Abstract

This paper examines the gender narratives of conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs in Argentina and their implications for women's livelihoods and agency. Donors and international institutions promote CCTs to women as the latest development trend in tackling extreme poverty. This paper contributes to feminist debates on the role CCTs ascribe to women, by offering a context-specific analysis of two CCT initiatives that illustrate distinct narratives about womanhood and social inclusion.

Findings indicate that the altruistic maternalism fostered by *Plan Jefas y Jefes* re-enacts Peronist rhetorics of "dignified" workers while reproducing unequal gender norms by obscuring women's triple burden and their unpaid reproductive work. Whereas, *Plan Familias* with its moral narratives of "good mothering" recognizes women's care responsibilities, while essentializing sexual differences and discouraging women's links with labor and community activism.

The paper concludes by arguing that contextual analysis of maternalism serves as a way to disrupt trans-historical and essentialized visions of women present in development policies.

Biography

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Contesting Gender Narratives in Development Policies:
Women and Conditional Cash Transfers in Argentina

INTRODUCTION

> "*For all the nuance feminist theory can offer,*
> *the translation of feminist thinking into development narratives has tended to*
> *produce social constructions that are remarkably singular and static.*"
> (Cornwall 2007:163)

Conditional cash transfers (CCTs) have proliferated over Latin America as the prescribed recipe for dealing with the current regional levels of poverty and social exclusion, and are now spreading beyond the region (Barrientos 2004; González de la Rocha 2003; Serrano 2005a).[1] By means of focusing on poor women and their presumed maternal function within families, they tackle current poverty by providing cash to women, and long-term social exclusion by promoting children's human capital formation. Encouraged by international financial institutions, such programs emphasize the social risk management approach to social protection and offer a liberal attempt to re-embed the market and mitigate the social consequences of structural adjustment.

Because of the specific focus on women as pivotal actors in the fight against exclusion, many proponents of CCTs claim they better women's situation, improve their bargaining position in the family, or even empower them through the management of the cash stipend and their participation in social assistance initiatives (Barrientos and DeJong 2004; de la Brière and Rawlings 2006; Rawlings 2004).[2] Yet feminist scholars tend to disagree with this statement. Pioneering studies on the Mexican program *Oportunidades* (Molyneux 2006, 2007) and subsequent critical examinations of CCTs in Latin America serve to shed light on and question the primacy of maternalistic narratives present in these initiatives. Research carried out in various Latin American countries[3] shows the extensive use of maternal notions of women that position women as mothers, and motherhood as the exit route out of marginalization.

This paper draws inspiration from two interrelated groups of feminist literature, one being the above-mentioned discussion of CCT programs, and the other being contemporary feminist engagements with development policies that contest gender narratives—what scholars refer to as gender myths and feminist fables—in development.[4] Andrea Cornwall, Elizabeth Harrison, and Ann Whitehead argue that gender myth making often relies on essentialized images about women (2007:7) and fails to "deal with complexity, context specificity, and the dynamics of power relations" (2007:12). In the same volume, Cecile Jackson (2007) and Anne Marie Goetz (2007) put forward, as a "counter-recipe" to this, the importance of nuance and context-specific analysis of gender relations.

This paper seeks to destabilize maternal narratives about women by providing an alternative story: a socially contextualized and nationally specific picture of the elements that constitute maternal narratives in social policies. By understanding how these narratives become entangled with local political cultures, the role of feminist ideas within them, and the specific socio-historical welfare structures and modes of participation in which they are anchored, we can find a basis to contest them.

To achieve this, the analysis concentrates on the main CCT programs in Argentina developed in the period 2002–2007: the "Plan Jefas y Jefes de Hogar Desocupados: Derecho Familiar a la Inclusión Social"[5] (*Plan Jefas y Jefes*) and the "Familias por la Inclusión Social"[6] (*Plan Familias*). The case

of Argentina is of special interest because it provides two contrasting gender narratives and fables on how to achieve social inclusion: Plan Jefas y Jefes views women as workers, while Plan Familias sees women as mothers.

This paper first describes the aims and methodology of the study, as well as the Argentine socio-cultural context. It then moves on to discuss the first program, Plan Jefas y Jefes. It looks at the role of historical Peronist narratives and images of work, the position of feminist notions of equality, and their impact on gender practices and local networks of survival. The third and final section focuses on the reinforcement of maternal narratives with the transition to Plan Familias. It considers the role played by conservative narratives on families and the poor more generally, the moralization of gender relations in policy making, and their impact on women's livelihood and survival networks.

1. MATERNAL NARRATIVES IN CONTEXT

The linkages between women and maternity have been extensively problematized by feminism, and they have been transversal to the "equality vs. difference" debate (Scott 1988). Images of women as mothers have been employed to anchor a diversity of social demands (and in some cases, demands for women's rights), and they have also served to construct (not unproblematically) gender identities.[7]

With the emergence of CCTs, feminists have sought to evaluate their gender components and possible impacts on poor women. The most extensively researched example—that of *Oportunidades* in Mexico—sets the parameters of the discussion. Their first observation is that CCT strategies position the women as "conduits of policy," since they acquire a visible role in poverty alleviation but their needs are not the ultimate policy objective (Molyneux 2006).[8]

The main conclusions reached in Mexico, followed by research in the other Latin American countries, underline the fact that Oportunidades is premised on gendered constructions of social needs linked to maternalist conceptions of femininity and their naturalization (Molyneux 2007). This, Maxine Molyenux (2007) asserts, fosters a re-traditionalization of gendered roles and responsibilities.[9] Yet policy visions of poor households clash with the reality of women's everyday experience, producing two overall results: women are over-stretched and overburdened with responsibilities (Escobar Latapí and González de la Rocha 2004); and women's multiple tasks—income-earning, reproductive, and community activities—clash in ways that are detrimental to their future options (Escobar Latapí and González de la Rocha 2004, 2008; Molyneux 2006).[10]

In sum, this body of literature suggests there is sufficient evidence to maintain that maternal narratives in CCT programs foster traditional gender relations and identities. Even though the regional gender meanings present in these programs have been well researched, an important gap exists in terms of the little that has been said about the particularities they acquire in each case study. The generalized denunciation of maternalism can be unsatisfactory since the particular behavior of each country is dependent on gender and social relations and not on gender characteristics (Jackson 2007). The logical questions that follow are: What are the differences between maternal narratives in Mexico, Nicaragua, Brazil, or Argentina? What are the social relations in which these are embedded? How can we work toward disputing them?

We can then leave gender narratives as an open question and focus on analysis of particular contexts, culture, and institutions that will mold gender narratives and practices (Jackson 2007). There is a need to understand the links maternalism has with previous welfare structures, political

cultures, and interests groups, which offer them a social anchor in policy formulation at the national level.

Maternalism can be interpreted as a component in the broader political struggles over gender meanings in the public sphere. Currently, two contrasting gender tendencies seem to be at the heart of contemporary regional developments. One is the moralizing efforts mainly fostered through these family-centered policies. In opposition to this, Argentine feminist María del Carmen Feijóo (2008) identifies the current decline in welfare arrangements with a simultaneous increase in demands for gender equality and its legal recognition.[11]

This section has outlined the main conclusions of the feminist body of work on CCT programs. It has also identified a particular limitation and the need to carry out socially contextual comparative studies at the national level as a tool to disarticulate the problematic use of gender meanings in development policies.

A brief note on the methods used

The narrative methodology used involved selecting and organizing documents and fieldnotes and choosing sections of interview transcripts as a way of composing a story (Reissman 1993:706) that is able to grasp the contextual complexity of gender narratives and practices in CCT policies in Argentina. The empirical evidence is then a combination of data sources. Descriptive statistical information is used to provide a broad description of social practices related to these programs. Legislation of programs, newspaper articles, and semi-structured interviews with relevant state actors at national and municipal levels are used to inspect the narratives present in their design and implementation. Images and program publicity constitute the key to unlocking condensed meanings lying beneath the surface of the narratives used, encapsulated in "visual development icons" (Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead 2007:6). Selected fragments of interviews with program beneficiaries and community leaders, as well as fieldnotes on ethnographic observations of municipal offices and outreach meetings, are utilized to grasp local dynamics and agency beyond program expectations.

Interviews and participant observation formed part of my field research carried out between June–September 2006 and March–July 2007. Overall, I conducted forty-five interviews, which included: a) ten interviews with key state actors, mostly from the national Ministries of Social Development and of Work, Employment and Social Security; b) thirteen interviews with strategic local state administrators; c) five interviews with community leaders in the same municipality; and d) seventeen interviews with program beneficiaries. Key informants were selected at the different state levels, taking into account their degree of participation in the programs studied. Community actors and beneficiaries were selected through snowball sampling, with the intention of triangulating these three different perspectives/voices: state actors, civil society, and female program users. Our conversations focused on the creation and uses of the programs, families and neighborhood issues, and women's particular everyday needs and experiences.[12]

Interviews with local actors (bureaucrats, civil society, and beneficiaries) and participant observation of program activities were carried out in a specific municipality situated in the western part of the first of three suburban belts that constitute the *Conurbano Bonaerense*, the mega-suburbs that surround the metropolis of Buenos Aires. This municipality has a population of 322,477 in an area of 55.6 sq. km. It differs from other municipalities in the area because it is a mainly commercial, middle-class district and also because of its political orientation. After the removal of

the mayor, Juan Carlos Rousellot (1991–1998), the *Partido Justicialista* (Peronist Party) ceased to have a major influence in local politics. In this sense, it is more the exception than the rule in the broader context of the Conurbano. In spite of its comparatively large middle class and good social indicators, poverty appears concentrated in specific spatial locations. I did most of my research in one of these neighborhoods. With a population of 9,200 inhabitants, it possessed all the social characteristics associated with extreme poverty: high indexes of unsatisfied basic needs; extended households living in precarious housing; low educational levels; and poor access to health care. For instance, according to the 2001 National Census (INDEC 2001), around 26 percent of its population lived with unsatisfied basic needs, double the provincial average of 13 percent and in sharp contrast to the municipal standard of 6.3 percent.

The analysis of these different sources seeks to displace the mega gender stories present in CCT programs, as a way of telling a different and yet gendered story. With this objective, a particular attempt was made to identify the locations in which, for instance, interview material, images, and statistics provide distinct points of view. In light of this, the next section provides an introduction to the Argentine case study so that readers unfamiliar with this particular reality will have the basic tools to understand the subsequent discussions on the two CCT programs studied.

1.1 The Argentine Case Study

Argentina is a middle-income country and a regional pioneer in social policy terms (Mesa-Lago 1991). In Latin America, path-dependent and institutional analyses of welfare classify Argentina until the 1970s as part of the few welfare regimes (Gough 2004) in the region comparable to those found in Western Europe in the 1960s (Filgueira 2005). This regime, which was consolidated with the rise of Peronism in 1945, provided stratified social protection to the vast majority through a social security system linked to male formal employment and basic health and educational services. However, welfare institutions were eroded during the last military regime, from 1976–1983 (Merklen 2005), and were further weakened by the structural adjustment policies (SAPs) of the 1990s.

For Argentina, this historical period gives an important cultural imprint to identity construction (James 2005). During the 1946–1952 and 1952–1955 administrations, Juan Perón's main achievement was to foster a popular identity by means of incorporating the working class in three dimensions—political, economic, and social[13]—as well as by valuing what is considered "popular" culture "as a central and legitimate aspect of the 'national'" identity (Jelin 1996:29). Yet, while cultural ideals of dignity and middle-class aspirations of social mobility expanded through poor localities (Jelin 1996), we must note that not all of the poor were protected and included through formal (mostly male) employment.[14]

After the "lost decade" of the 1980s had unfolded, the first of Carlos Saúl Menem's presidencies (1989–1995) embraced orthodox economics and neo-liberal ideals that continued to be applied during his second term in office (1995–1999). Argentina became subject to SAPs and the measures[15] applied resulted in strong negative impacts on social development indicators (Kessler and Roggi 2005; Lo Vuolo et al. 2002).

With escalating rates of extreme poverty and inequality, both unemployment and informal work also rose to unprecedented levels, eroding the forms of inclusion associated with formal work. Impoverishment peaked in 2002 when 57.2 percent of the population was living in poverty and 27.5 percent in extreme scarcity. Economic stagnation deepened after 1998 and was followed by the

breakdown of the monetary regime and by a political and economic crisis at the beginning of the new millennium that generated broad social mobilizations and put an abrupt end to the presidency of Fernando de la Rúa (1999–2001).[16]

The new government of Néstor Kirchner (2003–2007) in the post-crisis scenario, with its own re-interpretation of the historical legacy and vision of Peronism, pledged its adherence to fighting scarcity and inequality and, in practical terms, secured political stability by adopting broad poverty alleviation measures to deal with the extreme social and economic consequences of the crisis.[17]

Within this broad framework, the main goal of the first CCT program analyzed, Plan Jefas y Jefes, was to mitigate the social emergency brought about by the neo-liberal policies of the 1990s. However, three years later, with a more stable socioeconomic situation and the need to move from emergency measures to long-term ones, its successor, Plan Familias, was launched in 2004 to detach CCTs from notions of work and orient them toward poor mothers.

These two phases in the design and development of CCTs in Argentina assumed and encouraged particular constructions of gendered identities, narratives, and potentials for affecting women's vulnerabilities and livelihoods. The next section deals specifically with Plan Jefas y Jefes, a program that defies the regional trend since it benefits unemployed household heads independently of their sex, instead of only focusing on women with children. This program underlines the cultural centrality of employment in Argentina's history, yet this initiative sits uncomfortably at the crossroads of income support and labor insertion strategies (Pautassi 2004).

After presenting the origins and main characteristics of the program and its beneficiaries, the following section discusses the forms that stories of maternalism take within this particular policy. Three particular concerns are examined: first, the way in which the "myth of inclusion"[18] calls upon historical Peronist notions of work that do not correspond to the current erosion of working conditions (Beccaria 2002; Merklen 2005); second, the influence of feminist positions within the program and the narratives of women that emerge from the particular way in which these two elements are combined in policy implementation; and finally, the possible livelihood implications and the fostering of particular gendered practices.

2. PLAN JEFAS Y JEFES: MATERNAL ALTRUISM IN THE GRASSROOTS

Plan Jefas y Jefes was launched as an emergency strategy in order to deal with the extreme social conditions resulting from the economic, political, and social crisis of 2001. At first it was developed by the administration of interim President Eduardo Duhalde (2002–2003). The program was then rapidly expanded and redefined by the successive elected government of Néstor Kirchner as the main strategy for fighting social ills, loss of income, and the adverse economic consequences of the occupational crisis.

Its overall objective is to provide social inclusion to unemployed heads of household, regardless of sex, who are responsible for caring for at least one of the following—a child below the age of eighteen, a disabled child, or a pregnant spouse—by providing a monthly stipend of 150 Argentine Pesos (ARS)[19] to each family, conditional upon the performance of twenty hours of work per week in productive, communal, or educational activities (Argentina 2002).

According to those involved in its design, the primary objective was principally to rapidly inject cash and provide a rudimentary safety net. In general, the main impact Plan Jefas y Jefes had on social indicators was a reduction of extreme poverty and of unemployment at the national level

(MTESS 2004a, 2004b), since beneficiaries were conveniently computed as employed in national statistics. This calculation equated the program's provision of work conditionality-related, below-minimum-wage income to having formal employment.

At its peak in 2003, the program reached slightly over two million beneficiaries. Over the years of its duration, as economic conditions improved, job creation increased, and other social assistance programs grew, the number of beneficiaries decreased to almost one million in 2007.

In terms of the socio-demographic characteristics of its participants, the available data suggests that close to 71 percent of them are women between thirty and forty years of age with low educational levels (primary school) (MTESS 2004a). Household surveys indicate that program beneficiaries are from the poorest sectors of the population, tending to live in large households with, on average, five household members, and experiencing low levels of economic activity and high unemployment rates (Cortés at al. 2004).

The two main features that stand out from this description are the role of work conditionality and its high amount of female uptake. So, what kinds of gender meanings are present in the articulation of the work conditionality and female participants? Considering the cultural context, what is the role of Peronist rhetoric and symbols? And what is that of feminist ideas? An attempt to provide some answer to these questions follows.

2.1 The gendered fable of work

Plan Jefas y Jefes sees paid work as the key mechanism of social integration (Resolution MTESS 256 2003), which has some parallels with the "welfare-to-work" policy thrust in the United States and the social democratic prescriptions for social inclusion in Europe (Gerhard et al. 2002). While evoking these, the plan's labor focus is intimately linked to the historical national development of the Argentine welfare regime. In contextualizing the gender narratives present in this program, I consider the cultural Peronist legacy and the positionality women's and feminist interests are given in it. It should be noted that the discussion on Peronism will be circumscribed to its use in public narratives.

"Argentine and Peronist"

As pointed out by the Executive Secretary of the Council of Social Policies at the time, one of the main features of Plan Jefas y Jefes is that it is based on previous national initiatives and on Peronist cultural legacy. The program was set in motion by two different Peronist administrations: that of Eduardo Duhalde and later that of Néstor Kirchner. Furthermore, the active participation of the Ministry of Labor assured that the program was nourished by the experience of work-fare initiatives—the most important being *Plan Trabajar*[20]—and other social funds developed during Carlos Menem's administrations of the 1990s (Golbert 2004; Pautassi 2004).

Historically, Peronism provided two symbolic mechanisms of social integration. As briefly described earlier, the first Peronist period—with its focus on industrial development and the male-breadwinner model (Pautassi, Faur, and Gherardi 2004)—based integration on the image of "the (male) worker." With less salience, a second method was also put in operation that appealed to the population through the icon of "the poor." This second approach fosters inclusion through compensatory social policies generally identified with the work of the *Fundación Eva Perón* (Svampa 2005). Within this matrix, the first instrument described is closely intertwined with notions

of social justice and of the dignity attached to work that became one of the pillars of working-class culture (James 2005; Jelin 1996).

With the focus on work present in Plan Jefas y Jefes, Peronist symbolism and narratives on work are an integral part of the images and publicity of the program. I examine them in an attempt to move beyond that which is implicit in its legislation in search of the "encapsulated 'powerful and appealing messages'" (Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead 2007:6) of Plan Jefas y Jefes.

Figure 1. Publicity for Plan Jefas y Jefes

Source: Communication Department, MTESS

Figure 2. Flyer for launching Plan Jefas y Jefes

Source: Communication Department, MTESS

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the use of nationalistic imagery and coloring—the pale blue and white of the national flag—to appeal at once and equate this national symbol with those colors historically associated with Peronism. The use of the flag and the motto "for an Argentina standing up and in peace," in addition to the slogans portraying work and education as forms of collaboration with nation (re)building, appeals to some of the main components of Peronist ideology: its nationalism and corporativism, an emphasis on social and class harmony, and state paternalism (Auyero 2001). In the background we find the republican assumption of the social significance of work and the bonds of solidarity it provides to sustain the social fabric. The work rationale of Plan Jefas y Jefes alludes to the dignity found in labor, an essential part of the moral economy of this social and political movement (James 2005).

Historian Daniel James (2005) points toward what he refers to as the "heretic" connotation Peronism had for workers because it connected the expansion of citizenship to workers' demands for more social status and dignity within and outside the workplace. Plan Jefas y Jefes brings an important innovation, at least as far as its narrative is concerned, since it re-enacts this heretic legacy within the neo-liberal context. For the first time after structural adjustment, it associates social policy with a rights-based rationale, a right to social inclusion, expressed (in Figure 2 above) by the slogan "no Argentine family without income," which marks a departure from previous minimalist thinking on social assistance.

However, social reality is unfortunately quite different. Peronist notions about the dignity of work once associated with formal and predominantly male employment, the provision of social security, and political participation and integration through labor unions, are revisited and utilized. But, what kind of work are we now talking about?

By looking at the stipend provided, we see that the sum of money is far below the poverty line.[21] Moreover, its value has not been revised since 2002 in spite of increasing rates of inflation. The work conditionality is not linked with pensions or social security but instead provides uncertain prospects (as will be shown in the next section). The poor are here provided with precarious forms of being occupied, busy. A program beneficiary reflects on this point and signals its value in preventing social unrest: "I am waiting for their promise, social inclusion, I want that…However, for me, it is all a con, a way of keeping the poor quiet, still, so that they do not rebel against the state, so that they do not cause trouble…"

This section has explored the fables that enhance the role of work in social inclusion, and it has pointed out that these might not coincide with the social arrangements traditionally associated with such activity. Yet, considering that women form the bulk of beneficiaries, how are women viewed within these stories?

Gender analyses of Plan Jefas y Jefes (Cortés et al. 2004; Di Marco et al. 2006; Pautassi 2004; Rodríguez Enriquez 2006) have given little consideration to the resonance found in the program, with liberal feminist ideas of promoting women's equality with men. The title selected for the program explicitly recognizes *both* women and men as potential beneficiaries. Does this equal recognition given to both sexes mean that women's interests and constraints are sufficiently reflected in the program? The next section ponders the destiny of these feminist elements.

The dilution of liberal feminist concerns

Various social policy experts involved in the design of Plan Jefas y Jefes had considerable experience in women and development issues, which meant that from the start the program was sensitive to some liberal feminist ideas on promoting women's equality with men. In this sense, the strategy of inclusion through labor should on paper provide men and women with equal opportunities.

First of all, the gender composition of beneficiaries consisted of an over-representation of women. Graph 1 shows that over the years more than 65 percent of participants have been female. Economic

Graph 1. Percentages of female and male beneficiaries in Plan Jefas y Jefes
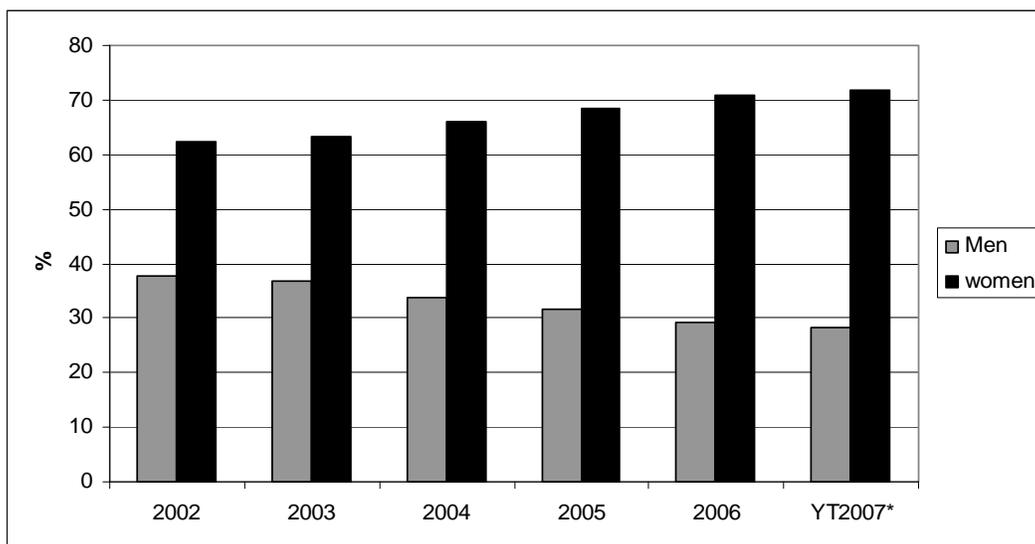
Source: Author's elaboration based on data provided by the Ministry of Labor (MTESS)
* Only includes the period January–May 2007

experts envisaged this situation and argued that the division of tasks and possibilities of accessing the few labor opportunities available meant that men within households would strive to access informal work opportunities, while women would seek out the program in order to complement that income.

The situation mirrors household survival strategies of the 1990s, when many male industrial workers lost their jobs. This vision, as discussed in detail in the next section, matched the reality for many beneficiaries.

The high-level considerations and feminist concerns evident in the name of the program did not, however, filter untransformed through the different national, provincial, and local bureaucracies associated with its implementation. As a consequence, experts not involved in these top discussions, as well as the media, showed genuine surprise when confronted with the numbers of women enrolled in the program and its progressive feminization.

By looking at the "images deployed by gender myths" (Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead 2007:6), the program's website provides the archetypal image of the ideal Plan Jefas y Jefes beneficiary, displaying the image of a content male industrial worker (see Figure 3).

If we move on to program publicity to understand how their target population is reflected, surprisingly we again encounter the use of images of working-class men in industrial occupations. When images of women are used, which fortunately is also the case, they are generally presented either performing typically "masculine" occupations or else their self-presentation is masculinized (see Figure 4).

Figure 3: Website image of Plan Jefas y Jefes beneficiary

Source: Communication Department, MTESS

Figure 4. Images of flyers of Plan Jefas y Jefes showing women and men working
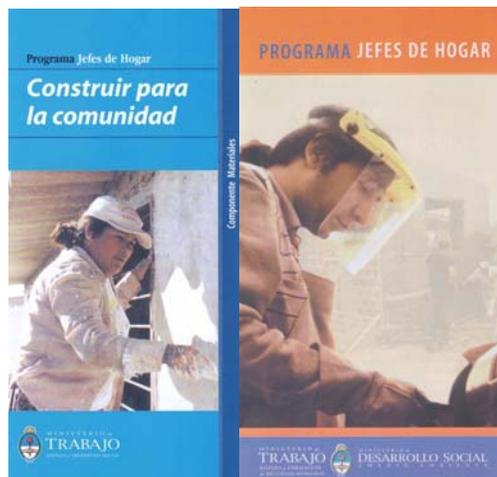
Source: Communication Department. MTESS

These images seem to be aimed at an audience not of beneficiaries but of the media and public opinion, which at the time envisaged the unemployed male members of the organized unemployed movement as the main target of the program.

Liberal feminist concerns were filtered and transformed through the echelons of government in the program's implementation. It is this weakening that results—as the icons of the program show—in the apparent masculinization of notions of work that serve to obliterate the precariousness of the tasks involved in the program. The way in which the preoccupation with gender equality is finally

presented offers a universalistic paradigm, treating both genders as one and the same (with masculine as paradigmatic). And yet the differences, though unproblematized, emerge in the program implementation since the distinct positioning of both sexes within labor markets, households, and access to social security was sidelined from consideration. This is therefore the focus of the following section.

2.2 Multiple livelihood strategies and unequal gender relations

An analysis of the meanings and uses given to the cash provided to both sexes over the duration of the program shows distinctions in the ways groups of men and women make use of Plan Jefas y Jefes.

First of all, women form the bulk of beneficiaries (Graph 1). Considering their limited possibilities of accessing other income sources, women are attracted by the stipend provided and utilize Plan Jefas y Jefes on a more permanent basis. The program becomes one of the multiple strategies they have recourse to in order to ensure household survival in a context of crisis. Participation in the program for them co-exists with intermittent links to the informal economy, receipt of other social program benefits, and their unpaid caring responsibilities (Tabbush 2008). For this reason, the proportion of women in the program increased almost ten percentage points between 2002 and 2007.

Graph 2. Number of beneficiaries incorporated into the formal labor market by sex and by year
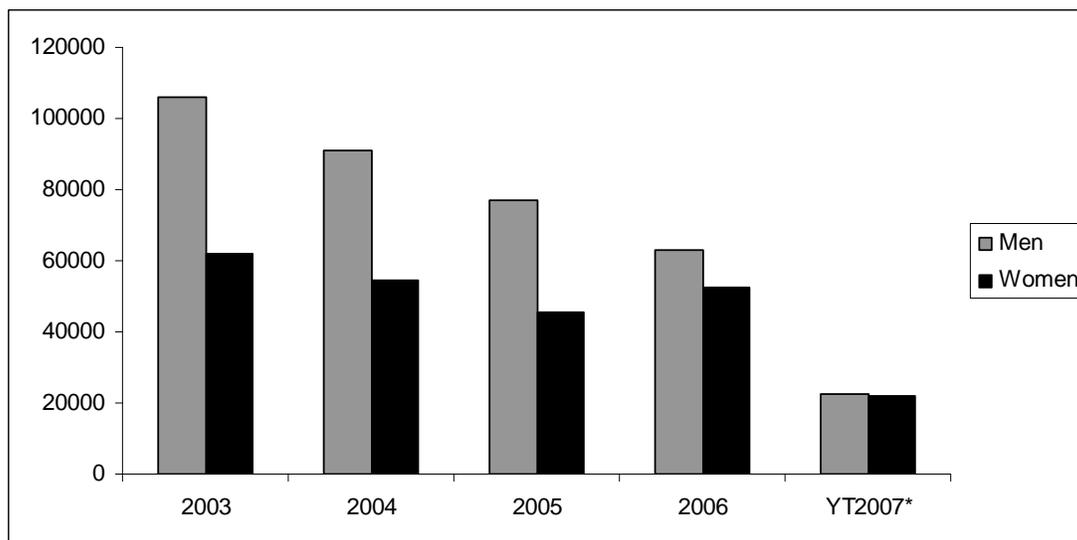
Source: Author's elaboration based on data provided by the Ministry of Labor (MTESS)
* Only includes the period January–May 2007

As Graph 2 indicates, female involvement appears to be somehow disarticulated from the formal labor inclusion called for by program regulations. While women form the bulk of the beneficiaries and in increasingly large proportions (as evident from Graph 1), until 2006 women paradoxically had a much lower chance of graduating from the program into formal work than their male counterparts. Esmeralda, a Plan Jefas y Jefes beneficiary, exemplifies this situation. She has completed secondary education and has four children. She has been looking for employment in local industries, but up to now has not been able to secure work, mainly due to lack of childcare

provision: "If I can't be included now that I am thirty-six years old, I'm not going to be included in the future. And it is not that I am not looking; I mean, I knock on the doors of factories, I don't have any diseases, I want to work, I have education, I have everything," she says. While she has not been completely discouraged into economic inactivity, she could be classified as long-term unemployed.

What her example shows is that the masculinized notions of work present in the program make it difficult to overcome the gendered articulations between care responsibilities within the home, lack of public childcare provision, and gender discrimination in local labor opportunities. The program did not grant any assistance in the form of childcare services (Kessler and Roggi 2005), nor does its legislation make any explicit reference to childcare (Pautassi 2004).

In contrast to women's experience, the majority of men resorted to the program to secure a temporary safety net in the immediate aftermath of the economic crisis of 2001. Concomitant to the improvement of social conditions and the beginning of slow economic recovery in certain economic sectors (MTESS 2006; World Bank 2006), men with previous formal employment experience in construction and manufacturing found other sources of income which were incompatible with continued participation in the program (MTESS 2004b, 2007). Thus, their participation progressively declines. Due to the type of growth geared toward construction and industry, access to work provides differential opportunities for female and male participants. Time-series data suggests an initial bias in favor of men, yet over the years gender disparities narrow and are reduced for both sexes (see Graph 2).[22]

While not catapulted massively into formal work, women formed the ranks of those participating in community projects as part of their program conditionality (MTESS 2004a),[23] which attracted mainly women from low-to-middle-income backgrounds (Di Marco et al. 2006). Women were active participants in these initiatives, mostly in "feminine" occupations, such as care-related tasks involving cooking, cleaning, caring, repairing shoes and clothes, and, less prominently, clerical responsibilities, which reinforced existing patterns of gender segmentation (Pautassi 2006; Rodríguez Enriquez 2006). Still, for women, co-responsibility represents a way of disentangling from their domestic lives and becoming included in public spaces of social interaction (Di Marco et al. 2006).

Because of the grand dimensions of the program and its decentralized implementation, my research results speak of the particularities this program had in one municipality.[24] In this local context, a multiplicity of community projects—in the forms of communal kitchens, after-school snack programs, and other grassroots organizations—mushroomed without much official oversight. The mixing of communal networks and revived projects formed a diversity of systems of survival that have less in common with the world of urban workers developed between the 1940s and the 1970s, and more similarities with the community-based world of the urban poor in other Latin American experiences (Svampa 2005:196).

A different scenario, some anthropologists underline, is the concentration of women whose work conditionality entails carrying out clerical work in the municipality. They argue that in this case horizontal segmentation of tasks according to gender had some positive outcomes for women (Kessler and Roggi 2005).

Box 1. Women in the Municipality: a counter-example?

The City of Buenos Aires provides an interesting illustration of the potential fostered in municipal bureaucracies for women's entry into formal employment. The city—until the assumption of the new government of Mauricio Macri from the *Propuesta Republicana* (PRO) Party in December 2007—provided spaces for women Plan Jefas y Jefes beneficiaries in local structures. Decree 948 and the Devoto Law allowed for Plan Jefas y Jefes participants that have been carrying out the work conditionality within municipal structures to become temporary municipal personnel. After many political tensions and negotiations, the women working at a decentralized municipal center in the western area of the city were given an annual contract during 2006, with a monthly salary of ARS1,085 (approximately US$ 358) and social and pension benefits.

"The 948s," as these women refer to themselves, in allusion to the decree that altered—at least temporarily—their working conditions, present two socio-demographic profiles. Women with low-income backgrounds and incomplete primary education form the ranks of cleaning ladies in municipal offices. Whereas women with complete secondary studies from low- to middle-income households—paradigmatic examples of the downward social mobility experienced by the lower to middle classes during the second half of the '90s— carry out administrative tasks in the cultural department. Even though these women have few characteristics in common, recurrent in their lives are the points of vulnerability experienced as a result of overlapping and exclusionary dynamics between work and child-raising responsibilities during the economic recession of the '90s.

Within the first group, life stories point to restricted choices (Kabeer 1999). For instance, Miriam raised eight children but, when confronted with a time of extreme economic hardship at the end of the '90s, had to put those children still residing with her into foster care, with the expectation that this would open up better life opportunities for them. The second profile groups together stories of women with years of work experience in administrative positions in the private sector that leave employment in order to take care of their offspring, but when wanting to return to the labor market are unable to take up the few current job opportunities available when family situations change—mainly due to divorce, separation, or widowhood. An illustrative example is that of Juana, who attempted to re-enter employment with little success, and progressively delinked from previous social networks, public spaces, and friends. When she started Plan Jefas y Jefes in 2002, the job at the municipality appeared to her to be her last work opportunity. She asks, "Who will employ me? I am fifty years old. Who cares about all the experience I have when they can hire someone younger?" The municipality seems the last recourse for her to avoid falling back into her previous social isolation.

With the current change of administration in the city, the future of the 948s within the center-right- and liberal-oriented new government remains full of doubts and uncertainty.

What the different experiences of the women in the municipality and in community projects have in common is that the key moments of vulnerability and their participation in the program are molded by their difficulties in articulating care responsibilities and work. Even though it encourages women's participation in community projects and is useful for dealing with momentary shocks, by

diluting in its implementation the liberal feminist ideas imprinted in its foundation, Plan Jefas y Jefes disregards women's multiple areas of responsibility and thus is not transformative of these unequal gender dynamics.

Peronist legacy and erosion of feminist ideas: women as mothers and Peronist workers

Within Plan Jefas y Jefes, notions of work become a fable. The storyteller provides us with a moral tale about inclusion in an attempt to appeal to the poor. By re-enacting memories of formal labor inclusion prior to structural adjustment, this fable, associated with the idea of work and dignity, serves as a platform for collective identification with a national project, and ultimately as a narrative silencing possible social tensions or unrest.

The performative aspect of these narratives puts past meanings of work in the present, even though the nature of current employment has been drastically altered in recent decades. Yet in its icons and visual support, Plan Jefas y Jefes also brings the anachronism of the male-breadwinner model and its gender-unequal relations.

This gendered fable of work stands in paradox with the statistical data, which indicates that most of those using this program on a regular basis are women. Gender narratives position women as "workers," yet they view work as a masculine activity. The obliteration of feminist concerns within this retake of Peronist narratives—present when designing the program—obscures the unequal gender norms and differential opportunities for work experienced by the sexes.

It is this particular combination that results in women being depicted as selfless workers and mothers who provide for their families. They are encouraged to make use of multiple strategies of survival at the local level without much regard for their personal costs. Maternalism here adopts the dangerous altruistic contours already identified in feminist literature (Whitehead 1991). The extension of the gendered division of tasks within the home into the public sphere is at the heart of Elsa Chaney's concept of *Supermadre* (1979:5).[25] In the altruistic notions of Plan Jefas y Jefes, the public sphere is constituted by the local spaces and neighborhood grounds in which women are aided to reproduce what Mercedes González de la Rocha denominates the "myth of survival," the perverse idea that the poor have an infinite capacity to withstand shocks and crisis through these multiple strategies (2007).

In sum, the combination of these maternal narratives on work calls silently upon women to sew back the torn social fabric following the 2001 crisis. And to do so, they have to think of the needs of others, they must be altruistic. In this sense, women are encouraged to utilize their multiple survival strategies to secure social reproduction. Their community activities, by means of the conditionality, are the main social capital investment for reviving local survival networks. It is in these personal exchanges at the local level that Peronism as a public narrative survives the deterioration of working conditions (Auyero 2001; Svampa 2005).

3. PLAN FAMILIAS: MORAL MATERNALISM AND FAMILIAL TALES OF INCLUSION

The contemporary Plan Familias was launched in October 2004 with the aim of tackling the social exclusion of poor families through the promotion of the human development of children (MDS 2005c). It provides cash transfers, dependent on family size, to women conditional upon school attendance and health checks of their children between five and nineteen years of age. The minimum transfer is ARS185[26] for families with two children, and offers increases of ARS30 per

child, up to a maximum of ARS305[27] per month for a family with six or more children (MDS 2007). A second component, targeting only sixty municipalities nationwide, offers optional community activities focused on training in preventive health care and school progress of children and adolescents.

Those eligible to participate in this program are previous beneficiaries of Plan Familias' predecessor[28] and female beneficiaries of Plan Jefas y Jefes—those with low education levels and two or more children, living in one of the 403 municipalities identified as geographical priorities (MDS 2006b, 2006c). Over 203,400 beneficiaries from Plan Jefas y Jefes have migrated to Plan Familias to date and, together with the population benefiting from the previous human development program, they total an estimated 427,282 beneficiaries.[29] Finally, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) is one of its main proponents. The table below summarizes and compares the key aspects of each of the programs considered.

Table 1. Main features of Plan Jefas y Jefes and Plan Familias

Key Features	Plan Jefas y Jefes	Plan Familias
Date of Creation	April 2002	October 2004
Stipend	Cash: Fixed at ARS150	Cash: Dependent on family size; ARS185–305
Target	Unemployed men and women	Only poor women with two or more children
Rationale	Work conditionality	Human capital conditionality
Coverage	Two million participants	Around 500,000 participants
International Financing Institution	World Bank	Inter-American Development Bank

Plan Familias was developed a few years later than Plan Jefas y Jefes, in a transformed social climate and with different social actors involved, which gives it a particular moral and gender imprint. The next sub-section looks at the arguments presented in this social context that contributed to the design of this new social policy.

3.1 Moral dilemmas in poverty alleviation

After the years of the social emergency, there was a need to rethink the strategies of social protection hastily put together in 2001. The interclass alliances drifted apart, and the sense of collective solidarity experienced at the foundation of the consultations and visions supporting Plan Jefas y Jefes gradually dissipated. Public opinion and the media began to express their discontent

with some of the basic uses of the program. Critiques voiced by Catholic organizations, the association of national industry, and international donors were aimed at the clientelar use of the program by members of the organized unemployed movement, and around fears it was not encouraging a "work culture" (Clarin 02/14/2006; CTA 2006).

It is in response to this that Plan Jefas y Jefes underwent modifications with the aim of transferring beneficiaries into two CCT strategies—Plan Familias and "Seguro de Capacitación y Empleo" (*Seguro*).[30] Each supposedly targeted a specific profile of Plan Jefas y Jefes beneficiaries: those with work prospects into the former and those with high levels of vulnerability into the latter. The rationale behind these changes is that, with the sense of stability gained, distinct mechanisms are needed to deal with extreme poverty and with unemployment.

The next two sub-sections will focus on disentangling the preoccupations with the family that led to its preponderant institutional role in Plan Familias, and on the reification of differences between the sexes encountered in its gender meanings.

Homes without dinner tables: The family fable

There is a growing public perception that, due to the strains produced by economic conditions after the crisis, the family as the primary institution for the transmission of shared values has been debased and needs additional state support in order to reposition itself. By appealing to women within poor households, Plan Familias seeks to pursue this noble objective: the "strengthening of vulnerable families" (MDS 2006d).

As expressed by public opinion concerns about the program, narratives regarding beneficiaries point to a sense of cultural erosion and a "widening cultural gap" between the poor and the non-poor, which appear encoded in the loss of the values associated with work and the family. Municipal workers appeal to middle-class images of family life and contrast them with those of program beneficiaries and, as a result, the latter are seen as potentially deviant from socially ascribed norms. The time family members share at the dinner table, for instance, is a recurring concern of many informants interviewed. An NGO leader expressed this anxiety when she noted: "(I would invite you) to enter the households….[But] the dinner table has been lost, Constanza, there are no tables in the homes."

This concomitant moral threat appears at dinner time. Meals are said not to be eaten and shared at home, and a generation of children are viewed as fed and raised in communal kitchens or *comedores*. There is an opposition between the meanings of children fed at home versus those who spend time in these collective environments, the latter generally being associated with forms of socialization that will produce shame, bullying from other children, and even sub-cultures and forms of asocial behavior.

A high-level official at the Ministry of Labor expressed these concerns as follows: "Maybe it is not wrong to say that it is better for a child to eat at home than at a communal kitchen, the comedor produces in the end…a lot of people used to say that the groups playing 'cumbia villera' music[31] were a product of children going to communal kitchens…Not that there is anything wrong with that, but I mean…it sets up a kind of sub-culture. And it's not such a bad idea to recover the space of the family as the *natural space*, is it?" (emphasis mine).

Diverging from the masculinized and uniform gender narratives of Plan Jefas y Jefes, in this program gender differences become further accentuated and (problematically) gender coded. The

division of the two processes of social exclusion (poverty and unemployment) leads to distinct sets of fables and stories about how to achieve social inclusion: safeguarding family wellbeing in the case of women and attaining paid work in the case of men.

By combining strands of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, these narratives focus attention on the alleged moral and cultural character of the poor[32] and accentuate fables of inclusion with a family focus. The main point, as put forward in more punitive forms of social assistance, is that economic reliance on welfare seems to stimulate a culture of dependency and a distinctive set of morally undesirable behaviors, in the case of women referring to their irresponsible sexual and reproductive behavior (Levitas 2005).

Then one can ponder if there is any space for feminist notions in this program. Which institutional actors were involved, and how are women positioned and narrated within this new anti-poverty strategy?

Lack of feminist concerns: Women as "good" mothers

Plan Familias can be considered a women-centered initiative, since it only targets women and emphasizes their *difference* from men, but no feminist constituents influenced its design. Women are then called upon, not in their roles as workers, but only in their maternal capacity. The explicit appeal to motherhood in social assistance and public policy is certainly not new and was already present in Argentina in Peronist narratives, specifically Evita's rhetoric of aiding the poor.[33] Mentioned briefly in section 2, this pinpoints a less salient avenue of inclusion through compensatory and assistential social policies prevalent in the work of Eva Perón (Svampa 2005). Building on these traditional narratives, maternalism acquires some specific features in Plan Familias. Namely, it obtains a strong moral imprint that naturalizes social differences between the sexes, while making women responsible for the "inclusion" of their families.

In its regulations, Plan Familias is said to guarantee the recognition and commitment of women and men to the education and development of their children (MDS 2005c). However, the naturalization of care as an essentially female activity is evident in the way Plan Familias treats the few male beneficiaries of Plan Jefas y Jefes who opt to transfer. In such cases, a thorough analysis of their characteristics is undertaken[34] and only in cases where the male applicant is a single parent—or when he has a partner who is a foreigner, disabled, imprisoned, or below eighteen years old—is he allowed to act as the main participant in the program (MDS 2006d, Formulario C solicitud de aceptación de titulares varones por excepción). It is clear: men are not the ones who are meant to sign this contract with state institutions.

Plan Familias is situated under the umbrella of the *Ministerio de Desarrollo Social* (Ministry of Social Development), directed by Alicia Kirchner, the sister of former President Néstor Kirchner. Many of the professionals interviewed identify strengthening the family through social protection as one of the objectives of her administration. In addition, when negotiating the IADB loan, the latter institution showed little interest in a second component of the program linked to community activities, and job training was cut down as one of the options available to women. Whereas before there was some form of training provision for women, this has now been curtailed. The ideological positioning and conservative family images of those heading this ministry and the international financing institution are partly responsible for further accentuating women's alleged "differences" with respect to men.

Considering there were no feminists involved in its design, this social program is an example of the popularization of modern notions of "women's difference" that have been extensively taken up by popular culture.[35] Yet, reflecting social constructivist criticisms of modern gender difference approaches, notions of women as mothers in the program describe universal and trans-historical narratives of womanhood. Chris Beasley argues that the popularization of difference discourses can end up "reflecting back (albeit in inverse fashion) conservative populist ideas about the immutable and unitary nature of women and men" (2005:57).

The family acquires center stage in this program as the site for carving out social inclusion and as a predominantly "feminine" territory. Yet, as the previous section outlined, contemporary features of poor families are considered culturally and morally undesirable. In sum, this program elicits a problematic treatment of gender differences and a direct association of women's and family interests through the moralization of gender relations within families. The next section looks at the consequences this essentialism can have at the local level.

3.2 Care and networks: the impact on women's livelihood

The program has the particularity of attempting to strengthen this female parental role, most evidently by the cancellation of the work requirement present in Plan Jefas y Jefes. The meaning this acquires for women at the local level is divided into two discussions: the acknowledgment of women's care duties (a feature not present in Plan Jefas y Jefes), and the paradoxical outcomes on local survival networks attached to the closure of the work conditionality.

Recognizing care

> *"I would like the plan to last forever."* (Plan Familias beneficiary)

> *"The mother that used to do the co-responsibility, in general, would leave the children at home; sometimes she didn't have anyone who could take care of them, so the children would be left alone."* (Community Activist)

The passage from Plan Jefas y Jefes to Plan Familias follows evaluations that identify a group of female beneficiaries living in large families with many children and demanding care duties that had a real and unmet need for more income support and fewer conditionality requirements. So, Plan Familias seems to partly acknowledge the difficulties for labor insertion faced by low-skilled and poor women with escalating domestic responsibilities (Rodríguez Enriquez 2006).

The first thing Plan Familias implies for women is a degree of visibility of the caring roles women with children tend to occupy, an important recognition, absent from Plan Jefas y Jefes, and an increase in the stipend women receive. Preliminary reports exemplify this increase and a less demanding conditionality as the main reasons cited for transferring to this strategy (MDS 2005a). While all beneficiaries interviewed concur with this, many also note they had stopped performing the work conditionality of Plan Jefas y Jefes due to care responsibilities or childbearing. They value that some time can be dedicated to care tasks that were sidelined because of the time burden imposed by the previous CCT.

Nevertheless, by identifying women solely as mothers and marking certain behaviors as good parenting, not only does the program overlook their contributions as workers and carers, it also symbolically establishes the impossibility of women entering labor markets (Rodríguez Enriquez 2006).

In spite of this, almost half of Plan Familias' beneficiaries (48 percent) claim to perform other informal labor activities in order to earn further income (MDS 2006a). The view of women as delinked from paid labor is questioned by the above-mentioned evaluation, by the beneficiaries interviewed, and by demographic studies of the family (Wainerman 2005). This is partially acknowledged by subsequent changes in program regulations that allow them to work part-time in the formal sector—provided that the salary is less than the minimum wage—parallel to receiving the cash stipend.

Finally, what received little consideration were differences between women participating in the program and the desires of some of them for education, training, and better employment. One beneficiary explained her unheard concerns quite clearly: "I could work in an office. Instead of that they give me 300 pesos. They don't give me the job that would strengthen me as a person, as an individual…They don't educate you."

Networks of survival: No more communal kitchens

Instead of providing women with further support in reaching their productive potential, Plan Familias chooses to consider them as not economically active.[36] One aspect that goes beyond economic considerations is the community participation present in Plan Jefas y Jefes, fueling local networks. The question that arises then concerns the effects this can have on communal activities and grassroots participation, the spaces in which Plan Jefas y Jefes maternalism was embedded. Bearing in mind the variety in local experiences, the considerations made are only based on the fieldwork material collected.

The perspective of municipal workers is that the relief of work requirements was well received by program participants. Municipal authorities also point out that this in fact corresponds to social reality; many beneficiaries, either for reasons related to care duties or new work opportunities, had already given up their Plan Jefas y Jefes activities. A social indicator of this is the number of communal kitchens that were emptied of workers and are now closing their doors.[37]

This particular municipality has the distinctive characteristic of not punishing lack of compliance with Plan Jefas y Jefes work conditionality, meaning that people would, in practice, continue to benefit from the program even though they did not fulfill its requirements. However, the municipality still receives demands from community organizations seeking to refill their ranks and carry on with their initiatives. Community leaders continue to request new lists of beneficiaries that could be potential participants in the municipality and show their concern: "I have a big problem, they sent me [the names of] twenty-five people and no one comes to do their co-responsibility and I am alone here at the communal kitchen."

The non-enforcement policy of local authorities tries to instigate grassroots participation as a personal choice related to individual fulfillment and not as a citizen's obligation. As the Director of Social Action says, "Solidarity and community work are not entrenched by dint of subsidies." Yet the disarticulation between the municipal political views and the needs of grassroots initiatives dependent on these workers for their daily functions creates tensions among community organizations, social movements, and local authorities. Two main strategies are envisaged by community projects to perpetuate their functions: one related to the general shift towards moralistic approaches and another based on informal arrangements.

Following the prescription that welfare rights should become attached to greater conditionality with the risk of reduction or removal, some groups have developed more punitive mechanisms for

attaining the participation required. These social organizations developed the strategy of bypassing the municipality and denouncing those beneficiaries that were not fulfilling their respective work conditionality directly to the national Ministry of Labor. The coordinator of an after-school club explained: "So, we called the 0800 number and lodged a complaint and the next month the plan was suspended…The time came to say 'that's enough, we should start reporting people because the municipality does not listen to a word we say.'" Because of the urgent need for help with their activities, they resort to formal mechanisms of control in the hope of instilling fear and some form of forced participation.

The second strategy developed relates to social movements that administer social programs with relative independence from the municipality, a regular practice in the outskirts of Buenos Aires.[38] In these cases, interviewees indicate that other informal mechanisms prevail over official changes in requisites. So, while Plan Familias might not require any form of labor conditionality, this is still demanded informally of program participants. Whether these informal rulings are complied with out of personal commitment or fear of losing the benefit is an important question to be studied in the future as it determines an aspect of women's agency within social movements.

Maternal altruism centers on the family

As argued in section 2, grassroots problem-solving networks are currently the most important social relations through which Peronist identity is maintained (Auyero 2001; Svampa 2005). This paper has discussed Plan Jefas y Jefes as one contemporary example of this. In addition, many food programs (most prominently *Plan Vida*) enforced throughout the 1990s re-invigorated these maternal images as a discursive legitimation of female grassroots activism (Masson 2004).[39] As described, these historical altruistic images of women are also reproduced in Plan Jefas y Jefes by means of encouraging their selfless sacrifice and multiple sites of struggle in the roles of mothers of their offspring, of their neighborhoods, and of the poor more generally.

Yet, it seems that while altruism is still present in the maternal narratives of Plan Familias, the nature of the altruism required has been altered. In this case, it does not refer to the public sphere, as was the case with the Jefas y Jefes "supermothers" and their community networks.
The use of maternalism within Plan Familias contrasts with the personalistic and "close-to-the-people" approach utilized in Plan Jefas y Jefes. Together with the detachment of local networks described in the above section, the "development icons" (Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead 2007) utilized in its publicity materials stand out by the abstract way in which the images are presented. While in general other similar programs in Brazil and Chile either use photographs or caricatures of families, Plan Familias utilizes an abstract design not only as the trademark of the program but also to represent its different components.

This communication strategy, coupled with the elimination of the work requirement and the emphasis placed on the family, makes an explicit attempt to bypass these local intermediaries as a way for the national Ministry of Social Development to dialog directly with beneficiaries.[40] Other programs, too—bastions of women's grassroots participation, such as Plan Vida—are attempting to eliminate female intermediaries in the distribution of food for mothers, and are replacing them with the technology of direct bank payments and magnetic cards.

Following this tendency, the proximity of the narratives of altruistic maternal bonds of care present in local resource distributions is absent here. The political tensions among local, provincial, and national levels of government in the implementation of a national program, such as Plan Familias,

Figure 5. Flyer of Plan Familias

Source: Communication Department. MDS

are represented as symbolic struggles in the appropriation of narratives on maternalism. The way in which Plan Familias is presented portrays not the "disinterested love" of the sacrifice made by those women at the local level present in Plan Jefas y Jefes, but rather the impersonal national state that will provide the private sphere of the family with a colder and moral version of maternal care. Social relations appear dangerously reified in gender characteristics.

Figure 6. Logos of CCT programs in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile (presented in that order)

Source: Communication Department, MTESS

CONCLUSION

This paper provided a specific case study of the changing maternal narratives in two CCT programs in Argentina between the years 2002 and 2007, indicating a variety of tensions in the positioning of women, families, and gender identities within program narratives. Results point out that in the Argentine context gender meanings were modeled by national and international institutional actors, the socio-economic contexts of production that shaped the Peronist rhetorics of work and motherhood utilized by both programs, the role (or lack) of feminist ideas, and their entanglement in tensions among different levels of government.

Findings show a progressive reification of gender differences and an unquestioned appeal to traditional gender roles that needs to be challenged given its potential effects on women's livelihoods and capabilities. Plan Jefas y Jefes focuses on activating women and promoting their participation in communitarian tasks by dignifying labor through recourse to images and narratives from the Peronist tradition. Women's social capital and networks are mobilized in the community and social movements more broadly, yet they see little of the formal labor insertion promised (except in special cases, such as some municipal structures of the City of Buenos Aires). Furthermore, as liberal feminist notions are erased from its implementation, this program offers an institutional setting with no childcare provision or consideration for women's quotidian unpaid workloads.

In practice, women—as altruistic strategic survivors—use Plan Jefas y Jefes as one of their various resources for maintaining family wellbeing and household income. Maternal altruism is embedded in local networks and represents women simultaneously as mothers, "Peronist" workers, and community activists. Through this idealization as supermothers, the program reproduces women's over-burdening, unequal gender norms and institutions that curtail their possibilities of working formally outside the home and gaining economic security.

The discursive transition from women "as Peronist workers" to women "as moral mothers" implies significant transformations in the gender meanings present in social protection. The essentialized and moral narratives that legitimate Plan Familias reinforce a familial tale of social inclusion that delinks women from their neighborhood social capital and treats sexual differences as natural.

In practice, Plan Familias resulted in slight improvements in women's income security through the recognition of their care responsibilities. Nevertheless, other forms of female vulnerability, such as the social meaning attached to losing insertion in new and public social spaces, are obliterated and disregarded. In a context of previous mobilization of women through the labor conditionality of Plan Jefas y Jefes, Plan Familias has an impact on women's community and political participation and in neighborhoods more generally. This moral maternalism aspires to cut intermediaries and relate directly with the nuclear family (in this case, equating it with women). Yet, it is a social bond of care that is impersonal, distant, and apolitical.

This program embodies the moralizing efforts fostered through family-centered policies to tackle exclusion by re-establishing an idealized "family," and make women's (mis)conduct responsible for social ills linked to the marginal conditions and gender inequalities of the neighborhoods in which they live. By returning women to the home and viewing them merely as vulnerable, the maternalism of Plan Familias does not consider a long-term way out of poverty and dilutes concerns about building their capabilities and connections with other sources of income and social networks.

The importance of highlighting social relations, institutional arrangements, and socio-historical contexts is to identify changes in the way gender narratives are anchored in order to find ways to contest them in the political arena. We should be more concerned with the fact that, in a context of better social and economic conditions, Plan Familias can be taken as mostly inclined to a conservative and moral accentuation of bridging marginality through retraditionalizing gender relations in poor families. The change in command from the Ministry of Labor to that of Social Development and the salience of the IADB are key institutional factors in this process. The unfolding of moral notions of maternalism shows serious effects on livelihood and agency at the local level.

NOTES

[1] There are national CCT programs in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, and Dominican Republic. Evaluations indicate that CCT programs are generally able to reach the poor and provide tangible welfare impacts (Barrientos and DeJong 2004; de la Brière and Rawlings 2006; IPC 2006; Rawlings 2004; Veras Soares et al. 2006; Villatoro 2004). They have reasonable success in basic human development objectives, as suggested by improvements in school enrollment and children's attendance and in nutrition and use of basic health care services, in addition to reducing child labor (Barrientos and DeJong 2004; de la Brière and Rawlings 2006; IPC 2006; Rawlings 2004; Rawlings and Rubio 2003; Villatoro 2004).

[2] Two main rationales for giving them the stipend are put forward. There seems to be an acknowledgement of microeconomic feminist research documenting women as better household administrators (than men), less likely to spend household finances on personal consumption, and more eager to promote girls' education (Serrano 2005a). Thus program designers appeal to female household members in order to secure maximum resource allocation for basic household survival needs (de la Brière and Rawlings 2006; Serrano 2005a).

[3] See Bradshaw 2008; Bradshaw with Quirós Víquez in press for Nicaragua; Chant 2006, 2008 for Costa Rica; Klein 2005; AGENDE 2006 for Brazil; Escobar Latapí and González de la Rocha 2008; González de la Rocha 2003, 2005 for Mexico; Serrano 2005b for Chile; Pautassi 2004; Tabbush 2008 for Argentina; and Molyneux 2006, 2007 for Latin America.

[4] Andrea Cornwall, Elizabeth Harrison, and Ann Whitehead suggest myths are narratives "composed of series of familiar images and devices, and work to produce an order-of-things that is compelling precisely because it resonates with the affective dimensions of values and norms. It is the mythical qualities of narratives about women evoked in gender and development policies, then, that gives them the power to spur people into action" (2007:151).

[5] Program for Unemployed Heads of Household: Family's Right to Social Inclusion

[6] Families for Social Inclusion Program

[7] Some Argentine examples are: the use of maternalism in policies of population control offered the possibility to use maternalistic narrative in feminist struggles for civil and political rights at the beginning of the twentieth century in terms of women's difference in relation to men; what Nari terms political maternalism (Nari 2005). Maternalism was also used strategically by the "Madres de Plaza de Mayo" during the Argentine military dictatorship 1976–1983 in Argentina (Jelin 2007). Women were not explicitly asserting gender demands, but the private search for a son or daughter gradually transformed into the public and political demand for democracy (Jelin 1996).

[8] The empirical effects this managerial role has on women's lives are inconclusive and sometimes contradictory (Molyneux in press). While results suggest that on the one hand women experience more autonomy as a result of their strengthened control over resources (Adato et al. 2000; Armas 2004; Daeren 2004; Escobar Lapatí and González de la Rocha 2008), they are tempered by feminist

concerns at the way such a process leaves existing gender norms and patriarchal family structures unchallenged (González de la Rocha 2005; Molyneux 2007, 2006). Studies point out that giving cash to women does not necessarily mean they actually control its use (Armas 2004; Espinosa 2007), nor that it will automatically increase household incomes since men might reduce their overall contributions (Bradshaw 2008; Chant 2008, 2006).

[9] An illustrative example flagged by research in Costa Rica (Chant 2008, 2006) and Nicaragua (Bradshaw 2008) is that men view the extra resources women bring into the household thanks to CCT programs as a substitution rather than a complement to their own incomes. As a result, there are cases in which they reduce their contributions. This can result in a situation where, even though overall household incomes increase, households may not be *sine qua non* economically better off, and the income available to women and children may stay constant or even decrease.

[10] Even though the majority of family structures in Latin America currently have two income generators and men are not currently sole providers (Arriagada 2004), policy design seems not to include them in strategies to tackle social exclusion (González de la Rocha 2005).

[11] The recognition in Mexico City of the right to abortion and the heated debates surrounding the issue in Argentina and Brazil, as well as the continuous political frictions over the morning-after pill in Chile, bear witness to the consolidation of this agenda.

[12] Interviews were conducted in Spanish and, when possible, were tape-recorded; notes were taken of field observations. I would like to note that in this article pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of interviewees.

[13] Politically through the Peronist movement and the Partido Justicialista (Peronist Party); economically by means of the expansion of work, salaries, workers' protection, and their organization in unions; and socially through participation in middle-class consumption and the obtainment of social citizenship (Jelin 1996).

[14] Informal, rural workers and the unemployed were sidelined from state-provided social security.

[15] State reforms in this direction entailed, in addition to the privatization of state-owned enterprises, fiscal constraint and the opening up of the economy; a fixed currency exchange plan; and the flexibilization of labor markets via diluting employment legislation and payroll taxes (Barrientos 2004; Lo Vuolo et al. 2002; Vinocur and Halperin 2004). The new policy scenario brought significant changes and deterioration in labor market conditions. While coverage of social insurance declined, some components of the previous "welfare state" were dismantled and established social rights were partially curtailed (Pautassi 2006; Rodríguez Enriquez 2006; Vinocur and Halperin 2004).

[16] The fragile political legitimacy and high levels of social unrest saw the succession of four interim presidents before national elections were called.

[17] In addition to CCTs, which attempted to tackle deprivation and overcome previous deficiencies in reaching the poor, the state also envisaged active policies to encourage formal employment and to extend basic health and pension insurance to those previously dependent on informal mechanisms. The most prominent example of such formalization was the campaign for the registration of domestic workers.

[18] Here I am following the use of myths in development policies by Andrea Cornwall, Elizabeth Harrison, and Ann Whitehead (2007). It is not my intention to suggest that inclusion is not "real," but rather to look at myths in terms of narratives that provide an "order-of-things that is compelling precisely because it resonates with the affective dimensions of values and norms" (Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead 2007:6).

[19] Approximately US$ 49

[20] Work Program

[21] The program provides ARS150. Poverty as measured by INDEC (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos) was set in October 2002 at ARS764.84, covering nutritional and basic service needs of a nuclear family of two adults and two children; indigence was set at ARS346.07 for the same household.

[22] Finally, a small number of male beneficiaries, who missed these work opportunities and still remain in the program, form a group of households with stronger traits of vulnerability and a high proportion of inactive members (Cortés at al. 2004). As a result, the contribution of the program to their overall household income is 11 percent higher than in the other cases (Pautassi 2004).

[23] Community projects were the main form of conditionality compliance, involving 60 percent of beneficiaries; administrative tasks, 20 percent; micro-enterprise development, 8 percent; finishing school, 6 percent; training, 4 percent; and 2 percent worked for the private sector (MTESS 2004a).

[24] Given that the implementation of the program was decentralized to local governments, the registration of beneficiaries was carried out in such haste, and a good deal of information was not computed, experts point out the difficulty in making any general and accurate assessment of the meaning of these activities. The spectrum of local experiences varies in the quality and supply of labor conditionality, which in turn is dependent on the characteristics of municipalities, number of beneficiaries, the role of social movements and faith-based organizations, as well as local labor and political dynamics. For instance, the big municipalities of the metropolitan region of Buenos Aires probably faced important difficulties due to the sheer weight of the numbers of beneficiaries, whereas in smaller localities the task might have been more manageable. In the locality of my study, the local administration identifies the most critical moment as the transition from 1,500 to 12,000 beneficiaries.

[25] She defines the terms as follows: "the female public official is often forced to legitimize her role as that of a mother in the larger "home" of the municipality or even the nation, a kind of supermadre." She also identifies Eva Perón as the most prominent example of a *supermother* (Chaney 1979:5).

[26] Approximately US$ 60

[27] Approximately US$ 99

[28] Plan Familias existed prior to 2004 on a smaller scale and with a slightly different design as the human development program IDH "programa de atencion a grupos vulnerables, subprograma de ingreso para el desarrollo humano." In October 2004, it was renamed "Programa Familias para la inclusion social" (MDS 2005c). Note that Plan Familias also requires that female beneficiaries' level of education should not exceed high school level.

[29] The available data indicates that Plan Jefas y Jefes beneficiaries who opt to transfer are mostly women (95.79 percent), of reproductive age, living in large households. The cash received is generally used for satisfying human development needs such as buying food, clothing, and school equipment and accessing health provision (MDS 2006a).

[30] Employment and training insurance – this strategy targets unemployed or informal workers with the aim of promoting a "real work culture" (Argentina 2004). It comprises a two-year insurance of ARS225 per month, conditional upon active job search and training of beneficiaries through the provision of job search support, training, and employment intermediation. Although Plan Jefas y Jefes gives way to Seguro and Plan Familias, due to the slow unfolding of the operations of the program and the minimal coverage provided, the main strategy of social protection is defined by the second CCT: Plan Familias. And thus, this paper focuses on the latter.

[31] This is a working-class music style associated with shantytowns (*villas*) that emerged during the 1990s in the outskirts of Buenos Aires. It is influenced by Colombian cumbia, by reggae, and more prominently by rap. The lyrics deal with two main topics: police brutality presented in an opposition between thieves and policemen, and sexist stories about women. There are multiple interpretations of the social meanings of this style of music, yet the middle class tend to focus on its stigmatizing character given its links with the experience of youths living in shantytowns (Svampa 2005).

[32] This movement is similar to the one identified by Levitas (2005) in what she labelled the underclass and the culture of dependency discourse on social exclusion in Europe.

[33] One of the myths surrounding the life of Eva Perón identified by Taylor (1979) is that of the Lady of Hope and the Good Fairy, in which her image is constructed as apolitical and where her femininity and emotional attachment to social justice naturally inclines her to social work with her *descamisados* (Taylor 1979).

[34] Male beneficiaries that opted to transfer to Plan Familias have some particular features compared to male participants of Plan Jefas y Jefes. They are characterized by extreme poverty, high vulnerability, and heading large households with a strong presence of children and with few possibilities of labor insertion. So the fact that there is no work co-responsibility, that it is not limited in time, and that the money provided is determined by the number of dependants seems to provide them with a better alternative (MDS 2005a).

[35] Modern gender difference feminism focuses on the needs, interests, and common features of women as a group (Scott 1988). Classical feminists' work concerned with motherhood and care, such as the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) and of Sarah Ruddick (1990), put forward the argument that women's experience of child raising can provide the basis for better models of the self and social relations than the individualism of liberal conceptions.

[36] This means that they are officially classified in statistics as not employed and not actively looking for employment.

[37] Their closure is also linked to changes in the economic and social situation. Community leaders might have found employment and are not able to dedicate their time to the organization of the initiatives. In addition, informants also claim that social demand for them has decreased so when meals cease to be provided for a week or so, there are no major repercussions in the community.

[38] This practice of having parallel entities administrating programs is not uncommon in the province of Buenos Aires and relates to the way in which state social assistance was articulated with historical forms of political participation of the poor (Svampa 2005).

[39] Plan Vida operated in the province of Buenos Aires; with it, new forms of female political and social participation emerged with the figure of the *manzaneras* who were selected to receive and distribute goods in their locality (Masson 2004).

[40] Efforts were made to formulate the information provided intelligibly, and the official points of reference and phone numbers of the program are systematically repeated. In addition, particular beneficiaries' concerns identified through focus groups and discussions with women in Plan Familias are also included in the information distributed.

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