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Social Policy Assessment of the Gendered Effects of Conditional Cash Transfers in Argentina on Female Beneficiaries

A critical analysis of empowerment and emancipation.

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Abstract

Conditional cash transfers are a popular social policy across Latin America. Often focused on investments in early childhood education and care, the social policy requires conditionalities such as educational attainment and healthcare to achieve human capital development. In the short-run the severity of poverty will be reduced by the immediate relief provided by transfers, whereas the conditionalities will serve the long-term effect of poverty eradication and economic development. Argentina is one such country to adopt the market neoliberal social policy in an attempt to boost economic growth and reduce poverty. While ample evidence has shown improvements related to education and health of young children, one concern of the transfers is the effects they have on mothers. In a few Latin American countries, the transfers are received by mothers under the expectations they aid in the facilitation of human capital development for their children. Critics of Argentinian cash transfers claim that while the transfers provide women the economic means to afford basic necessities for the children and the household, they are actually detrimental to their social standing and health. This thesis aims to analyse these claims, and take on a new perspective of the issue in a way that problematises the ethnocentric view of feminism. Using theories such as Bourdieu's theories of human capital, Amartya Sen's exclusion and unfavourable inclusion, Kabeer's victimisation of Global Southern women among others, this writing will discuss the ways in which women become empowered by the transfers, but not emancipated. It ends with a discussion on the ways in which conditional cash transfers can be reformed to adopt a gendered approach.

Key words: empowerment, emancipation, poverty, feminisation of obligation and responsibility, conditional cash transfers, Argentina

Abbreviations

AUH - Asignación Universal por Hijo

CCT - Conditional Cash Transfers

SAP - Structural Adjustment Programs

SCE - Seguro de Capacitación y Empleo

Table of contents.

Abstract	1
Abbreviations	2
1. Introduction	4
1.1. Purpose	4
1.2. Research Questions	7
1.3. How	7
1.4. Disposition	8
2. Background	8
2.1. Towards a new social investment strategy	8
2.2. Existing literature on the gendered effects of CCTs in Latin America	10
2.3. Argentina's conditional cash transfers	11
2.4. Argentina and the <i>machismo-marianismo</i> culture	13
3. Relevant Methods	15
3.1. Literature Review	15
3.2. Case study	15
3.3. Critical theory analysis	16
4. Theoretical Grounding	17
4.1. Bourdieu's theories of power	17
4.2. Amartya Sen: social exclusion and unfavourable inclusion	18
4.3. Empowerment, emancipation, and the concept of power	19
5. Analysis	21
5.1. Traditional gender roles being reinforced	21
5.2. Feminisation of obligation and responsibility in relation to poverty and the double burden theory	24
5.3. Critique of ethnocentric universalist feminism	25
5.4. Aspects of power available to beneficiaries	27
5.5. Empowerment or emancipation?	31
5.6. Limitations	33
6. Discussion	34
7. Resources	39

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This thesis aims to assess the social policy discourse of conditional cash transfers (CCTs). It will utilise clear-cut definitions of empowerment and emancipation to analyse the types of power experienced by female beneficiaries. The current literature on the gendered effects of CCTs are certain in their claims conditional cash transfers do not emancipate or empower women. However, these claims lack an analysis that takes into account the cultural and social contexts of the women who form the focus group. Theories of female power employed in the literature is based on a narrow definition of Global Northern feminism, which is here argued to be full of hypocrisy. This thesis will take a new approach that recognises the relative forms of power that women enjoy using a pragmatic feminist lens to reveal the types of power women enjoy as a result of the CCTs. Here, Argentinian conditional cash transfers and their effects on female beneficiaries will be reviewed.

Conditional cash transfers are the most popular social investment strategy in Latin America. Starting in the 1990s, CCTs in Latin America were money transfer schemes with attached expectations beneficiaries were required to meet (Lomelí, 2008). The beneficiaries would benefit directly from the immediate increase in income to the household, and society at large would benefit long-term as a result of the transfer conditionalities. CCTs were a neoliberal social policy strategy conceptualised as a way to remedy the inequalities and hardships of the poorest without reducing the effectiveness of the market as practised in a neoliberal market approach (Lomelí, 2008). Brazil and Mexico were the first two countries to introduce CCTs; program evaluations began soon after starting with Mexico's Oportunidades (Lomelí, 2008). Evaluations of the conditional cash transfers showed promising results increasing the popularity of CCTs, not only in Latin America but also South East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (Borges, 2019). Various evaluations, from multiple institutions spanning different periods of time showed increases in human capital generated by better educational outcomes, reductions in poverty, and effective targeting of the most vulnerable (Lomelí, 2008). The programs were seen to address the inequality and poverty created by the neoliberal policies of the Washington Consensus which required developing countries to cut social spending (Dapuez et. al., 2016).

CCTs have been adopted by almost all Latin American countries since the 1990s (Nagels, 2021). “By 2015, 131.8 million people [...] across 20 Latin American and Caribbean countries benefited from conditional cash transfer programs” (Borges, 2019, p.2). Sandberg (2014) coined four types of typologies for CCTs: universal, incorporating, compensating, and motivated by human capital, of which multiple can be combined in a program design. Most often Latin American countries adopt the latter type with the intentions to reduce poverty and bolster economic growth in the long-run through human capital investments. Due to the limitations on taxable income in developing countries, CCTs provide an affordable resource distribution program that directly targets the poor and has provided a wider band of social policy coverage for those most in need (de la Brière & Rawlings, 2006). Encouraged by the theories of Esping-Andersen (2005) and Heckman (2011) on social policy investments in children, conditional cash transfer program designs have increasingly started to adopt early childhood education and care conditionalities.

Each CCT program is designed to fit cultural, social, economic, and other contextual characteristics (Nelson & Sandberg, 2017). These contexts inform the way in which programs are transferred, enforced, funded, and designed in relation to their conditionalities (Nelson & Sandberg, 2017). While CCTs may hold much promise as a development tactic, they are certainly not a panacea, and their success depends entirely on the design of the transfers and the social makeup in which they are applied. The effects of CCTs therefore are not homogenous, and require consistent evaluations of each program design.

Cash transfers in a few Latin American countries are provided to beneficiaries based on the conditions that children attend school regularly, receive healthcare checkups, and meet certain health standards (de la Brière & Rawlings, 2006). In the short-run, the intention of CCT programs is to alleviate the severity of poverty by providing much needed income to meet basic needs within households such as clothing, food, water, medications, and more. In the long-run, cash transfers utilise conditions to manifest human capital development and boost productivity nation-wide. Additionally, when CCTs focus their conditionalities on human capital investments, they have the potential to increase inclusion in the labour market, therefore reducing inequalities between classes (de la Brière & Rawlings, 2006). Thus far evidence in favour of CCTs are limited to their short-term effects, which show reducing poverty and increased attendance to school and healthcare facilities (Borges, 2019; Sandberg, 2014). Evaluations of the long-term

effects are insufficient in number and indefinite due to the limited amount of time which has passed since the introduction of the programs. Those evaluations which do exist are not promising in relation to human capital accumulation and the breaking of the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Borges, 2019). Until significant time has passed since the implementation of CCTs, long-term effects cannot be conclusive.

Another attraction of CCTs for international organisations are their promises to incorporate a gendered perspective. For one, the transfers which focus directly on investments in early childhood education and care allows girls in countries with high gender inequality to attend school. It also means providing expecting mothers with health care visits to improve the well-being of the child prepartum and postpartum (Borges, 2019). Evidence of Latin American CCTs with investments in children have shown an increase in school attendance for girls by reducing their need to contribute to household labour by increasing the income to the household (Borges, 2019).

In a few Latin American countries like Uruguay, Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina, the transfers are directed at vulnerable female beneficiaries, often implying mothers. CCTs focusing on investments in children are designed in this way based on empirical evidence that women are more likely to spend the transfers nearly exclusively on children (Diepeveen & Rabinovich, 2015). By transferring the money directly to mothers, not only is the money expected to be spent more effectively, but it is also believed the transfers will provide women with more bargaining power in the household (de la Brière & Rawlings, 2006). Women take on the role as conduits of policy which is believed to have an additional positive effect of increasing their visibility in local affairs (de la Brière & Rawlings, 2006). Promoters of CCTs also promise the empowerment of women both in the short-term and long-term by including them in monetary affairs which can not only give them more political, social, and economic power, but also emancipate them from economically dependent relationships on male partners (Diepeveen & Rabinovich, 2015).

It is important in the development discourse to assess any form of social policy, not least of all when those efforts pertain to women. Social policy requires program monitoring of not only quantitative data, but also the qualitative effects of program progression (Adato, 2011). Policy assessments should also consider issues of non-performativity, which occurs when development policies are practised as an ideal rather than an actual discourse (Cookson, 2016). Attractive words can be used in the promotion of different policies to improve their popularity,

without having the results to support them. The proclaimed positive effects CCTs have on women may be at risk for being a non-performing, or even harmful, policy. While a number of evaluations evidence the effects of CCTs on their short-term effects and long-term goals, they lack insights on the gender aspect of transfers (Sandberg, 2014). A multitude of authors have already started to take on this task, and investigate the relationship between conditional cash transfers and their effects on women in respect to empowerment and emancipation. The majority of the literature conclude that CCTs do the opposite of empowering or emancipating women. What this literature lacks, are exact definitions of empowerment or emancipation therefore reducing their viability. The two terms are often used interchangeably as if they are synonyms, when in fact they are not (Inglis, 1997). This thesis does define those terms to increase the analytical reliability of the investigation into the gendered effects of CCTs in Argentina.

1.2 Research questions

1. How do conditional cash transfers affect the different aspects of power for female beneficiaries in Argentina?
2. Do these aspects achieve empowerment or emancipation?

1.3 How

Expanded on in section 3, the thesis will employ a literature review of the qualitative effects of conditional cash transfers on female emancipation and empowerment. As a theory-driven case study, it will utilise different theories to examine the issue of emancipation and empowerment and use a critical theory analysis to illuminate the different ways in which women possess power relevant to them and applicable to their cultural realities.

1.4 Disposition

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 will provide background on the conditional cash transfers in Latin America and Argentina, the need for a gendered approach, and the patriarchal family present in Argentinian society. Section 3 will discuss the relevant methods

of this thesis, as well as providing context for the applicability of a critical theory analysis. Section 4 provides the theories as proposed by different sociologists needed to analyse the data collected from the available literature. Section 5 is the analysis section and uses both the background from section 2 and theoretical grounding from section 4 to develop, analyse, and criticise different source literature on the subject. It will highlight new ways of viewing the issue of feminism in social policy, and section 6 will provide a discussion on how to move forward with the assessment of social policy in development studies in a more pragmatic and culturally appropriate way.

2. Background

2.1 Towards a new social investment strategy

Developmental social policy adopted the approach of social investment as a way to fix the disorder left in the wake of the Washington Consensus (Mahon, 2019). In the Global South, this social investment primarily took the role of conditional cash transfers as a way to increase the human capital development of children. Encouraged by experts on the discourse such as James Heckman and Gøsta Esping-Andersen, investments in children quickly overtook the development regime. Both Esping-Andersen (2005) and Heckman (2011) pressed the idea that investments in children would lead to a more competitive workforce and therefore create economic development as a way to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty by reducing class inequality and increasing the capabilities of poor children. Heckman (2011) evidenced that the experiences in a child's earliest years are the largest determinants of that child's skills acquisition, health, and success as an adult. Beyond that very sensitive period in a person's life, all interventions to increase human capital are minimal compared to education and care in the early stages. He saw that even those inequalities as a result of intergenerational transmission of poverty can be reduced or eradicated through these social investments. Children would be able to develop character and skills, which would directly translate into the economic and social capital they have access to later in life. These forms of capital, in addition to political and cultural, determine the well-being and opportunities that an individual will have.

Esping-Andersen (2005) pushed conditional cash transfers as a cost-effective form of welfare policy for developing countries that would decommodify social rights and stratify those social investments (Danforth, 2014). By investing in children, the intergenerational transmission of poverty could be broken by changing the life courses of the children in comparison to their predecessors (Lomeli, 2008). This would not only break the reproduction of inequalities but also increase social inclusion of the lower class into modern society (de Lettenhove, 2012).

While Heckman (2011) and Esping-Andersen (2005) both had sufficient evidence to demonstrate the importance of investments in children and therefore the interest of implementing conditional cash transfers as a way to achieve that goal, both lacked a gendered perspective in their theories. In particular, they did not consider the maternalising effect and double burden mothers would experience when the transfers were directed at them. For Esping-Andersen, his process of decommodification by conditional cash transfers often depend on women and the sacrifices they make for the development agenda as conditioned by their gendered roles (Danforth, 2014). He later amended his theories to incorporate defamilialisation, but after the implementation of CCTs in Latin America (Danforth, 2014). Heckman (2011) was concerned with parents, and the care they provide to their children. He saw social investments in children as needing to address parenting skills in addition to direct investments in education and healthcare as many disadvantages impoverished persons experience are taught or transmitted from parents generationally. The cultural and social capital of parents can have adverse outcomes on the social skills and character an individual develops (Heckman, 2011). Additionally, children need the presence of at least one parent in the household during young development. Better family environments that include love, care, and attention are all important factors in a child's development. He saw programs that focused particularly on mothers as the most effective way to achieve human capital development in children. In doing so, he failed to see how this could in fact strip women of many opportunities they may otherwise have if they were seen as more than tools of development.

2.2 Existing literature on the gendered effects of CCTs in Latin America

The development discourse is increasing their focus on women in development as the world transitions towards the equality of men and women, and the realisation that women and

men experience poverty and development differently. This focus has also broadened to the incorporation of social policy that addresses the needs and rights of women. Conditional cash transfers have been one such program. Advocates of the social policy regime have talked of the promise for CCTs to incorporate a gendered perspective to development that will give women more economic autonomy and create more opportunities for them to enjoy forms of power. Mexico's Progresa was the first conditional cash transfer in Latin America to incorporate a gendered perspective. The program was designed to empower women by providing larger transfers to girls than boys for schooling and education, and transferring the cash directly to mothers to increase their decision-making power in the household (Nagels, 2021). Progresa was the first and only Latin American CCT designed with women at the forefront. Thereafter, transfer programs in other Latin American countries adopted CCT designs that offered a gender awareness approach with potential positive externalities on women's empowerment and emancipation, but not as a premise of the programs (Nagels, 2021).

After Progresa, a few other Latin American countries designed conditional cash transfer programs that transferred the sums directly to mothers as a cost-effective approach to human capital development. It was later evidenced that those countries that did so - Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Chile - had more success with the short-term goals due significantly to the efforts and time investments of mothers in child-rearing (Lomelí, 2008). Women are instrumental in the enforcement of conditionalities due to their maternal care-taking roles which ensure the continued success of their children in the programs. A majority of evaluations on the gendered effects of CCTs in Latin America reveal the transfers reinforce traditional gender roles in the household for women as maternal, increasing their time and work burden (Molyneux, 2009). The process of awarding women the role of child-rearing standardised women as tools of development in these programs. The benefits of mothers as conduits of development is seen as outweighing their rights in light of the success they provide to the implementation of CCTs (Silva & Soares, 2010). It has also been evidenced some programs that targeted children had better outcomes than programs which targeted the labour integration of adults. It is therefore a more worthwhile investment in countries with limited taxable income to focus those resources on children.

That is not to say there have not been positive effects as well. According to Molyneux (2009) and Nagels (2021) women have experienced increases in confidence, economic

autonomy, and overall better well-being. However, these benefits are limited to the individual and do nothing to address the structural oppression of women.

The existing literature on the gendered effects of CCTs is few and far between. The majority of research is quantitative, and the existing qualitative evaluations are focused towards effects on children and lack the perspective of mother beneficiaries (Mahon, 2019). The discourse is in need of increasing the qualitative research on the topic that factors in gendered effects and can better analyse the issue of all parties.

2.3 Argentina's conditional cash transfers

Conditional cash transfers in Argentina constitute a form of targeted social policy. They were implemented as a cushion to the political, social, and economic disarray as a result of the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and their adverse outcomes (DuBois, 2021). The Argentinian government determined the best course of action for CCTs in the nation would be intended towards human capital investments (DuBois, 2021). The belief at this time was investments in the skills of the people would lead to economic growth and poverty reduction. It started with Plan Jefes y Jefas.

Plan Jefes y Jefas de Hogar Desocupados (Program for Unemployed Male and Female Heads of Households) was a reconciliation to the social unrest as caused by the neoliberal SAPs (Kostzer, 2008). The program aimed to reduce poverty and increase economic growth through labour market conditionalities (Meachem, 2012). To be eligible for the program, beneficiaries needed to be experiencing some form of financial difficulties relating to caring for children, pregnant, or as an incapacitated spouse (Meachem, 2012). As mothers their purpose was not to facilitate the human capital development of their children, but to receive compensation for their monetary stresses as vulnerable women. Beneficiaries were required to work 20 hours a week, and either needed to renew or establish legitimate citizenship in order to be included in the national database (Kostzner, 2008). During this time, in the post SAPs era, the neoliberal doctrine practised by Argentina saw the labour market as the most effective way to increase the opportunities for households to be included in society and the economy, and thereafter create long-term development. The program would both increase the well-being of the lower classes through skills acquisition and lead to higher competitiveness in the international economy by

strengthening the participants of the labour market and equate the opportunities for citizens to join. This signified a transition from a neoliberal market scheme to a market-driven neoliberal social policy scheme. Women made up 71% of the beneficiaries, of which 60% were single female-headed households (Kostzer, 2008). According to Tabbush (2010), the program was proactive in its attempts to strengthen the inclusion of women in society via the labour market. In doing so, the increased social network of the women created the possibility to organise and therefore practise political activism. These claims will be evaluated in later sections.

Plan Jefes only lasted four years, transitioning into two other transfer programs. The Seguro de Capacitación y Empleo (SCE) program started in 2006 was one of the successors to the Plan Jefes program. Plan Jefes had a stronger focus on income subsidies as compared to market strategy components and was disassembled to make room for programs that would address the market side of labour integration. Similar to the previous program, the SCE also focused on human capital transformation via labour conditionalities targeted at the beneficiaries receiving the transfers (Escudero & Mourelo, 2017). The SCE program would do so by encouraging completion of education, employment subsidies, training in skills acquisition, and support for unemployed individuals actively seeking labour (Escudero & Mourelo, 2017). The program was instituted as a buffer to future economic crises, as the cash transfers from Plan Jefes were seen as insufficient, nor as readily available, during those periods (Escudero & Mourelo, 2017). The program combined short-term poverty alleviation, with long-term sustainable development through skills creation, job-seeking, and job applications. Designing the program in this way fulfilled the activation component of social policy, a key aspect to successful development (Danforth, 2014). The program lasted a span of two years, and was designed to equip participants with the tools to participate economically in society.

As the other replacement program to Plan Jefes y Jefas, Plan Familias was established in 2004. Unlike the preceding program, Plan Familias focused specifically on the human capital investments of children as opposed to labour conditionalities of beneficiaries (Tabbush, 2010). The program provided transfers relative to the number of children, with conditionalities of regular health care checkups and school attendance. A unique aspect of Plan Familias was the direct transfer of cash to strictly female beneficiaries (Meachem, 2012). Critics have claimed though women were the receivers of the transfers, the program still lacked a gender perspective in the design. Whereas Plan Jefes y Jefas and the SCE program had attempted to bolster the

activity of women - as well as men - in the labour market, Plan Familias directed their transfers to mothers in the assumption that they would spend their money strictly on children and therefore maximise the success of the program (DuBois, 2021).

First started in 2009 by presidential decree, as a follow-up to Plan Familias and the SCE, Asignación Universal por Hijo (AUH) would also focus their conditions around school attendance, regular health care check ups, and vaccinations (DuBois, 2021; Diepeveen & Rabinovich, 2015). AUH succeeded Plan Familias and the SCE program as a correction to their pitfalls (DuBois, 2021). That which made AUH an exceptional conditional cash program, were unique characteristics applied to more effectively regulate and organise the different conditionalities; for example, AUH outsourced the management of school enrollment to ANSES, the national pension agency (DuBois, 2021). By designing the program in this way, evaluations of program criteria were more effective and excluded almost no-one who met the requirements. According to DuBois (2021), since the establishment of the program the process, effectiveness, and regulation of the program has gone increasingly smoothly. Asignación Universal por Hijo is still in effect.

2.4 Argentina and the *machismo-marianismo* culture

The historical trajectory of Argentina is important for better understanding the patriarchal context in which CCTs were established. It demonstrates the way in which power shapes the success and failures of the programs, as well as why it produces the gendered effects it does. While Argentina has enjoyed some progress on women's rights, an abundance of social and political occurrences throughout the 20th century reinforced the patriarchal family, a subset effect of the macho culture (Jelin, 2005). Starting with the Spanish Empire's colonisation of Argentina, they brought with them Roman Catholicism and therefore the familial attributes tied to the religion (Bacon, 2011). The family was designed to support and service society and as such secured a base for the ruling system of the colonial state (Bacon, 2011; Molyneux, 2000). Roman Catholicism promoted traditions, regulations, rules, and principles which fed into Argentinian family life (Bacon, 2011). By creating standards for families via religion designed by the colonial state as a control mechanism, traditional gender roles within families have been preserved even now.

In the 1920s and 1930s women were becoming more fluid in their sexuality and freedom, which was viewed as a threat to the traditional family and an upset to the social balance within Argentina (Molyneux, 2000). The state promoted the domestication of women in order to prevent social disintegration and preserve the Argentinian family identity (Molyneux, 2000). A hallmark of Argentine society is the *machismo* and *marianismo* culture where men are expected to be dominant, masculine, and independent, while women are seen as feminine, delicate, maternal, and male-dependent (The Cultural Atlas, n.d.). Between the 1930s and 1950s when women started entering the workforce, the state again attempted to reinforce the macho culture through propaganda that enforced an idea of women needing protection by their husbands and the state (Molyneux, 2000). Many congressmen saw female labour as a failure of the male breadwinner and a fragmenting macho culture. Working women were pitied by society, on the assumption their husbands were incapable of working enough to financially support them (Molyneux, 2000). The state thereafter reinstated a family wage so women would not have to work.

After the 1950s, a demographic transition was starting to take place as women were gaining more rights in politics and the labour force. Women had more autonomy and the patriarchal family was starting to dissolve. This progression halted soon after when the political and economic crises of the 1970s had the state again intervene to promote traditional gender roles in family life (Palermo, n.d.). Women were once again assigned their traditional role as caretakers and tools of reproduction to provide stability within households during this period of social unrest (Jelin, 2005; Palermo, n.d.). Throughout Argentina's history, and especially in times of trouble, it is always the family that has formed the bedrock of support, with women and their maternal roles at the centre. For this reason has the family and its structure become a political process and cultural standard (Jelin, 2005). Even school textbooks contained images asserting the maternal mother until 1990 (Jelin, 2005). By the same margin, European migration to Argentina also encouraged the Catholic family structure by bringing with it the form of the nuclear family (Jelin, 2005). Women had an incredible amount of burden on them both by society and the state to retain their roles caring for children and providing support to their husbands.

The traditional family still lives on, with some progress in gender equality. For one, the legalisation of divorce in 1986 gave women the autonomy to separate from their partners (Jelin, 2005). Most development for gender equality in Argentina is concentrated in the upper classes.

This includes more equality in the labour force, and less expectations on women to care for children (GoinGlobal, 2021). Lower classes have yet to see the same changes.

3. Relevant Methods

3.1 Literature review

The data collection approach to this thesis, is a literature review of existing sources on the emancipation and empowerment of Argentinian female beneficiaries in relation to conditional cash transfers. It is worth noting all data within this thesis is collected second-hand, and can only reflect the thoughts and perspectives of the authors and their participants. Unlike a literature report, a review takes a critical evaluation of the material collected (The University of Edinburgh, 2021). The strength of a review lies in its efforts to identify gaps, controversy, contested claims, and develop new ideas or theories from the existing sources. Therefore a literature review serves the purpose of the aims of this paper in attempting to problematise the ethnocentric view of feminism.

The sources chosen to inform this thesis were discovered online both through Google Scholar and LUBSearch. All sources that were deemed relevant to the topic were read carefully through, and any contradictions were accounted for through further research. These sources contained interviews, ethnographic studies, quantitative data reviews, among other methods that investigated the relationship between conditional cash transfers and female beneficiaries. Each study consists of at least one of the four cash transfer programs cited above, and span different provinces across Argentina.

3.2 Case study

Given that this thesis is not intended to be an evaluation of the conditional cash transfers themselves, but an evaluation of the literature pertaining to the effects of conditional cash transfers on female beneficiaries, it follows that this thesis would therefore abide by a theory-driven case study. The basis for the thesis is a case study of female beneficiaries in

Argentina, and the theory aspect refers to the theoretical groundings and sociologists that will be utilised to analyse the issue with a critical perspective and introduce a new way of viewing the issue. Expanded on further in this paper, theories such as Bourdieu's theories of human capital, Amartya Sen's theory of social exclusion and unfavourable inclusion, and Naila Kabeer's view on female empowerment will be used to examine the existing literature on this topic, and bring a fresh narrative divergent from that of past literature.

3.3 Critical theory analysis

For the intention of this thesis, critical theory analysis serves as the best methodological approach to reach the desired results. For one, it was originally the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, and Habermas specifically, that brought the issues of emancipation and empowerment to the forefront of development policy (Nivala & Ryyänen, 2017). This thesis does not aim to confirm or deny any hypotheses, but instead to illuminate the issue of power in a way that recognises power as a dynamic concept, determined by the individual. The purpose of critical theory is to develop and generate theory about the specific demands and needs of the target audience (Bohman et. al., 2021). There is a need in the social sciences, and sociology especially, to avoid assumptions and respond appropriately to problems by taking into consideration the heterogeneity and uniqueness of all actors within a given context (Bronner, 2017). Especially in the arena of development, objectives can only come to fruition when social inquiry takes place from the ground up, using a synergy of voices from both the inquirer and the inquired. Furthermore, critical theory is used principally for understanding social transformations involving emancipation and liberation, and thereby is especially fitting to the topic (Bohman et. al., 2021). By using a normative approach to inquiring about power, and how it can be gained or sustained, can power relations and societal and institutional structures be effectively examined and handled if needed. Habermas, one of the leading philosophers of the theory, said critical theory is "social science with a practical intent" (Habermas, 1971, as cited in Bohman et. al., 2021). It means to approach all research and projects prejudice-free so as to reveal the reality of society in a legitimate and relevant way to the intended focus. That which causes failures in development programs, projects, and aims is often equated by critical theories to be the lack of individuality and relativity in the approach.

In the instance of this thesis, the aim is to attempt to understand the real lives of female beneficiaries in Argentina, devoid of the ethnocentric views on female emancipation and empowerment. According to Dillon (2013), there is a trend in global society to create mass homogenisation and a culture of sameness. This thesis will criticise the view of female empowerment and emancipation from the Western point of view, in order to avoid victimising women based on a culture of feminism believed to be global in nature. Critical thinking is lost when relative forms of power, and the differences between societies and culture, are not considered when discussing development issues. This is how critical theory serves the purpose here: by evaluating empowerment and emancipation as it affects Argentinian women with a focus on their specific contexts, rather than with a totalitarian ethnocentric conception.

4. Theoretical Grounding

4.1 Bourdieu's theories of power

Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, introduced the concept of power as being created and diminished by different forms of human capital: political, economic, social, and cultural. These forms of capital can in one sense be retained to some degree by institutions, but predominantly through cultural and social processes (Dillon, 2013; Inglis, 1997). Social capital is the networks and relations an individual possesses to gain opportunities and advantages within a society; cultural capital is the tastes, knowledge, and education one has reproduced in their society which affect statuses, manners, and morals; political power is the influence an individual has within the political realm and how much influence they have on others and political processes; lastly, economic capital is simply the economic resources one has (Dillon, 2013; Inglis, 1997). Bourdieu believed these forms of capital were the root cause for the reproduction of inequality between classes, through repeating certain behaviours, opportunities, and lifestyles within the classes. They play an important role in configuring people's identities.

The family constitutes a significant degree of the cultural capital an individual has and plays a large role in the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Lomelí, 2008). Chant (2008) fears that female-headed households in poverty increase the risk of transmission further due to

the intersectionalities of feminisation of poverty and structural gender inequalities. In part for that reason, advocates of transfer programs emphasise the role of making mothers the primary receivers, as they make up the most vulnerable group of the poor (Lomeli, 2008). This thesis aims to highlight some of the ways in which this strategy improves the conditions of impoverished women, but can also negatively affect their status in society.

Furthermore, Bourdieu's theory of habitus explains how the norms of society are ingrained in people. This is achieved through the educational system, family, morals, cultural perspectives, language, and everyday life (Powercube, n.d.). A main purpose of this thesis is to recognise different forms of power, how they are used, and how they are reproduced. This requires an understanding of how habitus feeds into perspectives on power in different cultures and human capital. In the case of Argentinian female beneficiaries, this relates to how female power in the Global North is not representative of the perspectives on female power in the Global South. Different habitus' will cause individuals to view power differently according to their capital. Women of separate cultures may view their roles in society differently as a result of their environment. Bourdieu's theories of habitus and capital are useful in analysing the different ways in which power is viewed in foreign cultures and therefore aid in the analysis of this paper. For the purpose of this paper, habitus which implies the same notion as cultural capital - the norms which are reproduced within society - is presented as cultural capital from here on out.

4.2 Amartya Sen: social exclusion and unfavourable inclusion

Amartya Sen conceptualised poverty as forms of social exclusion which deprive individuals of the resources and opportunities they need to be successful in life (Nevile, 2007). Social exclusion is the process by which individuals are excluded from social processes such as political lobbies or the labour force. These deprivations create disproportionate opportunities to those included, and therefore increases the divide between the included and excluded. These processes reproduce poverty and inequality (Nevile, 2007). Development policy has thus coined the term inclusive development as a strategy to include individuals in social processes so as to break the intergenerational reproduction of poverty (Cookson, 2016). Conditional cash transfers are one such process claiming to be a form of inclusive development. The idea as supported by Heckman (2011) and Esping-Andersen (2005) is the early childhood education and care that is

made available to children as a result of these programs, giving them the opportunity to be included in social processes they may not have had access to before. In such a way can conditional cash transfers offer inclusion for deprived individuals in processes which can be of benefit to them both short- and long-term. Women who receive the transfers may also have the opportunity to be included in more social processes. The remainder of the thesis will expand more on this theory.

Sen also coined the term unfavourable inclusion. He distinguished between two types of exclusion: one which negatively impacts individuals and actively deprives them, and the other which does not need to be malignant but can lead to forms of deprivation through causality (Nevile, 2007). Sen sees the causal chain as fundamental in differentiating between the two forms of exclusion, and recognising the multidimensionality of poverty. Deprivation is not only caused by passive or active exclusion, but also by unfavourable inclusion which can burden individuals more than it does benefit (Nevile, 2007). Both exclusion and unfavourable inclusion can cause inequality or poverty, by depriving individuals of the ability to partake in the standard everyday life experienced by others within society and removing their autonomy to choose. Amartya Sen's theories were first applied to the unfavourable inclusion of persons in the labour market as a way to increase economic development and skills acquisition, even if it increased the burdens they were already handling or involved them in low-quality jobs. For many it was more harmful than beneficial (Nevile, 2007). His theories of unfavourable inclusion and exclusion serve an important aspect of the analysis of female empowerment and emancipation. The gendered perspective of women and development should focus on both issues of unfavourable inclusion and exclusion in the development agenda. While it is important to make sure women are not excluded from activities which may bolster their well-being and human capital, it is also important to prevent their unfavourable inclusion in society in a way that removes their decision making and disempowers them. Both social exclusion and unfavourable inclusion will be used in the analysis of female participation in the CCT programs.

4.3 Empowerment, emancipation, and the concept of power

Empowerment and emancipation are often used synonymously in the development discourse. Especially for the sources referenced in this thesis, the two terms were used

interchangeably, signifying the two represent the same concept of power. The two terms have lost and changed their meaning over time to reflect given ideals or political undertones and ultimately illegitimises their use (Nivala & Ryyänänen, 2017). Emancipation was a charismatic term used in the development agenda from the 1960s which later filtered out near the end of the 20th century (Nivala & Ryyänänen, 2017). When the promises of emancipation failed to materialise, the term was dropped and replaced with empowerment to signify a new ideal and better promise in the development world. In the politics of policy, concepts are continuously changing. To avoid this phenomenon, this paper separates empowerment and emancipation based on Tom Inglis' (1997) definitions. While both terms relate to the power of individuals in relation to their society, they constitute two different kinds of ways in which people have and use that power. The etymology of the word empowerment means to be *in* power, and emancipation comes from the Latin *emancipatus* to 'be set free from control' (Harper, n.d.). As coined by Inglis (1997), *empowerment* is the ability for people to successfully navigate the structures of the society in which they find themselves; *emancipation* is an individual's ability to challenge those same power structures and the degree of success they experience in those attempts. The prerequisite to empowerment is adaptive socialisation and the prerequisite for emancipation is education (Nivala & Ryyänänen, 2017). Empowerment and emancipation have also been differentiated by the feminist scholar Naila Kabeer. Similar to Inglis (1997), Kabeer (2019) states empowerment is autonomy over life decisions, and emancipation is the political and social transformations that give an individual power. She defines empowerment as a passive and emancipation as an active process (Karolak, 2013). Additionally, empowerment can be partially provided by those in power, but emancipation must come primarily from the people.

Equally important for conceptualising the aspects of power for emancipation and empowerment, are Pierre Bourdieu's forms of human capital. In addition to social structures enforcing forms of capital to some degree, the attitudes, behaviours, and actions of individuals are reproduced through practices and discourses which condition citizens of a society to adhere to a particular ideal. Therefore while governments can provide some forms of empowerment to women, they cannot provide a holistic transformation that empowers women, as many aspects of that power comes from the capital those women possess (Karolak, 2013). Therefore both empowerment and emancipation require some degree of education and capability production in the targeted audience for power to be achieved. Societal transformations must take place then to

affect and change those forms of capital. These transformations can award or disendow people of power that can include or exclude them from opportunities which can lead to development. It is thus also important to understand how power works in relation to these forms of capital. These theories will be applied applicably in the analysis section of this paper to examine the different ways in which women possess and use their power, and factors in Bourdieu's theories of human capital as informing the empowerment or emancipation of female beneficiaries.

5. Analysis

5.1 Traditional gender roles being reinforced

Conditional cash transfers have been paraded within the development discourse as a social policy that will either directly or indirectly increase the bargaining power of women. However, the majority of the literature finds that CCTs transform women into tools of development, where they can participate in the success of future generations as mothers instead (Tabbush, 2010).

To begin with, Plan Familias and AUH promoted through their campaign and advertising the traditional role of women as mothers. The propaganda was posed both for political and strategic reasons. For one, the design of both programs were strategically designed to transfer the money directly to mothers based on evidence that women, more than men, are more likely to spend money exclusively on their children (Diepeveen & Rabinovich, 2015). This outcome could be a result of women desiring to spend money primarily on their children, but another plausible reason could be related to their cultural and social capital. Due to the *machismo* and *marianismo* culture of Argentina, women are expected to sacrifice everything they can for their children. Especially in the lower classes, a woman's status relies on their fulfillments of a motherly capacity (DuBois, 2021). When it comes to the transfers, mothers are expected by their society to only spend the money on their children. They become disempowered by the cultural capital which holds them to such standards. If they do not spend the transfers in an acceptable manner, their social capital can suffer as a result, which can be detrimental to the survival of impoverished persons (DuBois, 2021). Mothers themselves feel shame when spending the

transfers on anything other than their children, even in dire situations (DuBois, 2021). The moral obligation of mothers in Argentinian culture increases the effectiveness of transfer spending on children with limited intervention from the programs to maintain this outcome. The cultural capital of these women prevents the personal use of the cash as their social capital depends on how they spend it. Despite their economic capital increasing, women do not experience more power as a result; social structures disadvantage the mothers from fulfilling this possibility (DuBois, 2021).

Additionally, Plan Familias strengthened women's maternal roles by pushing them into inactivity. In order to be eligible for the transfers, women were not allowed to be formally employed or receive a wage beyond a set minimum (Meachem, 2012). This reduced the chances of women pursuing employment in the labour market, and left them economically dependent on the transfers. Their economic capital was limited to that provided from the transfers, and they were prevented from extending those resources through other forms of income. Such a turn out is unfortunate, as the conditions on children to attend school could potentially give women more free time with which to work (Garganta et. al., 2017). Unfortunately, as the CCT program prevented women from seeking work, this benefit lacked fruition. Meachem (2012) claims the design of CCTs to transfer the money directly to women, was a political choice to prevent women from entering the labour market during the Argentine economic crisis. The *machismo* culture of Argentina conceives of men as breadwinners and will culturally prioritise the employment of men over women. Therefore, to secure the traditional family structure where men economically provide for their families, the state had to re-establish the *marianismo* woman to reduce social unrest during this time. The cultural capital which assigns gender roles within the lower classes of Argentinian society prevented women from seeking out more formal forms of labour, and their economic capital was severely limited to that provided by the transfers. They were therefore unable to emancipate themselves.

The cultural role of women for their reproductive capacity is practised in discourses, social policy programs, and even schools, therefore feeding into cultural capital (Jelin, 2005; Meachem, 2012). Women are perceived as the bedrock for the Argentinian state, for the support they provide to society daily on a community level and on a larger scale during nation-wide crises. There is therefore political interest in preventing any demographic transition that would upset this balance. Plan Familias was viewed to purposefully maintain this identity for the

greater good of society (Meachem, 2012). That is not to say the transfers did not still benefit children and their development. There is in fact sufficient evidence to suggest the effectiveness of cash transfers in promoting attendance to school and increased well-being in the short term (Nelson & Sandberg, 2017). Despite this, the design of Plan Familias did abuse and mould the cultural capital of the lower class through policy and trapped women in their roles for fear of losing their social capital. Additionally, they lacked the political capital to change that system and include themselves in the benefits brought by the transfers. Plan Familias was perceived to instrumentalise the female beneficiaries through cultural manipulation and reinforce their traditional roles as mothers to achieve poverty reduction and human capital creation in a cost-effective manner. While the structural efforts of those in power use political processes to prevent the emancipation of women and maintain the Argentinian identity, it is also the cultural and social capital reproduced in the lower classes that maintain those standards. Pressures by the state and the community enforce the moral obligation of mothers in how they spend their money, and to leave the role of the breadwinner to men.

Noticeably, it is Plan Familias and AUH, both programs which focused conditionalities on children as opposed to labour stimulation, that reinforce traditional gender roles. Plan Jefes y Jefas and the SCE on the other hand, who had labour conditionalities, did not. Their designs did not appoint development the responsibility of mothers and instead focused on increasing their inclusion in the labour market. Those programs attempted to encourage the productivity of women as labourers, rather than limit them to their reproductive capacity as mothers and actively exclude them from the economic sector. Unfortunately, both the SCE program and Plan Jefes were found to have little to no effect on the inclusion of women in the labour market (Escudero & Mourelo, 2017; Meachem, 2012). In fact, the SCE saw decreased activity for women and increased activity for men. The negative results were believed to be a result of the gender gap in the labour market which the program was unable to address (Escudero & Mourelo, 2017). As the gender gap in market opportunities is a result of structural power, and the cultural capital surrounding women's roles, CCT programs can at best hope to provide much needed income to women when they are unable to enter the labour market. Additionally, there was also speculation if the non-performativity of the programs was caused by a male-focused design of the program. While those programs were non-performative in their inclusion efforts, they did not exacerbate or worsen the social standing of women as did AUH and Plan Familias. They instead attempted

to fulfil the activation component of social policy by including women in the economic sector which could decrease their deprivations as impoverished persons. The AUH and Plan Familias on the other hand unfavourably included women as conduits of policy and excluded them from the productive sector.

5.2 Feminisation of obligation and responsibility in relation to poverty and the double burden

The conditional cash transfer programs that focus on children are more likely to reinforce gender roles in the household than conditionalities aimed towards labour market activation. The consequence of conditional cash transfers promoting traditional gender roles in the household consequently leads to a double (or triple) burden on women and a feminisation of obligation and responsibility in relation to poverty. The facilitation and creation of development becomes an aspect of the cultural capital of the maternal identity, and their social capital enforces their compliance with the programs. The double burden consists of a woman's reproductive capacity as a primary caretaker, and her productive capacity for both paid and unpaid labour (Wennerholm, 2002). The feminisation of obligation and responsibility in relation to poverty has to do with the increasingly important role of women as conduits of development policy; on the other side of it, men experience the masculinisation of ignorance and privilege as they are favourably excluded from that process (Tabbush, 2010). The state uses the cash transfer programs to outsource the responsibility of poverty reduction efforts directly to female beneficiaries increasing their unpaid labour. Poverty in the Argentinian context is perceived by government actors as caused by insufficient economic capital. Directing the transfers to women is advertised to provide them the economic capital to overcome that insufficiency. Women thereafter need to utilise that capital to reduce poverty (Dapuez et. al., 2016). A political process occurred as a result of this design, that saw women as failures if they were incapable of fulfilling those terms. Women are assigned the task of human capital development, and if the social policy intervention is non-performative women take the blame. In their culture, they are seen as having failed their maternal duties.

Transfers of the type made by Plan Familias and AUH constitute a crucial form of income and economic capital to impoverished households, but not enough to make ends meet

(Meachem, 2012). As the economic capital provided by the transfers is vital to the survival of the household, the policy design could be said to trap beneficiaries households in poverty, and therefore women (Meachem, 2012). As neither program offers the opportunity for women to become economically autonomous, they structurally enforce the domestication and feminisation of women; Plan Familias for example required women be unemployed to be eligible for the transfers. Plan Jefes and the SCE on the other hand, intended to create economic independence despite their non-performativity. AUH and Plan Familias normalise the incidence of poverty and use the cultural capital of impoverished persons to solidify the gender roles of women instead of emancipating them from those roles (Meachem, 2012).

Regarding Sen's theories on unfavourable inclusion, CCTs can enforce unfavourable forms of inclusion through their conditionalities. On top of the labours women spent on household chores and/or child-rearing, Plan Jefes required women to partake in community service hours to continue receiving the transfers (Meachem, 2012). Women were thus double burdened both for their productive and reproductive roles. The time women put into those community activities may have excluded them from spending their time and energy on other tasks they preferred. As these activities require a significant amount of time on top of the other time burdens women experience in the household, health implications may simultaneously occur as a result of increased stress and responsibilities (Batthyány et. al., 2005).

5.3 Critique of ethnocentric universalist feminism

Naila Kabeer warns against the victimisation of women that do not experience the same freedoms as women of the Global North (Kabeer, 2019). This victimisation occurs as a result of ignorance to the relative contexts and experiences of those women. Kabeer (2019) states these practices are unjust as they are viewed through the narrow scope of ethnocentric feminism. There is an ever increasing disregard for the diversity of feminism and empowerment across the globe, as it becomes narrated predominantly by the Global North. Such a view equates women of the Global South to have the same interests and ideologies as women of the Global North on the basis of their gender (Khan, 2020). This is what Dillon (2010) terms cultural totalitarianism; "the suppression of ideas and needs that are at odds with those mass marketed" (p.198). Kabeer (2019) defines the empowerment of women as "the capacity to make choices by those who have

been denied this capacity” (p.210). Similar to Inglis (1997), she views empowerment as the ability to navigate social structures, and make choices that are of importance to the individual. This includes being able to make choices that allow women autonomy, and have possibilities available through which their ambitions can be realised (Kabeer, 2019). She also criticises the way in which economic empowerment is often related to issues of labour force participation. Development agencies often attempt to include women in society by increasing the labour force participation of women as if it would automatically lead to empowerment. However, as Kabeer (2019) argues, this thinking disregards the unpaid labour of women, and can lead to the double burden of both paid labour and unpaid labour. In the case of the SCE and Plan Jefes, those labour conditionalities did not consider the other labours women took on as primary caretakers in the household. Referring back to Amartya Sen’s views on unfavourable inclusion, women encouraged into the labour market may feel this increases the burden they have to bear in order to support the family. While it is uncertain why Plan Jefes and the SCE were unsuccessful in sufficiently integrating women into the labour market, it could be attributed to this double burden factor. Between taking care of children and the household and taking on a job in the labour market, it is possible women prioritised the prior as a consequence of cultural capital; this is only a theory however and not to be taken as certain truth. As such, the monetary transfers from AUH or Plan Familias which focus their conditionalities on children may be able to relieve this unfavourable inclusion. This thought will be expanded on further in the following section.

The Swedish development agency SIDA in their paper on the feminisation of poverty also stated the need to understand the relative context of the women who are being addressed in any development policy. The perception of Northern and Southern women as having the same concerns in relation to poverty makes their actual needs invisible. While Northern women are concerned more with gender equality, impoverished Southern women are more concerned with meeting their everyday needs (Wennerholm, 2002).

Feminism in itself is dynamic. What it is depends on who you are asking. In the Global North, feminism is often regarded for its normative claim of men and women as equals (McAfee, 2018). Such a claim comes with philosophical critique: are women and men equal; are they comparable as creatures; does it make sense that they would have the exact same rights? Other feminists are more concerned with the oppression of women on the basis of gender, and still others aim to eradicate *all* oppression that women experience given the intersectionalities of

race, sexual orientation, religion, and more. (McAfee, 2018). That which is distinguished as oppression depends on the cultural and social context in which it is practised. In many developing countries, this oppression is related to labour market discrepancies and economic exploitation of the lower classes (McAfee, 2018). It is important in the development paradigm to recognise the cultural differences of women, and the oppressions they experience as a result of their gender, and furthermore, which freedoms they most desire to attain. Empowerment has not a solid definition, but a socially constructed one (Parry, 2004). That which constitutes power to a certain individual is the experiences and concerns relative to that person, informed by their cultural practices. In attempting to assess a social policy that relates to empowerment and emancipation, it is thus important to recognise the forms of power valuable to the focus audience rather than the Global Northern ideals of power.

5.4 Aspects of power available to beneficiaries

Considering the critiques on the ethnocentric oriented views of feminism, it is critical to address the relationship between CCTs and women through a pragmatic feminist lens. While it has been outlined above the ways in which traditional gender roles are being reaffirmed, the feminisation of poverty and the double burden of women, and the forms of unfavourable inclusion and exclusion women experience, the transfers offer other forms of empowerment.

For starters, the income women bring to the household as transfers increase their self-perception and confidence (Meachem, 2012). They view themselves as more capable mothers, able to provide economically for their children and therefore be included in their well-being. The transfers reduce stress in the household over having the economic capital to meet basic needs. Being free from the burden of financial stress through gains in economic capital could be considered a form of empowerment relevant in this context. While it may not be considered much, it still increases the relative power that women have to navigate themselves within a given society, and allows them to feel better included in their children's development. Money is not only a means to afford necessities, but is also social in nature (DuBois, 2021). It constructs the relationships people have, their lifestyle, and their sense of belonging in society. Even when viewed as a handout of sorts, women appreciate the transfers as a much needed help to the support of the household and a way to further include themselves in society.

Given the gender discrimination in the labour market, the transfers offer a more reliable source of economic capital to women. Instead of relying on husbands to provide income for the household and childcare, mothers had more decision-making power over how the transfers would be spent as a result of their access to economic capital (DuBois, 2021). As previously mentioned, the SCE program which aimed to move beneficiaries into the labour market through labour conditions, saw decreased activity for women believed to be a result of the inability for the program to address gender inequalities (Escudero & Mourelo, 2017). While CCTs are unable to address these cultural inequalities of gender roles, and may in fact strengthen them, they are able to provide income to women in the cultural context where the male breadwinner and female caretaker are practised. Women are therefore able to enjoy some decision-making power, and increased well-being from increases in economic capital.

The transfers also provide the possibility for women to emancipate themselves from partners. Despite the severity and incidence of poverty for female-headed households, many mothers prefer to leave abusive partners even with the accommodated economic risks (Chant, 2008). Due to the labour market barriers based on gender disparities, it is more difficult for mothers to make money through more official channels and could create hardships for a household void of a male breadwinner (Lacunza, 2010). Conditional cash transfers provide some relief from these difficulties by giving women the economic capital and agency to make those kinds of decisions for the welfare of herself and children. In an article written by Alcoba (2019) about the current economic crisis in Argentina, she stated that many women were unable to leave abusive relationships out of economic necessity. Women are especially vulnerable to hardships in times of economic distress as women are the first to be let-off and are therefore often dependent on male partners or family members to sustain them and their children (Alcoba, 2019). Given these realities, while the transfers may push women into inactivity or strengthen their traditional gender roles in the household, it can also provide the economic capital to give women greater freedom to make those choices. According to Kabeer's (2019) definition of empowerment, increased economic capital creates the possibility for women to make these choices that otherwise would not be as readily available. They are able to find purchase in an oppressive economic system, despite these difficulties. Even when partners are not physically abusive, women may still desire to have the freedom to separate with the presence of economic capital provided by the transfers.

Not only do these transfers present women with the possibility to leave partners, but gives women the opportunity to leave low-quality jobs (Garganta et. al., 2017). According to Gasparini and Marchionni (2015), the presence of social assistance and income to the household could prevent especially vulnerable, single women from taking low-quality or low-paid jobs. As such while the labour force participation of poor, single women may decrease, it may not in fact be an impediment to empowerment but gives them the opportunity to devote time and effort to more productive activities. The extent to which this is applicable in Argentina is difficult to judge. Further qualitative research is needed for conclusive evidence.

Returning to the unpaid community work required for beneficiaries of Plan Jefes y Jefas, women did not feel unfavourably included in the activities, nor were they opposed to them. While these labours could be critiqued as strengthening traditionally female roles, many women felt the work constituted legitimate forms of income to their household (Meachem, 2012). The women therefore enjoyed feelings of authority, and increased confidence and self-perception as valuable members of society. It made the transfers feel less like pitiful handouts, and more like well-deserved economic capital (Meachem, 2012). Subsequently, their sense of identity was strengthened as they felt more included in their society and its functioning. These forms of inclusion allowed women to increase their social capital by expanding their social networks. They had the opportunity to interact with other female beneficiaries, and consequently increased the opportunities available to them and contributed to their confidence in the form of friendships. Such sensations can only be equated to feelings of empowerment as women are able to better navigate society by both being included in social processes, and creating opportunistic relationships. Some of those opportunities include the chance for political organisation as the women are brought together in the community activities, and can increase their political capital (Tabbush, 2010). Meachem (2012) saw this as an opportunity to improve the severity of poverty they experience by organising and requesting transfer design reforms. According to Tabbush (2010), women who had politically organised from the social relations created in the Plan Familias program were able to effect some change through the unions they created, and increased the size of the transfers. Unfortunately, these improvements were limited to increasing the transfer to sums to address the more immediate needs of women (Tabbush, 2010). Their political capital was therefore not substantial enough to decrease their deprivations, even if it did increase their economic capital marginally.

The conditional cash transfers offered other forms of social inclusion. For one, the need to track beneficiaries over time and across programs required beneficiaries to have social identification (de la Brière & Rawlings, 2006). Argentina's government designed decentralised administrative institutions across the country, where beneficiaries could set up their official identity documentation and gain access to the programs (de la Brière & Rawlings, 2006). Whereas getting an identity to be officially recognised by the state was extremely difficult and time-consuming before the institution of the programs, the decentralised institutions made the process easy and quick. Many individuals involved in the programs stated the possession of a social identity in the official database made them feel legitimately included in society (DuBois, 2021). Identity constitutes a form of empowerment in terms of its inclusion effects, and social and political capital. It gives individuals a sense of belonging and importance by legitimising them as citizens. One of the forms of deprivation as experienced by impoverished households include lack of a social identity. Inclusion as a legal citizen can increase self-esteem and contribute to a sense of identity.

Beneficiaries of AUH were required to have bank accounts where the money would be wired to (DuBois, 2021). Beneficiaries claimed the bank account allowed them to be economically included in the modern economy (DuBois, 2021). The acquiring of bank accounts also provided women in the lower classes access to credit. Women were able to afford goods and services that otherwise would not have been available to them due to limited economic capital. The credit constituted a unique form of economic capital previously unavailable to them, and subsequently increased their decision-making power and autonomy within society. One negative aspect of credit was the lack of cultural capital around credit; what it was and how strongly its regulations were enforced. Whereas previously women could rely on illegitimate forms of credit practised culturally in their society based on trust, they were now legally bound to the time schedules of credit payments (DuBois, 2021). Borrowers could then be enslaved by their lack of cultural capital that does not educate about formal financial institutions.

Given these benefits, it is important to note the limited sum of economic capital provided by the transfers and the ways in which transfers reduce the chances of women seeking employment in the labour market (Meachem, 2012). The meagre transfers, while much needed, do not provide the full benefits that inclusion in the labour market would, and therefore potentially exclude women from opportunities they wish to have available to them. Whereas men

used the programs in-between periods of unemployment as they have access to more formal work, women were more likely to remain with the CCTs long term due to labour market discrepancies based on gender. Dependency on the transfers prevents emancipation from poverty and reinforces gender inequalities. Married women with children were more likely to be disincentivised to seek out work than unmarried women with children (Garganta et. al., 2017). Attributed to the income elasticity of labour supply, married women with working male counterparts did not experience monetary stress in the way unmarried women did (Garganta et. al., 2017). Unmarried women with responsibilities to their children are less likely to be affected by the conditional cash transfers on the basis that they are the sole source of income to the household. The cash transfers are just sufficient enough to provide women security and empowerment in relation to the forms of capital they provide, but not enough to emancipate them from the deprivations of poverty or cultural gender roles. Efforts to enter the labour market hold the potential of increasing economic capital more adequately than CCTs, and can possibly increase their political capital through social transformations regarding gender equality. Some beneficiaries expressed a desire for a job as opposed to depending on transfers for income to the household (DuBois, 2021). Lacunza (2010) suggests the only way for households to escape poverty is by making gains in the labour market. However the barriers to women into the workforce pose issues for that approach; and the image of the domestic woman as promoted by the currently running AUH stimulates those discrepancies. As the CCTs are the best option available to women for earning money, but also contributors to gender disparities in the lower classes, the transfers trap women in poverty (Meachem, 2012). It normalises the process of both the feminisation of poverty and the feminisation of responsibility and obligation in relation to poverty. Moreover, female domestic workers in poor areas have no legal maternity leave provisions (Lacunza, 2010). Childbirth composes another barrier women face for inclusion in the labour force. A lack of maternity leave provisions problematise women making sufficient income, even if they were employed. Furthermore, job access is not guaranteed after maternity leave. While it would seem that fertility rates would fall as a result, the cultural capital surrounding child-rearing in the lower classes causes women to prioritise their reproductive roles over the productive (Jelin, 2005). Because women are valued by their reproductive capabilities, their status in society depends on having and raising children sufficiently. Women are

accordingly excluded from official employment, and limited by the forms of capital provided by the transfers.

5.5 Empowerment or emancipation?

When taking a pragmatic feminist approach with respect to cultural differences, the CCTs in Argentina allowed women to practice empowerment in some aspects. They experienced more inclusion in social, political, and economic processes; they had more financial security and autonomy; and they saw themselves as more capable mothers and partners, and more valuable members of society. These forms of empowerment are the results of increased social, political, and economic capital, as well as increased inclusion in social activities. However, these aspects of power that women were able to experience only increased their ability to navigate structures within society, and therefore only increased *empowerment*.

Emancipation on the other hand requires social transformations that abolish or criticise the oppressive structures both at an institutional and social level. As demonstrated, the limited economic capital as provided by the transfers, the cultural capital which set standards for women, the lack of political capital, and their dependence on social capital were limitations towards their emancipation. The cash transfers are not only non-performative in the sense of emancipation, but they also actively prevent it. By exploiting the traditional gender roles as enforced by cultural capital, the transfer programs were able to be more cost-effective by using women as facilitators of development, thereby contributing to the feminisation of responsibility and obligation in relation to poverty. In assigning women these roles, cultural capital is moulded to reflect those expectations increasing the burdens and standards Argentinian women already face in their society. Additionally, the programs do not increase the inclusion of women in the labour force, and in the case of Plan Familias, purposefully excluded them from it. Women face extreme barriers to the labour force in the lower classes as a result of the *marianismo-machismo* culture, where men are expected to supply the household. Women are valued more for their reproductive than their productive roles (Rodríguez, 2017). The transfers supply enough capital to make up for the unemployment women experience, but not enough that their freedoms could contribute to emancipation.

For emancipation to occur, program designs would have to incorporate methods that address the culturally constructed gender roles so that women may enjoy increased economic and political capital, transform their cultural capital, and increase their inclusion in economic and social processes thereafter increasing their social capital beyond just the lower classes. So long as barriers exist for women in the labour market, it is very difficult for women and especially female-headed households, to survive without the interference of transfers.

5.6 Limitations

A good analysis will also include limitations to the research and theory creation process. Due to language issues, the sources presented in this paper were limited to those available in English. The inability to access Spanish sources may leave out significant perspectives on the issue, including the ways in which feminism and empowerment are perceived by Spanish-speaking authors. English-written authors may be more likely to reflect an ethnocentric view based on their educational background. Supposing that the majority of authors received education in the Global North, their narratives may better reflect the ideal there.

A second limitation was the use of secondary sources. Due to the inability to collect data firsthand, there was no way to devise a method designed specifically for the purpose of this thesis. The sources available on this topic and presented here may therefore not be sufficient enough for conclusions to be drawn. Ideally, this thesis would have used both secondary sources and the collection of first-hand data in order to compare and contrast the two in the efforts to problematise the ethnocentric view of feminism and approach this topic strictly from a pragmatic feminist lens. The best outcome would have been to have the perspectives of the beneficiaries as raw data without author bias, and further research is therefore needed. Yet, the sources employed here served the purposes of this thesis well, given they reflected an ethnocentric approach to the empowerment and emancipation of women which could be critically analysed. As well, the majority of sources were identified as legitimate sources from recognised publications. Those which were more difficult to corroborate were cross-referenced to ensure their reliability. This paper employs sources that shared similar conclusions and data, even when the research had different focus groups and/or methods. The validity of these sources is therefore perceived by the author to reach academic standards.

6. Discussion

The complexity of poverty makes the targeting of women in social investment strategies geared towards poverty eradication in countries with limited taxable income quite difficult. In the case of Argentinian transfers, the empowerment and emancipation of women was expected to be a runoff effect of their inclusion in the process. Instead, they were able to enjoy some aspects of empowerment, but the CCTs actively prevented their emancipation. The literature on the topic is few and far between, and research that does exist shows how crucial social policy assessment is, and the need to start focusing more on women. The gendered effects of CCTs in Argentina are not investigated thoroughly enough, and their qualitative effects even less so (Mahon, 2019; Tabbush, 2010). The emancipation of women is prevented by pushing women into inactivity, increasing their burdens, reinforcing their roles as primary caretakers, and exploiting their political maternal roles for the benefit of society (Chant 2008; DuBois, 2021; Molyneux, 2009; Tabbush, 2010). Whereas the conditional cash transfers should have addressed the cultural capital of women and their social positions, they reinforced them.

The design of transferring the income to women was not random, but based on evidence that women are more likely to spend the transfers exclusively on their children. Women are crucial to the success of conditional cash transfers (Lomelí, 2008). Evidence from the programs showed better results in the investment of young children as opposed to investments in labour inclusion of older generations (Nagels, 2021). Specifically pertaining to women, the labour activation component of the SCE and Plan Jefes failed to integrate women of the lower classes into the economic sector. When faced with decisions on how to spend the limited taxable income in the form of investments, it makes more sense from an economic standpoint to focus those resources on the human capital development of children (Nagels, 2021). Evidence that women are driving the success of the programs for the care they take of children and the transfers, is used to justify the use of women as conduits of development. The benefits they provide to the social policy design are perceived to outweigh their interests and rights (Nagels, 2021). To change the design of the program so as not to include mothers in the process of human capital development would be detrimental to the functioning of the policy. The reproductive role of

women is valuable in the development paradigm. If women have more children and those children become well educated and remain healthy throughout their development, a more productive workforce is created. Better educated and working women lead to decreasing fertility rates, and therefore reserving women for their reproductive capacities is seen as a better option for society.

Yet conditional cash transfers still play a vital role in the empowerment of women, if not their emancipation. Therefore the abolition of conditional cash transfer programs is not an option, either for the human capital development of children nor the much needed aspects of power provided by the transfers to the female beneficiaries. Aulicino and Waigrais (2019) push the need to analyse and monitor the negative effects of CCTs from a gendered approach so as to create meaningful policy design reformations that work both in the interest of women and the human capital development of children. In these assessments, the gendered perspective should not take the form of ethnocentric feminism, but a critical approach to pragmatic and transcultural feminism. Pragmatic feminism addresses the concerns and needs most relevant to the women in focus (Lake & Whipps, 2020). Transcultural feminism respects the differences between cultures and achieves to be non-colonialist, non-imperialistic, and non-racist (Aguinaga et. al., 2013). The assessment should focus on the experiences, context, geography and history of the women involved in order to appropriately address the forms of oppression they face rather than their perceived oppressions impressed by outsiders (Lake & Whipps, 2020). By approaching social policy in this way, the possibility for bottom-up development arises where women are able to voice their most pressing needs and concerns. Cultural diversity should be a cornerstone to development studies, to understand the taste and knowledge of different groups of people. The practice of victimising women of the Global South for the aspects of power they lack in relation to women of the Global North is not only unjustified but disrespectful to cultural differences. It is a poor conceptualisation that oppresses the voices of impoverished women and will fail to create change relevant to them.

While the fight for empowering and emancipating women is certainly a paramount goal, it is also important to allow those forms of power to come from the women themselves, rather than to force those ideals onto people of a different cultural background. Kabeer in Chant (2008) states “gender often operates through unquestioned acceptance of power” (p.181). The roles which gender are culturally assigned are a result of the cultural capital reproduced in classes.

When discourses relating to gender division echo through society, they are more likely to remain in motion. Women are able to see only a range of possibilities available to them, as predetermined by their cultural capital (Kabeer, 2005, in Chant, 2008). For emancipation to take place, those systems must be challenged through education (Nivala & Ryyänen, 2017). By educating and teaching women about the possibilities available to them and increasing their horizon of what is possible, women can become aware of other perceptions of feminism. Feminist development still needs to focus on *listening* to the needs of women, but increasing their awareness of the ways in which other women practice power, they may choose what aspects of power are important to them. Even when an individual is educated and their perspectives shift, it takes time before individuals are able to reformulate their identity and attempt to transform their environment (Parry, 2004). Until that point, development should focus on supporting women in their contextual struggles, rather than victimising them over the ethnocentric view of what feminist power is meant to be.

In addition to educating women on the opportunities available to them if they wish to take them, Lacunza (2010) suggests the best way for households to escape poverty is via the labour market. If cash transfers improved the ability for women to enter the labour force, the well-being and economic autonomy of female beneficiaries could increase along with that of their children (Rodríguez, 2017). However, it is also important that in the process of attempting to include women in the official labour market that it is something they desire to obtain and not a form of unfavourable inclusion. Integration into the labour market should therefore be an option available to women, rather than a requirement. It should offer the possibility for women to be empowered.

Furthermore, the social aspect of economic inclusion must be addressed (Arnold & Gammage, 2019). The social and cultural capital that shapes how women are expected to spend money must be changed before they can enjoy economic autonomy. As demonstrated, the economic capital available in the form of transfers is inaccessible to women, other than to be spent on their children. The sacrifices parents, and especially women, are expected to make in Argentina can force women to spend any income they make, whether from transfers or official forms of labour, on their children. Including women in the economic sector not only holds personal benefits, but also societal benefits. As evidenced time and time again, women are better reserved in spending money on the most vital needs when resources are low (Arnold &

Gammage, 2019). Empowering women is therefore not just a matter of bridging a gendered perspective to development, but also to best achieve real and sustained development over time.

As documented, CCTs in Argentina empower women in some aspects, are effective in alleviating the short-term severity of poverty in many households, and prevent the emancipation of women. Conditional cash transfers are a form of social policy that provides much needed income to many households in Argentina, and therefore what they require most are improvements in relation to the female beneficiaries who handle the transfers. Therefore further research and policy assessment on Argentina's CCTs is needed to reform the policy designs to better suit the needs of both mothers and children. This requires qualitative and mixed-method studies that are employed to better understand the needs of women as they see fit, and the cultural context in which they live. Listening as opposed to assuming needs to take a forefront in the development paradigm, so the struggles and the oppressions vulnerable people face can be effectively dealt with. The programs thereafter could be redesigned to address these issues and create meaningful change. As well, a focus on increasing the political capital of women is an important next step towards their emancipation. Whereas the transfers increased social and economic capital in some aspects, their cultural capital limited them and prevented their expanding of political capital. For development to take place from the bottom-up women must gain more purchase in political processes where they can voice their needs not only to development institutions, but work within their own societies to emancipate themselves. In this way can successful emancipation and meaningful power take place.

Word count: 13 246

7. Resources.

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