a post of responsibility in

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ Perón, 1950. "Speech Delivered by Mrs. Eva Perón at the Ceremony Held at the Headquarters of the Female Peronist Party, in the City of Paraná," 182.

⁸⁷ Perón, 1947. "Message to the Argentine Woman."

⁸⁸ Perón, 1951. "Speech delivered on August 22, 1951 in the Popular Assembly on 9 de Julio avenue that became the Open Council of Justicialism."

⁸⁹ Perón, 1949. "Speech by Mrs. Maria Eva Duarte de Perón at the Ceremony Held Today in Plaza de Mayo," 95.

the fight for a great cause, he should search in his life and in his past for some explanation, and he will be sure to find it.”⁹⁰ In describing her journey, Eva Perón reasoned that it was her inherent will to improve the lives of others that led her to political power that would give her the means to do so. Eva Perón wrote of fate and destiny often, making it a common motif throughout her speeches. In her 1947 speech titled “Announcement of the Law of Feminine Vote,” Eva Perón concluded: “let us raise that faith and illuminate with it the path of our destiny. It is a great, passionate, and happy destiny.”⁹¹ In this line, Eva Perón develops her logical choice of equating herself with the people by describing their shared destiny of building a new Argentina. In her “Message to the Argentine Woman” speech, Eva Perón described her relationship with fate, “just as fate made me be the wife of General Perón, your president, it also made me acquire the parallel notion of what it means to be the wife of Colonel Perón.”⁹² When Eva Perón talks of “fate,” it is almost always describing events of her past. Whereas when describing “destiny,” Eva Perón is almost always envisioning her ideas for the future and the active choices both she and her followers are making to achieve that vision.

Despite her effective appeals to logic featured in her speeches, Eva Perón tended to make logical fallacies. The two fallacies she applied the most, “us vs. them” speech and fear tactics, are the fallacies most commonly used by politicians because of their appeal to the masses. An author applies “us vs. them” or “false dilemma” logic when they want their audience to believe there are only two sides to an issue and that their side is the “right” side.⁹³ In her “Announcement of the Law of Feminine Vote” speech, Eva Perón created an “us vs. them” fallacy in describing: “our eternal enemies, the enemies of the people and their claims, used all the oligarchy’s resources to prevent our triumph.”⁹⁴ In addition to including herself with her audience, Eva Perón designated the oligarchy as their “eternal enemy.” But as a figure in a position of power, some could consider Eva Perón herself as a part of the new oligarchy. In reality, “us vs. them” arguments commonly fail because there are never two sides to an argument, as all complex situations require nuance. Eva Perón knew this but chose to rely on “us vs. them” reasoning because it kept her as a hero in the people’s minds and put a target on someone else. Eva Perón’s descriptions of the oligarchy, or “them,” are often harsh generalizations such as, “those laggards of the national awakening will have only one excuse: their mediocrity” as described in her 1949 May Day speech.⁹⁵ Eva Perón frequently described the people, or “us,” as exceptional and revolutionary and the elite, or “them,” as mediocre and traditional. This comparison of “old vs. new” is prevalent throughout Eva Perón’s speechwriting. This motif is ironic, however, considering Eva Perón’s goal of achieving moral reform feminism and a return to tradition throughout Argentine homes; despite being a figure of “womanly love,” Eva Perón’s speeches were known for their sometimes angry tone. Eva Perón was not afraid to show her true emotions,

⁹⁰ Perón, *My Mission in Life*, 34.

⁹¹ Perón, 1947. “Announcement of the Law of Feminine Vote,” 52.

⁹² Perón, 1947. “Message to the Argentine Woman.”

⁹³ Zilin Cidre Zhou. “The Logical Fallacies in Political Discourse.” *College of the Holy Cross CrossWorks*, August 2018, 26.

⁹⁴ Perón, 1947. “Announcement of the Law of Feminine Vote,” 49.

⁹⁵ Perón, 1949. “Speech by Mrs. Maria Eva Duarte de Perón at the Ceremony Held Today in Plaza de Mayo,” 94.

especially when speaking about topics she was most passionate about, including her love for her husband. In her 1949 May Day speech, Eva Perón threatens her beloved *descamisados* with, “yes; life for Perón, because if we lacked him, we would have dark hours for national progress and for the happiness of the humble homes of the country.”⁹⁶ Though deploying fear tactics and slippery slope reasoning is one of the most faulty logical fallacies, Eva Perón knew they were effective in gaining the support of scared people. Life for working-class Argentines pre-Peronism was incredibly difficult, full of union-busting, low wages, and poverty. Eva Perón saw this fear as a sure way to maintain her audience’s loyalty. Though most of her speeches were noble and honest, Eva Perón was not afraid to choose “dirty” rhetorical strategies as long as she knew they would keep her in power and able to achieve her visions for social change and feminism.

Blend of the three rhetorical appeals

The most impressive aspect of Eva Perón’s rhetorical capabilities was her ability to blend rhetorical appeals. This pattern is common whenever Eva Perón references the first Loyalty Day, October 17, 1945, when Peronists marched toward the presidential residence chanting, “bring back Perón” demanding Juan Perón’s reinstatement following his arrest.⁹⁷ Eva Perón considered herself to be spiritually with the workers who marched on that day. In her most famous speech, the “Speech to the Descamisados,” Eva Perón commemorated the sixth anniversary of Loyalty Day in writing, “with all my soul I wanted to be with you and Perón on this glorious day of the *descamisados*. I can’t ever miss this October 17 appointment with my people.”⁹⁸ This line, honoring Loyalty Day, perfectly combines rhetorical appeals. By appealing to credibility by referencing Juan Perón as the figurehead of this day. Eva Perón’s speechwriting placed her as a middleman between the people and the president, creating credibility for her necessity to the success of the Peronist movement. Additionally, Eva Perón’s position as a middleman placed her primarily with the people before her husband, further appealing to logic and reasoning. And most prominently, Eva Perón’s hyperbolic speech in this line, “with all my soul,” appeals to emotion by fully connecting herself to her audience in her dedication to their shared cause. Eva Perón knew exactly how to connect herself, a woman in a position of power, to an audience that should not have embraced her as much as they did because of their socioeconomic differences. Eva Perón’s ultimate goal was achieving moral reform feminism; achieving any sort of social change amongst this population would require their utmost support of both the movement and the movement’s figurehead, Eva Perón. To build this trust, Eva Perón appealed to the unsung heroes of that October 17, 1945: the women. In one of her earliest political speeches, Eva Perón wrote “in the evocation of October 17, it is when I feel linked to millions of women... whose friendly and feverish friendship, I feel each day with greater strength next to my heart.”⁹⁹ By connecting

⁹⁶ Perón, 1949. “Speech by Mrs. Maria Eva Duarte de Perón at the Ceremony Held Today in Plaza de Mayo,” 95.

⁹⁷ Masut, “Santa Evita: The Mother of the Descamisados: An Analysis of the Rhetoric of Eva Peron,” 33.

⁹⁸ Perón, 1951. “Speech delivered on October 17, 1951 before the people gathered in Plaza de Mayo to celebrate Loyalty Day” or the “Speech to the Descamisados.”

⁹⁹ Eva Perón. 1946. “A Vibrant Message to the Argentine Woman Addressed by the Wife of the President of the Nation,” 16.

herself to the nation's women, Eva Perón appealed to logic by distancing herself from the government and more towards the people. Eva Perón blends in another rhetorical appeal, an appeal to emotion, by describing her intimate friendship with Argentine women. And finally Eva Perón establishes credibility by describing how her relationship with the nation's women is getting "stronger" each day- depicting the growing, undeniable power of Peronism. Eva Perón knew that if Peronism gained near-unanimous support throughout Argentina (or if she could pretend that it did), then she could then begin enacting more extreme social change for women. Further, Eva Perón believed Argentina's "true owners are the *descamisadas* of the Homeland, the *descamisadas* of October 17 of 1945."¹⁰⁰ Eva Perón reaffirmed her loyalties were always to the working class before the oligarchy, and with the *descamisadas* before all else. Eva Perón's vision for Argentina ended with the empowerment of working-class women never realized before in global history. And in order to realize this dream, Eva Perón encouraged the nation's women to take pride in their country.

Eva Perón's goals for social change, including moral reform feminism, defined her political career. She described this great responsibility in a 1949 speech to Peronist women: "Argentine women, all of us, have made ourselves responsible before the country and the world that is watching us."¹⁰¹ Eva Perón knew her visions for a New Argentina were revolutionary and to achieve this vision, the nation's women had to be committed to that vision as well. Therefore, Eva Perón included women in her appeals to credibility for her "great responsibility" was also theirs. Eva Perón wrote herself as an equal to the people, appealing to logic. And though Eva Perón fully believed she would one day move on from tradition and start working to achieve the radical change she wanted, it probably would not have happened considering conservative Argentine culture. Considering this context, this line appeals to emotion because of its hyperbolic, dream-inspiring nature. In reality, Eva Perón instructed her audience of loyal, trusted women to make immediate change instead of dreaming of a better future. In a speech arguing for women's suffrage before its legalization, Eva Perón instructed women, "you are the Witness, the Actor and the Judge of your own national conscience."¹⁰² Eva Perón's confidence throughout the speech creates an appeal to credibility as it almost seems that she knows something her audience is unaware of: the inevitability of women's suffrage. Ultimately, this line is a message of encouragement, appealing to emotion by empowering women to realize their civil potential. And finally, Eva Perón's description of female autonomy and civic responsibility describes her political vision for women- appealing to logic through feminist political theory. Of course, Eva Perón's description of "nationalist feminism" is not complete without designating an enemy to the cause. Eva Perón specified the movement's opposition as the oligarchy, full of mediocre men. When describing the flawed logic of her enemies, Eva Perón wrote "if the spectacle of more than 6,000 *unidades basicas* ["Basic Units"] organized in two years were not enough for them... the

¹⁰⁰ Perón, 1950. "Speech on Civic Rights to the Peronist Women's Party."

¹⁰¹ Perón, 1949. "Speech by Mrs. Maria Eva Duarte de Perón in Today's Session of the Women's Assembly," 142.

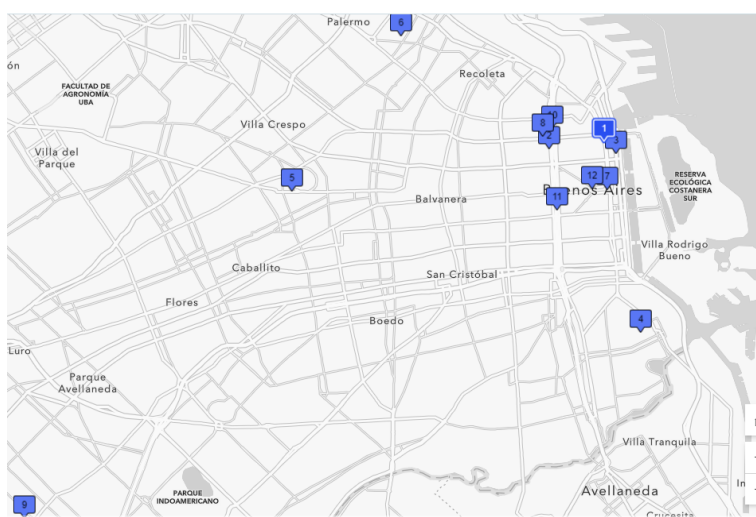
¹⁰² Eva Perón. 1947. "Argentine Women Await the Precious Instrument of their Civil Claim: the Right to Choose and be Chosen." Transcript of speech delivered via radio on February 12, 1947, 23.

Peronist women will still give the definitive proof of their civic conscience.”¹⁰³ This message of perseverance appeals to emotion by encouraging empowerment within the audience. Eva Perón’s most effective method of appealing to emotion was through love, whether through sacrificial speech or messages of encouragement. Eva Perón’s unified, powerful force of trust between herself and her followers appealed to her credibility. And perhaps the strongest rhetorical appeal in this line is the appeal to logic and reasoning. Though using an “if-then” logical fallacy, Eva Perón made logical sense to those working the hardest for the Peronist movement. After all, if Eva Perón’s followers truly believed in her messages of nationalist feminism and worked for it daily, they would not be quick to give up that ideology because of some criticism.

Discussion



Map 1: speeches outside Buenos Aires



Map 2: speeches within Buenos Aires

Eva Perón’s mission of empowering Argentine women through moral reform feminism defined her political career and social welfare initiatives. Eva Perón’s most effective way of reaching her audience was through speechwriting, in which she could display her full love for her *descamisadas* and carefully craft her vision for the “new” Argentine woman. Each speech’s audience depended on the location it was delivered at. And for each audience, Eva Perón had unique ways of expressing her love and gratitude for their loyalty to her feminist mission.

Among the 25 speeches I translated, only 5 were delivered outside of Buenos Aires. Immediately after mapping, I was most alarmed by the five speeches’ cluster in northern Argentina. However, this cluster can be explained by population density; one can assume most Argentines live where the major cities are, the north, and Eva Perón would only travel long distances to where large audiences awaited her. All five of these speeches had a common theme of encouraging loyalty to Peronism, most likely because Argentines outside of the capital city were unable to witness the new government’s initiatives firsthand. In a speech delivered on July

¹⁰³ Eva Perón. 1951. “Mrs. Eva Perón Addresses a Message to Peronist Women on the Occasion of the Anniversary of the Peronist Women's Party.” Transcript of speech delivered on October 29, 1951.

14, 1949, Eva Perón inaugurated the Children's City (*Ciudad Infantil*), a large playground, in La Plata as made possible by the *Fundación Eva Perón* (FEP or Eva Peron Foundation).¹⁰⁴ The Foundation was largely staffed by women and sought to enact social welfare initiatives that benefited everyday citizens, restored family values, and eased the lives of Argentine women.¹⁰⁵ In addition to spreading her social welfare initiatives, Eva Perón's speeches outside of Buenos Aires were sometimes delivered to generate loyalty among women, strengthening the Female Peronist Party. On March 2, 1950, Eva Perón visited Paraná, a city in the Entre Ríos province, to deliver a speech at the Female Peronist Party headquarters. Eva Perón delivered this speech intending to motivate "those who work loyally for the ideals of our Chief, for their patriotic dreams, so that, in a not too distant day, the Homeland is transformed."¹⁰⁶ In motivating women towards the Peronist cause, Eva Perón built the foundation for her feminist visions to become reality. Ultimately, Eva Perón had to adjust her usage of rhetorical strategies when she left Buenos Aires. Since she sought to generate loyalty in speeches outside of Buenos Aires, Eva Perón used appeals to credibility more frequently than in speeches delivered inside Buenos Aires. This was not because Argentines outside of Buenos Aires were anti-Peronists, though. As policy scholar Lars Schoultz found, the "areas of greatest Peronist voting strength have relatively large working-class populations" and there is no correlation between Peronist support and an area's level of industrialization.¹⁰⁷ Peronism relied on the mobilization of the working-class, meaning geographic location did not determine Peronist support.

The working class faced extremely poor socioeconomic conditions before the first wave of Peronism began in 1946. As European migration to Buenos Aires increased with the onset of World War II, low-income residents were forced to live in makeshift homes, or *villa miserias*, and faced racial prejudice as the Europeans labeled them *cabecitas negras* ("little blackheads").¹⁰⁸ Peronism radically changed the lives of the working class; for instance, Peronists embraced terms like *cabecita negra* and "turned them into positive symbols of a political as well as national identity."¹⁰⁹ In addition to the influx of European immigrants, rural Argentines moved to Buenos Aires seeking industrialized work. Women moved to Buenos Aires at a rate double that of men, and "the number of female employees and workers in industry in 1950 was 78.63% greater than their number in 1939."¹¹⁰ Motivated by moral reform feminism, Eva Perón sought to ensure fair socioeconomic conditions for these women. Eva Perón delivered two speeches within Buenos Aires that sought to inaugurate public works dedicated to the betterment of working-class women: the Home of the Employee and a Transit Home. In both of

¹⁰⁴ Eva Perón. 1949. "Speech by Mrs. Maria Eva Duarte de Perón at the Opening Ceremony of the Children's City." Transcript of speech delivered in La Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina on July 14, 1949.

¹⁰⁵ Elena, "New Directions in the History of Peronism," 20.

¹⁰⁶ Perón, 1950. "Speech Delivered by Mrs. Eva Perón at the Ceremony Held at the Headquarters of the Female Peronist Party, in the City of Paraná, 182.

¹⁰⁷ Lars Schoultz. "The Socio-Economic Determinants of Popular-Authoritarian Electoral Behavior: The Case of Peronism." *The American Political Science Review* 71, no. 4 (1977), 1432 & 1435.

¹⁰⁸ Tanja Bastia and Matthias vom Hau. "Migration, Race and Nationhood in Argentina." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40, no. 3 (2013), 6-7.

¹⁰⁹ Goebel, "Between Co-Optation and Opposition: Peronism, Nationalism and the Politics of History, 1943-55," 83.

¹¹⁰ Hollander, "Si Evita Viviera," 44-45.

these speeches, Eva Perón heavily utilized appeals to emotion. Inside Buenos Aires and doing the social work she was most proud of, Eva Perón did not have to concern herself with appeals to credibility as often as she did outside of Buenos Aires. One could consider Buenos Aires as an “echo chamber” of Peronist support as Eva Perón’s Buenos Aires audience was full of her supporters, recent internal migrants, and moral reform feminists. Eva Perón crafted her most unique rhetorical strategies in speeches delivered in Buenos Aires because she understood her audience so well. After all, Eva Perón earned the trust of Buenos Aires Peronists through the hard work of her Foundation and the promise of an empowered future for her *descamisadas*.

Conclusion

Whilst scholars researching Eva Perón’s impact have commonly deemed her a “non-feminist,” I claim the rhetorical choices made in her speechwriting represent moral reform feminism. Though Eva Perón’s feminism upheld conservative values in a first-wave context, her feminist ideas were still revolutionary considering mid-century Argentina’s reliance on traditional gender roles. For far too long, researchers have ignored the conditions Eva Perón existed in and viewed her feminism through a modern lens. Eva Perón’s rhetorical mastery, especially her ability to blend all three rhetorical appeals, led to her forming a genuine mutual respect with her audience of *descamisados*, allowing her to achieve great social initiatives. Specifically, Eva Perón’s choice in making rhetorical choices that would appeal to working-class women (such as appeals to tradition or family values, hyperbolic and sacrificial speech, and “us vs. them” logical fallacies) mobilized a previously silenced class to political and social empowerment. Eva Perón and her *descamisadas* were an unstoppable force, creating the Female Peronist Party and inaugurating Transit Homes for internal migrants moving to Buenos Aires from rural areas. My research findings, specifically my interactive StoryMaps or speech translation database available, open new avenues for further development. Future scholars should acknowledge Eva Perón’s feminist impact and stop complying with the standard of undermining her impact. Eva Perón’s brilliant speechwriting should be celebrated for the amazing feminist legacy it inspired.

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