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MJF-7

THE AMERICAS

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## Proving the World Bank's Gender Division Wrong: A Working-Class, Argentine House- Husband Bucks All the Stereotypes

"[Regarding gender equality,] I think a lot of scholars and activists started out talking about only women and then actually saw—from the perspective of the success or failure in real world attempts to change things—that you can't deal with just women in isolation. The idea of change in a system means that both women and men have to change for there to be a real difference."

—Judith Helzner, International Planned Parenthood Federation, Western Hemisphere Region, quoted in *Mainstreaming Men into Gender and Development* by Sylvia Chant and Matthew Gutmann (2000)

"Studies reveal that when women from two-parent homes enter the paid work force during economic crises, the [total] hours spent on domestic work decrease... This reveals that men are not taking responsibility when they become unemployed and their women leave the home to work."

—*Las relaciones de género en la Argentina: Un panorama sectorial*, World Bank: Gender Team, Latin America and Caribbean Region (1999)

By Martha Farmelo

MARCH 20, 2002

**BUENOS AIRES, Argentina**—*Argentina is deep into its fourth year of a severe economic recession that has had dramatic effects on marriages and gender roles. In MJF-5 (Gender and Economic Crisis: Exploring Unemployment, Families and Pain in Buenos Aires), I described the fallout of prolonged joblessness experienced by a 60-year-old, middle-class Argentine couple, Victoria and Martín, who ended up emigrating to Spain just last night. This newsletter conveys the story of a working-class woman, Ester Velázquez, and José Luis Mendoza, her common-law husband. In response to chronic unemployment, José Luis has broken numerous machista stereotypes and become what in the U.S. one would call a full-fledged "house-husband"—and a fine one, at that.*



José Luis Mendoza and his youngest son, Hugo.

*The hours I have spent reflecting on José Luis have moved me away from thinking about men as a generic, abstract, monolithic category to understanding the role actual individuals play in changing gender dynamics. His story also reminds me of the immense diversity of men's experiences and how they relate to variables*

such as class, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality and personality.

It is 6:00 p.m. on a hectic Tuesday. I have just walked through the thick, wooden door of her apartment and a boisterous four-year-old with big brown eyes named Casandra is yanking downward on my pant-leg. She wants to show me an elaborate colored-pencil drawing I am to take home to my son, her pre-school classmate. I stroke her satiny dark ponytail but am distracted, busy coveting her mother's small but newly remodeled kitchen with its black-and-white marble counters, maroon-and-gray tiled walls and shiny new appliances. Meanwhile, their housekeeper Ester has arrived just before me, rolled up her light-blue, cotton sleeves and is washing their dirty breakfast dishes and starting dinner.

Ester has eight children and cleans houses five days a week. Her partner, José Luis, is unemployed, with the exception of occasional half-day jobs. Time after time since arriving in Argentina, I have heard about women working overtime while their husbands or partners are virtually idle. Government officials estimate unemployment at 22 percent and rising, and underemployment (part-time work, even one hour a week, for those seeking full-time employment) at another 22 percent. Yet more and more women are seeking, and seem to be finding, just enough work to barely sustain their families.

I want to learn more about this labor market and women's experiences of it. I am also anxious to know how this aspect of the Argentine crisis impacts families—in particular, the relationships between men and women. Are male and female gender roles changing? How are men reacting now that their wives are the sole breadwinners? Are they taking any responsibility for domestic chores? What kinds of dynamics are evolving between husbands and wives in this utterly stressful situation?

At my request, Casandra's mother, Lina, conveyed my curiosity to Ester and arranged for us to have tea together for an hour or so. Actually, Ester made mugs of black tea for Lina and me but had none herself, refused to touch the dozen small pastries I had brought and insisted on bringing a stool from the kitchen

to the living room for herself. I sat on a deliciously overstuffed, off-white couch and Lina made herself more or less comfortable on the floor. Even though at 40 Ester is a year older than she, Lina addressed her with the familiar *vos* form of "you," while Ester used the more formal *Usted* and called her *Señora* Lina. I'm not that much younger than Ester myself, but called her *Usted*. I later learned that Ester was so nervous about our meeting she had asked Lina to sit in on our conversation.

I had braced myself for the worst since I had heard reports of increasing depression, alcoholism and domestic violence among unemployed men who are no longer able to fulfill their traditional masculine roles. So I was taken aback when Ester grinned and began to tell me that José Luis cooks, cleans, does the laundry and takes care of their children.

As I sipped my tea, Ester told me that José Luis is two years older than she. Her oldest son is from a previous relationship, and she and José Luis have seven children of their own. Altogether there are five boys and three girls ranging in age from seven to 19. If my math is correct, with eight pregnancies in 12 years, she was pregnant the equivalent of six of those 12 years.

Though she refers to José Luis as her *esposo* (husband), they are not married, nor interested in being married. She is Catholic and never fails to light candles to her saints or in honor of her dead relatives, but she doesn't really go to the cemetery, in part because she has no time. She and José Luis have no interest in attending mass, just like Ester's parents, especially her



Ester with her youngest son and daughter.



Entire sectors of Argentina's economy (such as petrochemical production) have disappeared, and of the country's remaining industrial capacity, half is idle. As a result, the race to the bottom is on at full speed. Around last November, I was told that as more and more women at all socioeconomic levels sought and found work, there was an increasing demand for domestic workers to cook, clean and provide child care. But at the same time as there was an increase in demand, there was an even greater increase in supply—so women like Ester are earning less and less for the same work.

Of course, no one wants to pay taxes, benefits or overhead, so just about all of this work is off-the-books

father, who is adamantly opposed to the church.

José Luis used to work as a laborer in a dusty factory that produced cement. He lost his job well over three years ago, before the recession had really deepened, and not because of the crisis. According to Ester, he used to hang out with a bunch of guys who liked to party and he missed work often. He wasn't particularly interested in his kids nor very aware of how his behavior worried and frustrated her.

Ester had always worked one or two days a week doing housekeeping, but back then their roles were entirely traditional: José Luis was the breadwinner and she took care of their home and children. Once he lost his job, it became increasingly hard for him to find new work. Even her brothers, who are painters, no longer had jobs to offer him. They used to get calls to paint the interiors of entire homes, but today they might be asked to paint a bedroom here, a bathroom there. They are lucky to find enough work to put food on their own tables.

Around the time José Luis lost his job, Ester was working for a housekeeping agency and began to increase her hours cleaning homes. There was so much work that housecleaners could easily reject jobs that they didn't like and simply ask for a reassignment. "Today, jobs are like gold," said Ester. "It doesn't matter how sick I am or what is going on in my family. There is no way I can miss a day of work. My employers depend on me and I depend on them."

In reality, the market has taken some perverse twists.

and under-the-table. Now add to the mix the limits on cash bank withdrawals announced in early December, 2001 (known here as *el corralito*, the little corral or playpen) that have practically paralyzed Argentina's vast informal economy. Many under-the-table workers have lost their jobs, while others continue working for greatly reduced or long-delayed wages.

I thought the going rate was five or six pesos an hour for housecleaning and related work. At least that's what people we know are paying. But Ester told me that even back in November, many women were earning as little as two pesos an hour or less. (That was U.S.\$2 then; the peso's now worth about 35 cents.)

Naively, I was shocked. Then as she began to tell me about her principal job cooking, cleaning and caring for a three-year-old, we began doing the math together. She works that job 11:00 to 5:00, five days a week. That's more than 120 hours per month, for which she's paid 300 pesos—less than two-and-a-half pesos an hour. "I don't even want to know the hourly rate," she sighed.

"I used to work more hours for this family and made 480 pesos a month. But now that their daughter goes to pre-school each morning, they cut my pay. I leave home at 8:30 a.m., arrive at 11:00, cook, clean and pick up the girl at noon. And of those 300 pesos, 100 go for transportation. That leaves me 200 pesos a month! There are days when I have to borrow the bus fare to get to work, or to get home."

As I walked home from Lina's, I did some more math.

A liter of milk costs 75 cents, so a gallon costs roughly three pesos. With eight children, she could easily go through dozens of gallons a month. Milk alone could consume 100 pesos or more of her earnings. I suppose they don't drink very much milk.

Even if Ester makes five pesos an hour for the additional twenty hours she works a week, that's only another 100 pesos or so a month. My partner, Alan, and I usually spend more than 75 pesos per week for groceries alone. That's equal to her 300 pesos of disposable monthly income right there—and we're a family of three! And that's only food. Worse yet, since the peso was devalued in January, 2002, prices have been steadily rising, even for locally produced foodstuffs.

Ester lives in Berazategui, a working-class suburb to



*Ester and José Luis' eldest, José Luis, age 16. I had to make quite an effort to coax that smile out of him.*

the south of the city of Buenos Aires. She gets off at 10:00 p.m., takes the number 64 bus to Plaza Once, and from there the number 98, which gets her home between 11:30 and 11:45.

She used to leave her house at 5:15 a.m. to be at work at 7:00. That gave her five-and-a-half hours at home. Personally, if I sleep that little more than two nights in a row, my stomach is a mess, my nerves are shot and I might end up getting sick. Yet if she could find the work, she would do it again. Even now that she leaves her house at 8:30, on weekdays she sees her kids only briefly in the morning before they head to school.

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"José Luis cooks all the meals, cleans the house, does the dishes, washes the clothes, hangs them out to dry and folds them. When there's a problem at school or a meeting with the teachers, he's the one who goes. The only thing he doesn't do is iron," Ester said with a huge smile.

Actually, ironing is a massive chore. I have yet to see

a clothes dryer here, and the vast majority of Argentines iron almost everything they wash. I can't begin to imagine how much ironing is generated by a family of ten.

However, Ester never cooks anymore, and claims she is forgetting how. Her kids help out, but José Luis takes care of most everything. On weekday mornings, he gets up, prepares breakfast, gets the kids ready for school, takes them to school, comes home, cleans up from breakfast, cleans or does laundry, makes lunch, goes and picks up the kids, brings them home and gives them lunch. In the afternoon he does more cleaning or washing clothes, watches TV and prepares dinner. Actually, it turns out that she buys the food when she shops for her employers. And each weekend she cleans the house from top to bottom. "He and the kids clean, but only so-so. The house is usually neat, but not so clean, and with eight kids, well..."

Did she have to plead with him to convince him to do all that work? "Oh, yes," she replied emphatically. "He didn't do any of this at the beginning."

What made him change?

She answers immediately, "Mostly, because one time I left him. It was several years ago, when we had only three children together. He didn't spend much time at home. He paid little attention to his kids and couldn't have cared less about what was going on with me. I threatened to leave, and then one day I took the kids and went to my mother's house. I stayed there for two years," she recalled. "He never had another woman. He waited for me."

And things worked OK when they got back together after such a long separation?

"We had four more children together, and we're still together today!"

Do his friends make fun of him? "He doesn't have any friends," Ester said without hesitation. "He is not a very sociable guy. He likes to watch TV, and his lifesaver is the reruns of soccer games from God-only-knows what year. We don't really go out. We can barely afford to pay the bus fare to get anywhere. On the weekends I sometimes go to birthday parties, but always alone," she said.

"He's not really depressed, although I'm not sure. I barely see him during the week. Sometimes I hear from the kids that he feels badly, that he's kind of down. You know, he used to drink until just six months ago. And he would get ugly. It was not good. Then he had a blood-1 pressure attack and got really scared. Since then, he hasn't had a drop. But his blood pressure is a problem. I worry about him."

And do his family members tease him? "They used to at the beginning, but no longer. More than tease him,



*At school Erica cut out words from the newspaper starting with “p” and “m”—a virtual chronicle of the Argentine crisis—things like pagá (pay), plata (money) and marcha (march).*

they would criticize me. My mother-in-law in particular used to tell me that I should be doing everything, and how could I ask him to help out in the house?”

In contrast, her 76-year-old father has always been a huge help to his wife, eight years his junior. “My father cooks, cleans and sweeps up the house. He has always been this way. My oldest brother, too. Even though he has a job and my sister-in-law does not, he has always helped out at home. My other brothers are different. They don’t lift a finger. I have no idea why they are so different,” she said, frowning and shaking her head.

After her sixth child was born, she suffered serious complications and went to live with her mother. “Don’t you want to build a place for yourselves here with us?” asked her mother. That is exactly what they did. They built a small house on the back of her parents’ property—just two bedrooms, a kitchen and bathroom. Their seven kids sleep in one room in bunk beds, while Ester’s eldest has a room at her parents’.

Unlike the Argentines I know, Ester wakes up at 6:00 a.m. on the weekends. When her seven-year-old daughter, Erica, has decided that it is time to get up, she climbs on top of Ester’s bed and forces her

mothers’ eyes open with her fingers. “If I roll over and try to keep sleeping, she tells me, ‘but Mommy, you’re never here with me during the week. Why don’t you wake up and play with me now that it’s the weekend?’”

Ester’s extended family is like a mini-safety net. “We all help each other out and between us, we support my parents. My parents are both retired but they have no pension, no nothing. My father never did a stitch of paperwork and they get nothing in retirement benefits. I give them whatever I can whenever I can, even if its just five pesos for my mother.”

She adds, “It’s always been my policy not to confront anyone in my family or in my husband’s family, even when they’ve said mean things to me. José Luis criticizes me for not fighting back, but I say, ‘what for?’ We all have to live together. It’s so much easier my way. When my father takes his afternoon nap, I insist that the kids be quiet. They know they can read or sleep or play quietly, but they cannot make noise. We all get along better this way.”

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José Luis leans on Ester for help with their children. “The kids respect me much more than they respect him. Just yesterday he called me at one of my jobs complaining that the three youngest ones weren’t minding him. I said ‘Put them on the phone’ and he did, one-by-one, and I took care of it. I told them to mind their father or I’ll have it out with them when I get home.”

On the other hand, he administers the money. Ev-



*Ester and her parents in her parents’ kitchen.*



*Hugo was held back a year, so is now in second grade together with Erica—and is doing well.*

ished trade-school in construction in March. “He’ll look for a job in construction, and, if not, well, he’ll do what he can,” she sighed. “He’d like to continue studying but I don’t think we can afford it. We can barely cover the cost of the bus fare, let alone books, supplies or tuition. We just don’t have it.” Later, I learned he may be in line for a job at a Coca-Cola factory, and they are hopeful. Ester’s dream for herself is to study hairstyling, something she can do when she’s too old to clean houses. She’d also like to buy a small piece of land and build a bigger place to live.

And if the economy were to make a miraculous recovery and José Luis were to find plenty of work tomorrow, what would happen? Without hesitation, Ester asserted, “Even if he has work, I would insist that he continue to help at home.” Her terminology is still about helping, but it sounds to me as though she is speaking about what she sees as his rightful share of domestic work in their home. Ester is not a feminist, mind you. When I asked, she said, “No” and wagged her head from side to side to emphasize her negative reply. I added that in my mind women are discriminated against, and if being a feminist means ending that discrimination, than I am one. She wagged her head again.

everything she earns she turns over to him, except what she spends on food and transportation. “My middle son, Victor, tells me that I’m not frugal enough. He sees the food I get for ten pesos and tells me he and his father could get the same for five, and he’s probably right. But his father is very dependent on me. When a bill comes for the electricity or phone, he tells me, ‘Ester, we need to pay a bill.’” She is clearly the sole provider right now—because she has the possibility of work. She agrees that women definitely have more job opportunities than men.

Her schedule permits her no time to read, little time for reflection and barely time to even rest. This is a woman with little formal education who is responding to the pressures and demands of daily life in a country whose democratic institutions are in crisis and whose economy is spiraling continually downward.

Does she ever feel stress? Her beaming smile and entirely buoyant attitude actually make me wonder. “Yes, of course I do. Sometimes I shut myself up in the bathroom and I just cry and cry. And sometimes when I’m tense, I pick fights with José Luis. He does not pick fights with me. *Es un hombre tranquilo*, he’s a mellow sort of man. But all day long I’m always thinking about how we’re going to make ends meet, and how we’re going to work it out. Yes, it’s stressful.”

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The cool, cloudy morning I met José Luis and three of the seven children, I took a one-hour-plus bus ride through some bleak areas of greater Buenos Aires. I was nervous about finding the place and worried that my visit (especially my camera) would make Ester and her family uncomfortable.

“That’s the thing about Ester,” said Lina. “The first day she came to work for me, she barely had her coat off before she was washing the dishes and cleaning the floor. I thought maybe there was something going on, but the next day was the same. She has a constant energy that I can’t believe.” Ester smiled.

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Touching my right cheek to the dirty bus window, I saw factory after factory, all shut down, and wide expanses of “housing” cobbled together from scraps of wood and tin. Looking out the other side of the bus, I saw skinny horses, like those that pull garbage-pickers’ wooden carts in my neighborhood and other parts of the capital, grazing in the median of the four-lane thoroughfare. I later learned that the stretch of Berazategui that smelled to me like block-long piles of dry dog food actually houses a soap factory, one of the only functioning industries in the area.

Ester pushes her kids to stay in school and study—and all eight are still in school. “I only finished seventh grade. I want them to go further than I did.” She oozes pride in 15-year-old Victor’s capacity to fix appliances and invent gadgets. She took a broken iron of Lina’s home one night. He took it entirely apart and put it back together, and now it works.

At her parents’ iron front gate, Ester introduced me to Erica and to Hugo, age 8. The four of us moseyed up their front walk which cuts through a garden of tomatoes, green peppers, squash, basil and rosemary. Some

Lina asked what her eldest son will do once he’s fin-

budding hot chile peppers told me these are no ordinary Argentines. Indeed, Ester called out to her father, who is Paraguayan, in the indigenous language *Guaraní*, which she learned from him here in Argentina. Inside their small but comfortable house, I squeezed his right hand and kissed his wrinkled cheek. Then Ester and I walked a narrow concrete path along the left side of her parents' place to a small, cement patio and a smaller, rough, brick structure with an old sheet hanging in the doorway.

I was hit by a wave of astonishment and sadness as I poked my head past the curtain and stepped into a dark, kitchen/dining area/sitting room no bigger than fifteen feet deep and ten feet wide. In that quick moment I was horrified by the contrast between their tiny home and my own spacious apartment for three, and by the knowledge that their living conditions are far superior to those of millions of indigent or homeless Argentines today. Not more than a few seconds later, I was sitting on a diminutive, rickety, wicker loveseat, thinking, "Wow. José Luis is so soft-spoken. He's also amazingly easy to talk to."

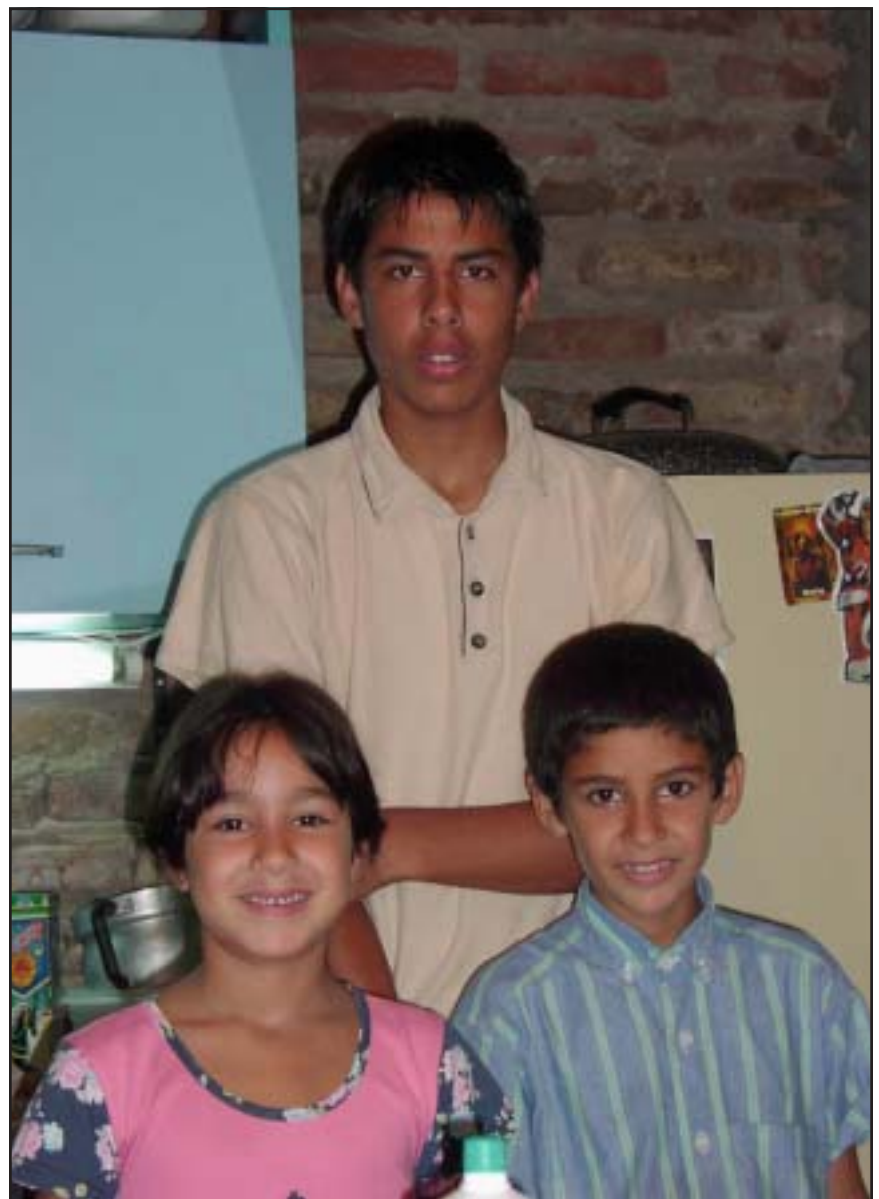
Even now, I savor the memory of how utterly at ease I felt right away, and how comfortable and even uninhibited Ester and José Luis appeared to feel with this well-to-do North American visitor. I am also warmed by the unspoken, unassuming harmony between this couple. I feel an odd yet powerful, internal clash between how soothing it was to be with them and how upsetting it was to witness their living conditions.

José Luis is tall and bulky, yet also gentle and almost graceful. He used a tin tea-kettle to serve *mate*, an Argentine tea drunk through a silver straw protruding from a gourd or wooden vessel. Ester told me, first thing, that the family whose daughter she picks up from school still owes her wages from two months ago. The mother works at the University of San Salvador in downtown Buenos Aires. "They pay her in installments, so she pays me in installments. I've had to buy food on credit, and not a lot of it," she said.

They are a family of ten! For a second I pursed my mouth and closed my eyes, then opened them again and, mouth still pursed, looked at Ester. I was glad that it was only 10:30 a.m., I had brought three dozen pastries and would leave before lunch. A little later

their eldest, José Luis (junior), rolled out of bed all groggy and serious. He said a solemn hello on his way to the tiny bathroom where they pour water from an old, white, plastic ten-gallon paint-bin to flush the toilet. After he changed his shirt he lit the gas stove and made himself a cup of tea. Then he sat hunched over on the loveseat, munched some crackers and sipped his hot drink.

What a difference between him and his younger siblings! Though timid, the little ones still grin with abandon and bubble with innocence and light, while their brother's look was dim, even dark. In fact, despite his parents' entirely sunny dispositions, not a smile crossed his lips. On the bus ride home, I was reminded of the teenagers I got to know in the municipality of Vicente López (see MJF-6, *Exploring Gender and Adolescence Among Buenos Aires Teens*), especially the boys' almost total inability to visualize a future for themselves



*What a difference between the faces of José Luis (junior) and his younger siblings. The younger kids bubbled with innocence, while not a smile crossed their older brother's lips.*



*Ester believes that José Luis is a somewhat exceptional case, and that many men in his situation assist their wives very little.* other than leaving Argentina. And those kids are far better off than the young José Luis.

His father recently applied for a *Plan Trabajar* (from “plan” and “to work”), one of the workfare positions that the government distributes as unemployment insurance. In exchange for 150 pesos a month, his dad would have to work 20 hours a week in some position with the municipality, a private business or a local, non-profit organization. “They turned him down,” Ester explained while he was out of the room. “He didn’t tell them we have seven kids. But when he went back and explained, they said, ‘Of course, with that many kids, you should have priority. You’ll be in line for a *Plan Trabajar* next month.’” Such positions are allocated monthly, and are usually highly politicized.

That day five of the children were out with an aunt and uncle. Erica crawled on her mother’s lap or otherwise snuggled up to her almost the whole time. Like his sister, Hugo was timid. “He’s shy now, and he’s shy at school. But he is not shy at home. He talks all the time!” said Ester.

José Luis and Ester talked at length about their other kids. As of this month, some go to school in the morning, some in the afternoon. José Luis explained how complicated it is now to get all the kids to their respective schools

on time *and* be there to pick them up.

A little later, I found myself comparing notes with him on the quite elaborate “adaptation process” in Argentine elementary and pre-schools. Each new school year, parents spend anywhere from a few days to two weeks accompanying their young ones as they get used to their classroom and teacher, whether they are new at school or not.

José Luis described how difficult it was to get Hugo adjusted to school this March. “I stayed in the classroom, and when I finally could, I moved out into the hallway,” he said with a hint of a smile. I chuckled and nodded my head in recognition. “I went back day after day until he was finally OK,” he said. “My other kids didn’t have such a hard time.” I remembered clearly that at my son’s pre-school, with the exception of my partner, Alan, not a single father was on hand for adaptation. Yet almost six-foot José Luis spoke as if sitting on a tiny chair in a crowded second-grade classroom were the most natural thing in the world.

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Ester believes that José Luis is an exceptional case, and that many men in his situation assist their wives very little. Clearly, José Luis has demonstrated the capacity to



change, even to give up alcohol. And yes, Ester has demanded that he assume new roles—but on the other hand, she stayed with him when he was unemployed and drinking.

I know José Luis is not alone, though it is hard to know how many men in Argentina have changed so much. One day I chatted at length with about 25 women waiting to pick up birth control pills or other contraceptive supplies at a public-health clinic in a Buenos Aires shanty-town. As we fidgeted on folding chairs in a stifling room crowded with cardboard boxes of medical supplies, a young woman no older than 25 said her husband never lifts a finger, not even when she was pregnant and on bed-rest. A 40-something immigrant from Paraguay said her husband helps out “except when his friends come around. Then he bosses me around and becomes really *machista*.”

But the majority of the women told me that their husbands do all kinds of domestic chores at home. Later, a medical staff person told me, “Don’t you think they said those things because they think it’s what they’re supposed to say? They have the gender discourse pretty well down, don’t you think?” Many of these women had, indeed, participated in one or more discussion groups with a gender-related focus.

A young biologist told me she saw a TV program on which unemployed men who had taken on much of the work at home were interviewed. I saw an article in the leftist daily *Página/12* that highlighted the case of an unemployed man and his newly employed wife in which he, too, took on the same chores as José Luis. And two social workers in the province of Buenos Aires told me they know countless cases of jobless husbands with working wives. In many of those cases, husbands have learned to cook, clean, do laundry and deal with the kids, simply because they have no other choice. One even makes a mean pizza for their dinner guests, they said. (“Dinner guests,” I thought. “They must not be so badly off.”)

Still, in my book, José Luis is an extraordinary man, and Ester a remarkable woman. She is amazingly upbeat, though if you look hard—and I had to look hard—you can see that she suffers. But she refuses to be a martyr. She is a go-getter and a hard worker. She’s barely around at home, and yet, together with José Luis, has kept eight kids in school. Furthermore, she displays zero solicitousness, and her relationship with Lina is defined by mutual respect and affection, even frequent moments of laughter. In fact, I think the last time I saw them together, Ester had dropped the “*Señora*” when speaking to Lina

and was using the more informal *vos* with her rather than *Usted*.

Although I am generally averse to hiring a housekeeper, I have frequent fantasies of giving Ester just the right amount of super-well-paid work.

“Ten years ago we were much better off,” she told me. “We had more money, and could buy things from time to time. Today things are much worse. I can’t afford to buy anything and I can’t take a loan because I know I can’t pay it back. José Luis is proud. He says he’s not going to give away his labor, but I’ve been telling him, if the job pays just ten pesos, he’s got to take it.” They are desperate for cash, and he’s beginning to see the light, she said.

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Meanwhile, by stating that “[Argentine] men are not taking responsibility when they become unemployed,” the World Bank seems to have made a mistake, or at a minimum, should avoid sweeping generalizations.

Knowing José Luis and Ester has caused me to reflect on how personal change takes place in adult men and women, and how profound and lasting that change might be. I have also been reflecting on the astonishing quantity of work that José Luis has taken on, that Ester simply has no time to do.

I wonder what they will do if he does find a job. I imagine Erica, Hugo and their siblings will grow up all that much faster if he does. □



*The author and Ester*

## A Smooth Landing in Spain

An Update to MJF-5

Gender and Economic Crisis:

*Exploring Unemployment, Families and Pain in Buenos Aires*

In MJF-5, I described the impact of prolonged unemployment and underemployment on the marriage of a 60-year-old, middle-class Argentine couple, Victoria and Martín. After several months of total unemployment, and taking advantage of Victoria's Spanish citizenship, they ended up emigrating to the coastal town of Vigo, Galicia, on March 19, 2002.

I became increasingly worried about them as I heard and read stories about how tough the situation is in Vigo for newly-arrived Argentines. For example, I had read in *La Nación* of January 26, 2002 that about 300 Argentines had participated in a raucous *cacerolazo* (pot-banging manifestation) in the streets of Vigo. Their goal was to protest discrimination by the Spanish authorities and demand the rapid resolution of their immigration paperwork that, while unfinished, prohibits many Argentines from working.

And over a leisurely *asado* or Argentine barbecue, a cousin of my partner, Alan, told me that friends of his reported seeing signs in the windows of businesses in Vigo that advertised "Help Wanted" but also *Argentinos Abstenerse* (Argentines Need Not Apply).

In this context, I was especially thrilled to hear that things have been going extremely well for Victoria and Martín. According to their daughter, Silvana, who herself recently experienced a smooth landing in the U.S.:

"Since [my parents] arrived in Vigo I have received only good news. They rented a very beautiful furnished apartment with two bedrooms and two bathrooms for US\$330 per month! My mother is already receiving unemployment insurance, as soon as she applied for it, and they just purchased the rights to a lingerie shop that my mother will run. She received from the government a subsidy of \$4,000 that is for women who want to have a small business. Of course, now she will no longer receive unemployment insurance. My father is looking for something, now that they found something for my mother.

"They are very content and relaxed, although they miss their family, but they can't believe what it is to live in an economy with stability and progress. In addition the welfare state in Spain is very good and they have free access to health care, and of course education is also free. They have also been doing some tourism and visiting my mother's relatives. They say the Spaniards have been really great with them and that they feel very comfortable. I hope everything continues to go well for them."

Silvana's words fill me with contradictory feelings: relief and happiness for Martín and Victoria, but also a profound sorrow that this turn of events required moving to Europe, sadness that so many Argentines cannot do the same, and a generalized grief and frustration about the situation in Argentina.

Of course, I, too, hope everything continues to go well for them.

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

### Fellows and Their Activities

#### **Wendy Call** (May 2000 - 2002) • **MEXICO**

A "Healthy Societies" Fellow, Wendy is spending two years in Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, immersed in contradictory trends: an attempt to industrialize and "develop" land along a proposed Caribbean-to-Pacific containerized railway, and the desire of indigenous peoples to preserve their way of life and some of Mexico's last remaining old-growth forests. With a B.A. in Biology from Oberlin, Wendy has worked as a communications coordinator for Grassroots International and national campaign director for Infact, a corporate accountability organization.

#### **Martha Farmelo** (April 2001- 2003) • **ARGENTINA**

A Georgetown graduate (major: psychology; minor, Spanish) with a Master's in Public Affairs from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton, Martha is the Institute's Suzanne Ecke McColl Fellow studying gender issues in Argentina. Married to an Argentine economist and mother of a small son, is focusing on both genders, which is immensely important in a land of Italo/Latino machismo. Martha has been involved with Latin America all her professional life, having worked with Catholic Relief Services and the Inter-American Development Bank in Costa Rica, with Human Rights Watch in Ecuador and the Inter-American Foundation in El Salvador, Uruguay and at the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing.

#### **Curt Gabrielson** (December 2000 - 2002) • **EAST TIMOR**

With a Missouri farm background and an MIT degree in physics, Curt is spending two years in East Timor, watching the new nation create an education system of its own out of the ashes of the Indonesian system. Since finishing MIT in 1993, Curt has focused on delivering inexpensive and culturally relevant hands-on science education to minority and low-income students. Based at the Teacher Institute of the Exploratorium in San Francisco, he has worked with youth and teachers in Beijing, Tibet, and the Mexican agricultural town of Watsonville, California.

#### **Peter Keller** (March 2000 - 2002) • **CHILE**

Public affairs officer at Redwood National Park and a park planner at Yosemite National Park before his fellowship, Peter holds a B.S. in Recreation Resource Management from the University of Montana and a Masters in Environmental Law from the Vermont Law School. As a John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, he is spending two years in Chile and Argentina comparing the operations of parks and forest reserves controlled by the Chilean and Argentine governments to those controlled by private persons and non-governmental organizations.

#### **Leena Khan** (April 2001-2003) • **PAKISTAN**

A U.S. lawyer previously focused on immigration law, Leena is looking at the wide-ranging strategies adopted by the women's movement in Pakistan, starting from the earliest days in the nationalist struggle for independence, to present. She is exploring the myths and realities of women living under Muslim laws in Pakistan through women's experiences of identity, religion, law and customs, and the implications on activism. Born in Pakistan and immersed in Persian and Urdu literature by her grandfather, she was raised in the States and holds a B.A. from North Carolina State University and a J.D. from the University of San Diego.

#### **Andrew D. Rice** (May 2002 - 2004) • **UGANDA**

A former staff writer for the *New York Observer* and a reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the Washington Bureau of *Newsday*, Andrew will be spending two years in Uganda, watching, waiting and reporting the possibility that the much-anticipated "African Renaissance" might begin with the administration of President Yoweri Museveni. Andrew won a B.A. in Government from Georgetown (minor: Theology) in 1997 after having spent a semester at Charles University in Prague, where he served as an intern for *Velvet* magazine and later traveled, experienced and wrote about the conflict in the Balkans.

#### **James G. Workman** (January 2002 - 2004) • **Southern Africa**

A policy strategist on national restoration initiatives for Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt from 1998 to 2000, Jamie is an ICWA Donors' Fellow looking at southern African nations (South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia and, maybe, Zimbabwe) through their utilization and conservation of fresh-water supplies. A Yale graduate (History; 1990) who spent his junior year at Oxford, Jamie won a journalism fellowship at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies and wrote for the *New Republic* and *Washington Business Journal* before his six years with Babbitt. Since then he has served as a Senior Advisor for the World Commission on Dams in Cape Town, South Africa.

ICWA Letters (**ISSN 1083-4303**) are published by the Institute of Current World Affairs Inc., a 501(c)(3) exempt operating foundation incorporated in New York State with offices located at 4 West Wheelock Street, Hanover, NH 03755. The letters are provided free of charge to members of ICWA and are available to libraries and professional researchers by subscription.

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Author: Farmelo, Martha J.  
Title: ICWA Letters - The Americas  
ISSN: 1083-4303  
Imprint: Institute of Current World Affairs, Hanover, NH  
Material Type: Serial  
Language: English  
Frequency: Monthly  
Other Regions: East Asia;  
Sub-Saharan Africa; Mideast/  
North Africa; South Asia;  
Europe/Russia

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