

Third-way neoliberalism and conditional cash transfers: The paradoxes of empowerment, participation and self-help among poor Uruguayan women

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The Latin American literature on Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) welfare programs has typically involved the quantitative evaluation of social and economic impact, with fewer studies addressing the qualitative and gendered impacts of CCTs. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork in poor squatter settlement communities in Uruguay, this article explores the everyday social realities of poor single mothers who have been disconnected from their kinship networks and must rely on CCT payments for survival. I locate these women's experiences within the third-way neoliberal discourses of 'empowerment', 'participation' and 'self-help' espoused by the state, and the various structural conditions, including crime, violence and unequal gender relations, that impact negatively on women's abilities to comply with their social and civic duties. I argue that rather than producing responsible and empowered subjects, Uruguay's recent CCT welfare program has paradoxically limited some women's participation in civic and public life and reproduced their dependent relations with men.

Keywords: conditional cash transfers, gender, Latin America

INTRODUCTION¹

In October 2004 I began ethnographic fieldwork in La Chacha, a squatter settlement in Montevideo, Uruguay, where I studied downward mobility and narratives of crisis among newly impoverished working- and middle-class Uruguayans who had migrated to the informal urban periphery.² In the first few months of my fieldwork, I experienced anxiety over whether I was doing 'real' ethnographic research due to the extended hours I was spending doing domestic tasks for my host family, including cooking and childcare. Believing that I should be spending more time 'recruiting informants' and doing interviews, I began to explore the settlement's public life more extensively. I volunteered to do the daily shopping and alternated between different stores or kiosks in the settlement. On my way, I would invariably stop at a street corner and strike up a conversation with an acquaintance passing by. I also made regular visits to a stretch of land populated by eucalypt trees, the only shaded area of the settlement, where residents would sit on hot summer days. It quickly dawned on me that

the majority of people who frequented public spaces were men. I rarely saw women sitting under the eucalypts and when I did they were always accompanied by their male partners. I sometimes struck up conversations with women on the street corner but they would never stay very long to chat, unlike the men.

Unfortunately, in my attempt to open up my ethnographic experience to more people, I had isolated myself from many women in the settlement who became increasingly suspicious of me as rumours spread that I was trying to steal their men. One of my friends and informants, Rosana, explained how I should avoid further problems from occurring: by respecting certain gendered expectations of spatial conduct whereby women remained in the domestic realm, unavailable to men outside their own household, thus both protecting themselves and reducing conflict with other women. My transgression of these expectations had profound methodological consequences for my research. Although I had gradually gained more access to women's domestic worlds, the majority of these women were single and living with their children. This opened up a window of opportunity to explore the gendered face of poverty and the vulnerability of single-parent families headed by women. There was, however, one piece of the puzzle that I struggled to understand. Throughout my stay in Uruguay, women frequently complained that their men were 'bad', did not work and were in fact a drain on the household. I wondered: what might be the benefit of keeping a 'bad' man and, further, of going to such lengths to ensure that he did not leave the household, potentially into the arms of another woman? Deciphering this puzzle required paying close attention to transformations in the composition of families, gender relations and social welfare policies in Latin America, and Uruguay more specifically.

According to the sociological literature, the traditional Uruguayan family was once characterised by the 'breadwinner' model where the father brings income to the family via his employment outside of the home and the mother dedicates her time to child rearing and domestic tasks (Filgueira 1996). From the 1970s onwards, the 'breadwinner' model in Uruguay gradually lost importance in the broader context of the second demographic transition, which was characterised by a drop in the rates of legal marriage and a huge elevation in divorce rates (Cabella 2006). These changes have led to a huge growth of single-parent families, predominantly headed by women. After a separation or divorce, women typically lose an important source of income that is unlikely to be supplemented by child maintenance costs from low-wage-earning fathers (Bucheli and Cabella 2005). Nevertheless, there is evidence in the broader Latin American literature to suggest that women may experience certain qualitative benefits from the absence of male partners in the household. These may include women's increased ability to plan economically for the household and their escape from relations of domination and violence often present in low-income households headed by men (Chant 2003). While there is no comparable literature in Uruguay, I also found this to be true among some single women; particularly, those who had formed extended families with female consanguineal kin, claiming to have deliberately refrained from allowing 'bad' men into the household due to their likelihood of draining income from the family.

While the absence of a man in the household may have been positive for some women, I found that this was not necessarily the case for my single female informants who had little support from kinship networks. These women instead had to rely on other survival strategies such as receiving aid from governmental, non-governmental and religious organisations. In this article, I am primarily interested in situating these women's experiences within the context of a newly implemented state social welfare program named the Plan of National Attention to Social Emergency (PANES). This Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) welfare program provided regular payments under the proviso that beneficiaries conform to certain duties, including participating in volunteer work and labour reinsertion programs and ensuring children attend school and regular medical check-ups. While some Latin American studies have shown that CCT programs may increase women's economic power within the household, particularly when they are the primary recipients of payments, other studies suggest that CCTs may lead to the reproduction of traditional gender roles (Valencia Lomeli 2008). For instance, CCTs may burden women with new responsibilities that are unachievable given other labour and domestic pressures, thereby further positioning women as dependent, or put pressure on women (rather than men or families) to enforce children's medical and school controls, and accordingly reproducing women's structured domestic roles (Molyneux 2007). While quantitative studies have analysed the impact of PANES on, for instance, labour participation, wages and women's power in making economic household decisions (finding few or even negative impacts on these variables) (Amarante *et al.* 2008), there have been no ethnographic or qualitative studies done on the gendered effects of the program.

In this article I tell the stories of my single female informants who had become disconnected from their kinship networks and relied predominantly on PANES for survival. My objectives are two-fold: first, to explore the social realities in which some poor Uruguayan women must negotiate the effects of recent transformations in the global neoliberal economy, including the recent implementation of a CCT welfare program; and second, to examine how this negotiation is complicated by certain structural conditions, including crime, violence and unequal gender relations. I make a contribution to the Latin American literature on single-parent households headed by women and the gendered effects of CCTs, under-researched topics in Uruguayan sociological and anthropological literature, by situating CCTs within broader third-way neoliberal policies and forms of governance that produce expectations of 'empowerment', 'participation' and responsible 'self-help' as viable forms of ending poverty. I show how structural conditions have produced limitations in some poor women's abilities to meet these expectations, potentially reducing women's access to both state welfare and other forms of support. In light of these limitations, the tendency for poor women to keep a hold of 'bad' men, observed in the opening ethnographic vignette, may result from a fundamental paradox: although the PANES program may have had certain benefits, it was insufficient and inaccessible for some poor women, leading them to rely on the social and economic security net afforded by 'bad' men and, thus, the reproduction of dependent gender relations.

THIRD-WAY NEOLIBERALISM IN URUGUAY

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Uruguay was known as the ‘Switzerland of the Americas’ due to its political democracy and progressive social welfare system, which featured minimum wages, social security benefits, generous old age pensions and retirement funds, free health services and free primary, secondary and tertiary education (Finch 2005). In the 1930s, like many Latin American countries at the time, Uruguay adopted the Import Substitution Industrialisation (ISI) economic development model, reducing its reliance on private and foreign capital by building internal markets via autonomous industrialisation (Finch 2005; Portes and Roberts 2005). ISI had some success in Uruguay, particularly in relation to the expansion of opportunities for employment and upward mobility. However, it was not sustainable and Uruguay, much like other Latin American countries, experienced growing inflation and an accumulation of foreign debt (Huber 2004). The resulting debt crisis marked the end of the ISI period and the rise of neoliberalism in Latin America.

The spread of neoliberal economic policies across Latin America throughout the 1980s and 1990s involved a number of key processes, including the withdrawal of states as providers of social welfare and employment, the contraction of domestic production, increased labour flexibility and currency devaluation (Robinson 2004). Neoliberal adjustments in Uruguay were not applied as aggressively as in other Latin American countries; however, structural reforms during the military era (1973–1985) and in subsequent conservative democratic administrations managed to partially dismantle the welfare state (Mesa-Lago 1997) and to implement extensive trade and economic reform, leading Uruguay to be ranked ‘as the second most liberalized economy in Latin America’ (Luna 2007: 13). Neoliberal reforms have led to rising poverty, inequality and class polarisation, largely due to a radical reconfiguration of labour conditions in Uruguay. This has included the contraction of public sector employment, freezing of the private sector, growth of the informal labour market and dramatic reduction of urban incomes (Katzman *et al.* 2004).

New labour conditions in Uruguay have impacted on men and women in different ways. Like other countries in the region, Uruguay experienced growing labour market segmentation during the neoliberal era (Filgueira 1996). According to Peri (2004), throughout the 1980s and 1990s Uruguay showed one of the highest rates of men’s unemployment and women’s participation in the labour market in Latin America. Nevertheless, women continued to suffer higher unemployment rates than men and typically worked in low paid jobs with little social protection or security (Aguirre 2003). These transformations contributed to various changes in Uruguayan gender relations and, consequently, to the transformations in family structures described in the introduction, particularly the growth of single-parent households headed by women. According to Katzman (1992), the erosion of men’s identities as economic providers and their consequent power within families (particularly given the ‘macho’

and authoritarian nature of gender relations in Latin America) has led men to refuse their family obligations, thus reproducing poverty and further weakening their authority and legitimacy within the family.

While neoliberal reforms have certainly contributed to transformations in labour markets and gender relations, neoliberalism cannot be interpreted as a totalising, coherent and unified set of practices and ideologies. Rose *et al.* (2006) argue that many governing regimes incorporate elements of neoliberalism without explicitly adopting neoliberalism as a master narrative or political agenda. Neoliberal regimes may also intersect and interact with other political regimes and ethical concerns (Ong 2006). Scholars have referred to this hybridity as the 'limits of neoliberalism' (Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008) or 'exception to neoliberalism' (Ong 2006). For instance, in Latin America, while neoliberal processes in the 1970s and 1980s were certainly aimed at economic reform, the opening of markets, free trade and the contraction of the state, later processes focused much more on social policy, particularly as it related to social protection and the relief of poverty, thus absorbing 'a diversity of ideological viewpoints combining elements of "thick" and "thin" liberalism' (Molyneux 2007: 12).

In Uruguay, the limits of neoliberalism are particularly evident from recent transformations in national politics after the election of a left-wing coalition named the Frente Amplio (the Broad Front) in October 2004. The Frente Amplio has maintained a strong discourse of moderation and increasing movement towards the centre, which closely resembles a third-way reformist approach (Panizza 2008) and which, according to Gledhill (2001: 126), 'resonates rather better with Latin American sensibilities than the more technocratic kind of neoliberal rhetoric'. While social democracy aims to minimise inequality through the intervention of the state in redistributing wealth, and neoliberalism views it as an inevitable outcome of capitalism that should be solved by individual determination to create wealth, the third way takes an intermediary position whereby the state should be responsible for reducing inequality and redistributing wealth by turning the poor into responsible, self-actualising subjects who are capable of lifting themselves out of poverty via entrepreneurial or other labour activities (Giddens 1998; Rose 2000).

Gledhill (2001) argues that the third way, or what Taylor (2006) calls 'third-way neoliberalism' in Latin America, fails to acknowledge the structural basis of poverty and inequality, thereby threatening to depoliticise, erase or 'disappear' the poor. This becomes particularly clear when examining how certain discourses have been mobilised within recent third-way neoliberal rationalities in Uruguay. While the Uruguayan state has traditionally been conceived of as holding responsibility for the welfare of its citizens, politics have increasingly drawn from a discourse of citizen 'participation' as the most viable form of addressing problems of socio-economic integration. This discourse was once focused on empowering marginalised communities to participate more directly in political decisions that impacted on the lives of their members (Chavez 2005). However, while the notion of 'participation' in development is rooted in a counter-hegemonic discourse, this 'buzzword' has been transformed in the neoliberal

era. States, international aid organisations and other entities such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) now encourage the poor to reduce their own poverty through ‘empowerment’, ‘self-help’, individual responsibility and active ‘participation’ in civil society (Cornwall and Brock 2005). These development buzzwords are not simply discourses mobilised in the attempt to neoliberalise individuals and communities; they represent cultural meanings and logics that people understand, respond to and act upon in diverse ways. Furthermore, these meanings, logics and discourses can have unpredictable and often paradoxical effects on people’s everyday lives (Sharma 2008; Shever 2008).

One way of exploring how these logics and discourses have affected poor women in Uruguay is to examine recent transformations in social welfare systems and, in particular, the implementation of a new CCT program that sets the context for the ethnographic data presented in this article. While there has been an abundance of literature quantitatively evaluating the outcomes of CCT programs in Latin America, little ethnographic work has been contributed to the Uruguayan or broader Latin American literature specifically about how third-way neoliberal discourses such as ‘empowerment’, ‘participation’ and ‘self-help’ have shaped the everyday social and economic realities of the poor and their engagement with CCT programs, particularly women who are the primary targets of such discourses.

PANES

As previously noted, Uruguay had a burgeoning social welfare system in the first half of the twentieth century that followed a strong protectionist discourse whereby the state was primarily responsible for ensuring the wellbeing of its citizens. The first cash transfer program, implemented by the welfare state in 1943, was the *asignación familiar* (the family allowance), originally available to formal workers with children and not to the unemployed or those employed in the informal economy (Pribble 2008). Over the years, the state has directed family allowances increasingly towards Uruguay’s poorer families (Aguirre 2003); however, it was not until 2004 that the state spread the coverage of family allowances to all low-income families with children (headed by men or women) in which total income fell to below a third of the minimum wage (Pribble 2008). These households began to receive 16 per cent of the national minimum wage (a little more than US\$10) paid every two months for each dependent child below the age of 14, or up to 18 years of age for those children continuing to study at a secondary institution.

In 2005, the Frente Amplio’s launch of a new welfare program dramatically changed how services were delivered to Uruguay’s poor. PANES was available to Uruguayan families classified as indigent or vulnerable to extreme poverty, and incorporated various levels of service delivery. One of the most important (and controversial) features of PANES was the *ingreso ciudadano* (‘citizenship income’) cash transfer, which consisted of 1,360 pesos (approximately US\$56 at the time) paid monthly into the bank accounts of recipients.³ Like other CCTs implemented across Latin America,

and very much in line with a 'no rights without responsibilities' third-way approach to welfare and poverty reduction (Giddens 1998: 65), PANES was provided conditionally under the proviso that recipients adhere to certain civil and social duties. A key duty expected of recipients was the regulation of children by ensuring their attendance at school and regular medical check-ups, with the possibility of being cut off from cash transfers if found to renege on this contract with the state. This duty was in fact already expected of recipients of the family allowance; however, its goal was once cast in relation to the avoidance of intergenerational poverty, and was newly articulated in PANES as producing 'participative, active and responsible' citizenship (Svalestuen 2007: 62). Another key duty newly introduced to PANES was the search for employment and participation in volunteer community work or work-for-welfare programs aimed at increasing social and labour reinsertion.

A total of 76,988 families successfully registered for PANES (Amarante *et al.* 2008), and approximately 53.4 per cent of recipients were women (Amarante *et al.* 2007). Approximately half of PANES recipients lived in nuclear families, 17.6 per cent in extended families and 27.9 per cent in single-parent families (mainly headed by women) (Amarante *et al.* 2007). An impact evaluation of PANES (Amarante *et al.* 2008) suggested that while the program led to significant improvements in children's primary school attendance and medical controls for children under the age of five, it showed no impact on other measures. There were no significant increases in labour market participation or hours worked and there was a negative effect on individual wages, particularly for women, and overall household wages for recipient families. Furthermore, given that more than half of recipients were women, the evaluation included indicators to measure women's empowerment in intra-household economic decision making, finding little change. Yet little has been written about why this may have occurred, or about the gendered effects of the program. Although the ethnographic data included in this article focuses on a very specific subset of women receiving PANES (single mothers who had few kinship networks or other sources of support), the results suggest that certain structural conditions, particularly gendered ones, may have contributed to restricting these women from participating in the labour market or PANES program activities.

'BAD' MEN AND THE DISADVANTAGES OF 'EMPOWERMENT'

For many of my informants, regardless of the composition of their families, the PANES cash transfers were a timely contribution to their households, particularly given the recent banking crisis in 2002, the economic recession that preceded it and the subsequent effects on employment opportunities. This was particularly so because the CCT payments to poor families were backdated from the date of their application for the welfare program, following its delayed implementation. Some families received back payments of up to US\$500. These payments provided many of my female informants, particularly those in extended families with other female kin, with a variety of opportunities, such as reconstructing their precarious homes from more durable

materials such as brick or concrete, starting up their own small business, or improving their consumption of durable household goods. However, for most of these informants, PANES was an additional contribution to wages (usually from employment in the informal economy) or other forms of economic or domestic support from family members. For a number of women I knew the benefits were not as straightforward, particularly for single mothers who described their drop into poverty as resulting from separation or divorce, with few or no kinship networks to cushion the fall. For these women, PANES payments were simply not enough to cover the daily cost of living, especially if drained by 'bad' men.

Locating 'bad' men and understanding the degree to which they were absent from, or transient in, the lives of their ex-partners was complex. It did, however, become easier during the year that PANES was implemented, through which I repeatedly observed the reappearance of 'absent' men around the time that women received their monthly CCT payments. For instance, 26-year-old Yanaina lived in La Chacha with her two young children after having separated from her ex-partner Pedro, who had been unemployed for many years. Pedro, like other single, unemployed men I knew, was unable to receive PANES as he had no dependents living under his roof, a small one-room shack in La Chacha that he shared with his older brother. Around the time that monthly PANES payments were due to recipients, Pedro would visit Yanaina in search of money or food. According to Yanaina, she often felt forced to give him resources, particularly since he had enacted violence on her during their relationship and had since done so again when she refused to give him money. Nevertheless, Pedro sometimes helped to take care of the children when Yanaina acquired casual employment or an odd job. Yanaina once described this occasional arrangement as a *mal necesario* (necessary evil): bad because she had less cash from PANES to spend on household costs, and good because she had few options for childcare and was able to work more when Pedro offered his time in exchange for food or cash payments. However, there were additional costs to this arrangement, which involved Yanaina's fear of domestic violence and her feelings of discomfort in maintaining an economic relationship with a man she had tried for several years to distance her family from.

Although extracting single women's monthly PANES payments was the most common way in which 'bad' men drained their ex-partners' household income, I also found examples of men doing so through other activities, such as stealing or drug consumption. In Rosana and her ex-partner Ricardo's case, it was both. Forty-two-year-old Rosana moved to La Chacha in 2002 with Ricardo and their infant son Fernando after having previously rented a home in a nearby suburb. According to Rosana, her standard of living had worsened significantly over the years, especially after moving to the squatter settlement, at which time Ricardo was jailed for two years. During this time, she had little support from kinship networks and was unable to find employment, partly due to her responsibility for caring for her son. Things started looking up for Rosana in August of 2005 when Ricardo was released from jail and began doing odd jobs around the neighbourhood and working in a market in the centre of Montevideo. At the end of October, Rosana began receiving the PANES CCT

payments from the state. She was back paid from her date of registration and she used the majority of this lump-sum payment (almost US\$400) to buy materials to construct a small kiosk in her front garden where she planned to sell cleaning products, chewing gum, lollies, cigarettes and other goods. Rosana was also aided by the fortuitous win of 10,000 pesos (approximately US\$450) in a lottery game. She used this money to buy products for her kiosk and by January 2006 'Kiosko Fernando', named after her son, was up and running and was bringing additional income to the household. Rosana was even planning on rebuilding her wood and zinc shack from more durable materials such as concrete or brick.

Rosana never did rebuild her home. Her good fortune gradually declined throughout 2006. Ricardo began consuming *pasta base* (a cocaine derivative similar to crack) and he started using the household income to support his growing addiction. According to Rosana, Ricardo also began taking goods from the kiosk for personal consumption. By August 2006, approximately one year after Ricardo was released from prison, Rosana was forced to close down Kiosko Fernando. Rosana even accused Ricardo of selling the door and the zinc sheeting roof from the small concrete construction. Rosana eventually asked him to leave. Although they remained legally separated, Ricardo continued to visit Fernando over the following months. I often heard Rosana's friends chastise her for continuing to see Ricardo after all that he had done, but she would explain that he occasionally brought over food or small amounts of cash, particularly toward the end of the month when Rosana's PANES payment was becoming exhausted. During one conversation with me, she further clarified her reasons:

Ricardo has made many mistakes and he has not given me the life that I deserve, nor to Fernando. But he is there when we need him. It is not easy for us to be alone, even with the Plan de Emergencia. It is barely enough for two people to eat. You see, Ricardo still supports us when we are short for the month. He brings food and clothes for Fernando. I do not ask him how he gets these things anymore. I do not want to know. All I know is that life is too difficult to struggle through alone. Ricardo did us wrong, but things were much harder for us when he was not here.

According to Rosana, Ricardo had become a 'bad' man, the same kind that women typically complained about. His movement in and out of jail over the years and his growing drug use had certainly played a large part in Rosana's increasing impoverishment. Nevertheless, although his actions sometimes led to problems for Rosana, Ricardo was also available to solve certain problems, especially economic ones associated with the limitations that welfare payments had on making ends meet.

The PANES welfare program undoubtedly helped many people I knew during my fieldwork, including my single female informants who described an elevation in their standard of living by virtue of ejecting 'bad' men from the household and retaining economic decision making among female kin within extended families. However, CCT payments were not sufficient for some women to maintain their households and support their children. Indeed, rather than 'empowering' these women to make

economic decisions, PANES had the opposite effect. It is evident from Yanaina and Rosana's stories that while 'bad' men drained welfare and other forms of income from their ex-partners' households in a number of ways, they simultaneously contributed to the economy of the household in times of need, locking women into dependent relationships with these men who sometimes enacted domestic violence. Somewhat paradoxically, while 'bad' men may be violent towards women, they may also offer protection in an environment in which women are increasingly vulnerable to other forms of crime and violence.

CRIME, VIOLENCE AND THE LIMITS OF 'PARTICIPATION'

Rates of crime in Uruguay have increased exponentially since 1998, particularly in marginalised peri-urban contexts, largely due to unemployment and growing social inequality (Aboal *et al.* 2007). In all the squatter settlements in which I conducted research, I found a growing sense of insecurity and fear of delinquency. Furthermore, these fears had crystallised into a dichotomy constructed around the perpetrators of crime: *malandros* and *rastrillos*. In Uruguay, the word *malandro* is used to describe a delinquent or scoundrel and the word *rastrillo* (meaning literally a 'rake') is used to describe a thief who steals indiscriminately, something that is small or large, valuable or otherwise. Both terms describe people who commit crimes (particularly robbery); however, according to my informants, there were important differences between these categories of criminal, largely related to their respective values and ethics. *Malandros* purportedly retained certain values, such as respect for family values and community solidarity. According to the accounts of some residents of La Chacha, certain *malandros* fed hungry children in the settlement, sometimes distributing money to the poorest families. In contrast, *rastrillos* had purportedly lost all trace of respectable values, which was evident through the frequent suggestion that they stole indiscriminately, even from their own neighbours or families.

Growing crime at the hands of *rastrillos* was a key concern for Nelita, a 35-year-old mother of four who moved to La Chacha in 2002 after separating from the father of her two youngest children. After surviving for almost three years on the family allowance and the occasional odd job, Nelita began receiving the PANES CCT payment in November 2005. Her back payment of just over US\$400 was particularly timely given that three months prior a violent storm had swept her shack away, destroying nearly all of her home's contents. Nelita used her back payment to rebuild her home from concrete and was gradually able to replace many of her family's belongings. Six months after rebuilding her home, Nelita found herself in a difficult situation when she was forced to ask her new boyfriend, who had recently moved into her home, to leave. According to Nelita, he drank too much and would act violently towards her and even her children. Although she insisted that she would not tolerate domestic violence, Nelita also described the difficulties she had experienced with security since her ex-boyfriend's departure:

It is good to have a man in the house because people do not bother you as much, and there is one person more who can watch over the house. There is a heap of *rastrillos* living in the *barrio* now. It was much quieter before but now they will rob everything if you are not looking. A few weeks ago I hung up the girls' clothing on the line and two hours later it was all gone. I did not even hear them coming. It has gotten worse since people started receiving the *Plan de Emergencia* because the *rastrillos* know that all of the neighbours have new things in their homes. If I start this *Trabajo por Uruguay*, or whatever other job, who will stay and watch over the house? We would lose everything. The *Plan de Emergencia* got me out of the hole and look how well we are now. If I let the thieves steal everything we have, then I will be straight back where I started, in the hole.

Earlier in this article, I noted that PANES was paid under the proviso that recipients adhere to certain civil and social duties such as volunteering in community activities, participating in work-for-welfare programs (in Nelita's case, a program named *Trabajo por Uruguay*—Work for Uruguay) and sending their children to school. At the beginning of 2006, Nelita sent her son to high school as she said she would. However, he withdrew halfway through the year to begin working. According to Nelita, the PANES payment was not enough to support the family. Furthermore, she suggested that since her ex-boyfriend had left, she needed to stay home to protect the contents of the house. Nelita also told me that she was frightened that if the Ministry of Social Development found out that her son was no longer attending high school, they would suspend her welfare payments. Out of fear of losing everything again, Nelita had reneged on her contract with the state by purposefully not looking for work or participating in community activities and by removing her son from school.

Nelita's choice to stay home in order to protect the contents of her home reflects an increasingly popular way in which poor squatters are dealing with rising crime. This occurs in the context of growing perceptions of the inability of the state to address the concerns of its citizens, particularly poor ones. Some of my informants suggested that there were simply not enough police officers and, further, that they rarely made their presence felt in the squatter settlements. Others suggested that the police were often in cahoots with criminals and could not be trusted, this corruption perceived to be largely due to low salaries. These perceptions are grounded in the very real effects of neoliberal policies in the last decades of the twentieth century, which led to drastic reductions of state salaries, particularly in the armed forces (Bogliaccini 2005). According to Bogliaccini (2005), this has led to a weakening of security provided by the state and a greater reliance on private forms of security. For those lacking the economic resources to access private security guards or alarm systems, less costly practices, such as always leaving the house attended, have had to be followed.

While fears of crime such as theft were common in my field sites, I found that residents of La Chacha, particularly single women, also complained of vulnerability to violence. Often, these fears of violence were associated with the belief that residents may suffer violent retribution from criminals if they went to the police after witnessing crime within the settlement. For instance, Rosana once described her daily experiences of crime and fears of violence while her ex-partner had been in jail:

Some people stole from me. They tore down my fence and they would throw stones at the shack at night to scare us. I knew who they were. They were young people from here, from the neighbourhood. But I could not report them to the police. Who knows what they would have done to Fernando and me? They may have burnt our shack down. You just cannot get involved with those things. When there is no man in the house, you have to be very careful.

According to popular stories, one way that perpetrators of crime take revenge on squatters for reporting them to the police is by burning down their homes. Although I did not witness an example of vengeful criminals burning down the homes of residents, this was a very real fear among my informants who assured me that threats from delinquents were common.

Escalating crime and violence have locked some women into fearful living conditions so that the absence of a resident partner in the household may reproduce insecurity and hinder women from participating in the public sphere. This limitation of women's participation may have severe consequences for their ability to comply with PANES CCT program requirements, whereby beneficiaries are expected to search for employment, participate in work-for-welfare programs or volunteer in their communities, no matter what their situation. In this context, the presence of a 'bad' man in the household may be an advantage for a number of reasons, including his contribution to the security of the household and protection of those living within it. Consequently, they may provide women with more opportunities to overcome the limitations of participating in social and civic life that they might experience living alone in a context of fear. For those women who cannot rely on welfare or the contribution of their ex-partners (however sporadic), and who may thus be limited in their opportunities for social and civic participation, other kinds of support networks are required to meet everyday social and economic needs. These networks, however, may come with their own cost.

NEIGHBOURHOOD SOLIDARITY AND 'SELF-HELP'

My single female informants frequently derived economic and social support from local community or neighbourhood relationships within the squatter settlement, through what my informants referred to as *solidaridad vecinal* (neighbourhood solidarity). That social solidarity has been displaced from the state and reformulated as the responsibility of communities or neighbourhoods is perhaps not surprising given recent anthropological literature suggesting that rather than being eliminated, solidarity, and the discourses and meanings associated with it, may be transforming in response to the spread of neoliberal rationalities (Shever 2008; Dockendorff *et al.* 2010; Muehlebach 2012). For instance, Dockendorff *et al.* (2010) argue that Chilean discourses of solidarity in the neoliberal era have shifted away from social democratic representations of social justice, mutual care and the common good, primarily exercised by the state, towards a kind of moral imperative for civil society to exercise

solidarity to solve its own problems of exclusion and poverty. My research suggests that a similar process of moralisation of civil society's enactment of solidarity may be occurring in poor Uruguayan enclaves, and that women are among its primary targets.

While many different types of families living in La Chacha received help in the name of solidarity, single mothers were particularly supported. This support came from a number of sources including through formal networks such as the squatter settlement's neighbourhood commission.⁴ La Chacha's neighbourhood commission members made no secret of their agreement that single women and children in the settlement were deserving of support, particularly through donations of clothing and other resources. Although these members claimed to give assistance through a sense of compassion and care, there were many occasions in which I observed an underlying expectation that solidarity would be reciprocated in particular ways, especially in relation to participation in activities that would further the goals of the commission and, therefore, purportedly the 'community'. These included participation in neighbourhood meetings, volunteer work, and even help in constructing the local medical centre. Commission members often exerted more pressure on single women due to the free time they were assumed to have as many did not work outside of the household. When residents did not reciprocate, for whatever reason, it was not uncommon for commission members to suggest that they should stop going out of their way to help people who would not reciprocate solidarity and who were unwilling to help themselves. Consequently, and somewhat paradoxically, expectations of reciprocity were based on perceptions of a necessary return to the community, yet they were expressed through a language of individualism whereby participation in community events and activities was described as a form of 'self-help' that could enable women to remove themselves from poverty.

Neighbourhood commissions were not the only sources of solidarity for struggling families such as those headed by women. I found that residents of La Chacha also exhibited everyday acts of solidarity towards single mothers. Some residents would provide supplies when they knew particular families were struggling. More generally, I found that solidarity was expressed through help with everyday commitments or responsibilities, such as childcare or making home repairs or improvements. I found that those individuals who exhibited solidarity to women did not expect reciprocity through participation in community activities but, rather, expected reciprocity through women's attempts to participate in the labour market. This was evident from the reactions of residents when women refused to work. For instance, Nelita's refusal to work due to her fear of having her belongings stolen by *rastrillos* was met with some hostility from her neighbours, who professed to have little empathy for those unwilling to help themselves by working. While these discourses of 'self-help' did not incorporate expectations of community involvement, as was the case with members of the neighbourhood commission, they certainly reproduced a rhetoric of individualism through which women were seen as responsible for lifting themselves out of poverty despite structural factors that impacted on their access to employment.

The emphasis some of my informants put on 'self-help' as the most effective way to escape poverty was also evident through the continued support they gave to women who created entrepreneurial forms of employment. I found that in La Chacha, opportunities for entrepreneurial activities expanded after the implementation of PANES with several residents spending their back payments on products or resources to develop their own small businesses. Amidst fears that the PANES CCT program might degrade the work ethic of the poor, I found it common for residents to reward women who used their back payments to support entrepreneurial activities. One woman from La Chacha began selling cleaning products door-to-door (such as bleach and soap) and although several people complained that the products were of poor quality and less effective than the more popular brands, many would buy at least a bar of soap from her. When hearing one elderly woman complain about the quality of the dish-washing liquid, I asked her why she continued to pay for products that were inferior. She suggested that people should be rewarded for 'getting off their backsides' and finding work.

Interestingly, I found that some residents attempted to enforce reciprocity onto those claiming CCT payments who were perceived to be failing to help themselves through their lack of participation in entrepreneurial activities or labour reinsertion programs. Several residents repeatedly attempted to recruit welfare recipients into certain volunteer activities, particularly those linked to PANES. For instance, in autumn of 2006 news emerged through a local NGO that the municipal administration was encouraging PANES beneficiaries to volunteer in a community program that involved door knocking to collect clothing and blanket donations for poor families. Several residents of La Chacha (none of them welfare recipients) formed a group with the purpose of recruiting PANES recipients to participate in the program, particularly single mothers due to their assumed availability. The recruitment group claimed to have done this for a number of reasons, the primary one being in order to 'help' the poor build a sense of solidarity by helping others in the community. Another key reason was to help the poor learn to help themselves out of poverty by developing or maintaining a work ethic.

In La Chacha, although neighbourhood commission members and other residents claimed to enact solidarity towards single mothers receiving welfare, they frequently expressed expectations of reciprocity such that women should participate in entrepreneurial activities, neighbourhood activities or volunteerism. Reciprocity is, of course, central to social solidarity and anthropologists have long drawn attention to how solidarity and social ties are connected to exchange and gift giving (Komter 2005). It is interesting to note, however, that expectations of reciprocity were framed around individual 'self-help' rather than a relational connection between participants in the solidarity exchange. The poor have long participated in particular 'self-help' strategies to alleviate poverty, such as the construction and maintenance of social and fictive kinship networks (Hyatt 2001). Yet I found that 'self-help' had been defined through a rhetoric of individualism rather than social and kinship network connectedness. Furthermore, civil society and community groups attempted to police some women's

'self-help' activities through a moralising discourse of personal responsibility for removing oneself from poverty. As a consequence, my single female informants' access to sustained networks of solidarity were fragile and dependent on them helping themselves and thus sustaining their positionality as moral subjects who were deserving of support.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this article, I presented an ethnographic vignette that outlined the methodological basis for my opportunity to both engage with single women and pose a subsequent question about what the value of 'bad' men might be, particularly to single mothers who have limited options for social and economic support. Although 'bad' men are not the main issue of interest in this article, I certainly found that understanding my informants' everyday social realities relied on analysing how their negotiation of new CCT welfare systems was complicated by structural conditions such as unequal gender relations, particularly with 'bad' men. The literature has suggested that the 'bad' man is an outcome of the neoliberal destruction of labour markets, which subsequently led to the transformation of the structure of Uruguayan families, including the growth of single-parent families headed by women. More recently, third-way neoliberal discourses, evident in the PANES CCT program, called for poor women to empower themselves and embrace 'participation' and 'self-help' in order to remove themselves from poverty. However, in a context of crime and violence and the increasing civic policing of self-actualising subjects, the enforcement of 'participation' and 'self-help' discourses through expectations of compliance with PANES duties has paradoxically led to some women's disempowerment. It has lessened these women's participation in civic and public life and reproduced their dependent relationships with men who may enact domestic violence and extract from, as much as they contribute to, the economy of the household.

The Latin American literature on gender, families and CCTs has indicated that in some contexts the absence of male partners may be beneficial for the social and economic wellbeing of women in low-income households and, furthermore, that CCTs paid directly to women may additionally contribute to their economic power within the household. The research presented in this article suggests that in Uruguay these benefits may not be relevant for all women, particularly single mothers with few kinship networks who must rely predominantly on CCT payments and who are simultaneously locked into dependent relations with men. Furthermore, my work suggests that understanding the everyday social and economic complexities faced by poor single mothers receiving CCT payments, and their potential limitations in complying with conditional civic and social duties, requires incorporating qualitative and ethnographic methods and analysing how third-way neoliberal governing tools such as 'empowerment' and 'participation' may have unintended and even paradoxical consequences for the recipients of state social protection interventions to alleviate poverty.

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NOTES

- 1 This research was conducted in the School of Philosophy, Anthropology and Social Inquiry at the University of Melbourne.
- 2 I conducted research in seven squatter settlements in Uruguay's capital city Montevideo and in various cities in the department of Canelones, for a period of over two-and-a-half years at various times between 2003 and 2007. This article is based on data collected in my primary field site, which I refer to as La Chacha (a pseudonym). The names of my informants used in this article are also pseudonyms.
- 3 PANES ran until September 2007, thereafter being replaced by the Plan de Equidad (the Equity Plan). A central feature of the Equity Plan was the elimination of the CCT payment in lieu of a sizeable increase of the family allowance for low-income households, although more generally its aim was to extend social assistance coverage and create a more viable long-term welfare program.
- 4 A squatter settlement's neighbourhood commission typically represents the needs of the residents when communicating with governmental and non-governmental agencies, particularly in relation to obtaining land titles and receiving social and infrastructural resources.

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