
Nesting Expectations: What Can the Mexican and Argentinean Cash Transfers Tell Us about the Development of Development?

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Abstract: Latin American cash transfer programs have been implemented aiming at particular anticipatory scenarios. Given that the fulfillment of cash transfer objectives can be calculated neither empirically nor rationally a priori, I analyse these programs in this article using the concept of an “imaginary future.” I posit that cash transfer implementers in Latin America have entertained three main fictional expectations: social pacification in the short term, market inclusion in the long term, and the construction of a more distributive society in the very long term. I classify and date these developing expectations into three waves of conditional cash transfers implementation.

Keywords: money, cash transfer, development, human capital, fictional expectations

Résumé : Je reconstruis les scénarios d’anticipation vers lequel les programmes de transfert d’argent ont été implémentés dans deux pays d’Amérique latine. Étant donné que la réalisation des objectifs de les transferts d’argent ne peut être ni calculé empiriquement, ni rationnellement a priori, je l’utilise le concept de « futur imaginaire » pour leur analyse. Je postule qu’il existe trois expectatives fictives qui prolifèrent dans les transferts d’Amérique latine : la pacification sociale dans le court terme, l’inclusion de marché sur le long terme, et la construction d’une société plus distributive dans le très long terme. Je classe ces espérances en développement en trois vagues d’implémentations de transferts monétaires conditionnels.

Mots-clés : argent, transfert d’argent, développement, capital humain, attentes fictives

Introduction

Cash transfers typically consist of regular payments to poor families from national states and, less frequently, from non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Their general aim is to improve poor families’ living conditions. Most cash transfer programs in developing countries entail monetary allowances with the explicit aim of improving poor children’s accumulation of “human capital.” Nowadays, the designers, advocates, financiers, donors, and implementers of such programs understand this accumulation to be necessary to break the reproductive cycle of poverty. Given that cash transfer policy language is not only descriptive but also, most often, prescriptive and prospective, it has proven difficult to contrast the stated and unstated objectives of cash transfers with their measurable effects on health, education, and consumption.¹

Omitting less favourable data in policy reports and evaluations, many of the promoters of these programs have often pre-defined and pre-selected the “impacts” that reassure the cash program’s success (Agudo Sanchíz 2015; Dapuez 2016). In this article, I follow Cris Shore and Susan Wright’s (1997) recommendation that the anthropological study of policy should extend beyond the comparative analysis of its documents. In fact, the policies explored here resist such analysis because their logic cannot be easily translated into causal language. One of the most important cash transfer effects, for instance, may relate to different accommodations of their implementation to new, emerging prospective contexts that will never be realised. In this article, I therefore try to shift the focus from how the implementation of such cash transfer policies depends on comparing their good intentions against their good or bad outcomes, to quote Santiago Levy’s (2008) famous study on Mexican cash transfers, toward an empirical analysis of how cash transfer policies themselves imply particular imaginary futures.

Redundantly crafted, there are at least three different communities of expectation that re-interpret cash transfers according to ever-changing horizons. Cash transfers are redefined to match three different future scenarios, teleologically objectified as prospective arenas in which these policies make sense:

1. *Cash transfers for coping with structural adjustment* (1993–2001), which are focused primarily on soothing social turmoil in times of neoliberal structural adjustments toward a near future of integration into what are envisioned as freer and more perfect markets (such as the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA]).²
2. *Cash transfers for breaking the poverty trap* (2002–08), which break the intergenerational cycle of poverty, using the accumulation of human capital in child beneficiaries – through health and education – with impacts that were to be ascertained through future generations.
3. *Cash transfers for a new redistributive economy* (2009–), which establish a new permanent monetised system of welfare.

Analysing cash transfers in terms of their expectations and describing their evolution within these three projections implies first differentiating the time frames in which the realisation of certain program objectives was anticipated. This article demonstrates that the first wave of cash transfer implementation had short- to mid-term objectives, while the second and third waves of cash transfers have postponed their intended effects, from the long term to the super long term.

This article's main aim, then, is to expand the anthropology of cash transfer policies toward a more empirical and detailed study of the adjustments of policy objectives to their planned horizons. This requires an analysis of past futures (Koselleck 2004). These past futures have been expressed, anticipated, and, to some extent, redundantly performed through cash transfer policies by beneficiaries as well as by expert discourses and practices. Beyond their "real effects" (Agudo Sanchíz 2011, 2012, 2015, 96), I am proposing that we should study how cash transfers infuse local, national, and transnational policy-making with renewed goals. What people "really" do with the transferred money is important, but there also exists a crucial dimension in which the potential of these transfers matters. Therefore, this article stresses the importance of the anthropological study of the virtual as a political dimension of development. If we are to appreciate how development works – not only as an important wheel in a "hope generating machine" but also in a transnational policy goals-

generating machine as well (Nuijten 2004) – we must understand the production of cash transfers' "imagined futures" (Beckert 2013).

The Places and the Research

This article focuses on the expansion of successive communities of expectations regarding the cash transferred within cash transfer policies. The study of beneficiaries is limited to two different localities. One is an eastern Mayan-speaking Yucatec village in which the mistrust of government, Mexicans, and foreigners stems back to, at least, the Caste Wars of 1857. There, half of the eligible landowners and eligible agriculturalists (around 400) receive Procampo, while around 90 percent of families are beneficiaries of the Oportunidades program. The second research site is the Argentinean city of Paraná, with approximately 250,000 inhabitants, in the Entre Ríos province. Beneficiaries of the Asignación Universal por Hijo (AUH) in Paraná primarily reside in suburban areas with high rates of unemployment and public employment.

To complete my doctoral dissertation, I conducted interviews with Procampo and Oportunidades officials, among other research tasks, in Mexico and the United States from 2003 until 2011. Drawing on a total of 26 months of ethnographic fieldwork, archival research, and in-depth interviews, I explored how conditional and unconditional cash transfers relate to ritual exchange in a Mayan-speaking village in Yucatan, Mexico, which I refer to here as Ixan (Dapuez 2011, 2013). Although I concentrated on the reception of cash transfers, I also read and interpreted policy papers to explore the different rationales behind them and to construct a chronology of policies. Speaking with cash transfer policy-makers to gain insight into their intentions was also crucial in producing a taxonomy based on the effects of the cash transfers. In Valladolid, Mérida, Mexico City, and the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, DC, I focused my research on the diverse effects that Procampo and Oportunidades were devised to provoke for their beneficiaries in Ixan.

Today, in this village of around 2,000, the most important commodity produced is honey. However, many remember the good days, around "thirty years ago," when they exchanged maize for money outside the village. The purposeful isolation of local crop markets peaked with the implementation of NAFTA, and almost none exist today. The only completely local conversion of maize into money still takes place at the village mills, where people go to grind their soaked maize grains, paying a percentage, or to buy maize paste to make tortillas. However, the intense monetisation of daily life

in Ixan is an ongoing process in which cash transfers have been an integral part.

From 2014 to 2016, I interviewed officials at Argentina's National Social Security Administration (ANSES) as well as recipients of the AUH in Paraná. Alongside a research team of four doctoral students who I am advising, I conducted a survey to investigate how beneficiaries appropriated the cash transfers. We also constructed family budgets with beneficiaries. These constructed monthly budgets were prospective and retrospective; they resulted from reflecting and comparing the money and services actually used in the previous month with the needs that the beneficiaries projected for the month to come. The data presented here on cash transfer beneficiaries, however, should not be directly expanded to understand Mexico or Argentina as a whole, without paying close attention to the locales' particularities.

Taking account of technical and political practices that have defined and redefined the prospects of the two cash transfer policies, my work began with an ethnography of the objectives and practices of a transnational "closed epistemic" community of interests at the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, DC (Mosse 2005 16). Later, I followed this community through its ramifications as it further developed into two different national policy networks, comprised of consultant experts and government officials: one in Mexico (Oportunidades) and the other in Argentina (AUH). Shaped by coalitions of interests, identities, and relationships between and within organisations, these networks have been fundamental to expert reinterpretations of such policies, always in relation to the concrete and changing horizons of given political and socio-economic national realities. In many interviews, I not only asked policy-makers about the conditions in which each particular form of intervention through cash emerged, but I also inquired how they envisioned the future for the transfer recipients. Although I abstractly classify cash transfers according to three prospects of cash transfers, these stem from an ethnography of policy-making – in particular, from my conversations with development economists, promoters, and beneficiaries.

One of my preliminary findings was that cash transfer programs depended first on developing their prospective results. This development took place at the same time that policy-makers began to suppose that focused cash transfers could be transformed into universal policies. Nowadays, we are witnesses to another expansion of the community of expectations supporting cash transfers. What started as a universal policy to fight poverty, cash transfers have been transformed into a basic income to help achieve a redistributive society.

Anthropological Research on Cash Transfers beyond Their "Real" Effects

Social studies of cash transfers date back to the 1990s, when the Mexican government implemented the first massive cash transfer programs (Procampo in 1994 and Progresa in 1997). Considering Progresa's unprecedented scale, the Mexican state set up a special evaluation committee to produce qualitative assessments of the program. Mercedes Gonzalez de la Rocha and Alejandro Agudo Sanchíz, who were participants in the Progresa–Oportunidades evaluation committee, later published the first qualitative studies concerning the reception and use of conditional cash transfers (CCTs). Without fully subscribing to Maxine Molyneux's (2006) bold criticism that CCTs were intended to transform mothers into "mere conduits of development policy," Gonzalez de la Rocha and Agudo Sanchíz discussed the conditionalities' unintended effects on women recipients, even while praising them for the subsequent health and education improvements in the transfers' true beneficiaries, the children. Although the Progresa–Oportunidades program's goal of women's "empowerment" was clear and has been previously assessed, the monetary transfers seemed to threaten women's prospects by re-traditionalising their roles as mothers at home (Gammage 2010; Maldonado, Nájera, and Segovia 2005, 38). Agudo Sanchíz (2015, 19, 29) has since related cash transfers' "real effects" to the disciplining processes imposed by transnational actors, NGOs, and the national state, with the main aim of creating governmentalised populations.

Further research on cash transfer implementation, this time on unconditional cash transfers in Africa, reveals that the proposed inclusion process through cash distribution may have also produced "suspicions" against the state and the NGOs that distribute the money (Olivier de Sardan et al. 2015). These suspicions most often respond to the changing functions of money, which conflict with an already known set of practices concerning food transfers and local leadership (Olivier de Sardan et al. 2015). Other researchers, expanding on Michael Taussig's (1980) criticism of the systematic production of worthless money on the periphery of the world economy, have relayed Indigenous denunciations of cash transfers as part of a strategy of "dangerous appropriation" of their lives by capitalists and the state (Piccoli 2014, 1). Fernando Santos-Granero and Frederica Barclay (2011) and Emmanuelle Piccoli (2014) report that some Peruvian Indigenous cash transfer beneficiaries insist that the state is giving them money in exchange for their lives (in the form of organs, children, or blood) in order to weaken them and, thus, more easily incorporate them into the world capitalist system.

These sociological and socio-anthropological studies on cash transfers contrast intended versus unintended effects, cosmopolitan versus local interpretations of the transferred money, and positive versus negative potentialities of the transfers. Most of these studies, however, have taken for granted that cash transfer programs were development instruments definitively devised to act on given social realities. Contrary to this assumption, I stress in this article that, among their most important actual effects, cash transfers promote diverse sets of expectations among their implementers as well as their beneficiaries. I refer to these as “communities of expectations.” Given the large scale of the implementation of regular cash transfers, these make changes in what can be called social virtualities. The logic of cash transfer possibilities is not, however, open-ended. Rather, it is limited by the concurrent set of beneficiaries’ and implementers’ expectations.

Conceptual Repertoire for Objectifying the Development of Expectations

To describe and analyse the prospects of the cash transfer programs in Mexico (Oportunidades, Procampo, Progresa, and Prospera) and in Argentina (AUH), with a specific emphasis on the formation of their different anticipatory scenarios, I return to the concepts of “imagined futures” or, interchangeably, “fictional expectations,” with which, according to Jens Beckert (2013, 220), economic actors face most of their economic decision making. Assuming that some decisions in economic situations are characterised by fundamental uncertainty, Beckert suggests that “the decisions of intentionally rational actors” are based on “fictions,” and he considers fictions to be “images of some future state of the world or course of events [that] are cognitively accessible through this mental representation” (220). Their “fictionality” lies in the use of simulation to describe a future reality and to suggest decisions “based on nothing more than assumptions” or on “*as if* futures” (228). Since they constitute anticipations of futures that are impossible to calculate a priori, “fictional expectations” cannot be considered fraudulent.

For instance, in development milieu and in economic thinking, the eventual breakdown of a self-reproductive cycle of poverty, as a mental representation of the future, is taken for granted. However, such a breakdown cannot be calculated rationally or empirically or be imputed as a fraud. This particular past future – the interruption of a generational transmission of poverty – has been clearly projected in a World Bank policy research report on cash transfers. In the document, the authors describe the conditional cash transfers or this “CCT wave” as a series of programs that transfer

cash to poor households if they make prespecified investments in the human capital of their children ... CCT programs have two clear objectives. First, they seek to provide poor households with a minimum consumption floor. Second, in making transfers conditional, they seek to encourage the accumulation of human capital and to break a vicious cycle whereby poverty is transmitted across generations. (Fiszbein and Schady 2009, 3)

Regardless of whether the cash transfer programs attain their intended goals, I argue that we can classify them in at least three different sets according to the different imagined futures they project.

Cash Transfers for Coping with Structural Adjustment

Structural adjustment aimed toward integrating Mexico with the North American free trade zone necessitated a new generation of development programs in Mexico in the early 1990s. In this political context, Procampo and Progresa (later called Oportunidades) emerged. According to the first article of the presidential bill of its creation, Procampo was introduced as an unconditional cash transfer program addressed “to transfer resources to support the rural producers’ economy” (Procampo 1994). In Ixan, as well as in most rural villages, Procampo support goes to older farmers, an immense majority of whom entered the program in 1994. This rural cash transfer was created not to promote productiveness but, rather, to support the switch toward a context in which “prices were determined by the market, based on their international references” (Procampo n.d., 3). Three years after implementing the unconditional Procampo, the Mexican state began to distribute conditional cash transfers to poor rural mothers through Progresa. One of Progresa’s creators, Santiago Levy, confirmed that, in the context of the 1994–95 crisis, the government’s challenge was to design “a rapid short-term response ... with the existing instruments while setting the basis for a medium-term strategy that, aside from protecting the poor from the transitory shock, could foster a sustained increase in their standard of living” (Levy 2006, 14).

While Procampo did not require the same conditionalities as Progresa, namely, tracking the vaccination, education, and health of poor children, both cash transfers were implemented as responses to economic turmoil. Concurrently, Kerianne Piester (1997, 471) argues that, for the governments of Carlos Salinas de Gortari and Ernesto Zedillo that were grappling with the political costs of economic restructuring, “targeted social programs were viewed as the most effective instrument available to reduce the likelihood of mass mobilisation against austerity and market reforms.”

Unlike similar programs in other countries, the documentation of the objectives and results of Progresas, Oportunidades, and Prospera is largely open access, clearly expressed, and contains relatively reliable data. While there are some differences between the CCT programs implemented around the world, most justify their schemes based on the Progresas (1997–2002), and Oportunidades (2002–14) model, which was the first CCT to be implemented on a massive scale. Nevertheless, Progresas was exceptional neither in its initial formulation nor in its aims.

During my research in Washington, DC, Mexico City, Mérida, and Valladolid, I was given varying explanations concerning Progresas's origins, all of which, however, were quite consistent with those offered by its creator, Santiago Levy, the current International Development Bank (IDB) vice president (Dapuez 2013). According to those interviewed, and to the bill that created it, Progresas's objectives were not extraordinary or necessarily groundbreaking. In fact, in an interview in 2009, an IDB economist told me that Progresas was derived from the US food stamp system. This revelation partially challenges the current appreciation of cash transfers as a "development revolution from the global South" (Ferguson 2015, 16; Hanlon, Barrientos, and Hulme 2010; Wetzel 2013). Not only does this open up potential new inquiries into the history of welfare in the United States, but it also reveals that the prospect of a new politics of distribution may, at least in part, be precariously based upon the repetitive horizon of economic development (Ferguson 2015).

First used to palliate the social effects of structural adjustments, Procampo and Progresas made a clear-cut switch from in-kind transfers and services (agricultural consultancies, development of new products, implementation of irrigation, marketing of crops, agricultural schools, and so on) to, nowadays, monetising the poor and extending financial services to them. Although their implementation was sensitive to election calendars, national and state news, and other events, the programs later began to adopt and express longer-term perspectives and aims. These included preparing new generations for different labour markets, while concomitantly reducing rural populations, under the logic of original capital accumulation (first human, later financial capital, through micro-credits and the multiplier effect of monetary distribution).

Cash Transfers for Breaking the Poverty Trap

During the first decade of their emergence in Mexico, cash transfers underwent continuous evaluation. Between

1998 and 2000, the positive effects of the program were mainly established through quasi-experimental evaluations (based on randomised controlled trials), primarily conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute (Skoufias, Davis, and Behrman 1999; Skoufias and McClafferty 2001).³ These positive evaluations, in turn, promised a different future for Progresas's beneficiaries. According to an International Food Policy Research Institute report, "after just three years, the poor children of the rural communities of Mexico where Progresas operates are attending school longer, eating more diversified diets, improving their health, and learning that the future may look quite different from the past" (Skoufias and McClafferty, 2001, 1).

These and similar evaluations inspired an expansion of the program's objectives, which became more ambitious and were extended for a longer term. These changes brought about the second "CCT wave," in which program objectives would be fulfilled in future generations. After having managed the effects of the 1994–95 crisis, the Mexican state then used Progresas for a different purpose: to project an imaginary future in which the children of the impoverished peasantry would find formal employment in NAFTA markets after, of course, they had accumulated sufficient "human capital" through education and health programming. Therefore, if the first CCT wave was aimed at redirecting the poor away from certain economic practices, the second wave postponed its outcomes for the new generation.

Oportunidades, for instance, through its long-term investment in children, helped to construct an idealised future. According to the implicit and explicit rationale of the policies now shared by most of the international development community, these children would be the generation that broke free once and for all from the self-reproductive poverty cycle. Through their incentives and conditionalities, related to alimentation, education, and health, these programs sought to achieve an accumulation of "human capital" or "human capabilities" that would be necessary and sufficient to successfully push a new generation into the formal labour market.⁴

The characterisation of poverty as a self-reproducing phenomenon remains consistent through each of the CCT "waves." In its last reformulation, poverty in Mexico is regarded as a "social phenomenon that is easily reproduced and transmitted from generation to generation" (Prospera 2014; author's translation). While the objective of "breaking the cycle of poverty" has not been, and, perhaps, cannot be, definitively proven, subsequent changes in the rates and patterns of education, health, and consumption in a generation of recipients have been measured and recorded.⁵ When faced with the potential

or observed failure of cash transfers to meet their key objectives, cash transfer proponents do not question their rationales but, rather, suggest the following as potential impediments to success:

1. Saturated labour markets – the market does not have a flexible demand, and there is and will be a surplus of available workers.
2. The “accumulation” of human capital takes more time – the benefits of cash transfers can take more than one generation to be apparent, perhaps due to shortcomings in health and education services provided by the state.
3. The benefits of human capital and of accumulated capabilities alone are not sufficient for individuals to achieve formal employment and escape poverty.

Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) economists, along with Mexican government officials, are well aware of these impediments. While Sarah Gammage (2010) finds the inherent ambiguity of capabilities to be a strength of Amartya Sen’s (1985) capability approach, these ambiguities have also created fictional expectations for cash transfer beneficiaries and promoters. If increased education and health do not seem to affect the intergenerational “transmission” of poverty, for instance, cash transfer proponents can choose instead to either revise their definition of poverty or construct a new future in which cash transfers might work. As Beckert (2011, 8) points out, “if the fictional story is disappointed, expectations will eventually be revised. This points to an experimental process in which stories are open to ‘revision and modification as new data and new interpretative insights become available’” (see also Holmes 2009, 401). In line with what Beckert refers to as the “self-fulfilling prophecy” of agreed-upon fictions, maintaining faith in cash transfers’ efficacy may not exclusively depend on contrasting data with expectations. In this case, cash transfer programs seem to have produced a more complex system of nested futurities, the latest one complementing the one right before it for further consistency.

For instance, the second wave of CCTs, which had the objective of “breaking the cycle of poverty,” promised a future with formal employment for beneficiaries. After he recognised that the “poverty trap” could not be disabled by incorporating the affected generations into inflexible formal labour markets, Santiago Levy (2008) announced the need for more neoliberal structural adjustments. In Levy’s (2008) book, interestingly titled *Good Intentions, Bad Outcomes*, he represents a definitive turn in cash transfer policies. Levy writes of his realisation that firms do not necessarily want to hire

more labourers, which implies a necessary turning point for all similar program designs. While the permanence or transitoriness of cash transfer programs depend on structural conditions that are beyond the scope of developmental economists’ modifications, Mexico has extended the CCT treatment of its poor population from one generation (20 years) to one-and-a-half generations (30 years) with the implementation of its Prospera program (2014). Neither was the cash transfer development machine dismantled (a possibility also mentioned by Levy 2008) nor was the economic structure revised, however. Instead, cash transfers were escalated. Now, cash transfers express a new, maximalist fictional future: a future without work for the majority of the (unemployed) world population.

Cash Transfers for a New Redistributive Economy

In this third, current CCT wave, however, state programs started by establishing “responsibility schemes [between the executive branch of government and transfer-manager mothers] that enable families to improve their living conditions and ensure the enjoyment of their social rights and access to social development and equal opportunity” (Prospera 2014). In contrast to the Mexican case, Argentina’s AUH and Progresar programs seem to have been pushed even further. They represent clear examples of the imagined redistributive economy of the future envisioned by James Ferguson (2015), with some of its possibilities and dangers.

In Argentina, President Cristina Fernández announced the AUH in late 2009, after the 2008 economic crisis negatively affected Argentina’s economy as well as her own popularity (Catterberg and Palanza 2012). In the words of its architects, the AUH is “a social inclusion program without precedent in the history of [the] country” (National Social Security Administration 2013, 9).⁶ The beneficiaries of this non-contributory cash allowance are Argentine children under the age of 18, disabled children, and, more recently, pregnant women. Each family can receive up to five of these transfers. Initially, Fernández referred to the AUH as compensation for those most negatively affected by Argentina’s neoliberal past, clarifying in her presidential bill that the program “does not necessarily imply the end of poverty but it undeniably offers a restorative response to a population that has been punished by neoliberal economic policies” (Asignación Universal por Hijo 2009).

Nowadays, the AUH is widely considered to be one of former President Fernández’s greatest successes, to the extent that no opposing political party has dared propose ending the policy. As a result, the AUH has

abandoned its first role as providing compensation for Argentina's past neoliberal policies (whether it be for coping with the negative effects of past policies or for promoting economic development for the children of the under- or unemployed). ANSES officials purposely avoid using the terms "cash transfers," or "*transferencias monetarias*" in Spanish, opting instead to refer to the program benefits as "family allowances" or "income transfers" ("*asignaciones familiares*" or "*transferencias de ingresos*"). Likewise, in our 2014 and 2015 interviews with education, health, and social workers in Paraná, Entre Ríos, for instance, all of the researchers of the research group I conducted were told in their interviews that the education and health requirements were inconsequential to the program's continuation. In short, health and education conditionalities were considered secondary aspects of the program. Cash transfers in Argentina have been transformed, popularly and politically, into a full-fledged welfare "right," and any enforcement of the health and educational conditionalities is weak, if not non-existent.

Fernández confirmed the benefit's seemingly permanent position when she explicitly assured citizens that the AUH benefits "do not constitute a gift, but a right'" (Fernández 2010). Even though they were partly financed with loans from the international organisations that finance other cash transfers around the world, their beneficiaries assume that the cash transfers are fully funded by the ANSES.⁷ This assumption is, in large part, based on the understanding of the transfers as a new national "right," not necessarily as a tool for development, in a political process that Kirchnerismo defined as a process of extending rights or "*ampliación de derechos*."

However, in Argentina, this new permanency of the cash transfer benefit as a "right" does not directly reflect what Ferguson (2015, 12) has described in South Africa as a distributive regime decoupled from labour prospects. At least in Argentina's official AUH discourse, the program has evolved into a more ambitious program that would subsume existing social benefits toward the very long-term goal of full employment.⁸ But despite clear distinctions between their policies and those of a "neoliberal" past, the Kirchner-Fernandez administrations expressly aimed to increase the monetary base and promote virtuous consumption among recipients to move toward an ideal situation of full employment.⁹ In the Argentinean case, at least, the envisioned multi-dimensional image of "inclusion" has never strayed from its final objective of producing formal labourers.

A fictional future with expansive labour markets and plenty of opportunities still functions as the main expectation behind the implementation of Argentina's cash

transfer programs (both the AUH and Progresar), while politicians praise them for their effects in the present. Beneficiaries who are in contact with the labour market know that their incorporation into the formal sector would be difficult, but, as with the majority of the people interviewed in Ixan (around 60), the beneficiaries postpone this possibility to their children's futures.

In this ongoing wave of CCT expectations, policy-makers have not openly conceded that the lack of gainful, formal, and permanent wage labour will be the normal expectation for the majority of the world's population. For some, this envisioned long-term future may call to mind a neo-Malthusian logic (Castro 2015). Ferguson (2015), however, deals with this future explicitly in his book, in which he focuses on the role of cash transfers in relation to a current process of decoupling capital from the poor. Based on a summary of research results, he points to an ongoing, radical disconnection of global capital reproduction from social reproduction (Li 2010; Marais 2011; Seekings and Natrass 2005). Ferguson (2015, 11–12; emphasis added) deduces that capital does not require the reproduction of a large labour force nor a reserve army of labourers:

The suffering of the poor and marginalized *appears* as functionally isolated from a production system that simply no longer has any use for them. And if such people increasingly receive social payments, this cannot plausibly be understood as part of a vital and necessary functional logic of reproducing a workforce, for there is simply no demand for the kind of labor such payments might plausibly "reproduce." On the contrary, insofar as today's social protection programs do support a sort of social reproduction, it is the reproduction of precisely that class of people who have increasingly slim prospects of ever entering the labour market at all.

Can we envision capital without projecting any "use" of the poor's suffering? If we have difficulty in doing so, it is perhaps because capital, even if not imagined as evil per se, is considered utilitarian. The only situation in which one can envision capitalists not finding some function for the poor would be if they were provided with a universal basic income above the minimum wage. Otherwise, helping to reduce the general level of salaries could always be alleged as a function of the poor's suffering. If not reducing incomes (through the reproduction of a reserve army of the unemployed), a second possible function of the capitalist cash transfer scheme could be to maintain an active consumer force of the under- and unemployed. By subsidising the consumption of certain goods (staple foods, for instance), the cash transfer enterprise not only purchases a certain social peace for

capital but, above all, contributes to restructuring and managing certain price schemes.

Ferguson and those who share his line of reasoning could reasonably allege that some version of a precariat, as a class in the making, is not a novelty, given that there will always be “surplus” populations, not only in South Africa (Standing 2011). Nevertheless, no one can deny that the ideology of the current transfer wave moves toward an abandonment of all formal labour teleology, at least as was clearly expressed in the second wave. As policy-makers begin to recognise that inclusion in formal labour markets is an unreachable objective for the majority of cash transfer recipients, new imagined futures may be needed to continue to sustain cash distribution. Ferguson’s (2015, 178) contribution clearly refers to the ongoing conceptualisation of transferring cash “as part of a vital and necessary functional logic of reproducing” unemployment and under-employment. Rather than blaming the messenger for the bad news, we should appreciate Ferguson’s insightful articulation of this grim reality. While permanent unemployment should be considered a negative expectation for the populations that receive cash transfers, there are other expectations that Ferguson points to as emergent. Since cash transfers may also produce “rightful expectations, rather than simple gratitude,” he understands that, for instance, requesting more money from the state or from capitalism can fuel new forms of social justice and memberships. As people enact their new prerogatives to demand their rightful share of capital profits, an innovative reorganisation of capital and affiliation may emerge as claims for a more just global society.

Peoples’ Expectations Meet the Transferred Cash

Most culturalist approaches to money tend to over-interpret the signification of cash in the hands of the poor. In this article, keeping in mind that money is, per se, a highly expectational token, I did not think I could compensate for any poverty of means through any richness of meanings. On the other hand, in the following discussion, I do not intend to depict an idealised everydayness of the poor or the peasantry, ignoring actors’ great expectations (for themselves but, more frequently, for their children) when some monetary tokens acquire vital importance in fundamental circumstances (such as sickness, funerals, weddings, births, and so on). While conducting fieldwork in Ixan, I noted that, when cash transfer recipients spoke of Oportunidades and Procampo or of their effects, they never used any of the programs’ terms. Not only were concepts such as “development,” “capacity approach,” or “human capital accumulation”

totally absent from recipients’ conversations, but their expectations in regard to the transferred cash always ignored or contradicted those of promoters and development officials.

Oportunidades money was mostly converted into food, while Procampo’s was invested in fertiliser and, to a lesser extent, beer. Cash transfers in Ixan did not nourish peoples’ extraordinary expectations nor did they encourage any sort of traditional peasant way of life. On the other hand, I found virtually no feedback on cash transfers as maintaining any sort of a moral economy of the poor. Instead, the women and men conceptualised cash transfers as a “support” that the government “gives” to improve the livelihood of “peasants.” Such support referred to embodied ontologies of “burden” as dutiful tasks rather than making ethical discourses on para-economical orders. Despite a shared ideology of regeneration and the practices of cargo rites, however, not all the villagers shared the same ideas about which future livelihoods were best (on the village, see Dapuez 2013). Their relationship to agriculture – and expectations for their children’s futures – differed across generations. Younger parents (those in their twenties, thirties, and early forties) identified their children’s need for cash transfers with the explicit hope they would improve their futures. Considering these to be an ambivalent support for better education and health services, they hoped that their children would be better equipped for higher paying jobs in urban economies, most often envisioned in the tourism sector.

An older generation of parents, however, maintained that traditional peasantry – ritualised slash and burn agriculture – might still be the best way to develop an “even,” tranquil, if not prosperous, life course. They did not discard “traditional agriculture” as an efficient means for overcoming recurrent poverty and hunger. Local intellectuals, some of whom work for the Mexican state as Indigenous promoters and teachers, also concur with these opinions and practices. Directly or by hiring paid labourers, they keep and take care of their own fieldplots (*milpa*), mainly to cultivate staple crops like maize and beans. Despite their differing hopes for their families and children, however, every cash transfer recipient I spoke with stressed that the cash transfer support he or she received was “insufficient.” In Ixan, money seemed to matter so much because it was so scarce. Paradoxically, transferring cash to the people may only emphasise the significance of cash scarcity.

Despite the expected impact of the CCT programs on their long-term futures, the older inhabitants of the village still viewed the cash transfers in a shorter context, related to their subsistence. Since most of the

families counted on the cash transfers as regular sources of money to buy maize for consumption, they considered this money as a “little help for the peasant,” which, to some extent, “supports” the people’s long-term reproductive tasks (for young families, it helps in raising children and, secondarily, in procuring more money, either by requesting it from the state or by looking for other economic activities).

Procampo and Oportunidades cash transfers, then, reveal that their objectives in this village imply a moral construction unrelated to long-term expectations in formal job markets. When poverty is a day-by-day development for which harvests and labour migrations represent short- to mid-term mitigations, cash transfer program money does not stabilise people’s practices. Rather, it tends to postpone economic change to an intergenerational time frame. When they express the moral necessity of being supported by the government, beneficiaries concomitantly highlighted the very short-term relationship they maintain with government representatives. When they spoke of the current insufficiency of this support in the present tense, recipients argued that the amount transferred is useful but too little. By stressing that they do not maintain great expectations – either from the government or for their own long-term futures – the recipients minimised or kept the developmental community of expectations at bay.

Unlike the labourist ideology embedded in the Argentinean cash transfers, nowadays the expectations of the Mexican program that their beneficiaries will achieve gainful wage labour as an escape from poverty are much more limited. Based on our own interviews with government officials, it appears that the transformative process of developing the “accumulation” of “capabilities” or “human capital” is less crucial to the AUH than it was or is to Mexico’s Oportunidades or Prospera programs. In contrast to the Mexican village case, the beneficiaries of the cash transfer program in Paraná, Argentina, and its state administrators made only minimal references to the goal of accumulation of capacities or human capital to prompt intergenerational socio-economic change through future formal labour.

Nevertheless, in 2014, an ANSES official in Paraná, Entre Ríos, identified the “lack of culture” of some families as an impediment to the proper administration of AUH money and the achievement of its objective of improving their economic situation. To illustrate his idea, he mentioned the case of one recipient who would collect her AUH money at the Paraná branch of ANSES in the morning and, the same day, could be found at the city casino spending it all. Without having to justify his own presence in the casino, the ANSES official was

highlighting this case as an example of what he referred to as “the lack of culture of the beneficiaries” to use the money properly. He concluded: “Instead of using it for their children, they use it for betting.”

This case not only contrasts with the official narrative of the AUH as a highly effective universal right but also serves as an example of failed expectations. The failure is twofold. First, the AUH money is being diverted from its expected target – the health, education, and care of children – and, as some of the program’s major critics put it, is instead being “‘dumped’ into the drains of drugs and bets” (Sanz 2010). Second, as the ANSES official stressed, the recipient is gambling away the money “the same day” she receives it. The immediacy of her use – or waste – of the money contradicts the policy’s long-term, cumulative, and progressive scope.

Nevertheless, the official’s recognition that there are some people that reject the fictional expectations imbued in AUH money through policy papers and government propaganda, reveals a dreadful short-term temporality, in which the money can be immediately wasted. This rejection has been overlooked by the policy-makers and policy advocates in Argentina, and it has been alleged by politicians who consider money scarcity to be a purposeful instrument for the marketability of a labour force. Unproductive expenditure of the AUH has been overlooked by both the policy-makers and policy advocates in Argentina. While it has been condemned by right-wing politicians who consider money scarcity to be a purposeful instrument for the marketability of a labour force, no serious research has been done on this. On the contrary, and based on the view of cash transfers as a “right” granted and protected by the Argentinian government, most people commonly assume that “allowances” coming from the AUH emerged as compensations for a lack of the “family allowances” given to the formally employed. ANSES officials at different dependencies expressed this assumption to us, alleging that the AUH proposes a sort of distributive justice through which the state and those who have formal jobs are contributing to child allowances distributed to those without formal jobs. The state strategically stresses the AUH’s equalising effects between children of both populations. More commonly, people argue for a child’s right to receive monetary allowances regardless of his or her parents’ employment status (formal, informal, or unemployed) as a universal normative ideal. Six years after its implementation, the AUH is no longer considered a short-term or long-term transitory benefit in Argentina but, rather, a permanent fixture that should extend into the distant future.

Conclusions

The expansion of successive communities of expectations regarding the cash transferred through CCTs opens up a new area of inquiry that connects the anthropology of development, the anthropology of policy, and the anthropology of the future. By ethnographically investigating the communities of expectations of cash transfer policies beyond their textual semantics and describing how fictional futures for cash transfers diverge, overlap, and entangle, I hope to have contributed to the discussion of what has been called the anthropology of the future (Appadurai 2013; Guyer 2007; Piot 2010). The three future scenarios sketched by the three different cash transfer waves not only serve to historicise such policies but also give us a more complex image of how current capitalism depends on producing nested regimes of futurities. Cash transfer policies have been pre-eminent in nesting such futurities in the following ways.

1. For the very short term, they promised remediation while structural adjustment measures were taking place (Procampo and Progresá in Mexico) or while the government was in the process of palliating the effects of neoliberalism (in the first presidential bill that created the AUH).
2. For the intergenerational temporality of the accumulation of capacities or human capital, the second wave of cash transfers anticipated significant improvements in this generation, shifting them toward the formal labour market. Without mentioning that the neoliberal structural adjustments made possible by the first wave of cash transfers did not bring the expected results, this policy renewal stressed the individual life course as an instrument of development.
3. Finally, in this ongoing third wave, cash transferring became a normalised basis for a new, monetised welfare system. Whether a universal basic income scheme still looms on the horizon as a fourth wave of transfers or not, normalising under-employment and unemployment appears as a threat for those fearing to become part of a new class: the precariat. Beyond the one generation period of around 20 years, cash transfers may become permanent if, in 2017, the Mexican government can recognise that poverty statistics have remained more or less unchanged since Progresá was first implemented in 1997, as it actually did when the Mexican government gave a new name to the cash transfer program in 2014. One can foresee, then, that the financialisation and the financial accountability of selves will probably emerge as new objectives to improve the way of life of disadvantaged populations.

On the other hand, recipients will reorient the cash according to their own imaginary futures, ideals, and practices of money. In Ixan, Mexico, and Paraná, Argentina, they have readjusted the money they have received to their own situated expectations. In this sense, most of these people will relocate money beyond what has been prescribed by the economic experts' discourses and teleological practices of transferring. In Ixan, money's new capacities for subject building are either reframed in terms of promises made by government officials or redirected toward traditional agriculture and temporal migrations (Dapuez, Dzib May, and Gavigan 2011). Meanwhile, in Paraná, Argentina, transfers of money were not able to escape the popular ideology that prescribes formal labour as a universal right. In such a context, there is no conceptualising a way out of poverty without reference to formal labour for the current generation or for the next generation.

Otherwise, cash transfers have been mostly equated with the anti-economic circuits of gambling and dissipated life courses. In both locales, cash transfers fall within precise monetary ideologies and fuel expectations that have almost nothing to do with those of the experts. However, through their stated and unstated objectives, these cash transfer policies have constituted nested communities of expectations by amplifying the potential of current money. Unless one melancholically thinks that the nested futurity of the cash transferred may become, someday, merely a devalued token for the people with a future only of a grim precariat, an anthropology of the transferred money should also give an account of its ongoing potential. Whether this current decommodification of money positively or negatively works for reimagining capitalism, a close study of cash transfer phenomena in different parts of the world, as well as other related events, such as the near exponential expansion of the world's monetary base and the changing characteristics of money in its electronic nature, for instance, will surely contribute toward an understanding of how expectations currently ground reality and, in this particular case, how imagined futures of social pacification in the short term, market inclusion in the long term, and of a more just and distributive society in the very long term, as they recede into the far distant future, seem to establish the monetary bedrock of what can be called imagined capitalism.

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Notes

- 1 For a broader assessment of the results of conditional and unconditional transfers worldwide, see Hanlon, Barrientos, and Hulme (2010); Lavinás (2013a, 2013b); Soares, Ribas, and Osório (2010). Piperata, McSweeney, and Murrieta (2016) have carried out a long-term, detailed nutritional assessment of *Bolsa familia* in a community of the upper Amazonia basin. Among her findings, which cannot be easily extrapolated to other places, I would like to highlight that, according to this research, *Bolsa familia* has not improved its high quality food consumption.
- 2 North American Free Trade Agreement, 1992, 32 ILM 289, 605 (1993).
- 3 For a critique of the application of randomised controlled trial methodology to conditional cash transfers (CCTs), see Dapuez (2016).
- 4 In her exploration of Sen's (1985) "capability approach," Gammage (2010, 76) points out the seemingly infinite ways in which these capabilities can be measured and, subsequently, evaluated: "[T]here is no single list of capabilities nor a unique array of spheres or dimensions that describe these capabilities, nor techniques to combine these spheres that can be relevant in all circumstances. As a result, one of the strengths of a capability approach is that the researchers can employ multiple analytical techniques and measurements of poverty, selecting those that appear to be most relevant for the analysis they wish to undertake."
- 5 According to official statistics, the indexes imply that the reproductive cycle of poverty has not been broken. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (2015) established that poverty increased in 2014 to 37.1 percent and extreme poverty to 14.2 percent. The National Council for Evaluation of Social Development (2015) indicated the poor made up the following percentages of the population for the years 2010, 2012, and 2014; 46.1, 45.5, and 46.2, respectively. The World Bank itself admits that poverty in Mexico remains almost unchanged from the period before Progresá was implemented.
- 6 The Asignación Universal por Hijo (AUH), however, is not the first CCT administered by the Argentine government. A similar Plan Familia por la Inclusión Social was implemented in 2004 under the guidance of the minister of social development, Alicia Kirchner. The AUH was promoted as an expansion of these programs, incorporating more beneficiaries and distributing larger cash transfers (National Social Security Administration 2013, 16). While the government characterised the Programa Familias and Plan Jefes y Jefas de Hogar Desocupados (JJH) as successful, it promoted the AUH as a program that "pursues broader goals in the longer term" (17).
- 7 For Argentina's programs, they include the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), in the following distribution: World Bank loans: Project P120622 – \$480 million in 2011 and Project P115183 – \$450 million in 2009. IADB loans: Project AR-L1098 – US \$850 in 2009.
- 8 In terms of its target and its permanency, the AUH diverges from existing social benefits in Argentina. The JJH, an unemployment benefit initiated by the Duhalde administration in 2002, for instance, targeted individual unemployed adults according to a framework of temporary need. This

contrast is made explicit in World Bank AUH-funding documents, which note that previous social assistance programs in Argentina, including the JJH, were "created as a response to the economic crisis in 2001–2002" but the family allowance program, on the contrary, was "created [as] a permanent, non-emergency related transfer program" (59201-AR). While the JJH was a benefit that targeted adults and was meant to address unemployment, the AUH, in contrast, focuses on children and, thus, postpones its effects to a long-term future.

- 9 This concern could stem from strong ties to Labourism, in particular, with the ideology of Peronism, the political movement from which both Presidents Kirchner and Fernández de Kirchner began their careers.

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