

**RELATIONS THAT MAKE THE AUH WORK: UNDERSTANDING ARGENTINA'S
CONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFER PROGRAM**

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores how Argentina's Conditional Cash Transfer policy, the Asignación Universal por Hijo (AUH) or the Universal Child Allowance operates in conjunction with established day-to-day relationships. When state support is important, but at the same time not enough, how does the policy become a part of people's lives? The types of relationships I pay close attention to are those involved in the domestic, household, familial, and land-based realm. I argue that people depend on prior and existing relationships to make the policy work in the ways that it does. The ways people make the policy work are heavily tied to the policy's focus on children. These actions are contextualized by broader processes of marginalization which limit the extent that AUH recipients can better their own lives and the lives of those close to them. I make this subtle argument through the small details I exemplify in each chapter.

List of Abbreviations Used

ANSES: Administración Nacional de Seguridad Social (National Administration of Social Security)

AUH: Asignación Universal por Hijo para Protección Social (Universal Child Allowance for Social Protection)

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“It (the AUH) helps. Because when one does not have (the money) to take your children somewhere-you know how kids are they ask for everything, to not have (the money) to buy them things, it makes you feel bad. And since we have had the Asignación, you can say ok, it is all right with this money. And even some stores, they will give you credit with the Asignación, and then you can buy your children clothes, or shoes, or whatever”.

- Melanie, AUH recipient

In the above quote, Melanie highlights how the AUH (Asignacion Universal por Hijo para Proteccion Social- Universal Child Allowance) is technically a relief. Melanie, is a young mother residing in Barrio Ruedas with two young children. She works fixing cell-phones which provides her with some income and she is a recipient of the AUH. The policy gave her a form of economic freedom she previously did not have. This freedom allowed her to provide for her children in ways that she was unable to do without the money she received from the policy. This is just one example of how the AUH becomes an intricate part of parents’ relationships with their children. The policy makes possible certain acts of care, forms of affection, economic strategies, independence, and in some cases, it even makes temporary survival possible. The policy alone, however, is no magical remedy to the all too common circumstances of economic disparity that are a constant presence in the lives of many of the Mar Platenses (people from Mar del Plata) I spent time with throughout my fieldwork. This thesis is an exploration of how one policy is lived, contested, and understood by those whose lives the policy aims to benefit.

In particular, this thesis looks at the kinds of relations people have and use to make ends meet, and how these relationships are impacted by a policy that is often instrumental, and at the very least helpful, to achieving this end. I ask, if the AUH is not enough to live off what kinds of

other support systems become important. How do recipients and those close to them make the AUH work? Given the household, familial, or domestic focus of the policy, the types of relationships I pay close attention to are those involved in these somewhat bounded, but nonetheless porous and fluid relational realms.

The AUH was introduced in 2009 by decree by President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner as an extension to the already existing family grant system in place within the country (Bestard., Carrasco, & Kantor, 2012; Arcidiacono, Barrenechea, Paura, & Straschnoy, 2012). The AUH is assigned to those children whose parents are unemployed or work in the informal economy and make equal to or less than the minimum monthly salary which as of July, 2017 was increased to 8,860 pesos, approximately \$645 CAD (Urien, 2017). The program, however, is more than simply state authorized social assistance. It operates under the pretexts of a rights-based approach to welfare, meaning that individuals are entitled to state-financial support irrespective of their position as labourers in the formal labour market (Arcidiacono et al, 2012). The policy is often portrayed as an extension to the country's already existing family grant system for registered workers, called *el salario* or the *Asignación Familiar*; a monthly sum given to registered workers on behalf of their children which first began in the 1940's. Currently, a monthly sum of 1246 pesos (currently about \$90 CAD) is given per child under the age of 18 up to a maximum of five children¹. Eighty percent of this amount is given directly to the mother of these children, except in cases where a father or other guardian is designated, and is accessible via a bank account. Twenty percent of the funds are held by ANSES, they are to be distributed once a year on the condition that the caregiver of the child provides official documents

¹When I conducted my fieldwork the sum received through the program was 966 pesos per month. At that time this was equivalent to roughly \$88 CAD.

demonstrating that the child regularly attends school and has received vaccines and the necessary health check-ups. These are the conditions of the program (ANSES, 2017).

The AUH is widely credited with significantly reducing poverty in the country. Just two years after the program's initiation, household poverty had been cut in half (Roca, 2011). Currently, the program provides financial support to the parents (or guardians) of more than 4 million children, who, prior to the program's initiation, remained outside of the country's grant-based social protection sphere (ANSES, 2017; Arbia, 2017; Lousteau, 2017). The AUH is just one of many CCTs in place in Latin America and, like almost all other CCTs in the region, the AUH intervenes at the level of the family and household (Gasparini & Cruces, 2010; Lomeli, 2008). My research explores the puzzle of how families, and other relational networks are central to the performing of CCTs. I pay close attention to how individuals bound in certain familial and other relations become involved in the policy and in so doing, shape how CCTs are lived and what these programs come to mean for those who are either direct recipients of the policy, or the people close to them. This puzzle is best studied through an in-depth case study of one program to consider the nuances and functioning of that program, the historical and political contexts which shape the program, and the lived ways that familial and neighbourhood relations become integral to the program. These tasks are important for developing a full understanding of how poor people in Mar del Plata make and form their lives in relation to policy.

My research project is not so concerned with whether the policy is effective in this sense (and for whom). The goals of the policy are notably different depending on who you ask. Instead, as I have noted, my project aims to delve into the relational complexes of those receiving the policy's monthly sum. I ask, what happens in the day-to-day lives of families, parents, children, and neighbours because of the policy, and how people come to understand

their own relationships through the policy? My thesis explores how the policy works in the ways that it does because of the relationships that people have with others close to them. Indeed, it is because of this policy and particularly the policy's emphasis on children that the AUH becomes a part of these relationships, through the actions required by recipients and others to make the policy work. In so doing, the policy shifts the meanings of these relations while also shaping what the policy itself comes to mean. My argument is not grandiose, but rather an avocation that the day-to-day relations people have with each other matter politically. This claim is evident in the details of my analysis which focus on the particularities of recipients' experiences with the AUH policy.

Specifically, I suggest that the AUH intervenes and becomes a part of daily relations in three overarching ways. First, the policy becomes a component of the moral realm of recipients' lives especially through how recipients use the policy to improve the lives of their children. Recipients are often deemed unworthy of state support (undeserving poor sentiments) by the broader public and therefore distinguish themselves from other recipients to improve their own moral status. Secondly, the policy (and the ways recipients live out the policy) occupies a curious space between state assistance and neoliberal-individual responsibility. The policy helps, but it also requires that individuals use their existing familial and broader social networks for the policy to work to a fuller potential. Indeed, the policy plays a role in creating the family because it makes the family primarily responsible for carrying out the AUH. Thirdly, the policy in effect enhances the importance of attaining income through employment because the policy alone does not provide enough money for survival. This is connected to importance of kin and others in making the policy work.

I aim to offer insights both to an anthropology of kinship and to an anthropology of the welfare state, through an exploration of the ways policy is tied to familial, neighbourhood, *terreno* (a plot of land) and friend relations. On a practical basis, this research is useful for developing a clearer understanding of how policies become lived in the day-to-day sense, as I suggest some of the ways that the AUH's impact in recipients' lives is more extensive than may originally be anticipated. Moreover, giving academic merit to what are assumed to be the "little things" in the lives of those people who are often deemed trivial to global society, is one means of countering this false assumption. This research suggests that there are significant number of people in Mar del Plata who need state support, and additional state resources for survival. Policies that accept this reality and work to address it, can further a future where people are seen as entitled to state assistance that enables survival irrespective of employment status. Of course, this thesis also plays a role in complicating the illusion that policies work in perfect or idealistic ways. Recipients, or those intended beneficiaries, play a large role in making the policy work as it does.

Chapter 2: Finding Family in the Current Argentine Political Landscape

By exploring the effects, understandings, and lived realities of one welfare program (the AUH), I aim to contribute helpful insights into what it means to the functioning and interpretation of public policies, that certain familial and neighbourhood relations are essential. Moreover, my field-research has focused on addressing this question from the perspective of AUH recipients and those close to them. I will draw from three areas in the literature to both contextualize and theorize my analysis of the AUH: conditional cash transfers (CCT) and neoliberalism, kinship and household studies, and a brief history of family based Argentine policy. I have chosen these fields because they contextualize and historicize my research problem while also speaking to broader welfare issues of the present.

Cash Transfer Programs & Neoliberalism

Some social scientists have positioned themselves as advocates for cash transfer programs while others have argued that their neoliberal nature suggests these projects require serious questioning. In defining neoliberalism, David Harvey (2005) argues that the concept is “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade” (p.2). In this sense the emphasis is on ensuring that the individual is able to excel through his or her own potential. It is worth drawing attention to this distinction between neoliberalism as theory and neoliberalism as practice, because the distinction between the two leaves space for the messiness of reality: neoliberalism in practice is never as it is in theory, but the theory of neoliberalism frames how the processes of neoliberalism operate. Furthermore, distinguishing neoliberal theory from neoliberalism as it is carried out variedly is important because it hinders the

conceptualization of neoliberalism as a totalizing political project and leaves room for understandings of political and economic contexts which stem from particular places and moments. It is, as Daniel Fridman (2010) reminds us, ironic that, “neoliberalism’s rationale is that the government artificially creates the conditions for individuals” who act to their own economic advantage to be produced (p.291). This is ironic because free, rational actors are essential to neoliberal governments. But, as Fridman (2010) contends, these individuals “have to be created, nurtured and promoted through active government intervention, partly overriding the freedom and autonomy that is to be created” (p.291). In this way, neoliberal theory and practice are contradictory. As is clear in the above case, but is also true in many other ways, the interventions which neoliberal projects must employ, do not necessarily operate in the theoretically neoliberal form in which one would think they should.

Conditional Cash Transfer programs, of which the AUH is one example, operate within this space of tension between neoliberal theory and neoliberal practice. They both extend the realm of state support, widening social security networks in many ways through direct financial assistance. At the same time, however, as Veronica Schild (2013) argues, they expand the realm of the markets through a neoliberal rationality that places families as units responsible for themselves and their activation in the economy. CCT’s tend to operate through redistributive measures which place an emphasis on improving human capital (Rawlings & Rubio, 2005). As such, these programs do not necessarily challenge capitalist relations of power. Power relations remain intact through the maintenance of certain labour relations which involve excluding some from profitable and entitled labour positions and relegating others to more exploitative types of work (employed vs. unemployed, formal and informal labour).

James Ferguson (2015) has argued that cash transfer programs, one model of what he

terms more broadly “distributive policies”, have serious potential to improve the livelihood of many people around the world. In *Give a Man a Fish*, Ferguson (2015) explores the important role that distributive policies have played in ensuring the survival of a large portion of the South African population. He suggests that even though distributive policies have a neoliberal flavour, they should still be considered as positive policy programs. This is primarily because of the ways in which these policies allow for people to be brought into a social sphere of state dependence at a time when so many are excluded from both the wage labour and market sphere (Ferguson, 2015).

In his book, Ferguson (2015) frequently cites Tania Li (2010). Li published a compelling article about the changing relationship between labour and capital accumulation in which she explores the need for “make live interventions” (p.67). Li argues that “make live interventions” are those programs and policies which address the needs of the increasing number of people around the world whose labour, now unnecessary to processes of capital accumulation, is considered surplus. Li argues that the current economic situation which no longer requires the labour of a vast amount of people around the world leaves many to die. She argues that “make live interventions become urgent when people can no longer sustain their own lives through direct access to the means of production, or access to a living wage” (Li, 2010, p.67). In this sense, CCTs are make live interventions which allow people to survive in dire situations where paid-employment is not an option.

Positioning herself in opposition to Ferguson (2015), Veronica Schild (2013) is quite concerned about the neoliberal flavour of CCT programs in Latin America. Moreover, she brings gender into discussion of CCT’s which is a frame relatively absent from Ferguson’s ethnography. Schild (2013) explains, speaking to the context of Chile, that CCTs both deepen the

social protection floor and engrain the neoliberal state further within the fabric of society. The neoliberal form of the Chilean state is, as she argues, both coercive and enabling, but also feminized. Schild argues that Chile's CCT, *Chile Solidario* acts as what she terms the caring arm of the state. Notably, this ameliorative arm of the state is complemented by what she terms a punitive dimension which targets men through "aggressive and punitive forms of regulation and control" (Schild, 2013, p.197). Schild (2013) demonstrates how the caring dimension of the state, as directly facilitated by Chile's CCT program Chile Solidario, in contrast targets women. Although Chile Solidario is focused explicitly on providing assistance for families, especially children, she argues women become the actors responsible for facilitating their family's transition from indigence to simply one of poverty. Thus, Schild demonstrates why gender is a crucial frame of analysis for contextualizing not only who CCTs involve, but the broader implications that CCTs have in other aspects of daily life.

Missing from Schild (2013), and Ferguson (2015)'s analysis of cash transfer type programs however, is attention to how CCTs vary from case to case. Here, Lindsay DuBois' (2014) attention to the extent to which CCTs strengthen social protection floors, is especially helpful. She pays attention to how the role CCT's play in enhancing neoliberal models of government and hindering welfare models depends on the program in question and the prior welfare components of that country. As DuBois suggests, Argentina's AUH is a particularly interesting case study in this regard because it seems to have been put in place to strengthen the Argentine welfare state, as opposed to enforcing a neoliberal one. As Bertranou & Maurizio (2012) likewise insist other CCT programs in Latin America, like Bolsa Familia (Brasil) and Oportunidades (Mexico) differ from the AUH because they exist outside of their countries' social security systems. As will be made clearer below, the AUH is embedded within and

extends the country's previously established social protection sphere. This social protection sphere is extended by intervening at the family and household level. By intervening at this level, social protection is produced by using pre-existing family and household support networks.

Kinship (Family) and Household

As many feminist scholars have noted, family and household are two terms which although often conflated, hold important distinctions (Harris, 1981; Whitehead, 1981; Yanagisako, 1979). For Sylvia Yanagisako, family is equated with kinship, whereas household refers to a group of people living together and carrying out tasks of social reproduction. Much of the confusion between the two terms, has to do with the ways in which family and household are both often bound to the so-called "domestic" realm (Yanagisako, 1979). That the two terms are used interchangeably speaks also to dominant ideals. Argentine sociologist Elizabeth Jelin (1998) argues that the "'ideal' family is: the nuclear and neolocal family characterized by a monogamous marriage, where partners live together with their children and sexuality, procreation, and co-habitation coincide in this private and domestic space" (p.16). In this sense, at the level of dominant norms and ideals, family and household together comprise the "domestic" realm and as such are often treated as one and the same. Despite the ways in which both the family and household seem to align with the domestic realm, most literature has taken the household as the unit of "production and consumption" and in contrast the family, at least when defined in terms of kinship, is treated largely as an entity of relatedness (Fitting, 2001, p.166; Leinaweaver, 2008). The ways in which the two terms are distinct but nonetheless overlap time and again, is a tension that I explore through my research into how the AUH becomes a part of daily life among program participants. I place an explicit focus on the way these two concepts get bound together in the form of *terrenos* (plots of land) in the barrios outside of Mar del Plata.

Notably, my primary area of exploration is the way family matters to the AUH because of the particular language used within the AUH program. The Asignación requires family relationships so that the beneficiaries and title-holders are the *hijos* (the legally defined children, as in sons or daughters of the parents), while the guardians who receive the funds are tasked with using the money they receive and providing proof that the program's conditionality requirements have been fulfilled. Moreover, the family has remained a central concept to Argentine social policy for over 70 years (Danani & Hintze, 2010). Studying the family is worthwhile precisely because of the way the concept often goes unquestioned within policy and political discussion (Creed, 2000). Moreover, as Gerald Creed (2000) highlights, the term is heavily charged with ideals and values that stem from attempts to "tap the cultural capital concentrated in the idea of family for personal, social, political and economic objectives" (p.330). In this way, within policies family is by no means a neutral target. Instead, in policy, a focus on the family says much about the state's recognition of the role the family plays in achieving political ends. It is especially curious how family becomes important to the AUH because of the way the program is framed as a child-social protection policy.

In the anthropological literature on kinship and family, the idea that both concepts hold at their core relatedness underlies the definitions that abound. Relatedness in the literature is characterized by a tension between relatedness achieved through practice, and relatedness determined through blood relations, or biogenetically (Gellner, 1960; Schneider, 1984; Leinaweaver, 2008). According to Ernest Gellner, (1960) biological associations were foundational to kinship, and the basis from which all other relational associations stemmed. Speaking against this view in the 1980's, David Schneider (1984) criticized the assertion that biology was the foundational component of kinship systems. Instead, Schneider argued that this

biological priority is derived from a European prioritizing of blood relations that made arguing for the priority of blood relations as determinants of kinship systems, flawed. Through her work on kinship in Peru, Leinaweaver (2008) suggests that “kinship consists of practices that constantly produce and reproduce relatedness” (p.99). Under this definition kinship is something practiced and produced. In her ethnography, she exemplifies this definition by showing how kinship bonds are created through practices of child circulation, co-habitation, the use of certain linguistic terms and physical actions which emphasize belonging. Notably, anthropologists have carefully shown that biogenetic kin relations are also produced and by no means naturally engrained within and between bodies. Indeed, as Leinaweaver (2008) suggests in her ethnography, biogenetic relations must be known in order to be acted upon. Moreover, as Ari Gandsman (2009) notes, these relations can also be denied and refuted. This was sometimes the case in Argentina when DNA results linked grandparents to their missing grandchildren. Some of those missing children who, taken by the regime, were placed in either military homes or homes of the regime’s supporters refused to acknowledge that a biogenetic similarity necessitated a bounded relation. They felt connected to the families that they had been placed in and refused to acknowledge that a biological relation implied a binding tie, instead choosing to identify as part of their captors’ families.

Although critiques of kinship notions based on biological relatedness are many, beliefs that biological markers constitute kin-relatedness have remained present. Kath Weston (1991), in her ethnography *Families we choose*, speaks to how gay men and lesbians in the Bay area of California articulate their own conception of families by defining their families as “chosen”. As Weston (1991) notes, chosen families reject the idealized family definition which many gay and lesbians term “straight, biological, or blood family” (p.27). For some gay men and lesbians in the

area, however, the term ‘family’ explicitly referred to those relations that one was born into, and cannot be extended to those intimate relations one chooses.

As the literature suggests, however, the concept ‘household’ is an important corrective to the concept ‘family’. This is because the concept ‘household’ allows for researchers 1) to account for how a group of individuals are variably positioned in relation to each other, 2) to counter the notion of families as composed of relations of solidarity, and 3) to focus on a particular space where intimate relations occur through carrying out domestic tasks (Harris, 1981; Gonzáles de la Rocha, 2001; Whitehead, 1981).

The AUH directly inserts itself into both household and familial realms and in at least one significantly overlapping way. According to findings by Aduriz, Arinci, Chitarroni, Gamus, and Wermus (2015) only 0.3% of AUH participants have a non-familial relationship to a head of household, and this figure only accounts for those towns with a population lower than 100,000. In areas where the population is above 100,000, according to the statistics they provide, no AUH recipients have a non-familial relationship to the head of household in their home. Thus, in AUH policy, family and household become even more closely aligned than just being associated with the domestic sphere because kin relations are in practice the specific household relations which facilitate the AUH in almost 100% of cases. In this sense both family and household are useful concepts for analysing the intersection between state support and the relational networks of program participants, whether they are household or familial based. Although I do not seek to propose a definition of family, I have explored understandings of family through my research into what kind of relations matter to the AUH.

Family Focused Argentine Policy: How does the AUH Fit?

In Resto Cruz’s (2012) analysis of the importance of gender and kinship as frames for

analyzing Filipino labour migration he argues that it is important “to understand how categories like ‘male’, ‘female’ and ‘family’ have been defined historically, and how these enable and at the same time are transformed by given political economic processes” (Cruz, 2012, p.544).

Assessing how the concept family has been inserted into Argentine social policy is necessary for developing an understanding of what the concept means in its present political application.

Moreover, developing an understanding of the broader historical contexts in which family has been an important concept, allows me to better frame the concept family in relation to the AUH.

Argentine scholars and others have paid close attention to how the country’s social policies have been shaped particularly since the populist government of Juan Perón, the president largely credited with establishing the country as a welfare state. As Emilia Roca (2011) asserts, the AUH is part and parcel to the country’s historically established system of social protection. Family is very much central to the country’s national social policies, and the state’s political focus more generally. Although the prevalence of family within Argentine social policy appears to remain constant, the concept is by no means static within policy. Indeed, the country’s government attention towards the family has changed over time as different political actors are tasked with carrying out various policies and the broader economic and political landscapes shift as well.

Donna Guy (2008) noted that although women philanthropists and feminists had begun shaping Argentina into a welfare state well before President Juan Perón’s government in 1946, his government is credited with the formation of an expanded and more cohesive Argentine welfare state. This welfare state was formed through a focus on the Argentine family and particularly a concern for children, as evident through Perón’s enactment of adoption laws, and his direct support for child focused care. As Guy (2008) argues, Juan Perón is cited as saying that “in the new Argentina the only privileged ones are the children”, a slogan that came to frame his

construction of the welfare state (in Guy, 2008, p.169). In this way, the AUH, initiated by a Peronist government in 2009, resonates with Peron's declaration some 60 years earlier.

Moreover, as Roxanna Mazzola (2012) contends, it was during the 1950s that the state began to conceptualize children as what she terms, "minors in formation", in the sense that children needed to be socialized through both schooling and by their own families (p.33). She argues that it is through this ideological frame that the national government began to give momentum to both systems of public health and public education. Moreover, Mazzola suggests that the family was given a state-legitimized central role in this process of child-socialization through the Argentine government's official initiation of a system of family grants in 1957. Therefore, the Argentine national government and "the family" operate in constant relation with each other. These family allowance grants were issued to workers as a means for providing social security to the family, and stemmed from a conception of the family as nuclear and headed by men. At the same time through this policy children were constructed as morally legitimate dependents (Mazzola, 2012, p. 34; Danani & Hintze, 2010).

To this day, this family allowance system remains in place as the means through which families with parents who work in the formal economy receive financial support from the government. Notably, in 2013 the AUH policy changed so that mothers were the automatic recipients of this grant. The *salario* or the *asignacion familiar* also changed so that mothers were the primary recipients of these family grants, but this was only the case if mothers were employed. In two headed households where only the father is a registered worker, he will receive these funds. Importantly, the AUH effectively extends this family allowance system by providing financial support to unemployed persons and those working in the informal labour market, effectively incorporating non-formal labourers and the unemployed into the country's grant-

based social protection sphere.

After the fall of Juan Peron's second presidency in 1955, Laura Tedesco (1999) argues that two groups of people, the armed forces and the working class, grew to have increasing influence on an ever tumultuous Argentine nation state. The period leading up to the 1976 military dictatorship was tension ridden and between 1963 and 1965 alone just over 600 labour strikes took place across the country (Tedesco, 1999). Certainly, families must have been greatly affected by, and involved in the political moment, but it has proved difficult to find literature which discusses national family-focused policies throughout this time period. This is perhaps in part due to the "developmentalism" focus of Arturo's Frondizi's 1966 government whose main aim, through the acquisition of foreign funds, was to industrialize and expand multiple sectors of the Argentine economy (Tedesco, p.15).

From 1976 to 1983 Argentina endured a military dictatorship commonly known as the *proceso*. During the *proceso* the family was an explicit target of military intervention and simultaneously, a focal point and place of political resistance (Arditti, 1999; Filc, 1997). As Rita Arditti (1999) notes, the *proceso* explicitly set out to tear apart the families of "subversives" through exile, and the disappearing of an estimated 30,000 people. Arditti describes how at times entire families were tortured in plain view of each other or in distant cells while family members were aware that their loved ones were being harmed. Both children whose parents had been taken by the military and infants born in cells where their mothers were detained, were placed in military homes to be raised by those the regime deemed "proper" families. As Arditti notes, the military dictatorship's focus on the family is an expression of the government's understanding of the power that families (and she notes especially mothers) hold in conveying ideals and identity through generations. In direct response to the targeting of families, it was the families of the

disappeared who voiced their critiques of the dictatorship most strongly. This is well exemplified through protests by the *madres de plaza de mayo* and the efforts of the *abuelas de plaza de mayo* to confirm the true identity of their grandchildren who were taken and displaced by the military regime (Arditti, 1999). As Ari Gandsman (2012) explains “the family member” became a key actor in symbolically representing and incorporating the disappeared relative into the political climate of contestation (p.198).

The post-dictatorship period of the 1980s was characterized by what Javier Auyero (2001) calls the “‘downward mobility’ of ever larger portions of the middle class” (p.42). During this time Midre (1992) notes that the government, under president Alfonsín, issued a social program in 1983 geared explicitly towards nourishing poor families: PAN- (Programa Alimentario Nacional- National Nutrition Program). PAN’s aim was to distribute food packages to those in need. The food kits supposedly contained 1/3 the amount of nutrients required for a four person family for one month (Midre, 1992). Notably, PAN was largely contested by many congress members because of their fear that PAN would threaten the nature of the family as a basic structure of Argentine society (Midre, 2005).

Beginning in 1991 and culminating in 1996, the Family Allowance Policy shifted so that the amount of grant money given to families was determined through “means testing” (Kessler, 2011). This policy was, as mentioned, first initiated in 1957 and to this day gives money to wage earners for their families. During this 1991-1996 time period the program still excluded those not receiving a salary and set out an “income trap” where an increased wage meant a loss in family supports (Lo Vuolo, 1997, p.397). Moreover, as Arcidiacono et al. (2012) argue it represented a shift, from aiding families with the cost of necessities, to a system of protection that depended on family earnings (p.155). This change stayed until the implementation of the AUH in 2009

(Danini & Hertz, 2010).

Aduriz, Arinci, Chitarroni, Gamus, & Wermus (2015) highlight the fact that the AUH model—a cash transfer type program which directs money to families as a means for combatting poverty—is not novel for Argentina as similar social programs came into being prior to the AUH's 2009 initiation. Throughout the 1990's the federal government initiated two social programs which took the family as the target unit. In 1995 *el plan trabajar* was initiated as a means of providing emergency cash to ameliorate poverty in exchange for employment. The program was explicitly directed to heads of family who were not able to meet their own or their family's basic needs (Aduriz et al., 2015). In 1997 SIEMPRO (The government's System of Information, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Social Programs) created the IDH (Income for human development) proposal. The proposal aimed to expand the opportunities available to all members of poor families through cash transfers. Eventually the proposal led to the creation of *Programa de Atencion a Grupos Vulnerables* (PAGV) in 2002 which eventually offered a monthly cash transfer payment to mothers per child. The program, however, was assigned only to those families who lived in designated vulnerable areas (Aduriz et al., 2015). Following the PAGV, the PJJHD (Plan Jefes y Jefas de Hogares Desocupados – Program for unemployed heads of household) was initiated as an emergency response to the economic crisis of 2001/2002 (Arcidiacono et al., 2012). As per the program, a money transfer was given to unemployed parents for each child under 19 (up to a maximum of five children), and also to pregnant mothers (Bestard et al. 2012, p.118). In the PJJHD, unlike the AUH that would follow, the parent was seen as both the recipient and beneficiary because the plan was set to aid unemployed heads of the home. The cash transfer family focused programs outlined above are similarly designed to the AUH, suggesting that the AUH has its roots in previous models and that the family holds an

important place as the target unit of state financial support.

As scholars have noted, there are an array of notable differences between the AUH and other similar programs I have mentioned which make it such a compelling marker of a state-based social security net. These include: the program's permanent status (that is it has been directly implemented as an extension to the family allowance program established in 1957), the way it is given on behalf of children, the rights based discourse which surrounds the policy, and that it counters the norm that participation in the formal labour market is a requirement for social protection (Aduriz et al., 2015; Arcidiacono et al., DuBois, 2014; 2012; Roca, 2011). With the initiation of the program in 2009, family focused social policy has been further engrained into the country's system of social protection. Indeed, even as Argentina's recently elected government (December, 2015) operates precisely under a neoliberal framework, the AUH remains a stable part of the country's social protection system (Natanson, 2016).

Chapter 3: A Note on Marginality: Bridging Theory and Research

Marginality is a concept that has been adopted, contested, criticised and given new meanings, quite commonly in scholarly work (Perlman, 2001). Javier Auyero is likely one of the most well-known sociologists writing on Argentina today and his work is renowned in both academic circles and among the broader public in Argentina. In his most recent co-authored book, Javier Auyero and Fernanda Berti's (2016) *In Harm's Way*, the authors often invoke the term *marginal* to describe "Arquitecto Tucci", the barrio in which their research is based. Their ethnography about violence in a neighbourhood outside of the city of Buenos Aires is compelling, but it is hard to miss the constant use of the term margin (margins, marginal), used to describe how a certain poor neighbourhood is purposefully distinct from other places. As a concept "marginal" allows the authors to explore why certain processes, specifically processes of violence, are at play in some places and not in others. The repetitive use of the term to describe the barrio in their ethnography, however, is worrisome because it acts as a marker of place and people, even though the authors surely do not intend for it to be. In this brief chapter, I will discuss some of the reasons the term marginal is worth questioning, by showing how the term can be harmful, in an attempt to better contextualize and articulate how poor people, supposedly living on the outside (like those I conducted research with), are framed theoretically.

Attaching the term marginal to the barrio Arquitecto Tucci serves as a justification for the harm that readily occurs in this neighbourhood by suggesting that violence occurs *because* this space is marginal. It is worth noting, that there is nothing intrinsically or necessarily marginal about the neighbourhood they study as many people live and construct their lives in the neighbourhood. Moreover, the particular barrio that Auyero and Berti's (2015) ethnographic data stems from, is home to the largest *feria* in Argentina where all kinds of things and goods are

sold. Auyero and Berti suggest that 50 000 people attend the street fair each day it is open, and over 7000 vendors sell products at the *feria*. As such, people from areas far outside the neighbourhood come to purchase and sell goods. As they note, the state also makes itself extensively present in this neighbourhood through high-levels of police surveillance. In this way Arquitecto Tucci is its own kind of epicenter, and the term marginal does not quite seem to fit.

Of course, Auyero and Berti are trying to find terminology to account for the occurrences of violence that are so prevalent in the neighbourhood, and the meanings that violence comes to hold for the people who live there. However, I want to suggest, as it is particularly relevant to my own thesis, that 1) people are made marginal, not marginal intrinsically, and that 2) marginality is a designation made from a certain position and point of reference. Auyero and Berti are likely aware of these contentions, but the commonplace of the term marginal, unquestioned in their ethnography, provoked this section of my thesis. Given Auyero's compelling work on the lives of the poor in Argentina, reflecting on his work seemed an appropriate point from which to make a useful critique. Although marginality has come to take on new meanings in the particular global economic context where "surplus populations" are a reality, the term must be used with caution and explanation (Li, 2001). When the term marginal is left unquestioned it makes it so that certain people and places are irrelevant, less than, or unwanted additions to more valued lives and processes.

In her 1976 publication, *The Myth of Marginality: Urban Politics and Poverty in Rio de Janeiro*, Janice Perlman argued that the urban poor of Rio de Janeiro, who were perceived as marginal to the operation of societal organization, were in fact instrumental to the how these processes functioned. She states "the very people who had been dismissed as 'marginal' or outside the system, were actually playing a vital role in the workings of the city and were tightly

integrated into that system, but in a perversely asymmetrical manner” (Perlman, 2010, p.148). The “perversely asymmetrical manner” to which she refers is how residents of the favelas in the city were not at all “marginal”, but instead tied intricately into broader society in ways that hurt their own interests and welfare. These urban poor are designated a “marginal” status because of the ways they are intentionally “excluded”, “exploited”, “repressed” and “stigmatized” (Perlman, 2010, p.150). Used as such, the concept marginality hides these actions. It makes it seem that people are somehow naturally on the outside of processes that they are instead purposefully made disadvantageously a part of.

One crucial aspect of the concept marginality is that it spatially articulates separation. The margins of a page are the outer sections left blank to the words which give the page meaning. Geographically, the term serves to represent the outskirts, creating a separation between those distanced from larger and assumed more important centers. My research took place in Mar del Plata’s peripheral *barrios*. These neighbourhoods surround the city’s centre. The three neighbourhoods I spent time in, were separated from the *centro* by a large wide avenue that comes to comprise one of the major highways leading out of the city. The people who live in these neighbourhoods are generally poor, especially in comparison to their fellow *Marplatenses* that reside in homes or apartments in the city centre. In contrast, *barrio* homes are in much poorer condition and economic struggle, though visible in the *centro* of Mar del Plata, is a more striking component of life in the peripheral neighbourhoods; a component naturalized in the poor conditions of roads, churches, shopping malls, and public service centres. In this sense, marginality is a lived experience for people who live to the outskirts of the city centre. But again, it is an experience produced through actions of exclusion, exploitation, repression, and

stigmatization². Marginal, however, is not a concept that defines who these people are. The neighbourhoods comprise the centres of the lives of the people who live there, and “marginal” is not an accurate or fair depiction of who these people are in relation to wealthier others.

Curiously, the global economic situation today is such that the concept marginality has come to take on pertinent significances. Tania Li (2001), James Ferguson (2015), Lois Wacquant (1996) and others have suggested, the new predicament of the present labour economy is that large groups of people are rendered disposable, because their labour power is not required for capitalist production. Wacquant (1996) has argued that this produces “advanced marginality” whereby, structural forces create a marginality that can lead certain groups of people to “outright abandonment” (p.123). Wacquant suggests that contrary to the years of Fordist expansion, where mass production offered the working-class employment security, this wage labour relationship is now part of the problem. The wage-labour relation creates marginality as people struggle to be a part of a relationship that enables survival, at the same time that many are outright excluded. In this way marginality, has transitioned from what Perlman described in 1976 as a myth to what she regrettably called in 2010 a “reality”. Presently, a prominent point of exclusion is from the labour market.

The crucial distinction I want to make is that there is a difference between seeing and terming a place and the people who reside in that place marginal, and accounting for the ways in which certain places and peoples are made marginal. The latter of which is a useful academic endeavour because it furthers a deeper understanding of the day-to-day with a contextual outlook, whereas the former likely feeds the assumption that the “marginal” are inferior through their own fault. As Janice Perlman (2010) has noted, “the ideology of marginality, with its

² As should be clear, I am referencing the paragraph prior, and Perlman’s use of the terms, “exploited”, “excluded” “repressed” and “stigmatized” (Perlman, 2010, p.150).

moralistic, victim blaming narrative, has persisted in the face of blatantly contradictory evidence” (p.150). Marginality is not a priori, it is produced.

Because of marginality’s spatial undertone, it is a designation made from a certain perspective, and never a totalizing statement. Auyero and Berti’s use of the term marginality does a disservice to the great work they do in complicating understandings of violence and showing how varied forms of violence are connected. If a neighbourhood is said to be violent because it is marginal, this makes certain global locations and the people who live and inhabit these places, criminal, dangerous, and ultimately less valued on a global scale. Moreover, it reinforces certain understandings of place, whereby those from non-marginal areas are privileged the position of designating others marginal. This has steep implications for what it means to do ethnography. If the task of the ethnographer is, as Auyero and Berti suggest by invoking the work of Annick Prieur (1998), “to try to understand a culture in the way the participants understand it themselves, to take on their point of view- to *dare* to take on their point of view” then marginality as a concept used describe the barrio that they are studying may be inaccurate (in Auyero & Berti, 2016, p.19).

I have delved into this critique of marginality because my own research focuses on three barrios which I have described as resting to the outskirts or the periphery of Mar del Plata’s city centre. In relation to what is thought of and termed *el centro*, they do indeed sit at the city’s margins. I want to clarify, however, that I do not mean to suggest these barrios, nor the people who reside in them are marginal in any sense. Indeed, for the people who live in these neighbourhoods, these spaces are where most of their daily lives are lived. As I will show, it is these neighbourhoods which are the basis for many of their most economically and socially valuable relationships. Relationships which come to make the AUH work as it does. Likewise,

for my research purposes, these neighbourhoods and the people who reside in them are the source of what I learned and therefore entirely integral to the analysis I provide.

It is worth questioning marginality in relation to place, just as Munck (2013) has suggested we question “marginality” in relation to employment and capitalism. To assume certain places are marginal or that they rest at the margins of a larger more valuable epicentre, invites the idea that the people who live in these spaces are somehow less important. Without a doubt, different people in different places have different understandings about which spaces are marginal and which are not. Thus, it is important that ethnographic research challenge pre-determined assumptions about how people geographically envision, live out, and construct their social worlds.

Chapter 4: Methodology: Towards a Fuller Understanding

The research I conducted for this project involved 4 months of fieldwork in the city of Mar del Plata, Argentina. My research project makes up a small component of Dr. Lindsay DuBois' larger research project on the AUH. The field site for my research and the original contacts I worked with in the area were therefore established through (and because of) Lindsay DuBois. As is commonly the case in ethnographic research studies, my plans for my intended research differed from the research I would eventually conduct. Despite moments of feeling worried that I had nothing to show for my research in Argentina, I left the country with a fruitful array of stories, emotions, observation notes, kinship diagrams, and indeed a deeper understanding of how the AUH becomes a part of people's lives in the area.

Sourcing the Data

Most of my fieldwork took place in three different neighbourhoods (*barrios*) situated about a 40-minute bus ride outside of the city-center. The reasons for my presence in each of the three *barrios* differed slightly, although my overarching aim remained the same: to better understand how kinship and other relational systems matter to the AUH. In other words, how do people make the AUH work? In *Barrio de la feria*, I attended the daily *actividades* hosted by the Catholic church in a space I will call San Miguel. Here, church-outreach worker Morena opened the large warehouse-looking building every day (except Sunday and Monday) around three in the afternoon to provide a space for mothers and children from the neighbourhood to play, work on their homework and enjoy *la merienda* (the afternoon snack). In *Barrio Doña Rosa*, I occasionally visited the church where volunteers and mothers gave out hot chocolate to children on Tuesdays and Fridays of most weeks. I also became good friends with one family in this neighbourhood and frequently visited their home to share meals, and to drink mate and chat. In

Barrio Ruedas, I attended a weekly women's group that was hosted in a community center in the neighbourhood. I gained access to this women's group through the loving and fierce psychoanalyst and Peronist *militante* Elena. Elena helped me understand neighbourhood relations as well as recruit participants and I and my research owes much to her. Through the connections I made in these various places, I was at times invited further into the lives of people in these barrios, as they graciously made space for me in their homes and lives.

Research Methods

It was in these three neighbourhoods that I conducted almost all my interviews and participant observations. My fieldwork can be characterized as ethnography, because my research required me to directly engage in the lives of those I wanted to learn from, seeking to explore my research problem through an in-depth study over a significant period of time. In total, I conducted 48 formal interviews 44 of which were recorded. My interview participants included two medical doctors who worked in the neighbourhoods and three groups of social workers. The remainder of interviewees were, as per my target research population, past or present recipients of the AUH. I conducted only three interviews with men, two of whom were spouses to the AUH recipients, and one who was an AUH recipient himself. The remaining 40 interviews were all conducted with women recipients of the AUH. I followed a rough interview guideline to carry out my interviews, which was helpful for keeping my interviews on track. My interviews were largely conducted "in the moment" by which I mean sporadically arranged in the particular circumstances in which potential interviewees and I found ourselves. As such, our interview conversations usually had an informal undertone and were always shorter than the hour-long interviews I had anticipated conducting. In many instances, I did feel my interviews lacked depth. I compensated for this through my consistent presence in the neighbourhoods I have

described and the daily analyses I realized in these places. This allowed me to helpfully layer the information I attained through interviews.

My interviews all began with a question about who was in the recipient's family. From here, I would draw a kin-diagram of the recipient's family and visually express who received the AUH in the diagram. This was helpful for understanding who is and is not considered a part of people's families, and the divisions that occur between associating those in your home with those in your family. Kinship diagrams were useful in this sense, and they also fostered a more relaxed interview setting from which to build the interviews, often making conversation more comfortable. In most cases, however, families were described in the typically nuclear sense, one's partner and one's children. When pushed further, it became clearer the important roles that other relatives played in people's lives. My kinship diagrams were less developed than I had originally anticipated, and were more practical in the sense that they most often included relatives who had a more constant presence in the interview participant's life.

Although doing interviews sometimes seemed like the objective of my research, I likely learned the most from being present in Mar del Plata, eager to learn and open to conversing with anyone willing to talk to me about the AUH. Kristin Luker (2008) states that "the point of doing observational methods is to document 'practices,' those moments when belief and action come together" (p.158). In this sense, my project required developing an understanding of how the AUH is understood by participants and the intersection between this conceptualization and the relationships that recipients form with those close to them; comprising this belief and action component that Luker discusses. As per Lynn Hume and Jane Mulcock's (2004) description of the method, participant observation "requires that researchers simultaneously observe and participate (as much as possible) in the social action they are attempting to document" (p.xi).

This rather simple definition seems true in that it clearly articulates the two components of the method, participating and observing. It is worth noting, however, that for me participant observation usually felt quite subtle rather than a forced desire to participate “as much as possible”.

One day near the end of September, already three months deep into my research, I questioned how what I was doing could possibly be considered research. I found myself particularly frustrated because, once again, I was the one carrying out the heavier cleaning tasks at the San Miguel space. On that day, I had the special pleasure of dealing with the widespread mess that resulted from a diaper that had been smeared all over the bathroom floor and walls. I came up with the conclusion that participant observation involves doing whatever one must do to be accepted into the places and spaces that allow the researcher to learn about the questions and problems they seek to answer. It is a researcher’s presence in these spaces coupled with a curiosity about a certain problem, that makes research through participant observation possible. It is possible only when those that one wishes to learn from allow you to be a part of their lives. Instead of an insistence that anthropologists involve themselves in the social milieu fruitful to their investigations “as much as possible”, it is important to remember that researchers are involved in people’s lives to the extent that others allow them. It is within these negotiated spaces that I both participated and observed, with the intention of learning about the AUH and how neighbourhood and kin relations shape and are shaped by the policy.

As an additional method, I also skimmed a collection of national newspaper articles and presidential speeches. Although I did not conduct a thorough analysis of all the newspaper articles I gathered relevant to my topic of the AUH and family, I have used these documents as a

supplement to the data I attained conducting fieldwork in Mar del Plata. As such, newspaper articles and political speeches are cited sporadically throughout my thesis.

Data Analysis

My data analysis took place in part while I was doing my field work in Argentina during those moments that I reflected on key issues and curiosities that made themselves apparent. After I left the field, however, my official data analysis took place. I transcribed the interviews I recorded and then read them all thoroughly. In the process of reading, I extracted quotes I found to be relevant and pertaining to a larger theme/concern. I hand-wrote each quote onto a cue-card and then placed the card under the appropriate theme heading, or created a new theme heading if required. By doing so, I organized the themes I found most evident in my research, and by going through the stacks of cue cards, I could see how these themes were exemplified in my research data. As Kristin Luker (2008) notes this process is beneficial for seeing how themes vary, and creating subthemes as a result. After this first analysis, the writing process was also part of my analysis as I had to engage critically with my themed-data to construct a thesis with an overarching purpose.

Ethical Concerns

The AUH recipients I interviewed and spent time with are economically poor. For many, the AUH was their only consistent income. I have used pseudonyms in this thesis to refer to the places and people I discuss, to protect the identities of those who were generous enough to share their time and insights with me. My fieldwork involved individuals who are indeed vulnerable because of their economic status. Some were unable to read, and verbal consent was received for all interviews after an explanation of my project and what I was asking of them. The AUH recipients I interviewed live in regions of the city where houses and public infrastructure such as

roadways are often not properly maintained. Many of the people I interviewed and spent time with, struggled in many ways to meet their basic daily needs. Thus, it is important to recognize the privileged position I held as a student-researcher from Canada. I came from far away, I could live relatively independently at 22, I attended university: there was a clear class-distinction between me and research participants. This class distinction was made visible by the noted reality that I had enough money to be in Mar del Plata, to live in *el centro*, and to not have to worry about my day-to-day subsistence needs.

That said, these people are part of a “vulnerable population” because they do not have the same kind of financial or support means that I and others living in Mar del Plata may have, not because of some personal failings. Participants were aware of what it meant to be involved in the research, and usually seemed to understand that I depended on them for information, not the other way around. They knew they were helping me out and for the most part seemed to enjoy the process of sharing their insights.

Chapter 5: Understanding People, Place and Policy in Mar del Plata

Describing Place: Where I Conducted My Research

Mar del Plata: The downtown part of the city - cold, coast, clammy hands, wind, wave breaks, tall buildings in crumbling condition, people out and about on sidewalks, random houses spotted about, lots of tiny shops and dog poop, big shopping districts and zones, lots of vehicles.

Mar del Plata: Peripheral neighbourhoods- dusty roads, very brown, smaller homes, many dogs, more garbage, people scattered, no sidewalks, trees, few vehicles.

I spent just over 4 months in Mar del Plata conducting my fieldwork from early June to mid-October of 2016. Mar del Plata is a coastal city in the province of Buenos Aires, and located approximately 300km outside of the country's capital, the city of Buenos Aires. Located directly on the coast, in the summer, Mar del Plata is a prime tourist destination as large flocks of people from the city of Buenos Aires and elsewhere come to spend time on the beach. In the winter, the season in which I conducted my fieldwork, the city feels quite empty. The many high-rise apartment buildings bordering the coast that can accommodate the multitudes of people that flock to the city in the summer months, remained mostly vacant. It is important to distinguish *el centro* of Mar del Plata from the *barrios periféricos* (the neighbourhoods which lie to the periphery of the city center). Although both regions technically comprise the city, there is a visible economic divide between the two regions articulated in the construction of homes, the quality of the roads and the state of public buildings.

During my four month stay in Mar del Plata, I lived in a shared-house with various young Argentine adults on the coastal side of the city. My home was not directly in the centre of the city, but by walking briskly for 30 minutes, I could get to what was considered by Marplatenses as the downtown core or *el centro*. Although I frequented the downtown a few times a week, I

mostly came to understand the *centro* in passing. The *centro* comprised about 20 minutes of the roughly hour long bus ride I took daily to get to one of the three barrios where I did my fieldwork.

Although every moment I spent in Argentina was technically designated as my field work, I had to make specific efforts to find people who were recipients of the AUH program. This meant that as opposed to what I imagined as the “true ethnographic” experience (living among those one is studying), my time was divided between where I slept and stored my belongings and where I did participant observation and interviews.

In Argentina today, 4,279,685 children are beneficiaries of the AUH (Lousteau, 2017). In Mar del Plata, as of 2012, 49,205 children belonging to 27,315 families were beneficiaries of the program (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social de la Nación in Arroyo, 2014). That number is surely higher today as the total number of AUH beneficiaries has risen since 2012. Because recipients of the AUH usually have very low incomes, it was easier for me to make contact with recipients in low-income neighbourhoods. It came to be that I learned from AUH recipients the most by visiting three different barrios that rested inland from the *centro*. I visited at least one barrio almost every day of the week that I was in Mar del Plata. It was in these barrios where most of my interviews and observations about the Asignación took place.

The many barrios which rest outside of the center of Mar del Plata are occupied almost entirely by people of low economic resources. Most homes are constructed by people themselves or their relatives and there are often numerous homes on one plot of land. Nonetheless, class divisions exist within the barrios as well. Purchasing a piece of land to build a home or renting in one of these barrios outside the city, is much cheaper than finding a place to live in the city centre. Accordingly, these barrios are inhabited by people who are economically poor. The types

of work that poor people participate in —the types of work that make people poor —is vulnerable employment, characterized by instability, inconsistency and exploitation. Of course, those who are worse off are unemployed altogether, and therefore lack the economic benefit (however minimal) that vulnerable employment provides. The employment situations I have noted (or lack thereof) mean that those in these situations are likely to receive the AUH, as it is unregistered work or unemployment which qualifies families for the AUH. These neighbourhoods were thus appropriate places to study the functioning of the AUH and the involvement of families and other relational units in the policy. Despite the reality that AUH recipients are almost exclusively quite poor, some prefer to work informal jobs over formal registered positions. It is not necessarily the case that registered work positions are always preferable to informal work, and as will become clearer later on, these informal/formal statuses are in constant flux.

I came to spend most of my time in three *barrios periféricos* where I developed close relationships with some of the people who called these neighbourhoods home. The pseudonyms I have used for the three barrios I frequented are Barrio de la feria, Barrio Doña Rosa, and Barrio Ruedas. The largest of the three neighbourhoods is Ruedas, where I was told an estimated 13,000 people reside. The smallest of the three is Doña Rosa, where I would guess around 2000 to 3000 people live. Barrio de la feria, is somewhere in between that range with likely around of 7000 inhabitants. Barrio Ruedas is the only neighbourhood for which I received an approximate number of residents. Although I am sure statistics exist on the number of inhabitants in each neighbourhood, I was unable to find them. Throughout my time in Mar del Plata I did visit other barrios, but these were the three neighbourhoods that I attended consistently and represent the places where I gathered a deeper understanding of people's lives in relation to the AUH.

A Temporal Note

I was in Mar del Plata at a significant political moment. In December of 2015, six months prior to my arrival in Argentina, the country elected president Mauricio Macri of the party *Cambiamos*. With Macri assuming the role of president, the country ended a 12 year reign by the center-leftist government party *Frente para La Victoria* (FPV). For 12 years the country had been under Kirchner rule: the late Nestor Kirchner assumed the presidency in 2003, and his wife Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner took office in 2007. The political ideology adopted by the Kirchners is often termed *kirchnerismo* and has a deep ideological connection to the populist government of Juan Perón who first took office in 1946, was elected again in 1952, and then finally in 1973. Peronism remains a driving political force to this day in Argentina, and its contemporary version, *kirchnerismo* is quite vibrant.

Lindsay DuBois (2005) argues that during Perón's first two terms as president (1946-1955), "Peronism came to represent not only the ideology but also the practices of the beneficent welfare state" (p.38). Even towards the end of the twentieth century the association between beneficent welfare and Peronism remained relevant as social assistance was often tied to Peronist political ventures (Auyero, 2001; DuBois, 2005). An understanding of Peronism (and stemming from this Kirchnerism) as a political ideology for and devoted to the poor persists in Argentina today. With the election of President Mauricio Macri in December, 2015, the country underwent a drastic political shift from a government for the masses, towards a government for the wealthy. I do not mean to suggest that in practice this shift was so simple; corruption has been a huge issue both within the previous and present governments.

Nonetheless, for many that I met in Mar del Plata who were devoted to the Peronist cause, this shift in government was aligned with a direct attack on concern for the poor. Clearly

aware of this understanding, President Macri has frequently cited “Pobreza Cero” or “Zero Poverty” as a core aim of his political endeavour, likely in attempt to appease this concern. As one AUH recipient said to me in an especially memorable and bleak conversation, “the government tells us that there is not going to be more poverty, and I say that is because he is going to kill us with hunger!” *Cambiamos* run a pro-business and neoliberal government, stripping back economic resources for social security measures and emphasizing international trade. Many of the social workers and NGO workers I met with during my fieldwork discussed with me the rapid change that had occurred because of the new government, citing the now minimal resources that were available to carry out their tasks. Attached to the Kirchner political cause, or at least the interpretation held by many is a dedication to the country’s poor. But, supporting the Kirchner government and being poor, or devoted to improving the livelihood of the economically poor, are not one in the same. Argentines have varying political beliefs that cannot be so easily simplified.

Field Site Descriptions

The barrios that I frequented are outside of the city but not in the countryside. Instead, they encompass small residential zones where clusters of people live and carry out much of their daily lives. These barrios consist of usually a few *locales* (shops), a *verdulería* (a vegetable/fruit vendor) and *carnicería* (a vendor that sells meat), a health clinic, a plaza or a park, various churches, and a community centre of some kind.



Figure 1: To the left, a screen shot of a google maps of image of Mar del Plata in Relation to Buenos Aires. Mar del Plata is a coastal city situated approximately a 4-hour drive (270km) from the country's capital city, Buenos Aires.

Reprinted from Map Data @2017 Google. Retrieved from www.google.ca/maps



Figure 2: Above is a screen shot of a google maps, map image of the city of Mar del Plata. I have circled in red the two general areas of the three barrios (neighbourhoods) where most of my fieldwork took place. As is visible, the barrios are located outside of the city centre which is located on the coast. The distance from the city centre to the outlying barrios is approximately 7.5km. Reprinted from Map Data @2017 Google. Retrieved from google.ca/maps

There is not much employment available within the barrios themselves and unless people are self-employed those with jobs usually must commute to the city centre, to the coast, or other areas for work. It is possible, however, to live and subsist within the spaces of the barrios if one

does not work or makes a living within the neighbourhood itself. Food is usually cheaper here than in the city centre and going to the centre requires an almost hour commute and the price of a bus ticket. Those who did not live in the *barrios periféricos* often expressed genuine fear to me about these places when I told them I would visit the neighbourhoods alone. Those who I came to know quite well in these neighbourhoods were also sure to look out for me, citing the fact that it was obvious I was not from the neighbourhood as a reason that I may be at risk of harm.

I rarely felt unsafe, however, and was well cared for by the people with whom I spent time. There is a fear about Mar del Plata's barrios that seeps through the population generally, a fear undoubtedly aligned with a fear of poverty. I was reminded by a young girl, however, that the places people fear vary based on where people are from and their own positioning. A girl, probably about the age of 8 from the Barrio Ruedas, explained to me one day that her mother's cell phone had been stolen in *el centro*, and that one must always be very careful there. This was a fear that she did not of course express about her own neighbourhood. For her, the barrio was the safe place and the centre was a place where one should wander with caution.

Barrio de la Feria

Barrio de la feria was often referred to me as a "*barrio bastante bravo*" a sufficiently rough neighbourhood. The barrio had dusty roads that were dried out and almost sandy. It was as if the beach had brought itself 10 kilometers inland, but with no water, no waves, no ocean, the sand had dried and hardened. When it rained, it flooded, and giant puddles often pooled over large sections of the street. Homes were made from bricks, bound together with cement and positioned close to the road. Gated at the front entrance, the houses were usually small and most often only one story high.

One of the important ways that Barrio de la feria can be distinguished from the other two barrios I visited is that de la feria hosts a market on Saturday in the neighbourhood's central

plaza. People are said to come from all over Mar del Plata to purchase and sell goods, random knick-knacks, cleaning products, food, and clothes; an overall assortment of things. Because of this weekend event that draws an influx of people to the barrio, the plaza is utterly worn out. What I imagine at one point was a green space with grass and some trees is now a large square of dried grey dirt that holds a small swing set and slide, and a running or walking route around the square's border. The *feria* is a contentious issue, as some *vecinos* (neighbours) see it as a beneficial source of income for vendors, and others see it as a disorderly disruption and the source of a lot of garbage.

The place that I frequented most afternoons during my stay in Mar del Plata was called *San Miguel*. It was a large, open building that looked like a warehouse and was owned by the Catholic church. Because there was an actual church located on the Plaza, *San Miguel* was rarely used for mass and instead commonly used for the church's outreach assistance programs. Other neighbourhood events such as dance classes also took place in the building. From about 3:30 to 6:30pm every afternoon, from Tuesday through Saturday, under the guidance of church worker, Morena, a small number of mothers would come together to prepare *la merienda* in a small kitchen for anywhere between 15 and 50 children who would stop by. These daily meetings were referred to as *actividades*, and were sponsored financially by the Catholic church.

During the *actividades*, Morena often tried to organize crafts for the children or help them with their homework. This was her intention and I believe also her job description, but with usually upwards of 25 children running around, she spent a lot of time breaking up fights between kids and ensuring they were *portándose bien* (behaving well). Indeed, Morena also often directed the mothers in their meal preparation, although she did not usually cook. Morena is extremely dedicated to her work, but she often told me that she felt like she was not facilitating

the kind of space that she wanted to because she had not imagined she would have to reprimand children so frequently. While at San Miguel I spent time chatting with the mothers that prepared the meals, drinking *mate* with them as they gossiped about their daily lives, giving the children piggy-backs and helping clean up after the children had been sent home. I was able to conduct interviews in this bustling space as most mothers that attended the daily *actividades* were recipients of the program. It was through my time in this space that I gathered my deepest understanding of barrio life and neighbourhood relations though it was not the site where I conducted the majority of interviews.

Barrio Doña Rosa

Barrio Doña Rosa is a smaller neighbourhood located on the other side of the wide *Avenida* opposite Barrio de la feria. Although the two barrios, de la feria and Doña Rosa are essentially connected and share a small shopping centre between them, the division between the two is clear. Barrio Doña Rosa feels smaller and better maintained. The barrio itself is also contained between two main roadways and has a more compressed feel. Even the homes are more likely to be stacked on top of each other than in Barrio de la feria. The neighbourhood park has both grass and a cement soccer pitch, with a much larger playground than can be found in Barrio de la feria. Doña Rosa also seemed to have more trees than Barrio de la feria. My perception of Doña Rosa as a more enclosed barrio, may also be partly because I spent much of my time in Doña Rosa with one family, that of grandmother (abuela) Iris.

Although I did frequently attend church and neighbourhood functions and indeed interviewed others in the neighbourhood, most of my understandings about the barrio were filtered through, or achieved because of, the strong connections I made with one family that received the Asignación. It was through my time in Doña Rosa that I gained a deep understanding of one family's daily life and how it pertains to the AUH. I often ate dinner or

would stop by to drink *mate* with abuela Iris and her family. Abuela Iris's home was separate but connected to other houses where her son and daughter and their respective families lived. It was located across the street from a home that was known for selling drugs and re-selling stolen goods. Inside the house, on the main flat, which technically was abuela Iris's home, the walls were covered in photos: photos of Iris, her late husband, her children, her children's spouses and her grand and great-grandchildren, as well as other cousins and relatives. All the photos were neatly framed and placed carefully on the brightly painted green cement walls of the living room. Two houses down the street there was also a *local*, where Martina and her uncle (Iris's son and grand-daughter) sold everyday items that ranged from *milanesas* (bread-battered meat) to ice-cream and individual *cigarillos*.

Barrio Ruedas

The last of the three barrios that I regularly attended was a barrio called Ruedas. Ruedas, is located approximately 6 km from the intersection of Doña Rosa and Barrio de la feria. The same kind of dusty feel of the other two barrios was also present in Ruedas, but there were more trees that lined the roads and apartment buildings exist in this neighbourhood and not in the other two. Ruedas became one of my field sites because of a particular community centre located in the neighbourhood.

The community centre operates under the guidance of a local non-governmental organization. The centre hosts a wide range of events and classes that include, mandala making, screen printing, dance classes, music workshops, and also hosts the plan FINES (which is a secondary-school option for adults who have not completed their highschool education). Placed in contact with Elena, I was able to attend the weekly Friday workshop called *Grupo de Mujeres*. During this workshop between 10 and 40 women would gather weekly, mostly from the barrio, but also from other barrios across the city to join in a group discussion or event and to have their

nails and hair done. Most of the women who came received the AUH, and the workshop provided me with a great opportunity to recruit participants for interviews. Most of my interviews were conducted in this space.

The centre, like the NGO that runs it, is highly influenced by the Kirchner government, and dedication to their political ideologies is expressed freely here. Indeed, “*vamos a volver*” (“we will return”- referencing the return of the Frente para La Victoria government to political power) sentiments abound. It is important to recognize how this space is politicized, because the politics of the space likely influenced the way some of the women I spoke to perceived the AUH. That said, the interviews were conducted individually and in private, so I am confident that participants felt open to express their ideas. I note this politicization of place because it became obvious to me through interviews that many of the regular attendees and women who were thoroughly involved in the centre, not just attendees at the meetings, were devout Kirchner supporters. They spoke openly of their praise for the previous government and cited the recent hardships they and others faced under the government of Mauricio Macri. In an interview with one attendee’s husband, he explained to me that unlike the women he knew who attended the weekly meeting, his wife included, he was not a Kirchner supporter. He made a clear association between attending the group and expressing support for the previous Kirchner governments. Moreover, when Axel Kicillof, the economic minister under Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner’s government came to deliver a speech in Mar del Plata to a full auditorium, I saw 7 or 8 of the regular group members at the political event, chanting in support of the FpV government. It is possible to align, at least in part, the women’s expression of support for the AUH with their political beliefs because those women, more involved in the centre were the ones who identified the AUH as a basic right. The AUH was widely advocated as a right’s based initiative in policy

discourse, but largely not understood as a fundamental right by the recipient population (DuBois, 2014). Those recipients that identified as Kirchner supporters were more attuned to this language and therefore identified the program as a right, while others did not.

In the following chapter I will discuss the significance of the AUH as a policy given on behalf of, but also for children. It is useful to consider marginality as a concept which contextualizes these designations. It becomes important that recipients see children as, and act so that children are the target beneficiaries of the AUH. Mothers (and fathers to a lesser extent) strive to position themselves as good AUH recipients in contexts where they are being deemed unfit parents by the Argentine public broadly, and fellow AUH recipients. Focusing on children becomes a crucial way recipients seek to improve their status as good recipients, but it is also a key component of how the policy functions at the day-to-day level.

Chapter 6: Asignación Universal por Hijo- Para los Chicos

Belen, a social worker, who operates out of a municipal community centre next to San Miguel in Barrio de la feria began her explanation of the AUH to me by stating that “sometimes it is difficult to understand in the discourse that public policies are not for everyone, I mean to say, the Asignación is *for the children*”. This understanding that the AUH is for the children, specifically one’s own children, that Belen articulates, is widespread among recipients and indeed the broader Argentine population. What Belen so attentively realizes is that public policies are specifically designated to certain groups of people, such that the public broadly is never fully the target of one policy. The AUH clearly targets one subset of the population by seeking to address the needs of one acceptably dependent demographic - children.

The *Asignación universal por hijo* is often translated into English as the universal child allowance/benefit. The Spanish word “hijo”, however, does not just mean child, but “son,” or in the feminine form, “daughter”. In this sense the program explicitly focuses on children by attending to a particular kin relationship- the parent-child relation. Although the program is indeed a child protection policy and children are required to attend school, and receive health check-ups, the policy is an allowance *por hijo*. In English this means ‘per child’ or ‘on behalf of children’. As per the ANSES website the AUH, however, is “destined to *family groups* that do not receive any sum of money through contributory employment benefits” (i.e. for those who are not covered through the *Asignación familiar*) (ANSES, 2017, para.4). Here, the Spanish distinction between *por* and *para* is important to note. Although the program is designated *per child*, (*por hijo*) and technically not *for* one’s children, (*para los hijos*) the understanding that children are to be the beneficiaries of the program is widespread and is essential to the program as per Belen’s recognition. This belief, that the best way for AUH recipients to be “good

recipients” was to spend the money they received through the program on their children, was quite prominent (DuBois & Correia, 2017). Earmarking AUH money came to have certain moral undertones in the neighbourhoods I visited (DuBois & Correia, 2017).

Laura Pautassi (2009) an esteemed Argentine Lawyer and Sociologist who has conducted much work on social and economic rights in Argentina wrote just prior to the implementation of the AUH, that there had not been child-focused intervention through public policy, creating what she called “a field without attention” (p.3). It is worth noting that in her article, she speaks to two national programs the Plan Jefas y Jefes de Hogar (Plan for Heads of Household) and Programa Familias por la Inclusion Social (Program for the Social Inclusion of Families), in which children were clearly embedded subjects, but not an explicit focus (Pautassi, 2009). Suggesting a possible reason for the creation of the AUH, Bertranou and Maurizio (2012) note that when Argentina began to recover from the economic crisis in 2001, although poverty decreased for those over 65 through the expansion of old-age benefits, it was more of an issue for children. In this sense, the AUH specifically addressed this gap, developing a similar policy where children were in fact an explicit focus.

As Donna Guy (2008) makes clear through her historical analysis of the formation of the welfare state in Argentina, however, children have in fact long been a focus of welfare development in the country. Guy accounts for how women, largely through their focus on caring for children, were essential to forming an Argentine welfare state, work which she describes as beginning in the early 1800’s. Nonetheless, the AUH was a paramount rights-based intervention characterized not only within policy as a child-rights initiative, but extensively by recipients as “for the children” as well (Arcidiacono et al., 2012). The aim of this chapter of my thesis is two-fold: first to explore the prominence of this idea and how this understanding that the AUH is for

the children has arisen; and second to examine the significances of this understanding for the kinds of relationships that I discussed in the previous chapter, familial, *terreno*, and neighbourhood by placing a special focus on the moral dimensions of this association.

Managing AUH Money: Moralizing Mothers³

As Viviana Zelizer (2011) contends, money is often thought to be a “seamlessly fungible medium in which each unit is identical to each other unit” such that money, regardless of where it comes from and how it is used, is all the same (p.89). As she suggests, however, this is far from true as money comes to have varied social meanings and its use often contributes purposefully to establishing relationships (Zelizer, 2011). Likewise, the specific meanings and uses of the AUH come to play a role in both familial and neighbourhood relations. Recipients of the AUH are aware that this social policy exists because of their children and have established through an interpretation of policy, that it is for the benefit of their children as well. Articulating that the AUH is for one’s children is integral to being a “good” recipient which comes to signify being a “good” mother. In this way, a mother’s moral status is tied to her devotion to her children, a devotion that is both demonstrated and made visible through her involvement in the policy. This interpretation became clear throughout interviews where in all cases participants linked the policy to being for their children in some way. Interviewees would often demonstrate that they clearly recognized the AUH as for their children. After expressing this understanding, participants would articulate how their own actions were in line with this understanding.

The key way recipients of the AUH demonstrate that they do consider the money they

³ I will talk almost exclusively about mothers as the moral actors in this chapter because as I have already noted, it is usually mothers who receive the AUH. I learned that often the control of money was divided where men would control the money they earned from their work, and women the money they received through the AUH. This was, however, not always the case. I learned of one case, where a husband handed all the money he earned per day to his wife, and another case, where a husband did not let his wife use the AUH money she received as she desired. There were also multiple cases of collaborative money managing.

receive through the program to be for their children is by articulating “appropriate” consumption practices. This articulation varied, however, depending on whether recipients of the AUH had access to additional income. Participants who had an additional source of regular income, or whose partner had an additional source of income, often cited using the money to: buy their children shoes or clothing, take them on a special outing, pay for swimming lessons or scout classes, put money aside in a savings account for their child, or buy them sweets. In other words, they expressed spending the money in ways easily recognizable as for their children’s benefit. For those who did not have an additional consistent income to depend on, these appropriate consumption practices –purchases that could easily be distinguished as for their children– were subtler. Recipients in this category cited using the money for: whatever their children needed when they received the money, shoes or school supplies, food, and household necessities. Sometimes the money was discussed as simply lumped together with all other money that entered the home. These type of spending practices, although clearly still benefiting the children, have less of an element of “frivolity” and are instead characterized more by necessity.

I use the term “frivolity” to emphasize how purchasing certain items for one’s child that children do not necessarily need allows mothers to exemplify that their children are special, and as such worthy of a special something, or treats. This is in line with recipients’ understanding of how the AUH should be used. Using the AUH in “frivolous” ways is further admirable because it suggests that the state is *not* providing for a mother’s children. Instead, the AUH enables the mother to be a better mother by assuring the sacredness of her children through these “frivolous” purchases for them. Being both a good mother and a good AUH recipient is tied to finding ways to use the AUH appropriately for one’s children, so that mothers are not seen as dependent on the state and above all putting their children first. To be clear, using the AUH, or claiming to use the

AUH for items that are extravagant is also suspect. Indeed Juana, an AUH recipient, claimed that someone she knew received the AUH and purchased a car because of this additional income.

Juana claimed this was a clear example of misspending the funds. Moreover, she suggested that it showed the family had no *necesidad* (need) for the AUH, making the parents bad recipients. In this sense, frivolous purchases must be for one's children, but also small.

It is important to note that whether or not mothers can purchase their children treats they might like is not a fixed capability. At times, parents may find themselves able to spend money on frivolous items for their children and at other moments they may be unable to do so. Sandra, an AUH recipient who also has experience receiving the *Asignación familiar*, described to me how her son used to accompany her to the ATM, and he knew that with that money she would buy him clothes or something that he wanted. She told me that this was possible because in that moment she was better off economically and she could give him “*un gustito* –a little pleasure”, but if she was unable to, the money went to pay the electricity or some other bill. Sometimes Sandra could indulge slightly in her son, and at other times this was not possible. Notably, Sandra emphasizes that if possible the first course of action she takes is for her child, thus demonstrating her understanding of how the AUH *should* operate.

Those mothers who are not able to indulge in child “frivolities” with the AUH because of economic constraints, however, often find creative ways to make their use of the AUH “appropriate”. In her ethnography *Longing and Belonging*, Alison Pugh (2009) examines how children themselves are directly involved in a consumer culture in Oakland, California which allows/or disallows them to belong in their peer groups. As a result, parents have to make purchasing decisions and negotiations so as to foster this sense of belonging. Pugh (2009) argues that “low-income parents engaged in ‘symbolic indulgence’, the practice of buying for their

children specific goods and experiences that would yield the most social impact for their dollars” (p.124). In this sense, purchasing has more significance than just the mere object or experience being bought, it is the parents’ careful consideration about exactly what to buy, and the social meanings that certain things have for children, which comes to make these indulgences something more than just spending money. Pugh continues, “by prioritizing the dignity of their social participation, low-income parents avoided condemning their children to the predicament of poverty...enabling them instead to ‘appear in public without shame’” (p.125). She contrasts this “symbolic indulgence” of low-income parents with the “symbolic deprivation” required of affluent parents, who instead must demonstrate discipline and an aversion to materialism (Pugh, 2009, p.123-4).

For recipients of the AUH, the task of appropriately consuming while economically restrained is also a real predicament. Pugh makes it clear that low-income parents have to carefully consider what they buy for their children because owning certain items impact a child’s ability to belong in their peer groups. Pugh’s ethnographic insights are useful for speaking to the social significance of purchasing, but the situation of AUH parents and their spending is different in a few key ways. First, the class division among AUH parents is quite different from that of the parents in Oakland, California. The class division that exists among AUH recipients is most visible as a distinction between those economically restrained, and those severely economically restrained. As such, the “symbolic indulgence” vs. “symbolic deprivation” contrast does not fit to this context. How mothers spend the AUH money is symbolic, because they struggle with spending the money in contexts where their spending choices are highly morally regulated. Thus, for AUH mothers, like the Oakland parents Pugh discusses, money is imbued with value far above its purchasing power. When money is tight, strategic spending becomes especially critical.

Recipients of the AUH, who are unable to spend the money they receive directly for things their children might desire, find creative ways to give appropriate meanings to their purchases. These actions are “symbolic” in the sense that Pugh (2009) discusses because it is about the meanings given to spending, just as much as, if not more so than, about what is actually bought. For AUH mothers, however, it is not so much about indulging in one’s children to foster their belonging to a child’s peer circle. Rather, it is about indulging in ways that enable one’s children to be provided for and given treats when possible, while also not being ostracized as a recipient. In this sense, the belonging that recipients seek to foster for their children, is a belonging to the realm of childhood, this realm where children are free from the pressures and realities of adulthood. Importantly, however, AUH money, regardless of its use, is always connected back to its source as state assistance. As a form of welfare AUH money has an unwritten morally pre-determined destination: for one’s children. Whether recipients deviate from this script, a deviation determined by other economic resources, influences the mothers’ moral status as good mothers.

Instead of making sure spending is either about “indulgence” or “deprivation” as was the case in Pugh’s analysis of parents’ purchasing for their children in Oakland California, in the peripheral barrios of Mar del Plata, spending money symbolically is more about trying to make one’s use of the AUH align with the expectation that the money is for the children. For example, one single mother of four, Juana, who finds she must stretch the money she receives from the AUH and from any form of employment she can attain “like gum”, states that every time she receives the AUH, she does one thing special. “What I do, what I have done for 7 years, is that when I receive the money I ask them what delicious item they want to eat, and they may ask for barbecued meat or an ice-cream, and I give them that”. Although perhaps a small action, the monthly consistency with which Juana offers her children this special meal is equated directly

with the AUH, and comes to symbolize appropriate use. It is more than just a special meal: it is a special moment for her children made possible because of the AUH. This moment comes to represent a time when Juana can do what parents hope to: provide their children not only with those things that they need for survival, but also offer them special things and experiences which make life sweeter and more enjoyable. Thus, the AUH facilitates not only this special moment for the children, but also gives the parent the satisfaction of doing so.

Other recipients who were quite economically restrained highlighted a special purchase that they made for their child with the sum. Although this was not possible every month, they emphasized a moment when it was. For example, one participant described using the money for her 15-year-old daughter's tattoo, and one to buy a baby's first outfit. One young mother I spoke to explained that although she thinks of the money she receives from the AUH as distinct and for her son, she is not able to use it in this way. To explain this discrepancy, she described a recent occurrence where she had hoped to use the AUH money to bring her three-year-old son to the mall to ride on the carousels, but instead found she had to use the money to pay bills. She made it clear that her intention for the funds was to spend the money specifically on her child's enjoyment, but reality made it so that she could not use the money in this way. Articulating her intention to spend the money on her son, however, allowed her to negotiate a morally appropriate consumption stance, even if it did not allow her to engage in one.

To this extent, effectively using the AUH goes beyond just using the money as one sees fit, it comes to play a significant role in good mothering. The fact that the AUH is designated to *hijos* relegates the AUH's influence in this relationship to a determinant of a mother's, indeed a poor mother's, moral status. Aside from exemplifying how they use the AUH for the children, mothers often distinguish themselves from others who do not use the sum of money received

through the program for their children's benefit. These "bad" mothers "*malgastar*" or "poorly spend" the money they receive through the AUH. Unsurprisingly, the most frowned upon way for mothers to poorly spend the AUH is to spend it on "frivolous" things for themselves. Expensive cell-phones, brand-named clothing, and alcohol were frequently mentioned as examples of poorly spent money. So, because the AUH is tied deeply to the mother-child relationship, just as the most esteemed way to spend the AUH money is on treats or special things or experiences for your children, the worst way for mothers to spend the AUH money is on frivolous items for themselves. A mother's moral status is heightened, if she can distinguish herself from other mothers who "poorly spend" their money in this way.

Beyond a mother's moral status being tied to her devotion to her children, the AUH makes it so that her own tangible well-being, at least in those cases where the AUH is the predominant family income, is inextricably tied to her children as well. As Clarice, a mother of three and recipient of the AUH suggests "it is a right for hijos it is a right that belongs to them, and aside from being a right, it helps you a lot". In this sense, the fact that the AUH operates through this mother-child relationship, means that both the child and mother are bound to the program through the relationship they hold with each other. Indeed, Ana, a mother of 5 and recipient of the AUH, acknowledges this dual purpose of the program. She says "Yes, of course I benefit from the *Asignacion*, I'm not saying that I do not benefit because I also benefit, but, I dedicate the *Asignacion* to my 'hijos'". In this sense, Ana, like Clarice, recognizes herself as a beneficiary of the program, but in a side-effect kind of a sense. For them, the AUH is for the *hijos* and any benefit that results from this designation, is then secondary to the benefit the program makes in her children's lives.

Children and Childhood

It is likely that the AUH is a policy with such moralizing influence because the policy focuses on children. Children are widely accepted as a population that requires aid and protection (United Nations: Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). It is not questioned that children need assistance for survival, though the extent to which this assistance is deemed acceptable if it comes in the form of child welfare is more debatable (Zelizer, 1985). Thus, caring for one's own children is especially moralized because parents, especially mothers, are expected to fulfill this caring role. As Viviana Zelizer (1985) has contended, children have in North-American and European history, been subject to a "cultural process of sacralization" which aligned with a moral discourse that suggested most forms of child labour occurring outside of the home were unacceptable (p.11). Zelizer (1985) shows that in the United States a shift occurred in the early 1900s so that children were encouraged to occupy a domestic space where they did not generate income through labour, making them economically invaluable. She goes on to argue that by being economically invaluable, children came to gain a sort of priceless status.

Although the history and acceptability of child-labour within Argentina and Latin America more broadly is quite different from the Euro-North-American context, there is something about this idea of children as sacred and acceptably dependent that seems to ring true in present day Mar del Plata. Indeed, my experiences within the neighbourhoods of the city suggest that what it means to be a child is importantly characterized by a young person's need for adult protection and care. Indeed, Abuela Iris' family who I came to know very well, was quite involved with their neighbourhood church. Every Tuesday and Friday afternoon, Iris and one or both of her two daughters (Lara or Natalia) as well as her 19-year-old granddaughter would often volunteer to "*dar la leche*-give milk" to the children. At 5pm they and a few other

neighbourhood volunteers would offer the children *chocolatadas*, and some kind of treat that ranged from sweet bread, to yogurt, to mandarin oranges. It was often children unaccompanied by their parents who would attend the gathering. When I met up with Natalia, Lara and Iris, either after the gathering to drink *mate*, or on some other occasion during the week, they would often discuss the children as being “*solitos*” and “*chiquitos*” (small and alone), expressing pity about their vulnerable living situations. Iris and her daughters and grand-daughter felt that the children needed to be cared for and volunteering to provide them with a snack twice a week was one small way they provided the adult protection and care they believed children required. It is through the particular “vulnerability” of children that a kind of “sacred” status is assigned. This idea of children as sacred is supported through the morally esteemed action of purchasing treats for one’s children with money from the AUH.

Children also become bound within these moral negotiations that are a part of everyday social interactions. Allison Pugh (2009) reminds us that children have a deep role in shaping both their own and adults’ social world. One of the ways that children do this, she notes, is through talk (Pugh, 2009). She says “through talk, children, like adults, mold and shape the relationships that form their environment” (Pugh, 2009, p. 50). Talk is one of the means that the children of AUH recipients convey a sense of entitlement to the money their parents receive on their behalf. Most children upwards of the age of 5 or so are aware that their parents receive the AUH. Many of them stake a claim to the money by asking their mother to purchase them something special when the money is deposited into their account. As AUH recipients are economically restrained, the power of their “talk” is restrained by the actual ability parents have to use AUH money in “frivolous” ways, mothers cannot always buy their children treats.

Older children seem to be more involved in the policy than younger children. In one case,

two young teenage daughters were tasked with travelling to *el centro* and withdrawing the funds, in another case an older teenage daughter was given the money every month directly. I was also told about a case where the money was a point of familial tension as a 17-year-old son claimed the money was his and that his mother must give it to him. In one case, the 16-year-old daughter of an AUH recipient was given the AUH card directly, and the money was hers. She could use the money as she pleased, as Sofia, her mother explained to me “she goes to the bank, and takes out her money, and does what she wishes with the cash”. In these ways children actively participate in the program and the moralizing atmosphere that results. Even the simple request that children make to their mother that she buy them something when she goes to withdraw the AUH money from her account is facilitated by the well-understood notion that the AUH is “for the children”. In this way, mothers are once again in the position where they are pressured to fulfill an obligation to their children through the program’s emphasis on “hijo”s. But mothers are of course not the only actors who make this obligation a reality; children themselves are involved in these discourses.

Children are not passive actors in discussion of the policy by any means. While sitting on the curb of the dirt road one September afternoon munching on a banana I had bought at the fruit shop close by, a chatty teenage boy, about the age of 14 stopped to talk to me. I was in *barrio de la feria*, just outside of the San Miguel building waiting for Morena to arrive and the afternoon activities to begin. He asked me what I was doing in the neighbourhood and as was my usual response to this frequent question, I explained I was studying the AUH. To this he responded, “did you know that they have increased the *Asignación*? I was kind of taken aback, he was 14 or so and he knew about the very recently established increase in monthly sum. When I asked how he knew, he said, “my brothers and cousins receive the *Asignación*”. His knowledge of the

program derived from close relatives that were directly involved. Children are, in their own ways, contributors to neighbourhood discussion of AUH policy just as they are contributors to the culture itself.

As anthropologists have long noted, conceptions of childhood vary cross-culturally and there is, and has been, much differentiation among how children are conceived through time and space (Szulc & Cohn, 2011). In many ways, this separation of children from adults is, as social geographer Stuart Aitken (2004) has noted, “simultaneously tied to local contexts and larger global transformations” (p. 582). Therefore, just as there are notable variations about who children are, these conceptualizations are bound within broader contexts. One of these contexts, is of course the political frame in which certain conceptualizations are used to implement policy. In as much as the AUH depends on an idea of what and who children are, the policy also plays a role in defining this life stage and indeed this parent-child relation. As per the policy then, children are defined as those under 18 who require care from a parent. Essential to the policy’s conception of what should encompass “childhood” is that children must attend school, and receive certain health check-ups. It is also crucial that they are under someone’s care. Those under 18 who are legally emancipated do not receive the AUH because they are technically the “hijos” of no one. As such, parents play an integral role. As I have noted, the policy means for some parents that their own survival is tied to their children as the AUH may sometimes be the only reliable funds parents have access to.

The intersection between a moralizing discourse which influences the positioning of children vis-a-vis their parents and how the AUH is thought about and used, is contextualized within broader class-based discourses about how poor people (mis)spend their money. By moralizing, I mean the moral basis from which judgments are made that place people as

somehow less than or superior to others. This moralizing atmosphere is the result of a broader regulation of the poor that exists through the stigmatization of welfare; stigmatization being one of the four actions that Janice Perlman (2010) has suggested create marginality. Poor people are involved in this moralizing regime which is contextualized within broader Argentine society, and fueled by political and class-based interests. AUH recipients, as I have shown however, also manipulate these discourses to their advantage, but it is important to recognize the broader sphere of moral regulation within which these actions and moral associations exist.

Contextualizing Moral Money

Children who are seen to be dirty, wandering around the streets, alone, poorly clothed and under-fed are pitied by parents whose own kids do not fall into this category. No parent I spoke to suggested that their own children were inadequately cared for, although some did recognize that they and their children have experienced moments of real hardship. The plight of these “other” children is often articulated as an expression of poor parenting rather than poverty in general. Clara, exemplified this dilemma in our interview. She said:

“there are a lot of people that you see, do not work and they have the Asignación. And you see, the Asignación is for the children, and you notice that the kids, they are little and they are taking care of cars at the *feria* with their shoes broken, or they are uncared for and they are begging for change, and you know that the mother and father receive the Asignación, and so sometimes this annoys people”.

Here, the fact that children are uncared for and wandering the streets to make money is problematic because it is known that their parents receive the Asignación, money that is understood as “for the children”. That children are poorly cared for in the ways that Clara spoke of becomes a fault of the parents, at least in part, because of the AUH. The program makes it

seem that there should be no excuse for children to be poorly cared for because each family is receiving monthly state assistance. The fault then rests on the individual parent, and the state and society are not blamed for these issues of child poverty. This belief plays a role in creating the moral atmosphere of these barrios despite it being well understood by recipients that the AUH alone does not provide enough money to adequately support a child.

The AUH as a policy of the *hijos* comes to influence the moral realm of child-rearing, largely through emphasizing the mother-child relationship. This moralization exists in conversation with a larger discourse that cuts across class-lines. There are quite a few myths about the AUH which are perpetuated by those who do not receive the AUH, but also at times by those who do. The three most predominant of these myths are 1) that they have children in order to receive the AUH, 2) that those who receive this money are lazy and do not work, and 3) that they spend the money they receive on drugs and alcohol. Much of the moral negotiations that recipients of the program become involved in stand to counter these assertions. It may often be easier for recipients to distinguish themselves from other recipients who they may say do these things than it is to contest the class stigmatization that is reinforced through the expression of mismanaged/undeserving state support.

The exception to this is the first stigmatization factor I mentioned, that people have children to receive the AUH. Recipients dismiss this assertion easily by demonstrating often through a discussion of how much things cost that the AUH is not enough to support a child. If the AUH does not provide enough money to support a child, then the argument that people have children to receive the AUH is no longer valid. The realm of moral negotiation fostered by AUH recipients does not exist outside of a larger discourse of the regulation of poor people's money, it

is instead a central component of this discourse because these moral negotiations exist in the broader context of class-based and welfare stigmatization.

Fathers and AUH Morality

Fathers are usually not the recipients of the AUH because of both an amendment to the policy which prioritized mothers and because fathers are more likely to work outside the home, thus spending less time with their kids than their female partners. As Joanne Passaro (1996) shows in her ethnography of homelessness in New York, social policy and social assistance which keep women housed and in safe places, do not operate in the same way for men, who are far more likely to be homeless than women. In her ethnography, she suggests that the role of the male father-figure in nuclear families is a difficult role to fill, as many of the men she interviewed spoke about the emotional toll that fulfilling this role carried (Passaro,1996). Although the AUH creates a morally difficult situation for mothers, it is worth noting that the assistance mothers receive through the program is difficult for fathers to access; they only receive the AUH in cases of exception.

Fathers do, however, have a moralizing role and are indeed moralized as well, albeit in distinct ways. I interviewed only three fathers in families that received the AUH. Two were spouses of a recipient, and one was a recipient himself, receiving the AUH because his first wife had died. In this sense, fathers are more secondary to the program's functioning. They moralize by making claims about their understanding of how the program *should* operate. Much of the moralizing these men do in relation to the AUH seemed to be about women AUH recipients they knew. All the men I spoke to initially claimed that women were responsible for the care of children and for carrying out the requirements of the AUH. It was clear that the mother was understood as the familial actor responsible for ensuring the program is carried out to the full benefit of the child. When pushed further about the role of the father in the program and in

raising their children, however, the men emphasized that fathers also have a key role to play; a role that was likened to that of the mother, to provide for their children and to ensure the AUH is implemented for the children's benefit.

I suggested earlier that a mother's own well-being may be bound to her child through the focus the AUH places on the parent-child relation. When the AUH is the only economic resource a mother has access to, it is because of the policy that a mother is able to provide for herself using these funds. It is more often the case that a mother's survival is ensured through the policy than it is that the policy enable a father's survival. I did learn of instances, however, where mother, father and children were being temporarily supported by the AUH. But, because fathers are more heavily tasked with seeking employment they are more likely to have direct access to money that is not explicitly intentioned for the benefit of the children. As Alfonso, a father of 5, whose wife receives the AUH explained to me "I give more importance to what I earn than what I receive through the policy...to earn money and to buy more things for me, to be better off, because I know that through the policy I cannot be better off".

Through employment Alfonso believes that he has the possibility to achieve a better life. Importantly, his chance at a better life through employment is not explicitly tied to the elevation of his children's well-being as is the case of a mother supporting her own well-being (and that of her children and perhaps spouse) through the funds received from the AUH. Despite the freedom that wage-labour may provide from the parent-child bond, a father's freedom is limited by the well-understood expectation that he is meant to provide for his family. As Leo, the father I interviewed who receives the AUH noted, "everything we do is for the children, it is not as if one takes that [AUH] money and buys a motorcycle, everything we have is for the family, for the children". In two-parent families then, fathers are instrumental in the process of maintaining their

children's livelihood, notably a livelihood that is to be fostered not through state-dependency but one's own initiative to work.

Fathers who do not work or are unable to acquire employment are seen as morally failing. Mothers who do not work are not subject to this same kind of moral judgment. While men must work, there is rising pressure for men to, as Kate Bedford (2008) argues, "care better" so that women can "work more" (p.230). Here, she means that men are pressured to do more care work inside the home, so that women can more fully engage in employment outside the home. Bedford (2008), speaking at the scale of global processes, suggests that these pressures to reverse dominant gender-roles are compatible with the idea that in difficult economic circumstances people look to support from their kin. Economic and ideological support for more cohesive, stronger and I would suggest productive families is compatible with the neoliberal incentive to responsabilize this so-called "private" sphere (Bedford, 2008). For families to care for themselves better, fathers are thus encouraged to do more in terms of child care and domestic work. In this sense, the notable absence of fathers within AUH policy is a curious trend.

Morality and Family Responsibility

As I have argued, AUH recipients understand the program as being for the benefit of their children and as an assistance they receive on behalf of them. That the AUH is a child-policy, is an important characterization of how the policy comes to function. The emphasis on children necessitates the involvement of other family members, especially mothers, who are tasked with carrying out the AUH in the right way. Thus, a moralizing environment is formed whereby recipients must negotiate their daily lives, and the use of AUH money to be considered good parents and good recipients. Coupled with the fact that the AUH is a significant economic resource for many recipients, often the AUH money is used directly to make ends meet. Through

the policy, the moralizing dynamic that results further makes family units responsible for themselves, impacting different family members in different ways. This moralizing dynamic involves the: pressures mothers felt to make the AUH seen as used for their children, strategies they used to make the AUH money's use representative of devotion to their child, fragility of these articulations and how they are in constant contention and, broader class stigmatization that makes it so that mothers must go to such lengths to demonstrate appropriate use of their money. Mothers are clearly the most directly influenced family member, but they, like their children are individuals embedded in a variety of relational circles. Indeed, that mothers are bound to their children through the policy means something important for fathers as well; they are less likely to benefit from the AUH than their spousal recipients. The policy works as it does, because of the ways recipients and others close to them make the policy work. Curiously, the responsabilization of the family created through these moral dynamics that occur both within and outside of the barrios in Mar del Plata is facilitated through a policy that provides state-assistance.

Receiving welfare support, even child welfare assistance like the AUH, is difficult because it invites moral stigma. As a recipient, it is widely assumed that one is positioned on some lower level of the relationship than someone who offers assistance. As people negotiate the terrain of being a good recipient their status as a good parent is also affected. Children play a crucial role in these moral negotiations, as both the focus of their parent's "appropriate" consumption practices as per the policy, and as agents involving themselves directly in a policy where they "ought" to be the beneficiaries. These moral concerns are further affected by the crucial role the program plays in supporting the lives of economically poor people in Argentina. In the next chapter, it will be clarified the economic and labour conditions which contextualize and specify the AUH policy, shedding light on how the policy is tied tightly to employment.

Chapter 7: Labour Context and the AUH

To be 'marginal', 'informal' or 'socially excluded' is to be beyond the parameters of the capitalist development process, if that is seen as a harmonious process of course. It is about being shut out from the social, economic, political and cultural mechanisms of social integration. Policy makers might thus design programmes to address marginality and exclusion, much as capitalism has always sought to address poverty in one way or another. But the prospects for social engineering would be limited if poverty and exclusion are structural and inherent features of an unequal system based on power differentials.

-Munck (2013, p. 750)

Trabajo en Negro and Trabajo en Blanco.

The above quotation is taken from Ronaldo Munck's (2013) "The Precariat: a view from the South". In his article, Munck critiques Guy Standing's (2011) use of the term precariat to describe the development of a "dangerous class" of marginalized workers. In so doing, Munck provides an historical account of the various ways that a collective of people who remain outside of the formalized capitalist production system has long been present. He suggests that "for millions of workers and urban poor in the global south...precariousness has always been a seemingly natural condition" (p.747). By suggesting that precarious work has long been present in the majority of the world, Munck takes issues with the idea that the precariat is a new and emerging class which he sees as a northern centric observation.

The above quotation addresses an important divide (one that is noteworthy, but not totalizing) between formal and informal workers which Munck argues has a longer historical

presence than Standing has suggested. This distinction between two streams of employment in Argentina, is regularly expressed by the general public as whether one works *en blanco* or *en negro*. Those who work *en blanco*, are formally recognized as actively engaging in the capitalist production system. Those who work *en negro* are not registered workers and they do not benefit from the system of state authorized protections which registered employees receives. Their work does not privilege them a recognized position as workers within the dominant system of capitalism. That said, some people prefer to work *en negro*, because of the flexibility certain informal positions offer. Indeed, some work *en negro* may be more lucrative or enjoyable than some work *en blanco*. Indeed, as Munck proposes, there has been for a long time a large number of people that are “excluded” from or “marginal” to processes of capitalism, a division that he suggests is not all-encompassing, but nonetheless apparent (p.750).

The distinction between those excluded from the formal labour market and those directly involved in it, however, is important to how these divisions get played upon and how they play out daily in Mar del Plata. This is particularly true for how the *Asignación Universal por Hijo* operates. Munck (2013) sees the division between formal and informal economies as intertwined and overlapping. Indeed, in the city of Mar del Plata the relationship between *trabajo en negro* and *trabajo en blanco* is reciprocal. This is the case not just because for *trabajo en blanco* to be a stream of employment, *trabajo en negro* must also be one; but because often working in *blanco* is made possible because someone else is working in *negro* and the reverse is also true. In addition, just because someone is a registered worker, it does not mean they are not participating in work with low-job security; they may be. Moreover (as I will make clear later on in types of work with low job-security) a worker’s employment status can shift from *blanco* to *negro*, rather abruptly. This is especially likely for people who live in Mar del Plata’s peripheral barrios.

Because of the influx of people to the city during the summer months, there is a lot more available employment, and often people find consistent work in the summer, but struggle to do so throughout other seasons of the year.

In Argentina, approximately 1/3 of the population works in the informal labour market (La Nación, Sept. 2015). The AUH is given specifically to those who work in the informal economy or are unemployed. As a policy, the AUH is technically not a social assistance measure targeting the poor, even though many recipients see “*necesidad*” (need) as a precursor to being involved in the program. Instead, the AUH, implemented in 2009, is part of the country’s long-standing social support system which provides a monthly allowance to those who do not receive any kind of contributory benefits from the state (because they are not registered workers). It is in this way that the program makes claims to universality by providing state support to a significant portion of the Argentine population that was, prior to the program, largely removed from this kind of monetary state benefit system that began in the country in the 1940’s (Danani & Hintze, 2010).

Not only is there an interdependent relation between work in *negro* and work in *blanco*, there is also a certain malleability to these designations. Employers may shift an employee’s status from either *blanco* to *negro* or from *negro* to *blanco* to their own advantage, at times without informing their employees. This was indeed the case with Morena’s daughter, a story that Morena told me twice to re-iterate the importance of the AUH within her daughter’s life.

Morena, the church employee who organizes the weekly actividades at San Miguel is a patient woman with a very practical outlook and a knack for giving useful advice. She is loving and kind, but also brutally accurate in some of the assessments she makes about life in Mar del Plata. The second time we met he explained to me that her daughter receives the Asignación. She

noted, however, that her daughter was relatively well off, making a distinction between her daughter and grandchildren and some of the families observed in Barrio de la feria. Due to her relatively well-off status, her daughter can use the money from the AUH to pay for her son and daughter's' activities like swimming lessons, something that the mothers who visit San Miguel are unable to do because the AUH is their most dominant and consistent *ingreso* (source of income).

In mid- September, however, Morena informed me and the other women in the kitchen at San Miguel, that they had taken away her daughter's Asignación. Clearly upset, Morena noted that her grand-children were always impeccably cared for and that they regularly received their health check-ups as required by the program. Morena explained that her son-in-law's boss had registered him in *blanco* without informing him. It was only clear to both her daughter and son-in-law that he had been placed in *blanco* when her daughter went directly to ANSES and was informed that "*ya no corresponde a la asignacion*" (she is no longer eligible to receive the AUH). Apparently, her husband's boss had placed her husband in *blanco* because it was cheaper for the boss to pay an insurance coverage than to directly pay him a security cheque. Thus, Morena's daughter is now only eligible for the monthly state benefit for those who work in *blanco*, the Asignación Familiar (most commonly referred to as *el salario*). This conversion affected Morena's daughter significantly because, according to Morena, her daughter received just 200 pesos per-child, as opposed to the roughly 1000 pesos per child she had received through the AUH.

This anecdote shows not only that the line between *trabajo en negro* and *trabajo en blanco* is far from rigid, but that the distinction between the two has important implications for people's relationship to the AUH. Whether someone is or is not a recipient of the AUH is more

in flux than is often suggested because whether someone works in *negro* or *blanco* is variable in the contexts of vulnerable employment. Indeed, it is precisely the flexibility of these markers that produces a certain degree of fear among recipients of the AUH, that the government will *sacar* (take-away) their Asignación. Furthermore, a sense of entitlement to the AUH is reflected in the frustration that recipients express about having their monthly benefit taken away and the fear of losing access to these funds. This fear may seem un-called for given that those who work in *blanco* are also entitled to a monthly benefit, the *salario*. The monthly payment, received through *el salario*, however, may take up to two months to re-instate with no retroactive payment. Moreover, as was made evident through Morena's anecdote, once placed in *blanco* a sliding scale applies such that if you make above a certain minimal wage you receive less money than is received through the AUH or none at all.

Gender, Work, and the AUH

Although many women do have their own jobs, in families where the mother and father are both responsible for caring for their child, it is common for the father to seek outside employment and the mother to stay home and care for the kids and the house. Barrio life is visibly structured in this way as in the day there are visibly fewer men in the neighbourhoods and in the early evening men are more present as many arrive back to their homes. Alejandra, a mother of four and grandmother of three who receives the AUH for her youngest child described the reality of many fathers as she sees it. She said, "what happens is, the father is always like outside, because the father comes home from work and he watches television and the mothers we are the ones who go to work outside the home, inside the home, and continue to care for the child all day". I met Alejandra at the community centre in Barrio Ruedas, she regularly attends *the Grupo de Mujeres* and paints the women's nails during and after the weekly session. Noelia, another AUH recipient who I also met at the weekly session explained to me that "as a mother,

one has more awareness of the necessities of the children”. She clarifies this statement by explaining that “I have the awareness of what we need to buy, he (her husband) will accompany me, take me in the car and everything, but the fact that I am with the kids all the time produces a consciousness, that (the husband) lacks”. Key to both these assertions is the understanding that it is the father’s absence in his children’s lives that creates an environment in which the mother is the primary caregiver; an environment that fosters a certain consciousness for children.

Among single mother-families, the need to work dynamic is different. The women I talked to who identified as single moms had to work and seek resources to provide for themselves and their children. They emphasized the fact that they had to work because the father of the child was not helping them with the costs of raising their kids. This emphasis stresses the widely understood dependence on the father as a primary income provider. Moreover, single mothers must find someone to care for their children while they work which poses an additional challenge. Cecilia, a young mother of a three-year-old, works consistently. But, she does not have fixed employment. Instead, each day she must look for work. Cecilia is fortunate enough to have a family that reaches beyond her household, where she and her daughter live. Cecilia’s mother and sister therefore sometimes help her out by watching her daughter when she must work. Cecilia, however, was quick to note that they generally only help her when she has to work, and not always. Although it was noted to me a few times by participants that there are single fathers, I did not meet any men who care for their kids alone and therefore cannot speak about their experiences. Many mothers with male partners also work, but it is generally the father whose employment is more consistent and importantly, is assumed will earn money to provide for his family. In addition, some mothers who did not work expressed a desire to do so, but cited having to care for their kids as the reason this was not possible.

In Argentina, 47 % of adult women actively participate in the labour market, compared to 72% of adult men (Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo, y Seguridad Social, 2014). There remains a significant difference between male and female employment rates, but the gap has decreased since 1990, when only 34% of women actively participated in the labour market (Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo, y Seguridad Social, 2014). The types of paid work that women who receive the AUH do include: care work, cooking work, beauty-work, cleaning work, for a community centre, and work in the sardine factories. The men that I spoke to, or whose employment I learned of through their wives, worked: in construction, as taxi-drivers, as bus-drivers, selling vegetables, as painters, in a bakery, and as a car-parker.

Prioritizing Mothers and Being *Blanqueado*

The mother is automatically, as per AUH policy, the guardian who receives the monthly program sum. Mothers were given priority in July of 2013, three and a half years after the AUH was first put in place. As noted by President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner at the time:

“we have many complaints by mothers that their husbands have abandoned them and continue to receive the AUH. Therefore, we want it to be the mother who always receives the AUH except when, as determined by judicial decision, the father has custody of the children” (May 22, 2013).

Under the pretext that mothers are the primary caregivers of their children then, mothers were given priority access to these monthly funds that are designated for bettering children’s lives. This shift in policy, reflected in President Fernandez de Kirchner’s statement, is indeed reflective of the reality that mothers are more likely the ones responsible for their children. At the same time, however, giving mothers priority access to the AUH means that fathers are legitimately excused and excluded from the

caregiving realm. Surprisingly, most of the people I talked to who received the AUH, almost all women, believed that it should be the person in charge of the child that receives the sum, not necessarily the mother. Most, though not all, were unaware that the shift in policy which granted AUH priority to women had occurred.

Given that it is most often men who leave the house on a day-to-day basis to work, it becomes the father's status as either a registered or unregistered employee which determines the mother's access to the AUH. In this sense, the money that the mother has legislated access to depends on the employment status of her husband. This was apparent in the story I told about Morena, but was also clear in numerous other conversations. In one interview I conducted with Raul, the husband of an AUH recipient, it is made particularly clear not only how variable being *blanqueado*- (registered as a formal worker) is, but also how this status alters who has access to the monthly allowance. The 2-3 month delays for receiving state support that result from being *blanqueado*, which happens quite randomly, directly impacts a mother's ability to obtain the monthly benefit that she is entitled and her ability to use those funds.

R: I was in *relación de dependencia* (a registered employee) recently, but just briefly, and during that time-period, they took away the AUH from my wife. I should have received it. I was one month *en blanco*, but it took three months to receive the salario.

J: So, you went three months without receiving any assistance?

R: Without receiving anything, exactly. Last month the same thing happened, because I obtained another job where I was, for one month, '*blanqueado*', and they, once again, took away the AUH. And so last month she (his wife) did not receive the sum. She should have received money because of her pregnancy (Asignación por Embarazo) and the benefit for the other children, but

she only received 700 pesos which is nothing compared to what she should have received. It gets complicated when they register you as a formal worker. She stops receiving the money, you have to again go to ANSES and do the paperwork to begin receiving the allowance.

J: So, when you work *en blanco*, your wife no longer receives the AUH?

R: She does not receive the money anymore, I receive *el salario* (the Asignación familiar).

J: And to pass the *salario* on to her, do you have to do any paperwork?

R: Yes, I have to go to ANSES and say that I am receiving the money and fill out a declaration so that she can be the one who receives the money.

J: That's crazy, it changes so suddenly.

R: Yes, it changes just like that, everything changes. My wife wants to kill me because she is the one who uses that money for things, and then when she does not receive the money well.... I have to pay.

Although the mother is able to receive the *Asignación familiar* (the monthly benefit per child-for those who work *en blanco*, referred to as the *salario*), through her husband's employment, she or her husband must fill out a form to do so. In cases where both parents work, however, the mother is given priority. The *Asignación familiar* which is given based on registered employment status, first prioritizes the employed parent in the household; this is different from the AUH through which the mother is the recipient automatically.

The ways in which Raul envisions this money as belonging to his wife, speaks to an understanding among recipients that these *Asignaciones* are to be managed by the mother. Moreover, it provides an example of what happens when statuses of *en blanco* and *en negro* are

malleable. Because the state protection programs for which people find themselves eligible change on this basis, the way recipients make these programs work in their daily lives is influenced through recipients' experiences with both programs. Raul's wife comes to control the money received through both the *Asignación familiar* and the *Asignación universal por hijo*, even though she is not the automatic recipient. That money, which Raul's wife usually manages is what she uses to buy things. The precedent set by the AUH, that women are to be the automatic recipients, influences how the funds received through the *Asignación familiar* are controlled and managed. To transfer the funds to his wife, Raul had to physically go to an ANSES location to sign the money over to her. Through this example I have aimed to show how being *blanqueado*, a process that is only possible because of the constant flux between *trabajo en negro* and *trabajo en blanco*, affects access to and control of, monthly state benefits. This instability between registered and unregistered work directly impacts who controls the sum of money received through the *Asignación* programs. Moreover, the variability of *negro* and *blanco* work statuses creates the condition for the program to be acted out similarly despite the fact that the policies are variably designated to different parents. These designations are important to account for as well because they may cause money-managing tensions in the home and family when the recipient fluctuates.

Status and Stigma

At the same time that it is understood that work is flexible in that it can shift from being either registered or unregistered, it is a denial of this flexibility that allows people to use these associations as markers of status loss. Many of the AUH recipients I spoke with, discussed with me a feeling of stigma about receiving the AUH. Stigma was felt because others negatively assume that those receiving the AUH are "vagos" (lazy people/ people who don't work), a term that may also imply someone is involved with drugs and alcohol. In this way, if someone

receives the AUH it is seen as sign of what kind of person they are and a signal that they do not possess the work ethic necessary to participate in the formal labour market. These negative associations about AUH recipients can only be inferred if there is a presumed fixity to someone being a recipient of the AUH, such that it becomes part of their *ascribed* identity. This assumed fixity is the result of an equation between poverty and being an AUH recipient; it is often thought that they go hand-in-hand.

In their review of the concept ‘stigma’, Bruce Link and Jo Phelan (1999) suggest that one of the main problems with how researchers have used the concept stigma has to do with stigma “being seen as something in the person, rather than a distinction or tag that others affix to the person” (p.366). Although I agree this is an important distinction to make, there is something to be said for the basis upon which these “tag(s)” are “affix(ed)” (Link & Phelan, p.366). By no means a true marker of what a recipient of the AUH is like, these tags like *vago* directly speak harmfully about “something in the person”. So, although these terms do not truly speak to who the people that receive the AUH are, the stigmatization is harmful because the negative claim is made about a deeply innate aspect of the person. As Alejandra explained to me, clearly expressing her feelings of hurt “why does anyone have the right to say to someone that they are a *vago*? Or to say that they are whatever, you understand, it is horrible”.

Alejandra was also quick to note that this stigma is engrained in policy because those who receive the *Asignación familiar* (*salario*- the monthly benefit for registered workers) are not required to show that their children regularly attend school and receive health check-ups to receive the funds. Those receiving the *Asignación familiar* must sign a form showing proof of school attendance, but this form only needs to be signed once a year, and results in an additional sum of money ranging between 1043 to 2083 pesos (between roughly 80 and 160 CAD). In other

words it is given in addition to the money administered through the Asignación Familiar. In an interview, Alejandra told me that from her point of view she sees this distinction “as discriminative. It is like they are saying you are a registered worker, so you have lots of ability (*un monton de capacidad*) and you are superior to an informal worker”. In this sense, the message that Alejandra believes is delivered through this differentiation in policy is that formal workers are more able to care for their children because of their position within the registered labour market. The assumption then is that because of their *capacidades*, formal workers are in less need of state regulation.

The differences between the Asignación Universal por Hijo and the Asignación Familiar sometimes creates tensions that result in stigmatizing assertions about other recipients. In September 2016, ANSES, the national ministry tasked with facilitating the country’s social programs, published a payment calendar as it does seasonally to inform recipients of the date they will receive the funds. This month’s calendar posted on ANSES’ official facebook page is featured in the photo (figure 1) below.



Figure 3: *Calendario de Pagos: Desde septiembre Hasta diciembre 2016*. Reprinted from *Política Argentina* by ANSES, 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.politicargentina.com/notas/201610/17053-familia-tipo-y-rubia-vs-madre-sola-y-morocho-polemica-por-una-campana-de-anses.html>

This figure shows the dates recipients of the varying programs will receive the money they are entitled through the varying policies.

The photos suggest the recipients of the Asignación Familiares have light skin, one child, belong to two parent families, and have a well structured home in the backdrop. The photo which represents the AUH, shows recipients as having dark skin, being single mothers with multiple children (one of whom is cut off in the photo), and in an unknown location. In this sense the national government reinforces certain assumptions about these policies through its official materials. Stigma about the program is not disconnected from the policy or political information about the program. The photos further stigma by physically portraying AUH recipients in a certain light. If AUH recipients are stigmatized because they are receivers of state-support, are thought to not work, have lots of children, mismanage money, etc, then the photo makes it seem that being a person of colour, a single mother, and having lots of children are also somehow negative and aspects inextricably linked to the AUH. The photo received such backlash that it was removed from the website a few days later.

The week the photo was released, Elena thought it would be a good idea to discuss the photo together in the *Grupo de Mujeres*. The discussion was rather fruitful because the women articulated how they themselves reproduced the kinds of assumptions embedded in the photos. They spoke about the realization that they talked about others who received the AUH, and even themselves sometimes in negative ways. One group participant Sandra, explained how she used to be an Asignación Familiar recipient, but has since become a recipient of the AUH. She discussed how as an Asignación Familiar recipient, she saw herself as better than those receiving the AUH. But, because in that moment she herself was an AUH recipient she realized how wrong she was. Sandra spoke to the group about the power of the assumptions that those who receive the AUH are lazy, that they don't work, that they take drugs, or that they spend the money on themselves, because she was once someone who felt this way. When you are part of a

population that is made marginal through stigmatization, stigma can be a strategy to heighten one's own status. This strategy, however, is often ineffective when the same kinds of stigma reinforced through state discourses, like the photo above, reposition people as part of the same kinds of status groups that they seek to disassociate themselves from.

The Importance of Work: An Anti-Vago Culture

“Quiero que todos y cada uno de los argentinos tenga trabajo, porque el pueblo solo puede ser libre, porque el hombre solo puede ser libre cuando puede decidir su vida y decide su vida solo cuando tiene un trabajo digno y decente que le permite dar educación, salud, y vivienda a sus hijos” – *Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner*
(*december 23rd, 2009*)

On December 23rd, 2009, two months after the initiation of the AUH, president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner stated the above in a press conference in La Matanza of the province of Buenos Aires. She stated “I want each and every Argentine to have work, because the people can only be free, because man can only be free, when he can decide his life, when he has decent and dignified work that allows him to give education, health, and housing to his children.”⁴ She stated this while mentioning her government's implementation of the Asignación as an achievement for all workers. Here, it is made apparent that the program was never intended to replace work, and the government's goal to create work as the primary means for addressing poverty remained dominant. Indeed, the AUH facilitates the necessity for paid employment, by being something that helps, but not enough for survival. Furthermore, true freedom, as per the president's speech, is achieved when parents can provide for their children through their

⁴ The gendering of this quote is not so obvious in the Spanish version, where pronouns are not used. I would suggest the gendering is less harsh than the English translation makes it seem.

involvement in the labour market, notably *not* through state assistance. Freedom, therefore, is attained through an independence from the government as opposed to a dependence on state support. Furthermore, in her announcement of the AUH in 2009, President Fernandez de Kirchner stated that “those who receive the Asignación when they find work will continue to receive the Asignación, and therefore the program is absolutely complementary to our project of attaining decent work for all Argentines” (para. 2). That the president stresses her government’s concern with finding employment for Argentines, suggests the program does not challenge the common-sense notion that work is necessary for survival.

Basic income schemes are gaining traction politically, and scholars have recently conducted much work assessing the impacts and possibilities of these schemes (Ferguson, 2015). In the wake of this rather timely discourse, conditional cash transfer programs (of which the AUH is a widely praised example) are often cited as models of basic income schemes, or at least as precursors to more definite measures like Basic Income Guarantees/Grants (Ferguson, 2015). One of the main arguments backing basic income schemes is that they address the reality that employment is increasingly difficult to attain. Max Weber (1930) recognized almost a century ago that essential to capitalism is the idea that “labour must...be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself,” an ideology that is notably a “product of a long arduous process of education” (p. 25). To this extent, basic income schemes challenge this common-sense idea, which is deeply engrained in many places of the world, Mar del Plata being just one. As Lara an AUH recipient, and her sister Natalia, a prior AUH recipient from Barrio Doña Rosa explained to me, “whatever type of work it may be, work is everything...work is dignity”. The notion that working for working’s sake is virtuous strengthens the class power of those with stable employment by suggesting that those who work for pay are morally superior to those who do not

work, or whose work is unpaid (child-care). This moral ideal then, presented as a societal norm, excludes those unable to access employment from this realm of moral superiority. The ideal that work is in itself virtuous, deems those unable to work morally flawed. This exact idea was articulated by Alejandra when she discussed how the term “vago” is used to describe AUH recipients.

Despite the existence of the AUH, work remains a necessary precursor for a minimally-decent quality of life in Mar del Plata. Sentiments that “*no se vive de la Asignación*” (one does not live off the AUH) were widely expressed. The AUH was almost always referred to as an “ayuda”, something that helps. Indeed, it is a combination of the fact that the AUH is 1) both “for the children” and 2) alone not enough to live off, that recipients often cite as making it acceptable for them to receive the monthly sum. In other words, it is because 1) the AUH requires recipients and/or their partners to work to maintain their family’s basic standard of living and 2) because recipients do not feel that the money received is designated to them, that recipients feel it is ok for them to receive the monthly benefit.

Through the program then, individuals are still required to seek employment and additional resources, from kin or other support networks, or from charitable associations (often times the Catholic or Evangelical church) to provide for themselves and their children. Gimena, a single mother and AUH recipient that I met at the *Grupo de Mujeres* explained precisely this necessity to me in an interview. She says,

“The Asignación, think about it, right now it is at more or less 700 pesos. And if I try and think about a person depending on that, a person who does not work, that person cannot maintain themselves. One must have something, work, or try to figure out how to manage the situation, because it is not enough.”

On both a moral and practical level then, the AUH does not do what basic income schemes ought to: facilitate human livelihood without paid employment.

As I suggest that the AUH fails to do what basic income schemes must, the program is, however, for those who have severely limited access to employment, a “make-live intervention” (Li, 2009). The program is a make-live intervention because many recipients experience short or long terms where the AUH is their main or only *ingreso* (income) and the program does enable them to live (Li, 2009). Juana, one of the mothers that attended the San Miguel *actividades* on an on-and-off basis explains how the AUH kept her from living on the street during a particularly difficult moment in her life.

“I was working in *blanco*, so when they took away my Asignación, I stopped working there (in a geriatric care facility) and I went two months without receiving the Asignación. I had no place to be, to live, because I did not have money for rent during those two months, and on top of that, I had separated and I was with my two children. It was an ugly situation. After, when I began to receive the Asignación, then I could go back to renting a place. Imagine if I did not have the Asignación, I would have been living on the street”.

For Juana, the AUH was the difference between living on the street with her two children and renting a home. As Juana continues to share in the interview I conducted with her, the AUH alone, however, was not enough.

“The people from here, from the church, helped me a lot, like a lot. They helped me through all the steps that I was taking. They were with me; they gave me a very big

hand. And I also received a bag of dried goods monthly (distributed through the church's charity organization-Caritas)".

In this way, the AUH functions because of other existing support networks, notably, in this case, the non-state support network — her church community. A combination of the AUH and church community support then, helped Juana achieve the resources necessary for minimal survival. I suggest, therefore, the AUH is an important social program, which as an intervention does “make-live”, but not a basic income scheme. I have not termed the AUH a basic income scheme, because it does not necessarily challenge the common-sense notion that one must “work for a living” (Ferguson, 2015, p.22). Instead, although as a policy the AUH was enacted under the recognition that entering the formal labour market is difficult or impossible for many Argentines, because the program alone is insufficient, the program is compatible with the belief that one must work for a living.

In Mar del Plata Argentina, the co-existence of *trabajo en negro* and *trabajo en blanco* has important day-to-day significance that speaks to broader processes of government regulation, moral ascriptions, and how work is being both thought about and carried out. How the AUH relates to both *trabajo en negro* and *trabajo en blanco* has tangible effects in participants lives by impacting if, when, and who receives the monthly benefit that is essential to how many living in Mar del Plata's peripheral barrios manage their economic needs. The ways these two forms of employment are divided and overlapping constitute work in the area. How these varying streams of employment are connected to the AUH shapes the everyday lives of people in the city's peripheral barrios

and speaks to how these processes are embedded in the broader relationship between work and class.

Chapter 8: Policy and Kinship: What Types of Relationships Make the AUH Work?

Responsibilization: Finding a Place for Kinship in the Individual Neoliberal Model

Much of the literature that discusses the neoliberal political moment and indeed the kind of subjects such processes of neoliberalism endorse, suggests that the *individual* becomes responsabilized through policies which dismantle welfare states by stripping back social protection programs (Harvey, 2005). Jane Lewis (2001) has argued that this individualization has become normalized in social policies. Indeed, the market is supposed to fill the void that the state has left open, and it is an individual's positioning vis-a-vis these market systems which often comes to determine one's well-being; something that under welfare state models, the state, in its various forms of governance, is tasked with providing. In the case of Argentina, Daniel Fridman (2010) shows how an independent economic subject was fostered through the military dictatorship, as early as the 1970's. This subject was, as he notes, a product of reforms, but also essential to the reforms themselves. Under the model of a supposed free market, people are positioned as consumers and must learn to "defend himself [sic] rather than seek the government to defend him [sic]" (Fridman, 2010, p.284). In other words, protection must be created by and for the individual. Although neoliberalism in Argentina has its roots prior to the presidency of Carlos Menem, it was under his government from 1989-1999 that Argentina experienced the greatest neoliberal influence (Shever, 2012). Governance models which focus on the individual are part of seemingly larger global processes that scholars have well accounted for (Fridman, 2010; Harvey, 2005; Lewis, 2001).

In her critical engagement with the individual worker model that Lewis (2001) has put forward, Mary Daly (2013) suggests that the familization model is a helpful counter-perspective from which to assess policy, citing that the individual is "not the sole interest or focus of policy" (Daly, 2013, p.350). Indeed, individuals are embedded within webs of relations, of which

families are often central. She notes, however, that a familization model for policy analysis runs the risk of representing the family as static, or as an unproblematic unit of a broader society. Indeed, there is a tension in the literature, but also in lived experiences between this idea that neoliberal processes have an underlying individual focus, and the realization that individuals are not isolated agents in places, despite processes and policies which may seek to position them in these ways. This is especially the case in terms of child policy because children need caregivers for survival.

As Kate Bedford (2008) argues, the classic model of neoliberal responsabilization is “based on the idea that in economic crises, people rely upon their kin, that kinship relations should be shored up” (p.230). Thus, despite the ways in which neoliberal subjects are importantly individual, the individual is tasked with using other relations, relations that are often kin-based to form protection in the sense that Fridman (2010) argues neoliberal governance requires. Some policies, and I have argued the AUH is one such policy, are designed to tether specific familial relations, and in this sense, it is not the individual that is the focus, but a collection of individuals related to each other in certain ways. This chapter of my thesis will discuss the kinds of relationships that AUH recipients are a part of, with the aim of showing that these types of relationships influence how the AUH functions. The AUH impacts more than just those receiving or benefitting directly from the funds, because it is a part of people’s lives and the relationships they have with others. In this sense, the scope of the AUH policy is broader than just the parent-child relationship.

Kinship: Blood, Practice and Barrio Relatedness

I was wandering around the large open building that was San Miguel, when abuela Elsie had stepped through the door that led to the kitchen, chit-chatting to herself and anyone that would listen as per usual. Today, Elsie informed everyone that she had brought her blood-

glucose detector. A diabetic Elsie had decided that her fellow neighbours and kin should be informed about their blood sugar levels too. The process for checking one's blood sugar involved a prick in the finger, with a small hole punch like device containing a disposable lancet. A test strip, containing a drop of blood, was then inserted into the blood-glucose reader, revealing a number that Elsie would dictate as either too high or too low. The disposable lancet, which I imagine should have been changed every time a new person's blood was taken, was, however, not changed for every person. Instead, Elsie and the other women huddled together in the small kitchen deciding for whom they would change the lancet. This was determined based on who they deemed to be either healthy or related. Blood-relations became important, but not the only determining factor for whose lancet needed to be changed. Elsie did not have many lancets, and I assume they were costly to come by; minimizing their use was important.

Because Morena (the group organizer) had blood deemed to be clean, Paula, whose blood was taken after Morena's (the group organizer), did not require a new lancet. This seemed to be because Morena was a woman of some status, as she organized the group activities and was not from the barrio at all. When Clara's blood was taken after that of her brother-in-law Juan, a new lancet was also not required, because they were related-though not by blood. Eva, whose blood was taken after Clara also did not require a clean strip because she and Clara were sisters. Lisandro a teenage boy, of no kin relation to any of the adults was given a new strip to use, as was Ailen, who was Juan's sister, but her blood was taken after Lisandro. Understandings of relatedness, indeed kinship, seemed to underscore decision-making. Of course, relatedness was rather unimportant, if the goal was to prevent a blood-borne disease. The exception to relatedness as the deciding factor for whom the lancet needed to be changed was Morena. It was in fact her distanced relation from those of the barrio, underscored by a presumably higher class status, that

made her blood healthy.

This blood-testing experience was enlightening because it shows how understandings of kinship have a real impact on people's lives. Moreover, although blood was the substance of discussion it was not solely relatedness through blood that came to determine whether cross-contamination through blood could occur. It is not about any sort of actual blood relatedness, but about the understandings of how people are related that comes to affect how people understand their relationships with each other. This example does not speak directly to AUH policy, but it helps to construe a clearer picture of barrio relations and how kinship is practiced, determined, and a component of neighbourhood relations more broadly. Indeed, all those who had their blood tested that day were either AUH recipients themselves or relatives of recipients.

What is Family in Mar del Plata?

It is not possible to pin down one consistent meaning of family for those research participants who were kind enough to show me pieces of their lives. Family, however, is important in Mar del Plata from what I came to gather and people seem more tightly bound to their kin, than my experiences tell me is true of Canadians. It is important to note that my own understandings of family are classed, in the sense that my family is not poor, and my closest relatives not a part of the working class. That said, I would still suggest that generally-speaking Argentine family members are more a part of each other's lives than Canadian family members, because even the wealthy Argentine families I came to know seemed more closely bound than their Canadian counterparts. Argentine Parents tend to be much more involved in their children's lives, especially the lives of their older children. Familial gatherings of aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and friends were quite common, especially on Sundays, and kin seem to have a strong influence in each other's lives. There was an underlying theme that family is a structure of *positive* relationships, despite the ways people acknowledge harmful or destructive

relationships they have or have had with kin. In the *Grupo de Mujeres* one day the topic of discussion was family and it was a great opportunity for me to learn about how women in the group expressed understandings of family, flavouring my observations about the subject.

The afternoon prior, I had expressed to one of the group co-ordinators that I believed family was more important to Argentines than Canadians. She brought this comment up in the group, and one woman Carolina, likely in her late fifties, made the comment that this was merely a generalization, because she did not have any family, because of a long-history of parental abuse. Carolina, however, went on to stress that she had made friends, through choice, that she came to consider her siblings. That Carolina argues she does not have a family, however, means she distinguishes these chosen siblings from a biological family. This suggests that family is held in a positive light, as those familial members who are abusive, lose their status of relatedness. After suggesting that family could be chosen, however, Carolina perceptively suggested that there was something importantly *not* chosen about family. She asked the group “what can a child of three do, when she is being abused?” By posing this question, Carolina implied that a child cannot choose the support system that raises her. This familial dilemma is characterized by the dependent nature of parent-child relationships; young children cannot provide for themselves and in this sense family, or at least a guardian is necessary. The AUH understands this dilemma and intervenes directly in the parent-child relationship. Likewise, it was common for interview participants to suggest family was a positive aspect of life. When I asked interview participants “for you, what is a family?” responses included: “pure love”, “everything”, and “the most important thing that one has”. Family is a highly-valued component of Mar del Plata life, and this valuing imbues the meaning of family with moral good, even though families are not always positive relational units.

Family and Household: Los *Terrenos*

One of the most visibly apparent pieces of information I learned through my time in Mar del Plata, was how household and family are importantly intertwined. This was visible in the way that *terrenos* become a means for structuring mutual caring relationships. In the barrios outside of the city of Mar del Plata, *terrenos* are often small plots of land owned by one member of a family upon which various homes exist. Usually these homes are occupied by the landowner's relatives. In this sense, although the divisions that anthropologists often make between household and family are useful, the connections between them, or what Claudia Fonseca (1991) describes as how "they complement each other" must be made evident (p.135).

One of the AUH families that I became close with had a particularly interesting living situation: the family of abuela Iris. Iris is the clear matriarch of her family and resides in the bottom level of a two-story house in barrio Doña Rosa. Above, connected by some stairs on the outside of the house live her son, his wife, their daughter, and grandson. Not connected physically, but accessible only through abuela Iris's bottom flat, are her daughter Lara, her husband and their three children ranging in age from 13 to 21. Lara receives the AUH for her youngest daughter Yara. Their home is disconnected from abuela Iris' house, but there home has no washroom and therefore to either shower or use the toilet, Lara, her husband and her three children must pass through to the home of abuela Iris. Moreover, many, if not most meals are shared and occur in abuela Iris' home. In this way, various households, disconnected by physical structures and nuclear family arrangements are brought together through broader kin relations.

These kin relations are indeed economic in nature as this sharing of meals and house resources has economic benefit. I do not mean to reduce the value of these social relations;

indeed social intimacy is fostered *through* the enabling of economic benefit (Zelizer, 2005).

Because of the constant interactions between relatives that occur in these shared living spaces, it is inevitable that these relatives have a significant role in each other's lives. These relationships are economically imperative because they enable the social reproduction of the individuals connected through an understanding of kinship.

Lara, more so than most recipients, was adamant that the AUH was a “*complimento y nada mas*”- by which she means a slight bonus, but not something that makes any real kind of change in her life. Indeed, she stated that prior to receiving the AUH, she “*vivia igual*—lived the same”. It is worth noting that Lara received the AUH for only one child, while still taking care of her two other (older than 18) children. She also works casually cleaning houses, and her husband is employed as a taxi-driver. Thus, the AUH was a minimal sum, relative to other income and expenses. The AUH operates then, on top of this kin-based support network. How kinship is economically important for abuela Iris' family exemplifies McKinnon and Cannell's (2013) critique of the rather commonplace notion that kinship is a component of the “domestic domain” an assertion which strips kinship “of its political and economic functions” (p.5). Indeed, the relationships between the members of abuela Iris' family are economic in nature and political because relations are fluid depending on the political and economic contexts in which they rest.

Living on the same *terreno* as one's relatives is common in the peripheral barrios of Mar del Plata. Specific families seem to own certain small plots of land upon which two or even three houses, housing various relatives, will rest. Although the intensity and consistency of flow between homes on a piece of land varies, there is a pattern of sharing resources and caregiving that seems to occur through these familial and domestic lines. This is not to say that sharing of resources and caring is, however, exclusive to those who live on the same *terreno*. *Terrenos*, just

like families or households, are not isolated places.

Clara, a mother of five children under the age of seven, whose husband was in prison during the time I was in Mar del Plata, received a lot of support both economic and in the form of caregiving from abuela Elsie, her grandmother-in-law. Abuela Elsie would often accompany Clara to the *centro*, the clinic, or purchase food items or extra things, like cigarettes that she felt Clara might need. Clara, was also sure to check regularly on the abuela, and when she was quite sick during the time I was there, helped care for Elsie. Abuela Elsie, lives in a small house located to the back of the house where her son Mateo, his wife and their 7 children live. In this sense, they also live on the same *terreno*. Elsie was also one of the lucky few with a washing machine in her house. As such she often took it upon herself to wash clothes not only for Clara and her children, but for other neighbourhood families as well. Clara was frequently in Elsie's home, and I ran into her there on multiple occasions. Elsie and Clara, however, do not live on the same *terreno*, or even in the same *barrio*, as Clara's home is in the adjoining neighbourhood. What draws them into this caring relationship is at least in part their kin relation.

In Diane Austin-Broos (2003) account of the Western Arrernte people's involvement in welfare programs in Australia, she discusses how kin relationships have become validated through cash exchange through welfare programs in Australia. She explores how these cash based understandings of kinship intersect with more traditional understandings of kinship that are derived from place and origin (Austin-Broos, 2003). In her essay, she discusses how caring for others is one form of articulating kinship. The term used by the Western Arrernte "ntarntareme" means "looking after" and is a "euphemism for kinship" (Austin-Broos, 2003, p.120). "Looking after" involves care for others that is importantly reciprocal and noted by one's physical presence in a place (Austin-Broos, 2003). Although the cultural contexts of the *barrios* in Mar del Plata

and those of the Arrernte people in Australia are surely quite distinct, the ways in which kinship becomes real through “looking after” is important for developing understandings of kinship in both contexts. There is a connection between place and kinship that is drawn through by the physical presence that people have in each other’s lives and the caring relations that often result. Here I am referring to the Mar del Plata example of kin living in different homes on the same *terrenos*. In cases, like that of Clara and Elsie, where they do not reside on the same *terreno*, “looking after” is practiced through spending a significant amount of time together. To be clear, I do not intend to present the idea that all kin relations are caring, but by bringing into conversation cross-cultural examples of how kinship is practiced similarly in different places, I hope to speak to significances beyond one field site.

Changing the Kin Dependence Dynamic

At its most obvious level, the AUH helps mothers structure lives for their children, at times giving them a certain independence from other kin. This makes sense considering the explicit focus of the program on the parent-child relation (*hijos*). For Melanie, a recipient of the AUH and a young mother of two, the AUH allowed her to gain a certain level of independence from her mother-in-law.

“Before I began to receive the Asignacion, when my oldest daughter was born, I had to wait always, because the father did not work. I had to wait for the paternal grandmother to give me things. And it is horrible to have to wait, to not have diapers, and to have to ask for them, or to be able to eat, or for clothes”.

The AUH effectively gave Melanie a level of control over her own life and the life of her daughter by allowing her a certain level of independence from her mother-in-law. It was no longer necessary for Melanie to wait on her to provide for both her and her

daughter. Indeed, many women AUH recipients expressed a desire for independence in interviews. This was most commonly discussed in terms of being able to own one's own home as it meant not having to reside with extended family, or pay the consistent and high cost of rent. The AUH plays a part in limiting the dependence of certain relations, especially extended kin relations which often become the fall-back when parents are unable to provide for themselves, their spouses and their children alone.

It is worth noting that although to an extent the AUH limits the necessity of extended kin relations as can be seen through Melanie's story, kin relations, particularly, sisters, sisters-in-laws and mothers, are often a major source of information about the AUH. People tend to learn about increases in the AUH, added benefits that occur through being a recipient in the program and how to fill out necessary paperwork from their female kin. These female kin sometimes share in the tasks of fulfilling the program requirements by looking after each other's children or going to ANSES together to fill out forms. That it is female kin who collectively partake in these tasks is likely because women make up the majority of AUH recipients and their involvement in the program produces a practical knowledge about how the program operates.

To be effective, the AUH must operate alongside other systems of social and economic protection, namely kinship relations and those relations formed through living on the same *terreno*. In the following section, I will identify how other neighbourhood and friend relations serve the purpose of economic and social protection as well. While the AUH operates in conjunction with these types of relationships, it also plays a role in minimizing the dependency which comprises some of these relations. This independence facilitated by the AUH, was exemplified in Melanie's relationship with her mother-in-

law, when she felt that because of the AUH she did not have to wait for her mother-in-law to provide her with things she needed for herself and her children. By increasing the economic viability of certain parent-child relations, the economic necessity of extended kin relationships and others, may lessen.

The AUH also alters the parent/child through the widespread understanding that the AUH is “for the children”. This means that children may express entitlement to the money their parents receive through the program. This entitlement is often expressed by children as simply as “*mama cuando cobras me compras...* -mom, when you receive the money will you buy me (whatever it may be)”. But at times, as children express their understanding of the money as belonging to them, a conflict that requires a parent (though usually mother) -child negotiation ensues. As I demonstrated earlier, through talk children are able to express a sense of entitlement to the AUH money their parents receive on their behalf. That said, I heard of only one case where a teenage son demanded that the money was his and that his mother *had to* give the money to him; this is a more extreme example of expressing entitlement.

The negotiation that Naomi recounts having with her children is a good example of how the policy makes it so that parents are held accountable by their children. When I asked Naomi how she explained the AUH to her children, she told me that she described the program to them as an *ayuda* (help) that was given to mothers who were without work. She told them it was their money, but that sometimes she needed to use the money for food and that she was unable to use the money to buy clothes or something that they needed for school. Naomi told me that when she explained this, her children “*se enojaban*”- they got angry. In response she asked them “Do you eat? Do you like your

yogurt, your cereal, your cookies, your *chocolatadas*? Is mama working? No, mama is not working so we are going to use this money for food. When mama has work you can spend your money”. In this sense, Naomi, had to justify the way she spent the money to her children.

This justification involved demonstrating two key points. The first was that she was in fact using the money for them and things they liked and secondly that her ability to buy them what they claimed they wanted with “their money” was contingent on her employment status. In this way, the AUH can become a point of tension within the parent-child relationship, but the relationship is also purposeful for assuring the policy is carried out “for the children”. Naomi then, must acquire work, not only to better provide for herself and her children, but also so she can use at least some of the money from the AUH in ways that her children desire. By stressing a particular kin relationship, the AUH influences the dynamic of the parent-child relation in an economic way, tying the AUH’s appropriate use to Naomi’s employment status. In attempt to not overstate the significance of kinship for the AUH, I want to show how other relations also impact and are impacted by the program.

Barrio Relations: The AUH and Making Ends Meet

On one sunny early Friday afternoon in late September I made my way to Barrio Ruedas, stopping first at Elena’s home as per our weekly routine. Elena is an inspiringly selfless woman who spends most her time helping those in need of assistance. Her relationship with me was no exception. She graciously let me accompany her to various place that she worked where I might come to meet and spend time with AUH recipients. After making the trek across the busy *avenida* to the bus stop, Elena and I boarded the *colectivo*, *always busy at that time of day*, that would take us to the community centre in Barrio Ruedas.

After getting off the bus at our stop we began to walk toward the barrio's community centre, and ran into Sol, an AUH recipient who regularly attends the *Grupo de Mujeres*. Sol was walking along the dirt road taking three of her children to school. Elena was impressed, and clearly happy to see Sol taking her kids to class. Elena had been worried because Sol's children had recently incurred many school absences and frequent absences were not conducive to real learning. As a result, Elena had taken it upon herself to encourage Sol, on a few occasions, to bring her children to school. She promised the children *dulces* (sweets) if they cooperated with their mother and attended class. After our brief moment with Sol, Elena turned to me and said “*tengo una teoría, que lo que más ayuda es el amor* (I have a theory, that what helps the most is love)”. In this way, Elena played a role in ensuring that the school attendance requirement of the AUH for Sol's children was completed. Through this example I was reminded that despite the focus of AUH policy on the parent-child relationship, other relationships which go beyond both home and family networks affect how the policy is carried out. Crucially, children are still the center of focus.

The community centre was a source of support for many of the women that I came to know. Food is often distributed through the centre, and the events organized in the space serve to foster connections between individuals who attend. In some situations, the relationships in the space are familial, but more often they are friendships that develop through people's regular attendance in the space. In this sense, a neighbourhood's shared space strongly influenced the supportive relationships that these women developed. As one interviewee, Rosa, shared with me, when she, and others feel economically strained, “the women of the centre come together, and some bring vegetables”. This coming together, is a survival strategy that goes beyond an exchange of tangible support, it is also emotionally driven, as much of the support provided is

facilitated through the act of coming together. Notably, this is an example of a space where friendship becomes especially significant for the women in the group, many of whom are AUH recipients. In more than one case, it was these friendships that supported women whose spousal relations had proved detrimental to their well-being. Although kin relations extend through and within these friendships, kinship is not the underlying basis of relatedness. Instead, reciprocal support is fostered through *comaraderie* between the women that is formed through participation in the group.

A particularly telling example of the importance of friendship in times of difficulty was illustrated when one mother, Naomi, who frequented the *Grupo de Mujeres*, had lost her job and did not have money to pay rent to stay in her home. Naomi was taking care of two children while her ex-partner was responsible for looking after her other two kids. With no place to live despite having extended family in Mar del Plata, it was Laura, a fellow *Grupo de Mujeres* attendee and AUH recipient who offered Naomi her home. Laura is a single mother of four and lives off the AUH which she receives for two of her children and the *Asignación familiar* which she receives for her two other children. Laura is also a talented cook and because she is from Tucuman, a province in the north of Argentina, her particular culinary variations on empanadas and pizzas are often desired for purchase by neighbours and fellow group attendees. She makes some extra cash selling homemade food. As Elena said to me, “Laura is an angel”. It is not as if she has much at all in terms of extra resources to make ends meet, but she effectively provided for Naomi and her two children in addition to four of her own kids, while Naomi was unemployed. In this way, Naomi’s friendship with Laura became Naomi’s form of social protection. After losing her job, Naomi qualified for the AUH, but this alone was not enough to survive and

Naomi's friendship with Laura proved essential to keeping her and her children housed and fed. Later, Naomi was able to find work in a seniors' home and move out of Laura's house.

Men, Kinship, and the AUH

As I have noted, most of the people I spoke and spent time with were women. Women make up 95% of AUH recipients in Mar del Plata and the surrounding area (Fernández Blanco & Alegre, 2013). As such, as per the AUH policy, male recipients are exceptions to cases where a mother is not considered the primary caregiver of her children. It can also be visibly observed that men are more often away from their homes and their neighbourhoods as they often leave to seek employment, while mothers are more likely to stay home and care for their kids. For my own research this meant that I spent a lot more time with women involved with the AUH than men.

As Di Leonardo (1987) has argued, women do what she calls "kin work", a concept that she uses to describe the "creation and maintenance of kin and quasi-kin networks"; work, which she suggests is "largely women's work" (p.443). In this sense, kinship is something that must be practiced to be the relational network that it is. For Di Leonardo, the term allows her to speak about women's role in creating networks not only within households, but "across households", as a necessary means of forming family (p.443). This unpaid work, is mostly conducted by women, and men are often less responsible for doing this work as they are more responsible for earning an income outside the home⁵.

The one male AUH recipient I interviewed, Leo, explained to me that for him a family is "everything that is constituted in your life... that it is the most important thing that we have in

⁵ I am speaking generally here and to the point that Di Leonardo, makes in her article. I am trying to explain why men are left out of certain kinds of work at the same time they are expected to engage in different forms of labour. I am not trying to suggest that women as opposed to men are more heavily burdened with the labour that creates families. Instead, I am trying to distinguish, how the gendered division between the types of labour that men and women partake in creates the kind of relationships that people have with each other.

life”. The other two men I interviewed whose wives were AUH recipients, but not recipients themselves, also stated the importance of family. Fathers are supposed to seek employment, and therefore usually spend less time with their kids because of the expectation that they will provide for their families. In this way, the AUH does not offer the same kind of independence from extended kin that sometimes happens when women receive the AUH, because men usually do not receive the monthly sum. Kin relations are established in varying ways, and economically providing for someone is one example of how kinship is practiced. Fathers are still widely expected to be the employment seekers of the family/home (despite the reality that many women work outside the home) and they are largely neither the recipients nor the intended beneficiaries of the AUH. As such, men tend to spend less time with their kin than women because they are more likely to occupy consistent labour positions outside the home. This results in an absence in the lives of not only one’s wife and children, but because many relatives live close to one another, the absence is also from one’s broader families and neighbours. Indeed, men’s absence from the AUH aligns with their absence from these neighbourhood, *terreno*, and home spaces. To be clear, however, this absence is not akin to not caring for one’s children and it also does not signify a rupture or even a necessarily a weakening in kin or neighbourhood relations.

For example, although Hannah’s father was away from the home quite often because he works as a taxi-driver, Hannah (the 19-year old daughter of Lara) spoke to me often of the special connection she had to her father, a connection that she explained she did not feel to her mother, despite her mother being home most days of the week. In another example, an AUH recipient moved from living with her grandmother to a separate *terreno* that was owned by her uncle, where, because of him she was able to construct her own home. Another AUH recipient also lived on her uncle’s land, in a home that was in fact attached to his house. She, her husband

and her youngest child lived together in the back, while her uncle lived in front with her other four children. The presence and impact of men within these relationships is notable and just like the women I discussed earlier, comprise kin, *terreno* and neighbourhood relations.

The AUH rests at an intriguing intersection of these *terreno*, familial, friend, and neighbourhood relations. The state, through the policy, offers a means of assistance to women, their children, their spouses and others they see as close to them. The idea that the AUH is not enough to live off, however, is expressed repeatedly by recipients and further apparent in the reality of the difficult economic situation in Mar del Plata. The AUH is an *ayuda*, or something that helps, but it is not enough to live. I have argued that the policy becomes a part of recipients' close relationships by shifting and structuring the meanings and significances of these relationships in the ways the policy is acted. In so doing, the policy itself is also shaped, as it becomes lived through these actions. Speaking to Kate Bedford's argument that neoliberalism (often characterized by a withdrawal of state assistance and public services) responsabilizes the family, the AUH example shows that state assistance can responsabilize the family as well. To this extent then, it is not because of a weakening of government assistance programs that families, households, and neighbourhoods intertwine themselves in Mar del Plata in the ways I have discussed, but because of the national government's decision to further develop the country's welfare system through a focus on children that these relational networks are impacted. Of course, an important part of why certain relationships become so important for livelihood in the peripheral barrios of Mar del Plata is because of what the AUH cannot do, or does not provide: The AUH does not offer enough money for recipients and their children's survival. In part, the insufficiency of the AUH makes these other relationships work as they do. As I have shown, family often appears to be the most central relation that carries out the AUH. Other

neighbourhood, *terreno*, and friend relationships are also utilized to manage economically and in so doing operate in conjunction with AUH policy.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Policies often seem out of touch with our daily lives. As one AUH recipient said to me in an interview when we were discussing the significance of the monthly sum, “*viene de arriba*”, by which she meant the money she receives comes from above. Literally then, the political realm is imagined as situated above the recipient and outside of her everyday life. Through reflection, analysis, and of course research, it becomes clear that political decisions and initiatives do of course significantly affect the day-to-day. Indeed, our daily actions live out the political sphere that governments develop through policies. In other words, “the above” is not so “above” after all. Policies become a part of daily life by impacting the way individuals relate to others, by creating the environment for people to position themselves differently in the relationships they are a part of, and by changing their social, economic, or life circumstances. In this way, policies are lived; they are merely words, until they become acted on.

The AUH is one example of a policy that has quite a prominent impact in the everyday relationships of program recipients. This impact is achieved through the policy’s focus on children, which implicates the parent and as a result intervenes directly in the parent-child relationship. It is through this nexus that we can see how family is especially responsabilized for making the policy work. Other relationships such as household, *terreno*, and neighbourhood relationships, are also impacted by and impact what the policy comes to mean. In this thesis I have argued that the AUH becomes a part of the day-to-day and Argentine life more broadly in three key ways. First, the AUH plays into the moral meanings of receiving welfare support and being a “good” parent, of course tied to the policy’s focus on children. Secondly, the policy fosters a tension between state assistance and neoliberalism’s supposed emphasis on the individual, by implicating the family. Ultimately, the policy plays a part in creating the family

because it is this relational realm that is primarily responsible for carrying out the AUH. Thirdly, the policy maintains the importance of paid work by being not enough for survival. In doing so the policy both solidifies and dissolves these informal and formal labour realms. The AUH influences survival through economic strategies, signs of affection, and mechanisms of care, in the home, family, *terreno*, and neighbourhood. The AUH works in these ways because of how recipients, beneficiaries (and others) make the policy work. But, important to my thesis and the exploratory study I have conducted is the idea that individuals are not isolated agents who act alone and for themselves. Individuals are always relational, and the relational networks that individuals are a part of operate in conjunction with policy, despite and because of the ways that policies are supposed to work. The AUH means that parents receive a monthly benefit irrespective of their employment status by ensuring that their children attend school, receive necessary health-check-ups and acquire certain required vaccines. But, as I have sought to exemplify in this thesis, the outcomes of the policy are far more extensive.

The people who live in the neighbourhoods of Mar del Plata that I came to learn a great deal from are, through their involvement in the AUH, part of a process of producing and reproducing certain kinds of relationships which make the policy work. In making the policy work through earmarking money, sharing child-care responsibilities, supporting other recipient friends and families, the policy actively becomes a part of recipients lives in sometimes small and sometimes huge ways. Ethnography is a useful method for attempting to understand these processes, because as a method it is processual as well. I was able to learn about the functioning and meanings of the policy only over time, gaining insight into people's lives as they allowed me, learning from a variety of individuals with different experiences and stories to tell and show.

How the AUH is lived within the three barrios of Mar del Plata I have discussed, is

testimony to the importance certain daily relationships play in living out policy. Moreover, when the policy is, as I have claimed, important and useful but not enough for survival, it is these familial, friend, neighbourhood, household, and *terreno* relationships people have with each other, that facilitate livelihood. Because the AUH can enable survival temporarily, and is frequently a stable income which recipients rely on, this political intervention does make a real difference in the lives of recipients and those close to them. But it is because of the others close to them that the policy is often made further useful. It is, however, imperative to note that sometimes people do not have family, or supportive familial relationships. Therefore, if policies assume people have prior existing relational networks to support them, those who are not a part of such relations may be left without any form of support at all.

The concept marginality is useful as a reminder about the particularity of this policy, and the living situations in which many AUH recipients are bound. AUH recipients are made marginal through poverty which is a result of purposeful processes of exclusion, exploitation, repression, and stigmatization (Perlman, 2001). On one hand the AUH is a policy which through direct intervention, implemented as part of the country's more extensive social protection system, counters this produced marginality. The policy does so by including millions of Argentines into a social protection system from which they were previously excluded. On the other hand, however, marginality is also reinforced through the policy through the relatively inadequate sum provided to recipients, the conditions that they must carry out to receive the sum, the focus on children which influences who benefits from the policy, and the constant stigma that recipients face because they are a part of the AUH. Recipients' relational networks (friends, family, neighbourhood, household, *terreno*) become the means through which the policy is made more beneficial, and its usefulness more extensive. At the same time, however, the relational

networks that recipients are a part of also reinforce marginalization through the policy by reinstating stigma.

It is at the level of these relational networks that the AUH happens. Indeed, it is the fact that individuals are dependent on others, especially kin, for survival and daily tasks that the AUH works as it does. Of course, the policy recognizes that people rely on each other in the day-to-day, and this is likely one of the fundamental reasons the program intervenes at the level of such a binding and central relationship, the parent-child relation.

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