

**Anti-poverty Policy as the Cultivation of Market Subjects: The Case of the Conditional
Cash Transfer Program *Oportunidades***

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Abstract/Résumé

My thesis explores the conceptual underpinnings of the acclaimed Mexican conditional cash transfer (CCT) program *Oportunidades* as a way of engaging broader debates about how anti-poverty policy is evolving in the wake of the World Bank's mid-1990s legitimacy crisis. I am interested in the behaviours and attitudes—or “subjectivities”—that *Oportunidades* attempts to cultivate amongst participants. Whereas the majority of CCT studies tend to focus on measuring the extent to which the programs “mold” beneficiaries into the categories of being prescribed by the program, my thesis is concerned with specifying and critically examining these categories. I use a hybrid neo-Gramscian, governmentality and critical feminist theoretical framework to probe how *Oportunidades* beneficiaries are constructed within World Bank and Mexican government discourse, as well as in external program evaluations. I argue that *Oportunidades* is underpinned by an agent-centred conception of poverty and that the program promotes a kind of gendered market-conducive subjectivity amongst beneficiaries. I conclude by exploring some of the implications of the CCT model.

Ma thèse explore les fondements conceptuels du *Oportunidades*, un programme de transferts conditionnels de fonds (TMC) Mexicain acclamé. J'utilise les TMC comme une ouverture pour élargir le débat sur la manière dont la politique anti-pauvreté évolue dans le sillage de la crise de légitimité à laquelle la Banque Mondiale a fait face dans le milieu des années 1990. Je m'intéresse aux types de comportements et d'attitudes—ou «subjectivités»—que *Oportunidades* essaye de cultiver chez les participants. Alors que la majorité des études sur les TMC focalisent sur l'évaluation des succès du programme à modeler les participants afin qu'ils entrent dans les catégories de personnes prescrites par le programme, mon but est la spécification et l'examen critique de ces catégories. J'utilise un cadre théorique hybride qui combine néo-gramsciennes, la gouvernementalité et des théories féministes critiques pour enquêter sur la façon dont les bénéficiaires du programme *Oportunidades* sont construits à l'intérieur du discours de la Banque Mondiale, du gouvernement mexicain, ainsi que dans les évaluations externes du programme. Je soutiens qu'il y a, dans le programme *Oportunidades*, une conception sous-entendu de la pauvreté centrée sur les comportements des individus et que le programme promeut une subjectivité sexuée des bénéficiaires qui facilite leur participation au marché. Je conclus en explorant quelques implications du modèle TMC.

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT/RÉSUMÉ	II
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	III
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
WHAT ARE CONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFERS?	3
WHY IS THIS RESEARCH NEEDED?	7
CRITICAL CCT LITERATURE REVIEW	12
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	14
ARGUMENTS	14
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	19
METHODOLOGY: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND CASE STUDY	25
STRUCTURE	30
CHAPTER 2: THE EVOLUTION OF WORLD BANK AND MEXICAN ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGIES	31
PART ONE: CHARTING THE WORLD BANK'S APPROACH TO POVERTY	33
REDISTRIBUTION WITH GROWTH 1968-1981	33
THE STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT ERA 1981-1995	35
A "REDEDICATION" TO POVERTY	38
A CRISIS OF LEGITIMACY	40
ANTI-POVERTY POLICY IN THE POST-LEGITIMACY CRISIS YEARS	42
WHERE DO CCTS FIT IN?	45
BANK-MEXICAN RELATIONS	47
PART TWO: THE EVOLUTION OF MEXICAN SOCIAL POLICY	48
THE POSTREVOLUTIONARY WELFARE REGIME 1920-1981	49
LIBERALIZATION PERIOD 1982-1994	51
THE SOCIAL IMPACTS OF ECONOMIC REFORM	52
PRONASOL 1989-1994	53
RENEWED CRISIS AND ACCELERATED REFORMS	55
ANTI-POVERTY POLICY IN THE 2000S	56
AN AGENT-CENTRED APPROACH TO POVERTY ALLEVIATION	58
CHAPTER 3: CONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFER SUBJECT POSITIONS	59
SELF-RELIANCE	61
FINANCIAL SUBJECTS: SAVERS, INVESTORS AND ENTREPRENEURS	67
INCULCATING RATIONALITY	71
THE EMPOWERED WOMAN	77
THE CULTIVATION OF MARKET-CONDUCTIVE SUBJECTS	81
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION	84

WHAT HAS CHANGED?	85
IMPLICATIONS	88
CONCLUDING REMARKS	91
<u>REFERENCE LIST</u>	93

Chapter 1: Introduction

Scholars agree that the past two decades have seen some major changes in the way international development is conceptualized and practiced (Sheppard & Leitner, 2010). Among other things, this shift is associated with what Barrientos and Hulme (2008) call a “quiet revolution”—the rise of internationally and domestically funded and micro-targeted social protection programs aimed at helping the poorest in Global South countries (Hall, 2007; Vetterlein, 2007). What exactly has changed in the wake of this “quiet revolution” and whether or not it and other shifts in international development thinking can significantly reduce global poverty levels and wealth and gender inequalities, however, remains the subject of considerable debate (Barrientos, Gideon & Molyneux, 2008; Best, 2013; Craig & Porter, 2005; Noël, 2006). My thesis engages this debate by examining the conceptual underpinnings of one of the anti-poverty programs that has been at the forefront of this quiet revolution: the Mexican conditional cash transfer programs (CCT) *Oportunidades*.

CCTs are a type of social protection program that emerged in the mid-1990s, and they form an increasingly prominent part of national and international strategies for addressing poverty in the Global South (Molyneux, 2006). While there is some variation in design, CCTs generally consist of transferring cash to poor households provided that families fulfill certain conditions, typically related to regular health check-ups and sending children to school (Handa & Davis, 2006). The programs are designed to simultaneously address short and long-term poverty: on the one hand, monthly or bimonthly cash transfers

are intended to alleviate immediate shortfalls in purchasing power. On the other, in-kind transfers such as nutritional supplements and school supplies as well as conditions related to health and education, are intended to tackle the intergenerational transfer of poverty by fostering “responsible” parenting practices and increasing the “human capital” of poor children (Cecchini & Madariage, 2011; Luccisano, 2006).

My thesis seeks to contextualize *Oportunidades* within broader shifts in Mexican and international approaches to addressing poverty, and to examine how *Oportunidades* defines a rational or responsible person. More precisely, I am interested in the kinds of behaviours and attitudes—or “subjectivities”—that *Oportunidades* attempts to cultivate amongst participants.¹ Whereas the majority of CCT studies tend to focus on measuring the extent to which the programs successfully “mold” beneficiaries into the categories of being (or subject positions) prescribed by the program, my thesis is concerned with specifying and critically examining these categories. Thus, my project is similar to Rankin’s (2001) analysis of a Nepalese microfinance scheme, in that I examine *Oportunidades* as a conduit “through which [a] particular political rationality is exercised on the social body” (p. 22). Identifying the content of this “political rationality” and how it is deployed allows me to denaturalize and analyze the “model of responsible agency”² underscoring *Oportunidades* and, in turn, interrogate some elements of the broader conceptual framework underpinning mainstream development’s relatively recent interest in designing and financing micro-targeted anti-

¹ Throughout this thesis I use the terms “subjectivity,” “agency” and “identity” more or less interchangeably. While I am aware that they have subtle differences, I argue that CCTs impinge upon all three simultaneously: they promote various subject positions, they rest on a conceptualization of responsible agency and promote specific gendered identities. The use of all three terms, moreover, flows from my use of a hybrid Foucauldian-Gramscian-feminist theoretical framework, which I elaborate on below.

² I am indebted to Jayasuriya (2006) for this term.

poverty programs. My analysis sheds light on changes and continuities between the “quiet revolution” and the old Washington Consensus model, as well as between *Oportunidades* and past Mexican anti-poverty programs, and, most importantly, suggests some implications for the primary targets of this emerging strategy for addressing poverty: the poor themselves.

What are conditional cash transfers?

Conditioning welfare benefits on the performance of certain activities by the would-be recipient is not something particularly new. Indeed, Esping-Anderson (1990, p. 48) argues that social rights are rarely (if ever) bestowed with no-strings-attached: even benefitting from a universal food subsidy is still subject to one choosing to purchase whatever food item is being subsidized. Perhaps a more obvious and familiar example of conditional welfare in industrialized countries is workfare, where participants must work in order to receive benefits (Besley & Coate, 1992). While there are no doubt similarities between CCTs and other conditional based welfare schemes, this thesis focuses exclusively on the former. Following Fiszbein and Schady (2009), I define a CCT as a program that “transfer[s] cash, generally to poor households, on condition that those households make prespecified investment in the human capital of their children” (p. 1). While this definition provides a general description of how CCTs work, it is useful at this point to spend some time elaborating on the design features specific to my case study program, Mexico’s *Programa de Desarrollo Humano Oportunidades* (hereafter *Oportunidades*).³

³ I provide a more thorough and contextualized account of the genesis of *Oportunidades* as well as how it differed from past Mexican anti-poverty programs in Chapter 2.

Since its inception in 1997, *Oportunidades* has been the centrepiece of the Mexican government's poverty reduction strategy.⁴ According to the website of the government body responsible for the administration of *Oportunidades*, the Secretariat of Social Development (*Secretaría de Desarrollo Social* or SEDESOL), the program's mission is "to help eradicate poverty by promoting people's basic capabilities and access to social and economic opportunities" (SEDESOL, 2010b, my translation). Initially the program reached approximately 400 000 families in extremely poor rural areas. By the time coverage was extended to poor urban areas in 2002, the number of beneficiary families had risen to 4 million. SEDESOL's website currently pegs the number of program beneficiaries at 6.5 million families—which is roughly equivalent to a quarter of the entire Mexican population (SEDESOL, 2012). In poorer states such as Chiapas, six out of every ten people are *Oportunidades* beneficiaries. Beneficiaries are primarily located in rural communities of 2500 inhabitants or less, many of which have high proportions of indigenous peoples (SEDESOL, 2010c, p. 13).

Like most CCTs, *Oportunidades* is a targeted program that is intended only for those in extreme poverty. Program beneficiaries are selected using a combination of geographical testing and means testing (Azvedo & Robles, 2010; Diario Oficial, 2013; SEDESOL, 2013). Those households that score highest on the marginality index for their geographic region and meet the additional requirement of being situated within a certain distance of a

⁴ *Oportunidades* was originally launched under the name PROGRESA (*Programa de Educación, Salud, y Alimentación*). The name was changed to *Oportunidades* in 2002 under the newly elected administration of Vicente Fox.

medical clinic and school are incorporated into the program.⁵ The proxy means test is a two-step process where *Oportunidades* personnel administer surveys to families living within eligible localities in order to assess various socioeconomic factors such as housing quality, assets and family demographics. From there, an algorithm calculates households' average monthly per capita income based on the responses to the survey (Azvedo & Robles, 2010; SEDESOL, 2013). Families deemed “sufficiently poor” by the means test are then admitted into the program, or, particularly in rural areas, must complete the additional step of having their survey responses verified by the community (Honkanen, 2012). Beneficiaries are then required to recertify every five years (Diario Oficial, 2013).

Transfers are paid bimonthly in cash or via direct deposit in special bank accounts – managed mainly by the BANSEFI (National Bank of Savings and Financial Services) and TELECOMM (Telecommunications Mexico), and, in some urban areas, the private institutions BANCOMER (Bank of Commerce) (CGAP, 2011; Luccisano, 2006). Funds are distributed to mothers based on empirical evidence that suggests mothers are more likely than fathers to invest the money in the well-being of their children (Molyneux, 2006). The amount of money that *Oportunidades* beneficiaries receive depends on a range of factors including the number, ages and gender of school-aged children in the household. In order to discourage families from having more children to receive more benefits, there is a cap on how much any given family can receive. Currently, monthly transfer amounts range from a minimum of US\$24 for households without children to US\$215 for families with multiple

⁵ In some extremely poor localities where demographic is lacking, residents are eligible for complete coverage regardless of their monthly income; however, residents are still required to comply with co-responsibilities and to provide information about their socioeconomic status (Diario Oficial, 2013).

female children in upper secondary school as well as elderly family members (Diario Oficial, 2013). The value of Individual scholarships (*becas*) to support children attending school increases incrementally beginning in fourth grade, and girls receive slightly more money than boys starting in grade seven. Families living in communities with less than 2500 inhabitants also receive an annual monetary or in-kind transfer to help with purchasing school supplies. All households with family members aged seventy or over receive an additional bi-monthly transfers equivalent to US\$27 per elderly family member (Diario Oficial, 2013). Pregnant or lactating women and children aged nine and under are eligible for additional bimonthly transfer of US\$9 to help support nutrition, as well as nutritional supplements in instances of doctor-confirmed cases of malnutrition (Diario Oficial, 2013). Finally, a subsidiary program started in 2003 called *Jóvenes con Oportunidades* (Youth with Opportunities) automatically makes annual deposits into a BANSEFI bank account for every grade that a student completes starting in secondary school. If students graduate from high school before the age of twenty-two, they can access this money (maximum amount of US\$357) (Diario Oficial, 2013).

Beneficiaries' continued enrolment in *Oportunidades* is subject to their compliance with a number of conditions or, in the language of the program, "co-responsibilities." Firstly, school-aged children must have no more than three unexcused absences from school per month. Secondly, the entire family must attend regular health check-ups, and pregnant and lactating mothers as well as children nine and under are expected to take prescribed nutritional supplements. Thirdly, beneficiary mothers are required to attend monthly health talks (*pláticas*) to learn about preventative health strategies or self-care

(*autocuidado*). Finally, though not a formal condition, beneficiary mothers are tacitly expected to help with various community tasks (*faenas*) such as cleaning health clinics and schools and sweeping streets (Luccisano, 2006; SEDESOL, 2010a, p. 25). With the exception of the final expectation, failure to fulfill co-responsibilities can result in suspension of transfer payments and, if non-compliance continues, removal from the program (Diario Oficial, 2013).

Why is this research needed?

My research is needed for two reasons. Firstly and on a more general level, critically examining the conceptual underpinnings of CCTs is important due to the sheer geographic, demographic and financial scope of the programs. Barely two decades after the first CCTs were launched in Mexico and Brazil in the mid-1990s, similar programs have cropped up in over thirty countries in contexts as diverse as Chile, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and the United States. CCTs are especially popular in Latin America, where they often form a core part of national strategies to reduce poverty and inequality (Cecchini & Madariaga, 2011). It is estimated that they now reach over 110 million people in that region alone—that is 1 in 5 Latin Americans (ECLAC, 2011, p. 139-140). This particular kind of social program is, in Molyneux's (2006) words, well on its way to becoming "the preferred form of poverty relief in the developing world" (p. 440). For these reasons, it is imperative that CCTs be subjected to thorough critical analysis so that the types of power relations inherent in this new kind of development technology are acknowledged, explored and potentially challenged.

There is also an increasingly significant international dimension to CCTs, making them an entry point for engaging broader debates about how international development is evolving since the crisis of legitimacy that gripped international financial institutions (IFIs) in the mid-1990s. A host of key international development players, for example, have placed ideological and financial support behind the programs including: the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the British Department for International Development (DFID) (DFID, 2011; OECD, 2009; Peck & Theodore, 2010; Teichman, 2007). Nancy Birdsall, the president of the Washington-based think tank Centre for Global Development, went so far as calling the programs “as close as you can come to a magic bullet in development” (as cited in Dugger, 2004).

While most commentators would agree that CCTs are not a panacea,⁶ the rapid spread of the programs as well as high-levels of support among donors and IFIs nonetheless indicates that faith in the ability of the programs to make a major dent in global poverty and inequality levels is approaching (if it is not there already) hegemonic proportions. As such, CCT discourse and practice offers an important empirical site (much like microfinance) for scholars seeking to understand how anti-poverty policy and development policy more broadly is evolving in the twenty-first century.

On a more specific level, the second reason my research is needed is to address some knowledge gaps in the existing mainstream and (to a lesser extent) critical literature.

⁶ For example, Fiszbein and Schady (2009) of the World Bank plainly state that “CCTs are not a panacea” (p. 66).

CCTs' place at the forefront of the push in international development to foster a rigorous evaluation culture and to practice strict results-based management has meant that there is an unusually large amount of quantitative and qualitative CCT studies (Fiszbein & Schady, p. 70, 94-95).⁷ The majority of studies are evaluative in nature, and have measured and assessed everything from CCTs' impact on school enrolment and health (e.g. Rawlings & Rubio, 2005; Schady & Araujo, 2008), to their effect on intrahousehold relations and women's empowerment (e.g. Adato, de la Brière, Mindek & Quisumbing, 2000a; Gitter & Barham, 2007).⁸ There is a general consensus within the literature that well-designed and monitored CCTs like *Oportunidades* alleviate short-term poverty and improve health, nutrition and education indicators, and reduce beneficiaries' vulnerability to shocks (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009). Findings are much more mixed, however, regarding the ability of CCTs to break the intergenerational transfer of poverty (Behrman, Parker & Todd, 2011; Gertler, Martinez & Rubio-Codina, 2012; Rodriguez-Oreggia & Freije, 2011; Winters & Chiodi, 2011).⁹ Much of the debate within this evaluative literature revolves around the most effective way to target beneficiaries (Azevedo & Robles, 2010; Ribas, Hirata & Soares, 2008), and how to design conditionalities for maximum effect (Das, Do & Özler, 2004; de Janvry & Sadoulet, 2006).

Outside of a fairly well established critical feminist CCT literature—(discussed below)—few of the above studies deconstruct and critically examine CCTs' assumptions

⁷ Latin American CCTs in particular have been widely praised for often "[including] evaluations, notably impact evaluations conducted by external evaluators as an integral part of their design" (de la Brière & Rawlings, 2006, p. 11).

⁸ See Fiszbein and Schady (2009) for a synthesis of evaluations of CCTs.

⁹ All of these studies use *Oportunidades* as their case study, due in part to the fact that it is an older program, and has thus been in place long enough to actually have graduates to assess.

about what causes poverty, or what constitutes a responsible and empowered subject.¹⁰

The vast majority of studies reviewed, for instance, in World Bank's flagship CCT publication by Fiszbein and Schady (2009), focus exclusively on measuring to what extent CCTs succeed on their own terms. By "own terms" I mean that studies tend to take the ontological assumptions of the programs—e.g. that poverty is primarily the result of problematic individual behaviour or lack of human capital—for granted. The problem with this is that highly contested and complicated questions about the causes of poverty, what motivates people and what exactly qualifies as a responsible way of being in the world, are treated as apolitical and commonsensical. As Jayasuriya (2006) points out, welfare programs which are built around cultivating a particular kind of responsible subject "[depend] on a prior specification of the criteria for responsible behaviour, which is at root dependant on the working of a moral sociology" (p. 64). As I will discuss further in Chapter 3, the moral sociology informing CCTs draws heavily from rational choice theory, which starts from the ontological assumption that all individuals are motivated strictly by self-interest. In sum, the mainstream CCT literature largely fails to critically engage with the model of responsible agency and the theory of motivation (rational choice) underpinning CCT design.

Problematizing CCTs' ontology enables me to foreground and denaturalize the assumptions (rather than absolute truths) upon which CCTs' legitimacy rests. It allows me to examine how these assumptions legitimize the cultivation of certain gendered subjects by appealing to a particular (political) discursive framing of poverty, its alleviation and responsible subjectivity. Moreover, because any attempt to frame necessitates the

¹⁰ Some notable exceptions include: Harman (2011); Valencia Lomelí (2008); Ruckert (2009).

exclusion of the “things”—be it people, world views, cultural practices, etc.—that do not fit within the frame (Escobar, 1995, 1984; Foucault, 1975), getting to the bottom of how CCTs frame “responsible subjectivity” reveals what kinds of subjectivities are excluded, how this exclusion is accomplished and with what implications.

One potential implication of leaving the ontological underpinnings of CCTs unexplored is a mutually affirmative relationship between CCT research and policy whereby the foundational assumption of the programs (e.g. poverty stems from a lack of individual capabilities), legitimizes and directs funding toward research which measures how effectively CCTs improve human capital indicators (e.g. education and health). This sort of policy-research circuit can result in what Shove (2010) calls a “self-fulfilling cycle of credibility,” where the questions and the answers are embedded in an overarching policy paradigm (p. 9). In this scenario, the subjectivities that CCTs promote along with programs’ agent-centred diagnosis of poverty are not exposed to scrutiny or problematization in program evaluations; assumptions about the nature of poverty are passed off as fixed truths. The lack of CCT studies that acknowledge the structural causes of poverty, for example, suggests that mainstream development continues to cling to the liberal economic assumption—despite significant evidence to the contrary—that anyone with the right attitude and a minimum level of human capital can *choose* not to be poor in a free market economy.¹¹ My research seeks to break apart this policy-research circuit by unsettling and

¹¹ For critiques of this liberal economic assumption as well as its impact the design and practice of welfare programs see Esping-Anderson (1990) and Jayasuriya (2006).

critically analyzing *Oportunidades*'s ontological assumptions about the causes of poverty and what constitutes responsible and rational agency.

Critical CCT literature review

A burgeoning critical CCT literature has begun to grapple with some of the ontological assumptions glossed over by the above evaluative literature. As I mentioned above, critical feminists have led the way in challenging claims that CCTs are gender-sensitive programs that empower women. They have been my chief interlocutors regarding the gendered components of the subjectivities that *Oportunidades* promotes, and have also been a rich source of qualitative information about the everyday experiences and perceptions of beneficiary women. Molyneux (2006, 2007, 2008a) has been especially prolific in the field, arguing that rather than challenging gendered divisions of labour, CCTs actually “bind women to the household as carers, conditional on maternal responsibility for children’s care and welfare”(Molyneux, 2008a, p. 58). Bradshaw (2008) and Bradshaw and Viquez (2008) draw similar conclusions about Nicaragua’s CCT program, noting that the program acts as a moralizing force by linking notions of “good mothering” to compliance with program co-responsibilities. Bradshaw (2008) adds that channeling transfers through women because of their supposedly “natural” propensity to invest in their family means that CCT discourse tacitly recognizes men’s behaviour as problematic but does nothing to address it (p. 201).

Macías (2012) and Smith-Oka (2009) have also made valuable contributions to the critical feminist literature by exploring the particular power relations involved when

Oportunidades beneficiaries are indigenous. Both authors conducted extensive fieldwork in indigenous communities where *Oportunidades* is present, and they each point to the power imbalance inherent in health and school officials' interactions with indigenous mothers: the former speak Spanish, have the authority to confirm compliance or non-compliance with co-responsibilities and are generally dismissive of indigenous worldviews, while the latter often speak little or no Spanish, have few avenues to contest teachers' and doctors' decisions or orders and their views on health and education are treated as illegitimate.

Yet another theme explored within the critical CCT literature is how the subjectivities that CCTs promote amongst beneficiaries complement past macro economic restructuring initiated by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Ruckert (2009) for example links the conditional components of *Oportunidades* with the production of "complicit neoliberal subjects" (68). Others such as Luccisano (2004, 2006) focus on how these neoliberal subjectivities are deployed using a combination of overtly disciplinary techniques (e.g. co-responsibilities), and more subtle and productive techniques aimed at enabling the poor to actively and freely participate in the market economy.

While the above pieces all explore CCTs relative to issues of subjectivity and broader trends in international or Mexican development, there are nonetheless some knowledge gaps that I intend to fill with my research. Firstly, much of the critical feminist literature focuses exclusively on the kinds of subjectivities that CCTs promote amongst women, and how female empowerment is conceptualized. I pay attention to this issue as well; however, I broaden my analysis to include the subjectivities *Oportunidades* promotes among mothers children and fathers. I also explore how other key concepts such as "rational" and

“responsible” are operationalized within CCT discourse. Secondly, my aim is to complicate some of the more monolithic accounts of the subjectifying logic of CCTs (i.e. Luccisano 2004, 2006) by drawing attention to tensions between the various subject positions that *Oportunidades* promotes, and by citing instances of resistance. Finally, by carefully tracing what came before *Oportunidades* in terms of both international and Mexican approaches to poverty, I hope to provide a more historically-grounded and meticulous account of CCTs relative to past attempts at addressing poverty than most of the critical literature currently provides.

Research questions

The following four research questions guide my thesis: (1) What came before CCTs and *Oportunidades* in terms of anti-poverty thinking and practice at both the World Bank and Mexico? (2) What kinds of (gendered) subjectivities does Mexico’s *Oportunidades* program aim to cultivate, and through what techniques and practices? (3) What do the answers to the first two questions suggest about how anti-poverty policy is (or is not) changing in light of the World Bank’s mid-1990 legitimacy crisis? And finally, (4) what are some potential implications of my research findings for poor men, women and children?

Arguments

Following from my research questions, my main arguments are four-fold. Firstly I argue that the CCT model reflects a more “agent-centred” approach to poverty than previously informed either the World Bank or Mexico’s approaches to the problem of poverty. By agent-centred I mean that CCTs frame poverty as primarily a problem of

individual capacity and behaviour. This focus on individuals diverges significantly from the anti-poverty approach pursued by the World Bank during the 1980s and early 1990s, where the institution had sought to address poverty by intervening almost exclusively at the macroeconomic level. Poverty was assumed to be more or less a direct result of low national economic growth rates: fix the macroeconomic policy environment, most development economists reasoned, and the growth that would undoubtedly follow would automatically solve most incidences of poverty. By the mid-1990s, however, key events such as financial crises in Asia and Mexico as well as worsening poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, seriously undermined the legitimacy of this macroeconomic approach to poverty reduction. In response to these apparent policy failures, the Bank began in the mid-1990s to pay increased attention to the micro and social factors affecting economic growth and, significantly, individual subjectivities came to be seen as a legitimate object of development policy intervention.¹² It was this shifting international development context that served a backdrop for the emergence and spread of the CCT model.

The national context in which *PROGRESA/Oportunidades* was launched was no less transformative. Mexico's massive debt crisis in 1982 set in motion the radical re-orientation of the country's economy away from import-substitution industrialization to one modeled around the kind liberal macroeconomic framework advocated by the IFIs during the 1980s. Reforms were further accelerated after the Mexican 1994-1995 financial crisis not only in the area of macroeconomic policy, but also in the area of anti-poverty policy. It was at this

¹² As I will discuss in Chapter 2, the mid-1990s was not the first time that the World Bank took a more direct approach to addressing poverty. The 1970s was also a period in which the Bank supported policy interventions at the micro-level.

critical juncture—as Mexico sought to replace its universal food subsidy and solidarity-based social programs with something more economically efficient, and as the World Bank was paying increased attention to the micro-social factors affecting poverty—that the CCT model emerged.

Secondly, I argue that *Oportunidades* aims to address poverty by cultivating a “market-compatible” subject—meaning a subject who understands his or her interests as best served by aligning his or her behaviour with market imperatives. In other words, I contend that *Oportunidades* approach to poverty alleviation is centrally organized around the inculcation of a *homo economicus*-like individual. I found evidence within both *Oportunidades* discourse and practice that the program promotes four broad “subject positions” that are compatible with the logic of market-driven development: *self-help subjects* who take an active role in overcoming their impoverished state; *financially savvy* and *entrepreneurial subjects* who incorporate financial tools such as credit into their self-help strategies; *rational subjects* who calculate their decisions with an eye to maximizing productivity and efficiency gains; and *empowered* female subjects who are given the resources and knowledge necessary to maximize the future productivity prospects of their children.

These subject positions are, moreover, deployed using a range of techniques and practices that rely on a mix of direct coercive forms of power and more indirect “productive” forms.¹³ On the one hand, program beneficiaries face the more direct and

¹³ Barnett and Duvall (2005) use the term “productive power” to describe a form of indirect and diffuse power that works to actively constitutes subjects by structuring the field of possible, appropriate or moral action.

coercive threat of being removed from the program for failing to comply with some of the behavioural prescriptions of the program. On the other, *Oportunidades* seeks to actively enrol beneficiaries in their own self-improvement by appealing to normative and market-centred (but presented as technical or commonsensical) ideas about what kinds of people are deserving of social assistance, the behavioural pre-requisites for becoming non-poor and what constitutes responsible mothering practices. However, neither the subjectivities nor the techniques by which they are deployed are monolithic. CCTs appeal for legitimacy, for instance, to a logic that assumes the market is a natural byproduct of individuals pursuing their natural and rational self-interest, yet simultaneously work to meticulously construct this market via the cultivation of a particular kind of rational market participant.

Thirdly, I argue that the premise and subject-building ambitions of CCTs suggest that the “quiet revolution” is best understood as a reconfiguration of the neoliberal framework of the 1980s and mid-1990s as opposed to a clean break. While it is true that the World Bank would not have supported anti-poverty programs like CCTs during the height of structural adjustment, this alone is not indicative of a total rupture with the past. Much of CCT design and rationalization is founded on the same set of liberal economic assumptions that underpinned the Washington Consensus. CCT discourse assumes, for instance, that people are (or ought to be) motivated by self-interest, and that productivity and efficiency take precedence over other goals. Moreover, the market is still positioned as the ultimate escape from poverty in that CCTs are primarily aimed at creating more equal “opportunities” (via increased human capital) for the poor to participate in the market. This suggests that mainstream development’s move to address poverty more directly has taken

place with little acknowledgement or revision of the structural causes of poverty and inequality that many critical scholars argue are among the drivers of global poverty.¹⁴

Despite these continuities, I contend that it would be a mistake to merely interpret CCTs as the extension of the macro-oriented Washington Consensus to the micro level of individuals. The way that power in particular operates via the CCT model is much more subtle and diffuse than the kind of power exercised under the Washington Consensus. The responsibility of ensuring that *Oportunidades* beneficiaries adopt the subjectivities prescribed by the program, for instance, is divided amongst numerous actors including doctors, teachers, beneficiaries themselves, government officials and bankers. Also, during the structural adjustment era technical expertise was the primary source of the World Bank's legitimacy, whereas the language around CCTs seems to combine technical language with a more overtly normative tone—e.g. gender-sensitive design as an end unto itself *and* good for program efficiency.

Lastly, my research findings suggest a number of implications for CCT beneficiaries. First, the cultivation of a market-conducive subjectivity among individuals who have been largely excluded from the benefits of market liberalization (the poor) might work to support established power arrangements within the global capitalist economy. By providing beneficiaries with basic supports, for example, CCTs may well alleviate some effects of poverty, but might also serve to suppress movements for more systemic reform. Second, because the CCT model rests on an agent-centred conceptualization of poverty, a

¹⁴ See for example: Bergeron (2003); Crawford (2003); Fine, Lapavitsas and Pincus (2003); Jayasuriya and Rosser (2003); Önis and Senses (2005); Wade (1998).

disproportionate amount of the blame for poverty, as well as the responsibility for ultimately escaping it, is placed on the shoulders of the poor themselves. In countries like Mexico, where labour markets have long struggled to create enough jobs and racial discrimination have gone hand-and-hand with poverty, there are clear limits to this particular way of conceptualizing poverty. Third, while there are no doubt some benefits for women associated with the “gender-sensitive” CCT design features, hitching female empowerment to the performance of gendered social reproductive activities is more likely to reinforce than challenge deep-seated gender biases. Mothers and their daughters may face a “double burden” in that they are expected to be both socially and economically (re)productive.

Theoretical framework

By making subjectivity the focus of my research and using a theoretical perspective that combines the strengths of neo-Gramscian, governmentality and gendered analyses of anti-poverty programs, I address some of the current gaps in critical CCT literature. This hybrid framework enables me to broaden my analysis of how power operates through the CCT model to include both disciplinary and productive forms. It also allows me to examine the political rationalities that inform and legitimize the subjectivities that *Oportunidades* promotes in a way that ignores neither the issue of gender nor the tensions present in this process. Finally, all three theories provide unique insight into the continuities and changes between CCTs and past international and Mexican anti-poverty strategies.

Although neo-Gramscian theory has several variants, one of the unifying themes is the transposition of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony to the international realm (Germain & Kenny, 1998).¹⁵ Gramsci uses the term hegemony to denote a more subtle form of domination than outright coercion—one that operates by securing the consent of the oppressed to their disadvantaged situation. This consent is supposedly established when the dominant class—as result of their control of civil society—is able to make their world-view seem natural and commonsensical to subaltern classes. For Gramsci, hegemony offers an explanation as to “why large groups of people...acquiesce to, accept and sometimes actively support governments—and entire social and political systems—that continually work against their interests” (Ives, 2004, p. 6).

Whereas Gramsci examined the functioning of power within individual states, Cox's (1983) seminal article uses hegemony as a way of explaining trends in contemporary world order. Cox (1987) argues the increasingly global character of the capitalist economy has facilitated the internationalization of ideas originating from dominant classes in powerful industrialized states. He suggests dominant ideas such as free trade and privatization form the ideological foundation of powerful international institutions like the Bank and IMF, and impinge upon less industrialized states (Cox, 1987, p. 253-265).¹⁶ Thus, neo-Gramscians provide a way of linking internationally funded development programs in the Global South to a larger project of neoliberalization, and the power relations present in this process.

¹⁵ Gramsci elaborates his unique conceptualization of hegemony in *The Prison Notebooks*. See Gramsci (1971).

¹⁶ Several scholars (e.g. Abrahamsen, 1997; Gill, 1995; Ruckert, 2009; Rupert, 2005) have since built upon Cox's work.

A key advantage of a neo-Gramscian approach lies in its “non-deterministic yet structurally grounded” account of social phenomena (Germain & Kenny, 1998, p. 5). Neo-Gramscians reject rigid frameworks that suggest structures are somehow *a priori* to human action (i.e. Waltz, 1979), but are still mindful of how dominant structures, specifically capitalism, can work to constrain social change. In other words, neo-Gramscians are attentive to how social structure can engender the homeostasis of unequal power relations, but do not rule out possibilities for social change. They maintain that social structures are the result of “collective human action” and as such “transformable by human action” (Cox, 1987, p. 395). This last part highlights another strength of neo-Gramscian theory: its very explicit commitment to social change through the identification of weak points in the current social order where counter-hegemonic projects could take shape. This attention to context as well as emancipatory purpose are two things that I would argue are lacking in governmentality-inspired analyses of how power functions in contemporary society.

Nevertheless, there are some important limitations to solely employing a neo-Gramscian approach. Foremost among them in terms of my project is the tendency of neo-Gramscians’ to shy away from specifying the *micro* techniques and practices by which hegemonic power relationships are established and maintained. Neo-Gramscians tend to focus on the role of macro structures such as international financial institutions (Cox, 1987), a dominant transnational class (van der Pijl, 1984), or “internationally mobile capital” (Gill, 1990; Germain & Kenny, 1998, p. 17) as central to the convincing or coercing of subaltern classes into accepting the capitalist world order. If we put coercion aside for the moment, what does hegemony tell us about the concepts and *rationalities* that dominant social

forces appeal to in order to *make* consenting subjects and *legitimize* their hegemonic ambitions? All too often the answer to these questions, where neo-Gramscians tackle them at all, are somewhat vague. Neo-Gramscians also tend to assume the goals of capital and institutions are coherent; however, even cursory study of the Bank reveals that it is not monolithic, and my research points to tensions between the various ways CCTs are rationalized and deployed. Governmentality studies—despite their tensions with neo-Gramscians¹⁷—can offer some important insights into the mechanisms by which a particular hegemonic vision(s) comes into being and is sustained, and in turn draw attention to the internal contradictions inherent in this process.

Foucauldian governmentality studies are interested in the rationalities or logics by which we are governed and in turn govern ourselves; they ask *how* practices of government—defined broadly as any “activity aimed to shape, guide or affect the conduct of some person or persons” (Gordon, 1991, p. 2)—operate in modern liberal societies. Gould (2005) describes a governmental approach as “the identification of governmental practices that create ‘compliant subjectivities’” in the sense of the cultivation of subjects that “freely” participate in their own subjugation (p. 65). Governmental technologies of government are thus understood as practices or logics that seek to align individuals’ free conduct with broader government goals by instilling in them certain “habits” of self-regulation and self-discipline (Hindess, 2004).

¹⁷ For a more thorough review of these tensions and how they might be overcome see Milchman and Rosenberg (2002).

Governmentality studies assume individuals are shaped—to a greater and lesser extent—by particular techniques of governance that are legitimated by hegemonic truth-claims. The approach provides a number of conceptual tools with which to problematize the basis of “truths” such as CCTs’ claim that women are more likely to invest in their families. According to Foucault (1991), truths sustain their “truth status” (or hegemony) by virtue of their claim to be *rational*—or, “[a] form of thinking which strives to be...systematic and explicit about aspects of “external” or “internal” existence, about how things are or how they ought to be” (Dean, 1999, p. 11). Governmentality provides a framework to interrogate the implicit assumptions that underscore “truth fixing terms” such as appropriate, correct, and logical.

It is important to acknowledge some drawbacks of studying CCTs through the lens of governmentality. The fact that Foucault’s work was confined to European societies, and that governmentality continues to be considered a distinct characteristic of “liberal democracies in a western cultural context”, makes it a somewhat awkward fit with a study of a poverty alleviation strategy in the Global South (Gould, 2005, p. 66). Nevertheless, I believe governmentality is relevant for studying Global South development because, as Escobar (1984) points out, the idea of development originated in the West and today’s development expertise continues to emanate primarily from institutions (i.e. the World Bank) located in the Global North. As well, because governmental forms of power “do not find their principle of coherence in a State” (Rose, 1993, p. 286), it seems plausible as Gould (2005) suggests, that an international yet Washington-based organization like the Bank

could be a bearer of liberal technologies of government to the Global South.¹⁸ A more serious critique of governmentality—and one that I hope to mitigate by integrating neo-Gramscian theory and critical feminism—is that it presents a “unidirectional and monolithic model [of power]” that envisages an essentially passive human subject at the mercy of the subjectification ambitions of governmental practices (McNay, 1993, p. 12).¹⁹

Thus far, I have provided the schematics of a hybrid theoretical framework that combines a structurally-grounded (not cemented!) analysis with one which focuses on the micro-techniques aimed at integrating individual subjects into dominant structures. What is missing from both the neo-Gramscian and the governmentality approaches, however, is an explicit recognition of the power relations embedded in gender relations and the institution of the family.²⁰ Considering the centrality of gender to the design of many CCTs, including *Oportunidades*, and the fact that they target the extremely gendered (yet often ignored) site of the household, this is a serious limitation. Enloe’s (1989) point that “most political and economic systems [depend] on certain kinds of relationships between men and women” (p. 133), is not addressed by the framework discussed above. The subjectivities CCTs aim to cultivate may indeed be implicated in the construction a sort of market-subjectivity, but adopting a gendered lens adds another level of nuance by asking in what ways this subjectivity comprises different—and potentially unequal—roles for men and

¹⁸ Although Gould (2005) stresses the influence of the IMF and the World Bank in Global South development, he cautions against assuming that they “constitute the source of a transnational regime of governmentality that systematically ensnares southern governments within a web of complicity” (p. 67). His fieldwork in Tanzania suggests a complex and contested process of governmentalization.

¹⁹ Although Foucault (1986) began to grapple with the question of resistance in his later work, it remained somewhat underdeveloped. Allen (2008) suggests the possibility of counter-conduct arises from the refusal “to capitulate to the logic of subjection” (subject formation), and engagement in practices of “critical desubjectification” (p. 59).

²⁰ Regarding gender blindness, see Germain and Kenny (1998) for neo-Gramscian IPE, and Soper (1993) for Foucault.

women? The integration of a gender lens is not incompatible with neo-Gramscian and governmentality approaches since both are underscored by an ontology that assumes the contingency of social structures and thus problematize phenomena that are presented as “stable truths.” Moreover, both open up space for identifying tensions and possibly “destabilizing” the way in which CCT discourse constructs and attempts to fix gendered identities once gender relations is explicitly recognized as a site of power relations.

Methodology: Critical discourse analysis and case study

According to Hansen (2006) “the methodological starting point for a discourse analysis is the explicit articulation of identity within a web of signs” (p. 39). Critical discourse analyses assume that “utterances”—whether they are in text or spoken—are “always part and parcel of, and partially constitutive of, specific social practices and that social practices always have implications for inherently political things like status, solidarity, the distribution of social goods, and power” (Gee, 2010, p. 68). Discourse analysis for my research entails on the one hand teasing-out how the World Bank and Mexico’s approach to poverty has evolved over the years; and on the other, exploring how *Oportunidades* beneficiaries are implicitly and explicitly conceptualized and constructed within program evaluations, guides and other key documents. The first part allows me to contextualize the emergence of CCTs and point to changes and continuities (research questions one and three), while the second part enables me to explore the kinds of subjectivities that *Oportunidades* promotes and draw out some implications of these subjectivities (research questions two and four).

In addition to examining the kinds of subjectivities advocated within CCT discourse, I look at how they are legitimized and deployed. This means paying attention to the politics underpinning seemingly apolitical statements given to justify a specific program design feature or the World Bank's decision to fund a particular program. Identifying the ontological assumptions couched in reoccurring and ostensibly uncontested concepts is one way that I go about this. I pay particular attention to how various discourses distribute what Gee (2011) calls "social goods"—meaning that way in which discourses define "normal," "right," "good," "correct," "proper," "appropriate," "valuable," "the ways things are," [and] "the way things ought to be"" (p. 19). So, for example, what exactly do Fiszbein and Schady (2009, p. 50) *mean* when they argue that agents do not always behave as rationally as one would expect? How is rational behaviour being conceptualized, and who or what does this particular conceptualization serve? I turn to this very question in Chapters 3 and 4.

My approach is *critical* insofar as I wish to use discourse analysis as a method of engaging with the politics of CCTs as a way of making inferences about broader issues such as development and poverty. By contrast, a *descriptive* discourse analysis consists of studying language as an end in itself; this technique explicitly avoids making inferences about broader social issues because this (supposedly) taints the objectivity of the inquiry (Gee, 2011). Because I agree with Gee's (2011) assertion that all language is "political," my research starts from the ontological assumption that it is not possible to conduct a discourse analysis—or engage in any form of research for that matter—in a purely objective fashion. As such, I acknowledge that my project contains what positivists might critique as normative judgments about, for example, the desirability of gender equality.

My analysis targets two specific sites of discourse: the World Bank and Mexico's CCT program *Oportunidades*.²¹ I chose the World Bank as a site of discourse because of its dominant role in the production and dissemination of development and economic expertise (Escobar, 1995). Indeed, despite the frequent assertion that *Oportunidades* (and Brazil's *Bolsa Familia*) are "homegrown" and developed free of Bank financial support, the core rationalization of the programs—that the most effective way to address poverty is by investing in poor people's human capital—derives its principle coherence from a development discourse espoused by the Bank (Franzoni & Voorent, 2011; Peck & Theodore, 2010; Yaschine, 1999). According to Teichman (2007):

The role of international organizations in conditional cash transfers was particularly notable in the case of Mexico, where a tightly knit and highly integrated transnationalized network, involving a high degree of trust and personal friendships, had an important impact on the continuity and nature of the program (p. 561).

While Teichman focuses on the close relationship between Mexican policymakers, the IADB and the Washington-based International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the World Bank has had an increasingly direct presence in this transnational network. Not only is this evidenced by the scaling-up of Bank funding for CCT programs, but in a flurry of publications evaluating the programs and detailing best practices (e.g. Bassett, 2008; de Janvry, Sadoulet, Solomon & Vakis, 2006; Fiszbein, Ringold & Srinivasan, 2011; Fiszbein & Schady, 2009), and the highlighting of CCTs (especially *Oportunidades*) throughout the Bank's *Social Protection and Labour Strategy 2012-2022* (World Bank, 2012).

²¹ Both the World Bank and SEDESOL's *Oportunidades* websites have been important sources of primary documents for my research: <http://www.worldbank.org/>; <http://www.Oportunidades.gob.mx/Portal/>.

The significance of a person or institution's monopoly on expertise flows from Foucault's (1995) assertion that "power and knowledge directly imply one another [and that] there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (p. 27). Foucault's point is that whoever has the authority or expertise to decide what constitutes legitimate knowledge holds a tremendous amount of power; and, despite challenges to its legitimacy in the mid-1990s, the Bank retains its position as *the* key source of development—(and I argue increasingly CCT)—expertise (Birdsall & Kapur, 2005; Griffin, 2010; Roy, 2010). As Bedford (2007) puts it, with over 10 000 staff and a budget far outstripping any other development body in both financial and geographic scope, "[a]nyone seeking to understand contemporary development policy must understand the Bank" (p. 290). The Bank almost singularly establishes the foundations of a development discourse and corresponding policy framework to which other institutions and actors respond.

I selected *Oportunidades* as my case study CCT program for five reasons. Firstly, I chose a case that had a well-established body of literature on which I could perform a discourse analysis. The fact that *Oportunidades* is one of the older as well as larger CCTs, ensured that there was plenty of literature to draw from. Secondly, my ability to read Spanish influenced my choice since it would allow me to broaden the scope of my discourse analysis to include official program documents and to navigate the program website. Thirdly, *Oportunidades* currently receives substantial financial and advisory support from the World Bank and is promoted by the institution as a model of best practice for other CCT initiatives (Benderly, n.d.; Handa & Davis, 2006; Peck & Theodore, 2010)—two facts that

also strengthen the analytical unity between my two sites of discourse. Fourthly, the fact that *Oportunidades* is often singled out by international development organizations as a particularly well-designed CCT that can serve as a model for other programs helps strengthen the broader applicability of my research findings. *Oportunidades*'s status as a role model program means that it might serve as somewhat of a representative case for the kinds of subjectivities that other CCTs promote.

Finally, there is the potential for *Oportunidades* to fit Eckstein's (1975) criteria of a "crucial case" (p. 118)—a case where the social, economic, political and cultural conditions are either very unlikely or very likely to support a given theory. George and Bennett (2005) note that most likely cases "cast strong doubt on theories if the theories do not fit, while least likely cases can strengthen support for theories that fit even cases where they should be weak" (p. 121). Bradshaw (2008) suggests a link between Nicaragua's CCT program and generating economic growth via the cultivation of a productive work force; however, she goes on to say that this "stands in contrast to the poverty focus of the *Oportunidades* programme" (p. 196-197). If *Oportunidades* is one of the more poverty (as opposed to productivity) focused CCT programs, one expects it to be *less* (perhaps least) likely to be implicated in the fostering of market-conducive subjects. Since my research found that the cultivation of a particular rational market participant who is "empowered" to participate in growth is indeed taking place in the supposedly less growth-driven social policy environment of Mexico, this suggests that it is likely that cultivation of market-conducive subjects is an integral part of the CCT agenda as a whole.

Structure

Each subsequent chapter is organized around responding to one or more of my research questions. Chapter 2 contextualizes the genesis of CCTs by looking at what came before in terms of both the World Bank and Mexico's approaches to addressing poverty. Chapter 3 examines the kinds of subjectivities that *Oportunidades* attempts to cultivate among program beneficiaries; and Chapter 4 concludes by discussing the changes and continuities between CCTs and past international and Mexican anti-poverty strategies, and points to some implications of CCTs becoming the policy tool of choice for reducing global poverty and inequality.

Chapter 2: The evolution of World Bank and Mexican anti-poverty strategies

This chapter argues that a major outcome of the World Bank's mid-1990s legitimacy crisis and the consolidation of the neoliberal project in Mexico was the raise of micro targeted anti-poverty programs aimed at fostering new kinds of subjectivities. It also argues that this more micro and agent-centred approach to poverty reduction has a number of conceptual similarities with the conditional cash transfer (CCT) model. In what follows, I trace the evolution of both Bank and Mexican approaches to poverty in order to contextualize the emergence of the CCT model in relation to past anti-poverty policy thinking and practice. Far from being an exercise in historical fact-listing, looking back at what came before CCTs allows me to provide a historically-grounded account of the agent-centred conceptualization of poverty that I argue underpins the CCT model and *Oportunidades* in particular. It also allows me to engage my first and third research questions regarding change and continuity between CCTs and past policies: what came before CCTs and *Oportunidades* in terms of anti-poverty thinking and practice at both the World Bank and Mexico? And how is anti-poverty policy evolving in light of the World Bank's mid-1990 legitimacy crisis?

The chapter proceeds in two parts. Part one charts the evolution of anti-poverty thinking and practice at the World Bank since the late 1960s to the present. I begin by exploring the kinds of anti-poverty policies that the institution supported under president

Robert McNamara, before examining the more strictly macroeconomic and technical focus that coloured the Bank's approach to poverty during the structural adjustment era of the 1980s and early 1990s. I then look at how this macroeconomic approach came to be challenged and ultimately revised beginning in the mid-1990s, and what these revisions consisted of in relation to the specific issue of subjectivity. I pay particular attention to the so-called "new poverty agenda" or "post Washington Consensus" and its links to the CCT model. My goal is to demonstrate how in the years leading up to the first CCT programs, the Bank endorsed a much more agent-centred approach to poverty alleviation than had previously characterized its anti-poverty discourse and policy interventions.

Part two focuses on the evolution of Mexico's approach to the issue of poverty and highlights the financial and ideological links between the World Bank and Mexican trajectories. I explore the major anti-poverty themes in postrevolutionary²² ideology and practice concerning the poor, before considering the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Bank-inspired economic reforms that Mexico began to implement after its massive debt crisis in 1982. I pay close attention to the impact that these reforms had on anti-poverty policy by comparing and contrasting the various flagship programs throughout the 1980s and early 1990s with PROGRESA/*Oportunidades*. Finally, I conclude by demonstrating the ideological concurrence between the restructuring of Mexican social policy and the Bank's new poverty agenda.

²² Marquez and Sharradan (1994) use the term "postrevolutionary" to describe the particular brand and tone of Mexican federal politics that dominated from 1917 up until the onset of economic liberalization in the 1980s.

Part One: Charting the World Bank’s approach to poverty

The World Bank has from its inception considered poverty reduction to be part and parcel of its overarching mission of promoting development. Yet the way that the institution has conceptualized poverty and sought to address it over the years, has remained far from static. Where it would have been nigh unthinkable to imagine the Bank putting ideological and financial support behind a micro targeted social program like *Oportunidades* during the height of the structural adjustment era, conditions later shifted to the point that backing micro-targeted anti-poverty programs—what Barrientos and Hulme (2008) call the “quiet revolution”—came to be seen as a core part of the Bank’s mandate. How has Bank thinking around poverty reduction evolved over the years? And what does the “new poverty agenda” that emerged in the mid-1990s consist of and how is it linked to the CCT model? It is to the origins and idiosyncrasies of the World Bank’s shifting conceptualization of poverty that I now turn.

Redistribution with Growth 1968-1981

The mid-1990s was not the first time that the World Bank endorsed micro targeted anti-poverty programs. Under the leadership of Robert McNamara (1968-1981), the institution abandoned the strict macroeconomic focus that had been its hallmark since its inception in the 1945, and adopted a more direct and explicit poverty focus (Ayers, 1983; Bergeron, 2003).²³ Prior to the arrival of McNamara, the dominant assumption at the Bank had been that poverty reduction was synonymous with liberal macroeconomic policy. It had

²³ Reflecting this thinking, Bank staff in the 1950s and 1960s was almost exclusively comprised of engineers, financial analysts and technical experts, and projects focused on roads, dams and bridges (World Bank, 2003, p. 78).

been believed that a sound macroeconomic policy environment would undoubtedly lead to sustained gross domestic product (GDP) growth and prosperity, which in turn would “trickle-down” to the poor (Best, 2013). The belief that achieving economic growth was key to reducing poverty did not disappear during McNamara’s tenure, but it was no longer seen as the sole factor. The president’s foreword to the 1980 *World Development Report* (WDR) sums up this sentiment:

While there is now increasing recognition that growth does not obviate the need for human development and other steps to reduce poverty, it must be stressed that the converse is true as well—direct steps to reduce poverty do not obviate the need for growth (World Bank, 1980, p. iii).

Guided by the above line of thinking, McNamara’s flagship Redistribution with Growth (RWG) strategy advocated micro-level interventions to boost productivity levels among the poor and subsistence farmers in particular (McNamara, 1973).²⁴ RWG focused on reducing absolute (as opposed relative) poverty, and viewed poverty as a function of poor people’s lack of human capital due to insufficient supply of education and health services, and jobs (Ayers, 1983, p. 79). Specific programs focused on family planning, nutrition, access to basic education, preventative health practices and access to credit (Ayers, 1983; McNamara, 1973).

In contrast to the current emphasis on “demand-side” interventions, RWG programs generally focused on strengthening the supply of services for the poor (Ayers, 1983, p. 79). To clarify, supply-side interventions seek to increase the availability of a service (e.g. building new infrastructure, providing agricultural inputs, increasing the number of doctors

²⁴ In addition to RWG, the more micro and social focus that characterized the Bank under McNamara is also evidenced by the Bank’s hiring of its first sociologists and anthropologists during this period (Davis, 2004, p. 1).

and teachers in marginalized areas, etc.), while demand-side interventions are about inducing people to use existing services or bringing about behavioural change (e.g. reducing vulnerability to shocks, educational campaigns, CCTs, etc.). Another difference between RWG and recent anti-poverty thinking is the former's decidedly "static" conceptualization of poverty (Best, 2013, p. 111). RWG was static in the sense that it did not acknowledge the possibility for people to oscillate in and out of poverty in response to unexpected shocks (e.g. death of breadwinner, economic recession, natural disaster, etc.). Today's inclusion of "exposure to risk" and "vulnerability to shocks" as poverty indicators, makes for a much more dynamic framing of poverty (Best, 2013, p. 121).

The structural adjustment era 1981-1995

While RWG held sway at the World Bank for some time, the departure of McNamara and the appointment of Alden Clausen (1981-1986) as President and Anne Krueger as Chief Economist marked the beginning of the World Bank's reorientation to an almost exclusive preoccupation with macro economic policy and stimulating growth.²⁵ The 1980s saw a resurgence of the belief that the most effective way to solve poverty was by achieving sustained growth through strict observance of liberal economic principles, namely the superiority of markets (over governments) for organizing economies (World Bank, 1981; Demery & Addison, 1987, p. 5). In a throw back to the institution's early years, promoting liberal economic reform was believed to be more or less synonymous with anti-poverty

²⁵ To speak of "social" and "economic" policy as though they are two discrete spheres is, of course, rather misleading since the two impinge upon one another. When I say that the World Bank was primarily preoccupied with economic policy, I mean that social policy was subsumed beneath policies aimed at creating a particular kind of (liberal) macro economic policy environment.

policy: growth-oriented economic policies (and not expensive social programs) were seen as the most effective way to help the poor (Best, 2013; Demery & Addison, 1987).

The World Bank's chief policy instrument for promoting economic restructuring in borrower countries was Structural Adjustment Lending (SAL). Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, Bank loans were conditional on borrower countries adopting a series of macro (and later micro) economic policies (Ferreira & Keely, 2000). This collection of policy adjustments—famously dubbed the “Washington Consensus” following a 1989 meeting between economists at the United States Treasury, the World Bank and IMF—consisted of core tenets of neoclassical economic theory such as trade liberalization, deregulation, state contraction and privatization (Öni & Senses, 2005; Williamson, 2008).²⁶ As I will discuss in detail in part two, structural adjustment loans from both the IMF and the Bank were instrumental in ushering in the profound changes to Mexico's economic and social policy that occurred in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Although anti-poverty policy at the Bank was largely subsumed under macroeconomic restructuring in the 1980s, this position was not uncontested within the Bank.²⁷ In fact, the blueprints of a more micro-social development strategy were already taking shape within certain facets of the institution. The Bank's Senior Advisor for Sociology and Social Policy, Michael Cernea, for instance, was particularly vocal in advocating that the Bank pay more attention to the “sociocultural variables” affecting project outcomes. During

²⁶ More precisely, the Washington Consensus consisted of ten principles that the three parties believed were prerequisites for the achievement of sustained economic growth: fiscal discipline, reordering public expenditure priorities, tax reform, liberalizing interest rates, competitive exchange rate, trade liberalization, liberalization of inward foreign direct investment, privatization, deregulation and property rights (Williamson, 2008, p. 16-17).

²⁷ Indeed, Best (2013) cautions against overly monolithic accounts of the World Bank's history, noting that it is in fact a “frustratingly complex institution” (p. 113).

the height of structural adjustment, Cernea and colleagues oversaw the publication a book entitled *Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Rural Development* (Cernea, [1985] 1991). One of the main arguments of the book is that people's economic activities are socially embedded, and, as such, "[m]assive financial resources may trigger a short-term development spurt, but without institutional and social scaffoldings built in at the same pace, the new edifice is not durably constructed" (p. 9). While many of the ideas put forth by Cernea and his team would eventually make their way onto the Bank's mainstream agenda, this was not the case under Clausen (Hall, 2007). Indeed, a distinguishing feature of core Bank discourse and programs during the structural adjustment period, particularly when compared with current discourse and policy, is a strict separation between economic policy and the sociological variables identified by Cernea and others. With few exceptions, the "social realm"—i.e. cultural practices, communities, and individual men and women—were "black-boxed" within a development policy fixated on macro-level restructuring.

One exception to this black-boxing that provides an interesting contrast with CCTs were the Bank's "social safeguards." These were short-term policies instruments that sought to mitigate the impact of major Bank-funded infrastructure projects among affected groups (Hall, 2007, p. 160).²⁸ They typically involved involuntary resettlement or the preservation of culturally or environmentally significant resources (Hall, 2007). But while these policies were targeted at the micro-level, their prime objective was not promoting certain subjectivities among individuals. Instead, social safeguards sought to *compensate*

²⁸ Some of these programs later became "free-standing social protection instruments" aimed at helping people manage risks beyond those associated with structural adjustment programs (World Bank, 2001b, p. 2).

people for (rather than actively integrate or *socialize* them) into economic restructuring processes.

A “rededication” to poverty

While the trickle-down approach to poverty dominated World Bank discourse and practice under Clausen, by the late 1980s the effectiveness of this strategy was being called into question. One report that was especially key in alerting the development community to the social costs of structural adjustment was UNICEF’s *Adjustment with a Human Face*. This much-cited report argued that the most vulnerable members of society tended to suffer the most under structural adjustment (Cornia, Jolly & Stewart, 1987).²⁹ Mounting external criticism combined with a re-shuffling of key personnel such as the appointment of Barber Conable (1986-1991) as president, and the replacement of Chief Economist Krueger with Stanley Fischer, revitalized interest at the Bank in more direct anti-poverty interventions alongside economic restructuring (Kapur, Lewis & Webb, 1997, p. 360-369; Vetterlein, 2007). Echoing McNamara’s words a decade earlier, Conable concluded, “growth, by itself, is not enough” (as cited in Kapur, Lewis & Webb, 1997, p. 360).

It was this increasingly critical context that set the stage for the writing of the 1990/1991 WDR. In this report, entitled *Poverty*, the need for more direct policy interventions to increase people’s human capital—a central tenet of RWG under McNamara—was reaffirmed (World Bank, 1990). The report purposed a two-part strategy for tackling poverty: policies “to promote the productive use of the poor’s most abundant

²⁹ The Bank also faced fierce criticism for the environmental and social costs of its Polonoroeste settlement program in Brazil and Sardar Sarover Dam on the Narmada River in India (World Bank, 2013a).

asset—labor”; and the provision of basic social services to the poor, with primary health care, family planning, nutrition and primary education singled out as particularly important (p. 3). The report also includes a section on social transfers for “those unable to participate in growth” (i.e., the sick, old or disabled), and short-term safety nets to buttress poor people’s existing coping strategies in the face of shocks such as drought, famine or recession (p. 101).

The anti-poverty approach expounded by the 1990/1991 WDR shares the CCT model’s emphasis on human capital and increasing productivity levels among the poor; however, as with human capital policies under McNamara, the report focuses on improving access to services (supply-side intervention) (p. 74-89). More agent-centred interventions are briefly touched on in a small section of the report called “Creating Demand” (p. 87-88)—that identifies poor peoples’ lack of knowledge or cost-benefit calculus as a potential barrier to them utilizing social services—but these interventions remain peripheral and underdeveloped. In addition, while *Poverty* recognizes the need for more direct policy interventions in the form of social transfers and safety nets, it views them as a net cost to growth, and as such advises that they be reserved only for people too sick or old to contribute to economic growth, or for people in need of short-term relief from unexpected shocks. The report thus (re)articulates poor people as legitimate “objects” of direct World Bank policy intervention, but more as “passive” recipients of social transfers rather than the “active” participants or partners in overcoming poverty envisioned by current Bank and CCT discourse. Looking back at the way that anti-poverty policies were framed in *Poverty*, a more recent World Bank document notes that:

safety nets were still viewed as a ‘last resort’ – reactive measures dealing with the consequences of poverty but not its underlying causes. In this sense, safety net programs represented a cost to be minimized as opposed to an investment for which impact should be maximized (World Bank, 2001b, p. 2).

Direct anti-poverty interventions were thus back on the menu of legitimate Bank policy options in the early 1990s, but they were viewed as secondary to the core business of economic restructuring and growth, emphasized strengthening the supply of services for the poor, and they were framed as costs to growth (Best, 2013).

A crisis of legitimacy

Although the World Bank’s expert authority had come under fire in the late 1980s, by the time James Wolfensohn (1995-2005) was appointed president, the institution was in the midst of what Best (2007) characterizes as an all out legitimacy crisis. This crisis was precipitated by a number of events that were interpreted by actors both external and internal to the Bank as evidence that the Washington Consensus development model had failed not only to adequately address poverty, but also to induce sustained economic growth rates. Key events included widening global wealth disparities, deepening poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa—referred to as a “lost decade” of development—and successive financial crises in two regions initially held up as success stories of structural adjustment: Mexico (1994) and East Asia (1997-1999) (Best, 2013; Önis & Senses, 2005; Sheppard & Leitner, 2010).³⁰ These events in turn galvanized grassroots and activist movements such as

³⁰ Evidence of large-scale failure of structural adjustment programs was also surfacing within Bank internal reports, such an oft-cited 1992 report by the Portfolio Management Task Force (also called the Wapenhans Report). This report found that the number of Bank projects deemed “unsatisfactory” upon completion had risen substantially since 1981 (Weaver & Leiteritz, 2005, p. 373). Interestingly, the report itself is currently not

“50 Years is Enough” (which targeted the Bank and IMF specifically) and massive protests at the 1999 World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference in Seattle. In Mexico, opposition to aggressive economic restructuring erupted spectacularly in 1994 with the Zapatista movement in Chiapas.

The above events, among others, led to Wolfensohn’s very candid admission that “[g]ood economic policy alone is no longer enough...[t]he fact is, we are putting a lot of money into developing countries, yet poverty and inequality are increasing” (Wolfensohn, 1998, p. 60-61). Although the legitimacy crisis ultimately failed to dislodge the Bank’s faith in market-friendly reforms and economic growth for achieving poverty reduction, it did disturb the long-held belief that growth *automatically* reduced poverty (e.g. Bourguignon 2002; Rodrik, 2000; Stiglitz, 1998). Debate at the Bank instead began to centre on how to achieve “pro-poor growth” (Page, 2006; Ravallion, 2004). Conceptually, pro-poor growth avoided a more radical policy shift by structuring the debate around making markets work better for the poor (as opposed to questioning whether market-led growth was the “best” development trajectory), but it nevertheless opened something of an “expertise vacuum” at the Bank: if the old stand-bys of good economic policy and growth were necessary but not enough to solve poverty, then what had Bank researchers and policy designers missed? The following passage from the 2000/2001 WDR *Attacking Poverty* suggests that the “sociocultural variables” identified by Cernea and his team made up a significant part of their answer:

accessible on the World Bank website; however, its existence and its reverberations at the Bank have been well documented.

We have learned that traditional elements of strategies to foster growth—macroeconomic stability and market-friendly reforms—are essential for reducing poverty. But we also recognize the need for much more emphasis on laying the institutional and *social foundations* for the development process and on *managing vulnerability* and *encouraging participation* to ensure inclusive growth (World Bank, 2001a, p. vi, my emphasis).

At the turn of the century, the Bank no longer saw development as merely a process of macroeconomic restructuring, but in the language of Chief Economic Joseph Stiglitz, a process of comprehensive “societal transformation” (Stiglitz, 1998, p. 5).

Anti-poverty policy in the post-legitimacy crisis years

A number of new policies and concepts that cropped up in the mid-1990s and early 2000s are indicative of a growing concern on the part of the World Bank with various “social dimensions” of development. One such concept is “social capital,” which is most commonly defined as the “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1994, p. 167). With important implications for subjectivity, the social organizations and institutions that the Bank tends to count as “social capital” are those which promote efficient economic behaviour (Bergeron, 2003; Grootaert, 1998; Sheppard & Leitner, 2010).³¹ For societies that lack social capital, the Bank’s solution is social development interventions. The Bank launched its Social Development Department in 1997, which views institutional reform—with institutions broadly defined as “the set of formal and informal rules, norms and values that operate in society”—as key for achieving efficient and inclusive growth (World Bank, 2005, p. 1). To give an idea how pervasive social

³¹ The Bank launched a Social Capital Initiative in 1996 (<http://go.worldbank.org/W8FMEK6FR0>).

development has become at the Bank, by 2005 approximately half of the World Bank's projects in the past ten years included some social development aspect as opposed to less than a third in the past thirty years (Operations Evaluation Department [OED], 2005, p. xiv).³² Social capital and social development more broadly provide both an economic and social rationale for Bank initiatives that burrow deep into the social fabric of borrower countries.³³ An important question is how this new social focus impacted the Bank's view of anti-poverty policy.

There are three major differences between the anti-poverty approach articulated in the 1990/1991 WDR and the 2000/2001 WDR *Attacking Poverty*. Firstly, *Attacking Poverty* envisions a much more central role for micro targeted anti-poverty policies (now called social protection policies). And these anti-poverty policies are no longer about merely compensating those unable to participate in growth or negatively affected by structural reforms, but about carefully targeting large swaths of people that are chronically or transiently poor, reducing their vulnerability, and enabling them to engage in more productive activities (Hall, 2007; World Bank, 2001a, p. 37-41; 147-148). Secondly, the 2000/2001 WDR expands the Bank's conceptualization of poverty to include not only the traditional measures of material deprivation and low indicators in health and education, but

³² The report is from 2005, but presumably this number has increased especially since the report found that "projects that addressed at least one social development theme were rates three to four percent higher on outcome, sustainability, and institutional development impact" than projects that do not (OED, 2005, p. xvi).

³³ Many other notable changes to Bank policy occurred in the aftermath of the legitimacy crisis: a focus on poverty reduction (outlined in the, and put into practice through the replacement of SAL with Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers); an increased emphasis on participation and country ownership of development policies; emphasis on good governance reform; and a significant upswing in attention to gender issues (Bedford, 2007; Bergeron, 2003; Bradshaw, 2008; Hayami, 2003; Sheppard & Leitner, 2010). While all of these changes are important, my focus is exclusively on changes to the Bank's thinking around social safety nets and transfers.

also vulnerability, exposure to risk, voicelessness and powerlessness (World Bank, 2001a, p. 15). Finally, anti-poverty policies are framed not as costs to growth, but as productive investments in growth—i.e., social and economic policies are treated as mutually affirming (Vetterlein, 2007, p. 521).

While *Attacking Poverty* proposed a three-pronged strategy for reducing poverty—“promoting opportunities, facilitating empowerment, and enhancing security” (World Bank, 2001a, p. 6)—it is the third prong that resonates the most with the more agent-centred approach to poverty that I argue is at the heart of the CCT model. The security section in the 2000/2001 report argues for policies to enhance poor people’s security by reducing their vulnerability to shocks and helping them better manage risks so that they are able to pull themselves out of poverty (Chap. 8, Chap. 9). This is the first appearance in a WDR of ideas linked to “social risk management”—a conceptual framework for social protection policies that was becoming very influential within the Bank’s newly established Social Protection and Labor Unit (SP&L) (e.g. Holzmann & Jørgensen, 2000; World Bank, 2001b). The aim of social protection policies organized around social risk management is to enable the poor—by virtue of reducing their vulnerability—to *become* effective risk managers and improve their situation by taking advantage of the opportunities opened up by the market.

What is interesting about social risk management—particularly in relation to the cultivation of subjectivities—is that it redefines social protection as proactive micro-level policy interventions to empower the poor to participate in and benefit from economic growth. Social protection organized around social risk management, thus, becomes centrally about promoting more economically efficient subjectivities among the poor: the

goal is to create the conditions in which poor people can reconstitute themselves as the rational risk-takers, savers, investors, and entrepreneurs that are required in a market economy. Of course, this agent-centred approach rests on the implicit assumption that the free market will provide a living wage to anyone with basic human capital provided they work hard and take smart risks.

The SP&L Unit's sector strategy papers (World Bank, 2001b; World Bank, 2012) are also useful for teasing out the finer details of the kinds of anti-poverty (or social protection) policies advocated by the World Bank. The first strategy paper elaborates on the social risk management framework, arguing that social protection policies should act as both safety nets and springboards, that "provide people with the capacity to climb out of poverty" by strengthening their human capital and coping mechanisms (World Bank, 2001b, p. 9). The more recent 2012-2022 strategy largely reaffirms this agent-centred role for anti-poverty policies, asserting that "[s]ocial protection and labor programs are centrally aimed at family and individual behavior" (World Bank, 2012, p. ix). Three other themes that are emphasized in both reports are: ensuring that interventions are carefully targeted to the "critically" or "extremely" poor members of society; fostering human capital early in life, the need for shared responsibility between government, other service providers and poor beneficiaries in overcoming poverty; effective and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of programs; and the mutually affirmative relationship between social protection efforts and enhancing growth and competitiveness.

Where do CCTs fit in?

The CCT model resonates with recent Bank's thinking around social protection in a number of ways. Firstly, CCTs are an agent-centred approach to poverty in that they are centrally about modifying individual and household behavior in ways that will (ostensibly) enhance present or future productivity. Secondly, the language and logic of social risk management is ubiquitous within CCT discourse: cash and in-kind transfers aim to reduce poor people's vulnerability (safety net), while the performance of co-responsibilities aims to enable them to access more financially lucrative activities (springboard). Thirdly, CCTs generally focus on strengthening the human capital of children. Fourthly, CCTs are targeted programs—in fact they are often credited within the literature as at the forefront of advancing effective targeting methodologies (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009). Many CCTs moreover, including *Oportunidades* and Brazil's *Bolsa Familia*, are targeted at extremely (versus moderately) poor families in order to maximize budgetary efficiency and discourage welfare dependency or work disincentives. Fifthly, the co-responsibility aspect of CCTs requires beneficiaries to be active participants—together with the government and health and education authorities—in overcoming poverty. Sixthly, CCTs and *Oportunidades* in particular are also singled out in the literature for their commitment to monitoring and evaluating program results (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009). Finally, CCTs respect the Bank's positioning of the market as the supreme anti-poverty device: ultimately CCT beneficiaries must utilize their more secure position and newly-acquired human capital to take advantage of the entrepreneurial or employment opportunities that the market (undoubtedly) has to offer, and pull themselves out of poverty for good.

I have demonstrated the links between the CCT model and the more agent-centred approach to poverty alleviation that has characterized Bank discourse and practice this past decade; however, an important question is whether this approach is something new in the Mexican context of *Oportunidades*.

Bank-Mexican relations

Before examining how Mexican social policies have shifted since the postrevolutionary years, it is worthwhile to provide a brief overview of World Bank-Mexican relations. The Bank has a long history in Mexico, starting with its first loan to the country in 1949. Its presence was scaled up during the McNamara years, when president Luis Echeverría's (1970-1976) administration borrowed more money from the Bank than under all of the previous administrations combined (Urzúa, 1997, p. 64). This was in part due to an "ideological concurrence" between the Bank's RWG strategy and the Mexican government's own thinking around rural development in the 1970s: both emphasized targeted programs for the rural poor and addressing basic needs (Tetreault, 2012; Urzúa, 1997, p. 63). As the Bank's focus shifted to structural adjustment in the 1980s, and Mexico contended with its massive debt crisis, Bank interventions took the form of loans and technical advice that focused on trade liberalization and debt restructuring, and financial, agricultural and public sector reform (OED, 1994).³⁴

By the time Mexico joined the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, it was the Bank's top client in terms of loan volume (Urzúa, 1997). In 2001, Mexican

³⁴ Although the Bank certainly played a role in the restructuring process that followed Mexico's 1982 debt crisis, it was the Federal Reserve, the US Treasury and the IMF that were the key players initially (Urzúa, 1997, p. 84).

president Vicente Fox bestowed Bank president Wolfensohn with the prestigious order of the Aztec Eagle for the Bank's "efforts to support Mexico in the formation of solid financial packages" and for "initiating a very significant process of reform at the institutional level" (as cited in Charnock, 2006, p. 85). Today Bank-Mexico ideological and financial ties remain strong, though the focus has switched from stabilization and adjustment to poverty reduction. The Bank has a permanent staff of 48 people placed in Mexico City, and as of 2010 Mexico is the institution's fourth largest portfolio (Charnock, 2006; World Bank, 2013c). The most recent country partnership strategy between the two is scheduled to be adopted in December 2013, and—reflecting core tenets of the new poverty agenda—emphasizes the need to "increase productivity" and "ensure that poorer segments of society benefit from and are able to contribute to growth" (World Bank, 2013b). As will be discussed in greater detail below, the Bank also has notable financial and ideological connections with *Oportunidades*.

Part two: The evolution of Mexican social policy

Mexico is singled out in the literature for the speed and depth with which structural adjustments to its economy took place. As Williams (2001) puts it "no where did more governments embrace neoliberalism than in Latin America, and among these, none pursued a more extensive, sustained, and in respects, successful campaign than in Mexico" (p. 3). I am interested in how the neoliberal reforms that swept Mexico in the 1980s and early 1990s transformed social policy in the lead up to PROGRESA/*Oportunidades*. In particular, I wish to discern whether the agent-centred approach to poverty underpinning

Oportunidades has a historical precedent in Mexico. After first providing an overview of social policy under the postrevolutionary welfare regime, I examine the shifts that occurred in the wake of economic liberalization.

The postrevolutionary welfare regime 1920-1981

The “social pact” enshrined in Mexico’s 1917 constitution exerted a strong policy influence throughout the postrevolutionary period (Rapoport, 2006). This pact consisted of a guarantee on the part of the Mexican state to provide universal social rights to its citizens, especially regarding access to basic education and health care (Brachet-Marquez & Sherradan, 1994). In addition to universalism, “solidarity” with the poor and marginalized groups was strongly emphasized in policy discourse as late as the 1990s (Laurell, 2003). Between 1940-1970 Mexico achieved impressive and sustained growth with its import-substitution industrialization (ISI) development, which, in turn facilitated a rapid expansion of social services (Brachet-Marquez & Sherradan, 1994).³⁵ The main thrust of social policy during the postrevolutionary period was three-fold. First, the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) (created in 1943) oversaw the establishment of a robust social security system for formal sector workers (Brachet-Marquez & Sherradan, 1994). Second, a large percentage of social spending was concentrated in the education and health sectors (Lustig, 1998). Third, there was an elaborate system of universal and semi-targeted food and

³⁵ Import-substitution industrialization is an economic model that “consists of establishing domestic production facilities to manufacture goods which were formally imported” (Baer, 1972, p. 95). According to Rapoport (2006), Mexico’s average annual GDP growth rate for the period 1941-1982 was 6.3 percent (p. 506).

agricultural subsidies managed by the National Company of Popular Subsistence (CONASUPO) (Lustig, 1986).³⁶

While former workers had access to a range of services such as pensions, health insurance and disability, informal workers—such as the self-employed and those employed by microenterprises—were excluded from the purview of the IMSS (Barrientos, 2009). This provides an interesting contrast with *Oportunidades*, where the vast majority of beneficiaries are informal workers. In addition, urban areas were prioritized when it came to expanding access to health care and basic education. Large swaths of rural areas had little to no access to health care until the late 1970s (Brachet-Marquez & Sherradan, 1994). This regional and “occupationally stratified” approach to social policy did little to address the plight of the poor, since the majority Mexican poor were (and still are) concentrated in rural areas and the informal sector work (Barrientos, 2009; Lustig, 1998). The approach also had a gender bias in that full-time formal work (and the accompanying social benefits) was generally the preserve of male workers (Bayon, Roberts & Rojas, 2002). With regard to food subsidies, Lustig (1986) notes that price controls were less likely to be enforced in rural or poorer urban areas than more affluent areas.

The administration of López Portillo (1976-1982) tried to address some of these gaps with the creation of The General Plan for Depressed Zones and Marginal Groups (COPLAMAR)—one of the first “targeted” social programs in the sense that it was supposed to provide funds to communities based on an index of marginalization. In practice

³⁶ Mexico established an increasing number of food subsidies from the 1930s until 1982. CONASUPO was created in 1965 to centralize the management of subsidies (Yunez-Naude, 2003).

COPLAMAR funds were directed to “productive sectors [instead of] population groups” as per the advice of the World Bank (Rapoport, 2005, p. 505). Funds were channeled to communities and organized groups rather than individuals and households, and—echoing the later CCT logic of co-responsibilities—beneficiaries were expected to provide some labour for COPLAMAR projects or to participate in “activities designed to improve health” (Mexican Delegation, 1984, p. 65).³⁷

Despite some clear social gains, the postrevolutionary regime ultimately failed to fulfill the social pact enshrined in the constitution: overall poverty remained stubbornly high at 48.5 percent of households on the eve of the 1982 debt crisis (Brachet-Marquez & Sharraden, 1994, p. 1298). The lion’s share of social services had failed to cover (or provided inferior services to) large sections of the population—most notably, many rural poor, informal workers and workingwomen. Even the key areas of basic education and health care required “substantial improvement” as the quality of and access to services differed markedly across regions and among social groups (Lustig, 1998, p. 65)

Liberalization period 1982-1994

In 1982 Mexico faced a massive balance-of-payment crisis. Buoyed by the discovery of significant oil reserves and high global petrol prices, both the public and private sector in Mexico had borrowed heavily from commercial banks in the United States during the 1970s (Lustig, 1998, p. 20). A major drop in the price of oil in 1979 combined with US Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volker’s decision to significantly raise interest rates, resulted in

³⁷ The only urban programs with COPLAMAR were breakfast for school children and subsidized milk (Rapoport, 2006, p. 505).

Mexico declaring that it would no longer be able to service its debt. This marked the beginning of the radical reorientation of the Mexican economy away from the “protectionist” and “interventionalist” economic policies characteristic of the ISI period, and towards the neoliberal framework laid out in the Washington Consensus.³⁸

Under the leadership of president Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988), and with key support from the IMF, the first of many stabilization packages were implemented in 1983 (Kalter, 1992; Lustig, 1998). Specific reforms initiated under these various stabilization packages included “trade, exchange-rate, and industrial policy liberalization; deregulation of foreign investment flows and domestic commercial and financial activities; and the large-scale privatization of state-owned enterprises” (Middlebook & Zepeda, 2003, p. 8). By the late 1980s the speed and depth of Mexico’s reform coupled with stable growth rates had made the country something of a *cause célèbre* at the Bank and IMF as an “exemplary case of successful structural adjustment” (Middlebook & Zepeda, 2003, p. 9).

The social impacts of economic reform

It is now widely acknowledged that the 1980s was a time of immense hardship for many Mexicans, and rural Mexicans in particular (Kunz, 2010; Moreno-Brid, Carpizo & Bosch, 2009). Mesa-Lago (1997) and Soederberg (2001) note that labour and the poor bore the brunt of the negative effects of reform while capital and business benefited the most. High inflation, stagnating wages, increased flexibility of labour markets coupled with a decrease in the number of workers with access to social security, and drastic cuts to social spending combined to exacerbate both poverty and inequality levels (Bayon et al., 2002;

³⁸ For a detailed explanation of the origins of the crisis see Lustig (1998, p. 14-27).

Meso-Lago, 1997). Middlebrook and Zepeda (2003) conclude that liberal reforms “neither delivered rates of growth equal to those achieved through the 1940s through the 1970s nor guaranteed economic stability” (p. 4). Even World Bank publications found that wage inequality in Mexico increased substantially between 1984 and 1994, and that there was an absolute decline in real incomes among the poorest Mexicans (Lächler, 1998, p. 1; World Bank, 2000, p. 1-2).

In terms of the effects of structural adjustment on social policy, Bayon et al. (2002) point out two trends: reduced real federal budget for social programs and an “emphasis on self-help and delegation of responsibilities” (p. 115). In reference to the second trend, Laurell (2003) asserts that the household-level was expected to absorb the Mexican state’s withdrawal from welfare provision, which had gendered implications (p. 320). Social security for formal sector workers was eroded or privatized (Barrientos, 2009). Total spending on food subsidy programs was progressively reduced, and, in line with Bank thinking around anti-poverty policy, universal subsidies were replaced with more targeted schemes first for unionized workers (ostensibly to replace lost social security supports), and later to vulnerable populations (Rapoport, 2006, p. 506). In 1992, an IMF publication noted that the role of the social pact in determining the distribution of resources within the Mexican economy had been largely replaced by market imperatives (Kalter, 1992, p. 22).

PRONASOL 1989-1994

One major social program that bears examining in closer detail due to its size and somewhat “hybrid” design is the National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL) launched by

Carlos Salinas de Gortari's administration (1988-1994). I use the term hybrid because the program was a mixture of postrevolutionary and neoliberal features, reflecting its emergence during an interregal period. According to Dresser (1991), PRONASOL was the first major social program that "explicitly [endorsed] liberalization" (p. 16). Her example of Salinas framing unpopular reforms such as the privatization of state enterprises as consistent with the Revolution's redistributive goals (in that it would free up more money to fund PRONASOL), as well as the rhetoric of "solidarity" highlights the discursive continuities between PRONASOL and the postrevolutionary welfare.

Like COPLAMAR, PRONASOL targeted funds to communities and organized groups. Its objectives ranged from tackling poverty in urban and rural areas to boosting productivity levels among women, small-scale farmers and fishermen (Dresser, 1991; Rapoport, 2006). Policy tools included targeted and (to a lesser extent) general food subsidies, funds for various development projects and infrastructure, and microcredit (Dresser, 1991, p. 7). The majority of PRONASOL funds were notably put towards infrastructure projects (Rapoport, 2006). This suggests that in practice PRONASOL, as with earlier programs, focused on strengthening the supply of services and not inducing behavioural and attitudinal changes amongst the poor. One feature of PRONASOL that did break with past programs, however, was the practice of requiring beneficiaries "co-finance projects" with local funds or by supplying volunteer labour (Dresser, 1991, p. 9). This increased emphasis on shared responsibilities under PRONASOL (and later co-responsibilities under *Oportunidades*) was a significant departure from how social programs were framed under the postrevolutionary

regime.³⁹ Whereas the provision of social rights were once seen as the responsibility of the state, co-financing and co-responsibilities reframed the relationship between state and poor citizen as one of partnership where both parties have responsibilities (Dresser, 1999, p. 8). One major difference between *Oportunidades* and PRONASOL, however, was that the latter actively involved beneficiaries in policy decisions through their organization into “Solidarity Committees” and the writing of project proposals that prioritized project goals (Dresser, 1991; Yaschine, 1999).⁴⁰

Renewed crisis and accelerated reforms

Despite almost a decade of social spending cuts and aggressive macroeconomic reform, Mexico plunged into recession once again during the 1994-1995 financial crisis, and faced a major political crisis in the form of the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas.⁴¹ Rather than slowing the liberalization process, the administration of Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) deepened economic and social reforms with the help of structural adjustment loans from the IMF and World Bank (Laurell, 2003; Yaschine, 1999). To give an idea of the scope of Bank involvement in Mexico during this period, according to Charnock (2006), “between 1990-2000, Mexico borrowed a total of US\$ 23, 747, 250, 000 plus interest from the Bank, for 57 different projects [comprising] 9.4% of all loans authorized by the Bank” (p. 82)—the second most loans of any country.

³⁹ Some limited actions on the part of beneficiaries were required in order to receive funds under COPLAMAR, but this was significantly increased under PRONASOL.

⁴⁰ It should be noted that PRONASOL has since been widely criticized for, among other things, corruption at the national level of targeting and the local level of solidarity committees, lack of results and monitoring systems, and exclusion of the extreme. There is a general consensus that it failed to make a meaningful impact on poverty levels. See Yaschine (1999).

⁴¹ See Pastor (1999) for an explanation of the origins of the 1994-1995 crisis.

A number of important changes to social policy took place during this period. To begin, the Zedillo administration launched new National Development Plan 1995-2000 that called for policies to assist socially and economically disadvantaged groups. According to Yaschine (1999), “[s]tress was put on benefiting *individuals* and promoting the formation of *human capital* and the creation of *opportunities*” (p. 52-53, emphasis in original). This was followed by major reforms to the Secretariat of Social Development (SEDESOL) to bring it more in line with the “international discussion on poverty” by emphasizing the need for anti-poverty efforts to increase the productive capacity of the poor by boosting health and education levels (Rapoport, 2006, p. 513). Starting that same year—and also in line with the World Bank’s emphasis on efficient and transparent targeting—anti-poverty resources were to be distributed according to a “mathematical formula based on state and local poverty indicators” (Rapoport, 2006, p. 511). Finally, PRONASOL was replaced by PROGRESA in 1997, and food subsidy programs continued to be scaled-back, culminating in the total liquidation of CONASUPO in 1999.⁴²

Anti-poverty policy in the 2000s

In the years immediately leading up to PROGRESA, Mexican social policy was very clearly being reformed in a manner consistent with the new poverty agenda being espoused by the World Bank: redefining social policy as a productive investment; emphasizing human capital; narrow targeting; and the responsabilization of beneficiaries for

⁴² The only subsidy programs that did not end with CONASUPO were the Industrialized Milk Program (LICONSA or Industrialized Milk)—which consists of subsidized enriched milk targeted at poor families—and some government stores (run by DICONSA or the Distribution and Trade Promoting Company) that sell subsidized food staples in rural communities of 2500 inhabitants or less (Chora, 2011; Yunez-Naude, 2003, p. 101). See also <http://www.liconsa.gob.mx/> and <http://www.diconsa.gob.mx/>.

escaping poverty. PROGRESA continued this trend by targeting benefits to the extremely (versus moderately) poor, focusing on human capital investments in children, and requiring beneficiaries to modify their behaviour and attitudes in (ostensibly) productivity-enhancing ways in order to receive welfare supports.

The election of Vicente Fox (2000-2006) of the National Action Party (PAN) ended 71 years of rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), and saw the Bank and Mexico's trajectories become even more intertwined. Fox assembled a highly technocratic and economically orthodox cabinet, which included former Bank economist Luis Ernesto Derbez as Economy Minister and the father of PROGRESA, Santiago Levy, as general director of IMSS (Charnock, 2006). Following an advisory meeting between World Bank staff and the new administration in October 2000, the Bank published a book entitled *Mexico: A comprehensive development agenda for a new era*. In this book, the Bank praises Mexico for its commitment to structural reforms and calls on it to stay the course; highlights the need to strengthen human capital formation among the poorest; and suggests that PROGRESA be "maintained, and where possible, expanded" (Giugale, Lafourcade & Nguyen, 2001, p. 15). The Fox administration later published its own *National Development Plan 2001-2006*, which more or less reiterated the policy recommendations made in the Bank publication (Gobierno de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 2001).⁴³ Fox's anti-poverty strategy—called CONTIGO (With You)—also mirrored key aspects of the Bank's new agent-centred approach to poverty. The strategy's twin goals were "to provide basic social benefits to all Mexicans" and "provide opportunities for the productive and social

⁴³ See Charnock's (2006, p. 84) for a detailed chart on the similarities between the two documents.

integration of individuals through basic education, health, employment and training” (World Bank, 2004, p. 18). Overall, the Bank judged the CONTIGO framework to be “one of the most properly articulated in an international context” (World Bank, 2004, p. 20). PROGRESA/*Oportunidades* was CONTIGO’s flagship program, and, together with infrastructure projects, absorbed approximately 85 percent of CONTIGO’s budget (Tetreault, 2012, p. 36). Today, *Oportunidades* remains the flagship program of the successor to CONTIGO, the *Vivir Mejor* (Live Better) strategy (Gobierno de los Estados Mexicanos, 2008).

An agent-centred approach to poverty alleviation

This chapter argued that a distinguishing feature of the World Bank’s new poverty agenda is an emphasis on micro-targeted anti-poverty programs aimed at encouraging and enabling poor individuals’ to behave in particular ways. It furthermore demonstrated the links between this agent-centred approach to poverty alleviation and the CCTs model. Finally, it found that *Oportunidades* was indeed an innovation in the context of Mexican anti-poverty policy, and that it received high praise within post-1995 Bank discourse. In the next chapter, I set about specifying and analyzing the kinds of subjectivities that CCTs attempt to cultivate amongst program beneficiaries.

Chapter 3: Conditional cash transfer subject positions

This chapter examines the subjectivities *Oportunidades* promotes among program beneficiaries and the political rationalities (logics) with which these various “subject positions” or “ways of being” are articulated and legitimized. I examine how these positions are advanced within conditional cash transfer (CCT) discourse as well as put into practice via specific design features of the programs. My goals are to examine how poverty is conceptualized within the CCT model, and to examine the techniques that *Oportunidades* employs in its attempts to remedy behaviour deemed to be problematic. The findings presented here are a result of my analysis of a range of documents authored by the World Bank and the Mexican government, as well as by a number of external academics, think tanks and research institutes.

Before launching into my analysis, it is important to clarify my position on identity. I tend to follow Hall (1996) in viewing subjectivity and subject-building as a “process never completed” (p. 2) and therefore do not wish to give the impression that poor people’s identities are at the mercy of a perfectly unified and totalizing CCT logic. Indeed, as I shall discuss further in chapter four, Langley’s (2008) assertion that the “performance of everyday subject positions...are always perilous and beset with tensions and contradictions” (p. 16) is very much consistent with my findings. The various subjectivities advanced by CCTs are oftentimes at odds with one another and there are clear instances of resistance amongst participants.

For organizational purposes I have divided the chapter into four sections, each of which takes up a broad subject-position advanced within the CCT literature more generally and *Oportunidades* specifically. First, I examine the cultivation of a *self-reliant* or *self-regulating* subjectivity as it manifests in the desire to enlist the poor as “active” and willing participants in their own development as opposed to “passive recipients of state handouts” (Molyneux, 2006, p. 430). Second, I demonstrate how CCTs seek to create *entrepreneurial* and *investing* subjects by encouraging risk-taking and promoting financial inclusion. Third, I discuss the educational components of CCTs in relation to the fostering of what I term a *rational* subjectivity—meaning an agency where cultural norms and kinship ties are discredited and subordinated to efficiency and future productivity. Fourth, I examine gender and subjectivity by clarifying the ways in which CCTs encourage the cultivation of a particular kind of *empowered* women. Each of these sections is interwoven with broader insights and trends in development thinking relevant to the subject position in question.

The subject positions outlined above are conceptual categories that I have found useful for presenting my findings, and should be considered neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive. Clearly, all four overlap and intersect with one another in ways which can be both reinforcing and undermining. A common thread running through the subject positions advanced by CCTs’ is the attempt—albeit a far from unified and smooth attempt—to re-constitute poor peoples’ identities in ways which suit the needs of market-driven economic development.

Self-reliance

[CCTs] should take a life-cycle approach, helping households in the more critical aspects of each stage of their lives but always with the view that they should have incentives to earn a sufficient level of income through their own efforts to eventually pull themselves out of poverty. ~ Chief *Oportunidades* architect, Santiago Levy⁴⁴

In chapter two I showed that the past decade and a half has seen a proliferation of micro-level anti-poverty programs aimed at encouraging poor people to assume a more active role in overcoming their impoverished status. My review of CCT discourse suggests that both the design and rationalizations underpinning CCT programs have been influenced by this way of thinking. This section explores features of *Oportunidades* (and CCTs more generally) that suggest that a political rationality of “self-help” is a source of legitimacy as well as an integral part of the overall CCT approach to reducing poverty. I argue this logic is deployed in a way that encourages individual beneficiaries to become self-reliant by regulating their behaviour in particular ways.

If CCTs do indeed encourage beneficiaries to be self-reliant, then one would expect to find an emphasis on individualism considering that “self-reliance” by definition implies the ability to look after oneself. This appears to be the case in that unlike the community-oriented programs that once populated the social policy scene in Latin America, CCTs revolve around investment in the individual (Niño-Zarazúa, 2010). As I discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2, this contrast is particularly pronounced in Mexico where prior to the introduction of *Oportunidades*, national discourse had tended to emphasize the need to be in “‘social solidarity’ with those excluded from the spoils of the 1917 Revolution,” and many flagship anti-poverty programs had included “a component of community participation”

⁴⁴ See Levy (2006, p. 13).

(Luccisano, 2004, p. 38). The promotion of *self*-help as opposed to community-help resonates with the liberal economic figure of *homo economicus* whom is depicted as *self*-maximizing (Williams, 1999).

In addition, Adato's (2000) study of Progresá's effects on social relationships found evidence that—government discourse and programs aside—social solidarity is an important concept *in practice* among poor Mexicans. She found that “beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in focus groups [described] themselves as ‘all-poor’ and all in need, and thus [did] not agree with the finer distinctions made in the [CCT] selection process” (p. vi). Luccisano (2004) argues that the advent of CCTs in Mexico meant “a new conceptualization of social justice, which was understood in individual terms” (p. 39).

CCT beneficiaries do receive some external help with becoming self-reliant—the most obvious being cash transfers.⁴⁵ However, the transfers themselves tend to be strongly linked to a logic of self-help. Nowhere is this more evident than in the tendency of the monetary value of transfers to be on the low end of what is needed to have a meaningful impact on beneficiaries' lives.⁴⁶ *Oportunidades* cash and in-kind transfers for example comprise a mere 15 to 25 percent of average poor household income (Levy, 2006, p. 23), and program architects are clear that these amounts are intentionally “insufficient” to raise poor households above the poverty line so as to not deter adult work efforts and foster program dependency (Levy, 2006, p. 684; Luccisano, 2004). Barrientos (2012) notes that a

⁴⁵ In the case of *Oportunidades*, the amount of cash a family receives is dependent on the grade-level and gender of school-aged children, as well as whether there are any elderly family members seventy years or older. See Chapter 1 for a more detailed explanation of how *Oportunidades* benefits work.

⁴⁶ According to Handa and Davis (2006), “[transfers] should represent between 20% and 40% of the per capita total poverty line in order to be meaningful to the beneficiary” (p. 519). They go on to note that “[t]his standard is generally met at the low end by all programs, except for Brazil and Honduras where fractions are significantly lower than 20%” (p. 519).

“concern with minimizing labor supply disincentives has dominated discussions on the optimal design of transfers” (p. 16).⁴⁷ Meager transfers mean that besides pinning much of CCTs’ “poverty reduction” hopes on future returns from human capital investments in children, there is an increasingly explicit expectation (explored in section two) that adult beneficiaries make use of financial tools such as credit, take calculated risks and invest in more productive activities to achieve sustained financial security. The CCT model is designed to encourage—indeed require—that beneficiaries take up market activities and tools in order to overcome poverty.

In addition to cash, *Oportunidades* beneficiaries receive nutritional supplements for any children under five and pregnant or lactating women, and information on a range of health issues during mandatory medical clinic visits and monthly meetings called *pláticas*. Nutritional supplements as well as mandatory schooling are both framed as “investments” in the human capital of children that will enable them be more productive workers in adulthood (Barrientos, 2012; de la Brière & Rawling, 2006; IADB, 2004). Whether or not these “investments” have any returns, however, appears to be entirely consistent with a logic of self-help in that the onus is on the individual to use his or her “increased capacities” to find a financially secure job. The focus on fostering self-reliance is especially explicit when it comes to the health components of *Oportunidades*. Both *pláticas* and medical visits, for example, emphasize building beneficiaries’ capacity for *autocuidado*, which literally translates to “self-care” (Diario Oficial, 2013, p. 3). This emphasis on *autocuidado*

⁴⁷ For examples of studies that examine CCTs effect on adult beneficiaries’ work efforts see: Parker & Skoufias, 2000; Skoufias & di Maro, 2006).

takes the form of instructing mothers in preventative health techniques such as proper hygienic or responsible family planning practices during check-ups and health talks (Bassett, 2008). One way that Mexican doctors have responded to overcrowding of clinics due to *Oportunidades* beneficiaries' mandatory check-ups is by "'intensifying' self-help training" (Escobar Latapí, 2002, p. 230).

The concept of "co-responsibilities"—which is virtually ubiquitous in CCT discourse—is especially indicative of CCTs' concern with fashioning self-reliant subjects. The relationship that CCTs forge between the state and a poor household is referred to as one of co-responsibilities in the sense that the state fulfills its responsibility to support poor citizens by providing (albeit nominal) support in the form of cash transfers, and in return poor mothers are to comply with program conditions concerning health, nutrition and education. CCT proponents are quite explicit about how reframing conditions as co-responsibilities can help downplay the paternalistic tendencies of CCTs by making it clear that the poor are in the driver-seat with regard to their self-improvement. Fiszbein and Schady (2009) for example argue that "[w]hen conditions are seen as co-responsibilities, they treat the recipient more as a 'grown-up,' capable of agency to resolve his or her own problems" (p. 62-63). The conditionalities of the programs are thus conceptualized as a kind of "social contract whereby society (through the state) supports those poor households that are ready to make the effort to 'improve their lives'" (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009, p. 60).

Poor people who enrol in CCT programs are described within official discourse as willing to help themselves by amending problematic behaviour, and thus as "deserving" of social assistance (Bassett, 2008, p. 11). While framing CCT beneficiaries as deserving has

helped garner political and financial support for the programs (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009, p. 60), it can also serve to institutionalize rather than challenge simplistic explanations of poverty that rest on stereotyping poor people as lazy or irresponsible. The way in which globalization, economic policies and historical structures of exclusion such as ethnicity have affected the distribution and intensity of poverty is almost entirely absent from the CCT diagnosis of poverty, which revolves around poor peoples' lack of information, lack of credit, incorrect beliefs, and/or myopia.

Designating CCT participants as deserving of social assistance also serves to tacitly label poor people who are unwilling to commit to the actions prescribed by the programs as “undeserving” of help. Besides undeserving, non-participants or participants that fail to fulfill their co-responsibilities are associated with the usual negative categories liberalism has used to motivate “undesirables” to the task of self-improvement: irrational, irresponsible, backwards etc.⁴⁸ There is also a decidedly gendered component to this phenomenon—explored further in section four—when for example women who do not comply with conditions are not only undeserving of social assistance, but they are also labeled “bad-mothers” (Molyneux, 2006; Smith-Oka, 2009, p. 2074). Paying attention to this sort of “tacit labeling” is crucial because it is one of the more subtle ways that CCTs govern the poor or, rather, motivate the poor to govern themselves.

There is an interesting articulation between freedom and self-help that frequently surfaces within CCT discourse. Indeed, one of the aspects of *Oportunidades* that supposedly

⁴⁸ For an example of how liberal morality has been used as both a technique and justification for intervening at the level of individual subjectivity, see Hopgood's (2000) analysis of human rights discourse and the assimilation of indigenous peoples in North America.

make it more legitimate than the universal food subsidies that it replaced is its “explicit commitment to give beneficiaries the freedom to choose how they [use] the transfers” (Levy, 2006; Fiszbein & Schady, 2009, p. 35). In terms of a market-friendly subjectivity, it is interesting to note that in this instance, the degree to which someone is free seems to correspond to one’s number of consumption choices. Although this “freedom” is somewhat circumscribed in practice—Escobar Latapí and González de la Rocha (2008) for example found that mothers are instructed to spend transfers on “the food, clothes, shoes and school costs of the child in whose name the benefit is made” (p. 441)—it is nevertheless implicated in a logic of self-reliance because the onus is on beneficiaries to transcend poverty by exercising their freedom “wisely.” The combination of program design features, co-responsibilities, tacit-labeling and expertise all work to encourage the poor parents to understand their freedom as the financial means to adhere to a particular conception of a responsible and rational parent as well as Mexican citizen.

This section has argued that a central aim of CCT programs is to make poor people understand their exit from poverty (or economic freedom) as only possible, through their own conscientious commitment to conduct themselves in a certain manner. In effect, the poor must direct both monetary and in-kind transfers towards becoming self-reliant—a possibility that is held out as available to anyone in a free-market economy with minimal financial resources, sound health and basic education provided they make rational decisions, take “smart” risks and work hard. Beyond the more coercive components of CCTs (e.g. the threat of removal from the program or social sanctions), this framing of poverty alleviation as a process of becoming self-reliant is an example of a productive application of

power: beneficiaries are “empowered” via transfers, access to information and in-kind benefits to adopt the kind of self-reliant and market-friendly subjectivity promoted by the program. The fostering of citizens who are able to “help-themselves” is an overarching goal of CCTs, but in order to make up for the financial shortfall resulting from small transfer amounts, beneficiaries are increasingly directed towards two very market-based solutions: financial inclusion and entrepreneurialism.

Financial subjects: Savers, investors and entrepreneurs

I’m convinced that creating a financial market is one of the best social development policies...Poor people can be very productive, but they can’t invest to expand their businesses and boost their income. ~Miguel Székely, Former Undersecretary of Social Development in Mexico⁴⁹

There is a growing interest in streamlining CCTs so that they facilitate financial inclusion and stimulate investment in riskier but potentially higher return activities.⁵⁰ A background paper for the World Bank’s *2012 Social Protection and Labor Strategy*, for example, advises that social programs targeted at the household level stimulate “entrepreneurial activities [among beneficiaries] by reducing the cost of downside [sec] risk” (Alderman & Yemtsov, 2012, p. 4). The same paper suggests that CCTs in specific look for ways to “[introduce] linkages with other financial services” (p. 20). The Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest (CGAP)—a Washington-based think tank dedicated to promoting financial inclusion among the poor—has also taken a keen interest in finding ways to link CCT graduates with microfinance programs.⁵¹ One report for example, asserts

⁴⁹ See IADB (2004, p. 10).

⁵⁰ See for example: Treviño Garza (2011); Gertler, Martinez and Rubio-Codina (2012); Pickens, Porteous and Rotman (2009); and Zimmerman and Moury (2009).

⁵¹ CGAP has close ideological and financial ties with the World Bank. For an overview see Roy (2010, p. 45).

that “[t]he time is ripe” to explore linking G2P [Government to Person] recipients into the banking sector (Pickens et al., 2009, p. 18). Another CGAP-sponsored focus note, suggests that safety net programs could collaborate with microfinance institutions by sharing “information about participants’ behaviour” to help establish their credit (un)worthiness (Hashemi & Rosenberg, 2006, p. 3). How has *Oportunidades* sought to promote financial inclusion among beneficiaries? And how has this push to familiarize beneficiaries with everyday banking practices been rationalized?

CCTs are touted for their ability to reduce poor peoples’ vulnerability to economic shocks such as prices hikes or unanticipated reductions in household income (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009, p. 48). Theorists argue that CCTs can protect human capital investments in the face of shocks; they note that poor parents often turn to inefficient coping strategies when hit by shocks—such as removing children from school and cutting food consumption—which can have irreversible long-term effects on children’s future income-earning potential (Fiszbein, Ringold & Srinivasan, 2011). While the above articulation of CCTs is in itself steeped in market-compatible language of “investment,” “asset protection” and “(human) capital,” what is particularly fascinating relative to the issue of subjectivity is what CCT theorists hope reduced vulnerability will encourage beneficiaries to do in times of relative stability: save and/or invest in more productive activities.

Consistent with a rethinking of poverty in terms of risk and vulnerability that has animated mainstream development policy debates in recent years (Best, 2013), CCT proponents are increasingly interested in how transfers might alleviate beneficiaries’ “perception of vulnerability” so that they are willing to “bear more risk and perhaps save

and invest in new projects” (Levy, 2006, p. 12). Gertler et al. (2012) study indicates that this is indeed happening in Mexico, with beneficiaries investing an average of 26 percent of every peso transferred in productive activities. This is perhaps unsurprising given the fact that minimal benefits means *Oportunidades* beneficiaries are faced with few (if any) options to attain financial security apart from taking risks on the market. In order to take risks on the market however, some level of savings or assets is required.

Savings and asset accumulation among the poor is increasingly encouraged and facilitated through a number of CCT programs’ linkages with banks. De la Brière and Rawling (2006) note, “CCTs have been at the forefront of adopting new payment technologies to reach out to populations, many of whom had not participated previously in the financial sector” (p. 12). In the case of *Oportunidades*, an increasing number of beneficiaries are receiving transfer payments via prepaid cards linked to a BANSEFI (National Bank for Savings and Financial Services) account or through direct deposits into BANSEFI, TELECOMM (Telecommunications Mexico) or BANCOMBER (Bank of Commerce)—a private institution—savings accounts as opposed to cash-filled envelopes (CGAP, 2011, p. 11).⁵² While the majority of *Oportunidades* households still receive transfers via direct cash payments, this is likely to change in upcoming years thanks to a decree by the Ministry of Finance that all government payments (including CCTs) be dispensed via direct deposits into payees’ bank accounts starting in December 2012 (CGAP, 2011, p. 10).

⁵² As of December 2010, 66.12 percent of *Oportunidades* households received cash grants, 11.6 percent used prepaid cards linked to an account with BANSEFI, and 16.48 had their grants directly deposited into a BANSEFI savings account (CGAP, 2011, p. 11). I was unable to find a statistic on how many beneficiaries’ grants are linked to BANCOMER accounts, though a least one source states that BANCOMER accounts are currently limited to some urban zones and pilot projects (Calderón Colín, 2012, p. 61).

Miguel Székely notes that as women became more comfortable with receiving payments in bank accounts, they started saving some of the transfer in their accounts (IADB, 2004). While Székely's account gives the impression that mothers started saving on their own accord once they had a bank account, Luccisano's (2006) fieldwork suggests that there is more to the story. She found that when mothers came to pick up transfers from banking institutions they were actively "encouraged" by banking officials "to act as real clients and engage in practices of accumulation and savings" (p. 65). She also found that some mothers only save because they (mistakenly) believe that saving is another condition that they must fulfill to remain in the program.

Oportunidades promotes savings and asset accumulation among the children of beneficiaries through a sub-program called *Jóvenes con Oportunidades*. Introduced in 2003, this program allows poor children to receive points for each level of schooling they complete beginning in ninth grade. These points are converted into pesos upon graduation and deposited in a BANSEFI account opened under the name of the graduate (Luccisano, 2006). The graduate can then access these funds provided he or she uses them for one of the following options: (1) increasing their human capital through university or technical school; (2) securing a loan to start a business; (3) buying health insurance; (4) making a down payment on a house or home renovations; or (5) withdrawing the money to use however he or she chooses, but only after two years have elapsed (Luccisano, 2006, p. 71). All of these choices are notably geared towards "asset accumulation"—(in the form of human, physical and/or monetary capital—something that in the words of Miguel Székely will give these graduates something they have never had: "an option to climb to another

level” (IADB, 2004, p. 8). However Luccisano (2006) rightly points out that making it to “another level” is very much tied to whether or not graduates can successfully “participate in the market” (p. 71).

Besides promoting saving and asset accumulation, switching to electronic payments and encouraging beneficiaries to use bank accounts helps familiarize the poor with other everyday banking practices such as using ATM machines, interacting with bank tellers, depositing/withdrawing money and—crucially—accessing credit. As Székely extolled the virtues of linking *Oportunidades* beneficiaries to financial markets in his interview with the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), two of his quotes particularly stand out: “We aren’t talking about loans now, but this is what’s started to happen” and “[t]he next step is to link them to microcredit so their savings may become productive” (IADB, 2004, p. 9-10). Taking out a loan is presented as a logical—indeed necessary—step to being able to access the full-spectrum of opportunities that the market has to offer, and leave poverty behind permanently. Thus, poor people engaging in entrepreneurial activities becomes the hoped for outcome of efforts to combat risk aversion and promote financial inclusion.

Inculcating rationality

[A]gents do not always behave exactly as one would expect a fully informed, rational agents to behave. ~ (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009, p. 50)

The above quotation raises two important questions: what constitutes “rational” behaviour and how do CCTs attempt to cultivate rational subjects? To shed light on these two questions, I begin by discussing the conception of rationality underpinning the “cash” and “conditional” components of CCTs programs. Although rational conduct tends—as the

opening quotation illustrates—to be articulated within CCT discourse as an uncontested or commonsense concept, I argue that it privileges the Western and market-oriented values of efficiency and productivity over alternative notions of value.

The cash component of CCTs fits comfortably within a market-compatible discourse that assumes that under conditions of perfect information, “individuals make rational decisions to maximize their own well being taking into consideration benefits and costs associated with each decision” (Bassett, 2008, p. 10). Based on this liberal economic assumption, proponents reason that injecting cash into households will alter recipients’ “decision-making calculus” in a way that aligns with the desired outcomes of the policy intervention (Bassett, 2008, p. 10). In other words, it is assumed that parents would—under conditions of perfect information—*naturally* send their children to school, utilize modern health facilities and medications, and pursue more productive/efficient income earning activities because they now have the financial wherewithal to do so, and these practices are (presumably) a top priority to any “rational” individual. The notion of giving the poor cash as opposed to, say, subsidizing tortillas, is thus very much congruent with a central tenet of liberal economics and governance: individuals (not states) are the best judges of what is in their best interest. But how do proponents square the ontological assumption that all individuals are naturally rational self-maximizers with the conditional components of CCTs?

CCT theorists go to such great lengths to justify imposing conditions on people’s behaviour precisely because it seems to violate the above precept. Indeed, Fiszbein and Schady (2009) devote an entire chapter of their World Bank report to clarifying the conceptual arguments underpinning conditions because it is such an “unorthodox approach

for economists” (p. 8). One of the most frequently cited justifications for conditions revolves around “market failures”—the notion that insufficient information or allocation of certain goods and services prevent markets from functioning as effectively and efficiently as they otherwise would. Fiszbein and Schady (2009) for example contend that poor parents’ low-levels of education—interpreted to be the result of the market’s failure to efficiently allocate information—may inhibit their ability to perform cost-benefit calculations and thus limit their ability to grasp the “rates of return” to a formal education in the same way as an educated (read rational) person. Viewed through the lens of “market failure,” people’s supposed irrationalities are boiled down to a “technical” problem with the market’s allocation of resources. This narrative conveniently sidesteps alternative—and less politically palatable—explanations for “irrational” conduct that might revolve around moral or cultural shortcomings.

CCT discourse provides a new “technically rigorous” narrative with which poor people can make sense of their impoverished situation and, crucially, themselves. The CCT narrative is rendered “technical” as a result of built-in evaluation systems and an imposing amount of “sound, empirically based evidence” confirming that CCTs achieve their core goals of improving health, nutrition and education levels among children (Rawlings, 2004, p. 8). The claim to expertise and objectivity that accompanies technical rigor works to depoliticize or naturalize the entire CCT enterprise, including the conception of rationality contained therein. The programs thus foster a rational behaviour not only via the more coercive threat of removal from the program for failure to comply with conditions, but by

articulating a supposedly objective poverty-alleviation discourse through which the poor can understand themselves and the world in which they live.

I argue that CCT theorists' understanding of rationality rests more on a set of normative judgments about the appropriate way to live one's life than objective facts about the human condition. Productivity and efficiency seem to be the chief measuring sticks against which (ir)rational and, more implicitly, (im)moral behaviour can be gauged and behavioural policy interventions justified. For example, if parents are informed about the "human capital" benefits of sending their children to school and still choose to keep them at home, then conditions can be justified in the name of the future productivity prospects of the child and society at large (i.e. Das, Do & Özler, 2005; Fiszbein & Schady, 2009). There is an interesting and complex intersection between the liberal normative value of universal basic schooling and liberal economic fixation with growth: not sending children to school is not only poor parenting, but it also jeopardizes the economic growth prospects of the nation. Basic health and nutrition interventions are also framed as both "intrinsic rights" and instrumentally valuable in that they promote labour productivity, efficiency and economic growth. Fiszbein and Schady (2009) argue, for example, that "[p]roviding all citizens with an equality of opportunities, if not of outcomes, is an important policy goal" and that "a reduction in child work is often seen as a good in its own right" (i.e. equality of opportunities and educating children have intrinsic importance) (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009, p. 114, 163). On the more instrumental side, Niño-Zarazúa (2010) argues that "improvements in education, health and nutrition, plays a central role in enhancing people's capacity to produce, interact with their peers and integrate into society" (p. 8).

I think it is not an exaggeration to argue that the logic of CCTs, whether intended or not, may drive a bit of an intergenerational “wedge” between parents and children in a way that has echoes of the experience of Native Americans and residential schools.⁵³ Santiago Levy for example argues that the migration of *Oportunidades* graduates away from their communities in pursuit of more “productive” options abroad or in urban areas ought to be viewed as a positive effect of the program (Levy, 2006, p. 74). Likewise, the ubiquitous assumption—found in both CCT and the broader development literature—that formal schooling is the “best” education does not acknowledge the extent to what is often (dismissively) classified as “informal” learning is valued in different cultures. On this point, it is useful to quote Higgins (2004) at some length:

Traditional self understandings of the Tzotzil and Tzeltal Maya Indians who live in the highlands of Chiapas have long placed a social and cultural emphasis on agricultural labor. One example of this is the Maya belief that education is best understood as the slow acquisition of the soul. Such an education is not, however to be found in the traditional locations of Western learning, the schoolroom or the university lecture hall; rather the soul of a Maya Indian attains true maturity only through the careful tending of a corn field (p. 130).

Interestingly, at least two recent studies of the long-term effects of *Oportunidades* have noted (and viewed in a positive light) a shift away from agricultural-work towards either self-employment (micro-entrepreneurs) or other non-farm wage-based employment among program graduates (Behrman, Parker & Todd, 2011; Winters & Chiodi, 2011). Some parents’ reluctance to send children to public schools might very well be parents behaving

⁵³ See Hopgood (2000) for an account of how education played a key role in encouraging indigenous children in the United States to reject the cultural traditions of their parents. Also on the subject of *Oportunidades* as a technology of indigenous assimilation, see Macías (2012).

“myopically”—as Das, Do and Özler (2004) seem to suggest⁵⁴—but it might also be a reflection of different cultural conceptions of what constitutes “important” knowledge or “rational” parenting practices.

One thing that is quite clear after surveying *Oportunidades* discourse is that the sort of rational subject promoted by the program is most certainly not a subsistence farmer—there appears to be no room for such an economically inefficient subjectivity in the “modern” and “developed” Mexico envisaged by *Oportunidades* proponents. The possibility that rural poor are “induced to cling to small parcels of land or traditional farming methods” because of cultural and spiritual reasons and not—as Levy’s (2006, p. 11) account suggests—purely because they lack the capital to pursue more productive activities, is absent from the model of rationality underpinning CCTs. The kind of rational subject promoted by *Oportunidades* understands his or her relationship to the land in purely monetary terms, free from any kind of cultural or spiritual obligations that might interfere with economic efficiency.

A final example of *Oportunidades* linking a traditional practice to an economic rationality involves *faenas* or *tequio* among some indigenous groups (Luccisano, 2006, p. 77). *Faenas* refer to the practice in rural Mexico of sharing community tasks such as the sweeping of streets and the cleaning of schools. These tasks were once done on a voluntary basis, but since the implementation of *Oportunidades*, the performance of *faenas* has become tied to monetary compensation. Studies by Adato (2000) and Adato, Coady and

⁵⁴ Das, Do and Özler (2004) cite Kochar’s (2000a) and (2000b) studies —that found that rural parents under invest in children’s schooling as a way of preventing them from migrating to urban areas—as empirical evidence of myopic behaviour on the part of poor parents.

Ruel (2000b) for example, found that community members who were ineligible for *Oportunidades* were at times unwilling to help with *faenas* because they felt that they ought to receive monetary compensation like program beneficiaries. While participation in *faenas* is not a formal (i.e. sanctionable) co-responsibility, many beneficiaries believe that it is. This might have to do with the fact that the doctors and teachers at the schools and clinics being cleaned under *faenas* are the ones signing off on forms confirming that beneficiaries are complying with program conditions (Smith-Oka, 2009).

The empowered woman

Greater control over household resources by women lead to more investment in children's human capital with dynamic positive effects on economic growth.⁵⁵

The final subject position that I investigate is that of the empowered women. This subject position is unique in that unlike the others explored thus far, "empowering women" is *not* an explicitly stated aim of the majority of CCT programs including *Oportunidades* (Macías, 2012). Nevertheless, development experts and program officials alike frequently point to CCTs as an example of a "gender-sensitive" social policy (Molyneux, 2008a).⁵⁶ The 2012 World Development Report (WDR) *Gender Equality and Development*, for instance frequently highlights the programs in the context of supporting the report's overall thesis that there is a mutually affirmative relationship between gender equality and economic development (World Bank, 2011). Other development bodies, such as the United Nations' Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), have been less

⁵⁵ See World Bank (2011, p. 5).

⁵⁶ In a World Bank Social Policy Discussion paper, De la Brière and Rawlings (2006) go as far as to suggest that "[p]erhaps more than any other type of social programs, CCTs have incorporated gender dimensions into their operations as a strategy for promoting higher investments in children's human capital and redressing the legacies of gender-based discrimination" (p. 17).

ambiguous in linking CCTs to female empowerment, with one report definitively stating that channeling resources through mothers and female heads of household “has empowered [these women] and increased their self-confidence” (ECLAC, 2004, p. 55). Levy (2006) also states that women *Oportunidades* beneficiaries “sensed a new empowerment in not having to ask their husbands for money” (p. 71). Clearly CCTs and some form of female empowerment (however vaguely-defined) are associated with one another despite the latter not being an explicit goal of the programs. In what follows, I examine the four techniques and practices by which women are purportedly empowered by the CCT model, and show how the gendered components of the subjectivities advanced by *Oportunidades* tend to be geared more towards facilitating economic growth than challenging deep-seated gender inequalities.

The first explicitly gendered component of CCTs is the practice of entrusting women with the management of cash and in-kind transfers, and the responsibility for ensuring that the family fulfills co-responsibilities regarding health and education to beneficiary mothers. CCT theorists identify a number of potentially empowering side effects for mothers as a result of this payment-responsibility arrangement including: increased bargaining power within the household *vis-à-vis* husbands, confidence, self-esteem, neighbourhood visibility and health awareness (Adato, de la Brière, Mindek & Quisumbing, 2000a; Adato, Coady & Ruel, 2000b; Escobar Latapí & González de la Rocha, 2008; Levy, 2006). While qualitative research confirms that some beneficiary women have indeed felt empowered by the above scheme, it is important to note that the rationale for channeling resources through mothers does not hinge on “empowering women” but rather on the neoliberal values of cost-

effectiveness and efficiency (Bradshaw, 2008; Molyneux, 2006). Proponents, for instance, justify giving funds to women based on a large body of evidence that mothers are more reliable than fathers when it comes to investing in the human capital of their children—and not because this particular design feature empowers housewives.⁵⁷

Critical feminists note that the version of empowerment for mothers offered by CCTs is tied to strengthening mothers' capability (both financially and knowledge-wise) to perform tasks traditionally considered to be maternal (Bradshaw, 2008; Molyneux, 2008a; Tabbush, 2010). In other words empowered woman promoted by CCT discourse is child rather than women-centred, and as such tends to reinforce rather than challenges gender asymmetries surrounding the division of labour within the household.

The second gender-sensitive design feature that characterizes *Oportunidades* centres on maternal health. Pregnant and lactating mothers receive nutritional supplements and are required to attend regular health check-ups. Interestingly, just as transfers are given to mothers in order to ensure that benefits are invested in children, the emphasis on maternal health is equally as child-centred: mothers receive nutritional supplements and additional medical attention only when they are “incubating” or “nourishing” children.⁵⁸ The kind of empowered female subjectivity being constructed in this scenario is very much tied, as Tabbush (2010) observes, to raising their children to be healthy and educated enough to be productive members of society later in life.

⁵⁷ Some of the empirical literature on women's greater propensity to invest in their children includes: Thomas (1990); and Quisumbing & Maluccio (2000)

⁵⁸ Mothers are still required to attend health clinics when they are not pregnant, but the nutritional supplement ceases once they are no longer pregnant or breastfeeding.

The third gender-sensitive practice of *Oportunidades* is the requirement that mother beneficiaries elect three among them to serve as program *vocales* (formerly called *promotoras*). *Vocales* essentially act as liaisons between mothers and program officials (Luccisano, 2006). While Adato *et al.* (2000a) found that these women felt especially empowered by virtue of increased status in the community, movement outside the household, and experience organizing *pláticas* and the pick-up of transfers, Escobar Latapí (2002) points out that the *vocales* were not offered any kind of remuneration despite a the significant added workload that the position entails. Any of the empowering effects of the *vocale* position are, like the channeling of resources through women, secondary to concerns with program cost-effectiveness and efficiency.

A final gender-sensitive *Oportunidades* practice is the provision of a slightly larger monetary incentive for girls to attend secondary school than boys. *Oportunidades* incorporated this design feature in an effort to response to high secondary school dropout rates among girls as a result of, among other things, gender biases favoring male education, early marriages and teen pregnancies. There is little doubt in the literature that *Oportunidades* has successfully increased school enrolment rates among children and girls in particular; however, it is interesting that schooling for these girls is framed as an investment in their future productivity as workers.

On the one hand, the program (re)constructs these girls' mothers as primarily responsible for social reproductive duties by virtue of a gendered (but naturalized) division of household labour, while on the other hand it envisions young women as future workers. This is the reason that I described the subject category that *Oportunidades* promotes

among women and girls as aimed at cultivating female subjects whom are both socially and economically (re)productive: girls are constructed as future workers, while their mothers are cast as primary care-givers in the household. If this unequal division of labour within the household is not challenged, daughters may well end up sharing the same fate as many of their mothers: a double expectation that they generate income and do the lion's share of social reproductive work.

The cultivation of market-conducive subjects

All of the above subject positions are linked to a market-centred approach to overcoming poverty: emphasizing individualism over collectivism (self-reliance); promoting the use of formal banking tools such as credit (financial subjects); encouraging a decision-making calculus driven by concerns for economic efficiency (or rationality); and advancing a conception of female empowerment that rests on engaging in market-based activities and the wherewithal to be a "good" mother to future workers (economically and socially (re)productive).

The techniques and practices by which these various subject positions are promoted amongst beneficiaries rely not only on more traditional coercive forms of power, but also appeal to other less direct forms of power. Co-responsibilities are a clear example of a more coercive and top-down technique for making beneficiaries conform to the model of rationality and responsible motherhood underscoring *Oportunidades*. Mothers that fail to fulfill their co-responsibilities face the very real threat of removal from the program. The other forms of power at work, however, are much more subtle and diffuse. One form that I

discussed earlier is tacit labeling: a poor woman, for example, might feel compelled to stay enrolled in *Oportunidades* despite the extra burden that complying with co-responsibilities places on her time for fear of being deemed a “bad” or “irresponsible” mother among peers. In this instance, the woman is compelled to adopt the model of responsible motherhood promoted by the program not because of direct threats from SEDESOL officials, but for fear of more indirect social sanctions. This dispersal of the responsibility for overseeing the cultivation of *Oportunidades* subject positions to multiple actors besides government officials is another reoccurring theme. For instance, a range of people such as program officials, health officials, bankers, teachers, *vocales* and beneficiaries themselves are involved in overseeing that the model of responsible agency promoted by *Oportunidades* is conformed to and normalized. Finally, power in this instance is not only diffuse, it is also productive in the sense that not only does *Oportunidades* constrain subjects, but it also *enables* them—with cash, nutritional supplements and information at *pláticas*—to become the rational self-maximizing individual that can (presumably) chose to be un-poor in a market-based economy.

To sum up, my analysis of the discourse and practice of *Oportunidades* demonstrates that the program attempts to cultivate subjectivities that are consistent with the kind of subject required in a market economy. A self-help subjectivity is promoted by structuring the program around individual households rather than communities, keeping transfer amounts to a minimum, encouraging preventative health practices (*autocuidado*), and linking “returns” to human capital investments to beneficiaries’ active pursuit of more productive opportunities. One way that beneficiaries are encouraged to increase their

income is by taking smart risks and investing in higher return activities—i.e. engaging in entrepreneurial activities. To assist beneficiaries in becoming entrepreneurs, *Oportunidades* increasingly familiarizes beneficiaries with basic banking practices and connects them with microfinance programs. The program also emphasizes a rational subjectivity by ignoring or delegitimizing subject positions that are at odds with profit maximization. Finally, I argue that *Oportunidades* attempts to cultivate empowered female subjects, but it couches this subjectivity in very instrumental terms (e.g. reducing program costs), and normalizes unequal gendered divisions of labour within the household.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Thus far, my thesis has sought to answer the following questions: What major shifts in mainstream development thinking—particularly with regards to poverty reduction—accompanied the emergence and worldwide diffusion conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs? What kinds of (gendered) subjectivities do CCTs aim to cultivate, and through what techniques and practices? Chapter 2 showed how the emergence and popularization of CCT programs coincided with a deepening concern on the part of the World Bank and other international development actors with the social and micro-level factors affecting economic growth and incidences of poverty. I also highlighted the parallels between the radical reorientation of Mexico’s economic and social policy throughout the 1980s and 1990s and the policy recommendations of the Bank during this same period. Chapter 3 contended that *Oportunidades* (and similarly designed programs) attempt to (re)constitute program beneficiaries in ways that are consistent with market imperatives. The crux of my argument was that *Oportunidades*—through a range of gendered techniques and practices—aims to construct the kind of rational market participant (*homo economicus*) that liberal economics has long posited to be the “natural” (and thus apolitical) subjectivity of all human beings. This final chapter turns to the last of my research questions posed in Chapter 1: What do my research findings suggest about how anti-poverty policy is evolving in Mexico and in the “post Washington Consensus” era more broadly, and what are some potential implications?

It is important to acknowledge that just because I have argued that CCTs promote various subjectivities, does not mean that I am implying that program beneficiaries readily adopt these subject categories. Nor is it to say that the subjectivities and rationalizations underpinning *Oportunidades* are completely unified and coherent. There are some notable instances of resistance to or even subversion of the subjectivities prescribed by *Oportunidades*, as well as tensions among various CCT logics. Examples of resistance to *Oportunidades* emphasis on individualism and self-help include women using *pláticas* to organize politically and raising funds among themselves assist in covering *vocales* travel costs (Escobar Latapí & González de la Rocha, 2008). An example of a tension includes the program's casting women as both workers and primary caregivers—an act that could actually work against attempts to foster a better home life for children. Bradshaw and Víquez (2008) also note that women have had to give up income generating activities in order to have enough time to fulfill their co-responsibilities—which is clearly at odds with conceptualizations of empowerment that rest on women accessing wage-labour.

What has changed?

The conceptualization of poverty underpinning CCT programs is quite different than that which informed the Bank's approaches to poverty prior to the mid-1990s. Whereas the persistence of poverty was once understood to be the direct result of low national growth rates due to "incorrect" (i.e. not liberal) macroeconomic policies, CCTs approach poverty from the standpoint that poverty stems from a lack of individual capacity and capabilities. While it is true that the more direct anti-poverty policy interventions initiated under Robert

McNamara during the 1970s shared CCTs' preoccupation with upping productivity levels among the poor by increasing their human capital, there is, I believe, an important distinction between the two. The "Redistribution with Growth" strategy purposed to increase productivity levels among the rural poor by (for the most part) strengthening the supply side of services (i.e. building health clinics, schools and roads) (Ayers, 1984, p. 98).⁵⁹ It was assumed that the poor would make use of these services as part of their "natural" propensity to maximize their self-interest. CCTs, in contrast, focus on increasing human capital among the poor by *stimulating demand* for services. The crucial difference between supply-side and demand-side interventions is that the former emphasize the role of unequal access to services in sustaining poverty, while the latter moves the emphasis to the role of (problematic) social norms, behaviours and beliefs—demand-side interventions are inherently *agent-centred*.

This agent-centre approach to poverty alleviation is also an innovation in the Mexican context. *Oportunidades* appears to be the culmination of nearly two decades of aggressive economic and social restructuring, and differs from past practices in four key ways. Firstly, benefits are mathematically targeted to only those in extreme poverty. This is quite a contrast from the universal food subsidy programs and other supply-side interventions that once dominated the Mexican anti-poverty scene. Secondly, *Oportunidades* targets individual households rather than whole communities or neighbourhoods. Thirdly, it frames program beneficiaries not as citizens with inherent social

⁵⁹ Credit to small-scale farmers to purchase inputs was part of the McNamara approach (demand-side), but from Ayers's (1984) account, it does not appear that the provision of credit was strictly conditioned on farmers using the funds to purchase productive inputs.

rights, but as potential market participants whose exit from poverty is ultimately contingent on them using their newfound human capital to secure productive employment. Fourthly, *Oportunidades* emphasizes the redistribution of opportunities and choice more so than income. Targeting transfers at the poorest of the poor alleviates “extreme deprivation,” while the human capital components of the program (ostensibly) levels the playing field for finding employment. This incorporation of the potentially radical goal of equality into the dominant rationality of the market has a long history in the Global North; however, in the case of Mexico, this is radical departure from past discourse on equality, which strongly emphasized income and land redistribution (Luccisano, 2006).

Market-driven economic growth continues to be at the centre of this new agent-centred approach; however, my analysis suggests that it would be a mistake to view the “quiet revolution” as merely 1980s-style structural adjustment on a micro-scale. To begin, power in the structural adjustment approach was much more centrally concentrated than, if CCTs are any indication, the way that it seems to operate through the new pro-poor framework. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)—with their control over much-needed loans—were the very visible faces of structural adjustment, and were thus the targets of much protest and critique when economic reforms failed to deliver. CCTs are, as Teichman (2007) and Peck and Theodore (2010) show, no less attached to Bank ideas about how to best address poverty than were structural adjustment loans, yet the institution has a much less visible presence. The responsibility for measuring, monitoring and securing program goals is not the sole purview of the Bank, but includes a mixture of both private and public actors, and local, national and international institutions, and, of

course, individual participants themselves. Neo-Gramscians and governmentality studies are thus particularly suited to an analysis of how power operates in the CCT model, since they both insist that a more complete analysis of power requires that one look beyond the traditional focus on the state apparatus.

CCTs also suggest that power under the new framework operates not only coercively, but also productively. Unlike the supply-side interventions of the McNamara years or the structural adjustment loans of the 1980s, CCTs strive to actively create or enable the kind of rational, self-maximizing individual required by a market-driven economy. This is consistent with governmental forms of power, which Foucault distinguishes from coercive forms in that they seek to govern behaviour by linking individuals' pursuit of freedom with the broader goals of government. Such governmental forms of power are, however, still highly exclusionary as I demonstrated in Chapter 3 with the example of how the subjectivities associated with subsistence farmer or being Mayan are delegitimized and marginalized through various practices and techniques.

Implications

Perhaps one of the most obvious consequences of directing anti-poverty efforts towards the modification of individual behaviour is that structural factors affecting poverty such as ethnicity, class, gender and the structure of global capitalist economy tend to be downplayed (or entirely absent) from both the CCT diagnosis and treatment of poverty. The "blame" for poverty in the CCT model is (implicitly) displaced onto poor people rather than the institutional and political arrangements in which they find themselves. This displacing of

blame, moreover, may help immunize the programs from failure because if a CCT graduate is unsuccessful in transcending poverty, then by the programs' own foundational assumptions about the causes of poverty, it is because (rhetorically) that particular individual failed to conform to the model of responsible agency promoted by the program. In short, it can be assumed that the individual in question "failed" to exercise his or her "freedom" of choice responsibly, and is thus *deserving* of impoverishment. That this freedom might be constrained in anyway, once program beneficiaries' basic needs are attended to by transfers, is largely ignored.

In the above scenario, the liberal assumption that the market is self-regulating and thus capable of generating employment for all who wish to work is preserved. One major consequence of this particular line of thinking is that instead of viewing under- and unemployment as a collective problem and/or a sign of failed economic and social policy, it is interpreted as a failure of individual conduct on a massive scale, thus legitimizing further application of agent-centred interventions. This appears to be what has happened in Mexico, where the past decade has seen increased funding for human capital-focused programs while budgets for programs aimed at generating employment have tended to suffer (Randall, 2006; Tetreault, 2012). Indeed, the current Mexican government locates *Oportunidades* within a broader anti-poverty strategy called *Vivir Mejor* (Live Better); however, as of 2008 employment programs accounted for a mere 1.5 percent of *Vivir Mejor's* budget (Tetreault, 2012, p. 39-40).

This is happening despite that fact that Mexican economy has chronically struggled to generate enough jobs, which in turn has helped fuel large-scale migration of Mexicans to

the United States (Moreno-Brid et al., 2009, p. 162).⁶⁰ While it is still too early to tell whether children enrolled in *Oportunidades* from infancy will find sustainable jobs in adulthood, studies of the first generation of *Oportunidades* graduates have not been very encouraging. Winters and Chiodi (2011), for example, conclude that “[p]utting *Oportunidades* in place without complementary policies to promote rural income generation is unlikely to promote rural development and may in fact lead to increased out-migration, especially from more remote areas” (p. 536). Rodríguez-Oreggia and Freije (2010) drew similar conclusions: “despite well documented effects on human capital accumulation of the beneficiaries, labor prospects in the localities under the program remain sparse” (p. 1). If the gap between actual experience and the promises of the new poverty agenda—namely, that the market will provide jobs for anyone with basic human capital and a rational decision-making calculus—grows too wide, this could be fertile ground for what Gramscians call a counter-hegemonic project.

These emerging long-term studies also might provide a way of breaking apart or at least challenging the policy-results circuit that I argue currently characterizes much of the literature on CCTs. For example, if *Oportunidades* (and CCTs in general) are improving health and education indicators, but failing to improve final income outcomes, it could be taken as a sign that governments need to take more interventionist actions (as opposed to just relying on the invisible hand) in order to increase the supply and quality of jobs. Alternatively, it could be interpreted as an indication that poor people’s subjectivity is still

⁶⁰ Moreno-Brid et al. (2009) estimate that over 400 000 Mexicans annually migrate to the United States.

problematic, and thus authorize more thoroughgoing efforts to reform problematic subjectivities.

At the moment, *Oportunidades*'s gender perspective seems to be driven more by concerns with program efficiency than breaking down deep-seated structures of gender inequality. As several feminist studies of CCT programs have observed, giving funds to mothers conditional on their performance of tasks traditionally identified with motherhood actually reinforces rather than challenges the unequal (gendered) division of labour that prevails in most households (Razavi, 2008). Given the fact that Mexican mothers—(and indeed mothers worldwide)—constitute a growing percentage of the active work force (Bayon et al., 2002; Razavi, 2008), one potential consequence of leaving gender biases within the household undisturbed is to place a double burden on women. Also, CCTs' linking of responsible agency to individuals who are economically productive and independent does little to raise the profile of long under-valued social reproduction activities, and, by extension, the people (namely women) that perform them.

Concluding remarks

In sum, my analysis of CCTs suggests that the World Bank's new poverty agenda is best understood as a restructuring of the old structural adjustment framework, rather than a clean break with it. I have argued that a major outcome of the mid-1990s development legitimacy crisis was the proliferation of concepts and programs linked to creating the micro-sociological conditions in which the poor could participate in economic growth. I have also demonstrated how key aspects of the new poverty agenda—particularly the

emphasis on the role of individual behaviour in sustaining poverty—influenced the direction of Mexican anti-poverty policy, eventually culminating in *Oportunidades*. Finally, I argued that the kinds of subjectivities that CCTs attempt to cultivate amongst beneficiaries are consistent with the liberal economic figure of *homo economicus*.

CCTs are only one kind of anti-poverty policy, but their geographic, demographic and financial scope, as well as the level of support that they currently enjoy among development banks and donors suggests that they form an important part of the new pro-poor policy framework crystallizing since the legitimacy crisis. This is certainly true in the case of Mexico, where *Oportunidades* continues to be the centrepiece of that country's efforts to tackle poverty and income inequality. If the World Bank's *2012-2022 Social Protection and Labor Strategy* is any indication, CCTs and other micro-level programs aimed at inculcating a kind of responsible subject, capable of effectively managing his or her affairs in a market-based world, will comprise an increasingly prominent part of international and national efforts to combat poverty.

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