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Los Angeles

Hagiographies of Maternal Bodies:  
Corporality, Gender, and Citizenship in Argentina

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

by

Madison Felman-Panagotacos

2023

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2023

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Hagiographies of Maternal Bodies:  
Corporality, Gender, and Citizenship in Argentina

by

Madison Felman-Panagotacos

Doctor of Philosophy in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Adriana J. Bergero, Chair

Taking “gobernar es poblar” as a key mandate to Argentine women, this doctoral thesis will trace the centrality of motherhood to women’s citizenship and to the Argentine national imaginary writ large. Specifically, this project is based on an array of cultural productions, including novels, poetry, artwork, and film, along with archival documents, cultural artifacts, and theories from several fields, pertinent to the main topic of this thesis: the way post-mortem maternal/female bodies are notably depicted and reproduced around the model of sacrificial motherhood as a central site of reference for national identity building in Argentina.

Among the analytic objectives that guided the direction of this dissertation are the following assumptions and hypotheses: 1. Women’s citizenship and participation in the public sphere was dictated by maternity, as defined through Republican Motherhood; 2. Through foundational narratives’ depictions of mothers, this exemplar was disseminated and reproduced as

a model to be followed, or in a similar vein, narratives of “bad” mothers were circulated as cautionary tales, as in the case of *La Cautiva*; 3. As motherhood determined citizenship, rewriting these maternal archetypes can serve as a means of exploring the gendered, racialized, and class-based constraints this citizenship entailed; 4. Depictions of la Difunta Correa and Eva Perón can be considered examples of these reinterpretations due to their reliance on maternal tropes and the subjects’ relevance to women’s civic engagement, and therefore prove useful as vehicles for examining the limiting of women’s political status; 5. The situating of la Difunta’s and Evita’s narratives beyond their original historical moments allows the author to recontextualize the original constraints on women’s citizenship and thereby highlight the continued exclusionary practices of defining a citizenry via identitarian categories, including gender and sexuality. I argue that by reading these modern and contemporary cultural productions depicting la Difunta and Evita through the framework of motherhood and queer theory, the artists are reconfiguring the parameters of citizenship and reimagining the nation.

The dissertation of Madison Felman-Panagotacos is approved.

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2023

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## Introduction

# Founding Mothers: Civil War, Republican Motherhood, and the Formation of the Argentine State

*“To govern is to populate in the sense that to populate is to educate, to make better, to civilize, to make rich... to civilize through population it’s essential to do it with civilized populations; to educate our America in liberty and in industry it’s essential to populate it”*

- Juan Bautista Alberdi

As intellectual Juan Bautista Alberdi said on the 19<sup>th</sup> Century formation of the modern Argentine State, “gobernar es poblar” – to govern is to populate.<sup>1</sup> In the aftermath of its declaration of independence from Spain, Argentina’s emerging leaders sought to unite the territory under a common name and identity, a shared conception of *argentinidad*. As Alberdi lays out in his treatise *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización de la República Argentina* (1851), the text that would serve as a template for the country’s 1853 Constitution, the key to Argentina’s successful establishment of political unities lies in the widespread population of the territory by *criollos*, people of European descent born in the Americas. This concept needs to be read alongside what the most prominent Latin American intellectual of the period, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, describes as the supremacy of civilization over barbarism.<sup>2</sup> Not only would the *criollos* uphold

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<sup>1</sup> Juan Bautista Alberdi, *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización de la República Argentina* (1851).

<sup>2</sup> Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo, o, Civilización y Barbarie* (Buenos Aires: Biblioteca del Congreso de la Nación, 2018).

Western European values of Christianity without any allegiance to the Spanish monarchy,<sup>3</sup> but they would dilute the ‘undesirable’ populations of Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples. While Alberdi’s focus is on the “youth, who are tomorrow’s Fatherland,”<sup>4</sup> I argue that perhaps more important for the development of an institutionalized national identity are the *criolla* and European immigrant mothers who produce and raise them, as they are those tasked with passing down this values to the next generation of citizens.

Taking “gobernar es poblar” as a key mandate to Argentine women, this doctoral thesis will trace the centrality of motherhood to women’s citizenship and to the Argentine national imaginary writ large. Specifically, this project is based on an array of cultural productions, including novels, poetry, artwork, and film, along with archival documents, cultural artifacts, and theories from several fields, pertinent to the main topic of this thesis: the way post-mortem maternal/female bodies are notably depicted and reproduced around the model of sacrificial motherhood as a central site of reference for national identity building in Argentina.

In this Introduction, I will establish a theoretical background for sacrificial motherhood as it pertains to the foundation of the modern Argentine state. This includes an analytic background about previous theoretic work on motherhood, popular culture, hagiography, and the role of

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<sup>3</sup> While Sarmiento and Alberdi debated the best means of federal governance in the mid-1800s, earlier leaders of the independence movement, such as General José de San Martín (“The Liberator” of Argentina, Chile, and Peru, who began his military career in Spain) and Manuel Belgrano (designer of the Argentine flag, modeled on the Bourbon colors of white and sky blue), advocated for a constitutional monarchy based in Peru. Their *Plan del Inca* (Inca Plan), presented at the Congreso de Tucumán in 1816, put forth that establishing a constitutional monarchy headed by an Inca king would more closely resemble previous governance, creating continuity, preventing the rise of *caudillos*, and keeping the region from descending into civil war.

For more information about the Incan monarchist faction of Argentine independence leaders, see Félix Luna, *Grandes protagonistas de la Historia Argentina: Manuel Belgrano* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Planeta, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Alberdi, *Bases y puntos de partida*, 103.

“jóvenes, que son la patria de mañana”

women and mothers in early Argentina, beginning with earlier studies that have examined these themes.

## I. Previous Studies

Recent scholarship about motherhood ranges from conventional historical panoramas to theoretical looks at representations of mothers as complicit within patriarchal norms. Over the past 40 years, publications of secondary sources on maternity have included Erin O'Connor's *Mothers Making Latin America*; E. Ann Kaplan's, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture*; Eleonor Faur and Dora Barrancos' *Mujeres y varones en la Argentina de hoy: géneros en movimiento*; Maricela Nari's *Políticas de maternidad y maternalismo político*; Thomas Genova's *Imperial Educación*; and Linda Kerber's *Women of the Republic*. Kerber explores the importance of women in the early republic of the United States, focusing on the concept of the 'mother of the nation.' Although this idea is developed in relation to the United States and Europe, including the discussion of an iconic French image of the mother of the French nation breastfeeding an infant, which will be returned to momentarily, it spread via the of Modernity's global economic implementation and diffusion as a crucial component of social normalization. In the establishment of the Argentine Republic, women were viewed as necessary for their childrearing and caregiving, as providing for the future of the nation by inculcating them as model citizens. Following the declaration of independence of the Republic of Argentina in 1816 and up until industrialization toward the end of the century, women sustained domestic life via reproductive labor, even as many of them also worked in factories and workshops.<sup>5</sup> European immigrants to the Americas brought

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<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Engels, "Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State," in *Marx/Engels Selected Works, (Vol. 3)*, trans. Alick West, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1942), 191.

with them an inherited, and eminently patriarchal, “political vocabulary from Aristotle, who believed that the good life could be realized only in the context of the public sector, a strictly male arena,”<sup>6</sup> as opposed to “feminine” domestic life.

In *Mothers Making Latin America*, O’Connor considers a variety of case studies of women influencing politics throughout Latin America, ranging from 1825 to its publication in 2014. While this work gives a historical panorama of the topic of motherhood in the Latin American context, I will focus on aspects that she does not develop or address. Additionally, this work serves mainly as a history, rather than considering other dimensions of cultural productions, such as popular and mass culture, which can illuminate popular perspectives and the relation between the state and the populace more clearly in conjunction with the historical episodes invoked by O’Connor.

Other scholarship about motherhood has pertained to their veneration and vilification. These works include Lina Meruane’s *Contra los hijos*; Élisabeth Badinter’s multiple works – *The Conflict: How Overzealous Motherhood Undermines the Status of Women*, *Mother Love*, and *The Myth of Motherhood* –; Susan Fraiman’s *Extreme Domesticity*; and Shari L. Thurer’s *The Myths of Motherhood*. Meruane’s polemic piece argues that the demands placed upon women, first to *be* mothers and then *as* mothers, are excessive and pervasive. She fears that the unreasonable expectations of women to be “good” mothers have not only set back many of the achievements of feminist movements, but also skewed the way we perceive women. In order to be judged as a good person, women need to comply with the inordinate demands of motherhood. When women carry out these duties, their bodies become a site of their labor and, therefore, an object to be celebrated for, a reductive and conventional inventory of their contributions to society. Meruane’s theoretical

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<sup>6</sup> Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect & Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 7.

contribution, along with the others mentioned here, establish a longstanding tradition of venerating women's maternal bodies.

When women go as far as to sacrifice their lives for their children, they do so in a tradition celebrated by the Catholic Church and the global ideologies of Western societies writ large, as well as a full role as their insertion within the State narrative. Hagiographic tales, like that of the Virgin Mary and other beatified individuals, further this type of narrative. I will build upon the work of Lyman Johnson, in particular *Body Politics: Death, Dismemberment, and Memory in Latin America*, in addition to Virginia Burrus' *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects*, Lynda Coon's *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity*, and Catherine Mooney's *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, which explore the history of written accounts of saints' lives. These works will assist me in establishing a foundation of how saints' lives are interpreted and disseminated in order to implore adherence to certain social and religious norms. A thorough analysis of previous scholarship will allow me to explore the glorification of abnegate motherhood in the Catholic Church, and therefore in early Argentine history.

After framing the Argentine example in a long discourse of the history of celebrating maternal sacrifice, especially the corporeal sacrifice of dying for their children, I will move to the way these bodies are depicted in popular culture. This will be framed by a discussion of theory about popular culture, including Néstor García Canclini's *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* and *Arte popular y Sociedad en América Latina*, along with Jesús Martín-Barbero's *De los medios a las mediaciones: Comunicación, cultura y hegemonía*. The works of these predominant Latin American theoreticians explore the contradictions in Latin America between tradition and modernity. Manifested in the crucial tensions unleashed by popular

and mass cultures, they exceed and contrast with the cultural productions of the political *letrados* (Lettered), its intellectual elite, along with their institutionalized knowledge.

In the following chapters, I will build upon these ideas, in addition to previous scholarship from academics such as Jean Graham Jones and Donna J. Guy, both of whom have written about the narrative and iconography associated with Eva Perón and la Difunta Correa. I will then conclude with a contemporary look at how these figures have been connected to contemporary theorizations of queer motherhood.

## **II. Republican Motherhood**

Linda Kerber defines the Republican Mother as an “integrat[ion] of political values into her domestic life... as the custodian of civic morality.”<sup>7</sup> Within the frame of the foundation of the modern Nation-State, rather than focusing entirely on physically sustaining the household, mothers were charged with being key actors of the new Nations with respect to the new generations; they became responsible for raising their children, following the State’s criteria of good citizens, requiring the women themselves to become educated. Republican Motherhood was the first official capacity and imaginary that required mothers to expand their sphere of influence beyond the house, paving the way for subsequent forays into the public sphere. Scholars like Kerber identify the impetus for the shifting of feminine roles in society as the result of coinciding political and technological changes – the Industrial Revolution and political revolutions, or the rejection of monarchical rule in favor of a republican model.

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<sup>7</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 11.

The process of the Industrial Revolution materially altered the role of women in society – in the workforce, in politics, and in the home. Prior to the temporally coinciding Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution, and political liberatory movements in Europe and in European colonies globally, women were restricted by a narrow social order; there was a firm “separation of male and female spheres.”<sup>8</sup> Principally, women remained in the home, referred to as the domestic sphere, “engaged in nurturant activities, focused on children, husbands, and family dependents.”<sup>9</sup> Kerber argues that, although they were in the home, many women engaged in economic activities, producing food and clothing; most did so within the household, but lower-working class, mostly indigenous and Afro-descendent, women did labor in the public sphere, principally in sewing workshops and pre-industrial factories.<sup>10</sup> Households were self-sufficient, with women maintaining the home within a subsistence economy. However, after Argentine Independence in 1816 and the subsequent process of industrialization, women’s domestic responsibilities changed, while they continued to be beholden to earlier norms of motherhood. However, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, products that women once produced within the home were now being manufactured at a larger scale at the factories that emerged from the first stage of the Industrial Revolution. As they were no longer able to contribute economically from within the home, conditions of women’s labor were undermined; they were required to either leave the domestic sphere to work, or remain in the household without working.

In terms of political shifts, between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, most of Latin America was under the rule of European monarchies, including the Spanish Empire’s *Virreinato del Río de la*

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<sup>8</sup> Linda K. Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (Jun., 1988): 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Argentine Republic, Superintendente de Censo. *Primer Censo de la República Argentina. Verificado en los Días 15, 16 y 17 de Septiembre de 1869* (Buenos Aires: PORVENIR, 1872), XII.

*Plata* (Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata). As Latin American nations sought to liberate themselves from monarchical rule, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries much of their ideology was influenced by European enlightenment thinkers, who sought to explain their reasons for seeking revolution.<sup>11</sup> Although Enlightenment texts rejected the hierarchical social structures imposed by monarchies, “the authors’ use of *man* was in fact literal, not generic... [T]hey disapproved of women who intruded into politics.”<sup>12</sup> While rejecting their own political subjugation at the hands of monarchists, these *philosophes* did not directly address the rights of women. While the *philosophes* of the French Revolution may not seem pertinent to the case of Argentina, the Bourbon Enlightenment, influenced by the French *philosophes*, made its way to the Americas via intellectuals from Spain, France, and the United States. French Enlightenment ideas were popular in the Spanish Colonies, and with revolutionary thinkers and officers in Argentina like Mariano Moreno, who published a translation of Rousseau’s *The Social Contract* in 1810, just when Argentina was declaring independence.<sup>13</sup> Other popular thinkers included Marquis de Condorcet and Paul-Henri d’Holbach, both of whom espoused the importance of women becoming educated to better serve their communities.<sup>14</sup> Women were, indeed, integral participants in the revolutions themselves, emerging into the streets to demand rights and state support for their families. In the case of the French Revolution, “women’s active participation from 1789-1793 was necessary to the revolution’s success... [fighting] with the men to bring about a new society based on ‘liberty, equality, fraternity.’”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 21.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-6.

<sup>13</sup> Eugene M. Wait, “Mariano Moreno: Promoter of Enlightenment,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 45, no. 3 (1965).

<sup>14</sup> David Williams, “Condorcet, Feminism, and the Egalitarian Principle,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 5 (1976): 163.

<sup>15</sup> Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine, eds., *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 4-5.

Although Argentine women are not as well-documented participating in their Revolution, one notable case is that of María Remedios del Valle an Afro-Argentine mother and soldier, who followed her husband and sons to the front lines to fight against Spain because of “her unwillingness to be separated from her family.”<sup>16</sup> General Manuel Belgrano, under whom she fought after the death of her husband and sons, promoted her to the rank of Captain of the Auxiliary Army of Peru, making her “one of only three women who were paid military salaries at the rank of officer.”<sup>17</sup> It is notable not only that a woman, especially an Afro-Argentine woman, was able to gain the respect of officers who would become revolutionary heroes, but also that they celebrated her traditionally feminine traits, along with her military contributions. Not only is she a national hero in Argentina, but she is also referred to as the *Madre de la Patria* (Mother of the Fatherland), a title given to her by Belgrano. Guzmán and Edward note that, although Belgrano and other admirers celebrated her using “conventionally masculine terms like ‘courage,’ ‘heroism,’ and ‘meritorious’ to account for her performance... they also framed her actions in feminine terms, noting her role as a caregiver to the troops.”<sup>18</sup> Her ability for care, a trait associated with femininity, and in particular, with maternity, made her legible as a heroic figure – a Republican Mother – for the men who fought alongside her and for those who continue to call her “Mother of the Nation.”

Following Argentina’s independence from the Spanish Empire, women like Remedios del Valle were not expected to continue their exceptional contributions in the traditionally masculine arenas that they were able to occupy during the Revolution. While “[f]or many women the Revolution had been a strongly politicizing experience,... the newly created republic made little

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<sup>16</sup> Florencia Guzmán and Erika Denise Edwards, “María Remedios del Valle, Nineteenth-Century Argentina,” in *As If She Were Free: A Collective Biography of Women and Emancipation in the Americas*, ed. Erica L. Ball, Tatiana Seijas, and Terri L. Snyder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 361.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 364-5.

room for them as political beings.”<sup>19</sup> In spite of these mobilizing experiences in fighting for the liberation of their country, they were not guaranteed the same rights of citizenship in the Republic. Women were guaranteed “the same rights and privileges, according to its 1853 Constitution, to women born in Argentina,” including the ability to “obtain passports or other identity documents that reaffirmed their Argentine citizenship.”<sup>20</sup> However, they were not afforded the full citizenship afforded to men, which was tied to the right to vote – a right not granted to women until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>21</sup> Much like in France, without the rights of full citizenship women were left to return to domesticity, but in a capacity that furthered the goals of the revolutionary ideals. Kerber argues that even “those who opposed women in politics had to meet the proposal that women could – and should – play a political role through the raising of a patriotic child. The Republican Mother was to encourage in her sons civic interest and participation. She was to educate her children and guide them in the paths of morality and virtue. But she was not to tell her male relatives for whom to vote. She was a citizen but not really a constituent.”<sup>22</sup> Mothers were tasked with political socialization, an integral role in childrearing, but one without familial authority.

The authority of the patriarch remained from European influence in the American colonies. Under the Spanish monarchy, this territory formally ascribed to royal understandings of dynastic succession, in which heads of state were not elected, but determined hereditarily. Their “divine right” to rule positioned “royal sovereignty as a ‘natural’ extension of the biblical Adam’s *patria potestas* over his descendants,”<sup>23</sup> a direct line between the Christian God’s and the monarch’s

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<sup>19</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Donna Guy, *White Slavery and Mothers Alive and Dead: The Troubled Meaning of Sex, Gender, Public Health, and Progress in Latin America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 75-6.

<sup>21</sup> Kif Augustine-Adams, “‘She Consents Implicitly’: Women’s Citizenship, Marriage, and Liberal Political Theory in Late-Nineteenth- and Early-Twentieth-Century Argentina,” *Journal of Women’s History* 13, no. 4 (2002), 19.

<sup>22</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 282.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Genova, *Imperial Educación: Race and Republican Motherhood in the Nineteenth-Century Americas* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2021), 25.

authority, both as paternal figures. The term *patria potestas* itself comes from the Latin “power of a father” and descends from the Roman family law that the patriarch exercised authority over his children.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, “Hispanic Enlightenment thinkers considered that, ‘in accordance with natural law, ... authority passed from God to the *paterfamilias*, who would reproduce ‘the ties of nature itself’ and give origin to peoples and kingdoms... Royal power [was] transferred by God to the first man, from the first man to the *paterfamilias* and from the *paterfamilias* to peoples.”<sup>25</sup> It was not just the religious power that allowed the monarch to rule, but also his patriarchal, familial authority – his *patria potestas*.

As Latin American subjects formally rejected monarchical order in their declarations of independence from Spain, however, they did not fully repudiate patrilineal rule. In fact, according to Mary Lowenthal Felstiner, advocates of the republican model in Latin America continued to rely on family imagery: “family imagery succeeded in impressing feelings of deprivation upon fairly comfortable Spanish Americans, stirred the desire to liberate family patrimony from imperial control while binding citizens into a kindred nation, confirmed hierarchies inherent in the Creole family model, and legitimized the ways families gained a controlling interest in the state.”<sup>26</sup> Genova argues that the hierarchical patriarchal relations of power under monarchy were replaced by republican conceptualizations of *fraternidad*, or brotherhood.<sup>27</sup> As proponents of republican governance sought to establish more egalitarian notions of *argentinidad* – a unique

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<sup>24</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Patria potestas,” Accessed March 30, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/patria-potestas>.

<sup>25</sup> Rafael Rojas, *Las repúblicas de aires: Utopía y desencanto en la revolución de Hispanoamérica* (Madrid: Taurus Historia, 2009), quoted in Genova, *Imperial Educación*, 26.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Lowenthal Felstiner, “Family Metaphors: The Language of an Independent Revolution,” *Comparative Study of Society and History* 25, no. 1 (1983), 180.

<sup>27</sup> Genova, *Imperial Educación*, 26.

“Argentineness” – familial patriarchs continued to maintain *patria potestad*,<sup>28</sup> patriarchal control and custody, over their children.

Describing the concept of *patria potestad* in post-revolutionary 19<sup>th</sup> Century Argentina, Donna Guy writes, “Patria potestad gave all power and responsibility for children to the legal father. Without a legal father, an unmarried mother could exercise these rights and responsibilities unless she was deemed immoral by public authorities. *The only absolute authority of mothers over their children resided in the milk that came from their breasts.* Thereafter, custody of their children reverted to men.”<sup>29</sup> In practice, mothers were not afforded custodial rights after the period of lactation and breast feeding. In other words, without providing material sustenance of her own body, a woman had no legal claim to her child. In a broader sense, the rooting of maternal authority in the biological function of lactation traces back to French Revolutionary iconography and foreshadows the importance of the mythology surrounding la Difunta Correa’s martyrdom. One of the most paradigmatic of these revolutionary imageries, although painted at the end of the Second Empire of Emperor Napoleon III nearly a century after the Revolution itself, is the 1870 Honoré Daumier striking painting *La République, (The Republic)* also called *La République nourrit ses enfants et les instruit (The Republic Nourishes her Children and Instructs Them)*. Currently held at the Musée d’Orsay, the museum describes the painting as a “big woman,” “a mother nursing powerful toddlers, holding the tricolour flag in her hand and wearing the Phrygian hat on her head. The child sitting at her feet, reading, was much admired. This ‘big woman’ summed up an ideal, that of a strong republic, nourishing and educating her children. A ‘fertile,

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<sup>28</sup> *Patria potestas* is the original Latin term, while *patria potestad* is the Spanish translation, with meaning “authority.”

<sup>29</sup> Donna Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State: Performing Charity and Creating Rights in Argentina, 1880-1955*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 16. Emphasis added.

serene and glorious' republic."<sup>30</sup> In Daumier's depiction, the Republic, also known as *Marianne*,<sup>31</sup> is physically embodied by a mother with the flag of the French Republic and a Phrygian cap, or



Figure 1.1 *La République*, (*The Republic*) also called *La République nourrit ses enfants et les instruit* (*The Republic Nourishes her Children and Instructs Them*) Honoré Daumier (1870)

*bonnet rouge*, an emblem of the revolutionary spirit.<sup>32</sup> By juxtaposing the child reading at her feet and the two at her breast, the act of breastfeeding is equated with the political socialization the Republican Mother was charged with passing on. In this way, *La République* “places maternal breastfeeding at the foundation of the educational system,”<sup>33</sup> with the values of citizenship not only passed on through public moral instruction, but through the physical act of

<sup>30</sup> “La République,” Collections, Musée d’Orsay, accessed September 15, 2020. <https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/artworks/la-republique-10865>.

<sup>31</sup> Joan B. Landes, “Representing the Body Politic: The Paradox of Gender in the Graphic Politics of the French Revolution,” in *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*, ed. Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 30.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Wrigley, “Transformations of a Revolutionary Emblem: The Liberty Cap in the French Revolution,” *French History* 11, no. 2 (June 1997).

<sup>33</sup> Mary Jacobus, “Incorruptible Milk: Breast-Feeding and the French Revolution,” in *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*, ed. Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 61.

breastfeeding itself. Subrata K. Mitra and Lion König analyze *La Republique's* iconography, concluding that Marianne serves as a “figurehead of the Republic and icon of French womanhood... First, Marianne is the embodiment of republican values, and second, she is seen to



Figure 1.2 Recuerdo del Centenario Argentino 1810-1910 (Memory of the Argentine Centennial 1810-1910)

possess the distinctly ‘feminine’ virtues of peace, tenderness and maternity, while displaying revulsion for power.”<sup>34</sup> According to Mitra and König, icons like the Marianne serve integral roles in the legitimization of and identification with the state: “State and icon enter into a symbiosis, mutually influencing one another. When citizens increasingly feeling uneasy in a world that is in flux, with the nation-state perceived as disintegrating, the national icon, thought to represent a cultural essence, can act as a stabiliser. The state, on the other hand, finds in the national icon a surface on which to project a vision of victorious glory,

<sup>34</sup> Mitra, Subrata K. and Lion König. “Icon-ising national identity: France and India in comparative perspective.” *National Identities* (December 2013), 362-363.

which, more often than not, does not bear any resemblance to reality.”<sup>35</sup> Although not necessarily a reflection of reality, icons like Marianne, the archetypal Republican Mother constitute exemplary models for patriotic women to follow.

This same maternalist imagery would appear in the official coat of arms of the Republic of Argentina and depictions of the Republic embodied as a woman, simply referred to as “*La Nación*” (The Nation), a visual means of highlighting desirable values for women. One example is the *Recuerdo del Centenario Argentino 1810-1910* (*Memory of the Argentine Centennial 1810-1910*), an illustration from the centennial celebrations of Argentina’s independence. Similar to the mother in *La République*, “*La Nación*” dons a Phrygian cap and holds the national flag in her right hand, in addition to the Argentine coat of arms in her left. Unlike Marianne, “*La Nación*” stands and wears a white tunic. She also has a draped blue shawl, reminiscent of the *celeste* (sky blue) of the Argentine flag, as well as traditional dress of the Virgin Mary. Her white dress and blue cloak “represent the Virgin’s purity, symbolize the skies.”<sup>36</sup> Although not depicted in the act of breastfeeding, the anthropomorphized representations of “*la Nación*” continues to conform with the “abstract image of the State as Mother Republic,”<sup>37</sup> as well as, in this case, the abnegate Catholic mother. Much of the hagiographic imagery that will be discussed in later chapters stems from republican and Catholic depictions of motherhood, like that of *La République* and *Recuerdo del Centenario Argentino 1810-1910*.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 358.

<sup>36</sup> “Mary and the Colors of Motherhood,” NMWA Exhibitions, National Museum of Women in the Arts, published February 20, 2015, <https://nmwa.org/blog/nmwa-exhibitions/mary-and-the-colors-of-motherhood/>.

<sup>37</sup> Mary Jacobus, “Incorruptible Milk,” 66.

### III. Hagiographies, Folk Saints, and the Consecration of Popular Devotions

As biographical works that sanctify people post-mortem, hagiographies amplify individual saint's lives as exemplars for the broader population.<sup>38</sup> They describe the life, suffering, death, and subsequent martyrdom of a saint, serving not just as a historical narration but, more importantly, as a means of promoting devotion.<sup>39</sup> These “exemplary deaths of saints were used with great success to inculcate Christian values and to demonstrate to the faithful the power of God acting in the world.”<sup>40</sup> Hagiographies exist in many cultures and religions, tracing back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, but peaked in prominence during the Middle Ages in both the Eastern Orthodox and Western Christian traditions.<sup>41</sup> However, the characteristics of the hagiographies that I discuss in this dissertation are those that originate from ancient Greek tradition, which is where we get the term hagiography, from *agios* (ἅγιος, holy or saint) and *grafia* (γραφία, writing). This is the tradition that evolves into sainthood in Catholicism, the religion spread to Latin America by the conquistadors and early missionaries.

A central analytical goal of my dissertation is to examine Argentina's imagined communal<sup>42</sup> history of popular devotions and sacrificial motherhood create an environment in which maternal corpses are easily used for socially constructed hagiographies. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* postulates the conceptualization of the Nation as a socially constructed community, maintained by those who imagine themselves to be represented by this

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<sup>38</sup> Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>39</sup> Père Hippolyte, *The Legends of the Saints: An Introduction to Hagiography*, trans. V.M. Crawford (University of Notre Dame Press, 1961), 1.

<sup>40</sup> Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, 5.

<sup>41</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Hagiography: Religious Study and Literature,” accessed April 9, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/hagiography>.

<sup>42</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 2006).

community and those who seek to lead it. After officially declaring independence from Spain in the May Revolution of 1810, Argentina sought to build and preserve a sense of national unity. The resulting narratives of *argentinidad* that emerge in foundational fictions exemplify the construction of nationhood as an imagined community.<sup>43</sup> According to Doris Sommer a foundational fiction is work that serves as “a model for apparently non-violent national consolidation during periods of internecine conflict” due to its “natural and familial grounding, along with its rhetoric of productive sexuality.”<sup>44</sup> These two major allusions, productive sexuality and family, build the hierarchical claims of universality based on the women’s bodies. During this era, it was in the best interest of those who sought to lead the nascent Argentine state to generate and uphold a singular ideal of what constituted *argentinidad*, a unified foundation fiction, including an ingrained Catholic reverence. According to Lyman Johnson, Argentina’s and Latin America’s “‘body politics’ rely on a symbolic language uniquely informed by the enduring importance of Catholic Christianity, by the region’s experience of conquest and colonization, and by the complexity of cultural practices derived from the mixture of indigenous, African, and European origins.”<sup>45</sup> These syncretic roots prove important in the body of hagiographies that I consider for this project, which, notably, don’t come from the institution of the church, but are instead written and established by the people, a collective speaker whose imaginaries are not institutionalized, but push to be culturally and politically recognized.<sup>46</sup> Since they don’t have an “official” version the hagiographic narratives are able to be reproduced by different types of unconventional authors, with different aims.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Doris Sommer, “Irresistible romance: the foundational fictions of Latin America,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (Philadelphia: Routledge, 1990), 76.

<sup>45</sup> Lyman L. Johnson., ed. *Body Politics: Death, Dismemberment, and Memory in Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 8.

<sup>46</sup> Raymond Williams, “Structures of Feeling,” *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

Beyond their adulatory nature, I underline two key characteristics of hagiographies that prove important to my discussion. The first is that they are published after the saint's death. They are written by the saints' biographers post-mortem, because Catholic canonization only happens after death, a protracted process of investigating alleged miracles, blessing, beatification, and finally canonization as a saint.<sup>47</sup> The postmortem nature of canonization means that the saint has no input about the nature of their depiction, which is fully in the hands of the church hagiographer, who fully determines the content and context of their biography. The second is that they are commissioned by the Catholic Church – they are a representation, a narrative, and a knowledge institutionalized.

After the extended procedure to arrive at canonization, the narratives produced for public veneration remain, static, within the official records of the Church.<sup>48</sup> Since hagiographies are written with the explicit aim of recording saints' deeds, which are then reproduced in book form as exemplars for the broader population to use in perpetuity, they are traditionally unchanging, only amended if new details of the saint's life come to light.

The figures considered in this study are not canonized Catholic saints, but rather figures, symbols, and imaginaries who belong to folk or popular sainthoods. Frank Graziano, a scholar of popular or folk devotions in Latin America, defines these saints as “deceased people, some of entirely constructed identity, who are widely regarded as miraculous and receive the devotion of a substantial cult, but who are not canonized or officially recognized by the Catholic Church.”<sup>49</sup> Frequently, as in the case of the two major examples analyzes in this dissertation, Eva Perón and

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<sup>47</sup> “Saints,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, accessed April 1, 2023, <https://www.usccb.org/offices/public-affairs/saints>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Frank Graziano, *Cultures of Devotion: Folk Saints of Spanish America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), VII.

la Difunta Correa, the Church even goes to extreme lengths to prohibit not only their canonization, but their worship as folk saints. It is pertinent to note that the broadened usage of the term “saint” in Latin America has the effect of a “leveling and then reordering of the Catholic hierarchy,” in which members of the broader public can occupy the same positions of authority as canonized saints. Although most folk saint’s devotees are themselves devout Catholics, they search out the additional supplemental protection of “saints belonging to a given community and its culture,” meaning those who are like them, rather than antiquated and distanced European figures.<sup>50</sup>

One of the many resilient aspects of this hybrid process is that, whereas official saints are anchored in their recorded moment, popular or folk saints can take on new meanings with different historical contexts and political movements and communities. This is what Graziano refers to as the “malleable identities of folk saints,”<sup>51</sup> the temporal shifts in assigned meaning to their legends. He uses the case of la Difunta Correa, whose devotees began praying for miracles regarding poverty after the economic crisis of 2001, after over a century of worship unrelated to monetary issues.<sup>52</sup> This ability for narratives to shift reflects Lyman Johnson’s position that “[i]t is the attachment of these historical figures to enduring and unresolved conflicts over identity, social justice, and cultural constructions that give their bodies such potency as vehicles of political discourse.”<sup>53</sup> The ascription of political viewpoints to the corporeal narratives of hagiographies allows the legends of popular saints, like la Difunta and Eva Perón, to adopt to their contexts.

Many of the cases of folk saints in Argentine lore are parents or have traits associated with maternity and paternity. According to Graziano, “[i]t is quite common for people to request favors and miracles of their dead parents, often the mother,” due to the unique Catholic traditions present

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>53</sup> Johnson, *Body Politics*, 11.

in rural Latin America.<sup>54</sup> In some segments of the population, mostly those of working classes, people pray to deceased relatives for care or specific favors.<sup>55</sup> Popular saints, especially those with maternal connotations, “perform on a grand scale the role that a dead relative performs for the family,”<sup>56</sup> a continuation of the role deceased family members play, thereby heightening the relevance of the familial traits. Furthermore, in the case of maternal bodies, hagiographies allow the author to imbue the corpse with his/her own moralizing narratives about how the mother died, thereby making her a martyr for how other mothers should behave. Considering the point of departure for this study – *gobernar es poblar*, and its impetus to comply with the norms of Republican Motherhood –, the narratives of martyrdom connoted by sainthood convey that the moral for mothers following their example is to sacrifice for their children.

#### **IV. Chapter Organization**

In the first chapter of my dissertation, “Las Cautivas, la Difunta Correa, and Nationalism: Construction of a Collective Identity,” I investigate rewritings of the legend of la Difunta Correa dating from the early 1900s, the Peronist era, the military dictatorship of the 1970s and 1980s, and the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The chapter begins by situating the legend of la Difunta Correa as an archetype of Republican Motherhood within foundational narratives of the Civil Wars, in particular Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s *Facundo o Civilización y barbarie en las pampas argentinas* (1845) and Esteban Echeverría’s poem *La cautiva* (1837). After establishing her narrative’s reliance on the norms of Republican Motherhood and Catholic sacrificial motherhood, an example for Argentine

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<sup>54</sup> Graziano, *Cultures of Devotion*, 9.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

women to follow, I examine recontextualization of her legend. First, Nemer Barud's *Deolinda Correa* (1967) and León Benarós's *Romancero argentino* (1959) provide insight on the limited definition of *argentinidad* as synonymous with being *criollo*, elite, Catholic, and from *porteño*. I then look at Antonio Berni's multimedia pieces *La Difunta Correa I* and *La Difunta Correa II* (1975-1976), which depict la Difunta as a *desaparecida* victim of the Military Junta (1976-1983). By depicting la Difunta as having faced a gruesome, violent death due to State violence, Berni highlights the inherent violence of the sacrifice la Difunta and other Republican Mothers were mandated to make. Finally, I analyze Joaquín Molina's *Difunta Correa, vertiente de santidad* and *Difunta Correa, eterna fuente de vida* (2004), and Marcela Correa's *La Difunta Correa* (2014), which represent la Difunta as a victim of contemporary gendered violence. Each of these reframings of la Difunta's legend in new temporal and sociological contexts reflects the continuation of foundational narratives' exclusionary practices of defining citizenship.

With the first chapter focusing on the legend of la Difunta Correa as a non-traditional, non-lettered foundational fiction that is able to be reimagined to reflect changing notions of women's civic participation, the second chapter, entitled "Evita: the Transgressive Mother for the Nation," centers on the construction of Evita<sup>57</sup> as a nonnormative maternal figure, both during her lifetime and after her death. While earlier women occupying public spaces, namely those of beneficence and women's rights organizations, relied on maternalist rhetoric in reifying hierarchies based on gender, class, and ethnicity, Evita also invoked maternity, but through the construction of affective, motherly bonds, both through the *Partido Peronista Femenino* and the *Fundación Eva Perón*.

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<sup>57</sup> I use the diminutive 'Evita' instead of referring to her either by her given first name (Eva, or María Eva) or by her last names (Duarte, Ibarguren, or Duarte de Perón), for two reasons. The first is in sake of clarity, as I will also discuss her husband, Juan Domingo Perón, using their shared last name. The second is following the example of David William Foster, who "continued to use 'Evita' to evoke not so much the historical figure as the cultural icon" and the cultural forces behind her.

David William Foster, "Eva Perón, Juan José Sebreli, and Gender," in *Sexual Textualities: Essays on Queer/ing Latin American Writing*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 229.

Ultimately, I contend that these emotional, maternal connections made Evita legible as a saint after her death, an argument that I illustrate through the examination of five paintings by the artist Daniel Santoro: *Heladera Siam Di Tella, argentina, noble y buena* (2004); *La isla de los muertos III* (2004); Untitled Piece in *La isla de los muertos* series (2004); *El nacimiento político de Eva Perón* (2001); and *Altarcito* (2002).

The third chapter, “Alternative Maternities: La Difunta Correa and Evita as Queer Models of Motherhood,” studies the resilient communities of both la Difunta Correa’s and Evita’s popular devotions’ in their 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century interpretations as queer mothers. Although neither figure connotes a literal queer mother, they embody Karma Lochrie’s, Judith Butler’s, and Margaret F. Gibson’s understandings of queerness as a category for acting on cultural struggles beyond sex and gender. I illustrate the example of la Difunta as a *travesti* mother through Camila Sosa Villada’s novel *Las malas*, which positions a collective of *travestis* as those who raise la Difunta’s son, thereby implying the possibility of a system of Republican Mother centered on educating in queer values. I then examine the “queering” of Evita in three steps: 1. The negative depiction of Evita as masculine in Tomás Eloy Martínez’s *Santa Evita* (1995), “Rodolfo Walsh’s “Esa mujer” (1967), and Copi’s *Eva Perón* (1969) as a means of critiquing her performance of public masculine political roles; 2. The adoption of Evita as a queer figure through her performance in drag, both on the international drag franchise *RuPaul’s Drag Race* and by local artists, including the Cordoban Lady Alutrix; 3. Finally, contemporary LGBTQ+ movements’ assertions that Evita would have embodied dissident and transgressive gender and sexual identities, as she did with her political stances throughout her lifetime.

## Chapter 1 – Las Cautivas, la Difunta Correa, and Nationalism: Construction of a Collective Identity

“Of the beloved homeland of ours  
strong shield is your right hand,  
and, what is a woman worth?”<sup>58</sup>

- Esteban Echeverría

*“There is no heart in San Juan  
that, as hardened as it may be,  
has not felt the death  
of la difunta Correa.”*<sup>59</sup>

- León Benarós

### I. Introduction

Among the arid landscape and sparse signs of human population in Vallecito, a small town in the Argentine province of San Juan, there emerges a hillside covered in empty soda bottles, small replicas of homes, used wedding dresses, and license plates. These items, and the coordinating chapels, religious icons, and dedicatory plaques, are dedicated to la Difunta Correa (*Correa* is her surname, while *Difunta* denotes a dead woman), an early 19<sup>th</sup> Century woman said to have lived in the Cuyo Valley in Northwest Argentina until the Civil Wars disrupted her life. As she crossed the desert with her infant son, in search of her forcibly conscripted husband, Correa

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<sup>58</sup> Esteban Echeverría, *La cautiva* (Middletown: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016).

“De la amada patria nuestra / escudo fuerte es tu diestra, / y, ¿qué vale una mujer?”

<sup>59</sup> León Benarós, *Romancero argentino* (Buenos Aires: Troquel, 1959), 35.

“No hay corazón en San Juan / que, por curtido que sea, / no haya sentido la muerte / de la difunta Correa.”

died, likely of dehydration or exhaustion. Her child, however, was able to survive for days by nursing from his deceased mother's breast, a feat that led to a popular devotion<sup>60</sup> dedicated to Correa, focalized in the current-day San Juan Province. Between her death and the imaginaries of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the legend of la Difunta has undergone scrutiny and censorship from the upper classes, the government, and the Catholic Church alike. Her worship endured via makeshift altars on roadsides and in the homes of members of the popular classes, surrounded by used soda bottles filled with water, rusty license plates, and timeworn rosaries, displaced to marginal sites within the spatial dimension of rural, popular classes and their daily life.

This chapter will trace the tumultuous popularization of the devotion to la Difunta Correa, considering reverence for her in conjunction with the ample and inclusive leveraging of her image for disparate political aims, from *indigenismo* to feminism. Her story embodies what scholar Doris Sommer calls a foundational fiction, a work that legitimizes national consolidation and development through the resolution of racial, regional, class, or social differences within a hegemonic construction of love, family, and marriage.<sup>61</sup> Correa's condition as a wife and mother, one whose family was torn apart by the fraternal violence of the Argentine Civil Wars, makes her tale relatable for a broad public seeking national consolidation.

I will begin with the historical precedent that laid the foundation for the legend of la Difunta Correa, in particular, the Argentine Civil Wars, as well as the cultural antecedents to the later depictions of maternity, such as Argentina's "first poem," *La cautiva* (1837) by Esteban Echeverría (1805-1851). I am interested in examining these two texts since both their historical and literary discourses represent the foundational narratives that seek to establish a unified national identity. I

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<sup>60</sup> I use the term popular devotion employing the definition from Frank Graziano in *Cultures of Devotion*: followings of "saints who originate within the traditions of the common people" viii.

<sup>61</sup> Doris Sommer, "Irresistible romance," 76.

argue that they both depict or allude to the Republican model of motherhood as a way to “reconcile politics and domesticity; it justified continued political education and political sensibility. But the role remained a severely limited one; it had no collective definition, provided no outlet for women to affect a real political decision... The image of the Republican Mother could be used to mask women’s true place in the polis: they were still on its edges.”<sup>62</sup> From a sublimized model of motherhood in *la Difunta* and the involuntary negative one of *La cautiva*, these recognized, official narratives attempt to establish homogenized identities of *argentinidad*, while limiting roles for women within those boundaries. My investigation will begin with *La Cautiva*, focusing on the negative model of motherhood represented by its female protagonist María. Approaching its trajectory as the predominant frontier narrative in Argentina, with a fundamental logic of purity and exclusion needed to the demarcation of the modern Nation, both territorially and demographically. Then I will analyze how *la Difunta Correa*’s narrative’s emergence from popular lore, rather than from official discourse, expresses the more quotidian experiences of the nation, both concrete and abstract.

I believe that the popular nature of *la Difunta*’s legend reflects the uniting of the lower rungs of society, a motive for various factions to appropriate her image as a means of furthering their political aims. As conditions of the nation change, conceptions of nationhood and citizenship are constantly reexamined and reconstructed, mostly through the stories told as symbolic renderings of the nation.<sup>63</sup> By considering the legend of *la Difunta Correa* as an unconventional foundational narrative, rewritings of her story represent calculated reimaginations of what constitutes citizenship, of what deserves to be considered *argentinidad*, thereby rewriting

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<sup>62</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 12.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

previously excluded segments of the population into the nation.<sup>64</sup> According to Nicolas Shumway, “[w]ith few exceptions, it was not until the twentieth century that Spanish American intellectuals began considering the guiding fictions of national identity, peoplehood, and destiny in terms of their own popular culture,”<sup>65</sup> as is the case of la Difunta Correa and the fictional protagonist of *La Cautiva*, whose legend and narrations were reexamined in the shifting political conditions of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries. This project will analyze cultural productions depicting la Difunta Correa that were created during moments of political upheaval – modernization, the rise of Peronism, the military dictatorship, and feminist movements of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century –, which in turn lends insight to the values foundational fictions describe as inherent to Argentine citizenship at those particular moments. I argue that these rewritings of the legend of la Difunta Correa are calculated reimaginings of what constitutes citizenship and femininity through the lens of maternity, highlighting exclusionary practices in foundational narratives that are still present today.

## II. *La Cautiva*, Maternity, and Narratives of a National Identity

A decisive issue following the May Revolution was the distribution of power over the nascent country, cementing the factions whose rivalry would set up the underlying political conflict in the narrative of la Difunta Correa. On the one hand, the *Unitarios* (Unitarians, or Centralists) wanted a centralized national government following the Napoleonic model in which the Province of Buenos Aires, as the most developed, would lead the other provinces, resulting in a nation that privileged *porteño* interests.<sup>66</sup> *Porteño* translates to “of the port” but is used to refer

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<sup>64</sup> *Argentinidad* is a term that refers to a general Argentinean character or sentiment. It is levied to define who and what is considered deserving of being given citizenship or status in the national imaginary.

<sup>65</sup> Nicolas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 5.

<sup>66</sup> Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina*, 112.

to the people of Buenos Aires, the principal port city in the Southern Cone during the colonial period. Unitarios reasoned that its economic importance as the port of Buenos Aires, and as a site linking Argentina to the forces of the implementation of the first Industrial Revolution, justified the unequal distribution of resources to and input on governance from the *interior*, a term referring to all other Argentine provinces, and encompassing all “otherness.” The *Federales* (Federalists), who maintained control of the government for most of the interstice between 1810 and the signing of the Argentine Constitution in 1853, argued for federalization, a country composed of independent provinces in the spirit of the United States.<sup>67</sup> The fight for governance between the *Unitarios* and the *Federales*, groups comprised primarily of *criollos*, men of European descent born in the Americas, provided the fodder for the intermittent civil wars, formally instigated by the *Federales*’ rejection of the proposed constitution of 1819.<sup>68</sup> The subsequent first Battle of Cepeda in 1820 ceded leadership to the *Federales* and their infamous leader Juan Manuel de Rosas, a polemical figure who pledged death to all those who opposed him, using the slogan “Long live the holy Federation, death to the savage Unitarians!”<sup>69</sup> Despite the *Federales*’ stronghold on official structures of power, the elite literate intellectuals of the *Unitario* side occupied the majority of the cultural scene of the time and maintained harsh written critiques, especially those who lived in exile<sup>70</sup>. For his ideology and a violence strongly emphasized by his antagonists, Rosas’ detractors referred to him as a *caudillo*, a politico-military strongman who maintains power through charisma and violence, but who also “embodies cultural folk values,” the rejection of the

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Jorge Gelman, “Unitarios y Federales. Control político y construcción de identidades en Buenos Aires durante el primer gobierno de Rosas,” *Anuario Instituto de Estudios históricos sociales*, no. 19 (2004), 363.

<sup>67</sup> Gelman, “Unitarios y Federales,” 364.

<sup>68</sup> Celso Ramón Lorenzo, *Manual de historia constitucional Argentina* (La Plata: Editorial Juris, 1994), 294.

<sup>69</sup> Javier Domínguez Arribas, “El enemigo unitario en el discurso rosista (1829-1852),” *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* LX, no. 2 (2003), 557.

“Viva la Santa Federación, mueran los salvajes unitarios”

<sup>70</sup> Two notable examples are Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (*Facundo*) and Esteban Echevarría (*El matadero*).

elite culture of Buenos Aires.<sup>71</sup> Adding to this view of Rosas as brutal and backwards, the *Unitarios* furthered a narrative of civilization and barbarism, identifying themselves with Europe and their enemies with unruly nature.<sup>72</sup>

Many early Argentine authors<sup>73</sup> used the conflict between *Unitarismo* and *Federalismo* as a means of representing contrasting world models, the former associated with the European forces of globalization, and the latter with valuing local economies and equal distribution of State wealth among the Argentine provinces. One of the most notable narratives that used these differing models as a central topic or situational setting for cultural productions depicting life in the early Argentine Republic is *Facundo, o, Civilización y Barbarie*<sup>74</sup> (1845) by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-1888), who would go on to be the seventh President of Argentina but lived in exile in Chile during the time of this publication due to his ideological clashes with Rosas. Rather than directly discussing his ideological differences with Rosas, however, Sarmiento couched his critiques in an allusion to Facundo Quiroga, a Federalista predecessor of Rosas. In addition to a section dedicated to the biography of Quiroga, *Facundo* devotes one to the Argentine geography and history. Sarmiento describes looking to the horizon of the *pampas* and “not seeing anything; because the deeper his eyes sink into that uncertain, vaporous, indefinite horizon, the farther away, the more fascinated, confused and submerged in contemplation and doubt? Where does the world that he wants to penetrate in vain end? He does not know! What is beyond what he sees? Loneliness, danger, savagery, death!”<sup>75</sup> Sarmiento’s juxtaposition of the vast expanse of the

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<sup>71</sup> Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina*, 5-6.

<sup>72</sup> Gelman, “Unitarios y Federales,” 364.

<sup>73</sup> Most popular historical authors of this period were “writer-statesmen,” also involved in politics, frequently leading to the assertion of individual political beliefs via fiction or poetry.

<sup>74</sup> Translated to English as *Life in the Argentine Republic in the Days of the Tyrants: Or, Civilization and Barbarism* by Mary Mann.

<sup>75</sup> Sarmiento, *Facundo, o, Civilización y Barbarie*, 40.

pampas with “loneliness, danger, savagery, [and] death” reflects his crediting of the country’s failure to civilize the region outside of Buenos Aires. According to him, the pampas’ desolate expanses coupled with the uncontrolled barbarism of gauchos and caudillos left the uneducated peasants without any governance, or any desire for it. Sarmiento concludes with a description of his ideal for the future of Argentina under Unitarian rule, in which political power and cultural influence are shared between Buenos Aires and the interior.

The members of the *Generación del 37*, a group of *Unitario* authors who discussed their anti-Rosas works at their literary salon founded in 1837, worked to unseat Rosas by creating a cultural consensus that rejected the alleged barbarism he represented in favor of the civilization they espoused. One of the *Generación*’s most notable members is Esteban Echeverría, author of the canonical pro-*Unitario* pieces *El matadero* (1871), published posthumously, and *La cautiva* (1837). The latter is considered Argentina’s first national poem, an epic in nine parts that tells the story of Brián and María, a young couple who, along with their son, are kidnapped by Indians. They epitomize the new Argentine family, populating the *interior*’s frontier of Patagonia’s *Tierra Adentro* as Alberdi mandated. However, far beyond the limits of the civilized world in the risky borderlands, they are taken as captives and exposed to a tragic end. The conditions unleashed by their proximity to and coexistence with the Indians leads to the need to obliterate their family model, contaminated by their contact with barbarism.

In *La cautiva*, Echeverría furthers his dichotomic vision between civilization and barbarism, city and pampa, *criollo* and *indio*, by decrying the possibility of coexistence of the two poles, using María’s body as an allegory for the intranational frontier, a precursor to the legend of

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“no ver nada; porque cuanto más hunde los ojos en aquel horizonte incierto, vaporoso, indefinido, más se le aleja, más lo fascina, lo confunde y lo sume en la contemplación y la duda? ¿Dónde termina aquel mundo que quiere en vano penetrar? ¡No lo sabe! ¿Qué hay más allá de lo que ve? ¡La soledad, el peligro, el salvaje, la muerte!”

la Difunta Correa. In this way, Echeverría positions the female body as not only as a site of contention in the struggle against barbarism, but also as a generative biological force for assuring compliance with the established geopolitical and sexual borders, whose main function is to gesture to the outcasts and untouchables of the new Nation. Crossing these boundaries by entering into the contact zone would result in the woman's perdition. As an impure woman, as a tainted wife and a disgraced mother, Echeverría's fictional female captive provides a foundational negative example of sexuality and contact at the border of civilization, an example that must be eliminated.

As the country's "first poem," *La cautiva* is also a foundational fiction, an early work that reifies a natural sociopolitical order as part of the country's imaginary. In *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*, Sommer characterizes many of these foundational narratives as romances that use a heterosexual coupling as an analogy for a nation coming together. These narratives "fueled a desire for domestic happiness that runs over into dreams of national prosperity; and nation-building projects invested private passions with public purpose."<sup>76</sup> Although *La cautiva* is not a romance, but in fact describes the break-down of a family unit, it is imbued with the same generative lesson for its readers.

Returning to Alberdi's phrase "*gobernar es poblar*" and the notion of Republican Motherhood, fictional or non-fictional Argentine women needed to help the *criollo* and patriarchally oriented government maintain control by reproducing, thereby producing new *criollo* citizens. This in turn would guarantee a *criollo* lineage by the drastic exclusion of Indigenous demography, in order to bring about the rightful inheritance of the Nation and to preserve its purity. With the nuclear family as the basic unit for nation-building, the citizens who resulted from these unions needed to reproduce the values of the nation. According to Francine Masiello, "the family

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<sup>76</sup> Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 7.

was thought to cast a semblance of order upon the new society by mediating the extremes of chaos and authoritarian rule.”<sup>77</sup> By following the example of Republican Motherhood, this foundational narrative and other *literatura de frontera* (frontier or border literature) profess that, through her body and her own sexuality, the Argentine woman should impose order upon the chaotic and unknowable nature of the contended borderland she inhabits.

Notably, this imagination of Argentine lineage includes only *criollos* and European immigrants, explicitly excluding those of indigenous and Afro-Argentine descent. From the vantage point of the *criollo*, the *indio*—a brutal, heathen, and savage being—retarded the possibility of a national consolidation based on civilized values. While the Argentine military campaigns aimed to decimate the indigenous populations with violent conquests and cycles of genocide, Echeverría’s nation-building project proposed “to dominate the ‘desert,’ not by eliminating ‘barbarians’ but by increasing population.”<sup>78</sup> According to the frontier narratives, Argentine woman’s mandate to populate the country had the explicit goal of reducing the percentile of mestizo populations, especially between white women and indigenous men, became a strict taboo and a central part of the Nation’s manifestation of a politics of exclusion, as it would produce more mestizo peoples while also contaminating the purity of the white populace.

Echeverría’s diction in *La cautiva* clearly associates this unwelcome citizenry with the inhospitable desert they inhabit, a romanticist tradition inherited from the author’s studies in Europe. Romanticism is characterized by a focus on emotions, individualism and nature, with a strong link between a person’s characteristics and the environment he inhabits. In the European tradition, as a response to the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution that followed, this

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<sup>77</sup> Francine R. Masiello, *Between Civilization & Barbarism: Women, Nation, and Literary Culture in Modern Argentina*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 18.

<sup>78</sup> Sommer, *Foundational Fictions*, 9.

equilibrium privileges nature over the contamination of the city. However, Echeverría's criollo interpretation of the movement inverts the dichotomy between city and nature, describing the Argentine pampas in terms that emphasize its status as a wasteland. The first section, "El desierto" ("The Desert"), opens with a description of the land as "incommensurate, open, / and mysterious at his feet / it extends; sad the countenance / solitary and taciturn."<sup>79</sup> It is a vast, empty space that the author does not understand, reminiscent of Sarmiento's description of the untenable *pampas*. In the same section, just before the *indios* make their bombastic arrival, the narrator asks, "What proud human plant / dares to tread upon the desert / when all in it rests? / Who comes safe harbor / in their wastelands to seek?"<sup>80</sup> For Echeverría, the land is so inhospitable that those who do manage to live there must not be human. This is fitting with what Noé Jitrik describes as "the Echeverrian project of linking literary romanticism with social romanticism. Without a doubt, Echeverría is ahead of his time but somewhat disrupts his ideal by giving him a 'moral strength, in addition to an aesthetic delight.'<sup>81</sup> In this romanticist imagining, those who reside on the opposite side of the social and geographic border are configured as non-human and undeserving of continuing to inhabit the newly Argentinean terrain.

Echeverría continues his literary and social romanticism in *La cautiva* by positioning María as a romantic heroine. As Jitrik notes, she is "idealized to heroism, wife and mother, pure and

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<sup>79</sup> Esteban Echeverría, *La cautiva*.

"incommensurable, abierto, / y misterioso a sus pies / se extiende; triste el semblante, / solitario y taciturno"

<sup>80</sup> Echeverría, *La cautiva*.

¿Qué humana planta orgullosa / se atreve a hollar el desierto / cuando todo en él reposa? / ¿Quién viene seguro puerto / en sus yermos a buscar?

<sup>81</sup> Noé Jitrik, *Esteban Echeverría. La cautiva, El matadero y otros escritos* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1967), 23.

"el Proyecto echeverriano de ligar romanticismo literario con romanticismo social. Sin duda, Echeverría se adelanta a su época pero desbarata un tanto su ideal al adjudicarle 'una fuerza moral, además de un deleite estético'

protective, strong and sexless.”<sup>82</sup> She appears in the third section, “El puñal” (“The Dagger”) after the readers have experienced Echeverría’s descriptions of the pampa, the savage *indios*, and their capture of Brián, a former soldier in the War for Independence. When María is first described, she is disheveled, wielding a knife, killing one of the Indian captors. Despite her violence, she has “[a] powerful instinct, / a generous affect / impels and safely guides, / like pure starlight / in that darkness.”<sup>83</sup> She is generous and guided like pure starlight as she searches for Brián in the dark and ominous desert where they are kept as captives. As a devoted wife, looking to save her beloved husband, she is depicted positively: “Her heart of joy / throbs; what she wanted, / what she sought with eagerness / her loving vigilance / she found joyfully at last. / There, there is her universe, / her soul the smooth mirror, / her love, hope and life; / there she contemplates soaking in / her earthly seraph.”<sup>84</sup> This description of María’s purity and devoted behavior contrasts with the barbarity and danger of the indigenous woman who encourages the male *indios* in their savage acts. As the *indios* slice open the neck of a mare, drinking its warm blood “like thirsty vampires,” they do so “with the applause of the *indias*.”<sup>85</sup> María appears as Brián’s guardian angel, while the indigenous women applaud their men’s barbaric behavior.

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<sup>82</sup> Jitrik, *Esteban Echeverría*, 27.

“¡idealizada hasta el heroísmo, esposa y madre, pura y protectora, fuerte y asexuada”

<sup>83</sup> Echeverría, *La cautiva*.

“Un instinto poderoso, / un afecto generoso / le impele y guía segura, / como luz de estrella pura, / por aquella obscuridad”

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

“Su corazón de alegría / palpita; lo que quería, / lo que buscaba con ansia / su amorosa vigilancia / encontró gozosa al fin. / Allí, allí está su universo, / de su alma el espejo terso, / su amor, esperanza y vida; / allí contempla embebida / su terrestre serafín.”

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

“como sedientes vampiros”; “con aplausos de las indias”

This contrast between María's angelic appearance and the barbarism of the indigenous captors is heightened with the religious imagery in portraying the characters. The first to note is the name María's allusion to the figure of the Virgin Mary, which initially establishes María as a person worthy of devotion, but also as a devoted mother, much like la Difunta Correa. Furthermore, when she eventually rescues Brián, she describes herself as a guardian angel: "My vulgar name is María / I am your guardian angel."<sup>86</sup> I observe the Christian allusions heightened through the characterizations of Brián as María searches for him to set him loose. When she finds him, he is "looking at the sky, and girded / body with hard bonds, / arms open in a cross, / tied hands and feet."<sup>87</sup> With his limbs tied in the image of a cross, prepared to be sacrificed at the hands of his captors, Brián resembles the figure of Jesus as he was nailed to the cross. In this scenario, his captors are depicted as "inhuman tigers,"<sup>88</sup> demons who live in the "infernal" hellscape of the pampas:

Night is the vast horizon / night the air, sky, and earth. / It seems to have crowded / the genius of darkness, / for some filthy mystery, / on the immense plain, / the gloom of the abyss / where the unalterable reigns. / Only restless wandering, / among the black shadows, / the fatuous spirits / with vivid light reverberate, / dissipate, reappear, / come, go, withdraw, / as the insect screeches, / and in swamps or caves / the nocturnal animals / with sad howls complain."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

"Mi vulgar nombre es María / ángel de tu guarda soy"

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

"mirando al cielo, y ceñido / el cuerpo con duros lazos, / abiertos en cruz los brazos, / ligadas manos y pies"

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

"tigres inhumanos"

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

"Noche es el vasto horizonte / noche el aire, cielo y tierra. / Parece haber apiñado / el genio de las tinieblas, / para algún misterio inundo, / sobre la llanura inmensa, / la lobreguez del abismo / donde inalterable reina. / Sólo inquietos divagando, / por entre las sombras negras, / los espíritus foletos / con viva luz reverberan, / se disipan, reaparecen, / se disipan, reaparecen, / vienen, van, se alejan, / mientras el insecto chilla, / y en fachinales o cuevas / los nocturnos animales / con triste aullido se quejan"

The contrast of this depiction as demonic or animalistic rather than even human, with the Christian and angelic imagery surrounding María and Brián heightens the sense of horror in the reader. According to Christopher Conway, this reaction was beneficial since “[i]n the Romantic aesthetic, fear and horror were ultimately desirable because they could rattle the individual into a deeper understanding of the self and the world.”<sup>90</sup> In order to avoid falling prey to this inferno of barbarity, the frightened reader would internalize the didactic message to eschew the liminal frontier in favor of the safer communities only inhabited by *criollos*.

Although María originally appears as a virtuous and devoted angel, her experience in the barbaric Indian frontier causes her to assimilate both masculine and savage indigenous characteristics, making her unrecognizable to Brián and the rest of the civilized Nation. In a highly dramatic scene, as she wakes him, he “believes to see / a killer: they shoot fire / his eyes of anger.”<sup>91</sup> While he recognizes her shortly after, he expresses apprehension toward her as she continues to exhibit more traditionally masculine traits, which Francine Masiello describes as María “demonstrate[ing] the strength and resourcefulness necessary for survival in the desert.”<sup>92</sup> Brián, in turn, is depicted as more effeminate, “weakened...as a victim of barbarism”<sup>93</sup> as the tale continues, although he began as a fierce soldier who fought for the freedom of Argentina. In the fifth section, “El pajonal” (“The Scrubland”), he faints, a stereotypically feminine health condition, “in the arms of María / who remained immobile, / fell dead apparently.”<sup>94</sup> After he loses

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<sup>90</sup> Christopher Conway, “Gender Iconoclasm and Aesthetics in Esteban Echeverría’s *La cautiva* and the Captivity Paintings of Juan Manuel Blanes,” *Decimonónica* 12, no. 1 (2015): 122.

<sup>91</sup> Echeverría, *La cautiva*.

“cree ver / un asesino: echan fuego / sus ojos de ira”

<sup>92</sup> Masiello, *Between Civilization & Barbarism*, 28.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>94</sup> Echeverría, *La cautiva*.

“en los brazos de María / que inmóvil permanecía, / cayó muerto al parecer”

consciousness, only for María to occupy the masculine position of catching him, she carries him: “over her shoulders she carries him, / and with excessive vigor / she carries, carries, at a slow pace, / to the port of salvation / that precious cargo.”<sup>95</sup> Toward the end of the tale, she demonstrates this “manly strength”<sup>96</sup> and “excessive vigor” by carrying Brián from a massive fire, after which, in the eighth section, he dies. María outlives him, only dying in the final section when she learns that her son was killed by the indigenous captors. Realizing that her son has not survived and, knowing that her true and only destiny was to be a loving wife and mother, a role she can no longer fulfil, she dies.

However, before this death, the experience with the indigenous captors irrevocably marked María as incapable of returning to civilization, not only because of her contamination, but the possibility of her passing on this contagion to her son. Her maternal role, once placed in proximity to the savagery of the frontier, becomes unthinkable in the new Nation. She is unsuited for returning to Civilization after her physical and sexual contact with barbarism. Redemption is impossible for this fictional mother, along with her son and husband, and, following Echeverría’s narration, she must sacrifice herself. When María initially rescues Brián and he understands the circumstances, he tells her: “María, I am unhappy, / you are no longer Worthy of me. / From the savage clumsiness / it will have withered the purity / of your honor, and stained / your sanctified body / for my affection and your love; / I am no longer given to loving you.”<sup>97</sup> Brián is horrified

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

“sobre sus hombros le carga, / y con vigor desmedido / lleva, lleva, a paso lento, / al puerto de salvamento / aquella preciosa carga”

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

“varonil fortaleza”

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

“María, soy infelice, / ya no eres Digna de mí. / Del salvaje la torpeza / habrá ajado la pureza / de tu honor, y mancillado / tu cuerpo santificado / por mi cariño y tu amor; / ya no me es dado quererte”

at the prospect of miscegenation to the extreme that he is prepared to disavow her if she allowed herself to be raped by her indigenous captors. Faced with this position, María assures Brián that although the Indian chieftain attempted to seduce her, she was able to obtain a knife to kill him, thereby escaping without being violated. Although Brián accepts María, since she has not been tainted sexually, she is ultimately unable to return to society: “Crossing the border, María is located in a space where the rules of civilization disappear and in whose solitudes the liberalizing ruptures are produced, which allows her to integrate into other worlds, the masculine, the indigenous, and even the natural, in an integrating symbiosis.”<sup>98</sup> She is able to evade rape, escape indigenous captivity, slay her foes, summon the physical strength to carry her husband to safety, but her encounter makes her incapable of reincorporating to society, a message made clear by her death in the desert.

In many literary traditions, but particularly the Romanticist on which Foundational Fictions are based, the female body is a symbol of fecundity and possibility for the future. Since María’s feminine body is capable of reproducing criollo children, she and her son serve as a metonym for the country’s future, a future that only exists without indigenous contamination. Although, as Susana Rotker notes, there are few descriptions of María’s physical form, those that directly discuss her body do not echo the references to her as an angelic being that conjure a vision of an *ángel del hogar* (“angel in the house”), the ideal of the devoted wife and mother. When she sets Brián free, “her long hair floats / disheveled, and denote / her fighting spirit / ... She goes, and even her shadow, / like the criminal, astonishes him.”<sup>99</sup> In a striking scene of the poem, she appears

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<sup>98</sup> Fernando Operé, “La cautiva de Echeverría: el trágico señuelo de la frontera,” *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 80, no. 5 (2003): 552.

“Al cruzar la frontera, María queda ubicada en un espacio donde desaparecen las reglas de la civilización y en cuyas soledades se produce la ruptura liberalizadora que le permite integrarse a otros mundos, al masculino, al indígena, e incluso al natural, en una simbiosis integradora”

<sup>99</sup> Echeverría, *La cautiva*.

as a shadow and a criminal, despite the valor she exhibits in her escape. Just like the *indios*, María takes on the characteristics of her desert environment, following the romanticist tendencies of the work. Echeverría describes the environment as barren and inhospitable, however, in reality this “‘desert’ does not mean dry or sterile territory, but rather open and fertile land: it is the immense pampa.”<sup>100</sup> Just as the fertile pampa becomes a desert, María’s fecundity disappears when she enters Indian territory.

Since she has been contaminated by her contact with the *indios*, María is no longer capable of reproducing without passing on her contagion to successive generations through symbolic miscegenation. As someone incapable of increasing the *criollo* population, she is thus unable to contribute to the nationalist project. Therefore, as a wife without a home or family, “[a] hybrid being, at once a slayer of Indians and a loving mother, [María] cannot cross the threshold and reenter a conventional world of domesticity.”<sup>101</sup> Within the context of *La cautiva*, María’s nameless son with Brián represents the only tangible possibility for the Argentine future that Echeverría envisions, a symbolic parallel to the son of la Difunta Correa. But this future is violently ended by the indigenous captors, a direct invocation of the danger posed by the pampas’ original inhabitants, and a key element of women’s fragile defenselessness, immersed in this collapsing frontier. She is an unreliable piece within the assemblage of the Nation, due to the vulnerability and blame represented by her body and her sexuality. María and Brián, however, did not die directly from the actions of the *indios*, but belatedly as a result of their experience. As Rotker notes, “[t]he allegorical implications of the impossibility of *coexisting* with the Other (whether that

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“sus largos cabellos flotan / desgñados, y denotan / de su ánimo batallar /... Ella va, y aun de su sombra, / como el criminal, se asombra”

<sup>100</sup> Susana Rotker, *Captive Women: Oblivion and Memory in Argentina*, trans. Jennifer French (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 83.

<sup>101</sup> Conway, “Gender Iconoclasm and Aesthetics in Esteban Echeverría’s *La cautiva* and the Captivity Paintings of Juan Manuel Blanes,” 123.

Other be Rosas's followers or the Indians) are clear: coexistence leads to the death of the fatherland. Civilization or barbarism. Identity and difference."<sup>102</sup> The *criollos*, especially the women *criollas*, can't coexist with the *indios*, even temporarily, without being indelibly marked as contaminated by the other. More importantly, this contamination runs the risk of being passed down to their children through their educative function within Republican Motherhood. Instead of just tarnishing the women of the Nation, this contact corrupts the Nation's future – its children.

Although Echeverría's work is titled *La cautiva* (the woman captive), with a clear focus on the character of María, she is never able to return to civilization to tell her story. Once María, Brián, and their child have died, Echeverría and his narrator, both representing a man's perspective, are the only ones capable of recounting the tale. As a captive,

“she herself became taboo because of the forbidden racial contact, taboo because the Miranda of the pampa had crossed a cultural frontier and to understand her would oblige the lettered elite to rethink its project of development. To approach her, to allow her to speak, would oblige the political, cultural, and economic elites to see themselves as if from the other side, an operation that was unacceptable because it would introduce nuances into a spectrum where writing defined good and bad as absolutes.”<sup>103</sup>

Her voice is incapable of relaying the narrative because the *cautiva* can never return to civilization. In one of the few instances of speaking dialogue, after saving Brián, a difficult and noble feat, she asks, “Of the beloved homeland of ours / strong shield is your right hand, / and, what is a woman worth?”<sup>104</sup> Even María seems to recognize the illegibility of her voice and question its pertinence to their “beloved homeland.”

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<sup>102</sup> Rotker, *Captive Women*, 82.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>104</sup> Echeverría, *La cautiva*.

“De la amada patria nuestra / escudo fuerte es tu diestra, / y, ¿qué vale una mujer?”

Echeverría uses gender as a tool to guide attitudes toward the supposedly dangerous barbaric influence posed by those who inhabit the pampas— the indigenous peoples and the Federalista forces. *La cautiva*, in its depiction of the female body as a geopolitical site of conflict over the Argentine territory with “her body serv[ing] as a map of exclusions,”<sup>105</sup> contributes to the narrative that national consolidation rooted in miscegenation is impossible because civilization and barbarism are irreconcilable. With its visceral descriptions of the threat posed by the indigenous population, Echeverría appeals to criollos to defend their endangered culture and, therefore, their Nation. In this way, *La cautiva* can be read as a nationalist work that demonstrates the limits of a potential harmonic existence with the native population. When María and her family enter the liminal zone, the frontier between civilization and the *pampa*, they face existential danger from which they are unable to return. Despite María’s best efforts to return herself and her husband to civilization by pursuing an impossible escape, she is powerless to effect change. By crossing the geopolitical frontier, the act’s transgressive nature, even if the act is against her volition, is projected onto María’s body. Even though she is not explicitly blamed, her fate serves as a warning against miscegenation and the projection of the barbarian onto the criolla woman’s body challenges the binaristic reading of Echeverría’s reality.

Examining depictions of gender and maternity in *La Cautiva* provides ample insight into the way that both identity markers are institutionalized in the National identity. María’s contact with the uncontrollable barbarism of the indigenous *interior* marks her irreparably. When she crosses over the boundaries of civilization, she becomes masculine, savage, and uncontrollable, all characteristics considered unbecoming of a woman. However, most importantly for the purpose of this study, María can no longer function as a Republican Mother, her inherent value to the future

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<sup>105</sup> Rotker, *Captive Women*, 2002.

of the State. I argue that her contamination with the unknowable, indigenous barbarism renders her useless to the Nation in this capacity; any education she passed on would orient future citizens toward barbarism, not civilization.

### III. The Civil Wars: A Contextualization of the Legend of la Difunta Correa

This section will move from this negative model of maternity, impossible within the civilized Nation, to that of la Difunta Correa, the example to be followed in order to ensure Argentina's movement away from barbarism. Within this dichotomized perception of Argentina, gender, and indigeneity presented in *La cautiva* and the legend of la Difunta Correa, both *Unitarios* and *Federales* revered women for their contributions to the family unit and to the formation of nationhood.<sup>106</sup> Following the French Revolutionary example of Republican Motherhood, Argentine women embodied a symbolic role as mothers of the nation. By adhering to the traits of a Republican Mother, "dedicated as she was to the nurture of public-spirited male citizens, [a woman] guaranteed the steady infusion of virtue into the Republic."<sup>107</sup> In *Imperial Educación*, a study of motherhood in Latin America during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Genova describes Sarmiento's perspective of Republican Motherhood as a central tool for "civilizing" the Nation, writing that "Sarmiento proposes a new mother for the Argentine republic, one who will raise her children not in the 'barbarous' ways of Hispanic colonial obscurantism but in the bourgeois-republican modernity of northern 'civilization.'"<sup>108</sup> His compatriots also viewed the representation of women,

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<sup>106</sup> Irene S. Coromina, "La mujer en los escritos antirrosistas de Echeverría, Sarmiento y Mármol," *Hispania* 89, no. 1 (March 2006), 14.

<sup>107</sup> Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 11.

<sup>108</sup> Genova, *Imperial Educación*, 102.

in the abstract as a non-diversified demography, as necessary for their childrearing and caregiving, as providing for the future of the nation.

Although both camps considered women important actors in the formation of cultural self-preservation of the state, the *Federales* viewed women as integral to maintaining patriarchal norms, while *Unitarios* tended to consider the subversive possibilities of femininity. Rosas and the Federales maintained strict norms of conduct for women, assuring that they upheld Catholic morality on behalf of the fledgling state. For the *Unitarios*, however, women were “agents of resistance. They became identified as experts in feelings, refusing the trenchant rigor of male domination; they brought values of virtue and family ethics to a land ravaged by fratricidal war.”<sup>109</sup> Through their discourse, the stereotypical daintiness afforded to women served as a counterpoint to the rigor and violence thrust upon their husbands and sons. In this way, *Unitarios* pit innocent femininity against the barbarity of Rosas.<sup>110</sup> Liberal men *and* women experienced the brutal federalist repression, but women had a unique way of subverting it; their emotional protests against Rosas’ paternalism eluded the regular systems of control through violence.<sup>111</sup> Sarmiento invokes this fragility of womanhood in *Facundo*’s depiction of the fictional Severa Villafañe’s attempts to escape Facundo Quiroga. After Facundo becomes enamored with Villafañe, she spends years trying to evade him until Quiroga surprises her, beating her and kicking in her skull. Eventually, Villafañe escapes to a convent in the province of Catamarca, but Quiroga discovers her by chance. At this point in the story, the narrator returns to discussing Facundo’s warfare, leaving the reader to speculate as to Villafañe’s outcome, but implying that she fell victim to Quiroga’s violence. Furthermore, Sarmiento proposes the education of women as part of his idealized future Argentina,

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<sup>109</sup> Masiello, *Between Civilization & Barbarism*, 22.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>111</sup> Coromina, “La mujer en los escritos antirrosistas de Echeverría, Sarmiento y Mármol,” 15.

a possibility for women to contribute to the civilization of their country, as education would “predispose them to be tender and tolerant wives, enlightened and moral mothers, diligent and thrifty heads of households.”<sup>112</sup> Women’s education as a means of furthering the contributions of their sons emerged as a key aspect of the Republican Motherhood of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The appeal to elite values of femininity undermined the caudillo’s driving apart of families and appealed to a nationhood founded on idealized and yet instrumental womanhood. It is noteworthy that each of the foundational Argentine narratives explored here maintains a similar perspective on desirable feminine characteristics in the context of Nation-building that coincide with norms of Republican Motherhood. These same norms will be visible in retellings of the story of la Difunta Correa, from its origins through the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

#### IV. The Origins of the Legend of la Difunta Correa

From the setting of *Facundo*, *La cautiva*, and the Civil Wars emerges the legend of Deolinda Correa,<sup>113</sup> a legend predicated on a delicate femininity unable to protect itself from the external Federalist forces that cause the collapse of her family unit. Correa was a new mother whose husband was forced by Quiroga’s men to join their forces, thereby abandoning his family to perish in the desolate Cuyo Valley.<sup>114</sup> Faced with no other option, Correa, dressed in crimson to

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<sup>112</sup> Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Prospecto de un establecimiento de educación para señoritas* (Paraná: Impresora Argentina, 1942), 6.

Reproduced in English in Elizabeth Garrels, “Sarmiento and the Woman Question: From 1839 to the *Facundo*,” in *Sarmiento, Author of a Nation*, ed. Tulio Halperín Donghi, Iván Jaksic, Gwen Kirkpatrick, and Francine Masiello (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 272.

<sup>113</sup> Her name has not remained consistent through retellings of the legend, but Deolinda Correa is the most popular.

<sup>114</sup> Like her name, the reasons for Correa’s mortal journey through the Cuyo Valley vary from version to version. For this article, I rely on the variant that Chertudi and Newbery (1978) note is the most prevalent.

ally herself with Federales,<sup>115</sup> ventured with her infant son into the desert, where they soon ran out of any supplies. Near the current-day town of Vallecito, Correa summited a hilltop, potentially in search of a water supply, where she laid down and died with her son against her chest. Within days a group of muleteers happened across her body with the infant continuing to nurse on her fecund breast. Her ability to nourish her child, even in death, rendered her miraculous and worthy of a proper burial by the men who found her. The son was ostensibly adopted into a new family, never to be heard of again. I understand the perpetual association of Correa with this son as denoting an affective undermining of *Federalista* violence; in the face of an untenable situation of fratricidal wars, Correa upholds her position as a republican mother, to the extreme point of sacrificing her life for her son's, and the Nation's, future. Although la Difunta Correa's legend is not overtly pro-*Unitario*, the celebration of the protagonist for her subversion of Federalista violence through the continued assertion of her status as mother aligns it with *Unitario* narratives of femininity.

It is notable that, although versions of Correa's legend situate her life during the Civil Wars, she was not a well-known figure until the turn of the century. After her death, which took place sometime between 1830 and the early 1860s (although there are no official documents to corroborate this date), collective memory in the region kept alive an awareness of her story, albeit without a devoted following.<sup>116</sup> There are few written documents with testimonies of her existence predating the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, potentially due to the popularity of oral tradition, with a 1969 study by Susana Chertudi and Josefina Newbery documenting "41 versions of stories about the life, death, and miracles of la Difunta Correa."<sup>117</sup> However, "in the year 1921 eleven versions of the live and

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<sup>115</sup> Early versions have her dressed in *celeste*, the blue of the Argentine flag, to show her alliance with the *Unitarios* and disdain for the *Federales* who took her husband. Over time, this changed to crimson as a protectory measure, making sure that the *Federales* would not take further action against her.

<sup>116</sup> Susana Chertudi and Josefina Newbery, *La Difunta Correa. Temas de Antropología* (Buenos Aires: Huemul, 1978), 82.

<sup>117</sup> Chertudi and Newbery, *La Difunta Correa*, 64.

death of la Difunta Correa were documented, and five about the miracle of the recuperation of the lost animals,” with none existing before this date.<sup>118</sup> Chertudi and Newbery believe that “until the first three decades of the current [20<sup>th</sup>] century, the legend was exclusively transmitted by oral channels.”<sup>119</sup> Mass audiences experienced high rates of illiteracy before industrialization, so the printed word was not as effective in disseminating stories. In Aldo Büntig’s *¿Magia, Religión o Cristianismo?* (1970), the author transcribes the testimony of María Esther Fernández de Álvarez, a woman from San Juan who recounts thirdhand knowledge from an informant with the “real historia” (“real story.”)<sup>120</sup> The informant, Señora Gabriela Rodríguez de Farías, born in 1844, claimed to have learned the story of la Difunta from her mother who was alive when Correa perished and living in a nearby town. The next testimony they could locate came firsthand from Félix Romualdo Álvarez.<sup>121</sup> The author relates a version he had heard as a child more than sixty years earlier, during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Both tales end with the fate of Correa’s son, never commenting on a potential popular devotion. Even the latter, dated to the first decade after her renaissance, does not mention an earlier following. However, the *Cuadernos del Instituto Nacional de Antropología* also include an 1865 text from Pedro D. Quiroga, an unknown San Juan resident, that says, “travelers have complete faith in her miracles and invoke her in their tribulations, and when passing by they never fail to say some prayer or deposit a silver coin in the collection box.”<sup>122</sup> This text shows that there existed some acknowledgement of Correa’s death

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“41 versiones de relatos sobre vida, muerte y milagros de la Difunta Correa”

<sup>118</sup> *Cuadernos del Instituto Nacional de Antropología*, 126.

“En el año 1921 se anotaron 11 versiones sobre vida y Muerte de la Difunta Correa, y 5 sobre el milagro de la recuperación de los animales perdidos”

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

“hasta las tres primeras décadas del siglo actual, la leyenda se ha transmitido exclusivamente por vía oral”

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>121</sup> Félix Romualdo Álvarez, *Una nueva versión sobre la Difunta Correa* (San Juan: Editorial Sanjuanina, 1967).

<sup>122</sup> Quoted in Graziano, *Cultures of Devotion*, 168.

whether there was a devoted following or not. In *Cultures of Devotion*, scholar of popular Catholicism Frank Graziano notes that many early versions of the story do not, in fact, describe the miraculous breastfeeding. Until the 1940s, most describe the baby positioned at her chest, perhaps attempting to suckle, but no production of milk after death. I believe that, without this initial miraculous occurrence, a devoted following based on her status as a popular saint was unlikely; more probably, locals noted the death of a woman nearby and celebrated the ability of her son to survive the inhospitable conditions of the desert during the Civil Wars.

While Correa's death coincides with the Unitarian versus Federalist conflict, the rediscovery of her burial site, which launched a renaissance of her story, corresponds to the era of modernization, especially in the capital of Buenos Aires, some 1000 kilometers, or 625 miles, away. In 1880, Julio Argentino Roca was elected President, a role he held from 1880-1886 and 1898-1904. He undertook a project of modernization via increased foreign investment and European immigration, expansion of public infrastructure, agriculture, and manufacturing, and, most notably, the mass extermination of indigenous populations in Patagonia and Chaco, euphemistically called the Conquest of the Desert. Although this policy did not reach the Cuyo Valley, it continued the broader trend of the subjugation of native peoples in Argentina. The liberalism of Roca, marked by a desire for modernization and industrialization, led the country through positivist ideologies associated with rationalism and progress. Anthropologist María Laura Massolo notes that as part of this newfound order and progress, "[s]uccessive administrations translated modernization into public works – the construction of roads, railroads, administrative buildings – a disciplined army, free public education, and a church that concerned itself with private, spiritual matters rather than with the running of society."<sup>123</sup> However, these

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<sup>123</sup> María Laura Massolo, "Gracias Difunta Correa! Popular Devotion and Tactics of Belonging in Argentina" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1995), 40.

changes mostly affected the elite in the capital, leaving the impoverished inhabitants of the provinces behind. Eventually, the economic and cultural divide led to political alienation.

This schism was furthered by the political and financial interests of those in power. Roca's party, the *Partido Autonomista Nacional*, and the thinkers of the *Generación del '80* sought to expand the industrialization and whitening (a result of the number of the combination of the influx of European immigrants and massacre of indigenous peoples) happening in the capital to the rest of the country. Oligarchs in positions of power in the capital believed that notions of progress went beyond industry; it also included a strengthening of culture and morality. As discussed in the Introduction, nearly a century earlier, political theorist Juan Bautista Alberdi proposed a similar solution: *gobernar es poblar* (to govern is to populate). He believed that an influx of European immigration via the port city of Buenos Aires and a reduction of indigenous peoples would make the Interior more governable and orderly. This entailed a replacement of regional cultures deemed barbaric with the civilization of the capital. The exportation of *porteño* culture and urban industrialization to the interior was one step in "a long tradition of confusing Buenos Aires with the entire country."<sup>124</sup> This centralization and sociocultural modernization created a unified notion of what constituted being Argentine. In the face of a homogenizing sense of *argentinismo*, local cultures, especially those associated with indigenous populations, were overwritten. I believe that, in response to this cultural homogenization, the popular traditions that kept alive legends, like that of la Difunta, belonged to this category.

At Argentina's peak moment of industrialization, why was the population near Vallecito amenable to embracing and amplifying a folktale about a mother during the Civil Wars? As liberalist governments sought to erase the cultures beyond Buenos Aires, a countermovement

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<sup>124</sup> Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina*, 22.

emerged that privileged nativism and rural criollo culture over centralized liberal elitism. This nationalism coexisted with the burgeoning Argentine folklore movement, as they both celebrated a romanticized relationship between rural pueblos, their traditions, and the land owned by the elite. In *The Argentine Folklore Movement: Sugar Elites, Criollo Workers, and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism, 1900-1955*, Argentine historian Oscar Chamosa notes, “[f]olklorists in Latin America... were also drawn by the ideologies of *mestizaje* and *indigenismo*, which, within their own limitations, constituted an alternative to the rising Old World racism.”<sup>125</sup> In the Cuyo Valley region, to the northwest of Buenos Aires and beyond the area majorly affected by the Conquest of the Desert, much of the population was of indigenous heritage. As the capital threatened to displace these groups and traditions, I see their celebration becoming a means of reasserting the importance of collective, unofficial popular cultures.

The happenstance rediscovery of Deolinda Correa’s gravesite in 1898 occurred just as the positivist reign of *porteño* oligarchs was in decline and labor movements were surging, leaving space for the rise of the Argentine folklore movement. Chamosa argues that part of the emerging nationalist movement included the creation and celebration of new national legends, specific to the Argentine context, marked by the disorienting effects of European immigration. These folktales played a key role in the public construction of an Argentine nationhood predicated on autochthonous culture. Furthermore, I believe that local legends, like that of la Difunta, undermined the narrative of *porteño* exceptionalism propagated throughout the rest of the nation. These constructed legends, referred to by Eric Hobsbawm as invented traditions, “seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with

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<sup>125</sup> Oscar Chamosa, *The Argentine Folklore Movement: Sugar Elites, Criollo Workers, and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism, 1900-1955* (Tempe: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 15.

the past.”<sup>126</sup> In the case of la Difunta Correa, local muleteers established her legend at a historical moment when they were in need of a local folk hero to subvert hegemonic narratives from the capital. One night in 1898, lost muleteer don Flavio Zevallos, faced with a disorienting sandstorm, decided to stop for the night at the foot of Pie de Palo, the hill where Correa laid down and died. The following morning, Zevallos found that his livestock had wandered off in different directions. Not knowing how to track them all down, he vowed to la Difunta Correa that he would build her a beautiful mausoleum if she helped him escape the storm with all his lost livestock. When he arose the next morning to find his animals recovered, he swore to spread the word of the miraculous Difunta. According to his testimony, recorded secondhand by his granddaughter Ruth Zevallos, construction of the sanctuary began the following morning.<sup>127</sup>

The help afforded to Flavio Zevallos is considered the first miracle from Correa, apart from the initial post-mortem lactation. Although some were reluctant to follow Zevallos’ lead, la Difunta Correa quickly garnered a following locally. Other muleteers and cattle drivers, who experienced similar treacherous circumstances alone in the desert, identified with the fate of Correa and her son. Worry that dangers will befall those who do not stop to pay homage inspired many to stop at Correa’s burial site, assisted by the expectation that passersby “make an offering... at the sites of any accidental death.”<sup>128</sup> Few recordings of this process exist, but by 1921, there were at least seventeen recorded versions of the legend of Difunta Correa.<sup>129</sup> This amplification of her legend

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<sup>126</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1.

<sup>127</sup> Claudia Grynszpan, *Difunta Correa. Vallecito, San Juan*, (San Juan: GMH, 2018).

<sup>128</sup> Graziano, *Cultures of Devotion*, 169.

<sup>129</sup> Susana Chertudi and Sara Josefina Newbery published the earliest comprehensive study on Correa, *La Difunta Correa. Temas de Antropología*, with five editions published between 1966 and 1978. They chronicle different versions of her story, the earliest testimony appearing quoted in the 1966 edition of the *Cuadernos del Instituto Nacional de Antropología*.

shows a growth in her following, and discussion of her death, throughout the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## V. La Difunta, Peronism, and the Folklore Movement

This section will examine the ways that the sociopolitical conditions during and just preceding the first Peronist administration allowed la Difunta Correa's legend to become a useful vehicle for exploring women's role in the political sphere in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The decades leading up to the 1940s created the conditions necessary for a mass celebration of rural mestizo culture. Chamosa observes that "[t]he rise of folklore began with small steps during the Radical Party era of 1916 to 1930, grew during the conservative period of 1930 to 1943, consolidated during the nationalist military interregnum of 1943 to 1946, and took off during the Peronist decade of 1946 to 1955."<sup>130</sup> Regarding the institutionalization of folklore, under the Radical Party, the Consejo Nacional de Educación within the Ministry of Education worked to compile versions of folktales from around the country, which were published in 1921. All the documentation from this survey now resides in the *Colección de Folklore at the Archivos del Instituto Nacional de Antropología y Pensamiento Latinoamericano* in Buenos Aires that was founded as the *Instituto Nacional de la Tradición* in 1943. Continuing this trend, the conservative governments, all associated with large landownership, established agencies of Argentine culture, such as the National Commission on Museums, Monuments, and Historical Sites, which helped to popularize public performances of folklore, both for public celebrations and for tourism.<sup>131</sup> In the realm of education, the 1940 *Antología folklórica argentina para las escuelas de adultos* contains

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<sup>130</sup> Chamosa, *The Argentine Folklore Movement*, 2-3

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

a reproduction of the 1939 resolution to create the anthology: “For primary school to carry out its nationalist purpose, it is necessary that classroom teaching disseminate the most characteristic displays of our tradition.”<sup>132</sup> Those in power during the Infamous Decade (September 10, 1930-June 4, 1943), a period marked by economic crisis under the Great Depression, mass rural migration to the capital, and political electoral scandal and fraud, relied on a heightened sense of nationalism to unite the country, emphasizing the importance of Catholicism to *argentinidad*. Uniting the discourse of conservative nationalism with that of rural folklore, Chamosa notes that these governments furthered a narrative that rural *criollo* poets, musicians, and playwrights “contributed to this myth with the massive folklore collection that purportedly demonstrated the ancient links between Catholic Christianity and the Argentine soul.”<sup>133</sup> A consolidation of these two narratives of *argentinidad* is visible in the cultural productions of Roque Jacinto Pichetto, who will be returned to momentarily in discussion of representations of la Difunta Correa’s legend in popular cultural productions of the Peronist era.

Correa’s legend had spread throughout the country earlier in the decade, a process that I believe was helped by the ambulatory nature of her following and oral and popular culture overall; however, her devotion in the capital reached a much larger mass, beginning with the Infamous Decade. The Great Depression coupled with increased reliance on imported products resulted in scarcity of employment for agricultural workers in the interior. As a mainstay of economic life in the San Juan Province and its surroundings, many farmers, ranchers, and gauchos, now an internal flux of migration, sought refuge in Buenos Aires, where industrialization had created employment opportunities in factories. Domestic migration from San Juan increased after their devastating

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<sup>132</sup> *Antología folklórica para las escuelas de adultos* (Buenos Aires: Soc. Anón. de Impresiones Generales, 1940), 8.

<sup>133</sup> Chamosa, *The Argentine Folklore Movement*, 117.

earthquake in 1944 when life there became untenable to a further extent.<sup>134</sup> The physical dispersion of her devotees lent, even more, a visibility to her legend. I see these circumstances as pivotal for the explosion of cultural productions depicting la Difunta Correa, especially those that highlighted her marginalized status and providence from a region with mestizo and remnant indigenous populations.

I would like to underscore that, even though la Difunta symbolized regional interests in representation within the national imaginary, she did not come to represent the indigenous and mestizo heritage of the Cuyo Valley until the movement toward *Peronismo*. Previously referred to as *Justicialismo*, Peronism is the political party associated with Juan Domingo Perón, former President of Argentina, and his wife Eva Duarte de Perón, better known as Evita, who is the subject of the following chapter. As a party characterized by championing proletarian issues, Peronism reflects a broader populist movement benefitting the working classes through sociopolitical reforms. Perón became a political figure in 1943 when the military coup d'état unseated the corrupt President Ramón Castillo. As a member of the Armed Forces and collaborator in the coup, Perón garnered enough support to become the Secretary of Labor and Social Security and, later, the Minister of War under the military government of 1943-1946. This change in governance had been preceded by the Infamous Decade. When Perón came to power, especially during his first two terms as President (1946-1952; 1952-1955), his main supporters were these new urban dwellers who had experienced great hardship at the hands of corrupt governments and their implementation of import substitution industrialization. An important element to consider for my analysis is that

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<sup>134</sup> Gustavo Busso, "Migración interna y desarrollo en Argentina a inicios del Siglo XXI" (presentation, Seminario internacional sobre "Migración y desarrollo: el caso de América Latina," CEPAL, Santiago de Chile, August 7-8, 2007).

Peronism came to stand for the rights of *el pueblo* (the people), those who had not felt represented before.

The *pueblo*, mainly its lower classes, stood for much more than political representation; Peronism invoked the proletariat and all the cultural aspects of the working classes. Scholar María Eugenia Santiago puts forth that Peronist appeals to the *pueblo* refers to those who are not officially citizens, but “push to be part of the civic political structure,” who are gaining political consciousness.<sup>135</sup> While other governments, like that of Sarmiento, had embodied elitism, separating themselves from the masses, Peronism celebrated the quotidian. As I will return to expand on in Chapter 2, Perón and Evita invoked the average Argentine, with his or her daily struggles frequently in speeches. Once released from his imprisonment on Martín García Island on October 17, 1945, Perón declared himself to be at the “comprehensive service of the authentic Argentine people,” using the term *pueblo*.<sup>136</sup> On the second anniversary of this event, Perón’s speech at the Plaza de Mayo used notably similar imagery. Speaking of the accomplishments of his administration, his wife, and himself, Perón notes that, “socially, we have secured the order and the evolution that the country needed, and we are consolidating that evolution based on the inalienable rights of the people to live with dignity.”<sup>137</sup> This focus on the dignity reflects a key promise of the Peronist platform: returning “pride, self-respect, and dignity” to the Argentine

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<sup>135</sup> María Eugenia Santiago, “El concepto de pueblo en el primer peronismo. Mito y doctrina” (presentation, IV Congreso de Estudios sobre el Peronismo, Red de Estudios sobre el Peronismo, Tucumán, Argentina, September 18-20, 2014).

“presiona para formar parte de la estructura política ciudadana”

<sup>136</sup> Juan Domingo Perón, “Discurso 17 de octubre de 1945,” in María Eugenia Santiago, “El concepto de pueblo en el primer peronismo. Mito y doctrina” (presentation, IV Congreso de Estudios sobre el Peronismo, Red de Estudios sobre el Peronismo, Tucumán, Argentina, September 18-20, 2014).

“servicio integral del auténtico pueblo argentino”

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

“En lo social, hemos asegurado el orden y la evolución que el país necesitaba, y estamos afianzando esa evolución basada en los derechos inalienables que tiene el pueblo de vivir con dignidad”

working class.<sup>138</sup> From the perspective of Peronist supporters, Perón and Evita, through formal governmental channels and the Eva Perón Foundation, commit themselves to upholding the dignity of working-class life (a topic returned to in the subsequent chapter).<sup>139</sup> An integral means of promoting dignity in everyday life, on top of providing the economic conditions for survival, was funding cultural activities for families, especially impoverished women and children.<sup>140</sup> Both Evita and Juan sought institutional channels for legitimizing and expanding aid for rural populations, principally *mestizos*, and the working classes more broadly. This included an amplification of cultural agencies aimed at preserving the traditional Argentine patrimony, including rural folklore like the legend of la Difunta Correa.

In 1947, Perón set forth the *Plan Quinquenal* (Five-Year Plan) to develop the economy, institute social reforms, and protect Argentine culture. It also encompassed the documentation of traditions, which would be made readily available to citizens, both foreign and domestic, along with the creation of government agencies to carry out these goals. Perón's Plan executed the refoundation of the Institute of Tradition as the Institute of Tradition *and Folklore*; community outreach by the National Board of Education by offering folklore classes and performances, including concerts at the famous Teatro Cervantes in Buenos Aires; and the creation of a Division of Cultural Policy which housed the newfound National Commission of Folklore and Tradition. The Peronist government also issued significantly increased funding for research, school activities, and national holiday celebrations having to do with folklore. According to Chamosa, "the Peronist

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<sup>138</sup> Silvia Sigal, "Del Peronismo como promesa," *Desarrollo Económico* 48, no. 190/191 (July-December 2008), 276.

"el orgullo, el respeto propio y la dignidad"

<sup>139</sup> Edgar Zapata, "El peronismo representó la dignidad del trabajador," Noticias, Universidad Nacional de Rosario, published August 11, 2008, <https://dai.unr.edu.ar/noticia/910/edgar-zapata-el-peronismo-represento-la-dignidad-del-trabajador->.

<sup>140</sup> Chamosa, *The Argentine Folklore Movement*, 166.

movement enabled workers to articulate a new social citizenship and a common identity based on class and political allegiance... [T]he welfare state also implied that workers enjoyed a boon of new services such as education, tourism, and entertainment, which transformed working-class men and women into active participants in the mass cultural market.”<sup>141</sup> Overall, it is noteworthy that the Peróns elevated the culture of the masses to a national discourse, sometimes absorbing it into the government itself, thereby endorsing its celebration by the popular classes themselves.

I assert that elements of this discourse become apparent in representations of la Difunta Correa, which depart significantly from earlier portrayals. These, mostly images on religious icons and other materials, tended to show Correa as a light-skinned, and sometimes fair-haired, woman.



Figure 2.1 *Un episodio de la fiebre amarilla en Buenos Aires* (*An Episode of Yellow Fever in Buenos Aires*) by Juan Manuel Blanes (1870)

Graziano argues that the standardized image of Difunta Correa was based on the woman and child shown in the renowned painting *Un episodio de la fiebre amarilla en Buenos Aires* (*An Episode of Yellow Fever in Buenos Aires*, 1870) by Uruguayan artist Juan Manuel Blanes.<sup>142</sup>

The portrait of Eugenia María de Montijo (1826-1920) – the wife of Napoleon III – shows a family ravaged by an outbreak of yellow fever. She lays lifeless on the floor of a bedroom, her limbs warped in the same way characteristic of Correa. Doctors enter

<sup>141</sup> Chamosa, *The Argentine Folklore Movement*, 166.

<sup>142</sup> Graziano, *Cultures of Devotion*, 180.

and are shocked to see her infant child alive, as the father is visibly dead in the background as well. The baby touches her breasts, reminiscent of pre-1940s histories of la Difunta Correa before the miraculous lactation became an integral aspect. While the dominant iconography shows the process of breastfeeding, the back cover of the *Difunta Correa* magazine still prints a similar image to the original painting, according to Graziano.<sup>143</sup>

I observe that the most obvious analogy, especially given the status of Catholicism as the official state religion in Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America, is the Virgin Mary. Christian iconography has long depicted Mary with her infant Christ nursing at her breast. Both mothers offer their breasts as symbols of love and protection to their sons, but also their religious followers. In these tales, as in others “[t]he breast and its milk have gone far beyond their literal meanings to become symbols of maternal care generally, now both corporal and spiritual.”<sup>144</sup> A medieval legend related to the Christian figure of Mary Magdalene, as recorded in *The Golden Legend*, the circa 1260 collection of stories depicting the lives of saints compiled by Jacobus de Voragine and the most widely-read book of the time besides the Bible,<sup>145</sup> draws further parallels to the tale of Correa’s death. After Magdalene helped a governor and his wife conceive of a child, the mother dies during premature childbirth en route to Rome to speak with St. Peter. The mother “expired as she brought forth her son... [and] the newborn groped about seeking the comfort of his mother’s breasts.”<sup>146</sup> Although the others on board demanded the governor throw her corpse overboard, he insists they dock so he can leave his wife’s body with “the child with its head between the mother’s breasts,”<sup>147</sup> only returning two years with the expectation of finally bury them. To his surprise, the

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<sup>143</sup> I have not been able to find records or locate any copies of *la Revista Difunta Correa*.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>145</sup> Jacobus De Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), xi.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 378.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 378.

child had been nursing at her breast to sustain himself throughout the two years. When he embraced his child, he exclaimed “O Mary Magdalene, how happy I would be, how well everything would have turned out for me, if my wife were alive and able to return home with me! Indeed I know, I know and believe beyond a doubt, that having given us this child and kept him alive for two years on this rock, you could now, by your prayers, restore his mother to life and health,” a miracle that she does confer as a reward for the husband’s conversion to Christianity.<sup>148</sup> I would like to note that each of these stories evoke norms associated with *marianismo*, a term coined by Evelyn P. Stevens as “the cult of female spiritual superiority which teaches that women are semi-divine, morally superior to and spiritually stronger than men.”<sup>149</sup> I believe that this veneration afforded women for their ability to produce life and conform to feminine virtues of purity, faithfulness, abnegation, and self-sacrifice is embodied in representations of the breast as protection for the innocent child by invoking the divine nature of sacrificial motherhood.

Indeed, most historical parallels to the story of la Difunta Correa come from European religion and mythology, but a few can be traced back to indigenous lore. As cultural productions depicting la Difunta Correa began to emerge during the 1940s, her representations started to include aspects of the indigenous and mestizo cultures native to the Cuyo Valley. A Huarpe<sup>150</sup> myth from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century tells an indigenous version of divine lactation in which it is the father who produces milk, as documented by Catalina Teresa Michieli, a historian of the Huarpe people, an indigenous group native to the Cuyo area.<sup>151</sup> As the man’s wife did not survive the process of childbirth, he held the child to his chest in despair, knowing the newborn would not live long.

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 379.

<sup>149</sup> Evelyn P. Stevens, “El marianismo: la otra cara del machismo en América Latina,” trans. Martí Soler, *Diálogos: Artes, Letras, Ciencias humanas* 10, no. 1 (January-February 1974), 17.

<sup>150</sup> The Huarpes, also known as Warpes, are an indigenous group native to the Cuyo region of Argentina.

<sup>151</sup> Catalina Teresa Michieli, *Los Huarpes protohistóricos*, (San Juan: Instituto de Investigaciones Arqueológicas y Museo, 1983), 208-209; Gabriela Saidon, *Santos Ruterros* (Buenos Aires: Tusquets Editores, 2011), 149.

Other scholars have documented similar perceptions toward the Huarpe influence on the legend of la Difunta Correa. In *Santos rutereros. De la Difunta Correa al Gauchito Gil*, journalist Gabriela Saidon interviews Saúl Quiroga and his daughter Natalia, direct descendants of caudillo Facundo Quiroga. Saúl, both an atheist and a devotee to la Difunta, relates a similar version to that written by Michieli, noting specifically that he views la Difunta’s story as a fusion of the Huarpe myth with the tragic deaths of Catholic martyrs.<sup>152</sup> The resurgence of this syncretism under the Perón administrations reflects the incorporation of indigenous and mestizo populations into the social citizenship described by Chamosa.

It is important to acknowledge that beliefs and traditions from other indigenous populations also appear in cultural productions about la Difunta Correa during the Peronist era. Although the Huarpe people are an important indigenous group in the Cuyo Valley, before European conquest, their territory frequently experienced encroachment from neighboring populations, especially the dominant Incas to the north.<sup>153</sup> Inca traditions and belief systems, therefore, are not uncommon in northwestern Argentina. Specifically, Nemer Barud’s play *Deolinda Correa* (1967) roots the history of la Difunta in an Inca tradition of celebrating the Pachamama, a goddess revered in both



Figure 2.2 Photo taken by the author at the *Santuario de la Difunta Correa* in Vallecito, San Juan, Argentina. The plaque reads “Thank you Difunta Correa for having given us Luis Dario”



Figure 2.3 Photo taken by the author at the *Santuario de la Difunta Correa* in Vallecito, San Juan, Argentina. The plaque reads “Thank you Difunta Correa for bringing me into this world, Emilia”

<sup>152</sup> Saidon, *Santos Rutereros*, 149.

<sup>153</sup> Michieli, *Los Huarpes protohistóricos*, 103.

the Incan and the Aymara (an indigenous group native to the Andes in Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina) cultures. Pachamama is the World Mother or Mother Earth; within the cosmos, she is the goddess responsible for the harvest and fertility. I would like to underscore that, regarding fertility there is a clear correlation to Correa, a woman renowned for her copious breastmilk. Many women visit *El Santuario de la Difunta Correa* in Vallecito to plead for help in conceiving children, leaving placards thanking her for fulfilling their prayers, such as those pictured below.

Barud's play *Deolinda Correa* is explicit in the comparison it draws between la Difunta and the Pachamama, tracing a clear indigenous, yet hybrid, inheritance for Correa's mythology. The prologue, which was written by the author and meant to be read aloud by the narrator before the play's production, puts forth, "Perhaps 'La Difunta Correa' is the reincarnation of Mother Earth. The personification of the Pachamama."<sup>154</sup> The narrator, accompanied by unnamed men and women describing the *sanjuanino* nature, then repeats this sentiment during the introduction, using very similar phrasing: "Perhaps Deolinda Correa is the reincarnation of the Pachamama; of the earth she walks."<sup>155</sup> Once the play's action begins, other characters express their devotion to Correa for her performance of miracles. Juana, one of the townspeople, relates that another character, Juan, "says that you are a saint."<sup>156</sup> Shortly after, Deolinda replies, "And Juan should have told you that I cured his maggoty leg,"<sup>157</sup> acknowledging her status as a performer of miracles.

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<sup>154</sup> Nemer Barud, *Deolinda Correa* (San Juan: Self-Published, 1967), 10.

"Acaso 'La Difunta Correa' sea la reencarnación de la Madre Tierra. La personificación de la Pachamama"

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 14.

"Acaso Deolinda Correa sea la reencarnación de la Pachamama; de la tierra que anda"

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 25.

"Juan dice que usted es una santa"

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 26.

"Y el Juan debe de haberte dicho que le curé la pierna agusanada"

Later, Juan echoes his devotion when he says, “I love you, Deolinda. I love you. You are the mother of everyone.”<sup>158</sup> This last statement connects Deolinda’s worship and her miracles to her position as a mother, not just to her own child but to everyone, just like the indigenous belief in the Pachamama, the World Mother. In moving from la Difunta Correa as a reincarnation of the Pachamama directly to her invocations as a saint, Barud clearly identifies the antecedent influences of her legend as Catholicism and indigenous tradition and highlights its inherently syncretic nature.

I contend *Deolinda Correa* furthers the roots of the legend in indigeneity with references to holistic remedies and other pre-Columbian beliefs. At the beginning of the second act, a new character enters the drama: Huazihul. In Huarpe legend, Huazihul is the name given to spirit of the mountain. In the stage notes for Huazihul’s entry to the scene, Barud specifies, “The character’s stature should seem supernatural.”<sup>159</sup> The Pachamama is not part of a monotheistic tradition, however, therefore I believe the inclusion of other supernatural entities situates her, and Deolinda’s, worship within a more holistic indigenous spirituality. Huazihul speaks to Deolinda throughout the first act about their connection to nature, then disappears, only to return at the beginning of Act II “to make up the sleeping earth with my breath; to inaugurate the high pedestal of the spring; to sow suns and breads in this region of silence.”<sup>160</sup> He and Deolinda root their power, their ability to perform miracles, in their connection to the earth, the World Mother, the Pachamama.

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 49.

“Te quiero, Deolinda. Te quiero. Sos la santa madrecita de todos”

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 42.

“La estatura del personaje debe parecer sobrenatural”

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 51.

“a despertar con mi aliento la tierra dormida; a inaugurar el alto pedestal de la primavera; a sembrar de soles y de panes esta comarca de silencio”

Furthermore, and more importantly for my study, Barud highlights the particularly subversive nature of la Difunta's, and therefore la Pachamama's, spiritual following by positioning Deolinda in conflict with the Catholic Church, as embodied by a priest who accuses Deolinda of heresy. The parish priest first appears when he comes to Deolinda's home to speak with her mother. Deolinda excuses herself and when she returns, she remarks,

DEOLINDA. – Excuse me. I thought you had already left...

PRIEST. – I can leave, if you like.

DEOLINDA. – That's fine, father. It seems that you have a grudge against me. You don't like me? Houses have their occupations and mass is only heard on Sundays.

PRIEST (*severe*). – And you are an insolent little brat who has to correct herself if you don't want Got to punish you.<sup>161</sup>

Deolinda's mother and the priest express concern that she is not abiding by societal and religious norms. Due to her perceived aberrant behavior, the parish priest inquires about Deolinda's history of confession:

PRIEST. – Has it been long since you have confessed?

DEOLINDA. – I don't have any [sins] that you could understand and that's why I don't confess them.

PRIEST. – And now you treat me like an ignoramus.

DEOLINDA. – He who doesn't know isn't ignorant, but he who doesn't want to know is. For you I am a sinner. A little less than a witch. What do you want me to confess to you? That I like to sing. That many times I get angry with my mother because she sends me to the kitchen, or she has me stirring the frying pan for hours....<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 27-8.

“DEOLINDA – Disculpe. Creí que ya se había ido...”

PÁRROCO. – Puedo marcharme, si te parece.

DEOLINDA. – Bien haya, padre. Parece que me tiene ojeriza. ¿No le caigo bien? Las casas tienen sus ocupaciones y la misa se oye sólo los domingos.

PÁRROCO (*severo*). – Y vos sos una mocosita atrevida que tiene que corregirse si no querés que Dios te castigue”

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 28-9.

“PÁRROCO. – ¿Hace mucho que no te confiesas?”

DEOLINDA. – Nada tengo que usted pueda entender y por eso no las confieso.

PÁRROCO. – Y ahora me tratas de ignorante.

DEOLINDA. – No es ignorante el que no sabe, sino el que no quiere saber. Para usted soy una pecadora. Poco menos que una bruja. ¿Qué quiere que le confiese? Que me gusta cantar. Que muchas veces me enojo con mi madre porque me manda a la cocina o me tiene horas revolviendo la paila...”

When the priest confronts Deolinda for not participating in confession, she responds that she knows he considers her a “sinner” for resisting Catholic traditions, and moreover, nearly a “witch.” Coming from a priest, an accusation of being a witch is severe, as it “meant, above all, the process, actions, results, and powers relating to making a pact with the devil.”<sup>163</sup> These European conceptualizations of “witchcraft came to the Americas as a multipronged weapon of imperialism, a conception of non-Christian beliefs not as separate worldviews but as manifestations of evil and the reigning power of the devil over Indigenous peoples... suggest[ing] the imperialist worldview of civilization versus barbarism, good versus evil.”<sup>164</sup> By criticizing Deolinda, a figure already established as of indigenous tradition, for being a sinner and witch, I contend that the priest continues a tradition of demonizing indigeneity and difference as deviating from “civilization.” In the same moment that Deolinda acknowledges the perspective of her as a heretic, she also admits to feeling anger, an emotion not regularly tolerated in women, who are instead expected to be docile. Moreover, her anger comes from being confined to stereotypically feminine roles, like cooking, a further alienation of societal expectations. Therefore, Deolinda rejects the duties within the family that are traditionally associated with women and instead sets out to use her miracles to help other townspeople. The priest condemns her miracle working, deeming it heretical to detract from the church:

PRIEST. – But it is heresy to make these poor ignoramuses forget about the church with these things you do that they call miracles.

DEOLINDA. – I know the weeds of the mountains and you the book of prayers.

PRIEST. – It’s not just the weeds. They come to you and already believe.

DEOLINDA. – May the same thing happen to you. This will be your miracle.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Nicole von Germeten, “Witchcraft in Colonial Latin America,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedias, Latin American History*, published December 22, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.432>.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Barud, *Deolinda Correa*, 29.

“PÁRROCO. – Pero es una herejía hacer que estos pobres ignorantes se olviden de la iglesia con esas cosas que hacés y que ellos llaman milagros.

DEOLINDA. – Yo conozco los yuyos de la sierra y usted su libro de oraciones.

The invocation of heresy regarding Deolinda recalls the church's rejection of la Difunta as a false saint. In particular, her allusion to "the weeds of the mountains" refers to the indigenous convention of using herbal remedies for medicinal and religious practices, as witches do, as well. Barud's *Deolinda Correa* highlights the subversive nature of la Difunta's worship, tying her subversiveness to indigeneity.

While the historian and folklorist León Benarós' 1959 collection of poetry *Romancero argentino* does not directly compare la Difunta to an indigenous deity, it is written in a style evocative of rural mestizo traditions. In his brief introduction, Benarós describes the aim of his work: "These verses want to imitate the people's voice; the highest one, not the one that infers vulgarity and tastelessness... I proclaim in this way, with all respect, an anonymous patronage: that of our traditional song books."<sup>166</sup> In particular, I see the invocation of "the people's voice" as harkening back to the collective *el pueblo* used by the Peróns. By associating his poetry with *el pueblo*, Benarós, himself born in the Huarpe province of San Luis that neighbors San Juan, generates an alliance with the rural working class who are typically looked down upon by elite *porteños*, as well as by the local elites. Furthermore, he identifies his style as being influenced by "our traditional songbooks." In this case, the pronoun "our" most likely refers to that of the working-class *pueblo* from the interior of the country. But "our" could also be interpreted as indicating a collective Argentine tradition, the narrative furthered by the governments of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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PÁRROCO. – Es que no son sólo los yuyos. Te ven y ya creen.

DEOLINDA. – Haga que a usted le pase lo mismo. Ese será su milagro"

<sup>166</sup> Benarós, *Romancero argentino*, 14.

"Estas trovas quieren imitar la voz del pueblo; la más alta, no la que le infiere vulgaridad y chabacanería... Proclamo así, con todo respeto, un padrino anónimo: el de nuestros cancioneros tradicionales"

The most notable aspect of *Romancero argentino* is its adherence to a style of traditional folkloric poetry. According to *Confluencias culturales en el folklore argentino* by Augusto Raul Cortazar, to be classified as “folkloric,” something must be “in addition to popular, traditional, collective, empirical, functional.”<sup>167</sup> The genre of “folklore” music and poetry was originally called “native music,” but reached broader popularity by the late 1930s.<sup>168</sup> This style of poetry is most obviously associated with the gauchesque genre, but its oral tradition is heavily influenced by the indigenous roots of the gauchos. It’s prescient to note that since the indigenous practice of passing down stories through oral tradition often includes song, the two categories are conflated here, taking the lyrics of folkloric music as verses of poetry. *Romancero argentino* contains a poem entitled “La Difunta Correa,” which most closely resembles the conventions of the popular *vidalita*, a poem structured into verses of eight syllables each. “La Difunta Correa” takes the form of twenty-nine stanzas, each containing four octosyllabic lines. While *vidalita* meter usually abides by trochees, “La Difunta Correa” mixes trochees and iambs, perhaps due to the influence of iambic meter’s popularity in Europe.

I assert that the content of “La Difunta Correa” correlates to its form; both highlight a mestizo character unique to the interior of Argentina. The first line of the first stanza situates the narrative in the Cuyo Valley:

“There is no heart in San Juan  
that, as hardened as it may be,  
has not felt the death  
of la difunta Correa.”<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Augusto Raul Cortazar, *Confluencias culturales en el folklore argentino* (Buenos Aires: Institución cultural española, 1944), 48.

“además de popular, tradicional, colectivo, empírico, funcional”

<sup>168</sup> Chamosa, *The Argentine Folklore Movement*, 134.

<sup>169</sup> Benarós, *Romancero argentino*, 35.

“No hay corazón en San Juan / que, por curtido que sea, / no haya sentido la muerte / de la difunta Correa.”

Throughout the poem there are further references to the region – “Angaco,”<sup>170</sup> a department in the San Juan Province; “Chacabuco,”<sup>171</sup> a nearby town on the Chilean side of the Argentina-Chile border; “Vallecito”;<sup>172</sup> and “Pie de Palo,”<sup>173</sup> the mountain where la Difunta was buried. Imagery of nature specific to the area achieves the same end. Chamosa describes the genre of “native music” or “folklore music” (and thereby, folklore poetry) as being comprised of “songs that reflected the criollo... way of life and evoked a pastoral landscape set in contrast to urban Argentina.”<sup>174</sup> When in the narrative Correa’s father and husband are taken by Facundo Quiroga’s forces, Benarós compares her to an “urpila,”<sup>175</sup> a small bird from the Andean region also called a picui ground dove. As she begins to face danger in the desert without a man’s protection, the author describes “aves de carnicería,”<sup>176</sup> a rural way of saying “birds of prey,” as circling her ranch, waiting for her to fall prey to them. Benarós also conjures imagery of fauna typical to indigenous poetry. The “chañar,”<sup>177</sup> a tree indigenous to the Andean area and known for its vivid yellow flowers, appears in the fifteenth stanza as Correa begins to fall over from deliria after a long period of walking through the desert. I interpret these allusions as situating the reader within a specific rural context, without even considering the plot of Correa’s death being tied to a particularly *sanjuanino* mythology.

However, I believe that Benarós’ work is not exclusively an assertion of Chamosa’s understanding of *localismo* and regional folklore, but a legacy of syncretism. The title of the work firmly grounds its poetry in a tradition of hispanism – the term *romancero* refers to a collection of

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>174</sup> Chamosa, *The Argentine Folklore Movement*, 135.

<sup>175</sup> Benarós, *Romancero argentino*, 36.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 37.

folk ballads sung in Spanish, evoking tales of chivalric romance or conflicts from the Spanish Inquisition. The association of an otherwise rural and indigenous collection of poetry with a classical Spanish genre alludes to the Iberian influence over Argentina's culture. Furthermore, I note that the qualification of the work as a romancero *argentino* alludes to a sense of hybridization of indigenous cultures with long-established Spanish form to generate a uniquely Argentine patrimony.

This local, syncretic patrimony was officially institutionalized under the Perón government with the founding of the *Fundación Cementerio Vallecito* in 1948 under Ley 1300. Up until this point, the *Santuario* had been administered and maintained by Vallecito locals who were devotees to la Difunta. Under the new administration, run by “the mayor, the priest and the justice of the peace of the city of Caucete, and four ‘*personas caracterizadas*’ (well-respected persons) who would be nominated by the Executive Power,”<sup>178</sup> the *Santuario* was expanded – a new chapel was built, along with multiple smaller sites for particular gifts, such as diplomas and wedding dresses; and the grave site was converted into a renovated mausoleum, complete with a portrait covering the coffin. Although the Foundation did not officially use the name of la Difunta, its codification as a government body served as a legitimation of a previously informal, popular religious practice. In sum, the modifications made to the legend of la Difunta from the rise of Peronism until the death of Perón shows the malleability of popular traditions to fit different time periods.

The resurgence in the potential indigeneity of la Difunta echoes and responds to the Peronist era's questioning of who merits citizenship and civic participation. In the case of la Difunta Correa, the mooring of this interrogation to a maternal myth that serves as an unconventional foundational fiction is keenly relevant. As the Republican Mother is the ultimate

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<sup>178</sup> Massolo, *Gracias Difunta Correa!*, 73.

embodiment of the propagation of citizenship, questioning the *criollismo* of this myth inherently brings into question the standards of *argentinitismo*. In particular, I believe examining *argentinitismo* through the lens of a mother has an interestingly gendered aspect. In disputing standards of citizenship centered on *criollismo* by means of a feminine interlocutor, I argue that it inherently brings into question the gendered nature of citizenship, as well.

## VI. The 1976-1983 Military Junta and the *Desaparecidos*

While the previous section examined the representations of la Difunta as a representative of syncretism and *argentinidad* leading up to and during the Perón administrations, in this section I will now turn my attention to her politicization regarding the disappearance of 30,000 people under the Military Dictatorship. With the rise of authoritarianism leading toward the Military Junta that was in power 1976-1983, I contend that images like that of la Difunta lost the evocation of an indigenous *argentinidad* and instead highlighted the violence of her death to imbue it with political meaning. In 1955, in the middle of Perón's second presidential term, which was supposed to last 1952-1958, the military conducted a coup known as the *Revolución Libertadora*<sup>179</sup> that forced Perón into exile. While living in exile, Argentina underwent multiple governments, both civilian-led and militaristic, pro- and anti-Peronist. For most of his exile, participation in and discussion of Peronism was outlawed. In fact, President Arturo Illia's (1963-1966) attempts to legalize Peronism resulted in his own overthrow via a military coup. In Perón's absence and after Evita's death in 1952 to cancer, her embalmed body remained an iconic image, sometimes compared to that of la

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<sup>179</sup> This translates to "Liberating Revolution" but also references the early Argentine *libertadores*, the principal leaders of the Latin American wars of independence against Spain. By invoking heroic icons of early Argentina, leaders of the military coup attempted to discursively situate themselves in a tradition of rejecting tyrannical leadership.

Difunta. *Peronismo* and the cult of Evita remained popular, with ardent Peronists clandestinely showing their support by wearing small floral forget-me-not pins on their lapels<sup>180</sup>. Even in exile, many Argentines continued to support Perón's reelection and the Peronist revolution, *la tercera posición* (the third position).

Perón was reelected to a third term in 1973, with his new wife Isabel Martínez de Perón serving as Vice President. A year later, Juan Perón died, leaving Isabel to take over the presidency. After multiple leaves-of-absence in 1974 due to Isabel's own health, her leadership suffered perceptions of illegitimacy and inefficacy, especially among the Armed Forces. Finally, in 1976, a military coup overthrew her destabilized government, beginning the dictatorship officially termed the *Proceso de Reorganización Social*. Throughout the *Proceso*, state and military actors forcibly detained, tortured, and disappeared an estimated 30,000 people. For women, particularly, some of the violence inflicted upon them "included rape, insertion of harmful objects into the vagina, electric shocks to breasts and genitals, and other forms of sexual degradation, humiliation, and bodily and psychological harm."<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons) *Nunca Más* (Never Again), published under the presidency of Raúl Alfonsín just following the dictatorship, reports this torture, as well as the fact that pregnant women often had their newborns confiscated to be clandestinely adopted into families supportive of the dictatorship. These "repressors who took the disappeared children from their homes, or who seized mothers on the point of giving birth, were making decisions about people's lives in the same cold-blooded way that booty is distributed in

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<sup>180</sup> This imagery explicitly reminds the wearer not to forget their loyalty to Peronism, while drawing a connection between this ideology and *Argentinismo*, as the light blue and yellow undoubtedly allude to the colors of the Argentine flag. Furthermore, the name "*flor no me olvides*" ("forget-me-not") explicitly reminds the wearer to remember the Peróns, despite the prohibition of discussing them.

<sup>181</sup> Barbara Sutton, *Bodies in Crisis: Culture, Violence, and Women's Resistance in Neoliberal Argentina* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970), 136.

war. Deprived of their identity and taken away from their parents,... a new type of torment was conceived.”<sup>182</sup> In this context, I assert that a dead mother’s body, like that of la Difunta Correa, continuing to care for her child postmortem takes on a lugubrious meaning.

Although the Junta-led dictatorship began in 1976, the violent repression that became a hallmark of the dictatorial period began under Isabel Perón. A few months into her presidency, Perón enacted a string of legislation eroding constitutional protections to undermine the “subversive” Montoneros, communists, and other left-wing groups. Censorship and disappearances escalated, with the paramilitary death squad the Argentine Anticommunist Alliance killing nearly 300 people by the end of 1974, and many more before the end of Perón’s presidency.<sup>183</sup> While the tumult of the 1976 coup marked a discrete transition from democracy to a military junta, the bloodshed of Perón’s government served as a prelude to the violence that would follow.

While Catholicism had been the institutional religion of Argentina since the founding of the nation, the ties between the Church and the government intensified under the junta. Although many of the *desaparecidos* themselves were, in fact, catholic, those in positions of authority within the Church sought to preserve their influence over national policy by supporting the continued disappearance of subversives.<sup>184</sup> For this investigation’s consideration of non-canonized saints, it is pertinent to note that the expulsion of subversives included those who “misinterpreted” the Catholic doctrine as well as those who worshiped uncanonized figures.

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<sup>182</sup> Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (CONADEP), *Nunca Más* (1984).

<sup>183</sup> Carlos Fernando López de la Torre, “La Alianza Anticomunista Argentina. Análisis de su trayectoria y articulaciones represivas,” *Estudios Sociales Del Estado* 6, no. 12 (2020): 157.

<sup>184</sup> For further discussion, see sociologist Gustavo Morello’s *The Catholic Church and Argentina’s Dirty War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

It is important to take into account that at the beginning of the dictatorship, which officially lasted from 1976 to 1983, the Military Junta made worship of la Difunta Correa, along with other subversive figures like Evita, illegal due to her denunciation by the Catholic Church as heretical. In other words, la Difunta Correa's and Evita's imaginaries and cultural legacies seem to converge. Many devotees lobbied the Church to officially install Correa as a saint, but since there was no concrete proof of Correa's existence, there was no case for canonization or beatification. As a result, any worship of her and the supposed miracle was celebration of a figure unrecognizable by the Church as a saint. During the *Proceso*, the name the *Junta Militar* assigned to itself, according to Massolo, "the armed forces needed the support of the church to legitimize their mission as defenders of the Motherland."<sup>185</sup> As the Catholic Church saw the devotion to Correa as a superstition plaguing the popular classes and undermining the Church's authority, they formally declared their opposition in the declaration that emerged from the 1976 Conference of Argentine Bishops. Regarding popular saints, they issued a text subtitled, strikingly enough, "ABUSES," reading:

"Even in our days there are deviations regarding the cult of the saints and the souls of the deceased. Sometimes popular religiosity is debased by superstition and by an exaggerated interest in profit, encouraged by a deceiving tourism and its byproducts. There are concrete examples in which, without historical proof of their existence, and ignoring Church authorities, some individuals are worshipped. Such is the case of the so called Difunta Correa, whose illegitimate cult expands from Vallecito in San Juan, all the length and the width of the Republic, through shrines, niches and a profusion of images with no few superstitious derivations. Therefore we remind [our flock that]: 1). Catholics can only worship with public acts those people that the authority of the Catholic Church has included in the group of saints and beatified; 2). Therefore, the cult of the so called Difunta Correa is not within that group and it is illegitimate and reprehensible; 3). The conference of Argentine Bishops asks the real Catholics to abstain from practicing this cult."<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Massolo, "Gracias Difunta Correa!," 50.

<sup>186</sup> Quoted in Massolo, *Gracias Difunta Correa!*, 58. Translation by Massolo.

"Declaración de la Conferencia Episcopal Argentina, sobre el culto de los santos y de las almas del purgatorio," Conferencia Episcopal Argentina, Buenos Aires, 1976. <https://episcopado.org/documentos>.

The Junta, and its institutionalized wing of the Catholic Church, feared all forms of gathering, which was seen as a public threat posed against their control over the citizenry. This is particularly apparent in the decree's attempts at de-legitimizing the "so called Difunta Correa," describing her as "deceiving" and "illegitimate," as well as "expand[ing]" from its epicenter in Vallecito to threaten the Junta's power and the authority of the Catholic Church, which already rejected all uncanonized popular devotions. Following this decree, many municipal and provincial governments ordered the destruction of any public sites of worship of la Difunta.

In this moment of governmental repression, depictions of la Difunta become gruesome, as opposed to the serene icons typical of her shrine. The most notable example of this grisliness I would like to highlight regarding this evolving cultural signifier is the contribution of the Santa Fe born visual artist and member of the *Partido Comunista* (PC, Communist Party) Antonio Berni (1905-1981) in his exhibition *La Difunta Correa* (1975-1976). Berni, best known for pioneering the *Nuevo Realismo* (New Realism) movement in Argentina, achieved fame in Argentina and beyond for his art imbued with themes of social conflict. Artists affiliated with New Realism produced work that sought to unite the realm of art and reality, showcasing their concrete existence on canvas, and moving away from the bourgeois world of abstract art. In the case of Berni, I believe his exposition *La Difunta Correa* explicitly seeks to represent a popular tradition that disconcerts and threatens the Argentine bourgeoisie, thereby furthering the distancing of la Difunta's legend from the *criollo* elitism that began under the Peronist era. In most representations of Correa, one arm loosely swaddles her child while the other lays tranquilly by her side or angled slightly



Figure 2.4 *La Difunta Correa I* by Antonio Berni (1975-1976), close up

overhead. Her legs are either daintily crossed or naturally opened, as one would lay on their back to sleep. The facial expression approximates the countenance of *The Birth of Venus*, sometimes going as far as to represent a faint smile upon her face. Berni needed to spurn the peaceful representations of Correa, instead mangling her limbs and presenting her as corpse-like. What I find remarkable about Berni's version is his full awareness of the imperative to reverse the static and naturalized scene of *la Difunta Correa*, which prevent the spectator from feeling the tormented and suffering ordeal of her last moments, but not just because of the physical distance from the spectatorship, somewhere in the desert. Berni replaces the utility and commodification of the narrative signifier of her serene sacrificial motherhood with a highly disturbing, and even ominous, disfigurement of the maternal body. Removed from the narrative "logic" of her mythology, this disfigured body is now exposed to an audience deprived from the naturalization and closure evoked by the popular devotion.

Her legs are crossed, with one knee jutting upward; her neck is skewed unnaturally, and the only visible arm is tangled in her hair; her skin takes on a dirty, brownish-gray pallor instead of the rosy glow that appears in most icons. Furthermore, both breasts are visible, not just the teat

at which the child nurses. When the one breast is visible, it conveys a sort of intentionality – that Correa deliberately uncovered it to feed her child. On the other hand, I interpret the visibility of *both* breasts, the second nipple peeking out at the top of a lacy camisole, the strap falling uncomfortably between her *décolletage*, as an implication of an accidental slippage. Regarding her face, her mouth maintains an undistorted line, without upturned corners or furrows. However, the eyes give the clear impression that Correa is deceased – the only visible portion of them is the sclera, or the white of the eye, which is more evident when a person’s eyes are rolled back in their head. This gruesome depiction of Correa differs from the peaceful, serene statue that usually represents her, a difference that marks the violence inherent in Berni’s reality, the disappearance, torture, and violent murder of thousands of Argentines, during the piece’s production.

If Berni is able to transfer *la Difunta*’s signifier, linking her to the distorted body of the *desaparecidos*, it is because he acknowledges the essential nature of recovering and restoring the dramatism. The power of *la Difunta* never came from what she said, but from how she sacrificed her body, a theme that resonates during the dictatorship. Considering this comparison, I believe Berni’s *La Difunta Correa I* is less like a serene woman who accepted her death to protect her son and is more akin to the reappearance of the body of a *desaparecida* after having been tortured by the Junta. Since, as Masiello argues, “during the first years of the Process, all dissidence was considered a sickness, a malaise in the social body that should be purged by the population in general,”<sup>187</sup> anything considered subversive was punishable by disappearance.

The prevalence of *desaparecidos* clearly conveyed the Junta’s message: speak out against us and we will take swift action to silence you. In situations where dissidence is silenced, embodied resistance becomes one of the only viable options. When *la Difunta* experiences repression at the

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<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

hands of the *Federales*, her form of resistance is corporeal. As she realizes she will not survive her journey through the desert, she sacrifices her body so that her son can continue her struggle. In 1995, two decades after the end of the dictatorship, Massolo draws the comparison between the political situations of the Civil Wars and the *Proceso* – that la Difunta’s reaction to “persecution is to defy authority not with words, but with her body... Like the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, Deolinda Correa persists in her contestation of official power.”<sup>188</sup> The Madres resist the authority of the junta by physically occupying the Plaza de Mayo, a gathering deemed illegal during this period. They made their bodies visible to protest the clandestine nature of the illegitimate government’s illegal practices. As a result of their practices, the founder of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, Azucena Villaflor de Vincenti, and two other Madres, Esther Ballestrino and María Ponce de Bianco, were disappeared in December 1977, along with two nuns sympathetic to their cause. When faced with the potentially fatal results of public dissent, it makes sense to couch critiques in the figure from a different era. In this way, “Difunta Correa stories not only reflect similar themes as Dirty War ones, but they also provide a safely disguised way of discussing these issues.”<sup>189</sup> Although the comparison of la Difunta to the *desaparecidos* was evident, I argue that her image indirectly couched the critique of the junta.

It is important to consider that the techniques associated with New Realism that are evident in *La Difunta Correa* make the piece amenable to discussing an embodied resistance, both during the Civil Wars and under the dictatorship. One example is that many of Berni’s works, including *La Difunta Correa* series, incorporate found objects and materials from *villas miserias*, the slums, literally called miserable towns, on the outskirts of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. Using found objects allowed Berni and other artists to redefine what constituted art, imbuing high art

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 147-8.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 128.



Figure 2.5 *La Difunta Correa I* by Antonio Berni (1975-1976), installed at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires.

with the quotidian experiences of the working classes.<sup>190</sup> An especially popular means of using these objects was the creation of *décollages*, a de-collage that builds out from the canvas rather than combining deconstructed pieces into a collage. These techniques are especially prescient in the case of Berni's *La Difunta Correa*. The use of materials such as burned down candles, broken guitars, old family photos, and glass bottles from villas, reminds the spectator that la Difunta is a figure of the popular classes, part of *el pueblo*. Furthermore, the objects evoke those left at shrines for la Difunta by her devotees, such as candles to light her path and full water bottles to quench her thirst. *Promesantes* (devotees) frequently leave photos of the loved ones they are praying for

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<sup>190</sup> Many artists, including Berni, decided to leave Argentina during the military junta's regime due to increased censorship and, of course, heightened danger and violence. Berni moved to New York in 1976, after *La Difunta Correa* was first exhibited.

or as a means of thanking la Difunta for her help. Used casts and crutches<sup>191</sup> show Correa that her intervention has been so compelling that those who were previously in need of physical aid no longer need their supports.

Berni's series included a second work by the same title that, rather than focusing on la Difunta herself, depicted her devotees, thereby centering their belief and devotion instead of her death. I believe that this focal point expands upon the ideology of the New Realism, which acknowledged the collective singularity of a group brought together by their bleak reality. In his private notes, Berni describes this phenomenon in relation to la Difunta: "The failure of religions and of the rotating governments' ideologies, leads them to look for other material and mental therapies typical of an ignorant, defrauded, and exploited people. In the abandonment they don't find any alternative other than to take refuge in the protective divinities: witches, magicians, or chance."<sup>192</sup> When the Nation has failed, belief in la Difunta Correa is a different imagined community, one that represents those who are marginalized. Masiello describes this phenomenon in relation to the authoritarian regime:

the marginal transforms the binary opposition of dominators and oppressed, with the purpose of fragmenting any unified discourse that could support the authoritarian state or irreparably isolate the other. At the same time, this activity disarms the ideal of a unified subject, and dissolves the coherent human body that could be used by the military regime. Consequently, the responses to the dictatorship are frequently of a pluralistic nature, integrating the elite and popular cultures, and expanding unexplored spaces from those that articulate an alternative discourse.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Berni has discussed the important influence of surrealism on his work. For Salvador Dalí, perhaps the most famous surrealist, the crutch appeared often in his paintings as a symbol of death. Within the context of "La Difunta Correa," its inclusion can be read as an added layer of meaning alluding to the deaths of Correa and the desaparecidos.

<sup>192</sup> Antonio Berni, *Escritos* (Buenos Aires: Temas Grupo, 1999), 67.

<sup>193</sup> Masiello, *Between Civilization & Barbarism*, 13.

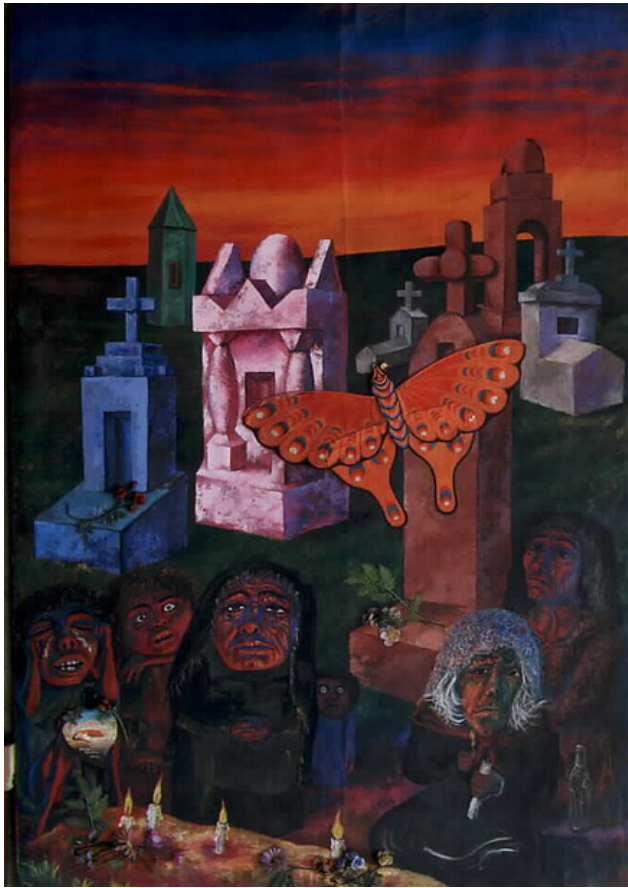


Figure 2.6 *La Difunta Correa II* by Antonio Berni (1975-1976)

This exhibition does just that – it shows the pluralistic essence behind the devotion to la Difunta, including Berni’s synthesis of a popular tradition into an elite art form, although it was proscribed under the Junta, and the painter went into exile. Most worship of la Difunta happens in roadside shrines, especially outside of San Juan where devotees are unable to travel to the *Santuario* in Vallecito. Unlike the informal, yet highly visible nature of her celebration, the series by Berni was displayed in the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Museum of Fine Arts) and well-known galleries in the Autonomous City of Buenos

Aires. As Massolo notes, “[s]ince it is very doubtful that devotees of Difunta Correa would visit such places, one can safely conclude that art had created the ultimate semantic distance between the miraculous woman and her everyday space.”<sup>194</sup> Remarkably, Berni’s *La Difunta Correa* series articulates the popular nature of the “subversives” and *desaparecidos*’ embodied resistance throughout the Military Dictatorship, while at the same time capturing the gruesome nature of the repression they endured. I argue that his visual analogy between the *desaparecidos* and la Difunta Correa, both of whom suffered morbid deaths as a result of state violence, either directly or

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 234.

indirectly, not only highlights the heinous acts of the Junta, but also situates this brutality as a centuries-long legacy that continues into the 21st Century.

## VII. La Difunta, Abortion, and Femicide in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Before arriving at rewritings of the legend of la Difunta through the lens of the gendered violence of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is important to understand the contexts that give rise to these interpretations. Just as art under the dictatorship made la Difunta gruesome in order to reflect the death and disappearances inflicted by the government, in this section I will argue that works depicting Correa during the 21<sup>st</sup> Century echo the lethal treatment of Argentine women during this time. In turn, by likening the respective causes of the death of Correa and the deaths of the annual 300 women from femicide in Argentina,<sup>195</sup> these works assert the remaining limitations on women's citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. During the first two decades of this century, artwork showing la Difunta tends to represent her via dismembered body parts. However, I believe that, rather than showing the gore inherent in violent death, these works take different approaches to highlight the distinct catalyst of this brutality: gender violence. While the violence of the military junta was inflicted by actors of the government in order to eliminate "subversive" activity, gender violence is generally committed by individual citizens who are merely receiving protection from the state through gendered policies.

Argentina's federal and provincial policies since 1994 have taken a stance against gender violence but tend to exclusively address domestic violence and, furthermore, have not taken steps

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<sup>195</sup> Sandra Crucianelli and Iván Ruiz, "Más de 300 mujeres por año son víctimas de femicidios en Argentina," *Infobae*, January 29, 2023. <https://www.infobae.com/politica/2023/01/29/mas-de-300-mujeres-por-ano-son-victimas-de-femicidios-en-argentina/>.

to criminalize it. In 1994, Argentina instituted *Ley 24.417 Protección Contra la Violencia Familiar* that permitted those who experience violence within their family units to formally report it.<sup>196</sup> Within the articles of this law, a judge could remove the complainant and their children from the home and provide them with the resources of the Consejo Nacional del Menor y la Familia<sup>197</sup> – a department within the Ministry of Health and Social Action charged with administering social services. The 2009 *Ley 26.485 Protección Integral a las Mujeres*, written to expand the goals of the 1994 law, continued these civil protections for women who experienced violence, along with the broad goal of eliminating gender discrimination.<sup>198</sup> In her 2010 analysis of domestic violence policy in Argentina and Chile, political scientist Susan Franceschet described the measures taken in Argentina, “embedded in a context of federalism and weak bureaucratic institutions, [as having] not only undermined policy implementation, but also has deprived reform advocated of influential insider allies who would improve their ability to politicize policy failures and build public support for meaningful policy reform.”<sup>199</sup> One of her main criticisms was that the Argentine state provided “civil rather than criminal” protections from domestic violence.<sup>200</sup> In other words, civil suits would settle disputes between the two parties, potentially awarding damages, instead of stipulating domestic violence as an offense worthy of legal punishment. Furthermore, these protections lacked the institutional support to follow through with sufficient protections.

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<sup>196</sup> Ley Protección Contra la Violencia Familiar, Ley 24.417 (July 12, 1994), <http://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/90000-94999/93554/norma.htm>.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

The *Consejo Nacional del Menor y la Familia* (National Council for Children and Family) underwent a restructuring and change of name to *Consejo Nacional de Niñez, Adolescencia y Familia* (National Council for Children, Adolescents, and Family) in 2001

<sup>198</sup> Ley de Protección Integral a las Mujeres, Ley 26.485 (March 11, 2009), <http://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/150000-154999/152155/norma.htm>.

<sup>199</sup> Susan Franceschet, “Explaining Domestic Violence Policy Outcomes in Chile and Argentina *Latin American Politics and Society* 52, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 3.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 4.

During this same time period, rates of gender violence and femicide<sup>201</sup> increased considerably in Argentina. Following the December 2001 economic collapse in Argentina that resulted in a state of emergency being declared by President Fernando de la Rúa, recorded instances of gender violence rose.<sup>202</sup> Although Argentina does not officially maintain statistics of gender violence or femicide, Argentine sociologist Barbara Sutton noted that “the numbers of complaints received by the Family and Women’s Police Stations in the Province of Buenos Aires grew significantly in just a few years: from 19,644 in 2006 to 52,231 reports of family violence from January to October 2008 (a 166 percent increase). Eighty percent of the reported perpetrators were male.”<sup>203</sup> She attributes this partially to women’s forced participation in the traditionally masculine role of wage earning as a result of economic scarcity.<sup>204</sup> In other words, although many women had no choice but to seek employment in order to help their families survive, their participation in labor outside the home was still viewed as transgressing gender roles. Their perceived undermining of hegemonic masculinity was met with a reassertion of masculine authority through gender violence. Perhaps the most extreme form of gender violence, femicide is the killing of women as a gender-motivated hate crime. Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, scholars of Latin American Studies and Criminal Justice, respectively, have claimed that femicide is not just the responsibility of the individuals (usually men) who kill women; it “is gender-based violence that is both public and private, implicating both the state (directly or indirectly) and individual perpetrators (private or state actors); it thus encompasses systematic,

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<sup>201</sup> I use the term *femicide* instead of the more common *femicide* following the logic of Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano in their introduction to *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas*: “In arguing for the use of the term *femicide* over *femicide*, we draw from a feminist analytical perspective that interrupts essentialist notions of female identity that equate gender and biological sex and looks instead to the gendered nature of practices and behaviors, along with the performance of gender norms,” 3.

<sup>202</sup> Franceschet, “Explaining Domestic Violence Policy Outcomes in Chile and Argentina,” 12.

<sup>203</sup> Sutton, *Bodies in Crisis*, 133.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 145

widespread, and everyday interpersonal violence... [F]emicide is systemic violence rooted in social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities.”<sup>205</sup> In sum, the violence against women committed by individuals is connected to the systemic undermining of their rights.

The Argentine government further eroded women’s bodily protections and autonomy with its regulation of abortion and contraceptives, which in turn has led to further instances of femicide caused by the state. Abortion had been summarily illegal in Argentina since the 1880s, until its legalization in December 2020.<sup>206</sup> The federal legislation that was in place before this moment was informed principally by legislation dating from 1922 and amended in 1984 (to override further restrictions put in place during the dictatorship).<sup>207</sup> This penal code allowed for exceptions only in the case that the pregnancy directly endangered the mother’s life, or that the pregnancy was the result of the rape of a mentally disabled person.<sup>208</sup> Beyond these two exceptions, abortion was punishable by up to fifteen years in prison for the inducer of the abortion, including the mother, doctor, or pharmacist.<sup>209</sup> Although this legislation has been formally overridden, it is crucial to note that a woman’s ability to prevent unwanted pregnancy is still limited by Argentine law and the medical field. Although contraceptives themselves are not illegal –condoms and birth control pills are readily available –, access to more permanent methods of contraceptives, like IUDs, implants, and sterilization, is heavily restricted. This is because individual medical professionals are able to refuse services based on their personal beliefs, denying health care due to

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<sup>205</sup> Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, eds. *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 5.

<sup>206</sup> Ley de Interrupción Voluntaria del Embarazo (IVE), Ley 27.610 (January 24, 2021), <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/noticias/ley-no-27610-acceso-la-interrupcion-voluntaria-del-embarazo-ive-obligatoriedad-de-brindar>.

<sup>207</sup> “Decisions Denied: Women’s Access to Contraceptives and Abortion in Argentina,” *Human Rights Watch*, June 14, 2005. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/06/14/decisions-denied/womens-access-contraceptives-and-abortion-argentina>.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

anti-contraceptive morality, an issue that is particularly salient in “the rural areas, especially in the Northern provinces, where the Catholic and Evangelical Churches have a considerable influence.”<sup>210</sup> Human Rights Watch reported that “successive governments have legislated on matters related to contraception and abortion as if women were instruments of reproduction rather than equal human beings, contributing to an underlying sense among service providers and policy makers that birth control and reproductive health care are somehow illegitimate, immoral, or even illegal. The consequences for women’s health and lives are serious, sometimes fatal.”<sup>211</sup> In other words, illegal and unsafe abortion have become potentially lethal realities for women and pregnant people, as a result of state policies.

It is important to keep in mind that, even though abortion was illegal and remains logistically restricted, women risked and continue to risk penalization and undergo clandestine abortion daily, frequently resulting in health complications, the direst of which is death. In his 2017 medical publication on abortion, Dr. Mario Sebastiani cites a 2005 study from the National Commission for Health Research Programs (CONAPRIS) that estimates between 460,000 and 600,000 per year in Argentina (only taking into account hospital data).<sup>212</sup> He also notes that, according to Argentina’s *Guide to the Improvement of Post-Abortion Care* from the Ministry of Health, “hospitalization for abortion [complications] has increased 44.9% between 1995 and 2000 in [Argentina], and 60% of these admissions correspond to women between 20- and 24-years old. Every hour, seven women leave a public hospital after having been admitted for complications

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<sup>210</sup> Daniel Politi, “Argentina legalizó el aborto, pero los opositores dificultan el acceso,” *The New York Times*, March 7, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2021/03/07/espanol/ley-aborto-argentina.html>.

“las zonas rurales, especialmente en las provincias del norte, donde las iglesias católicas y evangélicas tienen una influencia considerable”

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Mario Sebastiani, *#AbortoLegalYSeguro* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2017), 86.

resulting from an abortion.”<sup>213</sup> Planned Parenthood estimated in 2006 that clandestine abortions cause almost a third of maternal mortalities, making it the lead cause of maternal death overall in Argentina, a disturbing statistic.<sup>214</sup> The *Campaña por el Derecho al Aborto* (Campaign for the Right to Abortion) has been seeking the legalization of abortion in Argentina since 2005. Moreover, this campaign strives for abortion to not only be legal but also to be free (as part of socialized health care) and safe. This goal is expressed through their slogan: *educación sexual para decidir, contraceptivos para no abortar, aborto legal para no morir* (sexual education in order to decide, contraceptives in order to not abort, legal abortion in order to not die).

In the face of the harrowing femicide linked to the Argentine state through its inadequate protection of women’s bodies, I assert that artists like Joaquín Molina created art reminiscent of work produced under the dictatorship; this, perhaps unwitting, allusion to artwork from the most



Figure 2.7 *Difunta Correa, vertiente de santidad* (*Difunta Correa, Spring of Sanctity*) by Joaquín Molina (2004)

repressive moment in the nation’s history highlights the complicity of the state in women’s deaths. In 2004, Joaquín Molina showed his series *Imágenes y devociones populares* (Images and Popular Devotions), a series

<sup>213</sup> Ibid. 87-88.

“la hospitalización por aborto se ha incrementado en nuestro país en un 44,9% entre 1995 y 2000, y el 60% de estas internaciones corresponde a mujeres de entre 20 y 24 años. Cada hora, siete mujeres egresan de un hospital público después de haber estado internadas por complicaciones debidas a un aborto”

<sup>214</sup> Nadia Berenstein, “Abortion in Argentina,” *Planned Parenthood*, 2006, <https://web.archive.org/web/20061012093657/http://www.plannedparenthood.org/news-articles-press/politics-policy-issues/international-issues/abortion-in-argentina.htm>.

that contained two pieces referencing la Difunta Correa, at the Centro Cultural Recoleta in Buenos Aires. A June 13, 2004 article from *La Nación*, the country's leading conservative newspaper, described Berni's 1975 *La Difunta Correa* as "the more illustrious antecedent" to Molina's *Devociones populares*.<sup>215</sup> Similar to Berni's décollage, Molina's portrait of la Difunta, entitled *Difunta Correa, vertiente de santidad (Difunta Correa, Spring of Sanctity)*, disrupts the discursive peacefulness of her death by positioning her limbs as protruding unnaturally. Berni's piece relies upon the details of la Difunta's facial expression and corporeal details to reinforce the vulgarity of her death. On the other hand, Molina's full-body portrait of la Difunta does not provide any details – her image is limited to an outlining of her figure, filled in with blue and teal stripes that show the contours of her limbs, much like the temporary chalk outline of a dead body drawn at a crime scene. There is nothing to visually indicate that this person is la Difunta – just the title of the piece.

I see this de-personalization of la Difunta Correa as a method of amplifying her story to apply beyond its original framework. By decontextualizing la Difunta's body, she ostensibly becomes an archetype onto which the femicidal deaths of thousands of women can be mapped. Instead of the side view offered by the typical icon of la Difunta, this painting gives an aerial perspective, thereby allowing the viewer to see her within the desert where she died. Although the background in which la Difunta lies shows fissures of a desert's parched earth, it lacks the specificity necessary for the viewer to locate the setting as the Cuyo Valley. Without a face or a defined environment, the dead woman's body ceases to pertain solely to la Difunta; rather, it could be the body of any number of anonymous women who are the victims of femicide. Furthermore, the outlining of her body viewed from overhead is reminiscent of a crime scene tracing of a

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<sup>215</sup> "Devociones populares," *La Nación*, June 13, 2004, <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/cultura/devociones-populares-nid609540>.

"el antecedente más ilustre"

victim's corpse, like one of the victims of femicide in contemporary Argentina. On her chest appears a red and white circle vaguely resembling a breast, but also approximating a target. Since this circle is the only corporeal detail beyond the blue and teal stripes, the viewer's eye is drawn directly to it. This process resembles the attention women receive solely for the traditionally feminine physical traits they possess, like breasts. Namely, it highlights the fact that the way men see her body makes her a target for physical violence.

Molina's second piece evoking la Difunta Correa, *Difunta Correa, eterna fuente de vida* (*Difunta Correa, eternal source of life*), decontextualizes her even further by depicting her through a disembodied breast, projecting from the center of the same labyrinthine circle that appears on the chest of the portrait. Again, the positioning of the circle draws the viewer's attention to the



Figure 2.8 *Difunta Correa, eterna fuente de vida* (*Difunta Correa, Eternal Source of Life*) by Joaquín Molina (2004)

breast; however, in this piece the breast appears without even the contextualization of la Difunta's body. The centering of the breast in both of these works points to a central cause of femicide – men's desire for women's bodies. The possession of breasts leaves women with a symbolic target on their chests; scholar María Florencia Alcaraz notes that male "desire places us in an area of risk so fatal that over the last three decades there are, at least,

3,040 fewer women due to the absence of legal, safe, and free abortion,”<sup>216</sup> in addition to the 3.551 fewer women over due to femicide between 2008 and 2020.<sup>217</sup>

I would like to underscore that the positioning of a labyrinth surrounding the breast does more than suggesting a target; in fact, the locating of la Difunta’s breast within this figure, specifically, alludes to the convoluted and multifarious nature of femicide itself. Writing about Molina’s series *Devociones populares*, specialist in Art, Philosophy, and Literature Eduardo Tenconi Colonna traces the origins of the labyrinth as emerging from a Coptic icon. He describes the labyrinth as an Egyptian symbol of “the defense of anything precious that is hidden or sacred. [It] leads inside itself to a hidden inner sanctuary... [It] expresses a drive to represent the infinite using the two aspects that man’s imagination can grasp: perpetual infinity or the flux of the spiral, and infinity of the eternal return.”<sup>218</sup> According to Tenconi Colonna, the labyrinth protects that which is hidden in its center while simultaneously alluding to its interminable character.<sup>219</sup> In her studies on labyrinths as symbols, Vanessa Compton defines them as “a concentric arrangement of circuitous lines designed to create a unicursal path with a single decision point, leading from the entrance to a central goal, filling completely a finite space in which processes and events of a specific kind tend to and may be intended to occur.”<sup>220</sup> In other terms, the traditional Coptic labyrinth has a single pathway to follow, leading from the point of access to the center and back.

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<sup>216</sup> María Florencia Alcaraz, *¡Que sea ley! La lucha de los feminismos por el aborto legal* (Buenos Aires: Marea, 2019), 14.

“el deseo nos coloque en una zona de riesgo tan fatal que en las últimas tres décadas hay, al menos, 3040 mujeres menos por la ausencia de una ley de aborto legal, seguro y gratuito”

<sup>217</sup> Observatorio de Femicidios en Argentina “Adriana Marisel Zambrano,” *Informe de Investigación de Femicidios en Argentina* (2021).

<sup>218</sup> Eduardo Tenconi Colonna in Joaquín Molina, *Joaquín Molina. Imágenes y devociones populares* (Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural Recoleta, 2004), 60.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>220</sup> Vanessa Compton, “Understanding the Labyrinth as Transformative Site, Symbol, and Technology: An Arts-Informed Inquiry” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2007), 17.

Compton also describes the labyrinth as a site of “fecundity,” as it “suggests an interpenetration of place and consciousness,”<sup>221</sup> meaning that the labyrinth itself is fertile in its possibilities of physically and mentally permeating its boundaries. I would like to focus on this character of “fecundity” that I believe is particularly prescient in the case of *Difunta Correa, eternal source of life*, as the “sacred” object at its center is la Difunta Correa’s miraculous breast. As the physical manifestation of her ability to produce milk postmortem, this breast is the epitome of fecundity, as alluded to by the title’s inclusion of “eternal source of life.” Nevertheless, the labyrinth that encompasses it does not match the unicursal path described by Tenconi Colonna and Compton. Instead, it is a four-axis pattern, comprised of four quadrants, only one of which has an entrance; a neighboring quadrant uniquely allows access to the breast at the center. This labyrinth has no outlet, no escape, and no essence of perpetuity that a typical labyrinthine structure suggest. In light of this, I view what lies in the center, la Difunta’s breast, not as something precious that is hidden and protected, but a manifestation of fecundity tied to disembodiment and dismemberment, suggesting an inevitability, an inescapability, an impossibility. When considered in conjunction with *Difunta Correa, spring of sanctity*, this labyrinth seems to perfectly complement the suggested “target” at la Difunta’s chest, an enlarged inset of the other piece. Reading *Difunta Correa, eternal source of life* as an inset of *Difunta Correa, spring of sanctity*, a piece that overtly alludes to femicide, “eternal source of life” takes on a morbid connotation; it is no longer her life that is preserved, but her ability to give life to others, be it her son or her devotees.

Chilean artist Marcela Correa’s 2014 exhibition *La Difunta Correa* achieves a similar effect in dismembering la Difunta; however, I assert that her use of materials further alludes to the association of the maternal body with nourishment. Within the sparse, nearly industrial, gallery

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 18.



Figure 2.9 *La Difunta Correa* by Marcela Correa at Galería AFA in Santiago de Chile (2014)

space, three long iron bars in the ceiling support seven hanging sacks, each measuring about 10 feet tall. The sacks bare jagged seams, revealing the smaller parts that are behind the manufacturing of the almost conical shape of the superior structure. From the bottom of each cone emanates a hollow, shriveled tube of the same material, on the verge of touching the gallery floor. Considering the name of the exhibit, *La Difunta Correa*, these abstract forms bring to mind the shape of la Difunta's infamous breasts that were able to nurse her child postmortem. The artist, Correa,<sup>222</sup> in an interview for Visioneer TV, calls the original material for the sculptures "maxi sacks that are where grains are transported."<sup>223</sup> The use of grain sacks to construct giant breasts evokes the alimental function of a mother's breast in the rearing of a child. These seven sculptures made of molded feed bags are filled with artificial cotton and rice, highlighting the purpose of the bags,

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<sup>222</sup> From this point on, "Correa" will be used exclusively to refer to the visual artist Marcela Correa.

<sup>223</sup> Marcela Correa, "La Difunta Correa – Marcela Correa @ Galería AFA, SCL," *Visioneer TV*, August 14, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8WZtAIfsEo>

"maxi sacos que son donde se transportan los granos"

and therefore the breasts, in carrying goods for others' consumption. Without anything to represent the rest of la Difunta or her body, her breasts stand in as a dismembered metonym, a reduction of her being to her visible reproductive organs.

I argue that, while Molina's pieces disembody la Difunta and her breasts as a means of depicting the role of men's sexual ownership of women's bodies in femicide, Correa's factory-like setting and agro-industrial materials show women as they are viewed by anti-abortion activists – as vehicles for rearing children. While a womb would be the most obvious metonym for women-as-child-bearers, in the case of la Difunta the breast becomes more prescient. The reproduction of breasts without a body to accompany it already depersonalizes, but within the industrial setting of the factory, the piece also dehumanizes, evoking instead agro-industrial business. In this vein, Correa does not describe the sculptures as breasts: “They're udders.”<sup>224</sup> In the process of sacrificing her body and her life for her child, la Difunta is not merely disembodied, but also dehumanized. She transforms from a woman with breasts to a cow with udders, a metamorphosis enhanced by the gallery having, “The sensation of something industrial, of how a dairy might be.”<sup>225</sup> Rather than lactating solely to nurse her baby, who is notably absent from the art piece, la Difunta produces milk in an industrialized dairy factory, a space removed from any sense of humanization. Within the context of Argentina, I would like to underscore the choice of setting and medium, as it takes on elevated significance. Dating back to the 1870s, the Argentine economy was consolidated following an agro-export model, “based on its insertion in the world market through the export of agricultural products, for which the nation had exceptional agro-ecological

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

“Son ubres”

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

“[L]a sensación de algo industrial, de cómo podría una lechería”

conditions, enabling a high dynamism of the local economy, which expanded at a cumulative annual rate of 5.2% between 1870 and 1930, while per capita output was 1.9%.”<sup>226</sup> Namely, agricultural goods distributed within the country and exported internationally make up the largest portion of the Argentine economy. I contend that, within the context of Correa’s industrialized reproduction of la Difunta’s breasts as “udders” in this agro-industrial setting reveals that, symbolically, women are not only providing the care and nourishment to the country’s youth, but also providing the material goods that fuel the economy.

Correa also signals these qualities as meriting devotion with the inclusion of a prayer to accompany the art installation. On the wall of the gallery, written in the sky blue of the Argentine flag, reads:

“Hear, Oh Lord, this fervent and sincere cry  
From your people, so beloved of their tradition and  
Respectful of their native legends and customs,  
Who see in la ‘Difunta Correa’ a singular  
Model of a daughter, wife, and mother,  
Worthy of imitation.  
Your providence gave to her the miracle of prolonging the life of her son, suckling  
him  
Even after death.  
May just one of us evoke her  
With admiration of her love, piety,  
And strength in her cruel pilgrimage along this valley  
Of anguish, pain, and tears.  
So be it.”<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Nicolás Areco, Ana L. Fernández, and Mariana González, “El mercado de trabajo en el modelo agroexportador en Argentina: el papel de la inmigración,” *América Latina en la Historia Económica* 26, no. 3 (2019): 3.

“basado en la inserción en el mercado mundial a través de la exportación de productos de origen agropecuario, para los cuales la nación contaba con condiciones agroecológicas excepcionales, posibilitó un elevado dinamismo de la economía local, que se expandió a una tasa anual acumulativa de 5.2% entre 1870 y 1930, en tanto el producto per cápita lo hizo en 1.9%”

<sup>227</sup> Translation published in Marcela Correa, *Esculturas. 1986-2015* (Santiago de Chile: Marcela Correa, 2016), 124.

“Escucha Señor este clamor sincero y fervoroso  
De tu pueblo amante de su tradición y  
Respetuoso de sus leyendas y costumbres nativas,  
Que ven en la ‘Difunta Correa’ un singular  
Modelo de hija, de esposa, y de madre,

*Escucha Señor este clamor sincero y fervoroso  
de tu pueblo amante de su tradición y  
respetuoso de sus leyendas y costumbres nativas,  
que ven en la “Difunta Correa” un singular  
modelo de hija, de esposa, y de madre,  
digna de ser imitada.  
Tu providencia obró en ella el prodigio  
de prolongar la vida de su niño amamantándolo  
aún después de muerta.  
Haz que cada uno de nosotros la evoquemos  
siempre con admiración por su amor, piedad,  
y fortaleza en su cruel peregrinar por este valle  
de angustias, dolor y lágrimas.  
Así sea.*

Figure 2.10 *La Difunta Correa* Prayer by Marcela Correa at Galería AFA in Santiago de Chile (2014)

For a typical gallery exhibition, there is text appearing with the artwork to provide the basic information of the artist, year of production, and medium. In contrast, this text mimics a prayer reminiscent of a devotee’s supplications to la Difunta Correa. It is notable that this prayer, however, is not directed to la Difunta, but to God – a nod to the fact that a majority of la Difunta’s devotees, like those of many folk saints, are devout Catholics – and credits God with providing the providence for la Difunta to perform her miracles. What I find most important about this prayer

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Digna de ser imitada.

Tu providencia obró en ella el prodigio de prolongar la vida de su niño amamantándolo

Aún después de muerta.

Haz que cada uno de nosotros la evoquemos

Siempre con admiración por su amor, piedad,

Y fortaleza en su cruel peregrinar por este valle

De angustias, dolor y lágrimas.

Así sea.”

are the verses, “a singular model of a daughter, wife, and mother *worthy of imitation*.” In these two verses, Correa recognizes that the sacrifice la Difunta makes by dying for her son is not a unique, hyperbolic case, but a model for women to imitate, molding their embodiment as daughters, wives, and, especially, mothers to fit her example. The prayer continues, appealing for other women “to evoke her... anguish, pain, and tears,” equating the model of motherhood she personifies with misery and sorrow.

Considering this prayer alongside the physical installation, Correa’s exhibit draws a parallel between maternal abnegation, typified by breastfeeding, and an agro-industrial system that dehumanizes and undervalues its producers. Like Correa, many others have drawn this comparison, noting the exploitative nature of conventionalized sacrificial motherhood. *Ni Una Menos* (meaning “Not One Less [Woman]”), a major activist collective in Argentina and throughout Latin America that fights against *machista* — male chauvinist—violence and femicide, notes in their manifesto that this type of “violence on the body is sustained by and entangled with social inequality, the logic of wealth accumulation, labor conditions, institutions, and the State.”<sup>228</sup> Despite Correa never explicitly referring to femicide and the plight of *Ni Una Menos*, a collective that formed in 2015, the year after this exhibition, the situating of the piece leads me to this same conclusion. I assert that the disembodiment of la Difunta’s breasts in conjunction with the industrialized, yet particularly Argentine, setting demonstrate that the expectations of good mothering exploit the maternal figures they aim to celebrate. La Difunta becomes economized, only celebrated for her body’s ability to produce and reproduce, the same critique espoused by *Ni Una Menos* and anti-femicide activists throughout Argentina.

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<sup>228</sup> Ni Una Menos, *Carta Orgánica* (June 3, 2017), <https://niunamenos.org.ar/quienes-somos/carta-organica/>, 2.

“violencia sobre los cuerpos se sostiene y trenza con la desigualdad social, la lógica de la acumulación de riquezas, las condiciones de trabajo, las instituciones y el Estado”

While on their face, these artworks by Marcela Correa and Joaquín Molina simply depict disembodied representations of la Difunta's legend, I contend that they both contextualize la Difunta's legend within the landscape of 21<sup>st</sup> Century feminist movements in Argentina and Latin America, writ large. Each artist removes la Difunta from the setting of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Cuyo Valley, allowing the viewer to conceive of her legend within their individual frame of reference. I believe that analyzing these works through the lens of *Ni Una Menos, La campaña por el aborto legal, seguro y gratuito*, and their peers allows for the most fruitful, or fertile, reading. Contemporary feminist movements reject the "singular model of a daughter, wife, and mother" that Correa's artwork refers to la Difunta representing. Instead, in its advocacy for legal, safe, and free abortion, *La campaña por el aborto* advances the idea that women have the right to "saying no to obeying a mandate of a single way of being a woman, a docile caregiver, that positions her sexuality and desire in motherhood and marriage, to mother as the only destiny. Saying no to biological reproduction as slavery."<sup>229</sup> However, when women do assert their agency and reject the traditional norms of biological reproduction and motherhood, they are frequently met with domestic violence and, its most extreme form, femicide at the hands of their partners. It is possible to infer that, in the circumstances fabricated by Molina and Correa, la Difunta had attempted to exercise this choice and suffered the consequences; neither Molina's pieces nor Correa's exhibit depict la Difunta with her infant son, a hallmark of all previous representations of her. Without her son, la Difunta can be read as a victim of femicide or death from illegal abortion,

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<sup>229</sup> Alcaraz, *¡Qué sea ley!*, 21

"Decir que no a la obediencia de un mandato de un único modo de ser mujer dócil, cuidadora, que coloca su sexualidad y su deseo en la maternidad y el matrimonio, a maternar como único destino. Decir que no a la reproducción biológica como esclavitud"

especially when coupled with the disembodiment and dismemberment characteristic of these pieces.

It is important to acknowledge that the separate yet interwoven issues of motherhood, feminicide, and abortion in contemporary Argentina are rooted in struggles for women's citizenship that emphasize their importance beyond wives (whose bodies belong to and are subject to violence by their husbands) and mothers (whose wombs and breasts belong to their unborn or newborn children). In the work of Correa and Molina, as in those from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, representations of la Difunta's body reveal changing norms of womanhood within the Argentine national imaginary. Namely, as an exemplary embodiment of Republican Motherhood disembodied and framed within a labyrinth, a crime scene, and an agricultural factory, I believe that la Difunta sheds the original moral intended to be inculcated by the Republican Mother and acquires a unique 21<sup>st</sup> Century morality centered on contemporary issues of women's bodily autonomy.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

Difunta Correa's legend has undergone multiple transformations since her death during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, each reflecting broader trends within Argentina. I believe that, as a popular myth that corresponded with the founding of the Argentine Federation, specifically, the role of women as Republican Mothers, each mutation of her legend represents a reimagining of *argentinidad*. Despite the origins of her legend correlating to the traditional model of Republican Motherhood, the myth's anti-Federalist aims and roots in local folklore facilitate representations of her story deviating from these norms.

In each transformation and subsequent representation in cultural productions, la Difunta has served as a vehicle onto which sociopolitical changes of the historical moment are able to be projected. During the rapid and exclusionary modernization at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, la Difunta's legend is rediscovered and renewed publicly; her death as a consequence of governmental negligence becomes a relatable tale to the *sanjuaninos* who are left behind with the industrialization of the city and the agricultural trade. When the government and the modernizing economy was unable to provide for all its citizens, la Difunta's milk takes on a broader significance – that of provisions and maternal care for all. As the Peróns rise to power, la Difunta's body acquires a new connotation – a representation of “*el pueblo*” and the importance of local traditions, especially those of rural and indigenous heritages. The depictions of la Difunta under Peronist government highlight these aspects, constructing her legend as antagonistic to the Catholic Church and hegemonic motherhood that deviated from European models. During the period of the Military Junta, la Difunta becomes even more antagonistic, this time in opposition to the Argentine government, controlled by a Military Junta. Her body, now gruesome and cadaverous, stands in for those disappeared under Isabel Perón and the first year of the Junta. Finally, both international artists, like Chilean Marcela Correa, and Argentines alike have found new ways to depict la Difunta that confront contemporary realities of womanhood. 21<sup>st</sup> Century, as representations of la Difunta reflect prescient issues of femicide, *travesti* motherhood – a topic explored in Chapter 3–, and bodily autonomy.

The evolution of portrayals of la Difunta's myth and body reflect national trends toward questioning institutionalized sources of power and, specifically, what those sources determine are the roles of women and mothers. Since Republican Motherhood had been established in the 1800s as the principal means of women formally becoming involved in civic engagement, rewritings of

such a seminal tale of maternity, like that of la Difunta Correa, correspond to a reconceptualization of how women partake in citizenship. In reframing her legend within various different historical and cultural moments, I observe her seemingly straightforward tale as adopting the plight of various subjugated groups, culminating in a fundamental questioning of civic expectations. This is especially poignant in the case of women, whose civic rights were tied to maternity, an issue that will be further explored in Chapter 2, in the context of Evita Perón as a political and spiritual leader. Overall, I want to reinforce that rewritings of la Difunta Correa are calculated reimaginations of what constitutes citizenship, highlighting exclusionary practices in foundational narratives that are still present today.

## Chapter 2 – Evita: the Transgressive Mother for the Nation

*“I will return and I will be millions”*<sup>230</sup>

- Attributed to Eva Perón

*“In Pereda’s opinion, most of Argentina’s recent problems could be traced to the figure of the stepmother. We never had a mother, as a nation, he would say; or, she was never there; or, she left us on the doorstep of the orphanage. But we’ve had plenty of stepmothers, all sorts, starting with the great Peronist stepmother”*<sup>231</sup>

- Roberto Bolaño

### I. Introduction

On July 26, 1952, at 10:25pm, María Eva Duarte de Perón died of ovarian cancer at the age of 33 in the presidential residence in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Her death was reported nationally by the state-owned radio network, noting that the remains of the “*Jefa Espiritual de la Nación*” (“Spiritual Leader of the Nation”) would be transferred to the *Confederación General del Trabajo* (General Confederation of Labor, CGT) headquarters the following morning.<sup>232</sup> The reactions were complex, but I will address them in a twofold response. On the one hand, ardent anti-Peronists and those who considered Evita an illegitimate presence in the political sphere celebrated her demise. On the other, three million mourners poured into the streets to collectively

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<sup>230</sup> “Volveré y seré millones”

<sup>231</sup> Roberto Bolaño, “El gaucho insufrible,” *El gaucho insufrible* (Editorial Anagrama: Barcelona, 2003), 16.

“Para Pereda, el gran problema de Argentina, de la Argentina de aquellos años, era precisamente el problema de la madrastra. Los argentinos, decía, no tuvimos madre o nuestra madre fue invisible o nuestra madre nos abandonó en las puertas de la inclusa. Madrastras, en cambio, hemos tenido demasiadas y de todos los colores, empezando por la gran madrastra peronista”

<sup>232</sup> Claudia Soria, “Santa Evita, entre el goce místico y el revolucionario.” *CiberLetras*, no. 11 (2004).  
<https://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras/v11/soria2.html>

lament the loss of their idol, with so many wreaths sent that Argentina and bordering countries were temporarily without commercial flowers.<sup>233</sup>

On the 70th anniversary of her death, July 26, 2022, thousands, most of whom were not yet born when Evita died, visited the Duarte family mausoleum in Recoleta Cemetery to leave flowers, candles, and devotional objects to pay their respects. By 11 am, two hours after the opening of the cemetery to the public, the façade of the tomb was covered in wreaths, with a constant stream of visitors waiting in crowded lines for their turn to briefly stand before Evita's final resting place. Beyond the cemetery, shrines and altars are popular in homes, roadsides, workspaces, and even restaurants throughout the country.

I believe this hagiographic adoration stems from an affective bond that Evita constructed during her lifetime through a rejection of earlier beneficence standards of aid, substituting this with affective methods of state assistance through her *Fundación Eva Perón*, a model that Donna Guy calls "charismatic politics."<sup>234</sup> Her charisma, which I will argue is tantamount to the construction of affective bonds, allows her supporters, even those who were not yet alive during the Perón governments, a sort of transgenerational devotees active even now, to engage in para-social relationships with Evita as a supportive mother figure. This positions Evita as a Republican Mother to the Argentine nation, with government organizations serving as intermediary. However, she differed herself from the traditional roles of Republican Motherhood through the very affective bonds she forged, particularly in relation to the working class and other women, who were not previously expected to engage in the same civic participation as their elite, male counterparts in

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<sup>233</sup> Orlando Verna, "Cómo fueron las exequias de Eva Perón en Rosario con una multitud en las calles," *La Capital* (Rosario, Santa Fe), August 10, 2022, <https://www.lacapital.com.ar/la-ciudad/como-fueron-las-exequias-eva-peron-rosario-una-multitud-las-calles-n10024065.html>.

<sup>234</sup> Donna Guy, *Creating Charismatic Bonds in Argentina: Letters to Juan and Eva Perón* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016), 32.

the upper, middle, and working classes. This in turn allowed Evita to foster political participation from formerly excluded classes, including ethnic and gender minorities, centering their experiences instead of those of the elite in her political discourses. Cultural productions depicting Evita highlight her engagement with and unique, substantial departure from norms of Republican Motherhood, notably the novel *Santa Evita* by Tomás Elloy Martínez, which will be touched on in Chapter 3, and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century artwork of Daniel Santoro, both of whom focus on the invocation of her maternity postmortem. In this chapter, I begin by explaining the very hegemonic narratives that Evita undermined, the political conditions that allowed her rhetoric, and that of Juan Perón, to be successful, and the legacy of beneficence in the Argentine Republic, dating back to the presidency of Bernardino Rivadavia. I then examine the women's labor and political rights movements preceding the Perón administrations through the lens of hegemonic elite womanhood, noting the ways in which Evita will deviate from these norms. Although Evita does subvert many expectations of women at this time, she does continue to engage in some norms of Republican Motherhood. I consider these continuations as a means of achieving two goals: the first is performing an air of femininity, one rooted in maternity, in order to be accepted as a woman in a traditionally masculine role; and the second is constructing affective bonds with her followers. Ultimately, I argue that it is this facilitation of a powerful emotional engagement, provoked by her political embodiment of maternity, not only that makes her successful as a public-facing woman, but also legible as a saintly figure after her untimely death. I conclude by applying this analysis to the artwork of Daniel Santoro, who combines imagery of sainthood and maternal abnegation in depicting her legacy.

## II. Historical Precedent: Before the Peróns

Preceding the ascension of the Peróns to political power, Argentina underwent a substantial shift in its political landscape that facilitated the success of Evita and Perón's rhetoric. Leading up to the rise of Perón, Argentine politics sustained the strongest Crisis of Participation of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century from the working classes, a rise of radicalisms within the presidential office, coup d'états, and a long decade of hunger and repression that stemmed from and reacted to the longstanding discontent among the substantial populations excluded or outlawed, as in the case of Peronism, from political participation. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, participation in the political sphere was reserved for elite men as the right to vote was limited to literate men who owned property, as established by the *Ley Electoral de 1821*.<sup>235</sup> Since lawmaking and politics were restricted to a small, oligarchic segment of Argentines, the rest of the population, many of whom were of indigenous descent, struggled to participate in public life and to have their voices heard, although anarchist, socialist, communist, and feminist and suffragists movements threatened this status quo.<sup>236</sup> In 1912, the Sáenz Peña Law established universal male suffrage for all Argentine citizens over 18 years of age,<sup>237</sup> ushering in the possibility for an entire class of people who were previously excluded to cast their votes. Subsequently, as the oligarchy saw their possibilities of maintaining power diminishing, a struggle for power between the elites and the middle and lower classes ensued, one that would come to a head under the Perón government.

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<sup>235</sup> Marcela Ternavasio, *La Revolución del Voto. Política y elecciones en Buenos Aires, 1810-1952* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2015), 75.

<sup>236</sup> Felipe Pigna, *Los mitos de la historia Argentina. De la ley Sáenz Peña a los albores del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2009).

<sup>237</sup> Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, trans. James P. Brennan (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 1.

While the passage of universal male suffrage initiated a process of democratization, an expansion of the scope of politics from land-owning, educated elites to men of the middle class, which continued under the reforms of the three Radical governments of the *Unión Cívica Radical Argentina* between 1916 and 1930 (Hipólito Yrigoyen, 1916-1922; Marcelo Torcuato de Alvear, 1922-1928; Yrigoyen, 1928-1930), this political process was met with much resistance. After failed coup d'états throughout the Radical period, attempted by the armed forces and supported by members of the elite, José Félix Uriburu successfully mounted a coup to unseat Yrigoyen in September 1930. This marked the beginning of the *Década Infame*, or the Infamous Decade, a period of electoral fraud, political oppression, and corruption lasting until the coup that brought Perón to hold political office in 1943. Throughout this long decade, those who had gained the right to vote in 1912 saw their political power eroded, a process that inflamed resentment within the working classes and especially among a key demographic that still lacked voting rights: women.

For women, especially those belonging to the working classes and of indigenous descent, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century ushered in a new way to participate in civic life. As discussed at length in the Introduction, Republican Motherhood served as a means for women to perform civic engagement, but only those who had been properly educated following the values of the elite. Those minoritized groups of women who Sarmiento would include in “barbarism” represented an impediment to bourgeois-republican economic and political consolidation and were therefore rendered invisible through the vision of virtuous Republican Motherhood. This effectively excluded Afro-Argentine, indigenous, and lower-class women from contributing civically and participating in public life through an acceptable channel.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Erika Denise Edwards, *Hiding in Plain Sight: Black Women, the Law, and the Making of a White Argentine Republic* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2020), 3.

### III. The Social Place of Beneficence and Social Aid in Modern Argentina: Women in the Public Sphere

This section will examine the organizations through which elite women were indeed able to exert civic influence, focusing on charity work and, particularly, *La Sociedad de Beneficencia* (The Beneficence Society).<sup>239</sup> Performing charity work through the administration of orphanages and shelters, and the overseeing of women's domestic labor gave married middle- and upper-class women a legal leverage that they did not enjoy in their own families – namely, custody rights over children.”<sup>240</sup> I will rely on Donna Guy's survey of women's charity work in Argentina from the end of the Civil Wars through the Second Peronism, *Women Build the Welfare State: Performing Charity and Creating Rights in Argentina, 1880-1955*, along with Laura Golbert's and Alejandra Facciuto's histories of the *Sociedad* itself, *De la Sociedad de Beneficencia a los Derechos Sociales* and *La Sociedad de Beneficencia. Lo oculto en la bondad de una época*, respectively. I supplement these secondary sources with primary documents of the era, gathered by me during several field research trips, including issues of the weekly magazine *Caras y Caretas*, government decrees, and documents from the archives of the *Sociedad* and similar organizations.

Until the Perón administration, the women's organization that was able to acceptably exert the most political influence was the *Sociedad de Beneficencia de Buenos Aires*, also referred to as the *Sociedad de Beneficencia de la Capital*, an organization “for ladies” created by Bernardino

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<sup>239</sup> Although this chapter will only address the *Sociedad de Beneficencia de Buenos Aires*, the largest of such organizations in Argentina, “organizations that practiced beneficence, with similar characteristics to that of the Capital, multiplied throughout the country.”

Laura Golbert, *De la Sociedad de Beneficencia a los Derechos Sociales* (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social, 2010), 25.

“organizaciones que practicaban la beneficencia, con características similares a la de la Capital, se multiplicaron a lo largo y a lo ancho del país.”

<sup>240</sup> Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State*, 19.

Rivadavia in 1823 to transfer the responsibility for charitable work for women and children from the Catholic Church to the state. In effect, it was not state employees, but middle- and upper-class women who exercised this power.<sup>241</sup> "Its administration was left in the hands of women who were responsible, in addition to other duties, for the education of girls in a city like Buenos Aires," the administration of the Women's Hospital, and the orphanage known as the *Casa de Expósitos*.<sup>242</sup> The *Sociedad* founded twelve institutes for minors and health centers between 1833 and 1907, and twenty-three institutes for dependents, including geriatric institutes, health centers, and maternity institutes, between 1908 and 1938.<sup>243</sup> In practice, it provided health care, housing, education, employment, and most importantly, moral instruction.

The inauguration of the *Sociedad* represented a concerted effort not only to shift power away from the Catholic Church, but also to create a material role for upper-class, *criolla* women within the public sphere of the newly independent Argentina. Although the Society was entrusted to women of the oligarchy, the presidential decree establishing it began, "[t]he social existence of women is still too vague and uncertain... [which] has posed so many obstacles to the progress of civilization,"<sup>244</sup> meaning that women needed to be given a concrete role in society in order to civilize the population. When the *Sociedad de Beneficencia* was established in 1823, women were socially relegated to the private domain as mothers, wives, and caretakers. Rivadavia's creation of the *Sociedad de Beneficencia* acknowledges that this position was beginning to change and sets a

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<sup>241</sup> Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State*, 8-9.

<sup>242</sup> Golbert, *De la Sociedad de Beneficencia a los Derechos Sociales*, 14.

"Su administración quedó en manos de mujeres que debían encargarse, además de otras obligaciones, de la educación de las niñas en una ciudad como la de Buenos Aires."

<sup>243</sup> Alejandra Facciuto, *La Sociedad de Beneficencia. Lo oculto en la bondad de una época* (Buenos Aires: Espacio Editorial, 2005), 102-3.

<sup>244</sup> Ministerio de Gobierno, Decreto de creación de la Sociedad de Beneficencia (Buenos Aires, 1823).

"La existencia social de las mujeres es aún demasiado vaga e incierta... ha opuesto tantos obstáculos al progreso de la civilización."

model of how elite women could and should engage in the public sphere, according to their natural inclination for compassion and moral education. Susana Moniec sees this construction of a social role for women as a proclamation of “the subjective intentions of a certain sector of power in Argentine society at the time, fundamentally the men of the ruling class, who assigned to women of that class specific attributes and knowledge, different from men, that would enable them to deal with social problems.”<sup>245</sup> In this way, the *Damas* of the *Sociedad de Beneficencia* would complement men’s work within the more formally governmental domain, without entrusting them with further political rights. Moreover, these elite women were not only given their own formal role in public society, but also trusted to educate impoverished and working-class women on what their role should be.

The *Sociedad* was given the task of helping poor children, women, and youth through the institutions it administered, using state funds but as an autonomous organization. I believe its creation as a non-state entity reflected that “the problem of poverty was not visualized in the context of inequality that the system of politico-economic relations that the time produced, but as the product of immorality and the failure to keep religious precepts.”<sup>246</sup> Those who received aid did so not because the Argentine government felt a sense of constitutional duty to rectify its shortcomings to its citizens, but to correct moral flaws and a lack of personal responsibility within them, strongly following the social classifications of State eugenics reformers, as the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who posited that criminality was congenital, “partly pathological

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<sup>245</sup> Susana Moniec, “El universo simbólico entorno de la sociedad de la beneficencia en la política social argentina,” *Revista Perspectivas*, no. 19 (2008), 29-30.

“las intenciones subjetivas de un determinado sector de poder de la sociedad argentina de la época, fundamentalmente de los hombres de la clase dominante, quienes asignaban a las mujeres de dicha clase atributos y saberes específicos, diferentes de los hombres, que las habilitarían para encargarse de los problemas sociales.”

<sup>246</sup> Facciuto, *La Sociedad de Beneficencia*, 34.

and partly atavistic, a revival of the primitive savage”<sup>247</sup> or Charles Darwin’s theories on natural selection. Specifically in the case of Lombroso, his perspective placed the blame for indigence, abandonment, and orphanhood on those impacted, in effect claiming that the moral instruction the *Sociedad* provided would free them from these afflictions.

The condemnation of those assisted by the *Sociedad* left room for them to be bettered by moral instruction and for the Damas to determine who was worthy of receiving their aid. According



Figure 3.1 "Premios a la Virtud de la Fiesta en el Politeama" (Awards for Virtue at the Politeama Theater), pictured in *Caras y Caretas* June 3, 1899

to Golbert, “The criteria for granting social assistance was ‘merit.’ Therefore, the potential beneficiaries should demonstrate exemplary behavior. Sacrifice, abnegation, and Christian resignation were rewarded.”<sup>248</sup> To this end, in 1823, the same year that the *Sociedad* was founded by President Rivadavia, a government decree implemented the annual granting of *Premios a la Virtud* (Awards for Virtue) by the *Sociedad* every

<sup>247</sup> Cesare Lombroso, “Introduction,” in *Criminal Man, according to the Classification of Cesare Lombroso*, Gina Lombroso Ferrero (New York: Putnam, 1911), xii.

<sup>248</sup> Golbert, 25.

“El criterio que regía para otorgar la asistencia social era el ‘merecimiento’. Por lo tanto, los eventuales beneficiarios debían mostrar un comportamiento ejemplar. Se premiaba el sacrificio, la abnegación y la resignación cristiana.”

26<sup>th</sup> of May, as pictured in an 1899 edition of *Caras y Caretas*. The rules for these awards read, “Every prize awarded for real merits is, apart from a rigorously fair tribute, a trigger promoting social perfection. Honour, dear to public awards, generally represents much more than its intrinsic value and it is a permanent way to encourage a practical life of virtue and attempts to acquire the qualities leading to such a reward.”<sup>249</sup> The date of conferral for these awards, May 26<sup>th</sup>, coincides with the celebrations for 25 de Mayo, the federal holiday commemorating the May Revolution, which I view as a strategic positioning of their virtuousness as an embodiment of patriotism. These virtues included awards “For humility. For brotherly love. For selflessness. For the needy person who has demonstrated perseverance for work. For the family of the ex-police agent who has fallen in the line of duty. For the most patient ill person... For the most long-suffering and poor woman,”<sup>250</sup> all of which highlighted a dedication to work and abnegation. The *Premios a la Virtud*, and the work of the Sociedad that accompanied them, served as a means of rewarding “moral” behavior – as determined by the Damas – and rejecting behavior associated with the *bárbaro* that the poor and the laboring classes were perceived to embody in the civilization versus barbarism dichotomy.

Although funding was provided by the government, along with private donors, it was up to the *Damas de Beneficencia* to decide who received aid.<sup>251</sup> Facciuto notes that those who funded the *Sociedad*, including the State, did so not “as a commitment of solidarity with others, but which represented, for the donor, a strategy in defense of its economic and political interests and interest in sustaining a certain *status quo*.”<sup>252</sup> If Facciuto is correct, the creation and financing of the

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<sup>249</sup> Government decree to implement the Awards for Virtue, Buenos Aires, 1 March 1823, cited in Lorenzo, Rey, and Tossounian, “Images of Virtuous Women,” 567.

<sup>250</sup> Facciuto, 68.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

*Sociedad* intentionally upheld a system in which elite, white women decided which lower-class, mostly mestizo and indigenous women and children were virtuous enough to be helped, on an individual basis.

It is relevant to note that the Damas themselves maintained affective distance between themselves and the women and children who received aid, which Guy attributes to “few feelings of class solidarity.”<sup>253</sup> Images of the Damas and those receiving beneficence demonstrate this affective and class rift, with the Damas curating an image of respectability and aloofness. One example is the photograph published in the October 10, 1908 edition of the magazine *Caras y*



Figure 3.2 “La comisión de damas en la Bolsa” (“The Commission of Damas in the Stock Market) on the “Day of the Poor Children,” pictured in *Caras y Caretas*, October 10, 1908

*Caretas* under the title “The commission of Damas in the Stock Market. Ladies of Beneficence” within an article about the ‘Day of the Poor Children,’ observed by the *Sociedad* and the *Patronato de la Infancia* (Child Welfare Board), a subset of the *Sociedad*

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“como compromiso de solidaridad con el prójimo sino que representaba, para el donante, una estrategia en defensa de sus intereses económicos, políticos y de sostenimiento de un determinado *statu quo*”

<sup>253</sup> Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State*, 59.

specifically for the homeless children of working class and immigrant parents.<sup>254</sup> On this annual day of fundraising for the poor children the *Sociedad* cared for, the Damas held their charity event at the luxurious Teatro Colón and raised 150,000 pesos more than the prior year (1907).<sup>255</sup> In the published photos of the event, the Damas can be seen wearing Edwardian-style women’s fashion – formal dresses with ruffled collars and exaggerated hats. While performing their beneficence, the Damas maintained an air of propriety through their dress and posture, a visible marker of their class difference and hierarchical position regarding those they aided.



Figure 3.3 "La señora Teodelina Alvear de Lezica, presidenta de la comisión de damas del Patronato de la Infancia, presenciando el desfile de los niños aislados por la Institución" ("Mrs. Teodelina Alvear de Lezica, president of the commission of Damas of the Child Welfare Board, witnessing the Institution’s parade of unreached children”) and “Grupo de niños y niñas entregando sus alcancías en el teatro Colón” (“Group of boys and girls turning in their collection boxes at the *Teatro Colón*”), pictured side-by-side in *Caras y Caretas*, October 10, 1908.

<sup>254</sup> “Patronato de la Infancia,” Patronato de la Infancia, accessed February 2, 2023, <http://patronatodelainfancia.org>.

<sup>255</sup> “El día de los niños pobres,” *Caras y Caretas* 11.523, October 10, 1908.

Although *Caras y Caretas* published photos of the “poor children” alongside photos of the women, there is no affective link between the *Damas* and these children. In the same article



Figure 3.4 “En el foyer del mismo teatro, después del reparto de los juguetes” (“In the Foyer of the Same Theater, After the Distribution of Toys”), “Day of the Poor Children,” pictured in *Caras y Caretas*, October 10, 1908

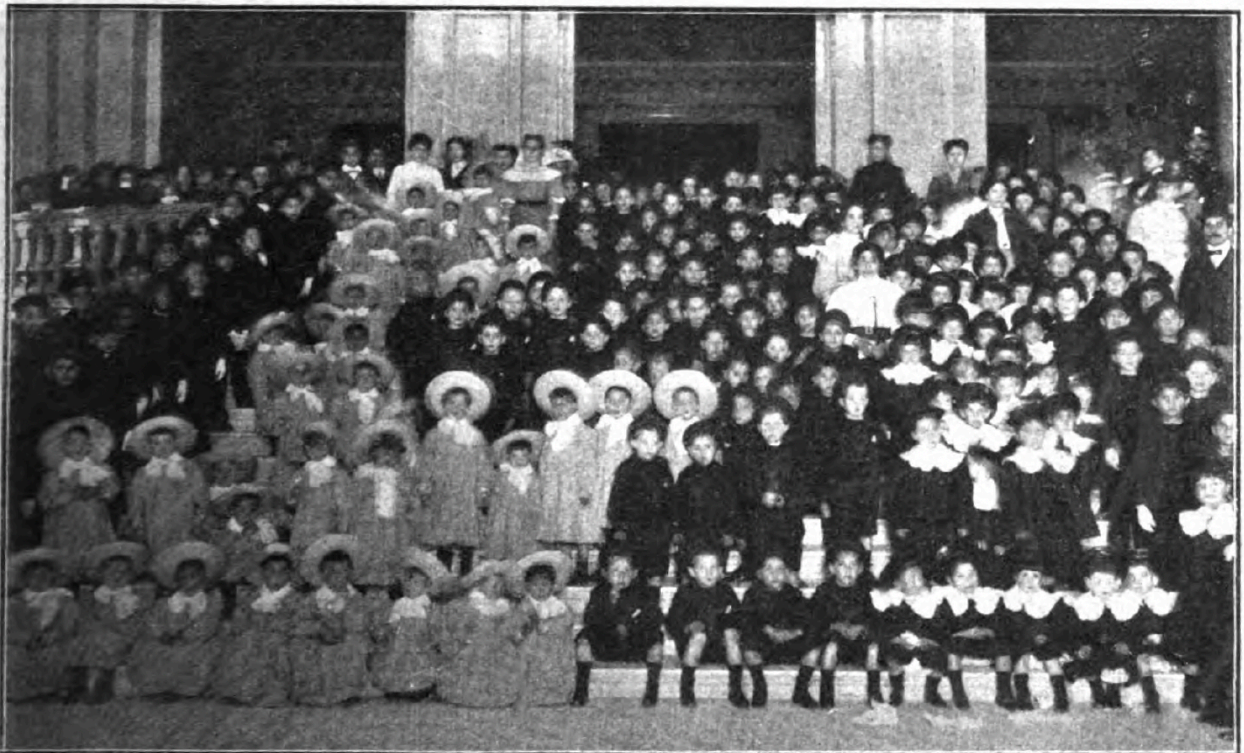


Figure 3.5 “Los niños del Patronato en la escalera de entrada del Colón” (“The children of the Patronato on the entryway stairs for the Colón”), pictured in *Caras y Caretas*, October 10, 1908

published for “Day of the Poor Children,” there appear four photos of both the *Damas* and the children – an image of three children with the president of the Child Welfare Board and two other *Damas* beside another of children turning in their donation boxes to the *Damas* (Figure 3.3); a portrait of children with *Damas* in the foyer of the Colón Theater (Figure 3.4); and a group picture of those in attendance at the entrance to the Colón (Figure 3.5). In each of these photographs, the *Damas* and the “poor children” are documented in close spatial proximity– the *Damas* are pictured standing next to or interacting with the children. However, their facial expressions and body language do not suggest any sort of emotional engagement. The *Damas* stand rigidly beside children with expressionless faces, a public display of formality of their restrained affective



Figure 3.6 Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane, from the collection of Asunción Lavrin. Reproduced in Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State* with the caption “Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane performing motherhood,” p. 89

geography. Notably, the children maintain their severe looks even in the photograph in Figure 3.5, taken after the children were given toys, a gesture that would normally engender feelings of excitement. In the photographs from the *Sociedad*, Guy notes an important characterization which in my analysis will prove to be on distinct impact in the case of Evita's maternal affect, "elite women were never photographed embracing a poor child or displaying emotions of caring... a stark contrast to the typical sentimental family portraits of children of the middle and upper classes, including the offspring of feminists."<sup>256</sup> An example of the latter is a photograph of early suffragist and first Argentine woman to receive a medical degree, Dr. Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane, a socialist, who is pictured above with four of her seven children (Figure 3.6). While the *Damas* in Figures 3.1-3.5 look stern or expressionless, Rawson de Dellepiane looks lovingly at the youngest of the children. The other children are posed with toys or reclining, a demonstration of comfort that is not present in the images of the *Damas*.

The *Sociedad*, like other philanthropic institutions run by elite women of the time, did provide aid to impoverished women and children, as well as administering housing for orphans and women's hospitals. However, much like Moniec, Facciuto, and Guy suggest, I observe this beneficence model to achieve three principal sociopolitical functions. First, it bequeaths a role to women of the upper class, allowing them to take on a role tangential to Republican Motherhood in a more public way, as these "[p]erceived gender-appropriate female roles gave these women the authority to help disadvantaged children. Female volunteerism also reflected the absence of professional jobs that would have increased female participation in the labor force as social workers, doctors, and psychologists in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century."<sup>257</sup> Second, it provides a moralizing function by having these elite women instruct those of the lower

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<sup>256</sup> Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State*, 60.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

classes in the “civilized” nature they were seen to lack. Finally, I would like to underscore the severe and emotionless division between the *Damas* and those they aided upheld the sociopolitical *status quo*, aligning elite, *criolla*, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century mestiza, women with civilization and impoverished indigenous and Afro-descendent women with barbarism.

#### **IV. Women’s Labor in the Public Sphere**

I believe that the powerful rupture represented by Eva Perón and her political maternity can only be fully understood by the naturalization and coupling of beneficence and oligarchy. The *Sociedad* not only created a standard of elite women’s public and social engagement, following the mandate of elite men’s interests, but also one for impoverished and racialized women. In this model, for women and children of the lower class, the *Sociedad de Beneficencia* generated a forced dependence on the charity of elite women, who became the arbiters of virtue and merit. While elite women engaged in public activities through the inherently maternal charity associated with the *Sociedad de Beneficencia*, it created a different form of participation for the women and children who received assistance. “Unlike the ‘Ladies,’ the poor and assisted women were prepared to act as servants, maids, ladies-in-waiting, nannies, and (domestic) cooks. In this sense, through the language and the typical categories of the time, the difference was constructed.”<sup>258</sup> This difference positioned elite women as the maternal caretakers of those without means, but also pushed the place of lower-class women outside of the home. Therefore, the recipients of the *Sociedad*’s

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<sup>258</sup> Moniec, 30.

“A diferencia de las ‘Damas’, las mujeres pobres y las asistidas eran preparadas para desempeñarse como sirvientas, mucamas, damas de compañía, niñeras y cocineras (domésticas). En este sentido, mediante el lenguaje y las categorías propias de la época se construyó la diferencia.”

“beneficence” occupied a sanctioned place in the public sphere as laborers, a position that would only increase after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Due to the nature of the class and ethnic differences between the Damas and the women receiving aid, the women who entered the workforce as a result of the *Sociedad*'s job training tended to belong to the indigenous and mestizo majority population of Argentina. The assumption that the lower- and working-class women and children assisted by the *Sociedad* lacked virtue or morals stemmed from longstanding stereotypes regarding indigeneity and race in Argentina and in Latin America more broadly. After the *Campaña del Desierto* (1878-1895), a genocide against Northern and Central Patagonian tribes, the multi-ethnic residual population of women and children would be relocated to Buenos Aires, received by the women of the elite who distributed them as servants among oligarchic families. As in the case of African and Afro-descendent slaves, mothers and children were forcibly separated and families disjoined. In 1885, the *Sociedad* prepared a series of work contracts for these indigenous women (and some men) who were captured in the “guerras contra el indio” (wars on the Indians) that the federal government waged in the Pampa, Patagonia, and the Chaco between 1878 and 1885.<sup>259</sup> These contracts handed the indigenous woman over to a female guardian who would supervise their work as a domestic servant and was charged with “integrating them into ‘civilization,’” which they signed a promise to uphold.<sup>260</sup> On the other hand, these contracts did not require a signature for the indigenous person being forced into servitude because “their consent did not play a part” in the agreement.<sup>261</sup> Those handed over were primarily single women, mothers with children, and couples whose

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<sup>259</sup> Cecilia Lorena Allemandi, “La Sociedad de Beneficencia y la colocación de indígenas: un acercamiento a través de los contratos de trabajo (Ciudad de Buenos Aires, circa 1885),” *Anuario del Instituto de Historia Argentina* 19, no. 1 (May 2019): 1.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

children would also be forced to serve the guardian and her family.<sup>262</sup> By having their domestic workforce “supplied by these groups [who were] stigmatized by their ethnic status (considered ‘barbarians,’ ‘savages,’ ‘atavistic’), domestic servitude reinforced the construction of these existing differences and hierarchies.”<sup>263</sup> This tendency has been identified by Mirta Zaida Lobato as a “tension between work and virtue,”<sup>264</sup> in which those who worked out of necessity were perceived as less virtuous than the *Damas* who provided aid out of beneficence. Following the moralizing aims of the *Sociedad*, the women and children destined for servitude under the guise of protection were subject to the moral reforms of the *Sociedad* to guarantee social and cultural assimilation. Apart from the hierarchical and emotionally distant element of this work by the *Sociedad*, a significant aspect of these work contracts aimed at assimilation is the effect it had on children. As the *Damas* assumed their mothers lacked the morals to properly instruct them to become citizens of the Nation, they intervened, performing a sort of surrogate Republican Motherhood, an affectless maternity while the biological mothers worked as domestic servants.

Although a majority of laborers continued to be men at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the shifting labor conditions during the Radical Period heavily affected women in the workplace. Women had always been present in the workforce;<sup>265</sup> “since the late nineteenth century, women

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>264</sup> Mirta Zaida Lobato, “Women workers in South America (nineteenth-twentieth centuries),” trans. Ethan Rundell, *Clio* [Online], 38, 2013.

<sup>265</sup> The first Argentine federal census, conducted in 1869 under the presidency of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, included a section titled “*Profesiones de mujeres*” (“Women’s Occupations”), which outlines the quantity of women in the national workforce. According to the census-takers, “[o]f the 61,424 widows, 247,602 single women, and more than 25,000 orphans in the republic, nearly 140,000 are seamstresses, laundresses, weavers, ironers, cigarmakers, kneaders, etc.; The result is that half the female adult population waits with uncertainty for daily sustenance, frequently difficult and precarious.”

Argentine Republic, Superintendente de Censo, *Primer Censo de la República Argentina*. XII.

“De las 61,424 viudas, 247,602 solteras, y más de 25,000 huérfanas, que tiene la república, resulta que unas 140,000 son costureras, lavanderas, tejedoras, planchadoras, cigarreras, amasadoras, etc.; esto es, tenemos la mitad de la población [sic] mujeril adulta, espera con incertidumbre el sustento de jornal, muchas veces difícil y precario.”

constituted a fundamental workforce in certain industries (textiles, clothing, tobacco, matches)...[T]he industrial growth of the city of Buenos Aires had a high proportion of female workers... The most concentrated industries (textiles and clothing) had one third of the workforce.”<sup>266</sup> Despite this presence, women’s labor in the public sector was still viewed as a “product of a particular personal condition from which society accepted her status as a salaried worker in activities that took her from her ‘natural place’: the home.”<sup>267</sup> Women’s labor and income was considered a complement to that of her husband or father, except in cases such as those receiving aid from the *Sociedad de Beneficencia*, which were viewed as anomalies to be pitied. Thus, at the beginning of the century, their labor was only paid 76% of what men made in the same unskilled positions, on average.<sup>268</sup> Considered within the scope of this study, it is important to note that, although women ventured beyond the confines of the domestic sphere to work, this labor was still considered illegitimate. Women of the lower classes, those who were forced to work out of necessity, continued to be perceived as less feminine and, therefore, worthy of dismissal, an exclusion that Evita sought to remedy. With the rise of the *Unión Cívica Radical* (Radical Civic Union), which Donna Guy calls “the first middle-class party,”<sup>269</sup> women came to occupy a more prominent and visible role in the workforce. By 1914, between the granting of

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<sup>266</sup> Maricela Nari, *Políticas de maternidad y maternalismo político. Buenos Aires, 1890-1940* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2004), 79.

“Desde finales del siglo XIX, las mujeres constituyeron una fuerza de trabajo fundamental en ciertas industrias (textiles, confección, tabaco, fósforos) ... [E]l crecimiento industrial de la ciudad de Buenos Aires contó con una alta proporción de trabajadoras... Las industrias más concentradas (textiles y confección) tenían una tercera parte de mano de obra femenina a fines del siglo XIX.”

<sup>267</sup> Juan Manuel Cerdá, “Levantando el telón: el trabajo femenino a comienzos del siglo XX. Una aproximación a partir de los Censos Nacionales de Población” (presentation, Segundas Jornadas Nacionales de Historia Social La Falda, Córdoba, May 13-15, 2009): 5.

“producto de una condición personal particular a partir de la cual la sociedad aceptaba su condición de trabajadora asalariada en actividades que la sacaba de su ‘lugar natural’: el hogar.”

<sup>268</sup> Superintendencia de Riesgos del Trabajo, “Un breve resumen de la Conquista de derechos laborales de las mujeres en la historia,” *Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social Argentina*, 2.

<sup>269</sup> Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State*, 10.

men's universal right to vote and the beginning of Yrigoyen's radical government, women made up 21% of the workforce.<sup>270</sup> As women's presence in the workplace began to increase, so did their labor and political organizing.

## V. Women in Labor and Political Organizing

What follows describes the pro-suffragist movement and leadership, leading up for Evita's resounding achievement in women's political participation and suffrage legislation. In the early years of women's organizing in Argentina, activists tended to belong to one of two groups – either anarchist or socialist working women or upper-class women advocating a white hegemonic, pro-European feminism with for rights for all literate, educated people. The anarchists and socialists began their organizing in the late 1800s and focused on the plight of working people, but continued to emphasize ethno-racial hierarchies. One of the most prominent early advocates for women's rights as a public interest was Alicia Moreau de Justo. She founded the *Centro Socialista Femenino* in the early 1900s, along with the *Unión Feminista Nacional* and *Nuestra Causa*, a publication for reformist feminists to call not only for basic rights, but also childcare, child protection, public education.<sup>271</sup> Within the *Centro Socialista Femenino*, Moreau de Justo and others like Rawson de Dellepiane (pictured earlier with her children) and Julieta Lanteri pushed for women's suffrage. In 1910 at the *Congreso Femenino Internacional in Buenos Aires*, the *Partido Socialista* first proposed Argentine women's suffrage, a right they continued to advocate for alongside the right to divorce. Despite her progressive views in many areas, Moreau de Justo maintained social

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>271</sup> Dora Barrancos, "Sociedad y género. Debates sobre el sufragio femenino en la Argentina (1870-1920)," *Debate Feminista*, vol. 29 (abril 2004), pp. 293-329: 310.

Darwinist, eugenicist beliefs that upheld the racial superiority of those of European descent. She claimed that there were “two types” of Argentine women: the “Hispano-Colonial type... the direct descendant of the woman born in a home formed by the union of the Spaniard and the Indian, a home ruled entirely by the father” and the “Argentine-European[s]... from the homes transplanted to this side of the sea by the current of immigration.”<sup>272</sup> The same women who were pushing for equal rights saw a distinction between themselves – mestiza women, of principally European descent – and lower class women, – of indigenous descent – who were less capable of administering their liberties.

After World War I, women of the upper-class responded to the shifting political landscape and working women’s organization by spearheading their own rights’ movements. Rather than organizing within political parties and moving for women to occupy political office, their strategy was to change public opinion and present male lawmakers with petitions. This resulted in a 1919 legislative proposal from Santa Fe Senator Rogelio Araya for women’s suffrage requiring literacy. The *Asociación Argentina para el Sufragio* (Argentine Association for Suffrage), an upper-class women’s group of European descendants founded in 1932, wanted to require literacy for voting women, as did the *Unión Argentina de Mujeres* (Argentine Union of Women), formed in 1936 by Victoria Ocampo, author and member of the illustrious Ocampo family. It is important to note that, although women were agitating for suffrage, it was principally those who belonged to privileged classes, both socioeconomic and racial. Most crucially, they did so through the lens of maternity, much like the advocacy of the *Sociedad de Beneficencia*.

No matter which camp of women’s rights advocacy, much rhetoric relied heavily on the idea of “feminismo maternal,” or maternal feminism. In the context of European women’s rights

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<sup>272</sup> National American Woman Suffrage Association, cited in Katherine Marino, *Feminism for the Americas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 29.

movements, Gisela Bock and Patricia Thane define maternal feminism as the “demand[ing] women’s rights by means of insisting on maternity and maternalism as a distinctive and common feature of the female sex.”<sup>273</sup> Many Argentine feminists adopted this position, highlighting women’s merited place in the home at the same time that they demanded political rights.

In Moreau de Justo’s seminal work “Como se transforma el hogar,” she argues that women’s movement into the public sphere wouldn’t and shouldn’t interrupt the nuclear family, which was integral for a good society.<sup>274</sup> The emphasis of the importance of the family in the private sphere, even from one of the earliest activists to adopt the term feminist in Argentina, conveys the continued relevance of the family and the home in women’s organizing. Writ large, women’s discourse surrounding social, political, and labor rights integrated questions of the home into public and political discourse, rather than erasing or overwriting domestic life. Even governmental discussions of women centered maternal discourse. In 1932 congressional debate over the rights of women, those in favor of the vote argued, “that the woman’s vote wouldn’t alter the family structure.”<sup>275</sup> As much as feminists advocated for women’s right to vote and participation in civic life, feminist discourse continued to rest on the importance of the nuclear family, highlighting the fact that women could both be integrated in public life and maintain their homes.

Although they did not want to interrupt domestic life, many “feminists believed that all mothers needed equal legal rights to protect and govern their children whereas under Argentine law only fathers exercised such rights.”<sup>276</sup> When legislation to this effect came before Congress,

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<sup>273</sup> Gisela Bock and Patricia Thane, *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880s-1950s* (London: Routledge, 1990), 120.

<sup>274</sup> Alicia Moreau de Justo, “Cómo se transforma el hogar,” *Humanidad Nueva*, Año II, Tomo III, Nro. 10, Buenos Aires, 31 de octubre, 1910: 486-488.

<sup>275</sup> Julia Rosemberg, *Eva y las mujeres. Historia de una irreverencia*, (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Futurock, 2019), 47. “que el voto femenino no alteraba la estructura de la familia”

<sup>276</sup> Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State*, 7.

“male members of the Socialist Party who backed this legislation... often heeded the advice of feminist allies. Radical Party legislators soon joined them and offered their own legislative proposals. Although legislators in 1926 granted married women the right to choose their own professions and keep their salaries, it soon became clear that it would be easier to provide women access to the workplace than to revise male control over *patria potestad* except in the case of delinquent children.”<sup>277</sup> Despite the gains that women’s rights groups made throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the process stalled during the *Década Infame* and World War II, which overshadowed the demand for equal rights, including the overwriting of *patria potestad*. I consider it crucial to recognize this context of disenfranchisement and dispossession among women and the working classes leading up to the 1940s, which created an auspicious political environment for the Peróns rhetoric that emphasized civic and human rights. However, most important is the centering of motherhood regarding the place of women in politics, a rhetoric that foreshadows Evita’s maternal political discourse.

## **VI. The Political Ascendence of the Peróns**

This section analyzes the breakout of a leader and a process that involve the three-time president, Juan Domingo Perón, and the Peronist movement, which turned out to be the most transformative political and socio-cultural phenomenon in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Argentina. I hope the information that follows can offer a background rich enough to introduce the complex, intangible, yet powerful imprint left by Peronism and its other leader – María Eva Duarte de Perón. Along with discussion of *patria potestad*, during the *Década Infame* and the onset of World War

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 22.

II legislative discussions of the women's vote stalled, along with movement for working- and lower-class peoples' rights. I argue that the discontent among the politically disenfranchised created an environment amenable not only to a regime change, but to the ascension to prominence of General Juan Perón to prominence within the new government. In 1943, in response to the political repression of the *Década Infame*, the United Officers' Group (GOU) organized a coup to overthrow the government of Ramón Castillo.<sup>278</sup> This self-proclaimed Revolution of 1943 demanded Castillo's resignation in June 1943, installing Arturo Rawson as President. As a participant in the Revolution, Perón was appointed *Secretario de Trabajo y Previsión* (Secretary of Labor and Social Welfare), a position he held from December 1943 until October 1945.<sup>279</sup> While this was not the most prestigious position he could be given, it proved to be a strategic way for him to garner favor among the working class. Within his sphere of influence in the Department of Labor, he instated long-awaited reforms for labor conditions, introduced social welfare benefits, strengthened the power of unions, broadened the power of his own Department, and ensured accident compensation, severance pay, guaranteed vacation days, minimum wage, and an *aguinaldo* (year-end bonus). These reforms were unsurprisingly favored by workers and unpopular among the wealthy, especially factory and business owners, which earned Perón enemies among the politically connected. Although this may not seem significant in the context of Evita, it represents a stark and long-lasting change from the attitudes of earlier political elites, a shift that Evita herself comes to embody in an unprecedented way within the international history of women's political leadership. In the case of Perón, his work within the Department of Labor

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<sup>278</sup> James P. Brennan and Marcelo Rougier, *The Politics of National Capitalism: Peronism and the Argentine Bourgeoisie, 1946-1976* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

bettered living conditions for the working class by focusing his efforts on changes that would provide a more dignified life, with the term “dignity” recurring in Peronist rhetoric.

For her part, Evita invoked parallel discourse about dignity in her political speeches and memoirs. For many Peronists, Evita represents the successful foray of Argentine women into the public sphere. While many women before her held paid labor positions and had advocated for a woman’s right to vote, along with others like the right to divorce and to hold property, Evita’s position as First Lady specially positioned her to advocate for the right to vote from a position of relative power. Furthermore, her humble origins made her ascension to political relevance all the more legible to working people, although the elite maintained she was illegitimate.

One example of this opinion represented in literature is that of Roberto Bolaño’s 2003 short story “El gaucho insufrible” (“The Insufferable Gaucho.”) This story is not situated in the Peronist era, nor does it directly discuss Evita at any moment. Rather, a former judge decides to abandon the city of Buenos Aires in favor of his family’s estancia, in a Borgesian journey southward. The judge, Pereda, comes from a wealthy family and lives alone after his wife has died and his adult children have left the house. When asked why he doesn’t remarry, Pereda responds that he doesn’t want to force the unbearable burden of a stepmother on his children: “In Pereda’s opinion, most of Argentina’s recent problems could be traced to the figure of the stepmother. We never had a mother, as a nation, he would say; or, she was never there; or, she left us on the doorstep of the orphanage. But we’ve had plenty of stepmothers, all sorts, starting with the great Peronist stepmother,”<sup>280</sup> alluding to Evita.

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<sup>280</sup> Bolaño, “El gaucho insufrible,” 16.

“Para Pereda, el gran problema de Argentina, de la Argentina de aquellos años, era precisamente el problema de la madrastra. Los argentinos, decía, no tuvimos madre o nuestra madre fue invisible o nuestra madre nos abandonó en las puertas de la inclusa. Madrastras, en cambio, hemos tenido demasiadas y de todos los colores, empezando por la gran madrastra peronista”

Up until this moment in the story, there had been no mention of Perón or Evita, making this reference striking and conspicuous. While I have observed many invoking Evita as mother of the Nation, this is the only instance I have discovered a mention of her as stepmother. Albeit Pereda elides her name and, in doing so, evokes the dictatorial policies banning the use of any Peronist imagery or “propaganda” under *Decreto 4161/56*.<sup>281</sup> Evidently, this offhand mention of the nameless “great Peronist stepmother” implies the archetype of the evil stepmother who usurps the rightful place of the mother and mistreats her children. On this archetype, Natalie Le Clue and Janelle Vermaak-Griessel write, “[t]hese structures serve to create villains out of women who seek control or power in a patriarchal society where they are denied it; women who seek more than their world allows them are, as a result, evil. They have overstepped the limits placed before them by society.”<sup>282</sup> In this regard, we can say Evita overstepped and overcame limits placed on women for generations, embodying the propagation of these paradigms throughout almost a century. In view of this, Pereda’s comparison of Evita to this wicked stepmother simultaneously chastises her for encroaching on the bounds placed on women in society as well as highlights her lack of legitimacy. As Perón is positioned here as the father, describing Evita as the *stepmother* undermines and intermediates her relationship to *his* children, the citizens of Argentina, as well as the marital relationship between the two of them.

When Evita married Juan Perón, their marriage license listed the bride as María Eva Duarte, born in Junín in the year 1922. In fact, she was born Eva María Ibarguren on May 7, 1919, in the town of Los Toldos in the Province of Buenos Aires. Besides the change in her birth year to make herself appear younger, the most notable change is the falsification of her last name to Duarte.

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<sup>281</sup> Decreto 4161/56 (1956), [https://www.argentina.gob.ar/normativa/nacional/decreto\\_ley-4161-1956-296876](https://www.argentina.gob.ar/normativa/nacional/decreto_ley-4161-1956-296876).

<sup>282</sup> Natalie Le Clue and Janelle Vermaak-Griessel, *Gender and Female Villains in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fairy Tale Narratives: From Evil Queens to Wicked Witches* (Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2022), 188.

Evita was given the last name Ibarguren, inherited from her mother Juana, rather than the paternal surname of her father Juan. Even though he fathered all of Juana Ibarguren's children, he never married her. In fact, he was married to another woman, with whom he had a family, making Juana, Evita, and her siblings his second, "illegitimate" family. Due to their status as the unrecognized family, Juana was forced to primarily support herself and her children single-handedly, which left them in poverty. Evita's provincial origins as an impoverished, unrecognized child, one who could have fallen under the auspices of the *Sociedad de Beneficencia*, did not position her to be well-respected in the political sphere by women like the *Damas*, where women were expected to come from aristocratic families.

More importantly, for the purposes of this study, her migration from the Province to the Capital, periphery to center, the hierarchical foundation of the country's geopolitics, revives the spatial dichotomy so important to the legend of la Difunta Correa. Her story of conflict foregrounded by the binary of civilization versus barbarism, *Federales* versus *Unitarios*, Buenos Aires versus *interior* is replicated in Evita's reception in the Capital. At age 15, in 1934, Evita moved to Buenos Aires on her own to pursue an acting career, a female profession that did not garner her any respect among the political elite in its own right, as it was perceived as a career for lower-class aspiring women, especially those who would receive economic and network-related support from men through sexual favors. This perspective was only exacerbated by Evita and Perón's cohabitation long before their marriage, a taboo at the time. Accusations of prostitution and social climbing characterized critiques from the elite throughout her relationship with Perón, only increasing as her political position became more prominent.

Her movement from province to Capital, actress to politically-oriented, illegitimate to established mimics the traditional binaries of central and periphery, and civilization and barbarism,

while thwarting the Nation's previous foundation of stability. In this vein, biographer Alfonso Crespo Rodas, in his chronicling of the life and afterlife of Evita, titles the chapter about her move to Buenos Aires "La travesía del desierto," "The Crossing of the Desert."<sup>283</sup> In this section, Crespo Rodas does not just touch on Evita's personal migration, but also the cultural positioning of Buenos Aires, from the point of view of the provinces and their inhabitants: "Strident and dynamic, Buenos Aires was the consecrating goal, the one that anointed idols or pulverized hopes. The province and the rest of Latin America were fascinated by the magnetism of 'La Reina del Plata.'"<sup>284</sup> While the title "La travesía del desierto" suggests a focus on the interior, beyond Buenos Aires, most of the situating of the chapter focuses on the City, not the Provinces. Much like in *La cautiva*, this desert that Crespo Rodas alludes to in the title is not in fact an arid and desolate landscape, but a lush, humid pampa.<sup>285</sup> For many of the political elites in Buenos Aires, Evita was worthy of comparison to María of *La cautiva*; she was contaminated by her upbringing and could never become accepted within the Lettered City and its economic oligarchy.

Returning to her acting, Evita was most successful in the field of *radioteatro*, audio-only performances transmitted over the radio which, then, represented in eruption of culturally underrated media, oriented toward audiences of the masses. These self-taught skills as an orator and performer translated to her political life, as she was able to convey tenacity, gravity, but, moreover, a particular transmission of emotion in her live and radio-broadcast speeches. Although members of the oligarchy and upper classes looked down on Evita, her background, rhetoric, and platform were able to garner her broad support and admiration from the lower classes and some

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<sup>283</sup> Alfonso Crespo Rodas, *Evita, viva o muerta* (Barcelona: Editorial Fontalba, 1980), 31.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

"Estridente y dinámica, Buenos Aires era la meta consagratoria, aquella que ungía ídolos o pulverizaba esperanzas. La provincia y el resto de América Latina vivían fascinados por el magnetismo de 'La Reina del Plata'"

<sup>285</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "the Pampas," accessed April 9, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/the-Pampas>.

sectors of the middle classes, as well. Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano summed up this dichotomy in the third volume of his collection *Memoria del fuego*:

“They hated her, hated her, the *biencomidos*: for being poor, for being a woman, for being insolent. She challenged them by speaking and offended them by living. Born to be a servant, or at most an actress in cheap melodramas, Evita had left her place.

They loved her, loved her, the *malqueridos*: for her mouth, they said and cursed. Besides, Evita was the blonde fairy who embraced the leper and the raggedy and gave peace to the desperate, the incessant spring that lavished jobs and mattresses, shoes and sewing machines, dentures, wedding clothes. The wretched received these charities from the side, not from above, even though Evita wore stunning jewels and in the middle of summer flaunted visionary coats. It’s not that they forgave the luxury: they celebrated it. The people did not feel humiliated but avenged by their queen’s robes.

In front of Evita’s body, surrounded by white carnations, the people parade in tears. Day after day, night after night, the lines of torches: a two-week-long caravan.”<sup>286</sup>

Positioned on the threshold of an abrupt change of political and cultural paradigms, Evita was, and continues to be a polarizing figure, within the Argentine public, revered by some and hated by others. This derives from her positionality, which represented a stark departure from the image of the politically-minded elite women, as embodied by the *Damas de Beneficencia* and feminist activists like Rawson de Dellepiane – a welcome change for members of the working class, who is fondly invoked as their spiritual mother.

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<sup>286</sup> Eduardo Galeano, *Memoria del fuego III* (Siglo XXI Editores: Madrid, 2010), 136.

“La odiaban, la odian, los biencomidos: por pobre, por mujer, por insolente. Ella los desafiaba hablando y los ofendía viviendo. Nacida para sirvienta, o a lo sumo como actriz de melodramas baratos, Evita se había salido de su lugar.

La querían, la quieren, los malqueridos: por su boca ellos decían y maldecían. Además, Evita era el hada rubia que abrazaba al leproso y al haraposos y daba paz al desesperado, el incesante manantial que prodigaba empleos y colchones, zapatos y máquinas de coser, dentaduras postizas, ajuares de novia. Los míseros recibían estas caridades desde al lado, no desde arriba, aunque Evita luciera joyas despampanantes y en pleno verano ostentara abrigos de visión. No es que le perdonaran el lujo: se lo celebraban. No se sentía el pueblo humillado sino vengado por sus atavíos de reina.

Ante el cuerpo de Evita, rodeado de claveles blancos, desfila el pueblo llorando. Día tras día, noche tras noche, la hilera de antorchas: una caravana de dos semanas de largo.”

## VII. Evita as a Departure from the Republican and Beneficence Models

As a woman in the political sphere without any biological children, Evita is hardly a stereotypical mother model. Although Evita never had children of her own, it is worth bearing in mind that she is referred to affectionately as Mother of the *Descamisados* and treated as a maternal figure. During her lifetime, Evita invoked maternal discourse when referring to herself as Spiritual Leader of the Nation or Mother of the *Descamisados*, as someone who cared for her people as if they were her children. Her Foundation furthered this discourse in the publication of pamphlets highlighting her contributions to the welfare of children and mothers through the *Ciudades Infantiles* and the *Hogares de Tránsito*. Furthermore, Evita's performance of maternal norms through the *Fundación Eva Perón* represents an affective departure from the top-down charity model of the *Sociedad* and the visual and the proxemic distance that the Damas maintained from those dispossessed and deprived subjects receiving aid.

When considering Evita's image through the lens of Republican Motherhood, she both continues and deviates from the model. As women's civic engagement in Argentina is inherently tied to their participation in Republican Motherhood, Evita's invocation of these norms represents a concerted effort to embody feminine norms, but especially those unusual ones, associated with participation in civic life while she occupies a pivotal space in the traditionally masculine sphere of politics. Moreover, while the Republican model places an emphasis on the raising of sons to be good citizens, Evita's labor focuses on her daughters, the *descamisadas*. Despite frequent critiques of her femininity, oftentimes rooted in her physical reproduction,<sup>287</sup> Evita was able to generate a

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<sup>287</sup> Evita's reproductive health will be discussed in the following chapter.

powerful political sentiment of maternity toward the Argentinean people, which in turn engendered acceptance as a childless woman in the public eye.

One of Evita's key means of engendering emotional connections with working class Argentines was through her notorious deviations from the norms and social choreography of the *Sociedad de Beneficencia*. As First Lady, Eva was expected to run the *Sociedad*; it was tradition for First Ladies to be elected president by its members, though not all received the invitation.<sup>288</sup> However, in the case of Evita, they worried her illegitimate upbringing and profession would set a bad example for the orphaned children and refused to instate her. Though not strictly in response to the snubbing of the First Lady, the Perón administration slowly disbanded the *Sociedad* and Evita personally funded her own charitable organization, *la Fundación Eva Perón*, "a social welfare institution, which allows her to channel her charitable activity in connection with the symbolic children: the masses of 'descamisadas.'"<sup>289</sup> Through the establishment of this *Fundación*, Evita created a space within which she was able to develop maternal relationships with people of the working classes, something lacking within the Beneficence system, and governmental social benefits as well.

One of the principal actions of the *Fundación Eva Perón* was the construction of *hogares*, or homes, for women in precarious positions. Most of these women were "single mothers, abandoned mothers, illegally constituted families, numerous offspring, abnormal children, elderly, disabled, chronically ill, medical treatment, unemployed, justified transit and immigrants,

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<sup>288</sup> Donna Guy, "La verdadera historia de la Sociedad de Beneficencia," ed. José Luis Moreno, *La política social antes de la política social. Caridad, Beneficencia y política social en Buenos Aires, siglos XVII a XX* (Buenos Aires: Trama-Prometeo Libros, 2000), 253-269, 257.

<sup>289</sup> Claudia Soria, *Los cuerpos de Eva. Anatomía del deseo femenino* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 2005), 124-5.

"una institución de ayuda social, que le permite canalizar su actividad benefactora en conexión con los hijos simbólicos: las masas 'descamisadas'"

homeless” in search of shelter, employment, or care for their children.<sup>290</sup> Between 1946 and the coup d’état that unseated Perón during his second presidential term, the *Fundación Eva Perón* constructed 3 *Hogares de Tránsito* (Temporary Homes), an *Hogar de la Empleada* (Workers’ Home), an *Hogar de Ancianos* (Elderly Home), a *Ciudad Infantil* (Children’s City), 20 *Hogares Escuela* (School Homes), and an *Escuela de Enfermeras* (Nurses’ School), among other residences for assistance, many of which were under construction when Perón was forced into exile.

In these *hogares*, *ciudades*, and *escuelas*, along with her other political projects, Evita fostered the construction of familial and maternal spaces, in which she took on the position of social or spiritual mother. The *Hogares*, notably called homes and not shelters, provided much more than shelter for the residents, with Evita providing structures of financial, familial, and spiritual support. Each of the *Hogares de Tránsito* housed between 70 and 90 women, plus cradles for their babies, providing not only temporary housing, but also medical care, prepared meals, and job training in typing and sewing, all free of charge.<sup>291</sup> Whereas the *Sociedad de Beneficencia* did also train women to take on employment, it was mostly positions in the private sphere, like nannying and serving as domestic servants. The work training from the *Fundación*, on the other hand, prepared women to support themselves and their children in the public sector with careers in fields that were open to women, with the explicit goal of “promoting their integration and protection” in society a novel initiative for women’s organizations.<sup>292</sup>

Previous models of beneficence and charity brought lower-class and racialized women into the homes of elite women to provide domestic work as servants in response to their demonstrated

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<sup>290</sup> Carolina Barry, “Mujeres en tránsito,” in *La Fundación Eva Perón y las mujeres: entre la provocación y la inclusión*, ed. Carolina Barry, Karina Ramacciotti, and Adriana Valobra, (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2008), 83.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

“promover su integración y protección”

socioeconomic need and the lack of labor options and jobs training at the time. These women and their children received aid rooted in pity and a hierarchical social structure, in which upper-class women were arbiters of need and holders of the proverbial purse strings. On the contrary, in the aid system epitomized by the *Fundación's hogares*, care is not predicated on a class or ethnic hierarchy that necessitates charity, but on a conscious and well-defined commitment to the dignity of life. Laura Golbert and Emilia Roca underscore another transformative aspect of the *Fundación*: “[u]nlike what happened in various societies of beneficence, the *Fundación* did not distinguish between deserving and undeserving of help. There was talk of social rights and aid was not limited to the satisfaction of a basic need.”<sup>293</sup> Her foundation approached social welfare not as beneficent or charitable acts, but as a means of providing a dignified life, a stark departure from the work of the *Sociedad*.<sup>294</sup>

Furthermore, certain *hogares* provided Catholic religious support, with weekly masses in addition to weddings, baptisms, and communions. At the inaugural ceremonies for all three of the *Hogares de Tránsito*, the buildings were blessed by Monsignor Santiago L. Copello, the Archbishop of Buenos Aires.<sup>295</sup> Most of the time, Evita and Perón themselves were the godparents for the child or the couple to be wed.<sup>296</sup> In addition to providing the space for residents of the *hogares* to engage with their religion, Evita takes on the role of godmother on multiple occasions,

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<sup>293</sup> Laura Golbert and Emilia Roca, “De la Sociedad de Beneficencia a los derechos sociales,” *Revista de Trabajo* 6, no. 8 (January/July 2010): 38.

“A diferencia de lo que sucedía en las distintas sociedades de beneficencia, en la *Fundación* no se distinguía entre merecedores y no merecedores de ayuda. Se hablaba de derechos sociales y la ayuda no se limitaba a la satisfacción de una necesidad básica.”

<sup>294</sup> Barry, “Mujeres en tránsito,” 86.

<sup>295</sup> Carolina Barry, “Las monjas peronistas: política y religión en la ayuda social 1946-1955,” *Revista Cultura y Religión* V, no. 1 (June 2011): 119.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.



Figure 3.7 Eva and Juan Perón serving as godparents for a baptism at the *Hogar de Tránsito N°2*, courtesy of the *Archivo General de la Nación Argentina*



Figure 3.8 Eva Perón participating in a christening at the *Hogar de Tránsito N°2*, courtesy of the *Archivo General de la Nación Argentina*

an agreement to assist in the upbringing of a child or the protector of a union in the case of a marriage, especially as it pertains to religion, making herself responsible to the residents and their children. In Figure 3.7, a photograph taken in the chapel of the *Hogar de Tránsito N°2*, the Peróns can be seen acting as godparents during a baptism.

Evita holds the infant in her arms, as she and Perón smile and look on lovingly. Evita demonstrates a similar expression in Figure 3.8, an image of Evita attending a christening, watching as children take communion. In occupying the role of godmother, Evita steps in to assist in the maternal duties required by Republican Motherhood,

but also adopts a rhetoric of proximity and emotional orientation toward the children she aids. She complements the mother's moral duty with her construction of and contribution to religious instruction within the *Hogares*. In their work on maternity and gender policies, Bock and Thane define "'social' or 'spiritual motherhood'... as the caring activities of women who did not necessarily have children of their own, in extra-domestic professions such as social work and

health care.”<sup>297</sup> I view Evita’s maternal and religious care directed toward the children under the auspices of the *Fundación* as a form of this social or spiritual motherhood. In the same way, discourse about Evita as the “Spiritual Leader of the Nation” and the “Mother of the *Descamisados*” feed into the perception of Evita as a childless woman occupying maternal social roles. Furthermore, her direct involvement in Catholic rites for children and their families at the *Hogares*, particularly her status as godmother in baptisms, communions, and weddings, emphasize her dedication to maternal duties.

Imagery of Evita alongside the beneficiaries of the *Fundación Eva Perón*’s aid projects offer a visual reinforcement of the affective, maternal bonds she fostered through her work. She was frequently photographed with children as part of her work for the *Fundación Eva Perón*, an organization supported by government funds that provided social welfare assistance, particularly dedicated to advocating for impoverished women and children, beginning in 1948. The *Fundación Eva Perón* also circulated images of Evita with children or assisting impoverished mothers that demonstrated an affective engagement absent from images from the *Sociedad de Beneficencia*. While the *Damas* remained physically and emotionally distant from children in the photographs from the “Day of Poor Children” in Figures 3.3-3.5, images of Evita depict a nearness more closely associated with maternal care. In Figure 3.9, Evita is pictured alongside women and children residents of the *Hogar de Tránsito N°2*, in addition to their relatives and Catholic clergy serving the *Hogar*, after having performed the duties as godmother for one of the children’s baptism. She stands inside the *Hogar*, within the crowd of people, a noticeable difference from the *Damas*, who position themselves as spatially isolated or separated. A similar physical closeness can be seen in the photograph of Evita visiting the same *Hogar* in Figure 3.10, where she stands with another

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<sup>297</sup> Bock and Thane, *Maternity and Gender Policies*, 8-9.

visitor and *Hogar* employees, as well as several children. Besides the spatial differentiation between Evita's positioning and that of the *Damas*, this photograph exemplifies the emotional



Figure 3.9 Eva Perón pictured with beneficiaries of the *Fundación Eva Perón* after serving as Godmother for a Baptism at the *Hogar de Tránsito N°2* on November 6, 1949, courtesy of the *Archivo General de la Nación Argentina*



Figure 3.10 Polaroid photograph of Eva Perón during a visit to the *Hogar de Tránsito N°2* on November 15, 1950, courtesy of the *Archivo General de la Nación Argentina*

proximity she used to separate herself from the *Damas'* aloof nature. In photographs, the *Damas* stand rigidly upright with stern faces directly facing the camera, and the children surrounding them do the same. In contrast, Evita and the children at the *Hogar de Tránsito N° 2* have a much more casual nature. She faces toward the other visitor, in conversation, while the children show playful grins, a stark comparison with portraits from the *Sociedad*. Furthermore, in comparison with the group photo of the children at the Teatro Colón,



Figure 3.11 Children who resided at the *Hogar de Tránsito N°2*, December 8, 1950, courtesy of the *Archivo General de la Nación Argentina*

the portrait of the children residing at the *Hogar de Tránsito N°2* shows displays similar emotional disparities. The amalgamation of a novel body language and social choreography gave rise to long-lasting adjustments to proxemic distances in the public sphere. In this

photograph from the *Fundación*, some children smile while some look around and others have blank expressions on their faces. Whereas the children at the Teatro Colón, who had just received toys from the *Sociedad de Beneficencia*, are sullen and frowning, the children of the *Hogar* have more neutral expressions. Overall, images of Evita and the children who resided at the *hogares*, many of which were subsequently published by the *Fundación*, promoted an affective schism between the aid practiced by Evita and that of her predecessors. I believe that this division emphasized her maternal sentiments toward the Argentine citizenry, especially those of the lower classes.

Publications from the *Fundación* and the governmental organizations that supported it accentuated this same affective element of its, and Evita's, work, thereby differentiating it from the dispassionate charity of its antecedents. In 1950, the *Subsecretaría de Informaciones*<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> The *Subsecretaría de Informaciones* (Subsecretary of Information) is a government structure developed during the military government preceding the first Perón administration, between 1943 and 1945, as a means of diffusing

(Subsecretary of Information) published informational pamphlets about the *Fundación*'s recent undertakings, including two titled *Eva Perón y su obra social* ("Eva Perón and her Social Work") and *Ciudad Infantil "Amanda Allen"* ("Amanda Allen' Children's City"). The latter publicized the July 14, 1949 inauguration of the *Fundación*'s first "Children's City," a miniature city that also functioned as an *Hogar-Escuela* ("Home-School") for children in need. Within this report, the *Subsecretaría* included information about the *Ciudad*'s successes over its first year of operation, as well as photographs of the children learning, playing, and engaging with the various civic structures that the children run, including a greengrocer, a pharmacy, a bank, and a gas station for the toy cars.

The report starts with a brief prologue attributed to Eva Perón, printed just below individual portraits of the Peróns. Her text begins "I once said that the country that forgets its children renounces its future; and the Children's City, which opens its doors today to the hopes of the economically disadvantaged children of the Homeland, proclaims to the four cardinal points that we do not forget childhood, we do not renounce our future."<sup>299</sup> As her prologue makes clear, the *Ciudad Infantil* serves as a means of raising children to create a better future for the nation – a sort of modernized Republican Motherhood in which Evita has created the political infrastructure to mediate the maternal role of fostering good citizens. Instead of a mother educating her sons in civic morality within the confines of the home, these children learn the same values while living in a pseudo-amusement park centered around community engagement, for both boys *and girls*.

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information to the public, especially via radio. For more information see Federico Lindenboim, "El desarrollo de la Subsecretaría de Informaciones (1943-1945). Los primeros ensayos de política mediática de Perón antes del peronismo," *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana Dr. Emilio Ravignani*, no. 55 (jul. 2021): 80-103.

<sup>299</sup> Fundación Eva Perón. *Ciudad Infantil "Amanda Allen"* (Buenos Aires: Subsecretaría de Informaciones, 1950).

"Dije en cierta oportunidad que el país que olvida a sus niños renuncia a su porvenir; y la Ciudad Infantil, que abre hoy sus puertas a las esperanzas de la niñez económicamente menos favorecida de la Patria, proclama hacia los cuatro puntos cardinales que nosotros no olvidamos a la niñez, no renunciamos a nuestro porvenir."



Figure 3.12 Cover of the 1950 report *Ciudad Infantil* "Amanda Allen," published by the *Subsecretaría de Informaciones*

Furthermore, in specifying that the *Ciudad Infantil* was for the "economically disadvantaged," Evita highlights the *Fundación*'s ability to bring an excluded class into civic life starting at a young age. The cover of the 1950 report on the *Ciudad Infantil* exhibits a colorized photograph of eight boys with their hands in the fountain located in the central plaza of the *Ciudad*. They smile happily, engaging with each other and the camera. The same image appears in black and white in the report *Eva*

*Perón and Her Social Work* with the caption, "In today's Justicialist Argentina, however, reclaimed children laugh happily from the cradle, as General Perón and his wife aspired. Eva Perón completely abolished asylums, banners, and uniforms that, more than humiliating children, showed the lack of love and the selfishness of the cold and ruthless oligarchy."<sup>300</sup>

This description of Evita's treatment of children contrasts with the image and text on the previous page: "Absolute sadness and orphanhood are those of these orphans, whom the

<sup>300</sup> Fundación Eva Perón. *Eva Perón y su obra social* (Buenos Aires: Subsecretaría de Informaciones, 1950).

"En la Argentina justicialista de hoy, en cambio, la infancia recuperada ríe feliz desde la cuna, como lo ambicionarán el General Perón y su esposa. Eva Perón abolió por completo asilos, estandartes y uniformes que más que humillar a los niños, ponían en evidencia el desamor y el egoísmo de la oligarquía fría y despiadada."



Figure 3.13 Children under the care of the *Sociedad de Beneficencia*, pictured in *Eva Perón y su obra social*, published by the *Subsecretaría de Informaciones*

Benevolence of yesterday considered socially inferior beings, isolating them completely from all of life's relationships. In these asylums of the Society of Benevolence of the Federal Capital, a discipline of its own barracks, marked them mercilessly at all times with their status as pariahs, without even the right to the leisure of childhood, until they become sullen and resentful."<sup>301</sup> The latter text accompanies a photograph of 18 young children who stand in a single-file line, with their hands on the shoulders of the child in front of them, demonstrating a much more regimented lifestyle than that of the *Ciudad Infantil*. They all have shaved heads, a common practice at

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<sup>301</sup> Fundación Eva Perón. *Ciudad Infantil "Amanda Allen."*

"Tristeza y orfandad absolutas las de estos huerfanitos, a quienes la Beneficencia de ayer consideraba seres socialmente inferiores, aislándolos por completo de toda vida de relación. En estos asilos de la Sociedad de Beneficencia de la Capital Federal, una disciplina propia de cuartel, las marcaba despiadadamente a toda hora su condición de parias, sin derecho siquiera a las expansiones propias de la infancia, hasta convertirlos en seres hoscos y resentidos."

orphanages to prevent the spread of lice,<sup>302</sup> making it difficult to differentiate between them, thereby limiting their markers of individual identity. As opposed to the children at the fountain, these children have facial expressions of unhappiness. Both the written and photographic publications of from the Subsecretaría de Informaciones regarding the *Fundación Eva Perón* demarcated emotional differences between the treatment of children under Evita's "maternal" care and that of the beneficence societies, with the children positively responding to their liberation from the restrictions of the *Sociedad*. Evita's work within the *Fundación* and the *Hogares* continued the historical legacy of women's advocacy depending heavily on maternalist discourse. Within the aid systems she constructed "women's social protection indirectly implied protecting the family as a whole. That is to say, it involved helping them as centers of their families and as 'creators of the world's destiny.' Evita defined women from the biological function, with the social and cultural allocations that this brings, as well as from the place that she occupies in the family, that is, the woman as mother."<sup>303</sup> The maternalist focus of the *Fundación* maintains Moreau de Justo's importance placed on the nuclear family, even as it only directly aids women and children.

As the names *Hogar de la Empleada* and *Escuela de Enfermeras* make clear with their use of the feminine *empleada* (employee) and *enfermera* (nurse), only women were allowed to reside at the *hogares*. In the case of children, once any male children reached the age of 14, they could no longer sleep at the *hogares*, but could visit their mothers. If the residents were married, their husbands were not allowed to stay overnight or visit outside of permitted hours, but were housed

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<sup>302</sup> Linda Gordon, "Child Welfare: A Brief History," *Social Welfare History Project*, 2011, <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/programs/child-welfare-overview/>.

<sup>303</sup> Barry, "Mujeres en tránsito," 86.

"La protección social de las mujeres implicaba indirectamente proteger a la familia en conjunto. Es decir, implicaba auxiliarlas como centros de sus familias y como 'creadores del destino del mundo'. Evita definía a la mujer desde la función biológica, con las asignaciones sociales y culturales que ésta trae aparejadas, como también desde el lugar que ocupa en la familia, es decir, la mujer en tanto madre"

separately at the *Instituto Municipal Moreno*, where they only stayed overnight and received temporary subsidies.<sup>304</sup> The exclusion of men from the purview of the *hogares*' mission reflects Evita's commitment to advancing the place of women in society, in particular, focusing on her *descamisadas* rather than the *descamisados*. Each of the projects of the *Fundación* created a structure within which women could live comfortably while learning skills to provide for themselves once they left the *Fundación*'s care. In providing the women at the *hogares* and *escuelas* with the ability to better their and their children's future without the reliance on a male figure in their lives, the *Fundación* in effect undermines a patriarchal structure that forces dependence and thereby advances women's independence.

I also consider this to be a fundamental undermining of the Republican Mother model. Although the *Fundación* inherently inculcates citizens in the morays of civic engagement, it does so for women, not men. Following the traditional example of Republican Motherhood, women are supposed to pass on these values to their sons so that they may be good future citizens, but not their daughters. Altogether, the *Fundación*'s emphasis on advocating for women as citizens, workers, and individuals beyond just their contributions to a husband and children within the domestic sphere is a striking departure from expectations for women at the time.

Evita furthered this emphasis on women's social, economic, and political independence in her political platforms as well, most notably in her contributions to the *Partido Peronista Femenino* (PPF), or the Women's Peronist Party. On June 25, 1949, the Peronist Party held an inaugural ceremony for the PPF with 6,000 delegates present, 1,500 of whom were women. From this moment on, the women's wing of the Peronist Party met and organized separately from the

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<sup>304</sup> Barry, "Mujeres en tránsito," 83.

men; except for Evita, no women were invited to the men's assembly.<sup>305</sup> Although the PPF operated autonomously from the rest of the Peronist Party, its explicit mission was not to provide an outlet for the women's political ambitions, but to lend moral support to the men's political ambitions. According to Carolina Barry, women "as mothers, from the women's movement, were to teach the work of Perón and instill his doctrine in the children."<sup>306</sup> For Evita, as President of the PPF and a woman without biological children, the children she inculcated with Perón's doctrine were the women of the PPF. In her autobiography, *La Razón de mi Vida*, Evita states, "I wanted my party to be a home... for every basic unit to be something like a family... with their great loves and their little disagreements, with their sublime fertility and their interminable diligence."<sup>307</sup> Much like the structure of the *Hogares*, the PPF asserted importance of women's political rights while also relying on maternalist rhetoric, equating women's contributions to familial contributions.

Although much activism prior to the Perón administrations had tried to secure women's suffrage, it was the *Partido Peronista Femenino* and Evita's advocacy that finally garnered Argentine women the right to vote. Political conditions for women had slowly improved, only reforming the Civil Code to "eliminate the minority status of women compared to their husbands" in 1926, before this women's rights legislation stalled during the *Década Infame*.<sup>308</sup> Under Evita's

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<sup>305</sup> Carolina Barry, "El Partido Peronista Femenino: la gestación política y legal," *Nuevo mundo, mundos nuevos*, no. 2 (2008).

<sup>306</sup> Barry, "El Partido Peronista Femenino."

"Como madres, desde el movimiento femenino, debían enseñar la obra de Perón e inculcar su doctrina en los niños"

<sup>307</sup> María Eva Duarte de Perón, *La Razón de mi Vida* (Buenos Aires: Asociación Museo Evita, 2015), 219.

"yo he querido que mi partido sea un hogar... que cada unidad básica sea algo así como una familia... con sus grandes amores y sus pequeñas desavenencias, con su fecundidad excelsa y su laboriosidad interminable."

<sup>308</sup> Susana Bianchi and Norma Sanchís, *El Partido Peronista Femenino. Primera parte* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1988), 32.

"elimina la situación de minoridad de las mujeres frente a sus maridos"

leadership, the PPF took up this political movement in 1949 as “an organization in which women’s mobilization promoted by Peronism from the State apparatuses culminates, lies fundamentally in their *feminine* condition,”<sup>309</sup> where femininity “is defined by the extension of the characteristics attributed to the domestic-private world: love, harmony, and subordination.”<sup>310</sup> In other words, the PPF lobbied for women’s political rights, namely, the right to vote, by leveraging the value of their potential contributions to the men of the Peronist party. Quoting Evita, Carolina Barry notes, “that the PPF would not seek ‘public positions’ because the aim was to ‘bring spiritual and moral values to the men’s Party’... She also mentioned that women should gradually begin to earn the right to build a great and just fatherland.”<sup>311</sup>

Notably, these values that Evita highlighted as the PPF’s principal attribution are the spiritual and the moral, two of the indispensable components pertaining to Republican Motherhood. I contend that this continuation of the expectations for women stemming from Republican Motherhood, even as women push for political rights that fundamentally undermine these expectations, contributed to the success of the PPF and Evita in the political sphere. Thus, on September 9, 1947, the Argentine Congress formally passed *Ley 13.010, la Ley del Voto Femenino* (Women’s Suffrage Law), which formally established that women “shall have the same

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 7.

“organización en la que culmina la movilización de mujeres impulsada por el Peronismo desde los aparatos del Estado, radique básicamente en su condición de *femenino*”

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 17.

“se define por la extensión de las características atribuidas al mundo doméstico-privado: el amor, la armonía y la subordinación”

<sup>311</sup> Barry, “El Partido Peronista Femenino.”

“que el PPF no buscaría ‘las posiciones públicas’ pues el objetivo era ‘aportar valores espirituales y morales al Partido de los hombres’... Mencionó también que la mujer debía empezar paulatinamente a ganarse el derecho a construir una patria grande y justa”

political rights and shall be subject to the same obligations as are agreed or imposed by law on Argentine men,”<sup>312</sup> taking effect in the 1951 elections when Evita voted from her deathbed.

Within the socio-political realm, Evita’s fervent championing of the plight of the working class and advocacy for their dignity through the *Fundación Eva Perón* undermined labor and class hierarchies, along with aid systems like the *Sociedad de Beneficencia*. In part, this was through Evita’s focus on elevating the position of “socially excluded sectors”<sup>313</sup> instead of upholding rigid class hierarchies through charity. The work of the *Fundación* was not rooted in beneficence, but a maternal care for the *descamisadas* and their children, nor was it racially or ethnically limited, like the work of many of the early Argentine feminists. Rather, Evita’s work built “a system of social aid closely linked to the personal,”<sup>314</sup> which I interpret as the personal needs of those she assisted as well as the personal bonds she constructed with them, along with the provocation of new social imaginaries that irreversibly propel the awareness of equitable social rights for the lower classes. In other words, the maternal spaces that Evita constructed, like the *Hogares*, disrupt normative practices of kinship and culture by encouraging the formation of affective bonds beyond just the nuclear family, an affective closeness that was also present in political organizing for women’s rights through the *Partido Peronista Femenino*. I believe that this cultivation of emotive, maternal

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<sup>312</sup> Ley del Voto Femenino, Ley 13.010 (1947), <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/normativa/nacional/ley-13010-47353/texto>.

“tendrán los mismos derechos políticos y estarán sujetas a las mismas obligaciones que les acuerdan o imponen las leyes a los varones argentinos”

<sup>313</sup> Carolina Barry, *Evita capitana. El partido Peronista Femenino, 1949-1955* (Caseros: Universidad Nacional Tres de Febrero, 2009), 83.

“Se trataba de sectores socialmente excluidos”

<sup>314</sup> Barry, Ramacciotti and Valobra, *La Fundación Eva Perón y las mujeres*, 16.

“un sistema de ayuda social muy ligado al vínculo personal”

spaces and relationships allowed Evita to garner broader support from the working and middle classes, but also made her legible as a saintly figure after her death in 1952.

### VIII. Spiritual Leader of the Nation: Establishment of a Popular Sainthood

This section will move from previous discussion of Evita's actions and rhetoric during her lifetime to her unmediated, hagiographic depictions that proliferated after her death. In September 1955, when the *Revolución Libertadora's* military coup unseated Perón, sending him into exile until his reelection in 1973, Evita's body remained in the CGT Building awaiting the construction of the "*Monumento al descamisado*" where she was to be buried.<sup>315</sup> From the moment of Evita's death, there began a process of immortalization, the unofficial writing of a "hagiography: a story with religious echoes in which the body is sublimated, funerals lead to processions, and the resurrection appears as the final hope."<sup>316</sup> Fearing that, through this process of immortalization, Evita's body would serve as a symbol of resistance around which Peronists would rally, leaders of the military government arranged to remove it from the CGT Building, which was then one of the pivotal symbols of Peronist influence.<sup>317</sup> Their fears were not unfounded, as widespread collective mourning overwhelmed the country following her death.<sup>318</sup> Her body took on a central place in

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<sup>315</sup> Gabriel Sánchez Sarondo, "El ambicioso 'Monumento al descamisado' que sería mausoleo de Evita pero no fue," Centro de Documentación e Investigación de la Arquitectura Pública, Argentina.gob.ar, published July 25, 2022, <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/noticias/el-ambicioso-monumento-al-descamisado-que-seria-mausoleo-de-evita-pero-no-fue>.

<sup>316</sup> Paola Cortés Rocca and Martín Kohan, *Imágenes de vida, relatos de muerte. Eva Perón: cuerpo y política*, (Buenos Aires: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 1998), 77-78.

"hagiografía: un relato con ecos religiosos en el que el cuerpo se sublima, los funerales derivan en procesiones, y la resurrección aparece como esperanza final"

<sup>317</sup> Beatriz Sarlo, *La pasión y la excepción: Eva, Borges y el asesinato de Aramburu* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2008), 22.

<sup>318</sup> Jean Graham-Jones, *Evita, Inevitably: Performing Argentina's Female Icons Before and After Eva Perón* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 101.

popular discourse, as well as in politics and cultural productions, becoming the protagonist of corpse-less funerals, literary works like Rodolfo Walsh's "Esa Mujer" and Tomás Eloy Martínez's *Santa Evita*, and countless personal shrines and altars. Following her death, iconography depicting Evita has highlighted her maternal and feminine qualities at the same time that it celebrates her saintliness, thereby inextricably linking the two.

Although one could have imagined that the fervor surrounding Evita might have calmed after her death, the heightened focus on her body and its absence of life only provided a vessel onto which others could project their ideology. Paola Cortés Rocca and Martín Kohan explore this idea in their collection *Imágenes de vida, relatos de muerte. Eva Perón: cuerpo y política*, theorizing Evita to be a "cultural artifact": a human-constructed being that conveys information about a cultural group that lends itself to exterior conceptualizations rather than studies of the person herself. They argue for the consideration of the iconography and images of Evita that circulated publicly as a corpus that reproduce ideologies of those who view her, rather than her own ideologies. I agree that, in this way, "the ideological dimension of the visual is but an inscription in corporality,"<sup>319</sup> a projection onto the body. This section will examine the ideologies projected onto Evita's body, centering those that aim to sanctify her by noting the immense sacrifice for her political and spiritual children, thereby inextricably linking her maternity and her sainthood. This begins with the hagiographic perspectives during her funeral and beyond that explicitly or implicitly appeal for her sanctification, followed by cultural depictions of her as a maternal and saintly figure.

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<sup>319</sup> Cortés Rocca and Kohan, *Imágenes de vida, relatos de muerte*, 14.

"la dimensión ideológica de lo visual no es sino inscripción en una corporalidad"

Just as her corpse was at the center of the official funeral held for Evita in the capital, it took on the same importance at events for a spectacular collective mourning held throughout the country, despite the body's notable absence. In the cities of Neuquén, Rosario, and Tucumán, among others, funerals and masses were held in her honor, many of which did so with empty coffins, invoking the presence of Evita's absent body.

In Rosario on August 10 and 11 –two weeks after Evita's death– the regional CGT held public exequies, or funeral rites.<sup>320</sup> The two-day proceedings included silent processions, a Catholic open-air mass held by Monsignor Silvino Martínez, the Auxiliary Bishop of Rosario, and the construction of an altar where mourners could place their flowers and icons.<sup>321</sup> The Rosario newspaper *La Capital* reported, “When the worship began, 'thousands of people surrounded the altar everywhere'. The feeling of sadness and respect became more emotional at the time of the offering, intensified by the sacred music of the military band.”<sup>322</sup> With organization from the regional General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and involvement of representatives of the Catholic Church, along with the participation of legislators, military officials, and the military band, the funeral rites without a body present “was an official act.”<sup>323</sup> I find this official nature is pertinent, as it informs the worry within the leaders of the *Revolución Libertadora* that her body, and its worship, could incite a revolt. The mass response to take to the streets as a sign of mourning demonstrates the collective emotional response to the death of Evita.

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<sup>320</sup> Verna, “Cómo fueron las exequias de Eva Perón en Rosario con una multitud en las calles.”

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

“Cuando comenzó el culto ‘millares de personas rodeaban por todas partes el altar’. El sentimiento de tristeza y respeto se hizo más emotivo en el momento de la ofrenda, intensificada por la música sacra de la banda militar.”

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

“se trataba de un acto oficial”

Similarly, in Tucumán, mourners showed their pain through public demonstrations, an instance of mourning publicized in *La Gaceta* in 2022, although most documentation of such



Figure 3.14 Exequies for Eva Perón in Rosario, pictured in *La Capital*, August 10, 2022



Figure 3.15 "Children and Flowers" in Tucumán, published in *La Gaceta*, July 27, 2022



Figure 3.16 "COMO UN ALTAR. Esta imagen se mantuvo durante varios días en las escalinatas de la Casa de Gobierno" ("LIKE AN ALTAR. This image was kept for several days on the steps of the Government House"), published in *La Gaceta*, July 27, 2022

<sup>324</sup> Sebastián Rosso and Jorge Olmos Sgrosso, "Así vivió Tucumán el luto por la muerte de Eva Perón," *La Gaceta* (Tucumán), July 27, 2022, <https://www.lagaceta.com.ar/nota/954153/politica/asi-vivio-tucuman-luto-muerte-eva-peron.html>.

"se destruyeron en 1955"

<sup>325</sup> Rosso and Olmos Sgrosso, "Así vivió Tucumán el luto por la muerte de Eva Perón."

"LOS CHICOS Y LAS FLORES. Se aprecia cómo las alumnas llevan brazaletes o crespones o negros. Fue obligado portarlos mientras se mantuvo el duelo nacional"

exequies was "destroyed in 1955."<sup>324</sup> In *La Gaceta*, photos of children leaving flowers on public grassy areas were accompanied by the caption, "CHILDREN AND FLOWERS. It is appreciated how the schoolgirls wear bracelets or crespons [black mourning ribbons] or black. It was obligatory to wear them while the national mourning was held."<sup>325</sup> The children depicted in this photograph, all of whom seem to be adolescent

girls, are wearing the black crespons over their white uniforms as they leave offerings for Evita outside the provincial *Casa de Gobierno*, or State House. The contributions of these schoolgirls to this altar, a symbolic demonstration of emotion, suggests a reciprocity of care. I believe it is important to note that these children are not capable of formal political participation, as they do not vote or engage in politics. Despite this, they are at the forefront of the public demonstrations of mourning, which I see as reflecting the centrality of the affective, rather than the political, nature of her devotion. I would like to underscore that the alternative family structure she constructed throughout her public work and advocacy for women and children continued to exist after her death, with hagiographic imagery and discourse surrounding Evita and her body highlighting the maternal, sacrificial nature of her labors.

The article also includes an image of the more formal altar that was constructed for her on the external staircase of this *Casa de Gobierno*, which includes a photograph of Evita among a display of flowers along the top steps, a banner reading “Confederación General del Trabajo Delegación Regional Tucumán” (“General Confederation of Labor Tucumán Regional Delegation”), as well as a large painted portrait of Evita with the text “Eva Perón Mártir del Trabajo C.G.T” (Eva Perón Martyr of Labor C.G.T.). This touting of Evita as a martyr, one who voluntarily suffers or is killed for advocating for their beliefs, draws comparisons to many official Catholic saints who are celebrated for their religious martyrdom. The CGT’s labeling of Evita not only as a martyr, but as a martyr *of labor*, inextricably ties Evita’s celebration as a saint to her contributions to the working class and the *descamisados*, a project that is not just political but emotional, as well.

The magnitude of Evita’s funeral, whether in the presence of her body or *in absentia*, is reflective of the emotional connections the *descamisados* felt, and continue to feel, for her, an affective reverence that culminates in her construction as a saint, including multiple campaigns for

formal beatification by the Catholic Church. On the occasion of Evita's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, the CGT's *Consejo Directivo* (Board of Directors) sent a letter to Cardinal Mario Poli, the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, asking him to initiate the process of her canonization as a saint and elevate the request to Pope Francisco.<sup>326</sup> In the letter, the CGT claim that Evita's "figure and work have reached the just, transcendent value they possess for our people and for all the peoples of the world with a thirst for Justice" and call for the Church to "accompany the popular feeling and place her on the official altars for the happiness of our faithful and saints."<sup>327</sup> This letter accentuates the *popular* sentiments toward Evita, the emotional investment of the people who include her portrait on altars alongside those of canonized saints, thereby centering the feelings of the popular classes as the most important aspect in the struggle for beatification. Simultaneously, a group of self-designated "*sacerdotes obreros*," or "worker-priests," published a manifest titled "Eva Santa del Pueblo" (Eva Saint of the People) to bring further attention to the canonization requests. I believe this self-chosen terminology as "worker-priests" is of particular importance as it shows the significance they place on being both members of the Catholic clergy and members of the working class, those represented spiritually by Evita. In their statement, they write that, "Eva Perón gave her life in a providential mandate that was the mission of rescuing the dignity of the human person in its most transcendent sense. Synthesis of a deep faith in her People and in God who, a hundred years after her birth, continues to be in the popular heart and in the altars of the humble people, together with the Virgin Mary."<sup>328</sup> Like the portrait outside of the Tucumán Regional CGT, this

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<sup>326</sup> "La CGT pidió la beatificación de Evita," *Página/12*, November 1, 2019, <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/228522-la-cgt-pidio-la-beatificacion-de-evita>.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*

"figura y obra han alcanzado el justo valor trascendente que poseen para nuestro pueblo y para todos los pueblos del mundo con sed de Justicia"

"acompañe el sentir popular y la coloque en los altares oficiales para la felicidad de nuestros fieles y santos"

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*

statement invokes Evita as a martyr by noting that she “gave her life,” a sacrifice that they believe makes her worthy of Catholic worship alongside the Virgin Mary, the most sacred, and maternal, woman in the Church.

As the requests for canonization note, many admirers construct adulatory altars and print *estampitas*, or prayer cards, both reminiscent of official Catholic worship. The *Fundación Villa Manuelita*, a Peronist foundation named for a *villa miseria* (slum) in Rosario that took to the streets in order to resist the ousting of Perón from power in 1955,<sup>329</sup> created an *estampita* of “Santa Evita Patrona del oprimido” (Saint Evita Patron of the Oppressed). On their website, they shared this *estampita*, along with images of Evita with children and an anecdote from the poet José María Castiñeira de Dios. Before these images and text, there is a preface introducing the reason for the *estampita*:

“The *Fundación Villa Manuelita* accompanies the feelings of millions of *compañeros* and *compañeras* who have the conviction that Evita is in heaven and that for this reason they can ask her to intercede with God with her prayers. This is why we offer this humble prayer for Saint Evita, Patron of the Oppressed—

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“Eva Perón entregó su vida en un mandato providencial que fue la misión de rescate de la dignidad de la persona humana en su sentido más trascendente. Síntesis de una profunda fe en su Pueblo y en Dios que a cien años de su nacimiento continúa estando en el corazón popular y en los altares del pueblo humilde junto a la Virgen María”

<sup>329</sup> “Quienes somos,” Fundación Villa Manuelita, accessed October 13, 2022, [http://www.villamanuelita.org/?page\\_id=7](http://www.villamanuelita.org/?page_id=7).



**Santa Evita**  
Patrona del oprimido

Figure 3.17 *Estampita* for *Santa Evita Patrona del oprimido* (Saint Evita Patron of the Oppressed)

Oh sweet Patron of the Oppressed  
You,  
who in life and in death  
Suffered the outrage of the Powerful Selfish.

Remember me,  
who is alone  
and unprotected !  
You who always stood by the  
Pain of the People...  
and transformed it all into joy  
giving the best to the excluded.

Give me the generous strength of your Love  
So that my sorrows may be filled with meaning  
And my heart overflows with life  
To deliver me from the wickedness of the exploiter.

Save me Santa Evita from the intrigues of  
the cruel,  
showing me my place  
in this fight

And intercede for me before God  
to allow me to fight with your flags.

Amen.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

“La Fundación Villa Manuelita acompaña el sentir de millones de compañeros y compañeras que tienen la convicción de que Evita está en el cielo y que por eso pueden pedirle que interceda ante Dios con sus plegarias. Por eso ofrecemos esta humilde oración para Santa Evita, la Patrona del Oprimido-

Oh dulce Patrona del Oprimido  
Tu,  
que en la vida y en la muerte  
Sufriste el ultraje del Egoísta Poderoso.

Acuérdate de mi, [sic]  
que estoy sólo  
y desprotegido !

Tu [sic] que siempre estuviste junto al  
Dolor del Pueblo...  
y lo transformaste todo en alegría  
dando lo mejor al excluido.

Dame la fuerza generosa de tu Amor  
Para que mis penas se llenen de sentido

This prayer, much like those to canonized saints and popular saints alike, implores Evita to protect her supplicants. However, it also positions her in contrast to “the Powerful Selfish,” the elite, who attempt to oppress her, along with her humble *descamisados*, “the excluded” who she was able to formally incorporate into the political sphere. Notably, the prayer does not request further inclusion, but rather her “Love,” the emotional aspect of Evita’s political presence that made her interpretable as a saint.

While this section has explored documentation of Evita’s sanctification from the perspective of the CGT, the Church, and journalists, there are also sources of this treatment of Evita as a saint that come from the *descamisados* themselves. One example of this is a photograph of a family surrounding their outdoors altar to Evita. In an undated photo taken in the Provincia de Buenos Aires, now held at the Archivo General de la Nación Argentina, a family of 10 stands beside an altar they constructed to Evita. Every family member is dressed in their Sunday best, with their hair nicely groomed, and the mother is wearing jewelry. Between the parents, there is a large portrait of Evita with the letters “PDA,” meaning “[En] Paz Descanse, Amén” (Rest [In] Peace Amen), across the top. In front of the portrait, there is a small ceramic arch sitting atop a table runner, in which there is a sculpture of Jesus. His hands clasped in prayer rest behind an image of Evita’s head between two lightbulbs, standing in for candles. The arch sits in the middle

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Y mi corazón rebalse de vida  
Para librarme de la maldad del explotador.

Sálvame Santa Evita de las intrigas de  
los crueles,  
señalándome mi lugar  
en ésta [sic] lucha

E intercede por mí ante Dios  
para permitirme combatir con tus banderas.

Amén”



Figure 3.18 Photograph titled "Altar Popular Para Evita" ("The People's Altar for Evita"), courtesy of the *Archivo General de la Nación*

of two small bouquets of flowers and a sheet of paper with an illegible prayer leans against it. There is another portrait of Evita attached to the front portion of the table runner that hangs over the front edge. In the background, to the left of the family, further portraits of Evita

and Perón can be seen. The formal nature of this image reflects the reverence these citizens feel for Evita, who is not only positioned alongside Jesus Christ, which would suggest an equality of importance to the most important figure in the Church, but in fact is represented larger and in many more iterations, thereby categorizing her as more significant. However, I read the presence of the entire family as a reflection of the intimate nature of the relationships Evita projected with the *descamisados*. Those present in adulation of the former First Lady are not only the parents, those who can formally participate in politics, but the whole family of ten, who can appreciate Evita's affective campaigns if not her more formal politics.

Each of these representations of Evita as a saint emphasize her sacrifice and her care, both necessary traits for canonization, but also inherent characteristics of sacrificial and Republican Motherhood. During her lifetime, Evita contributed greatly to the inclusion of those who had not been previously represented in the ideal of the Nation, nor in its conventional political sphere,

through charismatic politics and establishment of emotional bonds. In the depictions of Evita that highlight her saintliness, I note that she is simultaneously celebrated for precisely these actions that garner affective links and that ally her with norms of maternity.

## **IX. Maternal Evita in the Art of Daniel Santoro**

I will now conclude with the example of one particular Argentine artist, Daniel Santoro, whose work elucidates the themes I have discussed heretofore. *Porteño* artist Daniel Santoro, known for his paintings based on Peronist iconography, has frequently portrayed Evita and the exertion of her political influence. Many of his works visually examine Evita's contributions via her *Fundación Eva Perón*, including the 2002 painting *Heladera Siam Di Tella, argentina, noble y buena (Siam Di Tella Refrigerator, Argentine, Noble, and Good)*. In the center of the piece, there is a refrigerator made by Siam Di Tella, an Argentine appliance brand founded by an Italian immigrant in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Although I have not been able to find any documentation directly tying the Siam Di Tella brand to the *Fundación Eva Perón*, it was one of the beneficiaries of Perón's *Primer Plan Quinquenal* (First Five-Year Plan), which sought to revitalize the Argentine industrial sectors that had deteriorated during and after the World Wars.<sup>331</sup> Under this Plan, "the combination of state protection, increased demand, and abundant credit permitted long-established firms such as siam–Di Tella [sic], then Latin America's largest metalworking company, to grow and to diversify and numerous new firms and industrialists to emerge" [sic].<sup>332</sup> However, one of the major contributions of the *Fundación* for the average Argentine citizen was

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<sup>331</sup> Roberto Elisalde, *Mundo del trabajo en la Argentina 1935-1955. La Siam Di Tella: productivismo, educación y Resistencia obrera* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2019).

<sup>332</sup> Brennan and Rougier, *The Politics of National Capitalism*, 4.

the providing of home appliances, particularly Argentine-made products, a fact alluded to by the second portion of the title: *Argentine, Noble, and Good*. The current-day *Museo Evita*, housed at the former *Hogar de Tránsito N° 2*, contains many such products, including the Siam di Tella



Figure 3.19 *Heladera Siam Di Tella, argentina, noble y buena (Siam Di Tella Refrigerator, Argentine, noble, and good)*, by Daniel Santoro (2002)

refrigerator that was used at the *Hogar*.<sup>333</sup> On either side of the refrigerator is a child in a white uniform with the black crespons that were required to be worn during the period of national mourning after Evita’s death, very closely resembling the Tucumán schoolchildren leaving flowers in Figure 3.15. Atop the refrigerator sits a portrait of Evita with a red rose in the foreground. By placing the image of Evita atop the Siam Di Tella, Santoro links the material

<sup>333</sup> Museo Evita, “Si viniste al museo seguramente viste esta heladera en la sala de Ayuda Social,” Facebook, June 10, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/museoevita/posts/si-viniste-al-museo-seguramente-viste-esta-heladera-en-la-sala-de-ayuda-social-l/1319397211538329/>.

aid provided by the *Fundación Eva Perón* with Evita and her death, thereby drawing a line between the dignified care her *Fundación* was able to give and the mourning of her person. Furthermore, rather than a perfectly rectangular painting, the two upper corners have been cut out, leaving the piece reminiscent of the top half of a crucifix. In positioning Evita’s head at the top of the suggested cross, the artist invites the viewer to envision the rest of her body, as well, evoking the comparison of Evita as a martyr for the poor to Jesus, the ultimate martyr of the Catholic faith. In addition to the allusions to Catholic martyrdom, Santoro’s piece also references Siam Di Tella’s own

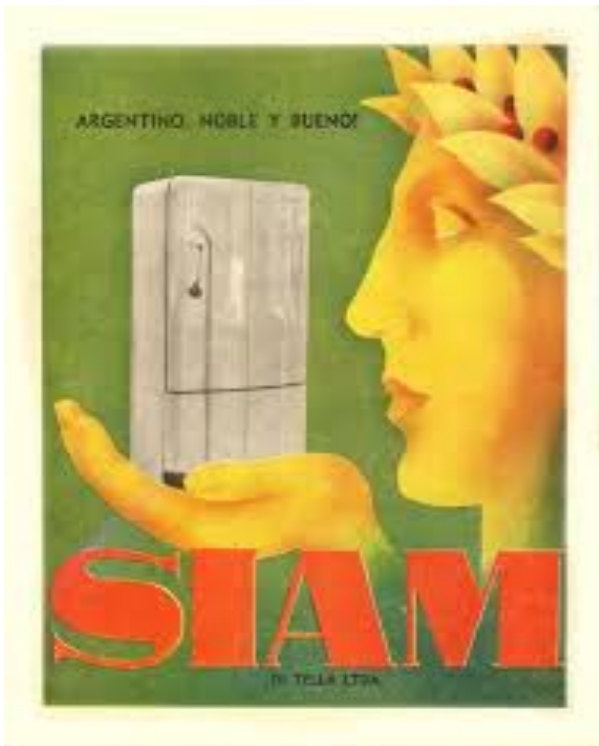


Figure 3.20 Advertisement for Siam Di Tella Refrigerators, appearing in the magazine *Mundo Peronista* on January 15, 1952

advertisements published during the early 20<sup>th</sup>

Century with the slogan “*Argentino, noble y bueno.*” One such advertisement, from the

January 15, 1952 edition of the magazine *Mundo Peronista* (Peronist World), shows the

same Siam di Tella refrigerator with the slogan.

Notably, this refrigerator is depicted in the palm of a woman’s hand, with her face looking

at the appliance; she wears on her head a wreath of laurel that recalls the 1910 depiction of “La

Nación” in *Recuerdo del Centenario*

*Argentino*, discussed in the Introduction. The

positioning of the Siam di Tella refrigerator in

the advertisement alongside a seemingly

nationalist, maternal image evokes the purchasing of Argentine-made products as patriotic. I

interpret Santoro’s recreation of this same imagery in *Heladera Siam Di Tella, argentina, noble y*

*buena* with the children mourning Evita as the artist’s equation of Evita herself to “La Nación,” the symbol of Argentina and Republican Motherhood, in the original advertisement. In doing so, Santoro connects Evita’s mourning and postmortem devotion with patriotism and motherhood, making clear the link between her popular devotion and her maternalist efforts through the *Fundación*.

These same children from *Heladera Siam Di Tella, argentina, noble y buena* appear in others of Santoro’s works, including an untitled piece (Figure 3.18) in his series titled *La isla de los muertos* (*The Island of the Dead*). In earlier *La isla de los muertos* paintings, the isolated Island can be seen with scattered cypress trees lining a long set of staircases. At the top of the stairs are two contiguous buildings, one that resembles the *Fundación Eva Perón*’s columned buildings and the other, labeled CGT, is a replica of the *Confederación General del Trabajo* (General Confederation of Labor) headquarters – both remind the viewers of Evita’s contributions to the



Figure 3.21 *Die Toteninsel* (*The Island of the Dead*) by Arnold Böcklin (1880)

needy and the working class, respectively. Santoro’s *La isla de los muertos* paintings evokes the series by the same name (originally *Die Toteninsel*) from Swiss Symbolist artist Arnold Böcklin, all

five painted between 1880 and 1886.<sup>334</sup> In Böcklin's originals, he depicts a rocky island with similar cream-colored, blocky buildings. The center of the island is dotted with cypress trees, a notable detail as they have traditionally been associated with death and were planted in the cemeteries of many Mediterranean countries "because it betokened immortality... Since the cypress is so long-lived and fruitful, since it stays green year round, and since its wood does not decay and has a sweet smell, it has traditionally been considered a symbol of immortality."<sup>335</sup> This



Figure 3.22 *La isla de los muertos III (The Island of the Dead III)* by Daniel Santoro (2004)

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<sup>334</sup> "Arnold Böcklin *Island of the Dead*," European Paintings, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed April 20, 2023, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435683>.

<sup>335</sup> Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyński, "Vincent van Gogh's Paintings of Olive Trees and Cypresses from St.-Rémy," *The Art Bulletin* 75, no. 4 (December 1993), 657.

practice of “entrusting ones dead”<sup>336</sup> under the cypress is evoked by the oarsmen rowing toward the island with a coffin on board, draped with a white cloth, reminiscent of Charon, who ferried souls to the underworld along the River Styx. In the instance of *La isla de los muertos III*, Santoro depicts a Peronist soldier rowing a small boat to the Island, his back to the viewer. In front of him on the rowboat is the base of a coffin, atop which rests a body, laying with arms crossed over the chest. Although the figure is hazy, resembling a mummified person in its silhouette, the face and hair reveal the corpse to belong to Evita.

Although not visible in *La isla de los muertos III*, other pieces from the same series, including the untitled piece pictured below (Figure 3.23), depict a statue of a sphinx, a creature from ancient Greek and Egyptian mythology with the body of a lion and the head of a human – frequently that of a ruler, king, or queen –, and in the Greek tradition, the wings of an eagle.<sup>337</sup> In both mythologies, the sphinxes serve as a sentinels, their statues guarding the entrances to temples or tombs.<sup>338</sup> Their presence at these sacred sites, especially tombs, derives from their believed immortality, as their “eternal life” would allow them to serve as guardians indefinitely.<sup>339</sup> In the case of this sphinx, the human head is clearly Evita’s, with her low *chignon*.

Like many sphinxes with women’s heads, the statue displays uncovered breasts.<sup>340</sup> However, the Evita-sphinx’s breasts have liquid cascading from its nipples into a small pool below, as if it were a fountain. One of the two children bends over the fountain, his hands under the stream as if to collect the liquid to drink. Strikingly, the liquid does not appear colorless, but a cloudy white like milk. As this milky fluid derives directly from the Evita-sphinx’s breasts, the image

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<sup>336</sup> R. Navarro, “Des hommes et des cyprès,” *Revue Française d’Allergologie* 56, no. 5 (September 2016): 417.

“on lui confie ses morts”

<sup>337</sup> Desmond Stewart, *The Pyramids and Sphinx* (New York: Newsweek, 1971), 48.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.



Figure 3.23 Untitled Piece in Daniel Santoro's *La isla de los muertos* (*The Island of the Dead*) Series (2004)

implies a maternal nature, as women naturally produce breastmilk only postpartum. Considering that Evita never had biological children, the production of breastmilk can be deemed miraculous, tantamount to the phenomenon of la Difunta Correa. While la Difunta lactates postmortem with her son at her breast so that he can survive in the harsh, arid desert, this child does not directly breastfeed, but drinks the milk from the statue of his own volition.

And unlike the setting of la

Difunta's miraculous lactation, Evita's does not occur in an inhospitable desert, although I would argue that the political climate in which Evita intervenes is similarly un-survivable for those who relied on her dignified beneficence. Much like a biological mother, Evita is depicted giving of herself, her body, to the children under the *Fundación's* care, who stand in as her surrogate children, even after her death. As this piece was painted in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, long after Evita's

death, its production implies that her maternal legacy lives on, long after not only her death, but also the dissolution of the *Fundación Eva Perón* and its subsidiaries. It is also noteworthy that this image appears on the cover of Donna Guy's *Women Build the Welfare State: Performing Charity and Creating Rights in Argentina, 1880-1955*, a signal that this image reflects the changed state of welfare under the *Fundación Eva Perón*.<sup>341</sup>

Although Santoro's untitled piece and *Heladera Siam Di Tella, argentina, noble y buena* recognize Evita's political contributions and formation of emotional bonds to the work of the



Figure 3.24 *El nacimiento político de Eva Perón (The Political Birth of Eva Perón)* by Daniel Santoro (2001)

*Fundación*, his painting *El nacimiento político de Eva Perón (The Political Birth of Eva Perón)* locates her political relevance as beginning with her death. In the latter, as described by Alberto Petrina on Daniel Santoro's website, "her recumbent body is

<sup>341</sup> Donna Guy, email to author, March 28, 2023.

held by two nurses from the *Fundación*, against a background of striated staircases and columns,”<sup>342</sup> a setting that coincides with Santoro’s other paintings situated within the ideal “ciudad peronista” (“Peronist city”). In her article “El peronismo en el gabinete iconográfico de Daniel Santoro,” Claudia Soria describes this scenery, noting that “the building with roman columns... recalls the Fundación Eva Perón.”<sup>343</sup> The nurses also evoke the *Fundación*, which inaugurated the *Escuela de Enfermeras* (School for Nurses) in 1950.<sup>344</sup> The inclusion of “birth” in the title, along with the two nurses brandishing a body, would suggest a typical hospital delivery. Instead, the positioning of Evita’s arms crossed over her chest more closely mimics the posing of a person in their coffin, including Evita herself, who was embalmed with her arms in that orientation. Rather than depicting a physical birth, Santoro represents her *political* birth, locating it at the moment of her death. Her political power begins, not when she is aiding through her work with the *Fundación*, but when she exists in an inanimate state.

Santoro’s 2002 painting *Altarcito* (*Little Altar*) continues the artist’s consideration of Evita’s postmortem legacy, depicting an altar for worship, similar to those seen at the *Santuario de la Difunta Correa* and in the photograph of the “Altar Popular Para Evita.” In the center is a portrait of Evita, just her head with the emblematic low-tied bun, a vertically-reflected copy of the portrait in *Siam Di Tella, Argentina, noble y buena*. The text above and below her portrait reads, “GRACIAS EVITA TUS QUERIDOS GRASITAS” (“THANK YOU EVITA YOUR BELOVED

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<sup>342</sup> Alberto Petrina, “La ciudad justicialista,” accessed October 14, 2022, <http://www.danielsantoro.com.ar/mundoperonista.php?mp=5>.

<sup>343</sup> Claudia Soria, “El peronismo en el gabinete iconográfico de Daniel Santoro,” in “*Evita vive.*” *Estudios literarios y culturales sobre Eva Perón*, ed. Anne-Berenike Rothstein and Pere Joan Tous (Berlin: edition tranvía, 2013), 197.

“el edificio de columnas romanas... recuerda a la Fundación Eva Perón (FEP)”

<sup>344</sup> Damián Cipolla, “La política sanitaria en el gobierno peronista. La experiencia de la escuela de enfermeras 7 de mayo de la Fundación Eva Perón,” (presentation, 4º Congreso de Estudios sobre el Peronismo (1943-2014) Eje Estado y Políticas Públicas, Tucumán, Argentina, September 18-20, 2014), 14.

GRASITAS”), a familiar supplication from a saint’s devotee. Her portrait is overlaid with painted



Figure 3.25 *Altarcito (Little Altar)* by Daniel Santoro (2002)

black roses and calligraphed two Chinese characters that translate to “look after,” an apt sentiment when praying for a saint to watch after you.<sup>345</sup> When considered in comparison with the altars to la Difunta Correa, to me, the most remarkable aspect is the inclusion of *milagros*; literally meaning “miracles,” *milagros* are small metal votives left at shrines, frequently in the form of a body part, serving as a means of asking for healing or thanking the saint for a prayer answered. Much like the supplications to la Difunta at the *Santuario*, the *milagros* surrounding the seemingly religious icon reflect individual Argentines’ equation of Evita’s good deeds during her life with

<sup>345</sup> Translation by Jake Wright, April 11, 2023.

her sanctity and merit of worship postmortem. Importantly, many of these good deeds she accomplished through the *Fundación*, the PPF, and beyond were those that generated affective bonds that created intimate connections between Evita and her admirers. This is reflected in the phrasing of “*tus queridos grasitas*,” which uses the affectionate diminutive term *grasitas*, or “little greasers,” Evita frequently invoked when discussing her political followers, but also by the possessive “*tus*.” Rather than addressing the former First Lady by the formal *Usted* and its possessive *sus*, the artist, and the devotees he stands in for, speaks directly to Evita through the informal register. This informality reflects the intimacy fostered through the emotionally charged demonstrations of aid performed by Evita and her *Fundación*.

Each of Daniel Santoro’s pieces analyzed here reflects Evita’s postmortem consideration as a saint and as a maternal figure. After her death, her maternal nature becomes the grounds for her sanctification, as her public nurturing, unconventional for the welfare of the era, makes her legible as a saint. The imagery that Santoro relies on, from embodiments of “La Nación” to the offerings on religious altars, combines the maternalist rhetoric of Republican Motherhood and the labor of the *Sociedad de Beneficencia*, the abnegate nature of Catholic sacrificial motherhood, but also the emotional nature of longstanding devotions to Evita, fostered through her contributions through the *Fundación Eva Perón* and the *Partido Peronista Femenino*.

## **X. Conclusion**

Evita’s political and extra-political actions during her lifetime generated strong affective bonds between her and the Peronists who supported her, a sort of maternal relationship in which Evita provided tangible, spiritual, and emotional care. I see her actions as responding to a significant gap in the national narrative, as established by the Foundational Fictions of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In these

works, namely *Facundo* and *La cautiva*, firm roles were established within the new Argentine Federation, where racist, classist, and patriarchal norms excluded large swaths of society from full participatory citizenship. Not only were minoritized peoples inhibited in their civic abilities, but they were also treated as intellectually inferior and relegated to occupying physically and symbolically peripheral spaces, still closer to the residual barbarian cultures. Evita, unlike maternalist charities like the *Sociedad de Beneficencia*, centered their plight and, more importantly, espoused their right to dignity and representation.

More importantly, I contend that her fostering of familial bonds, especially in the organization of the *Partido Peronista Femenino* and the services provided by the *Fundación Eva Perón*, positions Evita as a symbolic mother to the *descamisados*. Within the activities of the *Fundación*, Evita took on the roles of spiritual motherhood through her daily, hands-on involvement in providing necessities and objects that could improve quality of living, participating in religious activities like baptisms, and interacting with individuals receiving aid in a respectful, dignified manner that was unparalleled in similar aid systems. She fundamentally established solidarity, which I attribute partially to her emphatic background as an illegitimate child from an impoverished, rural area of the Province of Buenos Aires. These relationships that Evita was able to construct with her charismatic politics, which I contend evoke norms of maternity, allowed her to achieve three key aims. First, she established a foundation of normative femininity on which to engender acceptance as a woman in the political sphere. Second, her charismatic politics in the PPF and the *Fundación Eva Perón* contributed to the construction of affective relationships with *descamisados*, in which she stands in as a symbolic mother. And finally, this maternal nature contributed to her postmortem interpretation as a saint, as canonization efforts and mourning practices have highlighted her status as Mother of the *Descamisados* as well as Spiritual Leader of

the Nation, the one who inspired imaginaries for future revindications for the country's minoritized populations. Each of these aspects is represented in the artwork of Daniel Santoro, who depicted a variety of interpretations of the postmortem legacy of Evita and her lasting emotional hold on Peronists decades after her death. This legacy of Evita's maternal devotion also arises in terms of other types of non-normative motherhood, related to gender and sexual identity, as does that of la Difunta Correa, which will be the topic of the following chapter.

### Chapter 3 – Alternative Maternities: la Difunta Correa and Evita as Queer Models of Motherhood

“We thought that now we had our Jesus and our Mary and our Joseph, our own holy family, a family that looked like us and that we were daughters of”<sup>346</sup>

- Camila Sosa Villada

“If Evita were still alive, she’d be a *Montonero*”<sup>347</sup>

“If Evita were still alive, she’d be a dyke”<sup>348</sup>

#### I. Introduction

Just as the two hagiographies analyzed in this dissertation – those of la Difunta Correa and Evita – hinge on traditional feminine and maternal expectations, so too can their legends deviate from such normative constraints and exceed expected evolutions with Argentine imaginaries. Notably, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and, particularly, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries, depictions of la Difunta and Evita have invoked queerness as a means of exploring these departures. The most obvious point in question is the fact that neither of these women exhibits a typical “queerness” – a sexuality or gender that does not align with heterosexual and/or cisgender norms. However, academics have long theorized queerness as something that moves beyond sex and gender, “as a kind of position against normative or dominant modes of thought.”<sup>349</sup> Karma Lochrie defines queerness as “a

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<sup>346</sup> Camila Sosa Villada, *Las malas* (Buenos Aires: Tusquets Editores, 2019), 44-45.

“Nosotros pensamos que ahora teníamos nuestro Jesús y nuestra María y nuestro José, nuestra propia sagrada familia, una familia que se nos parecía y de la cual éramos hijas”

<sup>347</sup> “Si Evita viviera, sería Montonera”

<sup>348</sup> “Si Evita viviera, sería tortillería”

<sup>349</sup> Karl Whittington, “QUEER,” *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012): 157.

category marking the sexual as a site for a variety of cultural struggles,”<sup>350</sup> moving the term queer beyond its relation to sex. Judith Butler elaborates:

If gender consists of the social meanings that sex assumes, then sex does not *accrue* social meanings as additive properties but, rather, *is replaced by* the social meanings it takes on; sex is relinquished in the course of that assumption, and gender emerges, not as a term in a continued relationship of opposition to sex, but as the term which absorbs and displaces ‘sex,’ the mark of its full substantiation into gender or what, from a materialist point of view, might constitute a full *desubstantiation*.<sup>351</sup>

In other words, for Butler, queerness is a flexible term that serves as an open signifier to be attached to various political issues.<sup>352</sup> Expanding on Butler’s theorizations, Jack Kornak writes, “Butler uses the term [queer] in particular to underline the intersections of race, ethnicity and class with gender and sexuality,”<sup>353</sup> meaning that queerness can be used to understand not only constraints on gender and sexuality, but also other markers of identity that are pertinent to citizenship in Argentina. Using Butler’s, Lochrie’s, and Kornak’s approximations to the term “queer” becomes useful when considering the invocation of la Difunta and Evita, as it allows the exploration of nontraditional motherhood as a subversion of norms of maternity and gender, as well as race, ethnicity, and class, all of which become pertinent to the cultural productions considered for this chapter.

Regarding queer motherhood in particular, scholars understand this concept in two distinct, but complementary, ways. The first is the literal understanding, where a mother or other non-patriarchal parent who takes on a mothering role<sup>354</sup> identifies as queer, in terms of gender or sexuality. The second is the broader interpretation of the term queer, with queerness standing in

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<sup>350</sup> Karma Lochrie, “Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies,” in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 181.

<sup>351</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 5.

<sup>352</sup> Jack Kornak, “Judith Butler’s Queer Conceptual Politics,” *Redescriptions* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 52-3.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>354</sup> I use the term “non-patriarchal parent” as a means of including gender non-conforming peoples who perform maternal roles but do not identify with the gendered term of “mother.”

for the subversion of normative social roles and structures. For Margaret F. Gibson in *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*, “the designation ‘queer’ has something to do with sex, with gender, with race, with embodiment, and with disrupting the normative practices of kinship and culture,”<sup>355</sup> the subversion of norms associated with each of these identity markers through mothering practices. This is what Gibson defines as mothering “queerly,” rather than queerly mothering, by raising children “with different goals, values, and strategies than those found in dominant ideologies of motherhood.”<sup>356</sup> In other words, the queer motherhood Gibson theorizes works against normative social structures, such as conservative ideas of women’s citizenship, class, and ethnicity.

This chapter will continue the examinations of la Difunta Correa and Evita taken up in the previous chapters, but with a focus on their depictions and readings as both queer and maternal figures, which I posit is a means of subverting the expectations placed on women as their queerness stands in for Lochrie’s site of cultural struggles. Although a majority of this chapter will focus on the former, the literal invocation of la Difunta Correa and Evita as queer women, I will also explore the proliferation of discourse about Evita as a “queer icon,” more closely aligned with the second understanding of queer maternity. I assert that, beyond critiquing the heterosexual hegemony, the “queering” of la Difunta and Evita also represents a critique of the racial, ethnic, and class hegemonies that their hagiographies implicitly reject. I will first address the depiction of la Difunta Correa as a *travesti* alternative to normative maternity in the work of Camila Sosa Villada, *travesti* being the preferred term of self-identification for many who would be considered transgender

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<sup>355</sup> Margaret F. Gibson, *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives* (Ontario: Demeter Press, 2014), 9

<sup>356</sup> Gibson, *Queering Motherhood*, 10

beyond the confines of Latin America.<sup>357</sup> This will be followed by an exploration of Evita's invocation as a queer figure, both literally and metaphorically, in Tomás Elloy Martínez's novel *Santa Evita*, Rodolfo Walsh's "Esa Mujer," and Copi's *Eva Perón*, as well as in drag performances and protest materials. In both of these sections, I will focus on examining the political orientations that render their "queerings" useful for critiquing the normative structures of Argentine society.

## II. Religious Underpinnings of the Legend of la Difunta Correa

Although Argentina as a country has placed great value on motherhood, "mother" has not been a welcoming category, but rather a means of exclusionary politics. From the influence of Enlightenment perspectives on the roles of women in emerging republics to the institutionalization of Catholicism as the official religion, expectations of mothers have been singular and limiting. The celebrated standard of maternity is firmly rooted in a form of abnegate motherhood embodied by the Virgin Mary and the Republican Mother, models brought to the continent by European conquistadors and missionaries preaching the Catholic faith.

Catholicism is the official state religion – a 2019 investigation from the CONICET's Sociedad y Religión en Movimiento said nearly 63% of the population identifies as Catholic. Despite this, the Argentine people have long adopted popular or folk saints, uncanonized figures who are frequently condemned by the Church. Although the Vatican rejects popular devotions, most devotees worship their particular folk saint in parallel with a devout Catholic identity. According to scholar of popular devotions Frank Graziano, the Argentine predilection for folk

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<sup>357</sup> Anahí Farji Neer, "Defender la sociedad. El travestismo como peligro social," in *Travestismo, transexualidad y transgeneridad en los discursos del Estado argentino. Desde los Edictos Policiales hasta la Ley de Identidad de Género* (Buenos Aires: TeseoPress, 2017).

saints is intrinsic to the “preference for *lo nuestro*,”<sup>358</sup> a sort of religious syncretism that highlights local lore. In the Cuyo Valley region, to the northwest of Buenos Aires and beyond the area majorly affected by the *Conquista del Desierto* (Conquest of the Desert), much of the population is of indigenous heritage. As European influence displaced these groups and traditions, their celebration became a means of reasserting the importance of collective, unofficial popular cultures, such as folk devotions to unofficial saints, like la Difunta Correa.

Still today, devotees come to la Difunta’s sanctuary in Vallecito, to ask for protection or particular miracles, or to thank her for miracles she has already conferred. Couples come to pray



Figure 4.1 Photograph of dedicatory plaques and metal figurines of body parts (*milagritos*) taken by the author at the Santuario de la Difunta Correa (2019)

<sup>358</sup> Graziano, *Cultures of Devotion*, 29.

for fertility, women pray for husbands, truckers ask for protection in their travels, like she provided for her son. They leave dedicatory plaques, license plates, replicas of homes, wedding dresses, and used soda bottles filled with water. Those with health concerns even leave small metal replicas of the ailing body part to request healing, a cure. These practices, along with an annual pilgrimage, resemble Christian practices of worshipping saints. The image below (Figure 4.1) shows a small sample of the plaques and replicas of body parts left in the Catholic tradition of supplication.

Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 1, it is possible to trace the legend of la Difunta Correa back to indigenous lore. Returning to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Huarpe myth of masculine divine lactation can provide interesting insight into contemporary revisiting of la Difunta's legend. Catalina Teresa Michieli, a historian of the Huarpe people, believes this myth should be considered "a possible ancient antecedent of undeniable indigenous roots of the current legend of Difunta Correa, the latter having modernized the time period and having changed its protagonists from natives to members of the local creole population."<sup>359</sup> Camila Sosa Villada, author of the 2019 novel *Las malas* that prominently features the legend of la Difunta, has a similar perspective. Even Camila Sosa Villada acknowledges la Difunta's heritage as an example of Catholic-indigenous syncretism, referring to her in *Las malas* as "miraculous popular saint, Indian myth robbed by the Christians."<sup>360</sup> While the term 'saint' situates la Difunta within a particularly European Christian tradition of worship, her devotion acknowledges her roots in the same tradition of indigeneity becoming appropriated into whiteness.

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<sup>359</sup> Michieli, *Los Huarpes protohistóricos*, 209.

<sup>360</sup> Sosa Villada, *Las malas*, 114.

"Deolinda Correa, santa popular, milagrosa, mito indio robado por los cristianos"

### III. *Travestismo* and Queerness in Argentina

Along with a long history of indigenous exclusion and genocide in Argentina, *travesti* people have not been a visible segment of the population until recently and, in fact, have been regarded as deviants and menaces to the civilized population. During the rise of Positivist, eugenic, and hygienist social reformers toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Argentine government became concerned with the rise in immigrant populations and the immoral behaviors they brought with them.<sup>361</sup> Between 1870 and 1900, the *Departamento Nacional de Higiene* (National Department of Hygiene), along with the chairs in Hygiene and Legal Medicine within the School of Medicine in Buenos Aires were created to address these issues, combatting social ills that included homosexuality.

The Argentine Psychiatric community at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century pathologized gender and sexual deviance, deeming anyone non-conforming with gender or sexuality norms to be an *invertido* – an “invert.” This concept of “sexual inversion” was defined more broadly than homosexuality, as a moral failing associated with the adoption of traits of the opposite sex.<sup>362</sup> An essential trait of this “inversion” was the violation of “normal sexuality as that which tends toward a reproductive end.”<sup>363</sup> As this supposed “inversion” of sexual roles stands in the way of traditional sexual reproduction, and thereby not conforming with societal norms of childbearing, it was considered an impediment to maintaining moral society. Unlike other theorizations of gender and sexual deviance perceived an innate illness within the subject, “inversion” was postulated as “the

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<sup>361</sup> Osvaldo Bazán, *Historia de la Homosexualidad en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Marea, 2016), 112.

<sup>362</sup> Noelia García Neira and Rosa Falcone, “Perversión e inversión sexual en la psiquiatría Argentina a principios del siglo XX,” *Anuario de investigaciones* 21, no. 2 (2014): 175.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

“la sexualidad normal como aquella que tiende hacia un fin reproductivo.”

product of a perverse social environment.”<sup>364</sup> To keep this perversion from spreading, “inversion” was deemed immoral and worthy of involuntary internment, either in a sanatorium or a prison.

Medical publications, like the journal *Archivos de Psiquiatría y Criminología Aplicadas a las Ciencias Afines* (*Archives of Psychiatry and Criminology Applied to Related Sciences*), promoted this ideological stance within the politico-medical sphere. Founded by doctors Francisco De Veyga, José María Ramos Mejía, and José Ingenieros, this journal published several volumes of clinical documents between 1902 and 1910 on the topic, including multiple articles authored by Dr. De Veyga himself, such as “La inversión sexual congénita” (“Congenital Sexual Inversion,” 1902), “Invertido sexual imitando la mujer honesta” (“Sexual Invert Imitating the Honest Woman,” 1902), “Inversión sexual adquirida” (“Acquired Sexual Inversion,” 1903), “El amor de los invertidos sexuales” (“The Love of the Sexual Inverts,” 1903), “Fetichista con hermafroditismo psíquico activo y alucinaciones eróticas del olfato” (“Fetishist with Active Psychic Hermaphroditism and Erotic Hallucinations of Smell,” 1903), and “El sentido moral y la conducta en los invertidos sexuales” (“Moral Sense and Conduct in Sexual Inverts,” 1904).<sup>365</sup> As the title of the journal suggests, the psychiatric establishment through which Dr. De Veyga operated was closely linked with carceral institutes and studies of criminology, as exemplified by Dr. De Veyga’s membership in the Armed Forces, where hygienist rhetoric was prominent.<sup>366</sup> Beyond an approximation based purely on sexuality, physicians at the time associated sexual and gender dissidence with other moral ills. In the case of Dr. De Veyga, his research was “situated in the

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<sup>364</sup> Omar Acha and Pablo Ben, “Amorales, patoters, chongos y pitucos. La homosexualidad masculina durante el primer peronismo (Buenos Aires, 1943-1955),” *Trabajos y Comunicaciones*, no. 30-31 (2004-2005): 3.

<sup>365</sup> García Neira and Falcone, “Perversión e inversión sexual en la psiquiatría Argentina a principios del siglo XX,” 175.

<sup>366</sup> Bazán, *Historia de la homosexualidad en la Argentina*, 115.

empirical experience with this population from the ‘lunfardo’<sup>367</sup> world – such the expression of Dr. De Veyga – where criminals, prostitutes, thieves, and immigrants abound, who will be classified as abnormal (criminals, mentally ill, or sexually degenerate) for moral judgement and subjects dangerous to the social order.”<sup>368</sup> By associating sexual deviance with people of the working class, particularly those who were indigenous or immigrants, the medical apparatus at the time, following the Italian medical criminologist and phrenologist Cesare Lombroso, further pathologized and criminalized all gender and sexual orientations that diverged from traditional reproductive relationships. As a means of curbing this societal affliction, Dr. De Veyga and his associates “decreed that the weight or moral forces should fall upon them,”<sup>369</sup> which logistically translated to incarceration or interment at a sanatorium.

One such case was publicized in the magazine *Caras y Caretas* on May 17, 1902, calling attention to the need for policing deviant behavior. The short article with the title “El hombre-mujer descubierto en Viedma” (“The Man-Woman Discovered in Viedma”) accompanied three photographs of the unnamed – and racialized – person who had been discovered to be gender nonconforming after being arrested for violating the *Ley de Enrolamiento* (enlistment law) in the province of Río Negro, in northern Patagonia. The article read:

“Arrested in Viedma, capital of Río Negro, as an offender of the enlistment law, an indigenous subject who was dressed as a woman and served as godmother in baptisms, being very gifted by the neighbors of those distant places. In these remote

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<sup>367</sup> “The Italian dialect word *lunfardo*, meaning a criminal, began as *Lombardo*, then became *lumbardo*, and finally *lunfardo*. It was applied to criminal slang, which – along with brothel slang and the flood of immigrants in the late nineteenth century – gave a major boost to Argentine argot.”

Eduardo Romano, “Lunfardo,” *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture* 4 (2008): 291.

<sup>368</sup> Bazán, *Historia de la homosexualidad en la Argentina*, 115.

“El conocimiento radica en la experiencia empírica con esta población proveniente del mundo ‘lunfardo’ – tal la expresión de De Veyga – donde abundan criminales, prostitutas, ladrones e inmigrantes, que serán catalogados como anormales (criminales, enfermos mentales o degenerados sexuales) por el juicio moral y sujetos peligrosos para el orden social”

<sup>369</sup> Bazán, *Historia de la homosexualidad en la Argentina*, 115.

“decretaron que sobre ellos debía caer el peso de las fuerzas morales”

regions of our country, where there are few women, it is a profitable industry to sponsor children in the baptismal front. In the colony General Frías, where for many years the subject is settled just with his parents, it was public and notorious that, in spite of his women's clothes, he was a man; but as the original lady did not cause harm or damage, being an honest person, hardworking and extremely skilled in weaving, embroidery, and other feminine labors no one ever observed his singular mania of disguising his sex. The subject, dressed as a man is a man and dressed as a woman is a woman: this is undeniable. The lady imprisoned for 'violation of the enlistment law,' was recognized in the Viedma prison by Doctor César Fausone, doctor of the Government of Río Negro, and according to his report it is a case of 'sexual inversion, with congenital anesthesia.'<sup>370</sup>

### EL HOMBRE-MUJER DESCUBIERTO EN VIEDMA

Ha sido detenido en Viedma, capital del Río Negro, como infractor á la ley de enrolamiento, un sujeto indígena que vestía de mujer y servía como madrina en los bautismos, siendo muy obsequiado por los vecinos de aquellos lejanos lugares. En dichas apartadas regiones de nuestro país, en que son escasas las mujeres, es industria provechosa apadrinar niños en la pila bautismal. En la colonia General Frías, donde desde hace muchos años está radicado el sujeto juntamente con sus padres, era público y notorio que, á pesar de sus ropas de mujer se trataba de un hombre; pero como

la original dama no causaba daño ni perjuicio, siendo una persona honesta, trabajadora y habilísima en tejidos, bordados y otras labores femeninas, nadie observó nunca su singular manía de disfrazar su sexo. El sujeto, vestido de hombre es un hombre y vestido de mujer es una mujer: esto es innegable. Presa la dama por «infracción á la ley de enrolamiento», fué reconocida en la cárcel de Viedma por el doctor César Fausone, médico de la Gobernación del Río Negro, y según su informe se trata de un caso de «inversión sexual, con anestesia congénita».



EL HOMBRE VESTIDO DE MUJER



EL MÉDICO DE LA GOBERNACIÓN DOCTOR FAUSONE, EXAMINANDO AL HOMBRE-MUJER.



EL HOMBRE Á MEDIO VESTIR CON EL TRAJE DE SU SEXO

Figure 4.2 "El hombre-mujer descubierto en Viedma" ("The Man-Woman Discovered in Viedma") published in *Caras y Caretas*, May 17, 1902. The captions read, left to right, "The Man Dressed as a Woman;" "The Doctor of the Government Doctor Fausone, Examining the Man-Woman;" "The Man Half-Dressed with the Clothes of his Sex."

<sup>370</sup> "El hombre-mujer descubierto en Viedma," *Caras y Caretas*, May 17, 1902.

"Ha sido detenido en Viedma, capital de Río Negro, como infractor á [sic] la ley de enrolamiento, un sujeto indígena que vestía de mujer y servía como madrina en los bautismos, siendo muy obsequiado por los vecinos de aquellos lejanos lugares. En dichas apartadas regiones de nuestro país, en que son escasas las mujeres, es industria provechosa apadrinar niños en la pila bautismal. En la colonia General Frías, donde desde hace muchos años está

Notably, the first descriptor used when introducing the “subject” is the adjective indigenous, highlighting the already marginalized position of this person. The article goes on to say that, as women were scarce in the region, she had dressed as a woman and served as a godmother in baptisms because it was a “profitable industry.” Since there is no money to be gained in being a godparent, this likely refers to social capital gained by forming these relationships. The author notes that she was able to disguise her “mania” so efficiently because she was skilled in “feminine labors.” Although she identified herself as a woman, and performed this gender effectively, this identification is labeled “mania” and diagnosed by the Río Negro prison doctor as “sexual inversion, with congenital anesthesia.”<sup>371</sup> Despite the author noting that the woman was “honest” and “caused no harm,” the inherent offense of sexual inversion merited criminalization, not just through the carceral system, but through her public humiliation in a magazine with national circulation.

Although institutional medical pathologizing waned in prominence as the 20<sup>th</sup> Century wore on, *travesti* and gender non-conforming people did not achieve any true semblance of visibility or acceptance and, in fact, faced more violent repression outside of the medical and carceral establishments, which culminated under the 1976-1983 military dictatorship. According to Juan José Sebreli, diagnoses of *inversión sexual* waned toward the end of World War I because of the difficulty of performing femininity “with the change in women’s styles,” limiting itself to

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radicado el sujeto justamente con sus padres, era público y notorio que, á [sic] pesar de sus ropas de mujer se trataba de un hombre; pero como la original dama no causaba daño ni perjuicio, siendo una persona honesta, trabajadora y habilísima en tejidos, bordados y otras labores femeninas nadie observó nunca su singular manía de disfrazar su sexo. El sujeto, vestido de hombre es un hombre y vestido de mujer es una mujer: esto es innegable. Presa la dama por ‘infracción a la ley de enrolamiento’, fué [sic] reconocida en la cárcel de Viedma por el doctor César Fausone, médico de la Gobernación del Río Negro, y según su informe se trata de un caso de ‘inversión sexual, con anestesia congénita.’”

<sup>371</sup> Although physicians of the time refer to “congenital anesthesia” in diagnoses of sexual inversion, no such disease exists in contemporary medical journals.

appearances during Carnival and cabarets.<sup>372</sup> In agreement with Sebreli, Omar Acha and Pablo Ben argue that by the 1930s there was a greater repression of deviant sexualities, but without the legal prosecution of earlier decades.<sup>373</sup> During this ‘Infamous Decade,’ lasting 1930 to 1943, concretized repression became a means of further associating the lower classes with deviance, which lasted through World War II. This began with “an uncoordinated series of Agendas, Provisions, Circulars, Regulations, and Telegraphic Orders, many of them elaborated *ad hoc* as facts emerged, configured as threatening the social existence,” known as the “Edictos Policiales,” or Police Edicts.<sup>374</sup> One of the earliest of these Edicts was Decree 32.265 in 1932, which allowed for prosecution of homosexuals who accompanied anyone under the age of eighteen in public for the crime of corruption of minors, without any right to legal defense.<sup>375</sup> It also prohibited “displaying oneself in public routes or public places dressed or disguised in clothes of the opposite sex,”<sup>376</sup> outlawing all forms of *travestismo*.

Under *Peronismo*, these Edicts, which had not been formally codified into law, were less strictly enforced and so-called sexual dissidents began to achieve more visibility as legal repression gave way to more latent homophobia that expressed itself with random acts of virulent violence.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Juan José Sebreli, quoted in Marina Dragonetti, “La increíble historia de la ‘Princesa de Borbón’, la travesti que estuvo a punto de estafar al Estado argentino,” *Infobae*, August 4, 2022, <https://www.infobae.com/lgbt/2022/08/04/borbon/>.

“con el cambio de las modas femeninas”

<sup>373</sup> Acha and Ben, “Amorales, patoteros, chongos y pitucos,” 4.

<sup>374</sup> Farji Neer, “Defender la sociedad. El travestismo como peligro social.”

“una serie descoordinada de Órdenes del día, Disposiciones, Circulares, Reglamentaciones y Órdenes telegráficas, muchas de ellas elaboradas *ad hoc* conforme surgían hechos configurados como amenazantes de la convivencia social”

<sup>375</sup> Gastón Chillier, “La sanción de un código de convivencia urbana: causas y efectos de la eliminación de las detenciones arbitrarias por parte de la Policía Federal,” in *Las reformas policiales en Argentina*, Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (Buenos Aires: Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales, 1998), 6.

<sup>376</sup> Rafael Amadeo Gentili, *...me va a tener que acompañar. Una visión crítica sobre los edictos policiales* (Buenos Aires: Centro de Investigaciones Sociales y Asesorías Legales Populares, 1995), 15.

“exhibirse en la vía pública o lugares públicos vestidos o disfrazados con ropas del sexo contrario”

<sup>377</sup> Acha and Ben, “Amorales, patoteros, chongos y pitucos,” 7.

Even with the threat of violence, gay men with money, in particular, congregated privately in boarding houses and apartments in Buenos Aires – the makings of an organized subversive cultural movement.<sup>378</sup> According to Pablo Gasparini, this was possible under Peronism because of its uplifting of the working class by those of the middle-class and elite: “the eroticism that arises from this meeting of classes is powerful. The relationship of the middle-class fag with the fuck boy from the slum not only filled lamentations but also saunas. Personal testimonies show the existence of gay saunas in Buenos Aires in the 1950s, when there were none in New York.”<sup>379</sup> This tolerated, but contemned, furtively organized community soon became impossible after Evita’s death and the 1955 coup.

The Edicts were ratified as law under Ley 14.467 in 1958, in addition to “those from the recent dictatorship,”<sup>380</sup> after the exile of Perón. Much like the *Revolución Libertadora*’s attempts to regulate and repress all Peronist discourse, their judicial arm also sought to regulate the public spaces and their use by LGBTQ individuals. Many of the new Edicts they passed referred to “‘public dances,’ ‘carnival,’ ‘disorder,’ ‘drunkenness and other intoxications,’ ‘scandal,’ ‘playing cards, dice, and others,’ ‘right to assembly,’ ‘vagrancy and begging,’” all euphemistic labels aimed at criminal offenses as well as “moral offenses.”<sup>381</sup> Although these Police Edicts would not be repealed until 1996,<sup>382</sup> LGBTQ activism escalated during the 1960s and 1970s, punctuated by the

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>379</sup> Pablo Gasparini quoted in Adrián Melo, “Nuestra mujer,” *SOY, Página/12*, July 27, 2012, <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/soy/1-2557-2012-07-27.html>.

“ El erotismo que nace de ese encuentro de clases es potente. La relación de la marica de clase media con el chongo villero no sólo llenó lamentaciones sino también saunas. Testimonios personales dan cuenta de saunas gays en Buenos Aires en la década del ’50, cuando no los había en Nueva York”

<sup>380</sup> Farji Neer, “Defender la sociedad.”

<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

“‘bailes públicos’, ‘carnaval’, ‘desordenes’, ‘ebriedad y otras intoxicaciones’, ‘escándalo’, ‘juego de naipes, dados y otros’, ‘derecho de reunión’, ‘vagancia y mendicidad’”

<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

foundation of the *Grupo Nuestro Mundo* (Our World Group) in 1969 and the *Frente de Liberación Homosexual* (Homosexual Liberation Front) in 1971.<sup>383</sup> Both of these groups were able to achieve more public presences after the return of Perón in 1973, however “after Perón’s death in 1974, during the presidency of his widow, Isabel, there was a rapid upsurge of right-wing paramilitary attacks on homosexuals,”<sup>384</sup> an upswing that increased even further under the 1976-1983 Military Junta. Within the *Frente de Liberación Homosexual*, those who did not flee the country to live in exile ceased all public activism, leading the organization to disband in June of 1976. Due to the brutality of the repression of all dissidents, including those previously termed *invertidos*, under the Military Junta “formal lesbian and gay activism disappeared,”<sup>385</sup> only to publicly reappear during the 1980s.

After the collapse of the Military Junta in 1982, LGBTQ activism experienced a resurgence, although repression continued. New organizations were formed, such as the *Comunidad Homosexual Argentina* (Argentine Homosexual Community), as “activist were apparently influenced by the mass rallies that took place at the end of military rule and by the desire for new understandings after the discrediting of traditional institutions such as the military, the state, and the church.”<sup>386</sup> Although this activism provided one means of public presence for “sexual dissidents,” they were still without legal protections and subject to violence and discrimination. Part of this discrimination was economic, as many potential employers would not hire those who were known to be queer, leading to financial precarity.<sup>387</sup> Therefore, another visible manner that LGBTQ people were present in public was through sex work, like the main characters

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<sup>383</sup> Stephen Brown, “‘Con discriminación y represión no hay democracia’: The Lesbian and Gay Movement in Argentina,” *Latin American Perspectives* 29, no. 2 (March 2002): 120.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-121.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>387</sup> Ana Gabriela Alvarez, “Cuerpos transitantes: para una historia de las identidades travesti-trans en la Argentina (1960-2000),” *Avá*, no. 31 (December 2017): 48.

in *Las malas*, as it was sometimes the only way to survive. In this way, in the 1980s “a *travesti* identity begins to consolidate around the market of prostitution, which will go on to underwrite claims for political and legal rights in the following decade.”<sup>388</sup> Indeed, during the 1990s, *travestis* and other queer people in Argentina were able to liberalize, organizing the first pride march in 1992, culminating in the repeal of the Police Edicts in 1996, and the passing of legislation allowing civil unions in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires and the Province of Río Negro in 2003.<sup>389</sup> Legislation against discrimination was installed nationally later in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, with the passing of Ley 26.618<sup>390</sup> in 2010 that allowed for civil marriage for same-sex couples, Ley 26.743<sup>391</sup> in 2012, which permitted those who wished to change their name and gender on their *Documento Nacional de Identidad* (DNI, National Identity Document) to do so without offering medical proof of gender-affirming care, and Presidential Decree 476/21 in 2021 that officially recognized non-binary identities on DNIs.<sup>392</sup>

Although activism and legislation has achieved much in the way of *travesti/trans* and broader LGBTQ rights, there still remains much discrimination and prejudice, stemming back to institutionalized violence since the foundation of the Argentina Federation. One of the largest issues facing these communities is *travesticidio*, the murder of someone for being *travesti* or trans, a hate crime closely related to femicide.<sup>393</sup> In 2020 alone, the *Observatorio de Femicidios en Argentina “Adriana Marisel Zambrano”* (Observatory of Femicides in Argentina “Adriana

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>389</sup> “Breve reseña histórica de una Ley histórica,” Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos, Argentina.gob.ar, May 9, 2022, <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/noticias/breve-resena-historica-de-una-ley-historica>.

<sup>390</sup> Matrimonio Civil, Ley 26.618, July 2010, <http://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/165000-169999/169608/norma.htm>.

<sup>391</sup> Identidad de Género, Ley 26.743, May 2012, <http://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/195000-199999/197860/norma.htm>.

<sup>392</sup> “Breve reseña histórica de una Ley histórica,” Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos.

<sup>393</sup> Blas Radi and Alejandra Sardá-Chandiramani, “Travesticide/transfemicide: Coordinates to think crimes against travestis and trans women in Argentina,” Observatorio de Género, 2016, <https://www.aacademica.org/blas.radi/15>.

Marisel Zambrano”) documented 300 cases of feminicides and *travesticidios*,<sup>394</sup> a marked continuation of longstanding prejudice and violence against the trans/*travesti* community. It is in this legacy of discrimination that Sosa Villada’s *Las malas* intervenes, centering *travesti* characters within the setting of an intolerant Argentina of the 1990s.

#### IV. La Difunta as a *Travesti* Mother

The novel *Las malas* is not Sosa Villada’s first approximation to the lore surrounding la Difunta Correa. In fact, the *travesti* author, actress, and activist has a longstanding affective link stemming back to her adolescence. When she was a pre-teen, her mother made a pilgrimage from their native province of Córdoba to the sanctuary in Vallecito to pray that her son would stop cross-dressing and performing sex work. Her mother’s devotion to la Difunta and praying for a “cure” to Sosa Villada’s gender expression has heavily influenced her work, both as an author and an actress. She wrote and performed a burlesque cabaret titled “el Cabaret de la Difunta Correa” (“Cabaret of la Difunta Correa”) and has now published two books in which la Difunta is a principal actor. Precisely this intersection of Sosa Villada’s experiences as a *travesti* and her mother’s devotion to la Difunta is where the plot of *Las malas* is situated, drawing on a legacy of *travesti* exclusion within the nation.

As explored in Chapter 1, la Difunta can serve as an embodiment of Argentina’s ideals surrounding maternity, as an extreme example of Republican Motherhood, but can also be read as an undermining of the Eurocentric culture imposed on indigenous populations, when thought of as a form of religious syncretism. In the same way, Sosa Villada invokes la Difunta as a parallel to

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<sup>394</sup> “Informes de Femicidios en Argentina Adriana Marisel Zambrano,” La casa del encuentro, accessed September 12, 2022, <http://www.lacasadelencontro.org/femicidios03.html>.

the possibility of *travesti* motherhood. The plot of *Las malas* follows a group of *travestis* in Córdoba in the 1990s as they perform sex work to survive in a city that soundly rejects them because of their identities. Told through Camila's perspective, the novel focuses on the period after another *travesti*, Tía Encarna, rescues and unofficially adopts a child found in the park where they work. This child, who they collectively baptize El Brillo de los Ojos (The Light of His Eyes), who I will refer to as El Brillo, brings the group together even as his existence heightens other people's suspicion and intolerance toward their community.

Although *travesti* citizens generally have been excluded from large segments of Argentine society, Sosa Villada centers them as the protagonists of *Las malas*, with Tía Encarna as the principal actor. When introducing her character, Sosa Villada describes Encarna's body as the product and embodiment of Argentina's national history:

“If someone wanted to do a reading of our nation, this homeland for which we have sworn to die in every hymn sung in schoolyards, this homeland that has taken lives of young people in its wards, this homeland that has buried people in concentration camps, if someone wanted to make an exact record of that shit, then they should see the body of Tía Encarna. That's what we are as a country too, the relentless damage to the *travestis*' bodies. The mark left on certain bodies, in an unjust, random, and avoidable way, that mark of hate.

Tía Encarna was one hundred and seventy-eight years old. Tía Encarna had all kinds of cuts, made by herself in prison (because it's always better to be in the infirmary than in the heart of the violence) and also the result of street fights, miserable clients, and surprise attacks. She even had a scar on her left cheek that gave her a mean and mysterious air. Her breasts and hips were eternally bruised from the beatings she received while in detention, even during the time of the military rule (she swore that during the dictatorship she had known man's evil face to face). No, I take it back: those bruises were caused by the airplane oil with which she had molded her body, that body of an Italian *mamma* who fed her, paid for the electricity, gas, water for that beautiful courtyard dominated by vegetation, that courtyard that was the continuation of the Park, just as her body was the continuation of the war.”<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> Sosa Villada, *Las malas*, 27-28.

“Si alguien quisiera hacer una lectura de nuestra patria, de esta patria por la que hemos jurado morir en cada himno cantado en los patios de la escuela, esta patria que se ha llevado vidas de jóvenes en sus guerras, esta patria que ha

In addition to explicitly locating a national narrative on the body of Tía Encarna, Sosa Villada ages Encarna back to Argentina's independence, one hundred and seventy-eight years before the publication of this novel, and gives her scars from these nearly two centuries of violence. She is not just physically or emotionally burdened but branded and materially altered by the discriminatory brutality she has experienced. Other compelling descriptions of Encarna reinforce her personification of the Nation, including her living in a *casa rosada*, the name for the presidential office in Buenos Aires; but her pink house is "queered" by being, as Sosa Villada describes it in the novel, "the most travesti pink in the world."<sup>396</sup> In this metaphor, Encarna and the other *travestis* move from existing at the periphery of society to being centered, not just in the narrative, but politically. Here they occupy a building that metaphorically embodies the governance of the nation. Furthermore, as queer scholars Patricio Simonetto and Marce Butierrez note, the name Encarna, which comes from the Spanish verb *encarnar* (to embody), "can be read in the novel in a double dimension as a reference to *travestis*' gender materialization, as well as the body as a site in which memory and life experience is preserved and activated."<sup>397</sup> Encarna

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enterrado gente en campos de concentración, si alguien quisiera hacer un registro exacto de esa mierda, entonces debería ver el cuerpo de La Tía Encarna. Eso somos como país también, el daño sin tregua al cuerpo de las travestis. La huella dejada en determinados cuerpos, de manera injusta, azarosa y evitable, esa huella de odio.

La Tía Encarna tenía ciento setenta y ocho años. La Tía Encarna tenía cortaduras de todo tipo, hechas por ella misma en la cárcel (porque siempre es mejor estar en enfermería que en el corazón de la violencia) y también fruto de peleas callejeras, clientes miserables y ataques sorpresivos. Incluso tenía una cicatriz en la mejilla izquierda que le daba un aire ruin y misterioso. Sus tetas y sus caderas cargaban unos moretones eternos, a causa de las palizas recibidas cuando había estado detenida, incluso en tiempos de los milicos (ella juraba que en la dictadura había conocido la maldad del hombre cara a cara). No, me retracto: esos moretones eran por el aceite de avión con el que había moldeado su cuerpo, ese cuerpo de *mamma* italiana que le daba de comer, pagaba la luz, el gas, el agua para regar aquel patio hermosamente dominado por la vegetación, aquel patio que era la continuación del Parque, tal como el cuerpo de ella era la continuación de la guerra"

<sup>396</sup> Ibid. 25.

"del rosa más travesti del mundo"

<sup>397</sup> Patricio Simonetto and Marce Butierrez, "The archival riot: *Travesti/Trans\** audiovisual memory politics in twenty-first-century Argentina," *Memory Studies* 16, no. 2 (2022): 2.

moves beyond her singular existence as a *travesti* to become an embodiment, a personification, of the Argentine Nation itself – a Nation that has denied her existence and citizenship.

While there is a pregnant woman within the group of sex workers that is otherwise entirely comprised of *travestis*, Tía Encarna is the focal model of maternity, an embodiment of the sacrificial motherhood espoused throughout Argentina’s history. When she adopts *El Brillo*, Encarna’s world shifts from nights at Parque Sarmiento to those at home with her infant son. According to Barbara Sutton, “women are generally supposed to embody motherhood not only through pregnancy but also through an abnegated body oriented to the needs of others,”<sup>398</sup> both feats that Encarna achieves, despite not having a biological son. Although never physically pregnant, the scene of *El Brillo*’s discovery mimics the act of Encarna giving birth. As she pulls *El Brillo* from a thicket in a ditch, it is messy, noisy, and traumatic, with everything “covered in shit and blood.”<sup>399</sup> Before bringing home her child, Encarna had a relationship with a man referred to as *El Hombre sin Cabeza* (the Headless Man.) For Camila and the other *travestis* who live with Encarna, “We thought that now we had our Jesus and our Mary and our Joseph, our own holy family, a family that looked like us and that we were daughters of.”<sup>400</sup> They see the potential for a normative family structure that would more closely resemble the reproductively-oriented families that the medical apparatus had sought to uphold by criminalizing *travestismo*. However, as Encarna becomes more devoted to caring for El Brillo, she neglects her amorous relationship in addition to her other kinships within the pink house, resulting in El Hombre’s suicide. While la

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<sup>398</sup> Sutton, *Bodies in Crisis*, 96.

<sup>399</sup> Sosa Villada, *Las malas*, 21.

“está todo cagado y lleno de sangre”

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.

“Nosotros pensamos que ahora teníamos nuestro Jesús y nuestra María y nuestro José, nuestra propia sagrada familia, una familia que se nos parecía y de la cual éramos hijas”

Difunta's death occurs as she pursues her husband in search of protection and support, Encarna becomes increasingly more self-sufficient in her mothering, rejecting the one cisgender man contributing to El Brillo's care.

Even though Encarna gives up all other meaningful relationships in her life to focus all her love and attention on El Brillo, when she is discovered to be a *travesti* with an "adopted" child (long before the gender identity laws of the 21<sup>st</sup> century legalized the adoption of children by LGBTQ people), the residents of the pink house are harassed by neighbors, schoolmates, and the police. Although Encarna never relays any details to Camila, "[t]he gossip that comes to me assures me that the patrolmen appear at the door at all hours and that the neighbors throw all kinds of things into the yard. That the walls are covered with graffiti and the door scorched by two arson attempts."<sup>401</sup> This officially sanctioned and social violence occurs amid a "season of murdered *travestis*,"<sup>402</sup> violence that threatens all the residents of the pink house, but it is only after El Brillo is physically harmed by other children for having a *travesti* mother that they live as recluses, not even emerging from their room to interact with the other *travestis*. The novel culminates in Tía Encarna's intentional, fatal poisoning of them both with carbon monoxide.

Before the deaths in the final pages of the novel, comparisons of Encarna's motherhood to la Difunta highlight Encarna's position as a paragon of motherhood. When her breasts produce a few droplets of liquid, Sosa Villada calls Encarna a "nodriza" (wet nurse) whose breasts are just

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<sup>401</sup> Ibid., 213.

"Los chismes que me llegan aseguran que los patrulleros le aparecen a cualquier hora en la puerta y que los vecinos le arrojan todo tipo de cosas al patio. Que las paredes están cubiertas de pintadas y la puerta chamuscada por dos intentos de incendio"

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 142.

"temporada de las travestis asesinadas"

as miraculous as la Difunta's: "Oh, Encarna, wet nurse. Oh, miracle of your breasts. Oh, Difunta Correa of airplane fuel boobs, patron saint of all of us, who managed to find you in the tireless search for a mother, to procure for us a mother for those nights of remorse, a mother who would teach us not to suffer."<sup>403</sup> Her miracle does not derive from post-mortem lactation, however, but from the ability to sustain a child with breasts sculpted from airplane fuel. In fact, Encarna's miracle more closely resembles the Huarpe legend in which a man miraculously lactates after his wife dies in childbirth, since Encarna doesn't have the biological capability of lactating that la Difunta did. For this feat, she serves as patron saint to the other *travestis* in the house, imploring them *not to suffer*, something they have had to endure throughout Argentine history and that la Difunta had to do for her child. That's what Sosa Villada refers to in locating a national narrative on Tía Encarna's body through the violence she has incurred – the suffering inflicted on *travesti* people throughout Argentine history, from the criminalization of inversion at the turn of the century to their targeted torture under the dictatorship of the 70s and 80s to their harassment in the 1990s when the novel takes place. However, for both the non-biological motherhood and the supposed lack of suffering, Encarna overwrites two of the main aspects of la Difunta's legend.

Furthermore, I should note that Encarna herself seems to acknowledge her material connection to la Difunta: "Tía Encarna, who is a devotee of la Difunta Correa, says that the child is actually the son of la Difunta. That people shouldn't worry about that part of the story because the child was raised by a group of *travestis* who worked in Sarmiento Park."<sup>404</sup> Returning to the

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<sup>403</sup> Sosa Villada, 141.

"Oh, nodriza Encarna. Oh, milagro de tus pechos. Oh, Difunta Correa de tetas de aceite de avión, santa patrona de todas nosotras, que logramos encontrarte en la búsqueda sin descanso de una madre, de procurarnos una madre para esas noches de remordimiento, una madre que nos enseñara a no sufrir"

<sup>404</sup> Ibid., 116.

original legend of la Difunta, remember that it ends with the discovery of la Difunta and the baby, and his supposed adoption, which in some versions is specified to be to a family in Buenos Aires. The legend doesn't give us any details about the fate of la Difunta's son, only that a family adopted him, leaving his future open to interpretation. However, if we follow the ethos of Republican Motherhood, his fate reflects the future of the Argentine nation, in which the mother is sacrificing for her child but also for the future of the country. Within this context, Encarna considers El Brillo to be this long-lost child of la Difunta, raised not by his biological mother, not by an anonymous family, but collectively by the *travestis* of the pink house, which firmly puts the future of Argentina in the hands of a group of marginalized *travestis*.

This collective child rearing by the *travestis*, who cohabitate without any traditional familial frame or bonds, reflects and embodies a movement with queer motherhood studies of questioning the praxis of monomaterialism. In *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood: Resisting Monomaterialism in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended, and Polygamous Families*, Shelley M. Park defines “[m]onomaterialism, as an ideological doctrine, resides at the intersection of patriarchy (with its insistence that women bear responsibility for biological and social reproduction), heteronormativity (with its insistence that a woman must pair with a man, rather than other women, in order to raise children successfully), capitalism (in its conception of children as private property), and Eurocentrism (in its erasure of polymaterialism in other cultures and historical periods).”<sup>405</sup> According to Silvana Sciortino, polymaterialism is a practice in many pre-Hispanic communities throughout current-day Argentina, in which “indigenous women as mothers

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“La Tía Encarna, que es devota de la Difunta Correa, dice que el niño es en realidad el hijo de la Difunta. Que la gente no se preocupa por esa parte de la historia porque al niño lo criaron un grupo de travestis que trabajaban en el Parque Sarmiento”

<sup>405</sup> Shelley M. Park, *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood: Resisting Monomaterialism in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended, and Polygamous Families* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 7.

are defined in terms of their collective motherhood,”<sup>406</sup> meaning the polymaternalism Park refers to has a legacy of multiple centuries in the multiculturally diverse Southern Cone. Returning to the indigenous roots of the legend of la Difunta Correa, I see the practice of collective parenting as taking on a prescient connotation. Since Sosa Villada explicitly connects her narration of la Difunta’s legend to its indigenous antecedent, I see the practice of collective mothering in the context of *Las malas* as clearly constituting a form of polymaternalism inherited from the same cultures.

By anchoring her maternity in the figure of Difunta Correa, *Las malas* conveys Encarna’s attempts to fit into a legacy of maternal sacrifice, which traces back to cultural and political expectations for women under Republican Motherhood in early Argentina. With la Difunta as the model, this sacrifice is pushed to its extreme – the sacrifice of a woman’s life for her child. Following the logic of Republican Motherhood, in the original legend la Difunta’s child represents the future of the nation. So, too, does the child raised by the *travestis* of the pink house stand in for the possibility of a *new* country. The centering of a *travesti* mother, one who explicitly embodies the history of the Nation, in comparison to a paragon of motherhood, undermines the historical legacy of both sacrificial motherhood and the marginalization of *travestis*. These *travestis*, who have historically been considered delinquents and criminals, are the people who provide the ultimate protection to la Difunta’s child. Even without the reproductive functionality of la Difunta and women who procreate biologically, the *travestis* of the pink house provide a new

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<sup>406</sup> Silvana Sciortino, “Semillas, hijos y pueblos: cuando la maternidad se conforma en lucha,” *Corpus. Archivos virtuales de la alteridad americana* 7, no. 1 (2017): 2.

“la mujer indígena como madre que se define en términos de una maternidad colectiva”

model of care, of a collective rooted in indigenous tradition that is able to supplant the ambiguous ending for la Difunta's son and stand in as a new example for the future of Argentina.

While la Difunta's legend ends with her death to save her child, Encarna's ends of her own accord – with an act of mercy to end the suffering for *travestis* in the pink house and in Argentina. This self-sacrifice and abnegate motherhood embodied by both Tía Encarna, and by la Difunta Correa, epitomize the values of Republican Motherhood and the example set through Catholic maternity, while at the same time both women undermine the nationalist projects inherent to their proliferation. In many ways, Evita reproduces this same contradiction of conforming with traditional modes of motherhood at the same time as she subverts them, which some have reinterpreted through the lens of queerness.

## V. Evita: Queer Mother of the *Descamisadas*

While Sosa Villada invokes la Difunta Correa as an indigenous and *travesti* alternative to normative understandings of maternity, Evita can be called upon as a queer mother who operates within the construction of a more traditional familial model. Even though Evita and her cisgender, heterosexual marriage to Juan Perón do not evoke thoughts of queerness at first consideration, many of her actions within this relationship can be considered queer in a broader sense. Many scholars of queer theory agree that “queerness” extends beyond the sexual, becoming a term that encompasses broader dissidence.<sup>407</sup> In *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*, Gibson notes that “‘queering’ is stood to extend beyond individual identity and toward a consideration of how relationships, communities, genders, and sexualities might proceed

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<sup>407</sup> Whittington, “QUEER,” 157.

otherwise. Queering motherhood can therefore start where any of the central gendered, sexual, relational, political, and/or symbolic components of ‘expected’ motherhood are challenged.”<sup>408</sup> In other words, “queerness” does not only apply to gender and sex, but can be applied to people and institutions, like motherhood, when they undermine traditional expectations. This does not mean that all work against normative motherhood is queer. Rather, I consider this intersection of queerness and motherhood to apply when its gendered or sexual norms are subverted, as in the case of Evita. In my discussion of queer interpretations of Evita, I will begin with these two disruptions, first the biological, nuclear family and then the hierarchical system, and then consider how these subversions are represented in cultural productions.

Firstly, I argue that the mere invocation of a childless woman as a “mother” subverts the normative conceptualization of maternity, a queering of the reproductive mother. Discourse surrounding Evita’s body, especially her (in)fertility, began while she was still alive. Once she married Perón, societal expectations dictated that she would bear his children. However, during



Figure 4.3 “Viva el cancer” [sic] graffiti in the Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires in July, 1952

their 8 years of marriage, she never had biological children, a choice that evoked harsh critiques.

Evita and

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<sup>408</sup> Gibson, *Queering Motherhood*, 11.

other “[w]omen who choose to be childless are understood and perceived as selfish, psychologically flawed and unnatural, participating in an unfeminine lifestyle,”<sup>409</sup> a stark contrast to Evita’s public persona and caring political agenda. Childlessness, plus her eventual diagnosis with ovarian cancer, only added to the critiques that she was not feminine, serving as a punishment for her lack of children and domineering, provoking nature. When Evita passed away of ovarian cancer in 1952, anti- Peronists celebrated with the phrase “*Viva el cancer*” [sic];<sup>410</sup> some claimed that she suffered from this specific form of cancer due to her never having children. At the March 24, 2022 march for the *Día Nacional de la Memoria por la Verdad y Justicia* (National Day of Memory for Truth and Justice) in Buenos Aires, a middle-aged man espoused this viewpoint. When he saw an image of Evita and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, the former President (2007-2015) and current Vice President of Argentina (2019-2023), kissing (an image that will be returned to shortly), he belligerently screamed profanities. Most interestingly, he yelled, “*murió por ser macho*” – “she died for being a macho” – a confirmation of the cultural perception of her culpability in her own death, a culpability rooted in her lack of feminine biological prowess.

Furthermore, while Argentines know that her cancer was gynecological in nature, there is much confusion over exactly which type of cancer Evita suffered: uterine, cervical, or ovarian. While this may seem to be an insignificant distinction, there are negative connotations to suffering from cancer of the cervix, specifically, but also to that of the ovaries. Ovarian cancer is more common in women who have more lifetime ovulations.<sup>411</sup> In other words, women who take birth control to prevent monthly menstruation or do not have children run a higher risk of developing

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<sup>409</sup> Rosemary Gillespie, “Childfree and Feminine: Understanding the Gender Identity of Voluntarily Childless Women,” *Gender and Society* 17, no. 1 (February 2003): 124.

<sup>410</sup> Felipe Pigna, *Evita. Jirones de su vida* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2012), 318.

<sup>411</sup> A. Tavani, E. Ricci, C. La Vecchia, M. Surace, G. Benzi, F. Parazzini, and S. Franceschi, “Influence of menstrual and reproductive factors on ovarian cancer risk in women with and without family history of breast or ovarian cancer,” *International Journal of Epidemiology*, no. 29 (2000): 799.

ovarian cancer, since bearing children halts ovulation for nine months.<sup>412</sup> Cervical cancer, on the other hand, is generally caused by the sexually transmitted infection Human papilloma virus (HPV).<sup>413</sup> Its association with unsafe sex practices and multiple sexual partners disparages those who suffer from cervical cancer as loose, immoral women.<sup>414</sup> Therefore, when Eva's fatal cancer is referred to as cervical or ovarian, the speaker implies, perhaps unwittingly, that her own behavior (not having children and being sexually promiscuous) has caused her death.

This same condemnation for promiscuity, the attribution of culpability for one's own death, is echoed by discourse throughout the HIV/AIDS crisis. These parallels are notable, not only because many HIV/AIDS patients at the onset of the crisis were gay men, but also because sociological studies have shown that "the homosexual AIDS patient was considered more to blame for his illness than the heterosexual AIDS patient... when mode of transmission was sexual contact."<sup>415</sup> While this particular study was conducted in the United States, research from Argentina echoes this sentiment, with scholars from the *Escuela de Medicina y Ciencias de la Salud de la Universidad de Rosario* (University of Rosario School of Medicine and Health Sciences) noting that social and medical discourse "imposed fear and an imperative need to avoid carriers of the virus, because whoever lived with the infection was linked to a criminal condition."<sup>416</sup> I propose that criminalization, stigmatization, and blame for one's own death and

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid., 799.

<sup>413</sup> Gina S. Ogilvie, Mel Krajden, Dirk van Niekerk, et. al., "HPV for cervical cancer screening (HVP FOCAL): Complete Round 1 results of a randomized trial comparing HPV-based primary screening to liquid-based cytology for cervical cancer," *International Journal of Cancer*, no. 140 (2017): 440.

<sup>414</sup> Erica Marchand, Beth A. Glenn, and Roshan Bastani, "HPV Vaccination and Sexual Behavior in a Community College Sample," *J Community Health*, no. 38 (2013): 1010.

<sup>415</sup> Kathleen A. Dowell, Charles T. Lo Presto, and Martin F. Sherman, "When are AIDS patients to blame for their disease? Effects of patients' sexual orientation and mode of transmission," *Psychological Reports*, no. 69 (1991): 211.

<sup>416</sup> Leila Martina Passerino, "Imaginaris, biomedicina y normatividad: una respuesta a los procesos de estigmatización y discriminación por VIH," *Revista ciencias de la salud* 11, no. 2 (2013): 221.

illness create an initial link between Evita's death and those of many LGBTQ people, especially gay men.

However, Evita's "queering" of the biological family extending beyond this mortal correlation. I see Evita disrupting the traditional family that produced the Republican Mother, a family in which the patriarch commanded his wife and their biological children. Between Evita and Perón, they represent the first portion of this family: the patriarch and his wife. In *Los cuerpos de Eva. Anatomía del deseo femenino*, Claudia Soria describes this family structure:

Eva was symbolically called mother – “Mother of the Humble,” “*Madremía*,” “Holy Mother,” “Heavenly Mother” – [which] suggests a connection between the female body and the maternal role of Eva. Certainly, in 1944, when Eva emerged into Argentine political life – in connection with her direct participation with the victims of the San Juan earthquake – she did so from the hand of the “paternal” Perón, then secretary of labor, and the task of the “maternal” Eva comes to complement the task of the father and to enhance his action of governing.<sup>417</sup>

From Soria's perspective, Evita occupies a traditionally feminine role as the support to her husband's patriarchal duty in governing the nation, replicating the parental roles demanded by Republican Motherhood. While I do understand Soria's view, I interpret their familial structure differently. Without ever having children, either biological or adopted, Evita adds children to their family, the *descamisados* for whom she is “*madre*,” a term of affection used throughout her political life and after her death to reflect the maternal affect she generated, as explored in Chapter 3. While her role as the First Lady only existed insofar as her relationship to Perón and her husband's authority, her projects kept her in the sphere of politics beyond these confines. Under the auspices of the *Fundación Eva Perón*, an organization that functioned in tandem with

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<sup>417</sup> Soria, *Los cuerpos de Eva. Anatomía del deseo femenino*, 124.

“Eva fuera emblemáticamente llamada madre – ‘Madre de los humildes’, ‘Madremía’, ‘Santa Madre’, ‘Madre celestial’ – sugiere una conexión entre el cuerpo femenino y el rol maternal de Eva. Ciertamente, en 1944, cuando Eva surge a la vida política argentina –a propósito de su participación directa con los damnificados del terremoto de San Juan– lo hace de la mano del ‘paternal’ Perón, entonces secretario de trabajo, y la tarea de la ‘maternal’ Eva viene a complementar la tarea del padre y a potenciar su acción de gobierno”

government support but without direct oversight, Perón did not bear authority – Evita wielded command of the *hogares*. In these “homes,” Evita not only created the emotional, familial sentiment that made her legible to a broader public as a figure worthy of devotion, but also positioned herself as the patriarchal jurisdiction Perón would be expected to occupy. This reliance upon a nuclear family model – one without biological family grounding – in her occupation of a historically masculine political role, along with her focus on women as Argentine citizens, can be considered a deviation from the Republican Mother model.

Not only this, I see it as representing a queering of maternity and the heteronormative family structure and traditional divisions of Argentine society, one working against the political and symbolic nature of maternal models. Her essential undermining socio-political hierarchy begins with her embodiment of the values of the lower class. As an illegitimate child, a peripheric migrant to the capital, a woman who lived with her partner before marriage, she represents an undermining of the “central gendered, sexual, relational, political, and/or symbolic components” of social structure discussed by Gibson. Her embodiment in the positions of power she inhabited represent an inherent undermining of systems of authority and the traditional hierarchies they upheld. More importantly, I note the wielding of this authority she held to be in service of undermining Republican Motherhood. To prove this point, I focus on the orientation of her projects and policies toward women with the goal of women’s citizenship, both socially and politically. In regard to the former, I return to Carolina Barry, Karina Ramacciotti, and Adriana Valobra, who outline the work of the *Fundación* and its outcomes in *La Fundación Eva Perón y las mujeres: entre la provocación y la inclusión*. They conclude that the efforts of the *Fundación*, including the *hogares de tránsito* (transit homes), *escuela de enfermeras* (nursing school), and *hogar de la*

*empleada* (worker's home), indicate "the effort to achieve the social inclusion of woman."<sup>418</sup> Then and now, Evita's maternity embodies an inclusiveness. I concur in their observation, although I will not repeat the enumeration of the *Fundación*'s work that was carried out in Chapter 3; the various *hogares* provided not only housing, but also job training, healthcare, and childcare, while the *escuela de enfermeras* provided another option for professional education. Between these three examples of the work of the *Fundación*, women are trained for civic engagement beyond the domestic sphere and to participate in the workplace. In the domain of politics, Evita also wielded considerable influence over the participation of women. The *Partido Peronista Femenino*, of which Evita was the director, carried out the campaign for women's suffrage, a movement that was several decades in the making, but was only formally conferred under Evita's leadership.

I reconsider these contributions of the PPF and the *Fundación* because I consider it crucial to recognize these accomplishments within the context of Republican Motherhood. Kerber notes that "the Republican Mother's life was dedicated to the service of civic virtue; she educated her sons for it,"<sup>419</sup> but not her daughters. The mother's contribution to the civic sphere was through her sons, and her daughters continued the cycle of educating male children. Evita's political work disrupts this rhythm by positioning the daughters, her *descamisadas*, as the recipients of her education, inheritance, and heritage. As I previously noted, the *hogares* were reserved for women, and their sons were forced to move out upon reaching puberty, thereby limiting the ability to educate boys to be good citizens. Girls were allowed to stay, however, and received instruction in the spheres of labor and politics, in addition to homemaking. Returning to Gibson's assertion that

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<sup>418</sup> Carolina Barry, Karina Ramacciotti and Adriana Valobra, *La Fundación Eva Perón y las mujeres: entre la provocación y la inclusión* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2008), 13.

"el esfuerzo por lograr la inclusión social de las mujeres"

<sup>419</sup> Linda Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment – An American Perspective," *American Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 202.

“queering motherhood can... start where any of the central gendered, sexual, relational, political, and/or symbolic components of ‘expected’ motherhood are challenged,”<sup>420</sup> I argue that Evita’s inversion of the norms of Republican Motherhood to focus on her symbolic “daughters” does achieve this challenging. Evita’s political aims through the *Fundación* and the PPF place *descamisadas*, not *descamisados*, at the center of their discourse and activism, promoting women’s citizenship in a way that directly defies the mandate of Republican Motherhood and its expectations. Following Gibson’s contention, this constitutes a “queering” of Evita’s maternal embodiment, one that becomes clearer when viewed through conceptualizations of her relationship to gender.

## VI. “Macho” Embodiment: Evita in Drag

A frequent critique of Evita by those who politically and culturally oppose her concerns her gender embodiment, claiming that her position in politics, her severe rhetoric, her domineering nature, and her common background made her less feminine. Much like the discussion of her fertility, discourse about Evita’s masculine nature focuses on her public persona as a means of approaching her gender and sexuality. David William Foster asserts that “Evita’s basic allure has undoubtedly been that of the strong woman able to accrue power. This results in a portrait of a woman who defies macho-dominated society, often by assuming the macho’s own trappings of power.”<sup>421</sup> In other words, Evita’s assumption of a traditionally masculine role in politics engenders her to having a “macho” disposition, one associated with political power. He continues, “nevertheless, the woman does not become the macho but rather displaces him through the

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<sup>420</sup> Gibson, *Queering Motherhood*, 11.

<sup>421</sup> Foster, “Eva Perón, Juan José Sebreli, and Gender,” 220.

deconstructive gestures of a skillfully crafted presence.”<sup>422</sup> Foster suggests that Evita does not *become* the macho, the aggressively prideful masculine persona, but embodies and performs it. Taking Foster’s assertion as a point of departure, this section will examine the “queering” of Evita through drag, the performance of exaggerated gender in entertainment. I will begin with the literature that has laid the foundations for masculine embodiments of Evita: *Santa Evita* by Tomás Eloy Martínez, “Esa mujer” by Rodolfo Walsh, and, most critically, *Eva Perón* by Copi. After examining these works, I will turn my attention to contemporary drag acts in which the performer his/herself takes on the persona of Evita. I will then conclude with an analysis of the importance of this drag embodiment of Evita and her “queering” overall.

Tomás Eloy Martínez’s *Santa Evita* (1995) engages with this masculinization of Evita, although it is not the central focus of the novel and its plot. The title *Santa Evita* does not reflect the author’s hagiographic idealization of Evita as a saintly figure, but rather the effect she and her embalmed body elicit from other Argentines. As a fictionalized account of her corpse’s odyssey and the men involved in this process, *Santa Evita* explores the cultural mythmaking deriving from Evita’s body while embellishing the narrative with supernatural elements that evoke her perceived celestial nature. Eloy Martínez explores Evita’s early years in the public eye, when she was an aspiring actress in Buenos Aires. Although she took many acting roles throughout her career, there is a 9-month gap between January and September 1943 when she has no acting credits to her name. Eloy Martínez taps into a rumor that some anti-Peronists advanced throughout Evita’s marriage to Perón – that this 9-month absence corresponds to the gestation period of a secret, illegitimate pregnancy. Mercedes, one of Evita’s early friends after her arrival in Buenos Aires comments that:

“‘She was pregnant,’ Mercedes said. ‘Evita. But this wasn’t a problem. Neither the father nor she wanted to have the child. Him because he was already married, her to not ruin her career. The problem was that the abortion ended in disaster. A

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<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 220.

butchery. The uterine fundus, the ligaments, the tubes were broken. Within half an hour she was bathed in blood, with peritonitis. They had to put her in an emergency clinic. It took her more than two months to recover. I was the only person to see her every day. She almost died. She was on the edge. She almost died.”<sup>423</sup>

According to Mercedes’s comments, the botched abortion procedure left the future First Lady infertile nearly a decade before the hysterectomy intended to remove her cancer. I highlight this brief comment on Evita’s infertility within a multi-hundred-page novel because of the historical connotations of the condition with a masculine nature. In their studies on perceptions of women’s infertility, Gayle Davis and Tracey Loughran trace associations of inability to reproduce with masculinity back to the early modern period in Europe. According to them, both the medical establishment and public perception “related female infertility, in particular, to masculine features such as a hoarse voice and thick, black hair around the female genitalia, which were considered external signs of ‘deviance.’”<sup>424</sup> More than just physical features reminiscent of a lack of femininity, it was believed that infertility manifested itself in behavioral characteristics, as well. In 1952, psychologist I.C. Fischer created a two-category system of classification for women without reproductive capabilities, one of which was “the ambitious, masculine, aggressive, and domineering career women.”<sup>425</sup> Although the physical characterization of the pathologized infertile woman bares some relevance, as Evita was not a natural blonde, I believe the latter more clearly exemplifies the stereotyping of Evita as masculine. Her ambition and political acumen were

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<sup>423</sup> Tomás Eloy Martínez, *Santa Evita* (New York: Vintage Español, 1995), 198.

“– Ella estuvo embarazada – dijo Mercedes –. Evita. Pero eso no fue un problema. Ni el padre ni ella querían tener el hijo. Él porque ya estaba casado, ella para no arruinar su carrera. El problema fue que el aborto acabó en desastre. Una carnicería. Le rompieron el fondo del útero, los ligamentos, la trompa. A la media hora cayó bañada en sangre, con peritonitis. Tuvieron que internarla de emergencia en una clínica. Tardó más de dos meses en reponerse. Yo fui la única persona que la iba a ver todos los días. Casi se muere. Estuvo al borde. Casi se muere”

<sup>424</sup> Gayle Davis and Tracey Loughran, *The Palgrave Handbook of Infertility in History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 266.

<sup>425</sup> Sofia Gameiro and Jack Boivin, “The Psychology of Infertility in Reproductive Medicine and Healthcare, c. 1940s-2000s,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Infertility in History*, ed. Gayle Davis and Tracey Loughran (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 395.

not the desired traits of a domestic woman, and therefore serve as a means of undermining her femininity, as plays out in *Santa Evita*.

The primary focus of *Santa Evita*'s plot concerns the saga of Evita's cadaver after the overthrow of Perón in 1955, focusing on the obsession her body induces upon the military officials who assume possession of it in a blend of fact and fiction. To recapitulate the true fate of Evita's body postmortem, I will note that her cadaver was ordered to be embalmed by Doctor Ara, a Spanish physician, to be interned at the *Monumento al Descamisado*, a monument that was never constructed due to the overthrow of the second Perón administration in 1955.<sup>426</sup> When the military government, the *Revolución Libertadora*, seized power, Colonel Moori Koenig, head of the *Servicio de Inteligencia del Ejército* (Military Intelligence Service.)<sup>427</sup> After occupying multiple residences in Argentina, her body was smuggled out of the country under the name Maria Maggi de Magistri, that of an Italian woman who had immigrated to Argentina and was to be buried in the Monumental Cemetery in Milan.<sup>428</sup>

Eloy Martínez uses these facts as the background for his fictionalization of interactions between these characters. By the end of *Santa Evita*, Colonel Koenig and his subordinates become infatuated with Evita's cadaver. However, toward the beginning of the narration, he is skeptical of Doctor Ara's reverence for the body and reticence about handing over the body to the military, thinking, "this embalmer turned into a fag on us."<sup>429</sup> This comment is conspicuous, as the only other observations Koenig makes about Doctor Ara concern Evita's corpse, making necrophilia

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<sup>426</sup> Sánchez Sorondo, "El ambicioso 'Monumento al Descamisado' que sería mausoleo de Evita pero no fue."

<sup>427</sup> Sergio Wischñevsky, "El robo del cadáver de Eva Perón: qué muestra 'Santa Evita' y qué pasó en verdad," *Página/12*, July 26, 2022, <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/439987-el-robo-del-cadaver-de-eva-peron-que-muestra-santa-evita-y-q>.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> Eloy Martínez, *Santa Evita*, 35

"este embalsamador se nos volvió marica"

the more logical conclusion to draw from Ara's infatuation. In fact, without considering Evita as having a masculine embodiment, this thought makes no sense, as it reflects Ara's sentiments toward Evita and her body.

Although this is the only instance of *Santa Evita's* direct discussion of Evita in terms of queerness, there are other occasions of her framing as masculine. Describing when Evita and Perón first met at Luna Park, Koenig says she "presents herself with a seductive, high-voltage phrase 'Thank you for existing, Colonel,' and proposed that they sleep together that night... She didn't conceive that the woman could be passive in any field, even in bed, where it is by nature's mandate."<sup>430</sup> According to Koenig, upon first meeting Perón, Evita offers herself sexually, acting as the seducer who chases after sex. He adds that this active pursuit of sex goes against the "passive" nature women are supposed to exemplify, going as far as to say it is an inherent aspect of nature itself. From Koenig's traditional perspective on gender, Evita's brazen embrace of sexuality makes her a macho figure, continuing the masculinization in accusing Doctor Ara of same-sex desire in his attachment to her body.

Her masculinization and queer fetishization in literature extends beyond *Santa Evita* to Rodolfo Walsh's story "Esa mujer" ("That Woman"). "Esa mujer" is one of the many offensive epithets used to refer to Evita when discussion of Peronism, Perón, or Evita was prohibited under the *Revolución Libertadora*, along with others like "*la yegua*" (the mare, or the whore). Predating the publication of *Santa Evita*, "Esa mujer" deals with nearly the same subject matter and characters and, in fact, informed Eloy Martínez's novel. In this story, a journalist – of a similar to

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<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 137

"se le presenta con una frase de alto voltaje seductor 'Gracias por existir, coronel', y le propuso que durmieran juntos esa noche... No concebía que la mujer pudiera ser pasiva en ningún campo, ni aun en la cama, donde lo es por mandato de la naturaleza"

Walsh's himself – approaches “the Colonel [who] has a German surname,”<sup>431</sup> the same Moori Koenig. It is not a coincidence in name; the Colonel recounts the same story from *Santa Evita* of a Major who shot and killed his wife, in an effort to protect Evita's body in the attic from a burglar. The purpose of this interview, disclosing the whereabouts of Evita's disappeared body, extends throughout the entire narrative. Toward the end of the Colonel's tale, as he agitatedly approaches revealing her true location, he adds the detail, “‘She's standing on her feet!’ shouts the Colonel. ‘I buried her standing, like Facundo, because she was a macho.’”<sup>432</sup> The most obvious aspect of this quotation that is pertinent to this study is the last word: macho. However, in her 2004 translation of the story, Cindy Schuster translates this phrase to “because she had balls.”<sup>433</sup> In either version, Koenig directly calls Evita male. Not only male, but *macho*, the adjective used in Spanish to describe the sex of animals and from which *machismo*, the concept of exaggerated masculinity and virility, is derived.

This virile *macho* perception is exemplified by the comparison to Facundo, the notorious Federalista *caudillo* Facundo Quiroga discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to the legend of la Difunta Correa. Facundo was characterized by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento as a tyrant and the embodiment of barbarism, in opposition to his idealized and lettered civilization that Sarmiento believed Argentina was destined to become, despite the influence of *caudillismo*. The positioning of Evita as a *caudillo* is also explored by Soria, describing “her explosive personality as a *caudilla* at the service of the Peronist cause, represents her, not only as a leader whose hand does not tremble but, also, as an impulsive, impassioned, and inopportune woman.”<sup>434</sup> These characteristics that

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<sup>431</sup> Rodolfo Walsh, “That Woman,” trans. Cindy Schuster. February 1, 2004, <https://wordswithoutborders.org/read/article/2004-02/that-woman/>.

<sup>432</sup> Rodolfo Walsh, “Esa Mujer,” *Los oficios terrestres* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 2022), 20.

“–¡Está parada! – grita el coronel–. ¡La enterré parada, como Facundo, porque era un macho!”

<sup>433</sup> Walsh, “That Woman.”

<sup>434</sup> Soria, 128

define her as a *caudilla*, the unusual, feminized form of *caudillo*, are the same that I.C. Fischer used to define the category of infertile, masculine women. With both the allusion to Facundo and her description as a *macho*, “Walsh brings us to the vocabulary of barbarism,”<sup>435</sup> masculinizing Evita both through her sex and her behavior.

For the purposes of considering Evita’s gender embodiment in relation to masculinity, of a woman performing a *macho* persona, the clearest parallel is that of drag, the performance of exaggerated gender, generally for entertainment. Traditionally, drag performers have been gay men performing femininity, and although the concept of drag is much more nuanced, this somewhat reductive definition functions for the purposes of this analysis. In Argentina and internationally, Evita Perón has been a popular historical figure to interpret through drag, even making it to the main stage of the most globally acclaimed drag performance, *RuPaul’s Drag Race*.

On *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, *RuPaul’s Drag Race All Stars* and its now-cancelled Chilean spin-off *The Switch Drag Race: El arte del transformismo*, she has been interpreted three times in since 2015. Within the context of the three U.S.-based franchises (although *The Switch* was produced in Chile, it remains under the *RuPaul’s Drag Race* umbrella), Evita is framed through Madonna’s role in the 1996 musical movie *Evita*, directly by Alan Parker, based on the 1978 stage musical *Evita* by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Weber. Most recently, in 2020’s Season 12, Episode 7 of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, “Madonna: the Unauthorized Rusical” repeats this framing with Sherry

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“su explosiva personalidad de caudilla al servicio de la causa peronista, la representa, no sólo como una líder a la que no le tiembla la mano sino, además, como una mujer impulsiva, apasionada e intempestiva”

<sup>435</sup> José Luis García, “Rodolfo Walsh: El escritor de una realidad incontable,” *Cartaphilus. Revista de investigación y crítica estética*, no. 13 (2014): 145.

“Ahora la genealogía de Evita pertenece al macho mayor de la barbarie argentina. Durante todo el relato, Evita es considerada políticamente como un macho, mientras que su desnudez, su transparencia, nos recuerda que es una hembra, una hembra deseada sexualmente incluso después de muerta. Macho y hembra, no hombre y mujer. Walsh nos lleva al vocabulario de la barbarie”



Figure 4.4 Sherry Pie on *RuPaul's Drag Race* Season 12, Episode 7 "Madonna: the Unauthorized Rusical"

Pie, a contestant who was disqualified for misconduct and whose *Drag Race* performances have been scrubbed from the internet. In the since-deleted footage, Pie sings about Madonna's acting career, only mentioning Evita in the line "I was born to play Eva."<sup>436</sup> In September 2016, Roxxxxy Andrews performed as Eva Perón in the Season 2, Episode 3 "Rusical" (a portmanteau of RuPaul and musical) entitled "HERstory of the World." Set to samba-style music, vaguely evoking a Latin American character, Andrews lip-synchs, "I'm Eva Perón, so honey don't you cry for me. I'm an actress, model, diva, and first lady. I give the people hope for a better *mañana*. I was Evita, after all, I played it better than Madonna. I did it for the right, I did it for the



Figure 4.5 Roxxxxy Andrews on *RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars* Season 2, Episode 3 "HERstory of the World"

kids, I did it for the sick and poor. I did it for the fame, I did it for the money, I did it 'cause I wanted more. I give the people joy, I give the people life, I gave the people drama. And I did, oh yes I did it, better than Madonna."<sup>437</sup> In these lyrics, "Evita" asserts that her

<sup>436</sup> *RuPaul's Drag Race*, season 12, episode 7, "Madonna: The Unauthorized Rusical," aired April 10, 2020.

<sup>437</sup> *RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars*, season 2, episode 3, "HERstory of the World," aired September 8, 2016.

work was for the sake of the “right,” “the kids,” and “the sick and poor,” continuing the framing explored in Chapter 3 of *Evita* orienting her labor for the benefit of children and those in need, while also comparing herself to Madonna. In addition to the continued framing of *Evita* through the more legible figure of Madonna, at least in the United States, where *Evita* is not as well-known, both of these United States-based series, the drag queens interpreting *Evita* do so dressed in a similarly patterned pencil-skirted dress, pearls, red lipstick, and a blonde wig coiffed into a low-tied bun.

I argue that *The Switch* introduces a slight variation, in light of its situation for a Latin American audience. *The Switch Drag Race: El arte del transformismo* was a spin-off of *Drag Race* based in Chile, but with contestants from the other Southern Cone countries of Argentina and Uruguay. One of the Argentine contestants on the first season of *The Switch* in 2015, Sofía Camará ‘Sabélo’ participated in a second episode “Desafío de Canto”<sup>438</sup> (singing challenge) dressed more



Figure 4.6 Sofía Camará on *The Switch: El arte del transformismo* Season 1, Episode 2

akin to *Evita* dressed for a special occasion. She wears maintains the blonde bun and pearls, but substitutes the workwear for long, black gloves up to her elbows, a sparkling bracelet, and a floor-length

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<sup>438</sup> *The Switch Drag Race: El arte del transformismo*, season 1, episode 2, “Episode #1.2,” aired October 15, 2015.

gown with feathers at the bust. Although Camará never addresses the clear resemblance to the former First Lady, the comparison is clear through her choice of song: “No llores por me Argentina,” the Spanish-language translation of “Don’t Cry for Me, Argentina” from the musical *Evita*. These examples demonstrate not only Evita’s relevance within queer culture, albeit through the lens of Madonna in the context of the United States, but also her adaptability of gender performance.

Beyond the television interpretations of Evita in drag, she remains a popular drag persona in Argentina. In addition to being revived in gay bars throughout the country,<sup>439</sup> drag Evita recently



Figure 4.7 Lady Alutrix embodying Evita for the Primer Encuentro Federal de Deporte y Diversidad (First Federal Meeting on Sport and Diversity)

entered the broader public sphere; in 2022, she even made her way into the Tucumán Province’s seat of government, the *Casa de Tucumán*. Lady Alutrix, a 22-year-old drag queen who calls herself the *Drag de la Patra*, the Fatherland’s Drag Queen, was chosen by the Tucumán government to appear as Evita at the opening ceremony of the *Primer Encuentro Federal de*

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<sup>439</sup> Adrián Melo, “El colectivo LGTBIQ y la figura de Eva Perón: claves de una apropiación y una identificación,” *Universidad Nacional de la Plata Facultad de Trabajo Social “Entre Dichos: Intervenciones y Debates en Trabajo Social.”*



Figure 4.8 Lady Alutrix standing outside the *Casa de Tucumán* before singing the *Himno Nacional* (Argentine National Anthem)

*Deporte y Diversidad* (First Federal Meeting on Sport and Diversity), organized by Monarca, an LGBTQ+ sports group.<sup>440</sup> In the publicity images, Alutrix continues the pattern of interpreting Eva Perón in red lipstick, pearls, and a blonde bun, adding a light blue and white sash, reminiscent of those worn by the President of Argentina, albeit with long, red nails and heavy makeup. However, in images from the event itself, she is seen in a more modern, boho style white dress with billowing sleeves that drape

as she lifts her arms mimicking Evita’s recurrent gesture. More strikingly, she sports a neon blue wig, tied back into a looser bun, and a tiara resembling an *aureole*, the “little golden crowns” depicted on the heads of saints.<sup>441</sup> With this simple change in wardrobe, Alutrix ties in perceptions of Evita as a saint, a woman to be venerated, even as she is impersonated in drag. In an interview for the Province of Buenos Aires’s public radio station AM 1270/FM 97.UNE, Alutrix spoke about this experience, saying she considers that “Evita is a special turning point in me and Cristina

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<sup>440</sup> “Quién es la primera ‘Evita drag queen’ que cantará el Himno Nacional en la Casa de Tucumán,” *Los Andes* (Mendoza), August 12, 2022, <https://www.losandes.com.ar/por-las-redes/quien-es-la-primera-evita-drag-queen-que-cantara-el-himno-nacional-en-la-casa-de-tucuman/>.

<sup>441</sup> Christopher M. Brown, *Eternal Life and Human Happiness in Heaven* (Toronto: Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 328.

[Fernández de Kirchner] represents strength. Gays or diversities are represented in them because they are women, they are fragile, and at the same time have so much strength.”<sup>442</sup> Even though neither Fernández de Kirchner nor Evita directly embodies any identity related to sexual diversity, Alutrix, and other like her, see their struggles mirrored in the politics of both women. Scholar Adrián Melo echoes this sentiment, noting that “like people of sexual diversities... Evita had to assume different identities, sometimes as survival and sometimes to be someone else, an object of her own creation.”<sup>443</sup>

This aspect of self-fashioning is very reminiscent of drag impersonation, taking on and performing the identity of another. Importantly, in Alutrix’s fashioning of herself as Evita, she is photographed in front of the *Casa de Tucumán*, with the seal of the Argentine Republic directly overhead. This invitation was not just for a public appearance in drag as Evita, but to sing the Argentine National Anthem while interpreting her.<sup>444</sup> Unlike the other three examples of drag Evita, which did also involve singing or lip-synching, but related to Madonna and the musical *Evita*, Alutrix’s performance is situated in a particularly Argentine character. The confluence of Evita and the *Himno Nacional* is unsurprising, as she was the First Lady, but the element of drag brings into focus the subversive nature of Evita’s presence in the *Casa Rosada*.

The earliest example of drag interpretations of Evita is that of the play *Eva Perón* by Copi, né Raúl Damonte Botana. Copi lived much of his life in exile in Paris, beginning as a child because

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<sup>442</sup> Lady Alutrix, “Lady Alutrix: ‘Siempre soñé ser políticamente activa,’” interview by Rocío Coda, AM 1270/FM 97.UNE, August 11, 2022, [https://provinciaradio.com.ar/noticia.php?noti\\_id=7889](https://provinciaradio.com.ar/noticia.php?noti_id=7889).

“Evita es un quiebre especial en mí y Cristina representa la fortaleza. Los gays o las diversidad [sic] se ven representados en ellas porque son mujeres, son frágiles y a la vez tienen tanta fortaleza”

<sup>443</sup> Melo, “El colectivo LGTBIQ y la figura de Eva Perón.”

“Como las diversidades sexuales... Evita tuvo que asumir diferentes identidades, en ocasiones como supervivencia y en otras para ser otra, un objeto de su propia creación”

<sup>444</sup> Ibid.

of his family's political sentiments. His father, Raúl Damonte Taborda, was the head of the political publication *Tribuna Popular*, and his mother, Georgina, founded the paper *Crítica*, that were both known for their anti-Perón publications, forcing the family to live in exile until Perón himself went into exile in 1955.<sup>445</sup> With his visceral anti-Peronist upbringing, it is no surprise that *Eva Perón* is not a reverent piece, but “attempts to discredit the myth, making a mockery of the masks of that which is sacred that have covered the figure of Evita and making her whole life and her story a farce.”<sup>446</sup> This play takes place while Evita is on her deathbed, raging against her mother, brother, nurse, and husband, culminating in the revelation of several simulacra: Evita does not in fact have a fatal cancer, the infamous cadaver is not hers, but that of the nurse she murdered to take her place, and she is not a woman. The most notable aspect of the piece is that “the character of Evita is represented by a strident *travesti* who fights against an oppressive sphere that requires her to die to become an idol, to become a patriotic corpse and be waved as a flag by a demagogue, personalist, and necrophiliac government.”<sup>447</sup> Many have questioned this choice to have Evita played by a man. Policano Rossi enumerates these questions: “Why represent Eva with a male actor? Are there no women who could fill that role? Was Evita a fag, a woman with a phallus, or can we simply not tolerate blasphemy and must jump into the simulation?”<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> Luis Alfredo Intersimone, *La medusa, el mono y la marioneta* (Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 211.

<sup>446</sup> Melo, “El colectivo LGTBIQ y la figura de Eva Perón.”

“intenta desacralizar el mito, burlándose atrocemente, de las máscaras de lo sagrado que han cubierto la figura de Evita y haciendo de toda su vida y de su historia una farsa”

<sup>447</sup> Matías Policano Rossi, “Evita vive en el pop. Sobre *Eva Perón* de Copi” (MA thesis, Universidad Nacional de las Artes, 2016), 10.

“el personaje de Evita es representado por un estridente travesti que lucha contra un opresivo ámbito de control que le exige morir para convertirse en ídola, convertirse en cadáver patriótico y ser agitada como bandera por un gobierno demagogo, personalista y necrofilico”

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*, 10

Beatriz Sarlo responds, arguing, in essence, that the purpose of this drag interpretation of Evita is a camp homage to the public costume that she wore in fashioning herself as a mythic icon.<sup>449</sup> While her public persona is constructed around affective relationships and care for those in need, her depiction in *Eva Perón* diverges dramatically from this. One of the principal contributions of the *Fundación Eva Perón* was job training for women, in particular through the *Escuela de Enfermeras* (Nursing School). When interacting with this nurse, one who ostensibly could have been trained due to Evita’s labor, Evita does not demonstrate respect, let alone care. After asking the nurse to paint her nails red, she screams, “I told you to paint my nails black and you painted them red like a whore! Go! Go back to your room!”<sup>450</sup> After these bouts of anger, she



Figure 4.9 Production of *Eva Perón* by Copi in Buenos Aires in 2017, protagonized by Benjamín Vicuña

does feign affection toward the end of the play, telling the nurse “Tutéeme,”<sup>451</sup> use the informal *tú* when addressing me, just before encouraging her to go to a ball and offering for her “to

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“¿Por qué representar a Eva con un actor masculino? ¿No hay mujeres que puedan llenar a ese rol? ¿Evita era un maricón, una mujer con fallo, o simplemente no podemos tolerar la blasfemia y debemos saltar obligatoriamente a la simulación?”

<sup>449</sup> Sarlo, *La pasión y la excepción*, 21.

<sup>450</sup> Copi, *Eva Perón*, trans. Jorge Monteleone (Córdoba: Adriana Hidalgo Editora, 20004), 1.

“[¡L]e dije que me pintara las uñas de negro y usted me las pintó de rojo como una puta! ¡Váyase! ¡Retírese a su cuarto!

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

put on one of my dresses for the ball tonight... Whichever you want!”<sup>452</sup> While this seems to be a benevolent act, it is in fact a setup. Once she is wearing one of Evita’s iconic dresses, Evita and her brother stab the nameless nurse and Evita assumes the nurse’s identity, commanding her brother to “Go bring me the nurse’s cloak. I don’t want to run the risk of being recognized. And her hat. Bring her hat too.”<sup>453</sup> As soon as Evita escapes, disguised as the nurse, and the nurse is in Evita’s death bed, the stage directions specify, “Enter: journalists, ministers, monks, the curious, photographers, ambassadors, the little singers of the Patagonian cross, the cured, the daughters of the Peronist revolution, embalmers, cosmetologists, ecclesiastics, scholars, syndicalists, nurses carrying candles and crowns of artificial flowers,” all to witness the recently deceased First Lady.<sup>454</sup> Perón pronounces the death of Evita, ending with the exclamation, “Eva Perón, gentlemen, is more alive than ever!”<sup>455</sup> – a dramatic irony for the audience who knows she has sacrificed the nurse to take her place. Fundamentally, Evita’s actions reflect a self-interested nature, one that contradicts the caring, maternal image she cultivated through her labors. As I have explored these particular characteristics in Chapter 3 as being exemplary of a feminine, affective nature, positioning Evita as a man impersonating a woman undermines the intent behind her actions, depicting them as inherently selfish.

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<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 70.

“ponerte uno de mis vestidos para el baile de esta noche... ¡El que quieras!”

<sup>453</sup> Ibid. 83.

“Andá a traerme la capa de la enfermera. No quiero correr el riesgo de ser reconocida. Y su sombrero. Traé también su sombrero”

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., 85.

“Entran: periodistas, ministros, monjas, curiosos, fotógrafos, embajadoras, los pequeños cantores de la cruz patagónica, los sanados, las hijas de la revolución peronista, embalsamadores, cosmetólogas, eclesiásticos, escolares, sindicalistas, enfermeras llevando cirios y coronas de flores artificiales”

<sup>455</sup> Ibid. 87.

“¡Eva Perón, señores, está más viva que nunca!”

*Eva Perón* was first staged in Paris at the Théâtre de l'Épée-de-Bois on March 2, 1970, as it was originally written and published by Copi in his non-native French.<sup>456</sup> On opening night, it's



Figure 4.10 Photograph of the first production of *Eva Perón* in March 1970

performance was interrupted when “a group of disturbed extremists assaulted the theater,” vandalizing the theater with the phrase “*Vive le justicialisme*” – *Viva el justicialismo*, or “Long live Justicialism” (Peronism).<sup>457</sup> They “hurled stink bombs, tore down the set, attacked the cast and threatened to burn down the Théâtre de l'Épée-de-Bois before the

police intervened.”<sup>458</sup> This occurred just two months before the assassination of former dictator Pedro Eugenio Aramburu, leader of Argentina during the disappearance of Evita's body. In a bid to secure the return of Evita's body to Argentina, he was sequestered and then murdered by the *Montoneros*, a militant, left-wing Peronist group.<sup>459</sup> One of the refrains the *Montoneros* principally relied on was “*Si Evita viviera, sería montonera*” – “If Evita were still alive, she'd be a *Montonero*.”

The association of Evita with the radical politics of the *Montoneros* in the 1970s and 1980s was echoed by imagery and rallying cries of queer rights movements, including “*Si Evita viviera, sería montonera*.” This same slogan has been modified and reproduced by queer rights movements, altering *montonera* to *tortillera*, a derogatory term turned slang that can be understood

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<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>457</sup> Ezequiel Lozano, “Memorias del estreno argentino de *Eva Perón* de Copi: entrevista a María Gabriela González y Sergio Sansosti,” *telefondo*, no. 22 (2015): 98.

<sup>458</sup> Juliet Jacques, “Why Eva Perón remains a classic of queer theatre seventy years after her death,” *The New Statesman*, April 9, 2012, <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/theatre/2012/04/eva-peron-seventy-years-death>.

<sup>459</sup> Julieta Bartoletti, *Montoneros: de la movilización a la organización* (Rosario: Laborde Editor, 1973).



Figure 4.11 Graffiti reading “*Si Evita viviera sería tortillera*” (“If Evita were still alive, she’d be a dyke”), photo taken May 6, 2008 in Buenos Aires

<http://stencilenbuenosaires.blogspot.com/2008/05/si- evita-viviera-sera-tortillera.html>

in English as “dyke.” This phrase and the sentiment behind it have been reproduced in graffiti (Figure 4.11) and protest materials (Figure 4.12) throughout the country. A poster (Figure 4.12) uploaded to the Facebook page of *El Santa Evita*, a restaurant in Buenos Aires, depicts Evita and Fernández de Kirchner kissing.

It bears the phrases “Here we are again” and “The revolution will happen with *todes* or it won’t happen,” with gay and trans/*travesti* pride flags at

the bottom. *Todes* being an inclusive way of saying “everyone,” deriving from the gender-neutral pronoun *elle*. As it was posted on June 28, 2021, a date during Pride Month that commemorates the beginning of the Stonewall Riots, it bears the caption “Peronism is rights and social justice. Ergo, today is a Peronist day. #Pride,”<sup>460</sup> equating Peronism, both of the era of Evita and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, with pro-LGBTQ politics. This is not an isolated occurrence – “in each pride march in Argentina there appear one or more versions of Evita parading through the streets or waving from trucks or floats... And from bright and central discotheques to more or less hidden LGBT clubs and bars, there is always some *travesti*, some drag queen, some queer or lesbian characterized as Eva.”<sup>461</sup> Even though, during her lifetime, Evita never expressed any deviation from normative

<sup>460</sup> El Santa Evita, 2021, “Peronismo es derechos y justicia social. Ergo, hoy es un día peronista. #Orgullo,” Facebook, June 28, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/elsantaevita/posts/peronismo-es-derechos-y-justicia-social-ergo-hoy-es-un-día-peronista-orgullo/955933615241932/>.

“Peronismo es derechos y justicia social. Ergo, hoy es un día peronista. #Orgullo”

<sup>461</sup> Melo, “El colectivo LGTBIQ y la figura de Eva Perón.”

“A su vez, en cada marcha del orgullo en Argentina aparecen una o más versiones de Evita desfilando por las calles o saludando desde camiones o carrozas. Y desde luminosos y céntricas discotecas hasta más o menos recónditos



Figure 4.12 Protest sign shared on the Facebook page of El Santa Evita restaurant

heterosexuality nor did she “state any opinion on sexual diversities alternative to heteronormativity either in remarks or writings,”<sup>462</sup> her admirers continue to assert that she would have adopted this dissident and transgressive identity. Foster argues that “[t]he rags-to-riches tale of someone like Evita is homologous with a program of personal construction – the body and sexual identity as works in progress – that is central to so much of what is attributed to gay sensibility. And the parvenu as display text

is coterminous with drag (the latter

understood not just as ostentatious cross-dressing but as any form of dress) and related phenomena, representing structures of dissident articulation: bodily adornments, body language, affective speech, narrative discourse, and spatial placement.”<sup>463</sup>

Many of the same characteristics that allowed Evita to forge charismatic, maternal bonds and be interpreted as a saintly figure also permit the LGBTQ community to adopt her image as one of subversive politics. As Melo notes, “[Evita] is definitively crowned queen and mother of the LGBTQI collective.”<sup>464</sup> Just as, framed within the ideal of Republican Motherhood, she stood

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clubes y bares LGTB siempre se alberga alguna travesti, alguna drag queen, alguna marica o alguna lesbiana caracterizada como Eva”

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

“no se pronunció sobre las diversidades sexuales alternativas a la heteronormatividad ni en dichos ni en escritos”

<sup>463</sup> Foster, “Eva Perón, Juan José Sebreli, and Gender,” 220-221.

<sup>464</sup> Melo, “El colectivo LGTBIQ y la figura de Eva Perón.”

in for the possibility of women's civic participation in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, she can also be adopted as a figure of LGBTQ rights in Argentina.

## VII. Conclusion

If, as I have claimed previously, Republican Motherhood and sacrificial Catholic motherhood underlie women's civic participation in Argentina, and that la Difunta Correa and Evita can be interpreted as models of these maternities, I contend that their reinterpretations through the lens of LGBTQ identity serve as a way of reconfiguring the parameters of citizenship and reimagining the nation. In Chapters 2 and 3, I examined hagiographic representations of la Difunta Correa and Evita as maternal figures, coming to the conclusion that they can be interpreted as valuable models of sacrificial and Republican Motherhood. These traits were not just desired of women at the founding of the Argentine Federation, but, in fact, required for them to perform civic engagement. By taking these figures, who embody values of maternity and women's participation in the public sphere, and transforming their legends to fit new historical moments, they can "embody new meanings not always clear to the official culture."<sup>465</sup> Essentially, in framing la Difunta and Evita as queer or *travesti* figures, they can be used to interrogate the limits placed on citizenship, not just of women, but of other minoritized identities.

Butler, Lochrie, and Gibson's theorizations of queerness and, in particular, queer maternity, position queerness as working against normative structures and hierarchies, including those of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality, all important categories of citizenship.

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"Es definitivamente coronada como reina y madre del colectivo LGTBIQ"

<sup>465</sup> Massolo, "Gracias Difunta Correa!," 176

Applying these conceptualization of queerness to Republican Motherhood, in which mothers are supposed to pass on civic values to their children, permits thinking queerness within the context of citizenship and participation. It is for this reason that Evita and la Difunta are returned to, framed, and re-signified within the categories of queerness and *travestismo*.

In *Las malas*, Sosa Villada relies on the legend of la Difunta Correa to reframe the fate of her son, the child who stood in for the future of the Nation in its original narrative. She claims he came to be raised by the *travestis* of the *casa rosada*, and principally by Tía Encarna, who mimics aspects of the indigenous Huarpe antecedent to la Difunta's myth. The confluence of this foundational legend of Republican Motherhood, indigeneity, and *travestismo*, with the *travestis* themselves situated as embodying the nation, questions the pertinence of *travestis* to the Argentine Nation. Within the context of contemporary Argentina, can *travestis* engage in Argentine citizenship? Drawing the parallel to la Difunta highlights the pertinence of this question of citizenship as existing within a centuries-long legacy of struggles for citizenship by women and people of other minoritized identities.

The same questioning occurs when Evita Perón is framed as a *tortillera* or a drag queen. While she exhibited characteristics that conveyed a maternal, affective nature, her political presence and unconventional background for a woman in her position generated a negative perception of her as masculine. Using this as a point of departure, literary and cultural productions like "Esa Mujer," *Santa Evita*, and *Eva Perón* highlight this *macho* character, unbecoming of a woman, to criticize Evita and her political projects. However, members of the Argentine LGBTQ rights movements have reinterpreted this masculinity as a way of framing Evita as queer, *travesti*, or in drag, a member of a further marginalized identity who resists normativity and represents a push for citizenship for these communities.

In the cases of both la Difunta Correa and Evita, using queerness and *travestismo*, in particular, allows us to examine their maternal embodiments in a modern context. Reframing their hagiographies through the experiences of LGBTQ people in contemporary Argentina, while maintaining the legacy of Republican Motherhood in their stories, lets la Difunta and Evita stand in as exemplars of women's and queer peoples' ability to perform civic engagement and citizenship.

## Conclusion

### I. Overarching Themes and Central Arguments

The scope of this manuscript has been to critically analyze literary texts and cultural productions depicting sacrificial and Republican Motherhood in Argentina. Among the analytic objectives that guided the direction of this dissertation are the following assumptions and hypotheses: 1. Women's citizenship and participation in the public sphere was dictated by maternity, as defined through Republican Motherhood; 2. Through foundational narratives' depictions of mothers, this exemplar was disseminated and reproduced as a model to be followed, or in a similar vein, narratives of "bad" mothers were circulated as cautionary tales, as in the case of *La Cautiva*; 3. As motherhood determined citizenship, rewriting these maternal archetypes can serve as a means of exploring the gendered, racialized, and class-based constraints this citizenship entailed; 4. Depictions of la Difunta Correa and Eva Perón can be considered examples of these reinterpretations due to their reliance on maternal tropes and the subjects' relevance to women's civic engagement, and therefore prove useful as vehicles for examining the limiting of women's political status; 5. The situating of la Difunta's and Evita's narratives beyond their original historical moments allows the author to recontextualize the original constraints on women's citizenship and thereby highlight the continued exclusionary practices of defining a citizenry via identitarian categories, including gender and sexuality.

In particular, I chose the topic of motherhood because of its relevance to the establishment of the independent Argentine Federation, as articulated by Alberdi's crucial mandate – a State-linked role of maternity, never textually acknowledged – “*gobernar es poblar.*” As the Nation was

founded, mothers were integral in the production of the citizen body, but even more so in the inculcation of their children in the Nation's values. The construction of the Nation would prove impossible without the Republican Mothers who gave birth to its citizens and reproduced its ethos. The concept of Republican Motherhood required women to orient themselves toward the future of the Nation and its future generations, necessitating that they become educated in civic morality so they, in turn, could pass on this knowledge to their sons, making it the first official capacity within the Argentine imagined community for women to move beyond the immediate demands of the domestic sphere. The role of Republican Motherhood seemed to be a means of including women in the public, political sphere; however, as the Nation sought to define the ideal citizenry as white, elite, European-descendant, and Catholic, the women under the umbrella of Republican Motherhood were limited, making it a means of exclusion while feigning inclusion.

In particular, the example of Esteban Echeverría's *La Cautiva* (1837) is illustrative of the Nation's exclusionary nature via maternity. In this foundational poem, a *criolla* wife and mother is exposed to the untamed expanses of the internal Patagonian frontier and its indigenous inhabitants. After this contact, her husband, as an interlocutor for the Nation, expresses that she is unfit to be his wife and to return to civilization, irrevocably marked by the contagion. As the person charged with passing on the State's civic morality, her loss of purity makes her inherently unfit to educate without also transmitting the cultural values of the barbarism she was exposed to. Even though the character María is only a fictional representation of the Republican Mother lost to the barbarians, she must die at the end of the narrative to reflect the integral nature of pious, pure motherhood to the Nation's future generations. She becomes a cautionary tale for Argentine women, demonstrating that they will be cast away before allowing barbarism to infiltrate its pure citizenry.

As a role that inherently reproduced itself through the process of education, in which women taught their daughters to replicate the cycle, Republican Motherhood continued these exclusions indefinitely. In this way, analyzing Republican Motherhood is not just pertinent to the early Argentine Republic, but also the modern State, as it represents a static abstraction of purity and moral value. Because this vision of motherhood is an atemporal, archetypal abstraction, it is able to be reconstructed, inserted, and recontextualized in different historical moments. I argue that, since the Republican Mother is the embodiment of Argentina's civic virtue, new framings of this archetype within the modern Nation can reflect its shifting values that accompany sociological changes. In essence, contemporary movements that reject the early Nation's identitarian limitations of citizenship can appropriate the archetype of the Republican Mother to reflect the importance of educating future citizens in a decolonial way that breaks with this tradition of exclusion. The continuation of the trope of the Republican Mother with deviations from its normative conceptualizations reflects changing values within the Nation, particularly related to decoloniality and feminism. Analyzing cultural productions depicting non-normative approaches to Republican Motherhood, including novels, poetry, popular devotions, artwork, and plays, allows my approach to demonstrate substantial variations and rewritings not only across time periods and ideologies, but also across genres.

In their own way, each rewriting of the legend of la Difunta Correa and the life of Evita Perón analyzed in this dissertation achieves this aim of using Republican Motherhood to include those who were the unrecognized, uncelebrated Argentine citizens from the Nation's foundation. In the case of la Difunta, the folk saint celebrated for miraculous postmortem lactation during the time of the Argentine Civil Wars, she represents the counterpoint to *La Cautiva's* María, the example of the Republican Mother successfully sacrificing herself for the future of her son and the

Nation. Her original context of the Civil Wars situates her firmly within the original necessity for Republican Motherhood, as well as Sarmiento's positing of civilization versus barbarism, thereby making her a perfect exemplar of this model's necessity in the Republic of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. She embodies the original model of Republican Motherhood from the *interior*, a motherhood that seems to comply with all the requisites for Argentine citizenship but, in fact, represents rural culture and *mestizaje*. Eva Perón, on the other hand, is not a straightforward case of Republican Motherhood, nor a simple example of maternity at all. She never had biological children and her detractors critiqued her performance of traditionally masculine positions, as she pioneered new roles for women in the public sphere. However, she invokes a maternalist rhetoric evolved from the centrality of maternity within charities like the *Sociedad de Beneficencia* and early women's rights activists, originally relied upon as a means of justifying the (only) suitable place of women in the public sphere. While la Difunta seems to be a classic example of both sacrificial and Republican Motherhood, Evita embodies the assumption of maternal roles outside of the nuclear family, thereby an undermining of the Nation's reproduction of a citizen body, as well as the expansion of women's roles in the public sphere and ability to engage in the norms of citizenship afforded to men. Examined in tandem, these two examples of maternity complement each other, illustrating conventional and nontraditional means of approaching maternity. In my analyses of these two examples, I hypothesize that when their narratives are temporally shifted and rewritten in evolving historical and sociological contexts, they can be understood as deconstructive practices critiquing the original model of Republican Motherhood and the exclusionary practices the archetype represents.

In Chapter 1 about la Difunta Correa, I look at versions of her legend from three distinct periods of Argentine history: the first and second Perón administrations (1946-1955), the Military

Junta (1976-1983), and the feminist movements of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Although published after Perón's exile in 1955, Nemer Barud's *Deolinda Correa* (1967) and León Benarós's *Romancero argentino* (1959) reflect the rise of the Folklore Movement and its celebration of *localismo* and rural, indigenous culture. I conclude that both authors highlight the potential origins of la Difunta's legend within indigenous spirituality, a stark departure from the Catholic model of sacrificial motherhood that is the most apparent parallel for the Argentine public to draw. However, Barud highlights the subversive nature of this indigeneity, pitting her against the play's character only referred to as "priest," while Benarós depicts la Difunta as a rebellious model of Catholic-indigenous syncretism, a reflection of the true *mestizo* heritage of most Argentines. In both cases, the authors enforce the idea that la Difunta does not represent the ideal *criollo* citizenry her legend seems to support on its surface. In the context of the Military Junta, I examine two multimedia pieces by Antonio Berni titled *La Difunta Correa I* and *La Difunta Correa II* (1975-1976). Unlike the typical serene depictions of la Difunta, Berni's works show her body as mangled and disfigured, marking her death as violent and gruesome, a far cry from the necessary sacrifice it was upheld to be in the original legend. Within the context of the Military Junta, her death is understood as a result of State violence, thereby connecting the ideology of Republican Motherhood to the brutality of the dictatorship. I end with feminist interpretations of la Difunta's legend through Joaquín Molina's *Difunta Correa, vertiente de santidad* and *Difunta Correa, eterna fuente de vida* (2004), and Marcela Correa's *La Difunta Correa* (2014). Molina's two pieces from his series *Devociones populares* represent la Difunta as a victim of femicide in one and as a disembodied breast in the other. Correa's representation of la Difunta is similar to that of *Difunta Correa, eterna fuente de vida* – as a series of disembodied breasts constructed from grain sacks. Each of these depictions depersonalize la Difunta and, in doing so, reflect the precarious situation

created for women by the construct of Republican Motherhood, an endangering that is exemplified by the mortal outcomes of feminicide and illegal and unsafe abortion. Each of these calculated reimaginings of la Difunta's legend returns to the signifier of the Republican Mother, stripping it of the original temporal and sociological context as a means of projecting contemporaneous narratives of precarious, restrictive practices of defining citizenship.

Depictions of Evita Perón represent a very different angle on maternity in Argentina, as she does not straightforwardly fit within a conventional definition of motherhood. However, in Chapter 2, I examine her political and extra-political actions as creating maternal relationships with her supporters, responding to their historical exclusion from the national narratives. Prior to Evita's rise to prominence, both women advocating for political inclusion and women's charitable organizations like the *Sociedad de Beneficencia* relied on maternalist rhetoric to justify women's place in the public sphere. However, this maternalist discourse reified a classist, racialized, and patriarchal hierarchy in which the elite women could arrogantly aid the residual barbarian cultures. In my analysis of Evita's works through the *Partido Peronista Femenino* and the *Fundación Eva Perón*, I argue that Evita also invoked a maternalist rhetoric, instead lending an affective angle so powerful that allowed her to construct a new structure of national sentimentality with emotive, charismatic bonds with those she aided and of those who acknowledged her role as a socio-political agitator. Her tireless avidity to transform the country's social hierarchies largely exceeded the *literal* meaning of motherhood, which ultimately made her legible as a maternal, martyred saint after her untimely death.

To illustrate this popular understanding of Evita's spiritual motherhood, even decades after her death, I examine five paintings by Daniel Santoro: *Heladera Siam Di Tella, argentina, noble y buena* (2004); *La isla de los muertos III* (2004); *Untitled Piece in La isla de los muertos series*

(2004); *El nacimiento político de Eva Perón* (2001); *Altarcito* (2002). *Heladera Siam Di Tella* links Evita's aid through the *Fundación* with her death and subsequent worship, thereby correlating her dignity-oriented care and the mourning of her by *descamisados*. *La isla de los muertos III* and the Untitled Piece both depict Evita's presence on a mythical "Island of the Dead" reminiscent of Mediterranean burial practices, while also including visual clues relating the island to the Peronist CGT (*Confederación General del Trabajo*), once again linking her politics and her postmortem veneration. Furthermore, the Untitled Piece represents Evita as a lactating sphynx, a Greco-Egyptian symbol of eternal life with the implied capability of maternally nurturing her children, even after her death. This piece and *Heladera Siam Di Tella* both include Peronist children, a further allusion to her maternal work with the children of Argentina and the *Fundación Eva Perón's* aid. *El nacimiento político de Eva Perón* provides further references to her work through the *Fundación*, this time through the *Escuela de Enfermeras*. Instead of referring to Evita's physical birth, this painting emphasizes her *political* birth, locating it at the moment of her death, a moment in which she is inanimate and incapable of performing any real political action. I conclude that this power, then, derives from the legacy she created through her affective work during her lifetime. My interpretation of *Altarcito* reinforces this conclusion by creating a religious altar celebrating Evita, in the vein of those constructed for la Difunta Correa. The imagery from each of these pieces combines the maternalist discourse of Republican Motherhood, continued by the elite women of the *Sociedad de Beneficencia* and early women's rights organizations, the abnegate qualities of sacrificial Catholic maternity, and the affective legacy of Evita's devotions that she cultivated through the *Fundación* and the PPF.

The final chapter of this dissertation returned to both la Difunta Correa and Evita Perón, in order to reexamine their maternity, this time through the lens of queerness. Although neither are

explicitly queer figures, I argue that they can and have been read through Butler's, Lochrie's and Gibson's conceptualizations of queerness as undermining hegemonic structures of power and sentimentality. Specifically, I looked at their representations as exemplars of Gibson's idea of queer motherhood as not being limited to the literal understanding of a queer person mothering, but also as working against normative categories of citizenship, including race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. These categories are pertinent to the exclusionary definitions of citizenship for women in Argentina, as similar processes occurred for queer and *travesti* people. Camila Sosa Villada's semiautobiographical novel *Las malas* (2019) reframes the legend of la Difunta in the context of a collective of *travesti* sex workers in the 1990s, one of whom informally adopts a child deemed la Difunta's long-lost son. As the original legend, and the logic of Republican Motherhood, position this child as the future of the Nation, the re-signifying of la Difunta as a *travesti* and a mother of indigenous heritage, explicitly conveys that she will pass down the exact values Republican Motherhood was supposed to exclude. In centering *travestis*, an identity category that has traditionally been excluded from the idealized citizen body, and in comparing them to la Difunta Correa, Sosa Villada highlights the possibility of a Nation oriented toward the needs of its previously outcast citizens. I then examine a panorama of works that make reference to Evita's queerness. Tomás Eloy Martínez's *Santa Evita* (1995), "Rodolfo Walsh's "Esa mujer" (1967), and Copi's *Eva Perón* (1969) each allude to Evita's queerness as a criticism of her daring to perform traditionally masculine roles in society. All three of these literary works emphasize the common critiques of Evita for being masculine, a gender-embodiment that works against the femininity mothers were supposed to uphold. In these pieces, she performs a macho identity, one that is most evident in *Eva Perón*, a play in which Evita is depicted by a man in drag. Since its original performance in 1970, versions of Evita in drag have been reproduced countless times, but

I focus on four individual performances. I begin with three iterations of Evita on the *RuPaul's Drag Race* franchise by Sherry Pie on *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2020), Roxxy Andrews on *RuPaul's Drag Race All Stars* (2016), Sofía Camará on *The Switch: El arte del transformismo* (2015), the first two in English and last in Spanish. Although these examples rely principally on the international lens of *Evita* the film-musical protagonized by Madonna, they demonstrate both Evita's relevance within broader queer culture and the adaptability of her gender performance. The final instance is that of Argentine drag queen Lady Alutrix being invited to perform the *Himno Nacional Argentino* (2022) at the *Casa de Tucumán*, a government-sanctioned event. Moreover, she appears as Evita with a saintly crown, referencing Evita's popular devotion. I conclude with the appearance of Evita at LGBTQ+ pride events and slogans like *Si Evita viviera, sería Montonera*, which denote that Evita would have embodied dissident and transgressive sexual identities, like the socio-political policies she adopted during her lifetime. By reframing la Difunta Correa and Evita as queer or *travesti* figures, the exclusionary concept of citizenship propagated by foundational narratives and Republican Motherhood is questioned.

I believe that this dissertation has contributed to broader discussions about citizenship, women's rights, motherhood, and queerness in the context of Argentina. More specifically, it has highlighted the important and lasting legacy of Republican Motherhood, along with its malleability, allowing it to be re-signified in shifting temporal and cultural contexts. It has asserted that motherhood is an important category of analysis, one that can be interpreted beyond its narrow definition. Most importantly, it has shown that the archetypes of the Republican Mother and the abnegate mother can be used to understand the exclusionary nature of defining an ideal citizenry through categories of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion. I argue that by reading these modern and contemporary cultural productions depicting la Difunta and

Evita through the framework of motherhood and queer theory, the artists are reconfiguring the parameters of citizenship and reimagining the nation.

## II. Future Investigations

As I arrive at the conclusion of this project, numerous lines of investigation remain open for future research. Specifically, there are four omissions in this dissertation that provide the starting point for a compelling new project. First, the original scope of this dissertation sought to include a chapter analyzing feminist discourse about women, girls, *travestis*, and non-binary people who die as victims of femicide, *travesticidio*, and complications from illegal and unsafe abortions. My initial aim was to examine counter-maternal discourse, which I defined as rhetoric used to work against traditional norms of womanhood and maternity, thereby asserting their identity beyond these confines. Early steps in the research process revealed that much of counter-maternal discourse relied on similar hagiographic iconography, which I believed could be an interesting approach for closing the project. However, complications from the COVID-19 pandemic and the legalization of abortion at the end of 2020 made difficult the conducting of interviews at protests demanding legalization of abortion. I plan to reexamine these themes for future projects, incorporating elements of the second omission from this dissertation.

Secondly, the final chapter of this dissertation focuses on “queerings” of heterosexual women, rather than incorporating representations of those who identify as queer themselves. For the sake of narrowing the case studies to mothers who were broadly celebrated over the decades throughout Argentina via hagiographies, I was unable to locate a subject within this category of queerness. However, outside of these particular constraints, I am in contact a group of *travesti*

activists focused particularly on questions of *travesti* maternity in Argentina today. Its three principal members are Susy Shock, a trans-*sudaca* artist, activist, writer, and singer; Marlene Wayar, a social psychologist, author, and *travesti* activist; and Paulina Garnier, a *travesti* activist and musician. In addition to their individual and collective activism, together they put on children's spectacles under the name "La Banda de les Mostres" (The Monster Gang, using the gender-neutral ending "e") as a means of exposing children to gender-inclusivity. Shock has also rallied behind the slogan "Qué otros sean lo normal" (this has been translated elsewhere as "Other than Normal," but the original Spanish is a command, mandating the definition of "normal" as something "other"). She accompanies this phrase with an image, designed by her daughter, of three breasts, thereby using a mutation of and departure from a traditionally feminine symbol of maternal nourishment to subvert the norms of both gender and motherhood. I believe that this collective of *travestis* directly addresses the issue of queer and non-normative, although without the hagiographic aspect crucial to this investigation.

Thirdly, there are many individual women who were excluded for the sake of narrowing my corpus and, therefore, devoting more analysis to each case study. There are multiple examples who could be included in future versions of this project, including María Remedios del Valle (c. 1768-1847, the Afro-descendent Revolutionary captain discussed briefly in the Introduction as the "Mother of the Fatherland"); Juana Azurduy de Padilla (1781-1862, a *mestiza* Revolutionary hero and mother); Machaca Güemes (1787-1866, the sister of Revolutionary hero Martín Miguel de Güemes and known as *madrecita de los desprotegidos* – "mother of the unprotected"); Carolina Muzzilli (1889-1917, a socialist activist who fought against elite women's exploitation of lower-class women and child workers); Tita Merello (1904-2002, actress, dancer, and tango singer from the Golden Age of Argentine Cinema); María Elena Walsh (1930-2011, lesbian poet and

celebrated children's author); Aimé Paine (1943-1987, a Mapuche-Tehuelche-Ranquel activist and musician who struggled against the marginalization of indigenous cultures in Argentina); and Lohana Berkins (1965-2016, *travesti*, feminist activist from the northern province of Salta who organized against the carceral state). While the inclusion of all these examples would result in a behemoth undertaking, several could be expanded upon in future manuscripts as different examples of Argentine maternity.

Finally, the most glaring silence is regarding the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, the mothers and grandmothers who publicly accused the Military Junta of disappearing their children and grandchildren, petitioning for their safe return. While there is mention of the Madres and Abuelas in these chapters, there is no section dedicated to them, perhaps the most famous maternal figures in Argentine history, both domestically and abroad. When I began this study, I excluded the Madres and Abuelas as subjects of inquiry, not because they lacked significance, but because they are already well-studied as important maternal figures in Argentina and because they rarely appear in fictionalized depictions other than visual artwork. However, at the end of 2022, Hebe de Bonafini, one of the founders of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, emerged as a notable exception. After her death on November 20, 2022, representations of Bonafini as a communal, hagiographic mother proliferated, with the popular newspaper *Página/12* going so far as to publish an article titled “Hebe de Bonafini fue también madre de la comunidad lgtb” (“Hebe de Bonafini was also mother of the LGBT community”).<sup>466</sup> Considering Bonafini as a further case study can be as compelling as the examples studied in this dissertation. Furthermore, the Madres and Abuelas could be read through the same lens of queerness as in Chapter 3. As a collective of mothers and grandmothers working together to reclaim their disappeared family members and, in doing so,

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<sup>466</sup> Lía Ghara, “Hebe de Bonafini fue también madre de la comunidad lgtb,” *SOY, Página/12*, November 25, 2022, <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/500613-hebe-de-bonafini-fue-tambien-madre-de-la-comunidad-lgtb>.

threaten the Argentine government that defined them as subversives, it could be argued that they undermine both monomaternism and the Nation reified by Republican Motherhood. A future version of this project could expand to include some or all of these themes that were omitted from the final dissertation while at the same time rescue historic and popular examples of queerness throughout Argentine history. Maternity, long seen as a restriction on women's freedom thanks to its perceived mandatory and taxing nature, can be a powerful frame for understanding questions of women's and marginalized people's citizenship and participation.

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