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Elisabeth B. Tilstra
etilstra@utk.edu, etilstra@utk.edu

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Bringing the Outside In:
An Examination of Non-Governmental Aid Organizations in Buenos Aires

Elisabeth Tilstra
Global Studies and Spanish
Fall 2011
Thesis Adviser: Dr. Jon Shefner, Sociology

Acknowledgments

This project is the cumulation of nearly two years' work and research. More than that, though, it is proof of growth. I have found none of the answers I set out to find. Instead, I found new questions, and made my best effort to answer those instead. Furthermore, this process of academic and personal growth has by no means been an effort completely my own. There are many people who have been instrumental in this undertaking—who have given me financial, academic, and moral support, and whom I would like to acknowledge, thank, and dedicate this work:

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1. INTRODUCTION

FOUNDATIONS

Globally, nearly 1 billion people live in urban slums.[1] Nearly one third of the world's urban population are slum dwellers, and in the urban south this proportion rises to a staggering 50 percent.[2] This, given the recent population milestone of 7 billion, carries significant weight. As areas of dense urban poverty are increasing around the world, so too is the need for effective solutions. In order to combat this global issue, there need to be agents working to counterbalance it: urban poverty is an alarming reality; however, it is not an unavoidable and inevitable problem.

1 Martínez, Javier, et al. "Trends in urban and slum indicators across developing world cities, 1990-2003." Habitat International. 2008, vol. 32:1. p.86.
2 McMichael, Philip. *Development and Social Change: A Global Perspective.* Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 2008. p.212.

Nor is it a chance phenomenon. People do not simply wake up one day with the sudden conviction to move themselves and their families to the city where, due to their income, skill set, and the availability of jobs, they will almost certainly be living in slums of the worst conditions imaginable. Urban poverty is a problem that could be mitigated by states, yet is not.

Simultaneously, in Western cultures, there is a heavily prevalent culture of "helping" and "giving back." Volunteering and "outreach" projects are expected parts of building a college-entrance resume, though the expectation of community service work does not end with university applications. The notion that the "haves" should give to the "have nots" motivates many individuals to donate clothes to church charities, volunteer hours at a soup kitchen, or collect non-perishable food items for holiday can drives. At the same time, people in western cultures, in addition to their personal actions, assume that the basic needs of the most vulnerable will be taken care of by the state. Regardless of left or right political leanings, or opinions regarding welfare, there is an expectation that the government will provide a minimal safety net for its people. In other countries, this assumption cannot so easily be made. Many governments have been hindered from maintaining a healthy Welfare State, for economic and political reasons sometimes outside of their control. An increasingly believed doctrine is that development – and *economic growth* – will only be made possible through *less* government in the social sector, and more reliance on a free market system.

In situations where government has largely withdrawn from the social sector, the work of non-state agents plays a large role. This paper examines how the free-market doctrine affects the contemporary system of aid in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and analyzes the processes of primary non-governmental aid organizations. It introduces the political and economic history of

Argentina as a context from which to understand the current stage of actors in the social sector. Drawing from my fieldwork in Buenos Aires, I introduce twelve organizations that work with issues of poverty and development and explore themes and conclusions that can be made about the culture of poverty alleviation programs, and what an effective program might look like. Early on in my research I realized that "poverty alleviation programs" was not a suitable name for these organizations; rather, they were more appropriately projects aimed towards *decreasing marginalization.* Working from the context of a minimized state, this project examines the work of these non-governmental organizations, comparing their proposed objectives, specific initiatives, and self-perceptions in regards to how they fit into the greater structure of aid.

The paper is broken into three primary chapters, and each further organized into smaller subsections. These chapters are: 1) the political and economic context of Argentina's *villas*, 2) the case studies of the social organizations with whom I worked in Argentina and, 3) a proposal of a project that takes into account both what I learned from existing organizations as well as what I have learned regarding government.

The first chapter serves as a context for the rest of the paper; it is a historical overview to give a comprehensive background for a more detailed analysis of current social organizations. This context gives the "who" and the "why" of this study. In the first half of this chapter, the "who" are identified as the poor – and specifically those living in the urban areas designated as *villas* – in Buenos Aires. This section is a narrative of the Argentine *villa,* tracing its development through the 20th century. It records when they first took shape, who first lived in them, and how they grew. This is not intended to be a full history of the *villa,* rather a brief background so that the modern *villa* can be situated.

As the history of the *villa* is deeply political, the contextual section next looks at how *villa* dwellers, most notably in the past thirty years, have been affected by state action – or inaction. The goal of this second portion is to examine what political and economic influences led to the current socioeconomic situation in Argentina, how the state has responded to the problems brought about by strategies chosen, and what new issues have surfaced in this new culture. The "why," then, is the political and economic policy adopted by the government that necessarily affects *villa* dwellers. Specifically, this paper will discuss Argentina's neoliberal strategies of the last thirty years, as they have most affected the poor. The description of the *villa* and the explanation of policies necessarily go together: in defining the "who," one must explain the policies enacted that have further entrenched the poor in poverty; likewise, in discussing the "why," one must also understand the circumstances of those most negatively affected. Through the broad historical format, as well as a critical look at specific policy changes, this section gives a comprehensive view of both the progression of *villas* in Buenos Aires, as well as the political and economic circumstances that shaped them.

The second chapter exhibits twelve of the organizations with which I worked in Buenos Aires and draws conclusions on the non-governmental aid system in Buenos Aires from these case studies. The case study chapter is divided into three sections: the first is an introduction of the twelve organizations that make up the comparative study; the second identifies certain similar and dissimilar traits; and the third section analyzes the more abstract themes that became evident in my time with these projects.

Finally, the third chapter is an application of these conclusions in the form of a project proposal; a submission on how most suitably to combine the best of the programs I examined

while leaving behind their weaknesses. This section serves as a practical exercise of the project. Acknowledging the organizations with which I have worked and studied, I propose a new alternative, gleaning strategies from each and – as it is a proposed project in a theoretical vacuum – discarding those aspects shown ineffective. I am neither arrogant nor naive enough to believe that this is the only way to run an organization in Buenos Aires, nor do I maintain that its performance would be flawless; however, it is based on significant time spent working with and studying organizations focused on similar issues, and combines elements that have been shown to affect utility of such projects. While certainly being far from perfect, I submit it as an additions to the on-going conversation of what needs to exist for change to take place.

2. ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONTEXT.

I. *VILLAS*: A HISTORY

One hand clutching that of my little *guía's* as she led the way, the other with a firm grasp on an oversized, brightly colored plastic bag full of leftover lunch supplies, a mostly-empty two gallon water jug, and a fútbol, I followed nine-year old Milagros[3] as she and her sister Isabel escorted Aurelie and me through the back alleys of *Ciudad Oculta*—a slum of Buenos Aires—at dusk on a bitingly cold Saturday in late May. We had left the paved road, and now found ourselves on a narrow dirt alley-way that was densely lined by tin, wood, cement, and cardboard shacks three and four stories high. The ground was uneven and the alley narrow, making it

3 Names of individuals have been changed.

nearly impossible for cars to get through; even motorcycles would only occasionally make their way between the people-filled passages, littered with trash and lethargic stray dogs. Already there were men setting up grills and coolers of beer; *cumbia* blasted from a radio carried by a teenager as several of his friends began to dance around him; the small dirt streets were lit up by lanterns and single-bulb lights hanging on wires from doorway to doorway. The indistinct grays and blacks which I had come to associate with this place were transformed by the sporadic light into hazy browns and even blacker blacks, in the shadows and between buildings.

Aurelie and I, interns at CARE Argentina, had taken 19 children between the ages of 9 and 14 from this *villa* on the outskirts of Buenos Aires to a touristy area in the city for a photography workshop. We had aimed to have them home in time to get ourselves back to our office before dark, but the buses that go to the *villas* run less frequently on weekend evenings and the trip into the slum took much longer than normal. Now we found ourselves being led through small backstreets and passages that cut between rows of houses, stacked one on top of another, to where we could hire a car to take us back to the city center. As I walked, I watched the *villa* come alive in a way that it never had during the day, and I was very conscious of the Disney bag I was toting, of my blondness and Aurelie's *frenchness*, and of the fact that these two little girls – our charges – were the ones "protecting" us; they were our "in." The girls moved without fear, though they also did not greet anyone. They would occasionally look back over their shoulders at us, to let us know that we were almost there, though the carefree chatter from the day spent taking photos in the market was noticeably absent. This was their *home,* and we were not *in danger,* per se—yet the tenseness was clear, and all four of us hurried through the darkened maze of the *villa* interior.

Not only are slums like this are common in Argentina, they are recurrent realities in nearly every Latin American city: Alan Gilbert describes shantytowns as the "archetypal symbol of housing in Latin America."[4] In fact, CEPAL statistics from 2002 show urban poverty in Latin America at 38.4 percent, and extreme urban poverty at 13.5 percent.[5] In Greater Buenos Aires specifically, it is estimated that 10 percent of the metropolitan population are slum dwellers or live in an informal settlement of some kind.[6] Between 2001 and 2006, the number of people living in the villas of Buenos Aires doubled from 639,000 to 1.14 million[7], no doubt largely as a result of the social, political, and economic crisis of 2001-2002, though the numbers of residents in these areas did not decrease as other economic indicators stabilized in the years following the crisis. In fact, *villa* populations continue to rise, in Argentina and across the continent.

Undoubtedly, Milagros and Isabel do not remember the events of late 2001 that spiraled Argentina into deep recession, nor do they understand the political reasoning behind the national leaders' actions. They do, however, live with the consequences of these actions. Daily, their lives are shaped by the hardships and inequality of life in a *villa*: their education is substandard, access to food and potable water is unreliable, and safety is always a concern. Throughout their lives, they will face difficulties and make decisions far different from other girls their age, and they will always find themselves at a disadvantage in society. While these two may only know of the crisis through the memories of their parents, they live the daily reality of its marginalizing effects, and feel the sharp distinction of being "the other."

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4 Gilbert, Alan. *The Latin American City.* London: Latin American Bureau, 1994. p.79.

5 Koonings, Kees and Dirk Kruijt. "Fractured Cities, second-class citizenship and urban violence." *Fractured Cities: Social Exclusion, Urban Violence & Contested Spaces in Latin America.* Eds. Kees Koonings & Dirk Kruijt. New York: Zed Books, 2007. 7-22. p.9.

6 Auyero, Javier and Débora Alejandra Swistun. *Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. p.23.

7 Ibid., p.23.

Media gives us visuals of these spaces through films like *City of God, Slumdog Millionaire, Favela Rising* and *City of Joy*: they show images of acres of shacks built out of tin and plywood, young barefoot children playing unattended, drug lords controlling neighborhoods, and a culture inspiring neither desire nor rationale to attend school. Although "success stories" of individuals escaping these lives of poverty become box-office successes, the reality is that most people born into poverty will not be able to break free from it. Children born poor are less likely to finish secondary – "in 2002, only two out of ten 'poor' youth finished or went beyond high school"[8] –, and it is increasingly improbable to earn enough to live above the poverty line with only a primary education.[9] Economists Ricardo Morán, Tarsicio Castañeda, and Enrique Aldaz-Carroll discuss how Intergenerational Transition of Poverty (ITP) – the idea that a child is necessarily "trapped" into the same poverty of his or her parents – renders children unable to "reach lifetime income and consumption levels that would lift them out of poverty."[10] Despite also showing falsely sensational stories of rags-to-riches successes, popular culture does give haunting impressions of poverty and filth, danger and drugs, overpopulation and under-education that, indeed, are often very close parallels to the reality of these areas.

One of the starkest examples of this that I have seen in Buenos Aires is Villa 31.[11] The oldest, largest, and most known shantytown in Buenos Aires, Villa 31 is located quite literally "on the wrong side of the tracks." Positioned on a 0.34 km^2 parcel of land between the train and

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8 Barbeito, Alberto C. and Laura Goldberg. "Social Policy and Economic Regime in Argentina: Crisis and Retrenchment of Social Protection." *Latin America: A New Developmental Welfare State Model in the Making?* Ed. Manuel Riesco. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 187-216. p.197.

9 Morán, et al. "Family Background and Intergenerational Poverty in Latin America." *Escaping the Poverty Trap: Investing in Children in Latin America.* Ed. Ricardo Morán. Washington: Inter-American Development Bank, 2003.15-58. p.21.

10 Ibid., p.16.

11 Though technically this area is composed of two villas – Villas 31 and 31 Bis –, they are often categorized and referred to as one.

bus stations, just blocks away from one of the most expensive shopping districts of the city, this slum of over 26,000 people (a low estimate, by many opinions) is a not-so-hidden reminder of the extreme marginalization that exists in Buenos Aires.[12] The residents of Villa 31 live in the midst of one of the most trafficked parts of the city, a short walk from the financial district of the capital, and – with a ratio of over 85,000 persons per km^2 – are crowded into makeshift houses built five and six stories high. One cannot take a bus or northbound train out of the city without this clear example of the wealth disparity present in Argentina, a country often excluded from the "poor" or "developing" country lists.

Of course, the economic crisis of 2001 and 2002 has escalated the dire situation in *villas* like *31*. One calculation shows that the rate of *extreme* poverty in Argentina increased from 9.3 percent in 2000 to 12.6 percent in 2001, and then skyrocketed to 26.2 percent in 2002.[13] Certainly, the *villas* and their inhabitants can be assumed to have been the primary recipients of the harsh realities of these statistics. However, the narrative of the bonaerense *villa* begins not in 2001, nor even in the 1980s or 90s with the globally-experienced debt crises and subsequent loan refinancing; indeed, the history of the *villa* has roots much further back in the century.

In Argentina, the history of the *villa* as it is known now begins in the early 20th century when the country began the process of industrialization, and started to open itself up to the global market. According to Davide G. Erro, the early part of the century was a "liberal period … marked by rapid growth and close integration with the world economy."[14] This integration

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12 Ciudad de Buenos Aires. *Censo de Hogares y Población. Villas 31 y 31 bis.* Buenos Aires: Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 2009.

13 Şenses, Fikret, and Murat Koyuncu. "Socioeconomic Effects of Economic Crises: A Comparative Analysis of the Experiences of Indonesia, Argentina, and Turkey." *Argentina: Economic, Political and Social Issues.* Ed. Jeanne B. Haverland. Nova Science Publishers, Inc: New York, 2009. 51-77. p.58.

14 Erro, Davide G. *Resolving the Argentine Paradox.* Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993. p.12.

deepened when, in the 1940s, Perón adopted and strictly implemented an Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) economic model, which favored nationally manufactured goods over international imports through providing domestic industries with subsidies and tariff protections.[15] ISI led to the development of a new and large manufacturing sector, which was primarily based in the urbanized capital city. At this time, Argentina was already a country with high numbers of immigrants entering from Europe through the port city of Buenos Aires. However, as industrialization gained momentum, the demographics of immigrants coming into the city shifted from being largely international to consisting mainly of rural Argentines, seeking economic betterment. The lure of jobs created by the new industrialization – combined with weak agriculture economies in the outer provinces – led to a massive influx of immigrant workers to Buenos Aires.

Leaving their homes of rural poverty in the interior, Argentines relocated to the capital hoping for employment and, upon arrival, sought inexpensive housing. Across Latin America, the first kind of low income housing was tenement-style rentals. At this time, large houses in the city were used by all social classes: wealthy families would have the entire space to themselves and their servants, whereas in poorer classes the house would be shared by multiple families, each occupying an individual room. Regionally, these shared tenement buildings were known by different names; in Argentina, they were called *inquilinatos* or *conventillos.*[16] For those splitting these buildings between multiple families, living conditions were quite poor: the average *conventillo* had 15 rooms, each housing approximately 3.3 persons. However, these tenements were conveniently located near employment, and so the conditions were tolerated—certainly,

15 Barbeito, op. cit., p.188.
16 Gilbert, op. cit., p.79.

too, the situation was still considerably better than the conditions of the modern villa.

The inevitable dilemma was that although the physical space within the city limits for these buildings was finite, the internal migration neither ceased nor slowed. Nearly 750,000 migrants moved from rural Argentina to Buenos Aires between 1937 and 1947.[17] As these crowded tenements eventually filled up, newcomers began to establish informal communities on the outskirts of town, squatting on unclaimed – and, for the most part, unwanted – land. Buenos Aires is surrounded by marshland, and many of these first squatter settlements were located on land that was hard to build on and prone to flooding. These makeshift settlements were considered by most to be temporary housing solutions; they were cheap and provided easy access to the city and to work. This "self-help" housing is a trend seen across Latin America, a result of the poor having no other option.[18] At the same time, this form of housing was not necessarily considered a curse; rather, it was a self-produced ownership. The substandard conditions were believed to be temporary, and living in the *villas* themselves was not principally seen as a negative option. Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that forging a home of one's own would be seen positively, as marking propriety and personal achievement. Later, when the residents' right to the land was disputed, inhabitants of *villas* would work together to fight for their *homes,* which they saw as rightfully and respectably theirs.

However, villas today are visions that provoke thoughts of third-world countries. Housing materials are limited, and often include mostly what can be collected at night from trash heaps left on street corners in the city. Infrastructural services are scant; electricity and cable are often stolen from a single source, with wires spreading like a spiderweb to an entire block of

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17 Auyero, Javier. "'This is a Lot Like the Bronx, isn't it?' Lived Experiences of Marginality in an Argentine Slum." International Journal of Urban & Regional Research 23.1 (Mar. 1999). 45-69. p.53.
18 Gilbert, op. cit., p.80.

residences. Auyero writes of the early settlements in Buenos Aires as being situated in "lagoon-like" areas with a "lack of urban services [such as] water, sewage, garbage collection, electricity and other facilities."[19] However, the poor conditions of squatter settlements were tolerated by their inhabitants because of the general belief and resolute hope that slum life was temporary. Whether they believed that the Peronist government would build new apartments to house them, or considered themselves – as part of the working class – to be on a track of upward social mobility, these early slum dwellers were convinced that the slum was "a transient step from rural despair to urban advancement."[20] What ended up being the reality for most of these "temporary" residents of the early *villas,* however, was far from what they had expected. Instead of being able to work themselves out of the situation, they stayed. Indeed, *villa* populations continued to grow throughout the century. In the mid 1950s, only 2 percent of Buenos Aires' population was living in a *villa*. In 1970, this number had nearly doubled, and only ten years later, in 1980, had doubled again: nearly 957,000 people were now recorded to be living in a squatter settlement.[21] As people continued to move to Buenos Aires seeking work, these *villas* continued to grow, and became *more* instead of less permanent.

Through the century, as more and more immigrants moved into Buenos Aires, the availability of jobs – what had pulled them to the city in the first place – began to decrease. All across Latin America, the number of immigrants moving to urban centers for work superseded the availability of jobs in those cities. As Portes and Benton report, "between 1950 and 1980, the total Latin American economically active population grew at an annual rate of 2.5 percent, but

19 Auyero, op. cit. (Bronx), p.54.
20 Ibid., p.54.
21 Gilbert, op. cit., p.82.

the urban labor force increased at a rate of 4.1 percent per year."[22] Moreover, as recessions hit, the informal economies grew, and wages in the formal economy plunged. In the 1980s, "real manufacturing wages fell by 23 per cent" in Argentina.[23] The *villas* were not only growing bigger, they were growing *poorer.*

The history of the *villa* and the development of Buenos Aires' urban poverty cannot be told without concurrently relating the political history of the same period. A summary of the adoption of import substitution industrialization as merely the instigator of internal migration and therefore the onset of increased urban poverty is inadequate. Alberto C. Barbeito and Laura Goldberg examine how the period of ISI economic transition also marked the early stages of a Welfare State (WS) model that would last through the 1980s. They identify the period leading up to Juan Perón's presidency – the late 1800s and early 1900s – as the "embryonic" stage of the Welfare State. At this time, government focused itself on providing universal basic education and establishing the infrastructure and communications networks necessary for an agro-export model. These initiatives were largely successful: whereas in the mid-1800s illiteracy was at 80 percent, by 1914 it had fallen to less than 25 percent. The authors identify the end of the "embryonic" WS with the beginning of Perón's presidency. As the Secretary of Labour and Welfare (1943-45) and later as president (1946-55), Perón launched the development of typical WS institutions, creating and shaping the way the state would interact with the public sector for the rest of the century.[24] ISI, then, served not only as a pull factor for people to migrate to the city, but also as a vehicle by which the country created the foundation for its Welfare State,

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22 Portes, Alejandro and Laura Benton. "Industrial Development and Labor Absorption: A Reinterpretation." *Population and Development Review.* 10, 589-611. p.593.
23 Gilbert, op. cit., p.73.
24 Barbeito, op. cit., p.188.

which would become so vital for those migrating.

Two factors that separate Argentina's experience from that of other countries who have had similar industrialization-led development, however, are the policies by which Perón implemented social welfare, and the general insecurity of Argentina's politics. Perón ran a system which was largely favor-for-vote, creating a paternalistic relationship between society and state. This theme of clientelism will be revisited later, in the discussion of current shortcomings of the welfare state. Even larger than that, though, is the nature of political instability in Argentina, and how social and economic development in Argentina was not accompanied by political stability, as it was in European examples; as such, it should come as no surprise that the results be so vastly dissimilar.

A change in public policy towards villas and villa inhabitants came in 1955 with the ousting of Perón from power and the subsequent military regime. State policies in response to the villas chanted with the removal of Perón, as "the Revolución Libertadora began to consider the slum a problem: not only a housing problem, but a social one as well."[25] At this point, villas began to gain recognition by state and society: the government labeled them *villas de emergencia,* and Argentine writer Bernado Verbitsky's novel *Villa Miseria también es América* (Villa Miseria is also [a part of] the Americas) gave the shantytowns another new and lasting name. The government solution to this newly identified dilemma was for the sudden "removal of the emergency slums."[26] These eviction threats sparked movements among the villa dwellers to publicly claim the land that they inhabited and fight back against the forces attempting to drive them out. In the 1950s and 60s, neighborhood councils were created whose purpose was to

25 Auyero, op. cit. (Bronx), p.55.
26 Ibid., p.55.

improve the quality of life within the villa. Auyero refers to these groups' actions as "problem solving" and "claim-making," and indicates that this was the initiation of a new stage in villa history: villas were now communities with a collective voice and motives for solidarity.

Over the course of the 20th century, the development of the villa has been gradual, yet significant. For early internal migrants coming to Buenos Aires, employment was of key concern – not housing. Accordingly, cheap "self-help" housing with terrible living conditions was deemed livable, especially with the belief that it was temporary. *Villas* were merely a short-term solution to a side effect that came from an economic shift towards industrialization. They became, however, long-term problems of their own right. The "temporary" housing solution which reversed itself; rather, it only grew worse. Conditions that were acceptable when they were thought to be short-term became permanent obstacles to be survived: poorly made streets, lack of electricity, water, and sewage. However, what was seen as temporary 80 years ago now continues to exist as a burden of survival on the poor.

Through Perón's presidency, *villas* were no more than unofficial squatter settlements, hoping in the clientelistic nature of the WS to move them from their situation. By the time the military dictatorship was underway, however, this mentality had transitioned to one of community solidarity and collective bargaining. The years between 1960 and 1983 brought other political changes – government changed democratic and military hands three more times – and saw the further progression of the slums from transient squatter settlements to permanent poor residences. Auyero describes the transition of the villa well, from being portrayed "as the ultimate example of the failure of Peronist populism during the '50s, as project sites for the modernizing dreams of the '60s, as hotbeds where revolution was thought to be germinating

during the '70s, as obstacles to progress during the dictatorship of the '80s, and as places of immorality, crime, and lawlessness in contemporary Argentina."[27] Whether known as *villas, villas de emergencia*, or *villas miserias*, these locations are indeed the unfortunate centers of crime and danger portrayed in contemporary media. They are also, however, the unmistakable *homes* of families like those of Milagros and Isabel, who are growing up knowing no other environment.

II. THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICS

As the narrative of the *villa* continues, it becomes increasingly and unavoidably political. From the beginning, of course, state policies and actions have played a direct role in the lived experiences of *villa* inhabitants. The previous section detailed how, in the 1930s, *villas* were introduced as temporary housing constructed for the influx of workers that came to Buenos Aires for jobs created by a new national economic strategy; then, in the 1950s and 60s, how the government developed strategies to evict villeros from their homes. The conclusion is clear: government policies have intrinsically defined the situation of the *villa.* In the past thirty years, however, the government has played an even more powerful role in the well-being of those living in *villas.*

The past three decades have been ones of great change for Argentina. Only in 1983 did the last military dictatorship give way to democracy, leaving in its wake not only the horrific legacy of the Dirty War, but also the results of unsustainably high borrowing and spending. The 1980s brought massive debt crises to all of Latin America, Argentina included. Forced to

27 Auyero, op. cit. (Flammable), p.22.

refinance their debt alongside countless other similarly situated countries, Argentina entered a period of structural reform during the 1990s, under the presidency of Carlos Menem. Then, in 2001, the country underwent an economic crisis much larger than any of the previous recessions and, with an infrastructure weakened by Menem's policy changes in the 90s, hugely devastating to the poorest populations of Argentina. The past ten years have seen a country struggling to regain balance and reverse the effects of having over half of the country's population fall beneath the poverty line.[28]

This section looks briefly at the circumstances leading to Menem's presidency; critically examines the conditions of Argentina under his leadership, especially in regards to his rigid adherence to neoliberalism; describes the crisis of 2001 with interest in how it shaped the poor, changed politics, and in what ways the consequences were impacted by the system set up by Menem in the preceding years; and finally, concludes with how the state interacts with its public sector, post-Menem and post-2001.

PRE-MENEM YEARS

Global circumstance has shaped Argentina and the economic crises of the last thirty years. The end of the military regime in Argentina was marked as a period of high international borrowing and substantial government spending. The price of oil increased in the 1970s, due in large part to market manipulations by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and resulting in a sudden increase in capital to oil exporting countries. Private banks found themselves faced with an inundation of deposits from oil exporters, and began to look for

28 Romero, Luis Roberto. "The Argentine Crisis: A Look at the Twentieth Century." *The Argentine Crisis at the Turn of the Millennium: Causes, Consequences, and Explanations.* Eds. Flavia Fiorucci and Marcus Klein. Peasant Academic Publishers: Amsterdam, 2004. 15-39. p.31.

new markets in which to invest this new capital. As developed Western nations were facing their own recessions at the time, Latin American countries seemed the ideal borrower: they had better credit than other developing nations and, as sovereign states, were imagined to be invulnerable to bankruptcy.[29] Exchange rates for these loans, though variable – a crucially important aspect, later – were contracted exceptionally low, to the extent that the borrowing governments viewed this new money as "free." In an attempt to garner short-term support from their citizens, Latin American civilian and military governments alike used this influx of capital on current consumption projects, spending the borrowed funds without much caution, due to the low rates. This period of extreme borrowing and spending did give the public sector certain goods and infrastructural support; however, it also left borrowing nations like Argentina highly vulnerable to outside change and influence.[30]

Predictably, this arrangement came crashing down when, in the early 1980s, the United States and Europe tightened their financial policies to counter internal stagflation, increasing foreign exchange and interest rates. Debtor countries were left with less and less foreign exchange in their accounts as interest rates on existing loans dramatically increased, the costs of debt service rose and, simultaneously, prices for Latin American exports plunged. The game was up for Latin American countries. Despite having already begun taking out new loans to repay old ones, countries could keep up the act no longer. Starting with Mexico in 1982, countries across the globe reneged on their loans, causing great unrest and panic to their international loaners.[31]

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29 Skidmore, Thomas E, Peter H. Smith, and James N. Green. *Modern Latin America, 7th Edition.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. p.368.
30 Ibid., p.368.
31 Hershberg, Eric, and Fred Rosen. "Turned the Tide?" *Latin America After Neoliberalism: Turning the Tide in the*

Western countries responded to these widespread defaults by taking an increasingly more involved role in the political structure and economic development of Latin American countries. Financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank – which were created in 1944 by United Nations leaders at a conference in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, for the rebuilding of Europe after WWII – were transformed into international debt refinancers, allowing their member states to play a hand in developing nations' political and economic decisions. The IMF, specifically, converted from a stabilizer of short-term trade imbalances to that of a long-term debt manager. The catch of this new plan with the newly remodeled IMF was that reneging countries could only receive debt refinancing if they followed specific policy changes. Being in the position of defaulting borrowers, Latin American nations were compelled to accept the refinancing agreements offered by the IMF, as well as the adjustment programs with which they came.[32] These internationally imposed political and economic reforms that were imperatively tied to debt refinancing solutions were part of the Neoliberal model, and came as a sharp blow to Latin American countries after a period of such high borrowing and spending.

NEOLIBERALISM AND MENEM'S NINETIES

Of all the changes and periods of policy in the past thirty years, perhaps the most influential for Argentine politics, economy and society—and the most crucial to understanding the current socio-political situation—is that of Carlos Menem's presidency and his adherence to the neoliberal strategy. Without doubt, Menem's government was detrimental to the lower classes: from those living just above or at the poverty line to the extremely, or indigently, poor.

21st Century? Eds. Eric Hershberg and Fred Rosen. New York: The New Press, 2006. 1-25. p.6.

32 Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. p.29, 40.

Under Menem, Argentina took on massive structural reform under the banner of neoliberalism, which brought extreme changes to both the welfare state and the poor peoples' position in society. His policies aligned with the values of the IMF and created a weakened and more vulnerable poor population, with an excessively small safety net for protection against any systematic failure.[33] This section focuses on how the neoliberal reforms of privatization, reduction of state spending, and elimination of subsidies, among others and with the added level of the Convertibility Plan, caused a deterioration in the social sector of Argentina, lent to the collapse of the economy in 2001, and made recovery after the crisis an even more difficult and slow process.

Neoliberalism, a neoclassical approach to national development, can be seen in Latin American political economies as early as the 1970s, when General Augusto Pinochet completely restructured Chile's economy with the help of the 'Chicago Boys,' a group of Chileans who had studied economics at the University of Chicago, with strong affiliations to the neoliberal theories of Milton Friedman.[34] It was in the 1980s, though, when most other Latin American countries began the transition to largely neoliberal economic reform. Believing that a free market structure with minimal government would yield the most economic growth and be the most conducive to the stabilization of developing countries, a group of conservative economists, led by the World Bank's Bela Balassa, "produced the equivalent of a capitalist manifesto for bringing growth to third world countries" in the mid-1980s.[35] This neoliberal mission statement was widely distributed in Latin America, and served as a grounds for liberal reformers to seek structural

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33 Llanos, Mariana. "Understanding Presidential Power in Argentina: a Study of the Policy of Privatisation in the 1990s." Journal of Latin American Studies. 33 (2001): 67-100.
34 Harvey, op. cit., p.8.
35 Portes, Alejandro. "Neoliberalism and the Sociology of Development: Emerging Trends and Unanticipated Facts." Population and Development Review. 23.2 (1997). p.237.

change. Neoliberalism, however, does not simply refer to the change towards policies which tended toward a much higher dependency on a free market; rather, it also includes "a wholesale change in the relationship between the state and society, with a more vigorous embrace of the market being part of a generalized withdrawal of state provisioning and action."[36] It is this change in the relationship between government and people, then, that has caused many to question the net benefits of neoliberal policies.

The neoliberal strategies that emerged from "Western" policymakers came to be known as the Washington Consensus, and were enforced by the Internal Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Neoliberal programs implemented by governments worldwide were known by many different names, yet precipitated similar results: from austerity policies to structural adjustment policies to neoliberal reforms to shock treatments, these policy changes crippled the poor and dictated that governments remain nearly inactive in the social sector. These massive political and economic changes were made by developing countries across the globe in efforts to not default on their international loans and to stabilize their economies.[37] The international pressure to comply with these policies was high: the private lending institutions and the nations behind the Bretton Woods Institutions had keen interest in the success of neoliberalism.

Argentine president Carlos Menem's strongly neoliberal policies of the 1990s, then, were on par with the rest of Latin America. However, it has been noted that Argentina's structural adjustment program was "one of the broadest and most rapid in the Western Hemisphere."[38]

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36 Walton, Michael. "Neoliberalism in Latin America: Good, Bad, or Incomplete?" Latin American Research Review. 39.3 (2004): 165-184. p.165.

37 Brooks, Sarah M. "International Financial Institutions and the Diffusion of Foreign Models for Social Security Reform in Latin America." *Learning from Foreign Models in Latin American Policy Reform.* Ed. Kurt Weyland. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2004. 53-80. p.69.

38 Gerchunoff, P. and G. Cánovas, *Las Privatizaciones en la Argentina: Impactos micro y macroeconómicos.* (Chile,

Additionally, the very pretext by which Menem introduced these policies was widely questioned. Menem, a Peronist, ran for – and won – the presidency with a very protectionist campaign. This was not a surprise as, historically, Peronism has been virtually synonymous with populism. And, although Menem believed that market-oriented reforms would be the best economic plan for the country, he "thought [he] would lose the election if [he] announced this during the campaign."[39] Because of this, the quick switch to neoliberal free-market structural adjustments was a shock to Argentine economy and society, both in the sense of the harsh ramifications, as well as in the perceived ideological change of mind of the leader. In 1989, when Menem took the presidency, he "adopted in full the reform and re-adjustment programme, applying it in its simplest, most brutal and destructive form: an unrestricted financial opening to international markets and a completely reckless privatization of state companies".[40] Menem would proceed to hold office for ten years, a time that would be marked by his staunch loyalty to the neoliberal ideology and reform schedule.

However, the reforms that Menem implemented during the first years of his presidency were largely unsuccessful. In his first two years as president, Menem did not "fix" any of Argentina's economic problems: though inflation was reduced, it was not contained; prices jumped again in 1990; instead of improving, the recession begun in 1988 only worsened, causing the GDP to plummet.[41] It was not until a few years into his term that Menem began the implementation of extreme structural adjustments. One of Menem's most influential actions was

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1994), as quoted by Llanos, op. cit., p.67.

39 Acuña, Carlos H., Sabastián Galiani, and Mariano Tommasi. "Understanding Reform: the Case of Argentina." *Understanding Market Reform in Latin America: Similar Reforms, Diverse Constituencies, Varied Results.* Ed. José María Fanelli. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 31-72. p.39.

40 Romero, op. cit., p.30.

41 Schvarzer, Jorge. "The Costs of the Convertibility Plan: The Economic and Social Effects of Financial Hegemony." *Broken Promises? The Argentine Crisis and Argentine Democracy.* Eds. Edward Epstein and David Pion-Berlin. Oxford: Lexington Books, 2006. 71-91. p.73.

in 1990, when he appointed Domingo Cavallo as his financial director, and with him created the Convertibility Plan. This had two primary facets: first, it gave the peso a fixed rate by pegging it to the dollar, effectively freezing the exchange rate at an unsustainable level and, second, it mandated that the government create no new money.[42]

The Convertibility Plan of 1991 was perhaps the most pivotal step of the reform process, as it included "monetary reform, fiscal reform (simplification of the tax system and strengthening of the tax collection agency), liberalization of domestic and external markets, and strengthening of the privatization program."[43] By this time, the introduction of the Convertibility Plan into such an economic environment was:

> seen as a type of shock program that apparently sought to end inflation and produce a new direction for the Argentine economy. Its initial successes, as much in respect to price stabilization as in the mentioned cyclical recovery of economic activity, contributed to give it a halo of success that did not always correspond with reality.[44]

There was, indeed, initial success with the Plan. The new neoliberal strategies seemed to have positive social effects: the percentage of those living under the poverty line dropped from 40.4 percent to 23.0 percent between 1990 and 1992. However, throughout the decade, poverty increased, reaching 33.1 percent in 2000; by 2002, 55.3 percent of Argentina was living in poverty. Just as development of the early villas were indications of the country's economic shift towards industrialization, "the explosion of shantytowns in contemporary Argentina is deeply

42 Ibid., p.73.
43 Acuña et al, op. cit., p.40.
44 Schvarzer, op. cit., p.73.

imbricated with structural adjustment and deindustrialization."[45] Unemployment rates dropped, and even poverty indicators showed a positive economic turn. However, the Convertibility Plan and its synchronous structural reforms deepened the vulnerability of the nation to external factors, and ended in ultimate failure.

One of the key executive decisions that Menem and his council made was to bundle the reforms. Macro-economic stabilization was crucially important to Menem, and he used neoliberal structural adjustment policies to achieve this goal. In fact, as Acuña et al describes, "the structural reform package was also the stabilization program and vice versa."[46] Thus, the Convertibility Plan was put into effect with such reforms as privatization of some of the largest public companies and services; reducing or eliminating subsidies on food crops and staples such as *yerba maté* and sugar; and removing import barriers. Even those who support the structural reform process acknowledge that this merging of policies was, ultimately, a handicap to the government, as "public opinion perceived the failure of the stabilization as the failure of the reform package as a whole."[47] The combination of privatization, a wholesale cut of subsidies, and the absolute reduction of state spending only furthered the social and economic retrenchment of the nation.

A budget cut is an obvious hit to the poor. It is with this policy that it becomes evident how the poor are being doubly wounded. In regards to villas, Menem's policies had direct affects on slum-dwellers. Among other policies, Menem "practically dismantled public housing

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45 Auyero, op. cit. (Flammable), p.24.
46 Acuña et al, op. cit., p.42.
47 Fanelli, José María. "Understanding Market Reform in Latin America: Similar Reforms, Diverse Constituencies, Varied Results." *Understanding Market Reform in Latin America: Similar Reforms, Diverse Constituencies, Varied Results.* Ed. José María Fanelli. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 1-30. p.18.

policies. In 1992, public investment in housing was 33% less than that in 1980 and 1987."[48] With privatization, jobs are lost and prices increase. With the elimination of subsidies of staples, prices increase again. At the same time, with a complete reduction in state spending, the poor do not receive any real support from their government: as commodities get more expensive, they are helped less.

As discussed in the previous section, *villas* were already positioned as the temporary home of migrant workers and those hoping to "make it," and were therefore easily filled by those most severely affected by these political changes. Between 2001 and 2002, the unemployment rate rose 2.3 percentage points to 19.7 percent, and underemployment rose 3.7 percentage points to 19.3 percent. Simultaneously, real wages in the formal sector decreased by 21 percent, and by 34 percent in the informal sector.[49] The setup of *villas* as an already-established community of poor and lower-class citizens makes the overwhelmingly negative effects of Menem's presidency in the 1990s and the economic crisis of 2001 more comprehensible. As the nation soared into crisis, with over 50 percent of the population under the poverty line, and 22 percent indigent, *villas* became the central location, in the urban context, of this poverty.

While Menem's presidency did not end in crisis, neither could the reforms he implemented be declared a complete success. By the end of the twentieth century, Argentina had become characterized by "an economy which was opened to fluctuating financial capital, a deeply indebted state, a production machine in total ruin, high levels of unemployment, an impoverished and polarised society, and a weak and impotent state".[50] At this point, the negative effects of the program – as well as its inability to be maintained – were becoming increasingly

48 Auyero, op. cit. (Bronx), p.53.
49 Şenses, op. cit., p.57.
50 Romero, op. cit., p.30.

obvious, and Menem had let up on many of the extreme reforms that had defined the beginning of his presidency. In fact, Menem's most rigid reforms were implemented during the first half of the 1990s. Also, argues Mariana Llanos, the political nature of democracy led to an overall loss in support of the government and its programs.[51]

The public no longer backed Menem, and his second term administration was less unified to effect extreme neoliberal changes. Argentina is a classic case of anti-neoliberal protests: by the mid-1990s, demonstrations emerged nation-wide, expressing great disapproval of the reforms. And, unlike protests of the past which were union-led, these were organized by "those who involuntarily became part of the expanding pool of the long-term unemployed poor" as a result of the adoption of extreme neoliberalism.[52] Javier Auyero writes how:

> Sieges of (and attacks on) public buildings (government offices, legislatures, courthouses), barricades on national and provincial roads, camps in central plazas, lootings, and … rallies including demands of food from supermarkets became widespread in the south, center, and north of the country. … [These are] main examples of the resistance to the implementation and outcomes of neoliberal adjustment programs.[53]

The Argentine popular protests show how the nation did not back the government's decision to take on a neoliberal agenda. The effects of the plan were highly destructive, and Argentines took to the streets to express their dissatisfaction.

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51 Llanos, op. cit.

52 Epstein, Edward. "The Piquetero Movement in Greater Buenos Aires: Political Protests by the Unemployed Poor During the Crisis." *Broken Promises? The Argentine Crisis and Argentine Democracy.* Eds. Edward Epstein and David Pion-Berlin. Oxford: Lexington Books, 2006. 95-115. p.98.

53 Auyero, Javier. "Protest and Politics in Contemporary Argentina." *Argentine Democracy: The Politics of Institutional Weakness.* Eds. Steven Levitsky and María Victoria Murillo. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005. 250-268. p.252.

By the mid-1990s, the Convertibility Plan was already showing itself as evidently unsustainable and hugely unpopular with the public, as were the certain and sudden ramifications of a change from the Plan. At the end of his presidency in 1999, Menem handed to de la Rúa, his successor, a ticking time bomb: the Convertibility Plan would surely detonate, and the neoliberal reforms to which it was strongly bound would be of no help when it did. The true nature and most devastating consequences of Menem's nineties would only be seen after he had left office. However, from a historical perspective, it is easy now to see that much of the social and economic turmoil of the past decade can be directly attributed to policies and programs begun in the 1990s, implemented by the Menem government. While the system did not crash under his direct watch, it was only a matter of time before it would.

2001/2002 Crisis

The crash, in fact, came shortly after Menem's departure from office. Fernando de la Rúa, Menem's successor, was handed a fragile political and economic situation that was clearly on a path to self-destruction. De la Rúa's first Minister of Economics, José Luis Machinea, resigned in March of 2001, a foreboding indicator of the coming crash. The replacement, Ricardo López Murphy, proposed a plan that would require a cut in public spending, and the generation of a surplus of pesos to meet debt obligations. The social reaction to this proposal was so strong that De la Rúa fired Murphy within two weeks of appointing him.[54] It should be clarified that it was not just de la Rúa's administration which led to the economic crisis. Although he was acting chief, and took the lion's share of the blame – it was him, after all, of

54 Schvarzer, op. cit., p.85.

whom there is the famous shot of a helicopter evacuation from the *Casa Rosada* –, much of the situation was already pre-determined by the time he was sworn into office. As Barbeito and Goldberg write, the "social, political, and economic collapse at the end of 2001 highlighted the contradictions and the weaknesses of the economic and social regime installed in the 1990s."[55] In some ways, De la Rúa's course as president was already mapped out.

Interestingly enough, for his third financial advisor, de la Rúa chose Cavallo – the "Father of Convertibility" from Menem's presidency. Under de la Rúa, Cavallo's first action of creating a subsidy for exports that linked the peso to the euro rather than the dollar showed that he "indirectly recognized that the exchange rate of the Argentine peso was over-valued."[56] Until this time, the Convertibility Plan had been maintained, not because it was still believed to be the best policy, but rather because "no one could think of how the country [could] extricate itself from it without catastrophic consequences".[57] Events leading up to the crisis foreshadowed its severity; at a certain point, however, it became the inevitable disaster.

The 2001 crisis came about because structural adjustment policies were not sustainable: the neoliberal model finally collapsed upon itself. It had the most negative affect on those already in poverty, yet its affect was not limited to the existing poor: in 2002, over 55 percent of the populations was below the poverty line.[58] Not only was the crisis a result of these policy changes inwardly collapsing, but also these very same policies had so decreased the safety net for the public sector that when the system failed, few people were protected against its destruction. With regard to the *villas,* and understanding not only the history of these urban areas

55 Barbeito, op. cit., p.206.
56 Schvarzer, op. cit., p.86.
57 Romero, op. cit., p.35.
58 Şenses, op. cit., p.58.

of poverty, but now also of the political impact of the last twenty – and especially ten – years, it is more clear how these locations have become entrenched in poverty.

With the crisis of 2001/2002, the living conditions of the villas decreased, while the number of people living in them only increased. The poor, in essence, were doubly crippled by the outcomes of the crisis, especially as it came at a time when Argentina's government had so severely cut social welfare spending. Essentially, there was no safety net – rather, there was, it was simply a poorly maintained net full of holes – when the country's economy crashed. Poverty rates had already been rising, and this new crisis only added to the increase. While nationwide people's lives were greatly affected by the crisis, the populations that saw the greatest effects were those living in *villas.*

REVIEW OF NEOLIBERALISM

Present literature is replete with critiques and considerations of the neoliberal reforms taken on by Latin America, renouncing not only the morality and justness of these programs, but also their very efficacy. While some scholars note the relative efficacy of structural adjustment politics on Latin American economies, more common is the consensus that neoliberalism was unnecessarily harmful and useless where it was implemented. It has been shown that neoliberalism does not aid economy, has set developing countries further behind others, and further entrenches poverty and inequality. As Huber and Solt write, "More liberalized economies and more radical reform approaches are associated with higher levels of poverty."[59] In other words, those who reformed most experience the most damaging effects.

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59 Huber, Evelyne, and Fred Solt. "Successes and Failures of Neoliberalism." Latin American Research Review. 39.3 (2004). 150-164. 156.

It is now a generally accepted concept that Neoliberalism and the policies through which it was actualized have had extremely negative impacts on the public. Since the 2001/2002 crisis, most scholars – even those who had previously been supporters of the reforms – concur that neoliberal adjustments in Argentina were hugely detrimental to the public sphere – if not to the growth of the nation, as well. While there is still debate whether it was the policies themselves that were faulty, or merely their implementation – proponents of the ultimate goodness of the neoliberal strategy cite the case of Chile, and claim that other failures of the model simply did not allow enough time for the reforms to take their course – it is resoundingly agreed that the present situation, incontestably a result of these reforms, is far from what was predicted and idealized. Neoliberalism has been credited with setting developing countries back in their economic consolidation, and severely devastating the poor populations of Latin America. It has even been hailed as an "outright failure."[60]

Of course, the argument of Chile's apparently successful experiment with neoliberalism must be analyzed concurrently with the undeniable fact that the reforms were only implemented through Pinochet's highly restrictive and severely brutal military dictatorship. Also, perhaps the best response to the claim of imperfect use or termination before successful completion is that of Alejandro Portes:

> Whenever such incidents occur, supporters of neoliberal adjustment blame them on its imperfect application or argue for more time for its effects to take hold. But these justifications only beg the question. If the neoliberal model is properly applied only where it yields success and is improperly applied where it produces failure, the argument becomes hopelessly circular. Similarly, the plea for more

60 Fanelli, op. cit., p.23.

> time can become open ended and render impossible the falsification of any prediction. In Mexico's case, international finance agencies and other advocates of neoliberal adjustment were hailing its successes until the very moment in which it came crashing down, thus revealing the "imperfections" of its application.[61]

Of Argentina, Portes writes that "repeated predictions by economic minister Cavallo about the end of the fiscal deficit and the arrival of sustained growth came to naught, thus expanding indefinitely the time horizon for the predicted benefits to materialize".[62] Written in 1997, his words foreshadowed a fate similar to Mexico's, preceding the 2001/2002 crisis by four years. Even Michael Walton, former adviser for the World Bank, concedes that, when defined in its broad sense of state withdrawal from the public sector and rigid dependence on markets, "neoliberalism is clearly undesirable, and hopelessly incomplete as a development strategy".[63] He goes on to conclude that, while neoliberalism as pertains to valuing "macroeconomic prudence and a set of market-oriented policies" is a positive and even "an essential part" of a nation's development, "only with a combination of market-policies, equaling expansion of assets and influence, and political and social institutional development will Latin American countries get onto robust paths of rapid and equalizing social and economic advance".[64]

Neoliberalism, as a free-market structured economic model dictates that the state remove itself as much as possible from not only the economic arena of the country, but also from the public sector. It is not a necessarily new political agenda, nor did its story end with the Latin American austerity policies of the 1980s and 1990s. In fact, in the last decade, conservative

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61 Portes, op. cit. (Neoliberalism), p.240.
62 Ibid., p.240.
63 Walton, op. cit., p.181.
64 Ibid., p.181.

lobbyist Grover Norquist has been cited as saying he hopes to reduce government "to the size where I can drag it into the bathroom and drown it in the bathtub." In Argentina, the combination of this ideology and the creation of and adherence to the Convertibility Plan led to drastic socio-economic consequences. With the peso unreasonably pegged to the dollar, it was only a matter of time until the system would collapse. And, when it did, it was not only the poor who got poorer.

Most important to the poor populations were the subsets of the reforms which cut government's capacity for social spending. The effects of neoliberalism can be seen in every study of poverty and unemployment. In 1999, two years before the national economic crisis, Auyero wrote that, "since the launching of the Menem-Cavallo's 'Convertibility Plan' (1991) unemployment has increased 200% in Argentina."[65] Certainly it can be assumed that this number would deepen further in the following two years. In fact, he goes on to write that "unemployment rates doubled between 1991 and 1994, and doubled again in the 1994-5 period."[66] Clearly, the real results of Menem's neoliberal reforms were not positive, especially for the working class.

Since the 1960s, Argentina has had one of the biggest middle classes in Latin America. The crisis of 2001/2002 brought about the phenomenon to be known as the impoverishment of the middle class. The unsettling reality of the 2001 crisis was that, it was not merely the already poor who were hurt by economic downturn, though those already in poverty in the time leading up to the crisis were certainly considerably more affected than any other social class. In fact, of those classified as poor, 24.7 percent experienced poverty so extremely that they were unable to

65 Auyero, op. cit. (Bronx), p.49.
66 Ibid., p.49.

afford adequate food.[67] With over 54 percent of the nation's population falling beneath the poverty line in 2002, however, it is clear that issues of poverty were no longer concerns simply for the lowest classes; few were spared from the sweeping consequences of the failed economic project.

Argentina was, at first, "envisaged as the poster child of the Washington Consensus reforms and the reforms were explicitly supported by multilateral organizations and market participants."[68] However, "after the demise of the reforms, not only the government's legitimacy but also that of the international players weakened. It is no wonder that the ensuing government adopted an anti-reform discourse."[69] It was, in fact, the neoliberal policies implemented by Menem in the 1990s both brought about the crisis, and also hindered the state from recovering its public sector.

STATE ABILITY IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION

I have already discussed how neoliberalism calls for the reduction of state spending, and how this often directly translates into the reduction of social welfare and safety net measures for the poor. "During the 1990s, the dominant political framework reversed the ascending dynamic that had characterized the previous stage of maturation of the Argentine WS. Expansion controlled by favour-for-vote practices eventually gave way to exclusion, either controlled or not. The result was an anarchic withdrawal of the government from areas in which it had traditionally played a major role, which led different interest groups to attempt to find individual

67 Epstein, op. cit., p.98.
68 Fanelli, op. cit., p.5.
69 Ibid., p.6.

solutions and to secure a specific part of public funding for them."[70] The states ability to finance social initiatives was reduced by neoliberalism, and this had a direct and obvious affect on those needing and expecting its help during a time of crisis.

One of the continued legacies of neoliberalism is the general lack of government aid to the social sector. Neoliberalism as an economic and political strategy calls for minimal government interference; the increasing poor population, then, is receiving a decreasing amount of support from the government. At first glance, records show that the under the Convertibility Plan, government social sector spending actually increased, from 17.1 percent of GDP in 1991 to 22 percent in 2001. However, on further examination, one sees that nearly 40 percent of this percentage is social insurance spending, the majority of which is financed by its beneficiaries and not by the government, thus embellishing what the government is actually spending to a large degree. The increase can also be linked to the fact of an increasing economy: a fact which is emphasized by the drop in public social spending back to 17.1 percent after the 2001 crisis – a verification of its "procyclical characteristic".[71]

The government has numerous state assistance programs, targeting many different issues and populations. In fact, in 1998, there were 58 government-funded projects, ranging from work programs to child health initiatives.[72] However, "despite this thematic richness, the low level of funding combined with the politically manipulated, scattered and inefficient structure of programs [prevent] them from providing a reliable safety net for the poor".[73] During the crisis, there was obviously a dramatic increase in the number of poor people and, at the same time, the

70 Barbeito, op. cit., 195.
71 Şenses, op. cit., 59.
72 Ibid., p.59.
73 Ibid., p.59.

amount spent by the government *per poor person* after the crisis declined to half of what it had been in 2001. As far as the international financial institutions that had helped lead the way into this crisis, they were mostly absent:

> It is observed that the BWIs [Bretton Woods Institutions] are not very sensitive to the matter. Socioeconomic issues are known to be outside the interest areas of IMF historically. The fund's increasing interest in poverty and inequality that has recently developed within the context of the so-called Post-Washington Consensus remained rhetorical and did not transform to effective action.[74]

The scene immediately following the crisis showed a country suffering the worst economic, social, and political crisis it had seen, yet with a state that had destroyed any form of safety net and was unable to stop the most severe consequences.

Clientelism

It would be an untrue and unfair statement to say the government does absolutely nothing to contribute to the well-being of its public sector, and specifically the poor. As stated above, there are institutions in place which provide resources to the vulnerable, despite their unreliability. Another issue that is necessary to understand beyond the number or even the diversity of the programs when considering government involvement in the social sector is the methods it used to provide aid. A common trend across Latin America, and in Argentina, as well, is to have governments develop a client/patron relationship, providing social assistance for direct political support. In Argentina, the history of this can be traced back to the paternalistic and "favour-for-vote" manner in which Perón ran his administration in the 40s and 50s. This method

74 Ibid., p.73.

was key in the development of the villas and the provision of the infrastructure that currently exists. At the same time, the nature of this clientelistic relationships is also what led so many of the first villeros to believe that their situation was temporary – that Perón would eventually build them a new housing solution.

I have already shown that one of the ways that neoliberalism manifests itself through structural adjustment policies is through harming the poor by means of lack of social welfare programs. This same set-up of placing the government in the position of restriction on its social welfare funding creates an atmosphere where clientelism and clientelistic behavior becomes an easy and beneficial option for the government. In allowing – and promoting – a government which gives aid nominally and without regulation, the government is given freedom to abuse its power and treat social spending as an optional humanitarian means for an electoral end.

Auyero discourages the overly simplistic conclusion that poor people are "Pavlovian agents who vote and support political candidates *in exchange for* favors and services," and rather that we shift our perspective to include the "matrix … that links patrons, brokers, and (some) 'clients' in ongoing problem-solving networks, intricate webs of material and symbolic resources."[75] He does, however, identify political clientelism as "a form of social and political control."[76] Auyero characterizes the model of political clientelism as operating with the aid of three types of actors: clients, brokers, and the political party or specific political actors seeking public support – *caudillos, jefes politicos,* or *ward bosses*. Auyero points out that there is a intensely complex relationship that almost never is a direct link between the governmental

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75 Auyero, Javier. "'From the client's point(s) of view': How poor people perceive and evaluate political clientelism." 1999. 301.

76 Auyero, Javier. "The Logic of Clientelism in Argentina: An Ethnographic Account." *Latin American Research Review.* 35.3 (2000): 55-81. p.58.

parties and their citizens: this network includes such actors as brokers and community middle-men.

One of the concerns of a clientelistic method of governmental social support is that it delegitimizes the politicians and government. Fanelli discusses the role of clientelism during the Menem years, saying that Menem "resorted to clientelistic political machineries, which, in turn, harmed the quality of institutions and eroded the political legitimacy of the whole process."[77] Another way that clientelistic behavior becomes visible is in the structure of the "neighborhood brokers" as an intermediary between their poor communities and the state. Javier Auyero is one of the leading researchers in this area, having spent considerable time in Villa Paraíso, another slum of Buenos Aires, studying the local perspective of the government-community relationship. He found that the relationship that formed was seldom one explicitly questioned or protested by the exploited populations. One could argue the case, in fact, that it would be only logical for a people to vote in accordance to what they are receiving from the parties and/or candidates: it appears logical for one to vote for the candidate who has offered the most desirable package to one's community. In fact, one could take it a step further and ask if that is not, in actuality, what religiously affiliated aid organizations do as well – what separates a political vote from a religious conversion, and were they not bought through some tangible act or product?

NEED FOR ALTERNATIVES: NGOS?

In this section I have showed how the government, through a series of political and economic policy decisions, has not only further entrenched the poor in poverty, but has also

77 Fanelli, op. cit., p.5.

followed certain models that maintain governmental social spending at a minimum. If the government, then, is not the active agent it needs to be, who or what is taking its place? One of the possible answers to this question is the presence of non-governmental organizations as providers of services that are arguably the responsibility of the government. Certainly, the position in which neoliberalism has left Argentina requires at least some sort of alternative actor. In the next section, I will introduce and examine several specific NGOs in Buenos Aires that are working with *villa* populations.

3. CASE STUDIES

I. INTRODUCTION

METHODS

Understanding now how the political and economic histories of Argentina combine to create an overwhelmingly large and highly concentrated poor population with little access to governmental support, its seems logical to next seek out the current actors in the situation and question what they are doing, how, and to what effect. Who are "they," and why have they gotten themselves involved? What populations are they serving? What sort of projects are they initiating? How are they funded? Are they working with help from the government, or independently? Do they self-identify as replacements for state obligations?

It was with these questions at the forefront that I conducted my fieldwork in Argentina. My goal was to study the role of non-governmental organizations in a social sector from which the state seems very detached. I hoped to better understand the influence of these organizations in terms of the development in the *villa,* as well as highlight some of the challenges that they face.

My research was conducted over the course of six months: from January to July of 2011 I lived and worked in Buenos Aires, dividing my time between an internship at CARE Argentina[78] – an organization that provides after-school support for children in five community centers in Gran Buenos Aires – and conducting interviews with directors, founders, and presidents of comparable organizations. In order to narrow the study and be able to make sound comparisons and conclusions, I limited my focus to organizations that work specifically with *villa* children or issues of education. However, it should be mentioned that some of the organizations that I *have* included – like CARE, Voluntario Internacional, Asociación La Madrugada, and Fundación Las Aulas – also have operations outside of Greater Buenos Aires[79], which I will not be including as part of the assessment, as those details do not add to a discussion of non-governmental solutions to urban poverty.

With CARE, I divided my time between office work and in-field activities, gaining experience with the administrative side of the non-profit, and also a familiarity with the communities and individuals with which it operates. In the office, I my duties included receiving and replying to all of CARE's emails, mostly from future volunteers and interns; leading the orientation sessions for new volunteers; and being part of a "research and marketing" team. The

78 Names of organizations and individuals have been changed.

79 In CARE's case, this is a monthly excursion to Misiones a northern province of Argentina, where volunteers spend three days working with a rural jungle village.

research team was responsible for looking into new avenues of funding, finding contacts for volunteers, and advertising CARE's projects online – through this I not only learned the financial and marketing aspect of CARE, I experienced and participated in it. Similarly, with the task of presenting the orientations three time weekly, I had to explain, repeatedly, the various aspects of CARE and our role in the communities in a comprehensive manner. Being a part of the team in such an integral way was key as I developed an understanding of how CARE – and other organizations like it – functions.

As an intern, I was also a site-coordinator and was at first in charge of an activity site in the villa Ciudad Oculta. In March I transferred to Gregorio de Laferrere, a site further from the city, where I stayed until the end of my time in Argentina. While I worked primarily with the children and community in Laferrere, I was one of the few long-term interns, and therefore remained a coordinator that frequently traveled between sites. When CARE added two locations – paradores downtown – I was one of the coordinators to help establish the new relationships. However, my principle responsibility remained in Laferrere, where my duties were to prepare the children's activities each day, be a constant intermediary between our contact at Laferrere and the office, and facilitate the experience of the CARE volunteers – from their arrival at the office to the transport between the city and our activity site, and then back to the city center. This experience, as with being part of the administrative aspects, gave me a deep understanding of how an organization like CARE operates on the ground. The perspective I gained from my internship was monumentally beneficial because it gave me a fundamental knowledge of an NGO in Buenos Aires, as well as a basis from which I could identify characteristics and patterns in the organizations I interviewed.

If the fieldwork in Laferrere and Ciudad Oculta, coupled with continued experience in a managerial position at CARE, offered me an understanding of one organization's operations, then the interviews with directors of similar NGOs gave me a broader perspective of the range of programs that exist. While I worked to limit my selection to organizations with similar goals and target communities, there was still great diversity in the scope of my sample. In total, I interviewed 19 social organizations. This analysis, though, only highlights the twelve that either work specifically with children, within villa communities, or give insight on the concept of international volunteerism, excluding others whose focus is more on research, adults, or in located in mainly rural regions of the outer-lying provinces. The organizations I spoke with showed a wide range of practice in project methodology, volunteer dynamics, and source of funding. In fact, of the twelve organizations included in this analysis, two are based in Gran Buenos Aires, ten are in Buenos Aires capital; five have operations or partners in other provinces of the country; three were founded by non-Argentines; ten are still directed by their original founders; one is a community cooperative that operates locally with individuals and families of the neighborhood; and one is a national organization that works with school systems and smaller NGOs to carry out ts projects. This heterogeneity of the group gives breadth to the study by showing multiple approaches to the same social issues.

I develop this chapter in three sections, with a short preface for definitional clarity. Because of the inter-cultural – and, more imporantly, inter-linguistic – nature of this study, there are a few concepts that I do not want lost in translation, as well as others that are simply too broad and require some grounding definitions before I launch into any case analyses. The first main section will then serve as a basic introduction of the twelve organizations that I

interviewed. In this, I discuss the fundamentals of each organization: its history and founder information, mission statement, structure, and the demographics of the organization's target communities. Most importantly, this first section gives the basis from which I draw analyses further in the paper. In the next section, I identify, compare, and contrast key structural elements by which the organizations have been formed. These elements include organizational characteristics like location, source of funding, and to what extent each collaborates with other organizations. In the third and final section, I develop more nuanced trends of the organizations in the same manner. Like the previous section, this will be a comparison among the twelve organizations, though on more abstract themes that presented themselves in my fieldwork, like how culture affects organizational structure, perspectives of the government, and the contrast between "help" and "poverty tourism."

ESSENTIAL DEFINITIONS

Before introducing and examining specific organizations and their projects, there are a few terms whose definitions need clarifying. They range from philosophical and reflective concepts to more basic and even location-specific terms.

If what I am attempting to undertake is to observe effectiveness in social organizations, a necessary prerequisite is to first establish the grounds on which this *effectiveness* will be based. Determining definitions of ideas like "needs," "efficacy," and "help,"[80] assist in interpreting the actions and programs of social organizations. From my experience with both organizational

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80 I will further explore this idea of "help" in the section analyzing trends, as it plays a large part of determining the subcultures present in the organizations with which I worked. However, the looseness with which we use the concept of *need* and *effective* must be reduced.

leaders and villa dwellers – though, too, simply from having intuitively observed and interacted with people of all backgrounds –, I believe it reasonable to open up the concept of "need" from meaning solely a *physical* necessity. That is, it may be useful to look at "needs" not merely as what an individual physically must have for survival, but also as what conditions may be necessary for autonomy and self-betterment. Likewise, "help" cannot be considered simply a hand-out, or a process quantitatively measured. Rather, it requires a long-term perspective of what the action is accomplishing for the individual or community in the span of their lives, with the ultimate goal being their ability to cease "needing" such "help." "Efficacy" then, would be the ability of a program to see needs neither as constant nor as purely physical, but as transitional and fluid, and to meet these needs with a variety of of methods that cater to the targeted community's situation.

The other definitions that are needed for the subsequent analyses are much more elementary in nature. There are some instances in the following evaluations when a Spanish word is preferred over its English equivalent, because the direct translation conveys a connotation that does not accurately portray the word's function in Spanish. Culture is important in shaping language: there are words that, literally translated, do not carry their original meaning in their cultural context.

Its history already discussed at some length, the *villa* is a prime example of this type of cultural and linguistic variation. Despite having presented the definition of these poor neighborhoods as slums and shantytowns in the previous section, I still prefer to refer to them as *villas*, for there is a set of cultural and societal constructs in Argentina that accompany the term *villa*. There is a particular attitude, shared by most porteños, of the dirty and dangerous villa,

which is to be "feared and avoided,"[81] as Auyero notes. It is a stigma that permeates culture to such an extent that there are actual lines between where the "proper" city ends, and the villa begins. In the case of Ciudad Oculta, this is a brick wall built around the villa in 1978 by the government to hide the slum from press visiting for the World Cup. It has since been reduced to rubble, yet still is a notable reminder of the separateness of the two realities. The stigma transfers easily from the locational *villa* to the more personal *villero,* or someone who lives in or is from a villa. The popular disposition is to view villeros as "the others," and socially worth less than those from the "right side" of the villa line. Because of this highly prejudicial view, there is a distinctly negative undertone to the term villero. Though it is not necessarily a slur, it is typically a descriptor, and almost never a term of self-identification.

The term *porteño* refers to any person living in – and originally from – Buenos Aires, and comes with a great set of its own cultural baggage and biases. There is an entire literature on the subculture of the porteño, and the extent to which it simultaneously encompasses and is removed from general Argentine culture. For the porteños themselves, the label is worn with pride; for those from anywhere outside of the city's limits, or "las afueras," the term is said with slight scorn. Regardless of one's personal opinions, though, the term does its job to indicate that something is from Buenos Aires. At the same time, the specification aids this study, for I found no villeros living within the capital's limits who also self-identify as porteños; nor did I talk to any porteños who would consider themselves to be in the same group as somebody from a villa. This adds a class dynamic to the cultural quality of porteño, and allows a way to distinguish between the levels of "from Buenos Aires." It is more specific than simply bonarense, which could refer to anything from Buenos Aires, city or province.

81 Auyero, op. cit. (Flammable), p.22.

Another word that will appear frequently in this study is *comedor*. While often translated as a "soup kitchen," the way it operates is actually much different than how one experiences those kind of centers in North America, or a similar culture. Comedores in Argentina are places that give meals to a specific community and are typically fully or partially funded by the government. That being said, nothing is absolutely uniform about comedores*:* there are comedores that are free-standing entities, others that are run from a family's personal kitchen, and still others that are a combination of the two, where a family lives in a small space above an industrial kitchen. Usually they are operated by individuals of the community they serve. In a community where a comedor is needed, a petition is made to the municipal government and, after a fairly arduous bureaucratic process, they are provided with funds to open and operate. Sometimes the food itself is allocated to the comedores each month; another system the government employs is to provide the comedor operator with a "food card" - similar to a credit card, it can be used to purchase specific food items the comedor needs. Even the service provided by a comedor varies by location: some offer full meals, others only lunch or dinner, and still others simply the afternoon *merienda* – an afternoon snack, generally tea and bread or a pastry between three and five o'clock. However, the commonality between all comedores is that they exist in communities of high poverty and offer physical relief to those lacking food and/or access to food.

A problem with comedores is that they tend to create hierarchies and sub-channels of intra-community clientelism. Operators of comedores typically fill the role Javier Auyero describes as "brokers": they are the individuals filling the gap between the poor people and the government agents. They serve as a middle man, and often are solely responsible for enforcing

who gets what, and when. Whereas some comedores are open to the general public[82], others only supply food to a certain population within the grid of the villa and, as I found in one case, sometimes ethnicity or even familial prejudices can be factors of "selection." The list of those who do – and do not – get to eat at the comedor is often decided by the individuals who run it. This undoubtedly gives a significant amount of power in the *barrio,* or neighborhood, to those who run comedores.

A *parador* (literally, a stop-over) is a sort of refuge for people in extremely vulnerable situations. In fact, they are also referred to simply as *refugios,* and are seen as places of last resort. Paradores that offer free housing at night, a warm place to pass the day for those who spend their nights on the street, and sometimes meals during the day, depending on the location. Many designate that they are specifically open to only men, or only women and children, and most have limited space for overnight guests. Typically paradores are located in more central areas of the city, and target a population very different from comedores and other organizations working in villas: these are specifically for the homeless, or those in a transitory state of extreme vulnerability. It is important to see the difference between a parador and a comedor in a villa. An example of this dissimilarity – and also of the pronounced stigma of the villa – is a discussion I had a middle-age mother at a parador in downtown Buenos Aires, when I mentioned that one of my other activity sites was in Ciudad Oculta. "No!" she exclaimed, her eyes widening, horrified. "*I* wouldn't ever go there – it isn't safe!" This, from a woman passing the daytime in a parador,

82 Vivimos Juntos, one of the organizations I interviewed, had operated one such "open-door" comedor for a few years, serving anyone who wanted to come, yet closed down due to the extensive work involved in preparing, serving, and cleaning up after the meals of an ever-changing group of people. The woman who had been in charge of the kitchen told me that the people "were not respectful … not grateful … they would always leave a mess, and they would check around [at other comedores] to know what we … and others … were serving, before deciding to eat here. We weren't a restaurant!"

waiting for a hot meal, and nights alone with her four year old daughter in the street.

Even the term "non-governmental organization" – the very premise of this study – is overly large and can seem a daunting task to break down. However, one of the directors I interviewed showed the need to give it clarity when he objected to my labeling of his and all of my other interviewing organizations as *NGOs*. His reason was that one does not define anything else by its negative. "You," he said to example his point, "would not identify yourself as a *not-man*; rather, you are a *woman*." He concludes that it is best to classify these organizations as *social* rather than *non-governmental*. I agree that NGO has the potential to be misleading because its scope is entirely too broad, and leads to little comprehension about the organization itself. *Social organization*, however, hardly gives more narrow a description, though it does reverse the label from being one of negative definition. His concern, though, is legitimate, and I make my best effort to regard each project, organization, and initiative as it self-identifies, rather than as a part of an arbitrary grouping.

II. INTRODUCTION OF ORGANIZATIONS

CARE Argentina[83] began as a small project started by an Argentine woman named Rosa, and is now one of the organizations receiving the most international volunteers in Buenos Aires. Rosa has been involved with social work all her life, and the economic, social, and political crisis of 2001 spurred her to organize something concrete from which to organize her projects. Although CARE was not officially registered until 2005, Rosa began laying the foundations of

83 As previously stated, names of organizations have been changed. The organization and its projects, described here under the name "CARE," have no relation to the international humanitarian agency CARE, whose mission is to fight global poverty.

the organization in 2001. The plan was simple enough: give villa children what they would not have otherwise. With the intent to "let kids be kids," and to provide a safe space to experience the simple joys of childhood, Rosa began going into Ciudad Oculta, one of Buenos Aires' largest villas, to throw birthday parties with her own children and close friends as her team. Her initial purpose hinges on an important concept: children in the villa grow up tremendously fast. At the age of 12 and 13, many are already the caretakers of younger siblings and are facing life decisions of dropping out or of graduating secondary; having sex and, potentially, children of their own; and using and dealing *paco,* an extremely addictive drug. Anyone, then, that gives them the space to safely be children—to play fútbol, or color, or read a book, or just to hand off their baby sister or brother to a volunteer for two hours—is incredibly relevant to these children. This was the function that Rosa intended CARE to have as she started the birthday project, and although the organization has grown to include more than just parties, this mission runs true to the core of the what CARE still is.

Over time, Rosa and her children began networking with organizations and universities in North America and Europe, recruiting volunteers and financial support, and CARE grew to be known as an organization that welcomed internationals with open arms. As the volume of volunteers grew, so did the ability to expand the projects. In 2005 the office in Recoleta was rented to house the organization's institutional activities, which were needed to fully operate all the projects. Organizationally, CARE is composed of the founders, interns, and volunteers. Rosa, the founder, works at the managerial level together with her son, Darian, and daughter, Ramona. At any given time, there are between three and eight interns, all foreigners. It is typical to have the flux of interns follow the pattern of a northern hemisphere university schedule. The

interns all work both in the office and as site-coordinators. They stay for a minimum of two months, with the longest term I knew staying one year. Interns are responsible for behind-the-scenes functionality of the office, the orientation of new volunteers, and the preparations of the daily activities for the kids.

Currently, there are four regular components to CARE's work in the capital: after-school workshops, monthly photography workshops, play workshops and, of course, birthday parties. CARE has five activity sites at either full or partial comedores, four of which are in Ciudad Oculta, or Villa 15. The fifth is in Gregorio de Laferrere, which is neither a villa nor in the city itself. School support is held twice a week at each site, and birthday parties are held every Wednesday, on a rotation schedule between the sites so that each month all the children whose birthdays were that month are celebrated.

The main project of CARE is called "School Support," and is an educational after-school activity for children that both gives them access to college-aged students as personal tutors and serves the practical purpose of physically taking them off the streets for a few hours each week. For two days a week, the children are with CARE in the time between getting out of school and eating dinner – time that would have been spent on the street. Instead, they work with the volunteers on either homework they have brought or, more often, on worksheets provided by CARE. One of the initiatives recently started is an incentive system by which the children complete their worksheets. In it, the site-coordinator creates a *carpeta,* or folder, for each child, into which he or she places the completed work of that chid. All work done is recorded, and there is a system of stickers and prizes to encourage the children in their progress. The *carpetas* have turned out to hold two benefits beyond simply knowing what the child has or has not

completed. The first is that site-coordinators can begin to pre-plan the work for each child, giving out individualized worksheets and homework; the second is the overwhelmingly positive reaction of the kids: they love to have a carpeta that is *theirs* – many kids paste their prize stickers on the folder itself. Having something that has their name on it, and is so uniquely their own is, for most children, something novel. This, though not the main objective of the system, is certainly one of the most positive direct results.

Photography workshops are a monthly initiative that give the older children an opportunity to go into the city with the volunteers for a day of taking pictures in some of the scenic and touristy areas of the capital. Any volunteers participating that day lend their cameras to the kids for the afternoon, and often each camera is shared between two or three kids. This day is a really exceptional one for the kids. The obvious reason is that they get to visit parts of their city that they may have never seen, spend relaxed time one-on-one with volunteers and interns, and can be creative with their photos. However, from a sociological perspective, this is also a really important day for the children, also: like the after school activities, the photography workshops get the children off the streets – even more importantly, out of the villa completely – for an entire day. Beyond this, though, the most valuable aspect of photography Saturdays may be the exchange of cameras. Each child is handed the personal camera of a foreigner, with a message they very rarely hear: one of trust. For Rosa's goal of letting villa kids know that they are normal, this statement is key: they are not distrusted simply because they come from a villa. Indeed, there is a discernible boost of confidence and self-esteem in every child as they hold their borrowed cameras.

Play workshops generally happen only in the summer for the regular programs or during

holidays, following the kids' school schedule. The recent addition of two parador locations, however, have made play workshops a year-round activity. Typically these range from lightly educational games of matching and puzzles to coloring, jump rope, and card games. Similar to play workshops, CARE also does occasional special event days for Christmas, Easter, Kids' Day in August, and sometimes on the request of visiting volunteer groups. Also, in the late summer before school stars, school supplies are given to all of the children and, at the same time, the children receive a pair of shoes, as CARE works with an international shoe company that operates a global "one-for-one" aid project that donates one pair of shoes to a needy child for every pair sold.

Finally, despite the organization's growth and with the addition of many people and projects in the last ten years, birthday parties remain a special and untouched aspect of the program. Each child is still given an individualized gift, there are fanciful decorations, and specially decorated boys' and girls' cakes. For Rosa, this remains one of the most important things: that the children of the villas be seen the same as children anywhere, with the same hopes and wants – and that they be treated as such, regardless of their socio-economic status. Birthday parties are special: they recognize the individual child as significant, and this is the message that Rosa wants each child to hear.

However, these special touches add cost. While CARE is primarily an action-based organization that relies on volunteers' donation of time, even projects centered on less tangible needs of kids also occasionally and necessarily deal with the physical and practical ones, and add operational costs. The school supplies in the fall; gifts on Christmas, Kids' day, and birthdays; food during special events; and the daily *merienda* are all extra costs the organization's projects

incur. While many items are donated to CARE by local businesses, CARE also charges a fee to all of its incoming volunteers, and requires that each be responsible for the cost of the trips to and from the villa – a decision that is highly contested among the NGO leaders with whom I spoke. Rosa does not, however, receive any money from the state, and views government financial aid to NGOs very poorly, claiming that it will then attempt to control the organization's actions.

Rosa's goal for the future is to expand the organization enough to be able to run activities to each of the activity sites every day of the school week – and action that would increase the number of activities by over 100 percent. The idea of moving the office to a neighborhood closer to villa has been discussed in staff meetings, though this would man an almost certain drop in foreign volunteers, as many feel comfortable coming to CARE only because of its office location in such a known part of town. The future of CARE is not yet certain, though expansion is definitely on Rosa's mind.

Alianza de las Madres del Barrio San Rafael is a small, community-based initiative, founded over ten years ago by Filomena and Nadia, two women from the neighborhood San Rafael. My knowledge of Alianza del Barrio San Rafael comes predominantly through CARE Argentina, as one of our after-school sites – in fact, the one I myself coordinated – was located in the courtyard of Filomena's home, and Alianza's "office." Through this continual contact and informal conversation with Filomena, her husband Sergio, and the co-founder, Nadia, my understanding of this organization runs deeper than that of the other interviewed organizations. Although the other CARE activity sites are also located in small community centers like Alianza,

I did not gain the familiarity with them as with Alianza, and so they are not included in this study. However, it should be assumed that community cooperatives like this one exist in abundance. Because they are much smaller than CARE and other internationally-known NGOs, they often seem more hidden to outsiders. Indeed, had I not worked with Filomena directly, I would never have known of her or her cooperative – she has no presence online or in any network within the city.

Located in Gregorio de Laferrere, a town just outside of Buenos Aires Capital, in the province of Buenos Aires, the kind of poverty and *needs* that the community of San Rafael faces are different from those in the villa. Poverty in Laferrere is more rural than in the villa. The roads are wider, houses larger, and families may even have space for a small garden. However, cars are even more rare than in the villa; it is not uncommon to see horses grazing in the street, tethered to their owners' doors. The roads are dustier and more prone to flooding, especially after a big rain, but constantly with spillover sewage. While space may be in greater supply in Laferrere, residents of the area are more disconnected than villeros – from jobs, and the infrastructure that a large city provides. The school system, too, though certainly of poor quality in the villas, worsens still as one travels further out of the city. For my orientations with new volunteers, I would often explain the difference between Laferrere and the villa sites in visual terms: wheras poverty in the villa is black and grey, loud and "in your face," in outer-lying towns like Laferrere, it is brown and beige, silent and bleak.

Alianza de Las Madres is much smaller than the other NGOs I interviewed, as it is principally a coming-together of neighbors in an act of solidarity, rather than an outside organization reaching in to a poor community. In 2000, organizers of a regional political

meeting, brought up the need for community organization to provide for neighborhood welfare, and Filomena and a few of her friends volunteered to head the initiative. "We didn't know what we were doing, but... we did all the paperwork, and they sent us a little money," she says. The small group of neighborhood mothers, headed by Filomena – a mother and grandmother herself –, now works to provide about 60 neighborhood children and an equal number of elderly with resources and services. Partnering with local churches and organizations like CARE, *Alianza* is able to provide winter jackets and clothing, after-school support, and even health clinics, massages, and yoga classes once a week. Although Alianza had what Filomena calls "political beginnings," due to its formation as a result of the political meetings, it has transitioned into purely being a social organization, concerned with the welfare of the community, specifically the children and the elderly.

Moving toward the future, Filomena is hoping to expand and to be able to spatially support a comedor for the neighborhood, among other activities. She has her sights set on "la quinta," a small plot of land diagonally across from her house. Her current space hardly has room for the activities already being provided, and much less to become a place to cook for and feed a neighborhood. She says, "I would love to have a place where the kids could play fútbol, and not be in the streets … it isn't safe there." Attaining this space, however, would require outside help that Filomena has not found yet. Alianza receives donations of time, clothing, or of programs themselves, but not a great deal of monetary support. For this reason, Filomena says that their little association is largely "self-made," without help "from anybody, from anywhere."

Asociación Civil la Madrugada, a not-for-profit organization founded in 1999, works

with children and youth in "maximum situations of social infringement" to facilitate both social integration as well as reintegration into work, school, and family life. Andrés, the founder, is educated as a lawyer, though his passion is first and foremost theater. In law school, he started a drama club that quickly became controversial, because he would frequently call on street kids washing cars to play parts in his cast—revealing his other passion, which is social inclusion of those often marginalized. "It has always been my purpose," he states, "to include the kids... to cut down the walls that exist." Now, as the head of a social organization that works with marginalized kids through art and social projects, as well as providing legal and educational support, Andrés has found a way to integrate his formal training with his social agenda.

Considering himself to be a "director from the field" rather than a "director from the desk," Andrés does his best to be wherever he is needed – whenever he is needed. And, with 380 enrolled kids each month in programs reaching beyond the city limits of Buenos Aires capital, that goal can often prove difficult. He says that his organization is "apolitical, areligious, a...everything, only *in favor* of the kids." The work Asociación La Madrugada does with kids covers a wide range of activities: while largely focused on drama and theatre, giving youth an artistic way to express themselves and build relationships, La Madrugada also has workshops directed towards understanding rights and learning about educational and career options. The organization's goal is to attain "social integration by way of the arts, with firm roots in rights." The "arts," – the dramas that the kids are involved with – let the kids be part of something bigger than themselves. They create the play, produce it, and watch it grow – this process not only builds relationships between all involved, it also gives the youth involved a distinct sense of accomplishment and achievement – "a vital key," says Andrés, "to them ever becoming a part of

the larger society." The "rights" aspect of La Madrugada's mission statement is found in the classes offered by volunteers. These range from English and computer literacy programs to the availability of lawyers to talk to. It is important to Andrés that the youth he works with know that they have a voice and that there are professionals who are willing to hear them.

Asociación La Madrugada receives heavy funding from the government – municipal, provincial, *and* national – which provides the resources needed to operate multiple projects, keep a staff of 30 paid employees, and maintain the downtown office and an organizational van. Andrés says that the government monitors how its money is being spent, yet that this control is necessary and good: "the government should control the NGOs." He states that since 1983 (the year of Argentina's transition to political democracy), the government has been "present enough," and he is glad for its support, as La Madrugada would not function as it does without it.

Asociación Crecer is an organization that works with women and their children, teaching healthy lifestyle choices, infant and childhood malnutrition prevention, and other skills like sewing or gardening. Unlike most of the other organizations I worked with, Asociación Crecer is not directly in Buenos Aires capital. Located in Morón, an hour bus ride outside of the city center, it serves the population of *Villa Morón*, an official villa of Gran Buenos Aires. The organization's center is within walking distance of the homes of the families with which it works and for Marcela, the director, this proximity constitutes one the best parts of her organization. In fact, she says that this ought be the goal of any social initiative: to seek out the needs of the community within which it works, and then make efforts to meets those specific needs. If all organizations did this, she says, the system of help would be so much more effective.

This project is part of the larger network Red Salud Familiar, which was founded in Chile and preoccupies itself mainly with issues of childhood health and nutrition. Asociación Crecer's main project is a year long program for families – specifically mothers and their children – of the neighboring villa. Those enrolled attend daily workshops, classes, and counseling sessions, graduating from the program with new skills and resources. The classes and workshops range from sewing tutorials to informational classes on diet and nutrition, and there are trained psychologists and social works available to talk with the women as part of the counseling initiative. At the center, whenever the women are in their classes, there is someone who watches their children and leads them in art or play projects.

Starting with just 12 families enrolled the first year, Asociación Crecer is now up to 60 participating families. The organization operates through volunteers, university interns, and 10 paid employees, and is funded primarily through donations from individuals and local businesses. Another way that the project is funded is through occasional government *por proyecto* grants, or one-time awards that allocate a certain amount of money to an organization for a specific project or program. This government aid is helpful, says Marcela, yet so much more is necessary for effective change, and not just in terms of a government project transformation. Looking forward, Marcela hopes that more projects will take time to learn a community's needs, without "just doing for the sake of doing." The key, she says, is to work in partnership with other organizations.

Fundación Déjelos Venir Adentro is, first and foremost, a play-space. Even the office emits a message of fun. A tiny storage room converted into usable space in the back of an mid-

19th century building several blocks out of the financial district, the workspace has two rooms: the first, a brightly painted area with a blue wooden table and two multi-colored chairs; the second contains a few computers and more floor space for the coordinators to practice games. In the room with the table, there are hula hoops hanging from hooks on the wall, big rubber balls on a shelf, board games neatly stacked in a corner, and bins of toys, each clearly marked with its contents.

Founded in 2005 by a woman named Florencia, Déjelos Venir Adentro is based on the concept that play is important, and that all children deserve the opportunity to safe play time and space. Florencia, a translator, has always been involved with NGOs, and found herself fascinated by the psychology of play as she volunteered with organizations that specifically work with children. Looking for a volunteer opportunity for herself and her children, she made contact with a community project who told her that what they needed most was a *juegoteca*, or an organized play workshop. Thus the organization was born.

Now, Déjelos Venir Adentro has five paid employees – four coordinators and one general managing coordinator –, and four activity sites: two with community centers and two in schools, working with the school system to provide a "play" class period. This project differs from the majority of the other organizations in that it does not work in a villa. Rather, the "play projects" are targeted to schoolchildren of low income neighborhoods, but not those of the *villa.* Florencia describes this decision as one made from concerns "...of safety... I was going with my children, and I just don't want to have to take them there... I won't say *never,* but for now, we don't go into those places."

Currently, Fundación Déjelos Venir Adentro is financed primarily through private

donations and government “por proyecto” money, which often goes towards the purchase of new toys. In the future, Florencia hopes to grow Fundación Déjelos Venir Adentro so that it is completely self-sustaining. She wants to develop the “Play Program” into a marketable curriculum that she could then sell to schools in wealthy neighborhoods like Palermo and Recoleta which would, in effect, finance the primary function of the organization: to continue to provide safe play spaces for children in poor and marginalized neighborhoods. “The organization,” she says, is currently at capacity. “The coordinators we have cannot handle any more activities, and our budget does not allow for any more coordinators.”

Fundación Las Aulas is an organization that works on a macro-level across Argentina to promote education and healthy learning environments. Whereas most of the organizations of this analysis are community-based, Fundación Las Aulas works with schools and smaller organizations nation-wide to effect change in the education system. While the organization's methods are different, though, its goals are undoubtedly aligned to those of even the smallest local initiatives that provide personal tutorship and individual homework help. The foundation has many different projects that it runs, ranging from student sponsorship to a new initiative which gives scholarships to post-secondary students pursuing a career in education, on the condition that they stay in their home communities to give back, once they have completed their schooling. Student sponsorship is based on anonymous donors who give money each month or year to be the personal sponsor of a child's school needs.

One of the most creative aspects of Fundación las Aulas is that it is partially funded by a parking lot that it owns in the city center. While 50 percent of the revenue returns to the

maintenance of the lot itself, the other half goes to the operational costs of running the organization. This is where the salaries of the four paid employees is created, as well as the other institutional costs, like the rent for the office space, electricity, or phone bills. Because of this creative funding solution, donors are guaranteed that 100 percent of their money goes to the project or child for which it is intended. As the stress of finding funding for administrative costs is reduced, the organization is free to let the donors fund solely the projects and, as director Santiago says, "our greatest resource is our volunteers."

Hogar de Fernando is an artistically-driven social initiative started in 2007 by Claire, a French woman who relocated to Buenos Aires. With the idea of "giving the children the concept that there exists something within them that is different—special," Claire works to create an environment in which children are able to express their feelings without restraint through art: music, dance, paint, poetry, and drawing. Her after-school project does not have its own building; instead, the group borrows the upstairs space of a local fire department in La Boca, an area not far from downtown, which is simultaneously a large tourist magnet frequented by many foreigners, as well as a very poor slum neighborhood. Wednesday through Saturday, Claire and her volunteers meet with the children and work solely on creative projects. She says: "We don't look for the artist in the child, we only look for the art to be a way to touch something in the child... that they may express their creativity, and also their worry. Their fears. What's bothering them."

Institutionally, Hogar de Fernando is made up entirely of volunteers. Many of the specifically-trained teachers are actually specialists or professionals who give a few hours a

week to work with the kids. For example, the children's guitar instructor is a middle-age musician who has recorded a couple of CDs and spends the days that he is not with Hogar de Fernando giving paid private lessons. One of the unique aspects of Hogar de Fernando is that it strives to be sensitive to the emotional and psychological needs of not only the children but also of the team of adults that work with them, as well. The pain and struggles that children learn to accept as normal can be overwhelming for the volunteer; especially when they come to view the adult as a mentor and confidant. Often times the intensity of what one deals with when working with these kids is ignored; Claire hopes to have her team know they, too, are listened to and cared for. As Claire has maintained strong connections with her contacts in France, the organization receives most of its funding from French companies. In fact, all of the organization's money comes from individuals and groups, whether Argentine or foreign, with no help whatsoever from state or church agents.

Luz Creciente is a comedor and community center located in Bajo Flores, which is the southern part of Flores, a neighborhood in south-central Buenos Aires. Bajo Flores contains Villa 1-11-14, which is inhabited mostly by Peruvian, Bolivian, and Paraguayan immigrants. In addition to the meals it provides the community as a comedor, Luz Creciente also offers after-school activities and school support for children; workshops on family violence, victim defense, childcare, and computer literacy; temporary housing for disabled, homeless, or battered women and their children; and is a provider of work for women of Villa 1-11-14, at the on-site bakery, pasta factory, daycare and, of course, the comedor itself. Delia, the founder, is a nurse who began this project over ten years ago by helping nine children who had been abandoned by their

mother on her street. As the number of children coming to her for assistance grew, so did the number of friends and acquaintances who were willing to help her and, in 1998, Delia established their actions as the organization Luz Creciente. She found a building to operate out of and expanded the projects to include adult women seeking work, classes, or simply an escape form domestic abuse.

Located on the line dividing the villa from the rest of the neighborhood, the center works with women and children living literally across the street. The goal of the organization from the beginning, says Delia, was to "give the children school support, a place of self control and assistance, so that they will go to school." Then, in 2001, "with everything happening in the economy, we had to start feeding them," and Luz Creciente transitioned into being a comedor also. Now, ten years later, the comedor is still an integral part of the organization, which has expanded into a warehouse next door to the office as well as a small building further down the block. Nearly 700 people are fed three times a day, for lunch, merienda, and supper.

The program focuses on women and children from Villa 1-11-14, and provides a place for women to work, children to study, and all to attend workshops and classes. The center is a safe place for women to go when they have no other option; those who are disabled, homeless, or are escaping abusive home situations find a temporary haven at Luz Creciente. Delia's dream for the future is to have a 24-hour call center, which women could call seeking help in abusive situations. She says there is a government alternative to this, but it is backed up by nothing – women who call the line are not given the aid they need, and must simply wait in the situation they are in. Her plan is to provide this call center that would operate from Luz Creciente, so that women could be provided real solutions right away. However, to move forward at all, "we need

resources, we can't do anything with nothing," says Delia.

Ñasaindy ONG[84] is a new organization established just this year by a group of university students and young professionals. What began as student volunteering in a villa has developed into a long-term project with high ambitions. A mission group called Grupo Ñasaindy began volunteering with children in Villa 21 three years ago, mostly with the objective of playing and having fun with the kids. Over time, they realized that there was a need in this community that they, realistically, could fill. They decided to register as an official organization and continue their work with the help of donors, and in a more inclusive way than as just an informal student organization. One of the keys to the easy transition from mission group to NGO was that they kept the same name. The Guaraní word, meaning "light of the moon," carries personal significance to a few of the team members and, as they work in a primarily Paraguayan area of the villa, the community was receptive of it as well. Already the children and their families had been familiar with the students as Grupo Ñasaindy for three years, and Ñasaindy ONG was not a far step from this, and so the organization began with already strong community relationships.

Ñasaindy's ultimate goal is to have families no longer need social programs at all; to rely on their own resources and be autonomous family units. Their plan to achieve this is divided into two individual projects: educative and familial. In the first, there are four basic pillars on which they base the activities: diet (providing breakfast and lunch on activity days), school help, info-sessions, and scheduled play time. With the family project, there are six aspects taken into

84 ONG stands for *organización no gubernamental,* or non governmental organization. This is the only organization I spoke with who had NGO as such an advertised part of their identity. Indeed, it is quite a different stance from the director who took offense at the term, insisting that his organization be referred to only as a *social organization.*

consideration: legal, health, education, work, cultural promotion, and housing. Martín, one of the directors of the program, talks about the two projects as a comprehensive package that works with all aspects of family and individual growth. He stresses how important education is for the goal of making the organization's role obsolete – through gaining skills and resources, families will be able to become independent and no longer rely on any organization.

Institutionally, Ñasaindy ONG is still figuring out how it will operate best, as it has so recently transitioned to being an official organization. At the time of the interview, there were eight paid employees and three volunteers working on an administrative level. One of the aspects that sets Ñasaindy apart from other organizations is how youth-centered it is. Not only is the organization young because of how recently it has been established, but also because of the ages of the founders, volunteers, and employees: all are either young professionals, recent university graduates, or still in school. This absolutely shapes how the organization is run, and what importance is placed on various projects. In my discussion with Martín, our conversation quickly turned to academic themes in a way differing from every other interview. As students, the founders of Ñasaindy necessarily approach issues of poverty and development differently that those who have not been studying such concepts in an official setting. This is evident in their strategies of fundraising and organizational growth. For these students, they view what they are doing as blending their knowledge, enthusiasm, and ability towards efforts that are the "responsibility of any citizen." They see themselves making educated contributions to an issue, with the idea that the self-sustainment of the villeros can be attained.

In the nearly six months since my interview with Martín, Ñasaindy has grown and developed as an organization. One of the most notable forms of their growth has been through

technology – both with their own website and the use of social networking tools like Facebook and Twitter. Similarly, they target a young market by combining fundraising and advertisement strategies through the sale of rubber and cloth bracelets printed with the organization's name. Further funding is found through periodic *peñas,* or "folklore nights," where the attendees enjoy music, food, and dancing. Not only do these evening bring financial support to Ñasaindy, they often also serve as a place to recruit new volunteers, build relationships, and network. These tactics differ from many of the other organizations, and continue to show the youth of Ñasaindy's founders. In the last six months, Ñasaindy has grown considerably from what it was when Martín and I spoke; the students and young professionals have invested their time, energy, and creativity to developing a functional social organization that is relevant to the villa communities with which they work, as well as the technologically-savvy global community with whom they partner.

Vivimos Juntos*,* a community center located inside Ciudad Oculta, is a project that offers accredited[85] kindergarten classes for small children, after-school support for older students, as well as workshops for adult-learners in the neighborhood. Luis, the founder, is a Brazilian who first came to Buenos Aires in 1994 with a religious student exchange group. After spending time in Ciudad Oculta, he returned with the group to Brazil, yet was compelled by his experience and knew that he would be returning to Argentina to work in that villa. When he did, though, he was not supported – financially or otherwise – by his church, as they told him that they would not back a mission that was largely social rather than religious. The growth of Vivimos Juntos was

85 The kindergarten classes are the only aspect of the organization that is assisted by the government: the two kindergarten teachers are state employees. This provides the community with a local official kindergarten option for their children, as well as beginning the relationship between Vivimos Juntos and youth at an early age.

gradual, yet it has developed into a place where adults and children can take classes, receive counseling, and find educational resources.

A member of CARE Argentina once said that Vivimos Juntos was like the first model of CARE itself – it was the same program, but in a much more elementary stage. Although I went into the interview with this in mind, I found something very much different. Vivimos Juntos does not just offer temporary after-school programs; rather, it focuses on projects that engage students to enroll for several months in an on-going class with a progressive curriculum. Also, unlike CARE, Vivimos Juntos is not looking to gain more and more volunteers – its programs are not as volunteer-based. Rather, it seeks semesterly or yearly contracts with volunteers that can offer a skill to be taught in classroom form – like guitar, English, or even computer programming.

Looking forward to the future, Luis wants to secure a new building for Vivimos Juntos. Eventually, his churched offered to help him – once they saw the positive results of his relationship-building – and provided the organization with a physical location. However, he doesn't like that the church has the final word simply because it owns the building in which he operates all of the program's activities. "If we fight... we could be out a building... and then we would *vivimos juntos* (live together) in the street." He laughs, a play on words of his organization's name, yet his unease in relying so heavily on the church with potentially different objectives clearly weighs heavily for Luis. "Ideally, I'd like to have a place for children recovering from addictions, even as young as thirteen. There is no specific place for them to go, now." His goals remain social – not religious – and this stands as a potential conflict with one of the primary funders.

Voluntario Internacional is an organization designed to connect volunteers with opportunities to work. Essentially, it works as a intermediary, providing willing volunteers with contacts and activities at a project, like an orphanage or comedor. Voluntario Internacional has programs not simply in Buenos Aires, but also in the northern province of Misiones and the central province of Entre Ríos. One of the highlights of the program according to Graciela, the director of volunteers, is that each volunteer is placed specifically with a site that will draw on his or her talents – for example, a person with limited Spanish skills would not be asked to help in a rotation of Health Clinics; rather, the individual would be placed in an English tutoring program, or with a children's art and music initiative.

A noticeable difference between Voluntario Internacional and all of the other organizations I worked with is that its volunteers and founders, as Graciela says, "don't create anything." The programs it works with are already functioning projects and organizations, and Voluntario Internacional simply provides volunteers that can give time and energy to help where needed. In this way, it might be compared to CARE's work with Alianza; however, it would be more similar if CARE were simply to give Filomena's name, contact information, and day of center's activities to a prospective volunteer. Because, unlike CARE, Voluntario Internacional does not organize the projects themselves.

Essentially, Voluntario Internacional is a business, selling volunteer positions at local organizations to international volunteers seeking an "enriching experience." Benefits of this model are the ease with which a potential volunteer is able to find a location in which to help. Assuming that the organization partners with community projects that are actually beneficial to

the people they serve, it cuts down on the likelihood of a foreigner placing time and money into misguided and occasionally capricious projects. The third-party organization can act as a screen through which willing parties can participate and contribute, having been assured that their resources are not being wasted. At the same time, organizations like Voluntario Internacional raise questions of how the act of volunteering has begun to resemble an alternative tourist attraction, and if this is ethically justifiable.

Voluntarios Sin Límites is an organization similar to CARE, though its operations are geared less towards an English-speaking international base, and more towards South American internationals. Like Vivimos Juntos, Sin Límites focuses on providing educational opportuniities to youth and adults, as well as play time for younger children. In fact, this organization is an interesting mix between CARE, Voluntario Internacional, and Vivimos Juntos. It, like the first two, recruits volunteers on a large scale and, like Voluntario Internacional, places each volunteer in a setting that will be most beneficial to both the volunteer and the community site. One of the key differences between his organization and those like CARE and Voluntario Internacional, proclaims Facundo, the founder and director, is that Sin Límites does not charge a fee to its volunteers - “we would never fall to that.” Like Santiago of Fundación Las Aulas, founder and director Facundo views the organization's volunteers as one of its greatest assets. For this reason, he believes it highly counterproductive to require them to pay to give their time. However, with the exception of the volunteer fee and the fact that Sin Límites is predominantly spanish-speaking, it resembles CARE to a large degree.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL TRAITS

From the beginning, my goal was to understand who the non-governmental actors are, what they do for the development of vulnerably poor communities and if these actions are, ultimately, effective. To find effectiveness, this study is focused on examining the twelve organizations and identifying shared traits. Classifying them into groupings based on organizational features, I found that I could identify more clearly the trends that seem to work well and those that do not.

Within these twelve NGOs, I found that there are broad models that can be used to define and classify the organization of each association. The definitions of these models are often fluid, so the organization is identified by its position on a sliding scale of specific aspects. These provide a starting point from which the organizations can be examined, compared, and understood. The traits that I contrast and compare are the organizations' location, who the volunteers and employees are, its links – or lack thereof – with similar organizations, its source of financial support, and its perspectives of the government.

Location

The wind picked up a crumpled newspaper and blew it across the empty street. The sidewalks were abandoned, as was the road: it was as if I had come into a ghost town. The only person I could see—a woman—stood a block away, sweeping leaves from her apartment's doorstep into the street. She stopped as I approached, and looked startled when I asked her where I could find a specific street; nothing was well-marked. She looked at me for a moment, and then replied that she did not know, that she was not familiar with the roads.

"*Ojo*," she then warned, "*dos cuadras más y estarás en la villa:* two more blocks and you'll be in the villa."

I was in fact approaching 1-11-14, a villa in Bajo Flores, which is the southern part of Flores, a neighborhood in south-central Buenos Aires. In other words, this slum is the subsection of a subsection of a neighborhood – even still, it is inhabited by nearly 20,000 people, according to the government census of 1999/2000.[86] I had an appointment with the director of an organization that works with women and children of 1-11-14, and so had come with purpose. Yet, from the moment I stepped off the bus – indeed, from the moment I had remained on the bus past the last tourist or "central" location –, I had been warily regarded and scanned for what reasons I could possibly find myself in this part of town.

Arriving at Luz Creciente's office minutes later, with the grey view of the villa just across the street, I reflected on the difference between this organization and those that are located in the heart of Buenos Aires, to whose offices one can easily walk from any central place in the city. Location was, in fact, one of the first differentiating factors I noticed about an organization. Where its headquarters are is exceptionally indicative of the organization as a whole: it shows its relationship with the community it aims to serve. The priority of its volunteers and the ideology of how "help" should be distributed is also made blatantly evident by where the operations are – be it in the financial district downtown, a wealthy suburb of the city, or in the villa itself. For Luz Creciente and a few others, all of the organization's operations – office, *comedor,* and classroom spaces – are located on site or, in this case, on the street that separates the *villa* from the rest of the "proper" barrio.

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86 Ciudad de Buenos Aires. *Datos Estadísticos de Villas, N.H.T. Y Barrios.* Buenos Aires: Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 2005.

The location of the organization and the scope of projects it provides are often correlated. Luz Creciente, Asociación Crecer, and Vivimos Juntos – the three organizations with community centers located in or directly beside the villas with which they work – have the widest range of targeted age groups. They have kindergarten and daycares, English classes for various age levels, homework help for school children, and skill-building workshops for adults. The close contact with the community facilitates the many projects for the members of that area. Because they are permanent installations in the neighborhood, their interactions show an awareness and inclusion of the general public. They are immersed in the barrio, and so are able to see and meet needs that perhaps an outside organization – simply coming and going daily or weekly – may not see.

Also, as the community surrounding these organizations begin to see the center as a permanent fixture in the neighborhood – and, ideally, as a positive one – they are able to approach it with their needs and requests. Over time, some of the projects within organizations are actually initiated by community members, and thus the organization has even more legitimacy in the area. In all the time I spent at Vivimos Juntos, the community center located in Ciudad Oculta, the door bell was consistently ringing, and Cristina – the resident "mother" of all the children, coordinators, and volunteers – was constantly on her feet greeting mothers, children, and other community members; taking names and phone numbers; giving advice; and, of course, feeding everyone who would sit and eat. Clearly, Vivimos Juntos is known not only as a safe space, but also as a useful one, and so the range of those it reaches expands to be community-wide, and not merely including those involved with specific class and workshops.

Organizations like Voluntarios Sin Límites, CARE Argentina, and Asociación la

Madrugada have offices situated in the center of the city and surrounding wealthy neighborhoods – like the Magnificent Mile in Chicago. Undoubtedly, this is most convenient for their volunteers. As these organizations tend to have far more foreign volunteers than the organizations located further out of the centralized area of the city, their placement makes sense for those new to and unfamiliar with Buenos Aires. Volunteers at Luz Creciente and Vivimos Juntos must travel to some of the most dangerous areas of the city, and often this results in foreign volunteers being less willing to make the trip. While those who work with CARE or Voluntarios Sin Límites have an easier experience, the tradeoff of quantity of volunteers for quality of community relationships seems a high price to pay.

Volunteers

The characteristics of an organization's volunteer – who they are, what they do, where they are from, how long they stay – was one of the most varied practical concepts among organizations. Some have no discernible way to become a "part-time" volunteer; others refuse to take a volunteer who cannot stay for more than three months, or who does not speak Spanish; and one – Voluntario Internacional – is literally based upon the idea of the transient, foreign volunteer. The rest fall scattered in between, each with its own characteristics and tendencies. In fact, all twelve organizations have varying levels of volunteer collaboration. The level to which is incorporated in the organization – from being a temporary aide to being a key, decision-making team member affects how an organization interacts with the community.

When I first arrived at the CARE office, I was surprised to find that not only was my orientation session presented in English, but also that English seemed to be the primary of

language of business in the office. Given that this was an Argentine organization in Buenos Aires, which worked with underprivileged children in local *villas*, I had assumed that I would be expected to rapidly improve my Spanish skills. The reality, though, is that the great majority of the volunteers at CARE are either native English-speakers or at least speak English better than they do Spanish. Even more revealing is that, at CARE, foreign interns actually hold the majority of the administrative and activity-site duties, and are often the only ones present at the office. Interns manage the volunteers' experiences – from preliminary emails and orientations to transportation and activity coordination. For this reason, many outsiders view CARE as being a foreign – or even British or American, specifically – organization, and are often surprised to learn that Rosa, its founder, is Argentine.

In fact, a great deal of the volunteers at many of the organizations I interviewed were foreigners to Argentina. Every single organization had non-native volunteers, and in the cases of all but Luz Creciente, Vivimos Juntos, Asociación la Madrugada, Asociación Crecer, Fundación las Aulas, and Ñasaindy, they outnumbered local volunteers. Voluntario Internacional, Voluntarios Sin Límites, CARE, and Fundación Déjelos Venir Adentro all have volunteer programs which are largely filled by foreigners. Of that list, CARE and Voluntario Internacional both have exclusively international volunteers, almost all of which are from English-speaking countries. Ñasaindy, though it currently has a small number of international volunteers, hopes to expand into a more international program, but so far is just local. Hogar de Fernando and Asociación Crecer both accept foreign volunteers, but on a very longterm basis, and only those who have an exceptional level of Spanish ability.

The organizations that operate on a very local level – like Asociación Madres de Barrio

San Rafael, Vivimos Juntos, and Luz Creciente – typically have few to no international volunteers. These are often, for an outsider, the most difficult to find, as they are largely off the radar – with either no website or one that is not connected to any global networks. The added nuance, though, is that both Vivimos Juntos and Luz Creciente will use a foreign volunteer, provided that this individual actually finds them, presents a case for a skill that would be useful to the organization, and is able to take care of all of their living and travel arrangements. Often, too, these volunteers will stay for long periods of time – at least five or six months, and often up to one or two years.

Whether or not volunteers should be required to pay to work with a social organization is probably the most debated aspect of volunteerism that I found throughout my interviews. Some organizations charge a fee to volunteer, though they also give their volunteers certain perks, ranging from a tee-shirt to daily transportation to housing for the duration of the volunteer "experience." CARE and Voluntario Internacional fall into this category, with the latter certainly being more of a "complete package" kind of volunteer experience. Others, like Voluntarios Sin Límites and Hogar de Fernando, are opposed to this kind of organizational strategy – says Facundo, of Voluntario Sin Límites: "if they [the volunteers] are giving their time, why would we force them to pay, too? That is robbery, they can donate money if they want, or just buy a t-shirt, or nothing at all, if they choose."

University-age individuals make up the largest percentage of foreign volunteers in the organizations I talked to, most of these being foreigners. In a city as large as Buenos Aires, there is an abundance of foreign students, studying abroad or taking a "gap year." There are, of course, those who seek out social organizations on their own. Others, though, are helped by third

parties. Many international schools and study abroad programs have "volunteer electives" or human rights courses in which the student is placed with a local organization in order to gain an awareness of the "other side" of Argentine culture, and to better understand issues of poverty and aid. Universities that have these programs operate as middlemen much like Voluntario Internacional. Luz Creciente, Fundación Déjelos Venir Adentro, and Vivimos Juntos all receive primarily western university students from partnerships with programs like these. Their volunteers rarely seek them out specifically, but are rather matched with them. Often then, they have fewer volunteers who stay for long periods of time – typically one or two university semesters. Smaller, more "local" organizations have few public marketing strategies online and are harder for foreigners to find on their own, making the middlemen necessary for the connection to be made. Minimal to no online presence also means that these smaller projects tend to have more Argentine volunteers, who are better able to manage the culture and the process of finding and building contacts and connections.

Programs like CARE, Voluntarios Sin Límites, and Voluntario Internacional offer flexibility for internationals who seek a volunteer program that does not require a time commitment at all. CARE is appreciated by its volunteers for having complete flexibility, both in total commitment as well as weekly scheduling of volunteer days and locations. However, this flexibility leads to weaker ties between the volunteers and individuals of the communities in which the projects are run – which is, arguably, a significant part of a community-based project.

Another consideration of the volunteer is gender. While data from other organization is lacking, my experience with CARE showed that there was a vast majority of female volunteers – nearly ten to one, outnumbering the men by a long shot. At the same time, I saw notable

differences in how the kids responded to the volunteers, based on their gender. In Laferrere specifically, I watched the way my children interacted differently with me and with my co-coordinator, a male. I noticed significant difference in my kids, as much in the girls as with the boys. Having a male and female figure balanced our team: boys who would not show me respect would easily defer to Rig's word, girls were giggly and goofy around him, and he was always known to be ready for a fútbol game. At the same time, all of the children looked to me as the keeper of the *carpetas,* the one who knew what grade they were in, who their siblings were, and what homework they were doing and how well. More than once Rig and I were jokingly dubbed the "mom and dad" of Laferrere and, in all actuality, it seemed that our kids responded better to our system than at other CARE sites. Volunteers continually noticed the respect we had won from our children; their enthusiasm to do their homework; and the pleasantries between the kids themselves, with us, and with the volunteers as well. As a coordinator, I worked with every kind of group dynamic, and I continually observed how much smoother the activity went when we had a general gender balance. While I have no hard data from the other organizations, it appeared to me from an outsider's perspective that many of the more functional ones had more even male-female ratios. A volunteer's gender, of course, is an impossible thing for an organization to control, yet I believe it should be taken into consideration, especially when choosing roles of leadership.

Additionally, I found that having locals involved is key. It is vital for the children to not only be given role models, but specifically role models to which they can relate. Having a foreigner assist with math homework can be fine – beneficial even – yet the understood fact is that this foreigner is temporary. This brevity of volunteers does not foster an environment of

stability and accountability – an element that these children so vitally need. Also, having role models that understand them more than foreigners can is beneficial for kids.

However, directors working primarily with foreign volunteers continually gave me the same reasoning for not having more – or any – local volunteers: Argentines simply do not what to help; the culture of aid and volunteering just does not exist here. However, I also talked to organizations that have many local volunteers and some – like Luz Creciente – that have an almost entirely Argentine staff. Certainly, then, it is not the case that no Argentines desire to give their time to humanitarian projects. Indeed, from my experience, there seem to be many socially-driven Argentines – they are just not joining up with organizations like CARE or Voluntario Internacional. As it was these organizations that cater to foreign volunteers in the first place, my hypothesis is that the apparent lack of local support is really a lack of interest in *their specific projects* – few Argentines want to pay money to volunteer in a largely English-speaking environment with co-volunteers who are constantly changing and with whom they have very little in common.

Volunteers often make up the majority of an organization's "work force" and, as such, the breakdown of these volunteers sheds light on the priorities of the organization itself. Some organizations seem more outwardly focused rather than concentrated on local issues; that is, they are more interested in increasing their international support than strengthening their relationships with their communities. Too, themes surrounding the volunteer are important in considering an organization's work. Projects that use primarily foreign volunteers must be understood as having limitations that organizations of only locals do not have. These weaknesses range from obvious and surface-level obstacles like volunteers have a deficient grasp of the language and so being

restricted in their communication with children or community members, to more fundamental issues like transitory volunteers who are unfamiliar with the kids' culture being unable to develop lasting connections within an activity site.

Networks

Sitting in a hard-backed folding chair, slightly shivering from the cold creeping through the thin walls on the June afternoon, I quietly ate food from the refreshment table and wondered how I had managed to find myself among this specific group of individuals. Seated in similar chairs in a wide circle – also shivering, also eating –, were about twenty school counselors, directors of social organizations, and psychologists, all discussing child abuse: what it consists of, how to detect it, and how to deal with it – legally *and* emotionally. I had been invited to this meeting by Claire, the founder of Hogar de Fernando, and we met in the Fire Department of La Boca – the space used by Hogar for its after-school activities. At the meeting there was a guest psychologist who specializes in child abuse and, after she presented a general lecture on the topic, answered all questions brought up concerning the specific communities and situations of each attendee. The meeting was informal, yet serious; professional, yet clearly composed of a group of friends—or at least like-minded acquaintances with similar passions and goals.

This informational get-together is a clear example of the inter-organizational cooperation that is essential among social organizations. Although each deals with differing populations, they all share common themes and joining together – whether to complete a project or just for sharing information and support – is something that seems both beneficial and logical. At first, I was surprised to find that two of directors I had already interviewed were in attendance at this

meeting on child abuse – it was then that the fact of the community into which I had immersed myself really sunk in. Indeed, many of the organizations I talked to discussed the great benefit of work *"en red,"* or within a network. Florencia, of Déjelos Venir Adentro, said that it "would be foolish to try to do this alone... it's a group effort, you know?" Most other directors shared her sentiment, telling of the importance of solidarity.

However, despite working with similar communities and social problems, not all social organizations are in contact with each other, nor do they seek the solidarity of working in partnership. CARE and Voluntario Internacional, while working in partnership with local *comedores* and community centers, do not seek mutual support with similar organizations. I found this to be a major setback of these organizations: they are missing out on the practical assistance and support of similar organizations, as well as the sense of community and shared responsibility that comes from engaging in common networks.

It seemed that most organizations could seek more partnerships – even those who claim the importance of working in network often did not mention the issue further or explain more specific relationships. In fact, one director offered me the idea that there is actually a force influencing the *opposite* of partnered initiatives. Andrés, director of Asociación La Madrugada, discussed the existence of a certain territoriality between social organizations in any given places. This is the idea that there are known and respected "territories" of social organizations, where one NGO has programs and is actively working with a certain population, and so no other organization may start up projects in the same locale. He had been talking about the locations of La Madrugada's activities, and then mentioned Laferrere, saying that there was great need in that part of the province, but they did not go there. This was because, he said, there were already

other NGOs with projects in the area, and "what right does another organization have to go there, too?" This idea of having distinct territories among organizations is counterintuitive, as it seems that social organizations should work to be more integrated rather than less, viewing their goals as being more aligned than different or opposing. The organizations the work together do not seem to share Andrés' sentiment about territorial organizations, instead viewing their mission as a piece of a greater structure of aid and change. Through working together in networks, rather than seeking to becoming less united and more territory-centered, small organizations can find support for their individual projects.

Funding

Of all of the questions that I asked the heads of these organizations, details of finances were not first on my mind when I first began conducting interviews; rather, it seemed a fairly general question to ask an operating organization. However, the answers I received quickly stood out as some of the most interesting and telling topics raised. While the answers range in emotionality and transparency, most show a consistent trend in financial source: donations from individuals and business, volunteer contributions/fees, and government grants were the most common forms of funding. However, Alianza de Las Madres del Barrio San Rafael and Fundación Las Aulas stand out as exceptional cases.

Perhaps the most thought-provoking – albeit dissatisfying – answer with regards to funding came from Filomena of Alianza. Her answer stands out not because it reveals any different source of money than the others, per se, but rather because of its lack of logic. Filomena concurrently states that the association receives "no aid... from anyone or any place;"

that it receives clothing from a local *padrino* (patron, or benefactor) church; and that there is a subsidy (for an undisclosed amount of money) that is covered by an anonymous donor. At the same time, I also know from my own experience with the organization that, just prior to me starting as site coordinator of Laferrere, five wooden tables were given to the Alianza for use in the children's activities by the municipal government. Also, CARE, with whom I was connected to Filomena in the first place, provides not only after-school support for the children, but also *merienda* twice weekly, birthday parties monthly – replete with milk, cake, cookies and gifts –, and shoes and school supplies yearly. Her claim of having "no help" seems limited, and disregards several contradicting facts. That is not to say that Filomena does not feel at a disadvantage, nor that she is wrong in wanting more funding to be able to provide more activities and projects for her community – that is not at all my intention. Rather, her response made me realize that it is the nature of all social organizations to feel a certain monetary sparsity, and that all answers should be taken with a grain of salt.

The second exemplary answer came from Santiago at Fundación Las Aulas. The primary source for all of their projects and efforts with schools and the children come from private individual donors and sponsoring businesses—the typical response. Yet, how they fund organizational costs was a complete surprise: simply, a parking lot. In the center of the city, ideally located near offices and shopping centers, a small piece of property is owned by the organization and has been turned into a small parking lot. This yields a monthly profit large enough to have 50 percent maintain the lot and the other 50 percent pay the office's rent, electricity, and the salaries of the four paid employees. Creative solutions like these are so straightforward, and they certainly relive the organization the stress of needing to pay the

“unwanted bills” like utilities and the awkwardness of having to deduct this from donations intended for projects. Similar projects include monthly or yearly benefit events: be it a concert, a potluck meal, or even a talent show or musical put on by the kids, these events yield money from the general community, and are a great way that organizations like Asociación la Madrugada, Voluntarios Sin Límites, and Ñasaindy have found to raise money for their projects.

Most organizations report receiving little to no financial support from the government. However, many also claim the government as a source of *some* assistance. Fundación Déjelos Venir Adentro has received monetary support from the municipal government for two years. “Well, three technically,” Florencia says with a laugh, “but with how slow the government is... thank God we're not a comedor – think if we were trying to feed people, yet still on the state's schedule! … I don't know how they do it.” The money Déjelos Venir Adentro receives is *por proyecto*, or “by the project,” and not a recurring monthly subsidy. This system works well, says Florencia, whose only complaint is that sometimes the inability of the state to be flexible can be frustrating. But, she says, “it is good that they keep controls on how the money is spent. It is their money, and they should do that.” The only time this inflexibility became an issue was when they received $3000 from the state to buy toys, and then received a physical donation of $5000 in toys. Florencia presented a petition asking to be able to put the money towards something else the organization needed at the time – “it's not like I wanted to buy cookies or take everyone in the office on vacation or anything!” – but was turned down, and had to buy still more toys, “that just sat on the shelves for almost a year... it was senseless!” Others who receive government grants por proyecto – and also tell of its notorious tardiness – include Luz Creciente, Asociación la Madrugada, Asociación Crecer, Fundación las Aulas, and Vivimos Juntos.

Those who receive neither subsidies nor *por proyecto* grants claim no interest in receiving government money at all. Rosa of CARE says that once you accept government money, you start having to do more and more of what the state wants – your organization loses its autonomy and ability to pursue its own priorities freely. She, Claire of Hogar de Fernando, and Voluntario Internacional are all proud to work completely separate from the state.

IV. ABSTRACT THEMES

Along with the more practical aspects that differentiate the social organizations of my study, there are several more conceptual themes that also act as indicators of effectiveness. Whereas the last section focused primarily on aspects of *how* the organization runs its projects, through detailing location, volunteers, and finances, this section focuses more on the abstract ideas *through which* the organization operates. That is, this section draws attention to how cultural context, perspectives of the government, the dichotomy between help and "poverty tourism," the notion of fighting marginalization as opposed to poverty, and the importance of relationships all shape an organization's value in a given community.

Perspectives on government

Not surprisingly, I found that organizational attitudes toward the state paralleled whether or not the organization received governmental financial support. Andrés and Facundo of Asociación de la Madrugada and Voluntarios Sin Límites, respectively, both spoke vehemently of the positivity of the current government; both receive – or have received in the past – grants *por proyecto* from the municipal, provincial, or national government. When asked of the

possibility of the government providing poverty aid programs with electoral ends, Andrés admits that there may be that issues, yet says, "...I don't care why the government puts in money … even if it is just when there is an election ... if it gets to a kid, it's fine." Facundo, on the other hand, replied with a quick, "Who told you that? Did somebody say that that is how it works?" While he balks at the idea of criticizing the government, he also admits that his organization does not have any connection with the state. Continuing on, he says:

> We don't have even one... not even one direct link with any state network, nor a problem with having one... it's... it's necessary to have a … to be present... no?.. we don't have an anti-state position. At all. Nor do we have a relationship. At all. But it doesn't seem to me to be very mature to have an anti-state position... or anti-government – it does nothing (*no sirve nada, eso, nada*).

For many, there seems to be a direct connection between opinion of the government and organizational access to government aid. As the director of an organization heavily funded with government subsidies, Andrés by no means criticizes government actions. He is very pro-government, because Asociación La Madrugada benefits from government money made available to it. At the same time, Andrés does not consider himself nor his organization to be puppets of the government. While he recognizes that governments may have ulterior motives in how and to whom they give aid, he finds that this fact is inconsequential if the money indeed reaches a worthy project. Also, he agrees with the current guidelines of government grants: that the state should dictate how its money is spent. Others though, like Rosa of CARE, would say he is "in the state's pocket" for this belief and its implicit effects on his organization.

Showing less emotion and absolute backing of state practices, both Florencia from

Fundación Déjelos Venir Adentro and Marcela from Asociación Crecer speak with a conservative pragmatism towards the government, and its relationship to society. It should be noted, too, that both receive periodic governmental *por proyecto* grants for their organizations. Florencia spoke with great disgust of the state-provided assistance programs, saying that government programs that simply give money or necessary goods to poor people are not helping or changing anything and, worse, "they are not making the person decent … they are not treated as worthwhile: it is degrading for these people." She goes on to say that those who really have needs are receiving nothing and are in the same position as they were five years ago - "and, with all of these supposedly wonderful changes of the economy, if they are the same, then they are worse." She calls for the government to "dignify" its poorest population, not simply keep it where it is at, through meaningless *asistencia,* or assistance, programs.

Marcela, as a former state employee, provides another perspective of the government and its role in social welfare. Trained as a sociologist, she began her career by working for the state. Unsatisfied with the "government time" though, she left public office work and found herself spending her free time volunteering at Asociación CRECER. She loved it, and was gradually promoted to her present role as director. Like Florencia, Marcela talks of her hope in the goodness of the state, and believes that many of its efforts are not ill-founded. However, she notes that often the message of the government's programs are good, "yet they don't do what they say." Too, she sees that its short-sightedness poses a hindrance to efficacy; the government needs to have a more long-term vision as it moves forward with planning and programs, "thinking of future generations … they are just thinking of today, and not tomorrow." She, too, believes that the state should aim at projects beyond simple assistance programs to effect real

change.

For the most part, I found that the non-governmental social organizations of Buenos Aires that were committed to offering aid to the poorest and most vulnerable populations of the city did not see themselves as any sort of replacement for the government. They see value in the state, and in its programs, be they limited or even under-achieving. However, they do not see themselves acting in a capacity which undermines the actions of the government. Social organizations focus on the government's recent trends toward social spending, and call for further actions. They recognize that there is a large deficiency, and even criticize some of the state's techniques and methods, yet most are hopeful that the government will continue to grow into the role of an effective social actor in Argentina.

Culture

Culture plays an important role in the way that social organizations are run in Argentina. Latin America is notorious for having a laid-back culture that runs on a schedule far different than that of Wall Street and London Square's nine-to-five business world. There is, of course, a very practical side of this culture that comes to the surface quickly: emails are tardy, meetings are late or cancelled last minute, business is more "relaxed." However, all of these seem to be superficial details. Of course, they may be what is most evident, most quickly – however, there is an aspect of the unhurried culture that runs even deeper. Beyond the missed calls, unorthodox meetings, and the unperturbed *lateness* of so many Argentines, the relaxed values manifest themselves organizationally through a lack of transparency and, at times, an impenetrable hierarchy.

Transparency within a social organization is key, because it allows for a common understanding of how the system functions by all those involved, it makes needs and surpluses evident, and it gives donors confidence that their money is going to good use. Primarily through my time at CARE – though to a lesser degree from my interviews, as well – I found a general lack of openness, not only with those on the outside, but also between members of the organization itself. This surprising pattern of minimal organizational transparency presented itself early in my study. Within the first few days interning at CARE, I noticed that there were unclear and unmentioned topics, even to those who had been a part of the organization for a great period of time. At first, I thought that my exclusion from certain information was simply a result of my newness, and assumed that with time I would come to know how CARE operated.

Over the course of the next six months, however, I saw little change in CARE's level of transparency. I was placed in charge of the Research Team: among other tasks, we looked into new funding options for CARE. This became an increasingly difficult challenge, as I soon realized that in many respects, my hands were tied: I had to eliminate many grant options because they asked for budget charts, project costs, and year-end financial reviews. It was not that this information was not available to only me or any other person at my level, but rather that the data essentially did not exist. There are no official records of organizational spending or costs beyond Rosa's mental count, and even this she is reluctant to share with anyone. The lack of accountability trickles down through the organization to where there is a general sense of unease and frustration at "the way things work," and the inefficiency of getting problems resolved.

Related to the idea of transparency, another way that the easygoing Argentine culture gets

in the way of the "business" of an organization is through the hierarchical structure of social organizations. Several organizations I spoke with are still actively directed by the individual that founded the project, and often this leads to an uneven balance of power, or disagreements regarding the organization's mission and direction. CARE, Asociación La Madrugada, Voluntarios Sin Límites, Vivimos Juntos, Luz Creciente, and even Alianza de las Madres del Bario San Rafael, all have dynamic founding leaders, and all show signs of internal power struggles. In CARE, there is often tension between Rosa and her son or the interns, as new projects are proposed and methods explored. She fears losing control of the project she began, and resists the changes that new management may bring, yet continues to place significant responsibility in the hands of interns. Similarly, Andrés refers to Asociación La Madrugada as *his* organization and, pointing to himself, says with a loud chuckle, "he that weighs the most, has the most power." Across the board, there seems to be a recurring theme of one leader at the top controlling – or failing to control – the actions of all underneath. Only Florencia of Déjelos Venir Adentro seems to have broken this patriarchal role: "starting this year, I've tried to remove myself as much as possible … if I say too involved, we won't grow. … But it's hard, you can imagine."

Culture in Argentina is not solely an issue of the eight-to-five business day shifting to a ten-to-seven one. Rather, culture permeates to a level of organizational ambiguity and rigid pecking orders. These traits can decrease an organization's ability to function effectively internally, and can also cause a loss of external relationships and, sometimes, of funding or the possibility of funding.

Is this help, or is this tourism?

At the beginning of each orientation session with new volunteers at CARE, I first would introduce myself, telling them who I was, how I came to be working for the organization, and about my project and my interest in themes of poverty and inequality. I would then ask the group to introduce themselves and describe how and why each were there, wanting to become volunteers. The answers I received varied only slightly among the nearly 250 volunteers that I talked to over my five months as orientation leader. Most frequently, I would hear the phrases "I just want to *help,*" "I want to *give back,*" or "I wanted to see the *other side* of Argentina" as the reason that the individual sought CARE out and wanted to volunteer their time while on their study abroad trip, gap year, or spring break.

This is one of the most troubling issues I found as I worked with CARE and interviewed aid organizations: the idea of "help." It is a word that is simultaneously complex and overly simplistic. So frequently used, its meaning has become assumed knowledge, yet few have truly defined it. At first glance, one might say that it is a term oft misused; however, having never truly received a definition, it is more true that it is simply *overused.* It is a cliché term that, presumably, intends to denote a humanitarian good will. "Help" implies that a specific need has been identified and that the solution is known, or perhaps is being evaluated and researched. Ideally, it indicates that the efforts being made are positive; that they have been thought out and found to be truly beneficial to those receiving the aid. However, its tacit implication is that there be a well-off individual who *helps*, and a less fortunate one who *is helped*.

One of the large drawback of organizations like as CARE and Voluntario Internacional is that, because they tend to deal mostly with foreign volunteers, they are also more than likely also

with a majority tourists. And, with this great influx of foreigners – all desiring to "help" – there is a blurred line as to what is effective aid, and what is merely a new form of tourism. There are those who blatantly stated that curiosity was, in part, their goal of volunteering with CARE: to see "the other side." However, I believe that there are far more that fall into this category than just those who gave this as a reason for their volunteerism. There is a propensity for large organizations that attract a high volume of foreigners as volunteers to tow the thin line between "volunteerism" and what I call "poverty tourism."

This of course opens a much wider discourse of what "help" means, precisely, in either the local or global sense of the term. What does it mean, really, to "help" another person – and is that a worthy goal? Further, do the reasons motivating a person to give their time or money affect the aid received? The classic "give a man a fish" anecdote was rephrased by Graciela, who said, "If you give one woman who lives on the street a meal one night, that's great. And then, you give it to her the next night, and the next. Soon, you are giving a meal to her every night... what happens if you get sick, or go on vacation? What is she going to do?" And yet, in so many cases, the volunteers, or those willing to help, are transient, and do not have the time to help in this long-term scenario. Is there room for the type of help they offer, or is including them in the framework of philanthropic work detrimental to the eventual development and self-caring of the poor communities?

If anyone runs the risk of Poverty Tourism, it is in fact organizations like Voluntario Internacional whose function is to connect willing volunteers with local organizations. They are businesses that act as brokers between local humanitarian projects and foreign volunteers seeking a "complete experience." Many of their volunteers are short-term students or travelers, with

little interest in getting deeply involved in the programs to which they are assigned. These tourists often have agendas different from that of social welfare, and do this to complete a sense of duty to "helping" or "giving back." This leads often to a skewed image of reality of who the poor people are, what their skills and abilities are, and what real aid or development might look like.

There are several potential downfalls of this strategy, key among them that it is a market based on the fact that poor populations existing and needing aid. There is a slippery slope from being an objective third party willing to connect individuals with volunteer opportunities and running a shady Poverty Tourism organization, in which the poor feel unnecessarily used and minimally aided. With all organizations and any aid process, this of course is an obstacle to avoid, though I found especially with those programs that dealt primarily with large quantities of foreign volunteers that this was a potential hazard. They exist because poverty exists, and they thrive off of people who want to "see poverty."

Two contrasting experiences that example the difference between legitimate help and poverty tourism are ones I had with American university student groups coming to work with CARE. The first group was 16 students from an expensive state university in New York. The university's office in Buenos Aires requested one day of volunteering for their students who were spending a semester abroad in the city, arranging to donate a sum of money for a day-long excursion for their students. The Saturday that they wanted to go, we picked the students up from their posh university building in a wealthy subsection of the city, and bused them privately to Laferrere. Another intern and I conducted a mini-orientation on the ride out which, for many of the students, was the first they had heard of Argentina's specific poverty issues. The day was

spent doing none of our normal activities; instead, we played games, made crafts, and ate hamburgers that the university's donation had bought. Throughout the day, many of the students interacted with only each other rather than with the kids, speaking in English about the clothes of the women, the condition of the courtyard and street, and even the lack of salad dressing. All day long, it seemed that these extremely temporary "volunteers" could only see how the day was about them: this was a piece of *their* experience, a day to see something new and different, much like going to a museum or zoo as a field trip. And, as it was *my site* we had taken them to, I especially felt as if I – and CARE – had sold out our kids.

The second group, from Chicago, was by all appearances a group expecting the same kind of poverty tourism experience that the group from New York had wanted. However, it was astoundingly different. The students had decided to take an alternative spring break, and had contacted CARE months in advance to see if they could partner with us to do a week of service. I had the opportunity to lead this group for the first half of their time. Knowing they only had six volunteer days before returning to the United States, the group asked not to do the regular volunteering, but rather any "special projects" that we needed accomplished at the various sites. For six days, this group of twenty-four American university students donated their time and money to manual labor projects that needed to be done. We built shelves, moved sand and bricks, and painted. Only on two of the days did the students have any extensive contact with the kids, and both were special activities that were as much a treat for the students as for our kids. Unlike the first group, these students desired to see their time and money put to use in ways that would be significant for the children and the community; rather than personal enjoyment.

In cases like Luz Creciente and Vivimos Juntos, it is clear that volunteers – even

international volunteers – are seen as a tool, a resource, and that the goal of an organization is not lost in facilitating them. In organizations like Voluntario Internacional, though, the organization is centered not around the project, but rather around the volunteer: the fact that the local organizations – and the poverty they serve – exist is necessary for Voluntario Internacional's success. Organizations like CARE fall somewhere between the extremes of being a local organization and being a business for foreigners: of course, it still has its own projects, and its motivation today is not far from Rosa's original intent. In the two examples of student groups, it was clear that one simply wanted to take from the experiences, while the other truly wanted to see their time, effort, and money go towards some positive change. Organizations, then, differ in how they approach these two kinds of volunteers: they either create tourist experiences for foreigners, or they facilitate a volunteer's drive to be used by providing real and meaningful volunteer roles. Poverty Tourism stems from an organization's focus on the volunteer and their experience rather than on the project itself. Often this distinction comes at the cost of the community being "helped" – whether by feeling used, or by simply not being helped to any noteworthy extent, these local communities are not benefited by Poverty Tourism.

Decreasing Marginalization vs. Poverty Alleviation

"There is a social problem far worse than poverty, *mi amor,* and it is called marginalization," Rosa, the founder and director of CARE, said to me one evening. "It's like the trash. People need to think... but they don't think of what they throw away, they just put it all in there. And those who come after … the *cartoneros* … they'll cut themselves on a tin or broken glass that someone has put into a bag without thought."

The problem she spoke is an idea that is common to many of the organizations with whom I spoke. *Alleviating poverty* is not their primary goal: rather, they are *fighting marginalization*. It is not merely because a child is poor that she does not finish secondary school; it is the entire social construct into which she has been built. From the distinction between a villa and a barrio of the city, to the fear and assumed danger of a villero, culture has built a wall between the "proper" society and city, and the "other." CARE, in good company with organizations like Hogar de Fernando, Fundación Déjelos Venir Adentro, Asociación la Madrugada, Vivimos Juntos, and Ñasaindy, sees itself as an organization whose primary function is not to fight the beast of poverty; rather, the devil of marginalization. It is marginalization which hinders children from knowing their own city; which causes them to grow up believing in their own nature as the "outsider"; which turns the into an uncaring machine, unconcerned with issues beyond our narrow range of vision.

Indeed, it seems that the very structure of the system now not only supports, but *demands* the existence of these shantytown communities and their "other" population. There are no supports that lead to the possibility of an exit; even systems like education are not provided in a way that will make a notable difference for these children. "One could easily argue that their educational experiences are not intended to and cannot prepare [them] to function in the same society and the same economy."[87] Social organizations, then, build themselves to be the agents that bring these communities – beginning with children – up out of the "otherness" that exists between the "invisible wall of economic redundancy, educational exclusion, state abandonment and sustained stigmatization [that] has been erected."[88]

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87 Orfield 1985, as quoted in Auyero, op. cit. (Bronx), p.52.
88 Ibid. (Auyero), p.48.

For Rosa, the fight against marginalization manifests in her ability to bring together cultures and worlds: by introducing foreign volunteers to *villero* children, she is both showing the volunteer a world of poverty they may never have seen, as well as giving the child a glimpse of a world beyond their own – one of education and of travel. Her birthday parties and play days are envisioned as days to "make the child feel as any other child might." Other programs, like Hogar de Fernando and Asociación la Madrugada, focus on a child's creative nature to minimize certain themes of marginalization. By encouraging a child to produce art, and to let themselves be creative, they help that child see her own ability, and have a place to express her feelings. In this way, if marginalization is the "averted gaze"[89] of the government, then the actions and projects of these social organizations are a firm redirection of regard.

Relationships

For organizations aimed at minimizing marginalization, and especially those that do so through work specifically with children, building real and meaningful relationships is one of the most important aspects of any project. Relationships that are built between short-term volunteers and longer-term staff, between volunteers and kids, and even between community members themselves not only increase the likelihood of success of the organization, but also of any community initiatives and development. For any meaningful change to take place within a community, there needs to be strong relationships on multiple levels.

To say that relationships are paramount to structural change may seem a quixotic approach to problems complex as poverty and intense social marginalization; an idealistic cover of more pragmatic issues. Indeed it was not—by any stretch—the hypothesis I had set out to

89 Auyero, op. cit. (Bronx), p.48.

prove. In fact, it was a gradual change in approach. Rooted academically in the political and economic history of Argentina's poverty, I began to insert myself into the community through intuition, adjusting my own actions – and, later, aspects of CARE's systematic approach at my site – based on the reactions and results of the kids that I had begun to know well. Then, using this as a baseline from which I saw all other organizations, I started to see the great parallel between my own informal experience, and the experiences of all organizations: relationships are key to a healthy and effective social organization.

In my time at CARE, the pattern that I consistently saw repeated by foreign volunteers was the lack of a big picture. The interns who stayed for long periods of time would become so internally-focused, increasingly preoccupied with the daily tasks of running the office, that they would frequently forget about the children for whom the work was done. Florencia of Déjelos Venir Adrento spoke to this tendency when she said that "you always have to stay connected to the kids, or you'll forget what you're doing." On a higher organizational level, the trend was consistent: many social organizations spend more time recruiting more volunteers – growing the *organization* – than they do seeking ways to improve the services they provide to *people*. Their interests shift, becoming more about gaining volunteers and recognition and less about interacting with marginalized communities and meeting needs.

It is through developing a strong base of trust that any other efforts may be realized. For this reason, organizations who focus their outreach efforts on securing only volunteers run the risk of never fully being able to attain a level of genuine establishment in their target communities, because their volunteers are so transient. As a foreigner myself, I cannot say that I truly integrated into Laferrere in the six months that I was the site's coordinator; although I

worked with the kids longer than any other CARE volunteer ever had, I was still temporary, in a larger sense.

For six months, though, I made it my goal to accomplish just one thing: to let the children learn to trust in accountability. I was given the responsibility of Laferrere because nobody else wanted it. "The kids are bad," I was told by other interns who had gone for a week or two. What I found, though, was that the kids just needed a relationship with someone to whom they had to be accountable, and who would be accountable to them. It was in this context that I began the worksheet system with the individualized *carpetas.* I worked to learn the children's names and what they were doing in school. I spoke to their parents to see how I could better target their problem subjects. Gradually, the kids opened up to me.

One day in April, about a month into my time at Laferrere, I played a game of modified hide-and-seek with some of my kids outside. The object of the game is for the player who is "it" to either tag the others, having found them in hiding, or hit the "home-base" wall and called out the names of those racing to safety, automatically getting them "out." Having been in hiding for awhile, Ximena – the girl with whom I had taken cover behind a car – and I decided to make a run for Home Base. Fernando – the boy who was "it" that round – saw us coming, though, and raced to the wall, beating us squarely. He proudly slapped the wall with his hand, proclaiming "*pica Ximena y Pica la de CARE* – Ximena is out and the girl from CARE is out." I paused, then slapped the wall myself, declaring "No, I'm not." Fernando looked at me, dumbfounded – "But I said your name: you're out." "No, you said '*La de CARE,'* – that's not a name. I've been here one month, I'll be here four more, it's time you know who I am. You are Fernando, you are in grade five, you pretend you only know math up to multiplication, but you can really do division, too. I

know you, you should know me by now, too." Everyone who had been playing gathered around us, staring at me in astonishment, and then the game simply resumed.

The next week, all the children called me Elisabeth. Within two weeks, they had shortened it to Eli. By June, when I had seven children screaming my nickname from various corners of the courtyard – all requiring my immediate attention – I almost regretted taking this first step of familiarity. In all actually, though, the level to which my kids at Laferrere came to count on my presence was an acknowledgement of how important personal relationships are. Volunteers soon came to know Laferrere not for its "bad" kids, but the for the most diligent students and polite children – who actually took the time to greet each volunteer and learn his or her name.

One of the unifying factors of these organizations is that they build relationships. Whether through play, through school support, or even through the arts, they bring children in to relationships, and focus on an interpersonal skill set – they are building the child's ability to relate and to be in a social setting. Organizations that focus on the relationship-building aspect of their projects are ensuring its effectiveness: only through strong relationships can an organization both last in a community and have its projects be successful for the children's development.

4. PROJECT PROPOSAL

Examining existing aid organizations and their efficacy is only truly meaningful in the context of being used as a teaching device for how to move forward. Case studies, reviews of contemporary theoretical thought, and assessments of current programs contribute to a certain literature and are made useful by their ability to deepen pragmatic knowledge and effect practical change. A necessary step of this project then, having given both the contextual build-up for aid organizations in Buenos Aires and an examination of several existing projects in the city, is to propose what could be done in the future to further enhance the utility of such organizations. This is not a statement of what *must* be done, across the board; rather, it is an idea as to what may be another viable project, given what I have observed through my work with twelve existing aid

organizations in Buenos Aires.

The basic premise of the project I propose is that it be a self-supporting social organization, focused on creating a safe place for children that cultivates their creativity and supports their educational development. Like Fundación Las Aulas with its use of a parking lot as a source of funding, this organization would operate on two levels, having both a business and a social facet. The goal is that it not be static, but would change as the community needed; as kids grow and develop, so too would the organization to meet their new needs. Before getting into a detailed plan of the project, though, I would like to assume three basic understandings of the proposal: that it targets reducing marginalization as its core mission, rather than poverty; that it spends considerable time investing into a specific community; and that it is a small venture, not an international – or even national – one.

Three Assumptions

It is clear that marginalization runs deep in a country, where the wealthiest neighborhoods of the capital city are separated from *villa* poverty by merely one six-lane avenue and a set of train tracks, or a child's first time to go downtown is with an aid organization like CARE. If social inequality is really one of the greatest issues facing Argentine society, as I believe it is, a responsive program should make minimizing marginalization a targeted goal. Any proposed project of a small organization needs to be centered around increasing social integration, rather than reducing poverty. As discussed earlier, this approach seems to point in the direction of long-term reduction of poverty: only through gaining an equal footing will the poor be able to support themselves above poverty. Too, it is a more reasonable and practical approach for private

organizations. Application of this mission statement is carried out through community and integrative projects, rather than through monetary aid and support. Small, non-governmental organizations are best equipped for this sort of work: on the one hand, they do not have the financial capital – as does a government agency – to provide the wholesale relief that is needed and, on the other, they *do* have the human capital to establish relationship-based projects that target issues of inequality within a highly marginalized society.

After establishing that the overarching goal should be to decrease marginalization, a project does so through building strong community ties. These relationships can be established in a variety of ways, yet the commonality of each is time. Among the organizations of my study, in every case where strong and trusting connections exist between an organization and the community in which it works, that relationship has been developed over time. The students who formed Ñasaindy ONG had already been involved in Villa 21 for three years; Luis of Vivimos Juntos had been living and working in the villa Ciudad Oculta for years before he opened the doors of the center for the first time; even Rosa at CARE developed personal friendships with the women running each of the comedores and community centers before she was able to bring foreign volunteers to work and play with the kids. Establishing and developing these relationships, then, is the necessary first step: investing considerable time into the target community, building significant relationships, and learning the specific needs of that specific community.

The third basic assumption that I am making for this proposal is that the organization be a local one. I clarify this because I believe that all aid organizations focusing on relationships must begin with just that – real relationships, one-on-one. This means beginning small. Project

proposals can grow quickly; and while there is certainly room for expansion the model ought to work as a basic unit, as well. For a newly forming organization, the project must be able to succeed with small numbers: a project whose mission is to meet the foundational relational need of an underprivileged child should be able to operate with as little as a willing and compassionate person, and a space to develop this relationship. For this, one of the greatest advantages of small social organizations is that they are made of people. People can build trust and teach skills in a way that faceless government programs cannot.

From these three preliminary guidelines, a project could take many forms. Indeed, given the personal interests of the individuals heading the initiative, the context of the community, and any financial or temporal variables, there are any number of ways these guidelines could be met and the project be effective in its community, yet look nothing like another equally effective organization. As stated earlier, the project this proposal outlines is one that is financially self-sufficient, and works with kids on a social, educational, and creative level. It also attempts to address issues of employment, international volunteerism, and community integration.

Hostel Model

Though the idea of running a business and a social organizations as complementary projects could take many forms – from a bookstore, to a market, to a coffee shop –, for this proposal I look specifically at the idea of running a hostel as a complementary business to a social organization. In a city as large as Buenos Aires, there are hundreds of hostels, making it reasonable to assume that the project is possible. The ideal goal of this project would be to maintain a profitable hostel, in which children of a local poor neighborhood could find a space to

do after-school projects, socialize and, later, potentially find employment. With the issue of marginalization – and the immense stigma attached to being poor – as one of the greatest social problems, this proposed model serves two purposes. First, it is a very integrated way to include children in a wider community. And second, it serves as a place of growth for these kids.

As far as community development, this entire idea hinges on the notion of maintaining strong, long-term relationships and becoming a trusted and valued member of the area – hopefully, leading the way for other businesses and organizations to become more socially involved. This would be a local business that is known for inserting itself deeply into the surrounding community, becoming a trusted hang-out and help for the local kids as well as a useful resource for parents. The other main purpose of this model is that it be a place for kids to grow – academically and personally. At first, this would be done by maintaining an atmosphere of safety, fun, and accountability through school help and creative projects – be that music, dance, or art. As the kids grow, the model would allow for the youth to find jobs within the system. An intermediary step, too, may be to begin giving older children responsibilities of the younger ones, as test-runs of more "official" jobs.

Martín, a director of Ñasaindy, the organization of students and young professionals, explains how one of the most alarming sectors of the population are the *ni-ni*s, the youth who *ni estudian ni trabajan* – neither study nor work. Dropping out of secondary as early as the age of 13 or 14, these young people face few hopeful options for their future. Martín stresses how important it is to work with children before they get to this stage and to provide resources for those who are already a part of this group. A project which allows the possibility of internal job creation is an ideal solution to the problem of the *ni-ni*s. If the social organization with which

children have been working on homework or art projects is connected to a business, the kids could be hired to work part-time as they grow older. In the hostel model, there could be a requirement that a teenager both stay in secondary and maintain certain marks to be able to hold the job at the front desk, keeping the rooms and common areas clean, or helping with administrative and bookkeeping work. This fills a practical need of employment, creates a motivation for kids to continue their education, and gives them a space outside of school – and also off of the streets – where education and learning is prioritized.

One of the most important assets of this project then, and though also one that presents significant challenges, is that of its physical location. The program, like Vivimos Juntos and Luz Creciente, needs to be in the community it serves. This is more difficult in the highly urbanized city of Buenos Aires than it would be in a smaller urban area like Mendoza or Córdoba. The unfortunately high degree of inequality in the city, though, actually benefits the placement of an organization of this sort. Although it cannot serve areas like Villa 15 or Laferrere, because they are too far from the city center, Villa 31 and La Boca are just two of several examples of extremely poor areas that are situated immediately next to well-off neighborhoods. This would be the ideal location for a hostel: somewhere a tourist would stay, yet that is also readily accessible to the community.

The actual space of the organization is another of the project's key aspects. Of course there would need to be rooms for the hostel to be a viable part of the project. Too, the building needs to be designed in such a way that the common area can double as an activity space for the kids' after-school projects and activities. Preferably, there would be outdoor space to facilitate fútbol, jumprope, and hide-and-seek, as well as have the potential to grow a small garden.

Again, this space would be easily attainable in the less dense Mendoza; however, it would not be impossible or even unlikely to find a space in Buenos Aires with a rooftop or a courtyard that could function as a community garden, or a nearby park for outdoor play. These spaces would be where the children – and perhaps their mothers – would come. This is vital because these spaces are what physically breaks down barriers. A social organization funded by a hostel across town would be completely separate project, and one not nearly as strongly directed at decreasing marginalization. Having a place which is shared by both poor children and international travelers necessitates some convergence of cultures and of ideas. Likewise, an outdoor space for play and gardening is important as it may be one of the best ways to include parents. Also, it carries the added potential for being a practical food and income source, as well as being a skill-builder for adults and children alike.

Regarding foreign volunteers, this hostel model provides a way to use the internationals' desire to contribute to social development initiatives in projects that do not require depth of relationship. There are many projects into which short-term volunteers may invest their time, money, and energy, and be so much more effective than attempting to make a meaningful connection and "change a life" in the course of an afternoon. Those who stay at the hostel will not be required to participate in the activities of the organization, nor should all hostel guests necessarily be or become volunteers. Indeed, at the start of the project, the social and business aspect should be separated to the extent that the hostel's common area be the only overlap; hostel guests merely being told that on certain afternoons, after-school activities for local kids take place in the building as the small-scale initiative of the owner. Only when the organization has been established and accepted as a safe and trusted part of the community, and the hostel is

functioning as its own entity, should the two be merged together. Even then, the two will be distinct; the hostel funds the organization, provides the space of the organization's activities, and may even house volunteers occasionally, yet still remains a hostel, in all that that entails. In fact, if the social aspect of the organization is made a priority, there needs to be a team – or at least a partnership – that helps maintain the business of the hostel itself. The separation is possible, yet requires deliberate effort.

One of the main considerations of this organization is how it will use these internationals who wish to volunteer with the kids. In this, it is important that "poverty tourism" be avoided to all extents possible. In no way should this become a poverty trap where travelers know they can stay in hostel and "visit the poor." In the structure of running a hostel, internationals would be able to volunteer in much the same way that they are familiar with at home – temporarily, and with little commitment. However, differing from CARE's approach, these volunteers would be given temporary positions, and their status would be known by the kids – perhaps through a system of name tags, children and volunteers alike would know there are some "short-termers," who can be fun and helpful, yet who are simply there for a matter of days or weeks. Another way to manage the temporality of volunteers is by having certain activities that can only be participated in by those staying a determined amount of time. For example, working directly with the children would require a volunteer to stay a minimum of two weeks; all others would be able to volunteer in the garden, or in the preparation and planning of school and art activities. An additional initiative could be to establish relationships with universities in North America to develop an internships program – applicants could range from Spanish Business to Humanities majors, interested in placement with the hostel for either its business *or* social aspect.

At this point, one concern is that of funding. I agree with Facundo of Voluntarios Sin Límites that obligating volunteers to pay a fee to assist in a project seems counter-intuitive and unnecessary. At the same time, volunteers often expect to pay, and they can often be a significant source of organizational income. Despite this, I believe donations should be voluntary, and volunteers willing to give their time freely will regard their role as the service that it is, and not as a good that they have purchased, with the expectation of a specific experience. A good solution is to give volunteers a reduced rate at the hostel for hours worked. Or, for interns staying a semester or year, free board for their duration of their involvement.

Over time, the hostel may become known in the travelers' world for its social initiatives, and those wishing to become involved would seek it out. However, the primary goal would be to provide a space for the *children.* The project is a long-term commitment, and would require more than one person to fully develop both the social and the business facets. However, the benefits of this plan are that children are given a safe space, *within* their community, which would provide a sense of ownership and community. Too, there would be potential for employment, through the hostel and the garden, which would be highly valuable in such a community. Above all, the objective would be to integrate into the area and build lasting relationships, working towards long-term change through the community's youth.

5. CONCLUSION

Poor communities in Latin America are not a recent problem. They are, however, both growing in number as well as becoming an increasingly marginalized sector of society. Villas existed first as real solutions to housing problems and have grown into the stigmatized centers of poverty that they are today. Political and economic influences have shaped the expansion of these areas and have significantly affected the lived experiences of slum dwellers; both through policies that increase the burden of the poor, as well as those that decrease the state's ability to provide a safety net. In the context of a decreased government, social organizations have risen as contemporary non-state actors providing aid to the poor.

The purpose of this project is to serve as a review of the current structure of organized aid and projects aimed at decreasing marginalization. It is easy to want to criticize an organization

that does not operate entirely smoothly, or one that lacks communication on several organizational levels. It is also easy to want to paint every familiar organization in the best possible light. I hope that this study has done neither. In truth, one cannot be only disastrously critical of NGOs. Despite weaknesses that many have, these organizations do play a vital role in the communities in which they work. There is no question that lives are changed because of the work that they do. I hope to have reviewed with a critical eye the organizations with which I worked, yet to have also acknowledged the positive changes they are initiating. Certainly, some methods and practices are more effective than others, and I hope to have highlighted those. However, in most cases, I would not say that a social organization is an outright negative influence unless for some reason it is obviously rampant with corruption, or blatantly disregards the needs or basic respects of the children or community in which it works; these of course would be severe deviations for any organization focused on welfare and social betterment and, indeed, do not describe any of the organizations with whom I worked. For the most part, I found that most social organizations bring some positive change to the communities in which they work – the question is how much, to whom, and to what efficacy.

The utility of social organizations is shown through several characteristics, both practical and theoretical. Effectiveness in these kinds of organizations must be based on many factors, certainly including their proposed mission statements. Beyond intended goals, though, I found that concrete organizational traits like location, volunteers, and finances, as well as abstract concerns like cultural tendencies and the dichotomy between help and tourism have impacts on the extent of the organization's overall utility. Organizations located within or close to their target communities often had the most comprehensive programs and reached a wider populace;

networks serve as a means to increased knowledge on shared concerns, as well as a support-system for individual organizations; those financed by the government often hesitated to critique the state, yet many were skeptical of the value of governmental assistance programs; decreasing marginalization was overwhelmingly the focus of the social organizations with whom I worked, as opposed to fighting poverty; culture plays an integral role in how an organization is run, both on a day-to-day and structural level; and the fine line between what is aid and what is simply tourism directed at the socially curious affects an organization's ability to be effective within a community. Of all of the traits and themes I studied, however, two of the most influential aspects I found that affect an organization's utility are the organization's use of volunteers and the importance that is place on developing meaningful relationships.

Much of an organization's ability to bring effective change is found in how the practical use of volunteers – specifically, of foreigners. There will always be international volunteers who wish to "help." Organizations like CARE and Voluntarios Sin Límites currently offer the best structure for these individuals, providing ongoing activities which volunteers may attend for any amount of time, contributing what they choose. However, when local initiatives become so widely opened to short-term, foreign volunteers, one of the most positive aspects of these community centers is lost. Temporary volunteers – and especially those who are limited linguistically – are unable to develop meaningful relationships with the communities in which they work. Because they stay for such a short time, the depth of their connections is severely limited. For this reason, initiatives which necessitate lasting relationships should also seek volunteers and staff who are able to commit to the project. In the case of CARE, volunteers are placed in the position of tutor and mentor to children. However, the brevity of their time

disallows them from truly building connections. Often it is the interns, who stay at one site for a minimum of two months, who are able to develop relationship with the kids that show measurable change in the kids' school and emotional progress. Whether it hinders the children to have only temporary volunteers was not something my research was intended to find – though I believe further research into this idea would be beneficial.

I never intended my research to be so centered on interpersonal relationships and the notion of building such ties as being integral to promoting change. However, I noticed significant indicators that having accountability and permanence was a positive input to my children at Laferrere. So many of these children experience impermanence in nearly every aspect of their lives – people investing in them, continually and with accountability, is not something they are accustomed to. To have even one influence that shows them a positive image of accountability and stability developmentally allows these children a glimpse of life beyond their narrow villa understanding. The impact of volunteers on the ability to develop significant relationships signals, to a large degree, the overall efficacy of the organization. Far and above all other critiques that can be made of organizations who work specifically with underprivileged children is, in my mind, the ability of any volunteer with any organization to develop a meaningful relationships with the children with whom they work. As stated by Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Director-General of the World Health Organization, "Investing in early childhood means investing in poverty prevention."[90]

The work of NGOs, then, should be to support the growth and development of the individual, facilitating this movement towards change. Meeting physical necessities is

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90 Brundtland, Gro Harlem. "Bringing in New Actors." *Escaping the Poverty Trap: Investing in Children in Latin America.* Ed. Ricardo Morán. Washington: Inter-American Development Bank, 2003. 81-85. p.82.

something direly needed – however, many times it is a cop-out; a quick fix to a more complex problem. Hand-outs cannot compare to inspiring the change in the next generation. Besides, if the role of provider of basic needs falls on anyone, it should be on the government. Yes, there are inalienable human rights to the access of basic services and good – these, though, ought be provided by the state. Non-governmental social organizations do not and cannot take the place of the state in giving support to the social sector. Nor should they. There is, however, a very specific and important role that they may play in discontinuing intergenerational poverty and decreasing social marginalization. NGOs are not an across-the-board solution; rather, they are a tool. If used well, they can be a tool to create growth, movement, and change. They can also develop into situations that lead to no community development, and only create dependency. However, if done well, they can certainly be good enough that trying is worth it.

With the severe limitations placed on the government by neoliberal reforms, the dramatic downsizing of a government-funded welfare state, and the subsequent increased poverty, non-governmental social organizations have become important actors in issues of poverty in Buenos Aires. However, many of these organizations do not view themselves as agents of poverty alleviation. Rather, they claim a much more socially-oriented objective: decreasing the gap between wealth and poverty that marks Argentina as a highly marginalized society. Moving forward, the work of these organizations remain important, as does increased government support of issues of poverty. Only through directed projects of a reductions of poverty *and* marginalization will Argentina begin to see change in the landscape of the urban poor.

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