

**THE INFORMAL AND FORMAL ECONOMIES OF
INDIGENEITY
AMONG THE TOBA OF BARRIO NAM QOM,
FORMOSA, ARGENTINA**

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ABSTRACT:

The ways in which indigenous people with no income form dependent and reciprocal relationships with the state make their manner of subsistence participation in politics itself. The dependence of a Toba family flows to and from government and family networks and the and is continually reformed as family relationships flounder, as capital accumulates, and as new politicians and welfare projects came into power and just as quickly disappear. Food has become the lynchpin around which relationships of dependence and spaces of agency within these governmental aid and reciprocal exchange networks are constructed in Nam Qom. Identities of dependence are woven through these objects of exchange and consumption and crystallize as actors in the moral economy of poverty. The continual flow of resources and the identities of those who distribute them help recurrently construct link between belonging to the community of aborigines and the condition of living constantly in material scarcity. Dependence among the Toba is amorphous and unpredictable; and comes in many forms and functions in many ways in Nam Qom. As much as the Toba remain dependent on the government and forms of aid, they participant in and extricate from these political networks by carving out spaces of autonomy, yet their strong sense of identity and its link to poverty constrains the way in which capital ebbs and flows through the moral economy and kin networks when these resources hit the ground.

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Para Natalia, la artesana ingeniosa,
Lucinda, la cocinera fantástica,
Jose, mi ahijado

y Lorenzo, *mi tocayo*

Ñachek

Acknowledgements

I would like firstly like to express my deepest gratitude to the people of Nam Qom for inviting me into their lives and homes and for treating me as lovingly as a member of the family. Thank you for teaching me how to hold a baby, make *torta frita*, and weave *canastos*, for picking piojos out of my hair, and for always feeding me delicious food. I am also indebted to those women and men who were so open as to share sensitive, often sad personal histories and struggles with me. I continue to be amazed by such resilience, solidarity, and generosity of the community when life is so difficult for so many families. I felt privileged to be the keeper of my participant's intimate, painful narratives, knowing something that only they know – you idealize this intimacy a bit – what if it isn't as intimate as you might believe, understanding it in the way they want to explain it, trying to comprehend how it was formed and molded by economic and political forces. According to Nancy Scheper-Hughes, participant observation has a way of drawing the ethnographer into spaces of human life where she might really not prefer to go and once there doesn't know how to go about getting out except writing. I would only trust myself to tell these stories as someone dedicated to understanding the root of everyday struggles and how much poverty constructs lives and warps cultures.

I firstly next like to acknowledge Dr. Claudia Vallengia for allowing me to join the Chaco Area Reproductive Area (C.A.R.E.) my sophomore year of college and for continuing to mentor my research for the next two years, including providing me with a job and integrating me a family of researchers. Without her, this project would have never been possible. She has been a wonderful mentor, providing me support beyond the academic realm, from talking out the ethical quandaries of ethnographic research to taking care of me the many times I got food poisoning. Further, I am deeply indebted to the site coordinator, Cara McGuinness, for her immense support and intellectually thought-provoking input into my project. Also, I would like to thank Fundación Eco-specifically Analia, Ernesto, Cacho, Liliana, and Adriana- for bestowing support and guidance in a foreign country, providing wonderful accommodations, creating a comforting family-like atmosphere for student researchers.

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"In the past, if you wanted an orange, you went to the forest and they were there in abundance. Now you have to buy it, and we have no money." -Julian

Florinda, a towering yet childlike Toba woman with a soft voice and a broad face, met her husband Julian, an equally massive rugby player from the rural area of

Primavera when she was fifteen. Florinda was born in Barrio Nam Qom and came from a mestiza family; her father was an evangelical missionary, and her mother was *aborigen*. Julian had moved from Primavera to Barrio Nam Qom, a secluded settlement of members of the Toba indigenous tribe, 11 kilometers from the urban center of Formosa, with his aunt who was looking for work in the city.

The Toba traditionally followed a hunter-gatherer lifestyle up until the 1930s, when settlement by foreigners on Toba land made it increasingly difficult to live off smaller and smaller confinements of ecologically deteriorated territory. After 1930, with the introduction of agriculture by Anglican missionaries and the organization of indigenous people into cheap labor forces for timber companies and sugar plantations, the Toba became sedenterized and the forcefully integrated into the urban, formal economy of the city. Barrio Nam Qom, a peri-urban settlement 11 km from the city of Formosa, lies on unproductive land that disallows the Toba from growing or collecting foods on their own, along with legal prohibition against hunting on the privatized land that surrounds the community. As a result, Toba families have been stripped of their ability to provide for themselves and are now expected to now participate in the market economy, to buy the cheapest store-bought food, high in sugar and starches, for their large families, although they lack jobs and consequently lack money to buy these foods.

Instead of moving into their parents' house as per custom, Florinda and Julian found a plot of land at the very reaches of Barrio Nam Qom. Rather eerily, Florinda explained that they bought the title for the land from a man rushing to leave Nam Qom because his son was murdered, and his body thrown in the river and eaten by *bichos* (beasts). Rather jarringly, she then explained the initial set up of her home:

"When I first got *juntada* (engaged), that was the poorest we had ever been. We lived in a mudhut that Julian constructed. We had no chairs or beds. We slept and ate on the ground without plates or forks or knives. I feel embarrassment to tell you this now."

On my last day of three months of fieldwork in 2009, we sat in the sun as she pulled apart a frozen mass of blue, unidentifiable meat given to her by her great aunt. She cut off hardened pieces and tossed them at the dogs, sighing "*que feo esa carne*" (how ugly this meat is) and explained how she lived 10 years ago when she had her first son, Faustino. When white people from the city came to her home, like politicians and religious missionaries, she was embarrassed to invite them into her mudhut, or to offer them water or food.

She explained with a pleasant sentimentality how she used to travel to the *monte* (the forest) every day, about a mile from her hut, to get water and collect food and honey. When there was nothing to eat she would sap the liquid from the palm leaves of the trees in her garden. Now, she said, they would never fish from the Rio Paraguay; it's filled with chemicals. Sitting by the fire, her husband Julian described his grandmother with nostalgia; she lived in the rural area of the province in a settlement that retains more of the traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle:

"I think she's 89 now. And she's a healthy woman. She's so healthy because she eats natural- manioc, wild meat, pumpkin- which are good foods. And *aborigines* from the interior who live in the old lifestyle, they are much healthier than us here in Nam Qom. We eat terrible things, meats with chemicals. People didn't take care in the past, they didn't know how, they didn't have to. There was an abundance of food and work in the past, we didn't need to limit the amount of children. Now we can't even provide for ourselves. *In the past, if you wanted an orange, you went to the forest and they were there in abundance. Now you have to buy it, and we have no money.*"

In contradiction to his wistful account, Florinda seamlessly adds, "But the people in the *interior* (the more rural part of the province), they have no electricity or light. How

sad a life that is for them. They are the people you should really study if you want to know about hunger here."

After having their fifth child in 2006, Florinda and Julian applied to get a UNICEF house built on their parcel of land. After much waiting and hoping, they demolished their mudhut and a pristine white house with three empty rooms was constructed by UNICEF, identical to the others springing up in a grid along the crooked road in semblance of an emerging, orderly block. After forming a close and trusting relationship with Florinda through weekly cooking lessons full of laughter, gossip, and fried dough, the family invited me to stay in their house overnight several days a week so I would not have to commute back and forth from my home stay in the city. The house remained completely empty and un-used, with one uncovered bed in each room. The windows and doors remained permanently open, and the plastic chairs and table remained outside, along with most of their belongings.

As we sat discussing the way in which her mother cooked in the past, a man approached the gate selling a bucket full of detergent. Florinda said she would really like to buy some, but she cannot afford it.

"Dust is everywhere in the *vivienda* (house), on our plates and utensils. Julian wants to build us another mudhut, like the one we used to have, to live in because we spend so much of our time sweeping the floors and washing the house. Dust gets everywhere. We're not like the white people from the city, we don't fix up every little thing. We eat wild things from the forest- we'll eat any old creature. It's our custom."

When I was asking about the kind of wild game they used to eat, Florinda's husband Julian mentioned he was surprised when he first moved to Nam Qom because in order to hunt need a license, you need to buy an arm, pay a tax, check in with the owner of the land, and check out. Today, you can't hunt at all. Some people still sneak

on the land and snatch slower animals like armadillos if they see them, but there is no hunting allowed on the private lands surrounding Nam Qom. Florinda added that even if they were able to hunt, they're not accustomed to eat *comidas silvestres* (wild game) anymore or able to drink water from the river. It would make them sick.

Florinda and Julian occupy contradictory space on many levels in Nam Qom. They valorize the nostalgia of a past of abundance, of wild fruit and game in the days of their hunter-gatherers ancestors, yet they view their bodies as unaccustomed to eating such things. They desire markers of modernization, like clean, pristine houses, but feel uncomfortable living in them and rarely use them. Most astoundingly, they exist in an economic contradiction; they have no money and no jobs but they have free electricity, houses, light, water, food, and access to many social assistance programs. Yet still live in day-to-day material scarcity and never seem to accumulate. When I first arrived in Barrio Nam Qom, I realized early on that this economic contraction was the generalized condition of a majority of residents. Few people had jobs, even fewer had money, and everyone lived in day-to-day material insufficiency. Yet everyone seemed to survive somehow. *I wanted to understand how and why.* Through my ethnographic work, I aimed to unravel how these families eat when they have no money. I questioned where they get money if they have no jobs. How do scarce resources circulate among kin in Nam Qom who have so little, and how does the practice of sharing and asking work? I wanted to understand how do the Toba, under the immense pressures of poverty, navigate social networks, orient themselves to the formal state systems of welfare, and participate in complex system of reciprocal gift-giving, all in the pursuit of satiating daily

hunger. As an indigenous population continually negotiating traditional and modern beliefs, I wanted to grasp how Toba traditions of sharing, eating, and accumulating resources have changed under the pressures of poverty and urbanization. More broadly, I wanted to understand the broader political economy of Barrio Nam Qom, specifically the ways in which indigenous people interact with the state and local politicians, and what happens when indigenous people get a foothold in the politics of social assistance and governmental pension that dictate their livelihood.

BACKGROUND TO METHODS or HOW I ARRIVED IN BARRIO NAMQOM

In 2009, under the guidance of Dr. Claudia Vallengia, I formed a research plan to study women's attitudes towards biomedical and traditional forms of contraception among the Toba indigenous people of Barrio Nam Qom under the Chaco Area Reproductive Ecology Project (C.A.R.E). Different forms of biomedical contraception had been recently introduced into the community, yet there was a gap in the knowledge about how women were physically and culturally acclimating towards them. My inquiry centered around how women perceived the risks and benefits of contraception, the reasons they initiated usage, what problems or discomforts they were experiencing, and how health staff are addressing the needs and problems of women on contraception.

I intended on using traditional ethnographic methods, participant observation and semi-structured interviews, to collect data. However, my methodology took a different route in practice. Although one can read broad strokes on Toba society, one can never know the intimate details of their social worlds until doing the laborious work of breaking into their private spaces. I had to learn what was appropriate to talk about, how to

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approach someone, how to differentiate between jokes and seriousness, how to tell if they're annoyed or offended—and that was very scary, being culturally blind. It hit me early on that ethnography in a completely distinct cultural context is a difficult process of gaining trust into a community that fears outsiders due to both a history of discrimination and a present characterized by neglect by the state and the mainstream public. As one of my informants, Guillermina, explained to me,

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"When people come to Nam Qom to talk to us, they're just trying to get our vote, or deliver a *bolsito* (little bag) of food, or to convert us to whatever religion, but when students come, they sit down with us and ask us about our culture. They ask so many questions and women here love to talk."

I planned to stay for three months in the city of Formosa and commuted by bus to Nam Qom everyday. I showed up my very first day knowing no one and began by sitting everyday in the health center waiting room at the forefront of Nam Qom, silently at first, until I gradually, and painfully, made friends. I asked the local nurse, Mariana, to introduce me to women who might be interested in being interviewed about contraception use. Mariana often brought me on the back of her motorbike as she traveled the community visiting those with health issues. From these encounters, I met many women and then visited them at their homes. From these home visits, women would often introduce me to relatives, snowballing the amount of participants involved in my study. Due to the many biological anthropology projects that were successfully carried out over the last ten years in Nam Qom, the women of Nam Qom were generally open to talk to student researchers.

After making primary informant contacts from going on Mariana's health worker route, visiting public food kitchens and basketry weaving communes, and from working in the health center as a gynecologist's assistant, I went into the community to start

interviewing for my project. Initially, when I attempted to interview, informants appeared unsure about how open they should be with their answers, and would respond with one word; in the past they had been primarily interviewed through reproductive history charts that required simple yes-and-no answers. In order to elicit richer information, I found that a relatively long period of friendship-building was important to gain the trust of the women I planned on interviewing. I spent most of my days visiting friends in their homes, sitting outside in the warm sun, chatting on any subject as we weaved baskets or cooked or took pictures. Long home visits by foreigners are considered are highly valued by the Toba and the social reciprocity I gained from investing tons of hours observing and slowly integrating myself into the world of my subjects was enormous. It surprised me how my subjects let down their social barriers for me, revealing their intimate and difficult life histories: stories of domestic violence, racism, inequality, poverty, the decimation of their culture, struggling to survive and provide as their traditional methods of sustenance are no longer feasible in their urbanized environment.

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One family, after asking if I was *delicado* (fragile or refined), to which I responded no, invited me to stay overnight with them in their house and eat dinner with them. Rumor spread rapidly, and other informants began offering to let me sleep in their homes and share dinner and lunch. As one woman, Nilda, at the bus stop asked shockingly,

"You stayed with a woman in Nam Qom- a woman like me? An *aborigen*? Most people in the *Lote* (Nam Qom) are afraid of inviting white people to stay with them because they know they might be ashamed of the way that they live or fear that white people will be disgusted by the way that they live. You can stay with me anytime you want."

With this newfound sense of openness and trust, I was able to talk openly for hours on end with my subjects on any particular subject, and to observe all facets of life

in Nam Qom, from child rearing practices to food preparation to religious celebrations, in order to understand the everyday struggle and joy of Toba families. Because of this method of immersion, social reciprocity, and trust-building, many women revealed stories to me on their own terms about their experiences with biomedical contraception and family planning—which I found more accurately expressed their base emotional responses to what they were revealing. Soon I did not have to seek out informants, women approached me in the streets, on the bus, in the health center, and invited me into their lives. Simply put, spending a lot of time with families, observing daily life for an extended period of time, having relaxed conversations, and taking extensive field notes was the most truthful and evocative method of studying how families live in Nam Qom.

Phillipe Bourgois (2003) explains why his similarly organic methodology is especially suited to documenting the lives of those who live on the margins of society:

“Only by establishing long term relationships based on trust can one begin to ask provocative personal questions and expect thoughtful, serious answers. Ethnographers usually live in the communities they study, and they establish long-term, organic relationships with the people they write about. In other words, in order to collect, ‘accurate data’, ethnographers violate the canons of positivist research; we become intimately involved in the people they study.” (12-13)

From my research on biomedical contraception, I realized quickly that many women started contraception because they simply cannot afford any more children, and the unstable economic situation in Namqom began to elucidate itself. Many middle-age women recalled their childhoods when they were able to gather abundant food from the *monte* (forest) in order to provide for their families. However, with the ecological decimation of the forest and increased urbanization, families lacked a dependable source of food and income and struggled to feed and clothe their children.

While sitting in the kitchen of a friend one day, her very hungry son came in after school and asked if there was any food to eat after he had spent the whole afternoon in school. She seemed very distressed and had to tell him no. After he left, she told me in an angry tone, "You see, this is the reason that I can't have any more children. I can't feed them. There's no money." It is increasingly difficult for men to find stable jobs and many families depend on *changas*, daily construction jobs, that pay very little. A husband described to me how he proposed to his wife to start contraception because he simply could not get work, only *changas* that paid 12 pesos per day, not enough to feed his two children breakfast.

Women live often off their artesanal crafts and small jobs like ironing and washing, which did not pay enough to buy a loaf of bread. Additionally, many families began to depend solely on small salaries from government family plans and different types of pensions, which were often difficult to obtain due to complicated paperwork and were constantly getting cut off and revised without notice to the families. Often families did not know why their plans got cut off and lost time, energy, and resources traveling to the city bank to fix the paperwork, which is difficult to understand in itself. Furthermore, many noted that the community politicians helping to push the papers through often take a large monthly cut from the pension, leaving little money to the family, which firstly has to pay off its debts. Further I learned how essential pensions were to life in Nam Qom, rather than seeking employment; when I asked one of my friends who had 5 children if she wanted to have more kids, she laughed and said not really, but she probably will have 2 more so she can get them all covered on a pension plan. As a result of the lack of work and the time-consuming and sometimes illegal political

maneuvering with respect to pensions, I ascertained that most of my subjects were highly agitated about political and economic status of the community due to the animated ways in which they discussed their pensions and so I shifted the subject of my ethnographic inquiries when I returned in the summer of 2010.

Further I noticed that despite the low influx of cash and employment into Nam Qom, the majority of the barrio yet seemed to survive through a combination of an elaborate informal economy within the community, in which Toba families lend, gift, and sell things, and from extracting resources from the state through pension plans and social assistance programs. I wanted to understand how families in Nam Qom use different resources and strategies to avoid hunger and delineate the flow of food with respect to social and political networks in Namqom. I wanted to know what strategies people in Nam Qom were implementing to provide daily food for their families.

METHODOLOGY

As a result of my work in 2009, I had effectively immersed myself in the culture of Nam Qom and built up a trust with several families with differing socioeconomic employment statuses and gradations of integration into the formal labor market and the informal economy of the community. I centered my research on 8 families, some with and without social assistance and employment, with the aim of understanding how people with no money eat everyday, and how those with money and eat interact with those who do not. Over three months, I spent 24 hour time periods with specific families in order to watch the flow of resources, money, and food in and out of each nuclear household. Further, I followed families to and from the bank and the police station to

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understand how indigenous people interact with social assistance programs; specifically

I intended to document the how pension forms were filled out and processed, how much families received, and how quickly and in which ways pension moneys were dissipated.

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Further, I lingered and ate at the public kitchens and observed the monthly delivery of government provided groceries to further understand the production and consumption of food and hunger in Nam Qom.

Most importantly, I conducted conversational interviews with the following interview guide (Appendix A) which was not constraining and allowed a large portion of the time for the participant to discuss any personal issues or interests, tell stories, or guide the interview themselves, which often yielded the most insightful data. I returned to each interviewee 1-2 times a week to conduct further discussions and ask follow-up questions. Lastly, I took on extensive life histories of selected participants documenting employment histories in order to get personal accounts of how the economic and political system of Barrio Nam Qom has evolved and changed over time.

Intense interviewing combined with participation and observation allowed me to triangulate the stories I collected through interviews with direct observations of behavior, emotion, and attitude to the point of saturation in which I felt confident I understood the community from its perspective. Further I wanted to make sure not to treat my ethnographic data ahistorically by neglecting the way in which deep histories and political and economic forces shape and construct present context, behavior, and thought. In order to counteract decontextualization and create a more synthetic portrait, I also conducted a historical investigation into the political, economic, and historical conditions that led to the formation of Barrio Nam Qom, specifically the history of social

assistance programs in Argentina, the process of sedentarization and proletarianization of the Toba, and an ethnohistorical inquiry into accounts of Toba gift economies.

I have made a conscious effort not to be theory-laden in my approach to writing an ethnography of the poverty survival strategies and indigenous-state interaction in a specific political economy. Rather, I ~~am attempting to write a sensitive portrayal of what~~ it might feel to be a Toba of Nam Qom- the feelings of confinement, dependence, jealousy, hunger, anger, mistrust, and hope- through ethnographic interludes describing an array of ways in which people in Nam Qom deal with poverty on a daily basis.

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OUTLINE OF THESIS

The organization of this paper is as follows: The first section "**Background**" is comprised of four sections. **(1) History of Barrio Nam Qom** describes the general historical processes of missionization, sedentarization, and urban integration of Toba populations across Argentina. I then recount the conflicting historical reports about the founding of Barrio Nam Qom, the community in which I worked. Then I describe competing analyses of the geographic settlement Nam Qom as either a site of immersion in or a site of isolation from broader Argentinean life, and the effect that has on the economic status of the community. **(2) The Research Setting: Barrio Nam Qom Today** describes the physical space of ethnographic inquiry, specifically the way which the space of Nam Qom disallows residents from being self-sufficient, leading their forced introduction into the market economy of the city. As a result of these externally induced changes in sustenance strategies, the Toba have a paucity of employment opportunities, which are discussed in this section. **(3) Alcira, the babysitter with an**

advanced degree in physical chemistry is an ethnographic account of the work history of a babysitter, Alcira, who obtained an advanced degree, yet was unable to find work. Through her personal experience, Alcira elucidates the institutional, geographic, and social barriers that exist for Toba people in securing formal employment. Further, she introduces her thoughts on the sensibility of members of the community relying completely on pensions rather than seeking employment. **(4) Confinement of the Salvaje** (Savage) describes the way in which the settlement of Nam Qom, specifically histories of unlawful occupation of their land and continual confinement into smaller and smaller unproductive areas, has led to a sense of mistrust and suspicion has built up between the Toba and legal authorities, often leading to an apathetic view among the Toba with regard to following laws. I then introduce two ethnographic accounts of sustenance strategies presenting as protest against legally enforced confinement and the prohibition of traditional sustenance strategies.

The second section "**Welfare and Disability**" is comprised of three subsections discussing the ramifications of pensions as central form of income for residents of Nam Qom. **(1) Welfare in the Barrio: Nam Qom is Easy to Buy**, introduces the idea that the way in which a family is able to navigate and extort from the system of governmental assistance, pensions, and welfare greatly sustenance. This section provides a listing of the surplus of available governmental pensions and social assistance programs in Barrio Nam Qom and explains why Nam Qom specifically has become a hub of exchange between politicians and indigenous people. **(2) Becoming Invalid** is an ethnographic anecdote describing one woman's changing financial status and hopes of

production and consumption as she switched from a family pension to an invalid (handicap) pension. Through her anecdote, one can elucidate the feelings of dependence that continually shift between governmental assistance networks, kin networks, or a combination of both. **(3) Invalides and Invisibility** analyzes the way in which invalid pensions produce a form of social abandonment by the state in relation to its former attempts to make the Toba into manageable, productive laborers and citizens. **(4) Edith: Making Poverty Meaningful** is an ethnographic anecdote of another woman from a less well-connected family with an invalid pension and the how she renders her experience of poverty and dependence upon governmental assistance meaningful in light of Toba histories of discrimination and the need for reparations for past abuses. From this ethnographic foray, I briefly introduce other ways in which Toba understand political invasion into their economic lives.

The third section "**The Clashing of Informal Economies**" discusses Toba traditional values of reciprocity, sharing, the inability to accumulate, and the tight linkage between ethnic identity, economic status, and morality, and the ways in which these cultural attributes have become maladaptive as an incipient social stratification develops in a formerly egalitarian society. **(1) The History of Labor: There Can Be No Rich Toba** describes the historical process of initial contact of the Toba with wage labor through work at lumber, saw, and sugar mills. The section also introduces the concept of the Toba gift economy, or informal economy of reciprocity and sharing, in which one is obliged to share surplus goods with kin, so that everyone remains of equal economic status. This section introduces the conflict between sharing values and contemporary

accumulative possibilities that has become an unresolved problem for the Toba, which will be extensively discussed in the next three sections. **(2) Kin Networks of Reciprocity and Embodied Economies** provides an ethnographic anecdote that introduces the way in which kin networks of reciprocity existed in the past and their productive value of buffering against the harshness of the formal economy. I then describe through an ethnographic account the way the informal economy has become warped due to an incipient class stratification, leading to some to embody aspects of both the informal economy of sharing and the formal economy of accumulation and independence. **(3) Bringing your Groceries by Night: The Inability to Accumulate** is an ethnographic interlude that elucidates the way in which one is not able to accumulate goods in Nam Qom, due to the obligation of sharing. I further describe my ethnographic observations of the sharing economy and the way in which foreigners, such as missionaries and city people, become frustrated with the Toba informal economy as they attempt to mold Toba economic practices into mainstream, white values of parsimony, saving, and accumulating. **(4) Poverty, Belonging, and Jealousy-** is a collection of ethnographic vignettes surrounding the idea that the incipient social stratification in the Nam Qom along with the moral obligation to share and the geographic isolation of community had led to close surveillance of sharing or hoarding behavior and extensive rumors about the morality, belonging, and ethnicity of those who disobey the system of egalitarianism. The result of this rumor mongering, and the overwhelming atmosphere of fervent jealousy, criticism, rumor and surveillance has led to palpable feelings of disunity among those in Nam Qom.

The fourth section "**What Happens When Aid Hits the Ground**" discusses the interaction of indigenous people with politicians, the ramifications of including indigenous people in the political system, and elucidates the unexpected ways in which social assistance moneys actually play out when they arrive in Nam Qom. (1)

Paternalism and dependence describes the history of government aid and hand-outs among the Toba and the ways in which this history, along with Toba conceptualizations of gifts as reparations for past abuses, has fostered a sense of dependence and obligation of the government to provide for the Toba. I then introduce a current ethnographic example of a site of economic paternalism in Nam Qom, the Catholic community center. (2) **Toba Aid as Political capital** begins with an ethnographic vignette that describes the way in which government aid intended exclusively for the Toba has become a bargaining tool between the national government and provincial politicians. I then describe the concept of political capital, the way in which local politicians derive political capital from Toba food, and the way in which Toba aid is used as leverage in political power shifts orchestrated by outsiders. (3) **Spaces of Autonomy in Clientelistic Networks** describes the way in which Toba people get involved in politics, through public food kitchens and becoming local political brokers. I discuss how tensions often arise in these situations as indigenous political intermediaries can accumulate wealth which conflicts with the emphasis on the importance of poverty and reciprocity as the essential foundation of aboriginal identity. (4) **Disunity and Fragmentation** describes the way in which indigenous actors within the political system as brokers for outside political systems has hindered the formation of a unified oppositional aboriginal political party. All the indigenous politicians in Barrio Nam Qom

come from the Peronist party, and thus only serve as brokers in the chain of resources from the political parties to the indigenous people, rather than standing for meaningful and differing issues. Politics thus becomes only a conduit of resources.

SECTION I: BACKGROUND

HISTORY OF BARRIO NAMQOM

"The aborigines, they annoyed the city because they never tried to improve their way of living, they were always just staying put, and as the city was growing, [they] had to be removed. And they were moved here and here I am now."

—second generation member of Barrio Nam Qom

The Toba are a traditional, nomadic people whose former range spanned around the juncture of the Pilcomayo River and the Tropic of Capricorn, covering parts of Paraguay and the province of Formosa in Argentina. They speak a Guaycurúan language, and up until the 1930s followed a hunter-gatherer lifestyle (Miller 1999). The settlement of foreigners on Toba territory severely decreased the mobility of Toba foraging bands, who found it increasingly difficult to live off smaller and smaller confinements of land. The introduction of agriculture in the 1930s by Anglican missionaries, along with the organization of indigenous people into cheap labor forces for timber companies and sugar plantations, led to the sedentarization of the Toba population and the forced integration into the urban, formal economy of the city. As a result of this shift in sustenance, along with ecological deterioration of their territories, entire populations who used to rely on foraging or home-based cultivation were expected to integrate into the formal economy of the city of Formosa and depend on the processed foods available in city markets.

Toba communities exist in various stages of acculturation across Argentina; while rural settlements in the West maintain a degree of traditional hunter-gatherer sustenance strategies, such as fishing, hunting and collecting food, other peri-urban communities have different gradations of integration into city life, politics, and the labor market. The percentage of Toba families, both rural and urban, with unmet basic needs varies between 75% and 100%, depending on the province (Valeggia and Tola 2003).

There is sparse historical information documenting the exact nature of how of
Barrio Nam Qom, which means "Our People" in the Toba-Qom language, was officially founded and parsed into land plots with legal titles; existing historical accounts are conflicting regarding whether the Toba were forcefully relocated to the area or whether Nam Qom grew out of a squatter settlement and legal titles were required afterward. According to UNICEF documents and recalled ethnographic accounts, the original settlers of Barrio Nam Qom previously lived in spread out settlements along the river and relied on hunting and gathering for sustenance from the *monte* (the forest). Specifically, in 1970, 20-30 Toba families had settled in a spontaneous and disorganized manner in the peripheral plots in the outskirts of the urban city of Formosa including Lote 42 and Laguna Oca, but more specifically near the stream located in Puente Blanco (UNICEF-SDS 1996; Iñigo Carrera 2001). The original settlers came from the interior of the province of Formosa (*Bartolome de Las Casas, Mision Laishi, La Primavera, La Mision Tacaagle, el Colorado, San Carlos, Subteniente Perin, Riacho de Oro*) and from the Chaco Province (*Pampa del Indio, General San Martin, Rio Bermejo, Resistencia*). They migrated in waves to the urban central because of the potential for jobs in the city (Iñigo Carrera 2001). They were said to be relocated by armed force to

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the rural Lot 68 in 1972 during the government of Coronel Augusto Sosa Laprida (Iñigo Carrera 2001).

One resident described the formation of Nam Qom as an effort of the government to expel the Toba to an isolated region because of urbanization efforts by the city of Formosa:

"....and perhaps looking for improvement, as the city was new also, [my parents from the Chaco] came to this area. But they didn't precisely come here to the Lote [68], but rather over there, which is Barrio Fontana today. After this, they were moved. After, they were in Puente Blanco, and from Puente Blanco to here. I don't know if they were making the move themselves, but they were relocated because of a measure that was taken by the city of Formosa that was passing, when it was starting to grow bigger, and the *aborigenes*, *they annoyed the city because they never tried to improve their way of living*, like what you see today, roofs of straw. *They never tried to improve their way of living, they always were just staying put, and as the city was growing, it had to remove them from the city.* And they were moved here and where are here now. I am here." (quoted from Iñigo Carrera 2001, my translation)

A UNICEF document from 1996 recounts that in 1974 the Governor of the Province attempted to occupy a part of Lote 68, another name for Nam Qom, to install a Radio/Television station; he was confronted with strong resistance from the community organized by the *cacique*, Lucio Rodriguez, resulting in one death. Subsequent to this event, the document states that the governor negotiated the occupation of the land and distributed legitimate titles to the *aborigenes* (SDS-UNICEF 1996).

However, as I was helping Alejandrina, the 15 year old daughter of one of my informants with her English homework, I noticed a handout from the secondary school pasted in her notebook entitled, "*Algunas Historias de Los Aborigenes del Lote 68 Barrio Nam Qom, Contadas por Juan Caballero*" (History of the *Aborigenes* of Lote 68 Barrio Nam Qom, told by Juan Caballero, an indigenous nurse). Alejandrina happily traded me the document, which provided an alternative history of the founding of Nam Qom, for a

Jonas Brothers t-shirt I had brought her from the United States. Notably the document makes no direct reference to an armed relocation. The translated document, as told by Juan Caballero, a founding member, recounts:

"I am telling the history of the *aborigenes* that used to live in Puente Formosa and today live in Lot 68 in Barrio Nam Qom. Puente Formosa was given up by owner of the land, Sr. Brunelli, to the aboriginal Merles Ocampo in the year 1949. Between the years 1935 and 1940 we were in the zone of La Maroma. Later on, in the year 1950 the *aborigenes* lived in Villa Luida, en Chacra 41, in Puente Formosa. After this, we lived in the Puente Municipal La Maroma. We moved there because the land there was abundant. After, more people began appearing in this region.

The first habitants were: Mereles Ocampo, Torales Vega, Pedro Ocampo, Lorenzo Ocampo (who moved to Colonia Pilaga), Mariano Moreno, Margarita Moreno, Muricio Ocampo. After in 1968, Lucio Rodriguez came with his family; the Sitaloy family came also, as well as Manuel Patagaynos in 1969, Simon Palacios, and Antonio Palacios. They arrived to live in Lot 68. In this same year, our brothers from the Chaco arrived: Alejandro Arce, Agustin Tejera and Alejandro Acosta.

After, we formed a commission to request a place to live, because in our current place, we could not live. There were many of us and it always flooded. This was in 1970. While this was happening, many more people appeared to live in the community of Puente Formosa. Luis Mendoza and his family: Mario Acosta, Juan Medina, Anastacio Sosa, Pablo Balucir, Cirilo Liva and family. This commission, after insisting many times to the to the Ministry, headed by Dr. Kelly in the mid 70s, found a new way to obtain a new place for the indigenous people. Lucio Rodriguez [*the cacique*] had spending a lot of time going and coming from Buenos Aires. We continued insisting to the Government of Formosa. We made many petitions. They offered us a place in Laguna Oca, which we declined. With the help of a Coronal who was named Cardozo, they ceded us a part of land in Lot 68. Before, it was owned by Sr. Mercado. We accepted this place and started to move the people.

In the year 1984, the Comision Vecinal, together with Saravia Eugenio Barrio, talked with the governor Floro Bogado. In this opportunity, we achieved the titles of the lands and houses.

There were many who had courage who offered to stand guard. They were Burgos, Mereles, Torales, Santiago, Nagoloyi. With these volunteers, the previously named ones and with the help of Regiment 29, we installed ourselves approximately the 14 March in 1972."

(Caballero, unknown date, my translation)

The newly consolidated lot of Barrio Nam Qom, in addition to being a forcefully constricted and circumscribed territory, was the first totally ethnically uniform indigenous settlement in the city of Formosa (Iñigo Carrera 2001). As a sedentary settlement, Nam Qom was originally conceived of as an entrance point for the Toba into the broader national life of Formosa, where they could come in contact with the white world through religious organizations, municipal jobs, and health care. However, Iñigo Carrera (2001) in retrospect considers the spatial-social restriction of Nam Qom today as "an central element in the process of social abandonment" (Auyero 2001:22 qtd from Iñigo Carrera 2001, translated by me). The site represents a byproduct of the process of urban development as Nam Qom was consolidated from the haphazard consolidation of precarious and spontaneous settlements in the urban periphery into one allotted area (Iñigo Carrera 2001). Carrera concludes that this situation contributes to the instability of employment today and income and resulted in the exclusion of the Toba from the urban market.

Each alternative history of settlement engenders different meanings for the circumscribed geographical site. When viewed as a squatter settlement that turned into a legally portioned lot, the Toba are more inclined to defend their propriety of the site. One of my informants Alcira, explained,

"Look at how small our tracks of land have gotten. We were the original owners of this land and look how they've sectioned it off into smaller and smaller parts. The only way we have the rights we have today is by picketing- blocking the road, that's when the government takes notice of us. We used to be more spread out, now we've been put all in order. Look at the streets and the fences. When I was younger, we had more space to move."

When viewed from the point of forced relocation and strict captivity, the region feels constrained, unproductive, and inferior with respect to memories of the past

abundance of their peripherals sites, in which they were able to hunt and gather freely. This often engenders feelings of apathy and antagonism towards the constraints imposed upon those in Nam Qom by city officials. The following section ethnographically illustrates the attitudes of those who feel a sense of forced confinement and a resulting antagonism towards those who attempt to confine traditional practices.

Confinement of the Salvaje

"These are my animals. I don't care about license. I bet they come and steal my piglets anyway. Either way, what are they going to do to me, throw me in that little jail over there?" - Elba

As much as the Toba are confined by rules and authority figures, they constantly evade them. Due to histories of unlawful occupation of their land and continual confinement into smaller and smaller unproductive areas, a sense of mistrust and suspicion has built up between the Toba and legal authorities, often leading to an apathetic view among the Toba with regard to following laws. On the contrary, a number of people fear disobeying the laws that constrain them and readily adhere to the laws of the state.

A main source of work and a daily activity for both men and women was collecting wood from the forest. However between my trips in 2009 and 2010, which in total spanned 6 months, the land surrounding Nam Qom was privatized by the owner, the found of the most successful chain of supermarkets in Formosa, *Caceres*. There were rampant rumors that Toba were shot if they went to collect wood. Eventually, I

elucidated that the private owner required that if a Toba was to enter his property to collect wood for cooking, totorra for basketry, or piri wood for mats, he or she must ask permission from the land manager, check in when they planned to enter, and check out, displaying the amount of things collected. No animals were allowed to be taken off the land. Because many people feared getting shot and wood was scarce, people began to buy gas in tanks if they had stoves and ovens while others burned plastic bags and cardboard, which fundamentally changed the way in which they ate, as fire from cooking often provided heat during the winter months.

Elba, a hulking, muscular Toba woman with a head of curly matted hair, lives on one of the two ranches in Nam Qom; it lies at the end of a long, winding path far from any of the concrete houses closer to the center of the community. She walks barefoot tending her makeshift pen full of newborn piglets and hangs the bloody skin of animal she just slaughtered on the tree, and heartily laughs at my terrified face, throwing the severed tail in my direction. "You eat well here." I laugh. She responds, "That's why I'm so fat!" She introduces her husband, and laughs, "look how old he is" directly in his presence. He's a tall white man with a gaucho hat and a sweater vest and I'm very surprised that he's not *aborigen*; he looks very out of place on her very rustic ranch. She says he's about 70 years old and she's 42. I laugh and ask her if she's bored with him, and she laughs and then says, "Seriously, yes, of course".

He explains that they don't own this land, but they're allowed to stay on it. Elba's not sure for how long but says, "no one has come to kick me off yet." She invites me back next week to watch her slaughter one of the pigs, but when I run into her on the bus the next day, she tells me she isn't allowed to kill the pig. "Too much drama, the

police wanted a license or a tax or something, so we'll just eat *torta frita*." I ask her if she needs to pay a tax to sell the meat she raises, and she says at first she doesn't think so, she has some papers, but "thank god" the police have not asked for them. She tells me one time the police came to her gate to make sure the pigs weren't stolen or sold illegally, but she just waited for them to leave and carried on. The next day, she killed the pig anyway. "These are my animals. I don't care about license. I bet the police come and steal my piglets anyway. Either way, what are they going to do to me, throw me in that little jail over there?"

Elmer Miller, an anthropologist and missionary who worked with the Toba for several decades explains the habit of Toba purchasing one item at a time and demanding change after each transaction for fear of being cheated. Further Miller tells an anecdote in which a Toba family sold ostrich feathers to a vendor, who discovered the feathers were dipped in mud to increase their weight and price. When Miller recounted this story to the Toba, they found it extremely amusing, declaring "finally someone had finally found a way to repay the store owner for the many time he cheated us" (Miller 1980:51).

Florinda explains that her husband Julian used to be part of a group of men that would travel to privately owned land and hunt and "rob" animals to sell in the community. She explains that in this time of their lives, back in 2002, her husband risked his life but they had the most money during this era and ate very well. "My husband used to drink a lot, so one day he decided not to go on the hunt, because he was so hung over," she laughed:

"But this day when the men went to the woods, there owners of the land notice dead animals and called the rural police. The group crossed the police, who

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pulled out guns, and the *aborigines* had to defend themselves. One of the police was killed and they cut off his finger and took his ring and watch and the other was shot through the stomach. This was at about 4:00 am. They used to go at night because it was easier to rob the animals. When the men came back and we heard what happened Julian burned his clothes and destroyed his knife and gun. In the morning, around 7:00 am, a whole group of hundreds of police entered the barrio, they hit women and children asking them if their fathers went to the forest, asking them what they did there. Women were dragged to the police station for questioning, they were raped and beat up. There was a police man at every corner, we couldn't leave our houses. If we went on the bus to town, we got thrown off. This continued for a year until the men were found out- the *barrio vivio en terror* (lived in terror)."

She says her husband sometimes says he wants to go back to robbing because of how little they make now, but she always says no. "There's a hatred between people here and the police. When kids get thrown in jail for breaking curfew, most of the women here aren't afraid to scream at the police, to go to the jail and drag their kids out by themselves."

As Miller (1980) describes, although the Toba openly denounce behavior they find selfish and immoral, they often feel obliged to act in a manner towards outsiders that would be reprimanded had it been done towards another Toba. He describes, "Cheating the local rural trader is considered fair game since he is thought to constantly swindle the Toba. Outsmarting authority figures or *criollo* neighbors in the city is also legitimate when pursuing subsistence needs." (4)

There still continues to be land disputes and confrontations with the police in more united Toba communities. Recently, in November of 2010, there was a controversy concerning the land rights of the Toba of Primavera, who had occupied a plot of long span of time when suddenly, a private land owner emerged and filed a dispute that this was his private property. The provincial government gave the Toba of

Primavera a new plot to occupy, next to their former parcel. However, years later, the national government realized this new plot of land entered into the national park of Pilcomayo, so the Toba were then pushed out of the park back to their original settlement. The private owner then returned to sell this land to the government to build a university campus, but the land had already been transformed into a permanent housing for over 1000 Toba. The private owner then took this issue to the court in Clorinda, Argentina and the judge submitted an order to the police to *correr* (run) the Toba off the land. When the police arrived, numbering about ten, the entire community of Primavera confronted the police, who, outnumbered, fled for their lives, leaving their guns on the highway. Later, the several thousand policed returned and the Toba received them with guns. However, it is unclear how the conflict unfolded, but two Toba and one policeman died, one said to be run over by a police car. Several others sustained injuries. Toba communities and the general public were furious and picketed, cut national routes, and protested the judge who sent the ordinance. However, although people in Namqom were enraged, as one of the deaths was the grandfather of a Nam Qom resident, within the community no one was saying anything for fear of men who worked for the province losing their jobs. It took the community over a week to cut the route in protest due to this fear. Hence, antagonism and fear regarding authority co-exist in Nam Qom, especially due to social stratification (Personal communication with Cara McGuinness).

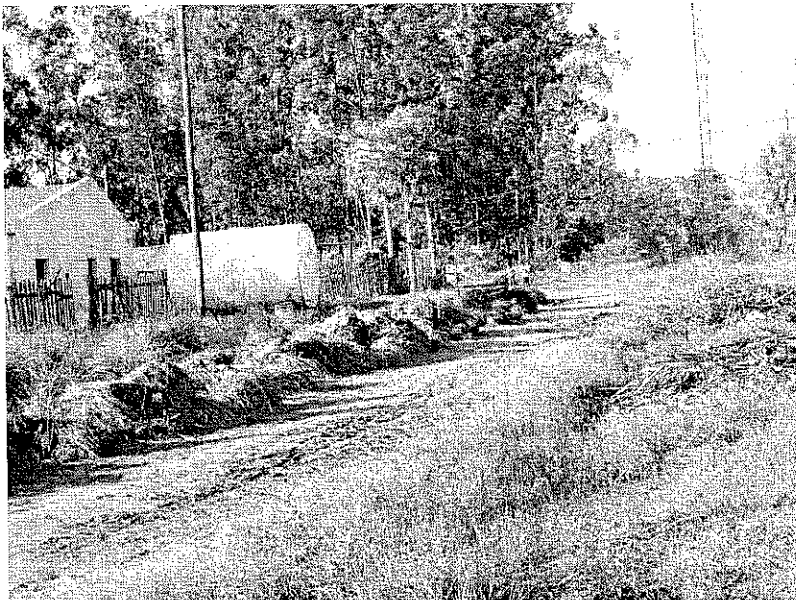
**The Research Setting:
Barrio Nam Qom Today**

"Well-paid jobs are restricted to a minority of public leaders, male nurses, midwives, and teaching assistants, a situation that is creating an incipient class differentiation and tensions between poor and better-off Toba"

Today, the first thing one notices about Barrio Nam Qom is that it is a literal cultural crossroads; the road in front of the community is a border control point for access into the city capital. The second thing one notices is that it is isolated: a singular road 11 km from the city of Formosa, flanked with the nothingness of mangled weeds and broken tractor parts on either side, is the only way into the barrio. The third thing one notices when they enter the barrio is the deteriorated quality of the land; along the main dirt road through the barrio, the street is lined with long basins of fetid stagnant water filled with garbage, which residents build precarious bridges of wood and scrap metal in order to enter their homes. Further inside the barrio, one can see a grid of weathered brick and white houses emerging, each surrounded by a makeshift fence of uneven wood beams and wire and gates made of shingles and scrap metal. While some streets are clearly defined, others are slight routes surrounded by piles of earth, evidence of an abandoned public works project, through which one must delicately maneuver. When it rains, it is too difficult for children to walk to school without getting sunken into the mud. Moving into the personal parcels, unproductive earth makes the foundation of each family's unit of land, which usually includes a house made of palm and mud or one made of brick and concrete, or a combination of both. Most plots contain a disconnected bathroom, a line for laundry, and a pile for garbage. Residents spend more time outside rather than inside their homes are more likely to keep their most used belongings, such as chairs, tables, and washing basins, outside. Electrical

poles circumscribe each makeshift *manzana* (block) with a communal water tank placed at the edge of each block. Makeshift bands of unattended children roam the streets while skin-and-bones stray dogs lazily litter the town, verifying the oft-used Argentinean phrase "*tan flaco como el perro del Indio*" (as skinny as an Indian's dog).

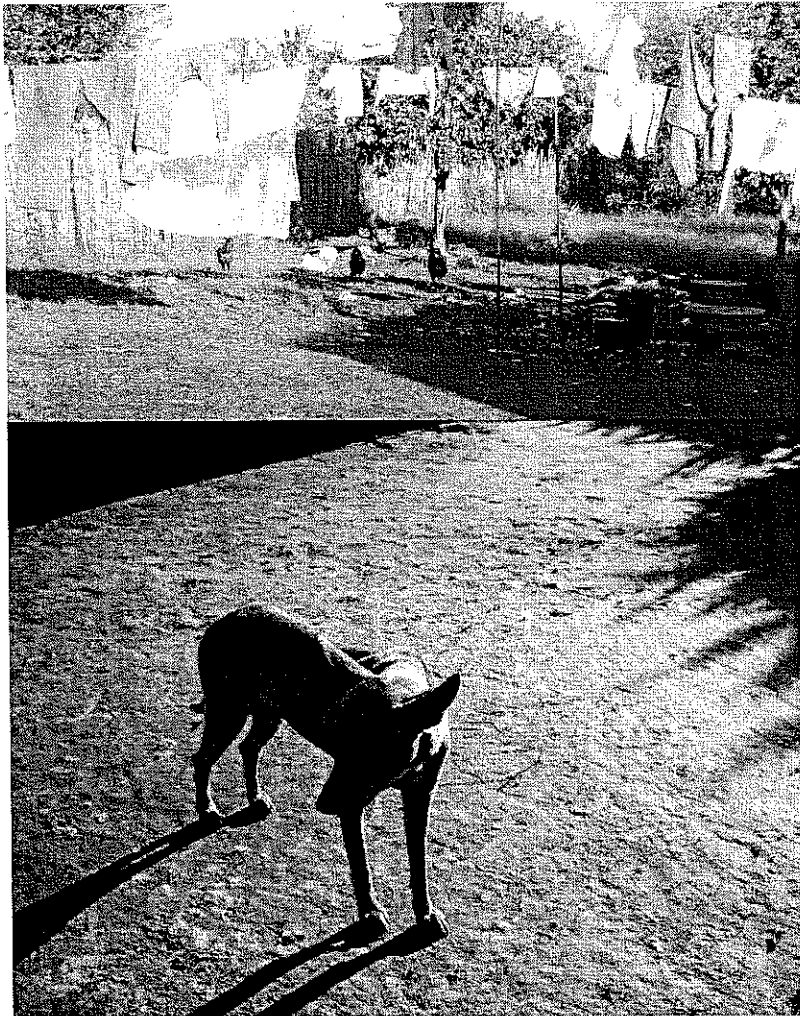
Nam Qom lies at both margins of the national Route 11, 500 meters from the municipal garbage dump, and is ajoined to a private cemetery Remanso de Paz. It is connected to the city of Formosa by one extremely unreliable bus transportation line that has a frequency of service every hour, which makes it very difficult for residents to

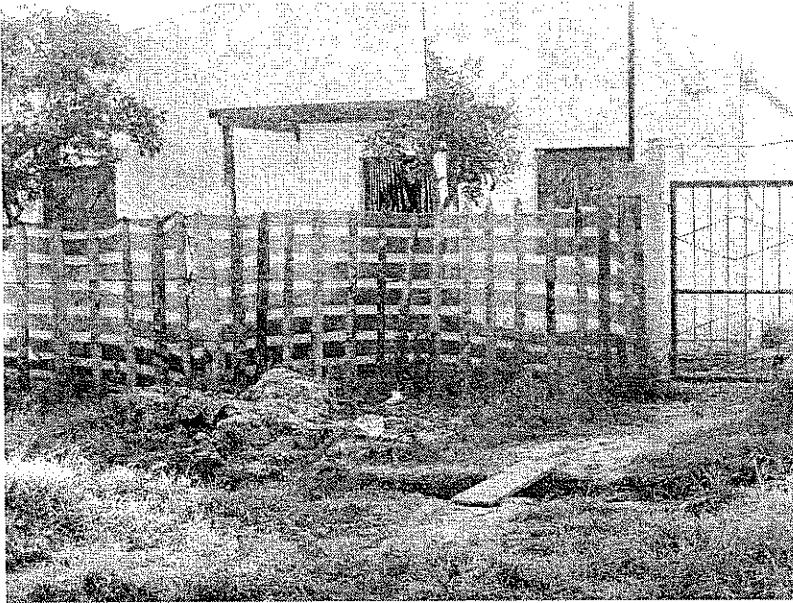


The

attend
daily
jobs.
barrio
spans
69.29

hectares, there are 27 blocks fractioned into





3003 parcels (Iñigo Carrera 2001). The most recent
 different sources varies between as 2300 people a
 Photos by Maria Diaz, the 8 year old
 daughter of an informant.

2001;Valeggia and Elison 2004), but varies due to frequent migration (Sanchez-Ocassio
 2003) and lack of proper identification for national censuses (SDS-UNICEF 1996).
 However, the barrio is in constant growth as relatives of residents move from the rural

areas of Chaco and Formosa provinces to Nam Qom. These rural to urban migratory trends are generalized for the city of Formosa, which grew from being 28.9% of the provincial population in 1996 to 97% of the provincial population in 1998 (Iñigo Carrera 2001).

The land on which Nam Qom is located, as previously described, is extremely unproductive, which disallowed the Toba from growing or collecting foods on their own. Further, the surrounding area, which was previously used for hunting and gathering was privatized to an individual owner, who prohibited hunting and only allowed for the collection of wood for cooking or totorra for making baskets if permission was asked. Hence, the Toba of Nam Qom have been forced to completely replace foraged items in their everyday diet with the least expensive store-bought foods. Thus, Toba families have been stripped of their ability to provide for themselves and are now expected to now participate in the market economy to buy food for their large families, working as wage laborers or cleaning ladies. However, few are able to get jobs, due to discrimination or lack of education. Families live on the wages of the few men with public employment and more frequently on the unstable salaries of temporary jobs (*changas*), and more increasingly on government subsidies and pensions. In 2001, less than 5% of women have paid jobs, typically as cooks, maids, or teaching assistants at the local school (Valeggia and Ellison 2004). Most women have no paid jobs and their activities revolve around childcare and household chores and many rely on small incomes from selling their traditional crafts, or *artensia*, in the city or to buyers that come to the barrio. Older women as well as solitary children beg door to door in the city for

bread. Furthermore, Toba women are increasingly resorting to prostitution at the local truck stop.

According to slightly outdated census data from 1996 when the population totaled 1745 persons: 223 had stable income, 313 had instable income, and 1209 were without any income. In regards to those with employment in 1996, 12.2% had municipal or provincial jobs; 16.2 had jobs in other urban areas (52 bricklayers, 4 electricians, 1 brickmaker, 7 Aboriginal teachers, 4 vendors, 5 domestic employees, 82 construction workers); 17.8% worked in the sale of artesanal crafts (SDS-UNICEF 1996). Today, most rely entirely on governmental assistance programs, pensions, and government subsidies.

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The only relatively important source of cash in the Nam Qom and many Toba settlements are public sector jobs, which were locally distributed since 1980 by various state agencies. However, "well-paid jobs are restricted to a minority of public leaders, male nurses, midwives, and teaching assistants, a situation that is creating an incipient class differentiation and tensions between poor and better-off Toba" (Gordillo 2002:14).

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The most prominent municipal job found in Nam Qom is a program called *Obreros Publicos* (Public Workers) in which men travel to different regions of Formosa to clean, and receive about 1000 pesos a month; however, as one informant, Ernestino said, "You have to know someone in the city to get one of those jobs. And I don't know anyone."

ALCIRA,
the babysitter with an advanced degree in physical chemistry

"People here are just accustomed to bad jobs." - Yessica

Alcira is a stout woman with curly hair and a boyish look who I have never seen smile. I saw her often while making trips to the Catholic community center (*La Capilla*), where she worked as a teacher in the day care, watching young children and serving daily lunch and breakfast. After asking her friend if she could arrange an interview between us, I stopped by her brick house, which was affixed to a broken-down kiosk and lined by a shockingly productive garden. She is one of the only people in Nam Qom I have met who lives alone.

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She invites me to sit down near her cousin Yessica, who is visiting from down the block, and I notice Alcira looks aggravated as usual. After an uncomfortable silence, I mention that one of the subjects of my project is the increasing amount of invalid (or handicap) pensions in the community and whether people in the community believe they are helping by providing money or hurting by discouraging formal employment. She begins laughing hysterically, "This barrio is definitely full of handicapped people." Her mood lightens and she explains, "Tons of young people here have that type of pension, because after they get of school, they know they're not going to get a job." Yessica chimes in, "and then they just buy a *moto* (motorbike) with all of the money. And then all the money's gone" and we all laugh.

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I ask Alcira about how she came to work in the *Capilla*, and she mentions she has a degree in physical chemistry. When she was younger, she says a nun from the *Capilla* rounded up a handful of students, which ended up totaling three, that wanted to go to secondary school in the city rather than in Nam Qom. "When I was younger, if you

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wanted to go to secondary school, you had to go at night, and my mother didn't want me walking through the barrio at night, so I went to the school in the city". She explains further,

"When I got there, I realized that my level of education I had was much lower than the other students and it was really difficult for me to travel back and forth. The other students from Nam Qom eventually all dropped out, some because of their family commitments and one girl because she was constantly harassed by the other white students, which happened to all of us *aboriginal* students. I had a really hard time, but I kept going no matter what. I had a teacher who helped me out a great deal. She wouldn't let me leave until she made sure I understood all the materials, but that was rare, most of the teachers didn't care, or harassed us."

When she finally graduated school with her title in physical chemistry, she could not get a job for two years, and her father told her that he could not support her studying anymore so she got a job at the Capilla watching children. "It's an okay job. It's not what my degree is in, but it's fine. Even if I wanted to continue studying, no, I can't. I can't leave my job, or afford all the costs."

She says she makes about 450 pesos a month. She explains it does not cover much, but it's sufficient for her because she lives alone. However, she has no idea how her co-workers, who have large families to support, can live on that salary. I ask her what she buys first when she gets paid, and she laughs and says she runs in a flash to the market to buy *mercaderia*, dry groceries like pasta, bread, and rice, and then she pays her bills, and then her money is usually gone and she begins got to buy things on credit from local vendors in the barrio, who note the amount of food borrowed and then add a tax everyday the payment is not made.

I ask her if she has a pension and she says she's not allowed to have one because she's technically a municipal employee, but in the past, she looked into getting one.

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"The majority of people here who have jobs in Nam Qom, they have jobs that are under the table, like construction. There are two big factories in Formosa, Coca-Cola and Unidan, but they don't hire people from here. You need to know someone to get a job there, and most people here don't know anyone from the city. They would never hire someone with dark skin, or a woman, and never give her maternity leave or benefits. You'll never see a woman working at the Coca-Cola factory. If you want to get factory job, you have to go to Buenos Aires or Cordoba. Toba people come from the interior, the rural parts of the Chaco, to get jobs here in Formosa, but there is nothing here."

She explains further, "There are literally only three jobs you can get here in Formosa that are secure: nurse, aboriginal teacher (MEMA), and policeman. There are no other jobs available." Yessica says, "And I heard they just suspended the aboriginal teachers license because there are so many out of work teachers." Alcira continues:

"There's really no other way of making money here except by *artesania*- (selling traditional crafts like straw baskets). But even that has become so devalued, because women get paid per basket now instead of by the quality of the basket. The buyer comes here to the Lot and the women sell their baskets for very cheap, eight pesos at most, and then buyer brings them to Buenos Aires and makes tons of money on them, 50 pesos a piece. Most women here will sometimes just trade the baskets for clothes."

When I ask her what she thinks about the proliferation of people living exclusively

on pensions, I assume she's going to say that she thinks it's the easy way out because she has a daily paying job. She seems unsettled by the question and explains,

"I really don't know because of the discrimination here, it's almost impossible to get a job, especially secure government employment. The pension for people is something secure and it allows people here to live a less stressful life. They don't have to worry about where they're going to get their food everyday."

Yessica adds, "People here have become accustomed to getting help from the government and even more accustomed to taking *trabajo malo* (bad jobs) instead of working towards a title or a better job. Many people intend to get jobs but have to leave them, because they have to take care of their families, or they can't get transportation out of the Lot, or they can't get hired because they look too *aborigen*."

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The barriers that exist to earning a title, finishing school or getting a formal job range from having a dark, broad Toba face, to the geographic and social isolation from potential city employers, the taunting of aboriginal students in higher-tier schools, the price of books and transportation, and the lack of understanding on the part of teacher and employers of that the main priority of the Toba is family. Because of these barriers to acquiring profitable jobs and easily acquired social welfare programs and pensions that discourage social mobility and integration into the labor market, people in Nam Qom have indeed become used to *trabajo malo*- low paying construction jobs, the production of devalued artesanal crafts, prostitution, and rummaging in the local dump.

Florinda explained to me, "In other aboriginal communities, there are people that are doctors and lawyers, but you'd never find that here." When I ask her why, she says she doesn't know, "maybe the cost. I always ask my kids what they want to be when they're older, and they don't know what to say, and even if they did, I don't know if it could ever happen. Ignacio says he wants to be in the army like his father. I'm proud of that."

SECTION II: WELFARE AND DISABILITY

Welfare in the Barrio: Why Nam Qom is Cheap to Buy

In Nam Qom today, the main source of income is through forms of government and nongovernmental social assistance, pensions, and religious and mission donations and programs. With the decimation of their traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle, the way in which a family is to effectively navigate their new wilderness-- the system of

governmental assistance, pensions, and welfare-- greatly day-to-day existence. The presence of the Argentinean state is evident within the limits Nam Qom, where there is a police station, a primary and secondary school, a health clinic, three publicly funded food kitchens, as well as government provided groceries that arrive monthly. Though traditional mud and palm houses are prevalent, government and UNICEF provided concrete houses neatly construct a series of numbered blocks and roads. Electricity is a fixture in most houses and tanks of water located on each block provide free water.

Since its consolidation in 1970, a number of development projects have been executed in Nam Qom. In 1979, ninety houses were constructed through the *Ministration of Social Action*. In 1995, fifty houses were constructed through the *Provincial Institute of Housing*, operation "*Techo y Trabajo*" (Roof and Job). In 1995, there was the development of a drinkable water project through the Subsecretary of Housing for the Nation. In 1995, the health center was constructed by the *Program BID/Arg/078*. In 1995, the *Program Strengthening of Civil Society* helped the community to construct a blockade. In 1996, there were health development projects such as *The Center of Infant Development* through the *Maternal-Infant Nutrition Program* (PROMIN), nutritional assistant by *Program PRANI*, and Maternal-Infant Assistance and Vaccination through *Programs of the Ministry of Public Health of the Nation*. On paper, there is a surplus of programs of assistance available in Nam Qom which include: (From Iñigo Carrea 2007):

- Plan for Unemployed Heads of Household (*Plan Jefe y Jefas de Hogar Desocupados*)
- Program for Food Security (*Programa de Seguridad Alimentaria*)
- Family Program for Social Inclusion (*Programa Familias por la Inclusión Social*)
- Plan Improvement (*Plan Mayores*)

- Program of National Support for Humanitarian Actions for Indigenous Populations (*Programa de Apoyo Nacional de Acciones Humanitarias par alas Poblaciones Indigenas*)
- Federal Program of Health (*Programa Federal de Salud*)
- National Program of Student Scholarships (*Programa Nacional de Becas Estudiantiles*)
- National Program of 700 schools (*Programa Nacional de 700 Escuelas*)
- National Fund for Housing (*Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda*)
- Program for the Provision of Drinkable Water (*Programa de Provisión de Agua Potable*)
- Social Help and Basic Sanitation (*Ayuda Social y Saneamiento Básico*)
- Program of Social Assistance in Frontier Area in the Northeast ad Northwest of Argentina (*Programa de Desarrollo Social en Áreas Fronterizas del Noroeste y Noreste Argentinos con NBI*)
- Project for Rural Development in the Northeast Argentina Provinces (*Proyecto de Desarrollo Rural de las Provincias del Noreste Argentino*)
- Agricultural Program to Increase Home Farms (*Programa Agrícola de Autoconsumo*)
- For All Our People (*Por Nuestra Gente Todo*)
- Attention of Non Tax Exempt Pensions (*Atención de Pensiones No Contributivas*)



Translated in numbers, for Barrio Nam Qom in 2000, more than one-third of the population (37.6%) were beneficiaries of one or more of the programs (Iñigo Carrea 2007). Generally in Formosa, there has been a substantial increase in the amount of beneficiaries of social programs; in September 2004, 53,430 people were beneficiaries of *Plan Jefes y Jefas de Hogar Desocupados* (Plan for Unemployed Heads of Households), in a population of approximately 486,000 people. Seventy percent of the total cost of the program is covered by the national government, from non governmental organizations, and in some cases externally funded multilateral organizations. There is low participation of the provincial government in providing resources (Iñigo Carrea 2007).

The surplus of these forms of aid results from fact that voting is compulsory in Argentina, and there is a lot of competition for the votes of the poor and uneducated who exist in material scarcity, and represent the majority of the population of Formosa.

Providing the promise of a these programs is both a way for politicians to buy votes from the poor and enhance their social assistance resume, and political capital, to show the country that they are "taking care of the poor indigenous populations". Nam Qom is not an exception, but only a more convenient place to execute vote-buying activities because it is closer to the capital and politicians can go there directly instead of sending someone else like they must do with the more rural, Western communities. In a sense, Namqom is "cheap to buy". All indigenous towns and villages, such as the Wichi, Pilaga, and Toba of Western Argentina, are inundated with political favors in exchange for votes. Furthermore, aid is not restricted to indigenous populations; the same assistance programs exist in the poorer barrios of Formosa, such as *Barrio Eva Peron* and *Barrio Juan Domingo* in which *punteros politicos* (political brokers) are ubiquitous, offering a multitude of promises and material gifts in exchange for votes. Further, disability pensions and the Jefe de Jogar Pension program are available nationally.

However, the actual existence of most of these programs is questionable, and they often disappear once the vote is secured. Politicians set up programs to the degree that they do enough paperwork and ground work to claim they exist without investing energy into the execution or sustainability. Toba people have become used to these unfulfilled promises, and the lack of trust they have in politicians has resulted in an apathetic relation towards politics; politics has become simply a conduit of resources rather than a meaningful endeavor.

Becoming Invalid

"Those who don't take advantage of this pension invalid are going to just remain poor."- Florinda

The plan *Jefes y Jefeas de Hogar Desocupados* was the central program introduced in 2002 and continued to be the most popular in 2009, during my first stay in Nam Qom. It was instituted to remedy those suffering from Argentina's economic depression. The pension provided 150 pesos monthly that would not have to be paid back to the unemployed with children younger than 18 with the goal of protection of the family. It required documentation of attendance of children listed in the pension in school, documentation of health status, and the integration of the head of the household in formal education or participation in classes to contribute to their future involvement in the labor market (Iñigo Carrea 2007). The program also provided communal improvement jobs for many Toba men and women (Sanchez-Ocassio 2003).

However, when I returned in 2010, I was shocked to see the unfettered proliferation and domination of the invalid (handicap) pension within the barrio in such a short period of time, a complete reversal from the pension trends of the last year, in which the majority had a variety of family pensions, from *Jefe de Hogar* pensions, 7-child pensions, universal pensions, single mother pensions as well as a variety of others. Further, I was surprised by the openness and humor with which people discussed bribing the doctors to falsify handicap documents, and how many of these transactions were pushed through by singular nurse, Mariana, at the health center for about 100 pesos.

In 2009, Florinda and Julian were living off of a *plan Jefe de Hogar Desocupada*, which required monthly documentation of their children's' school attendance and vaccination. I watched Florinda spend an enormous amount of time preparing and

manicuring her documents every month, going to the school to get attendance sheets, making sure the spelling was accurate, checking birth dates with the clinic nurse, making photocopies, and traveling back and forth to the registrar. Her document card was covered in an elaborate case decorated with flowers. We listened intently to the radio when they were announcing ID numbers that would be filled the next day. She loved talking about the things she would buy when her pension number came up every couple months- furniture, ice cream, colorful curtains, eggbeaters, backpacks for her children with a complete set of pens and pencils. Her eyes lit up with the hope of consumption and accumulation that her pension provided.

But the optimism she expressed while waiting for her pension to arrive was a moment of unexpected hope that momentarily peaked through what was an intense anxiety that permeated her daily existence: the inability to provide food for her children or to save money. She told me she dreaded when her oldest son came home from school and she had nothing to feed him. She debated daily about keeping her kids home from school when they had no shoes, or dirty clothes, which meant risking the free meal they would receive in the kindergarten.

When she went to go pick up her pension money, she was told she was missing a document and she had to completely refill her papers and reapply for the program. She tearfully told me that at the end of the year she became very desperate and the family went to the San Antonio Dump, about 10 km walking distance from Barrio Nam Qom, to collect trash to sell for 70 *centavos* per kilo. She said that she fished some clothes out for her youngest daughter but had heard rumors that the trash was toxic and was afraid to clothe her in them.

"There are tons of people, mostly children, who walk barefoot over the river and sleep covered in cardboard tents, disguised in the trash. They eat the garbage, a man died last year from toxic food and our neighbor, who lives on this side, we heard her son got cut in half by the bulldozer. *Peligroso es la vida aca*. (How dangerous our life is here)."

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When I returned a year later in 2010, she excitedly rushed me into her house to show off her small electric oven, her new refrigerator, and a host of new DVDs. After leaving her in 2009, deeply saddened by her stories of having no other choice than to scavenge through the toxic dump, I felt disjointed and dazed by her sense of excitement, by the pristine new devices she had acquired, by the way she carefully organized her house to accommodate her new things.

She took me into her bedroom with her new boxspring mattress. She laughs when she recounts how much it hurt her back the first time she slept on it. She opens the refrigerator door to show me the inside, but it is completely empty. "My son always makes fun of me because it's always empty". She explains that she just paid the third installment on the fridge but had to spend the entirety of her monthly pension, but it was worth it because she needed it. She excitedly tells me she's selling food throughout the neighborhood- *pastaflores, sopa paraguaya, torta dulce, pastelitos, empanadas, locro*- and she sometimes makes up to 60 pesos a day. She was not just dreaming of consumption, of buying curtains and toys, counting down the days when her pension arrived, but of production- planning a business and accumulating money. "I have a lot of clients" she smiles. She takes out her little moon shaped wallet and says, "This is where I keep my money that I make." She says quietly, she knows it's impossible, but in the future she wants to finish high school so she can take classes in gastronomy, and get a job as a cook somewhere. I had never seen her so excited or hopeful in the previous year, in which she just hoped to finish secondary school.

After dinner, I mention how great she's doing and ask her how she got the money to buy all these new things, and she laughs and says she has a *pension de invalidez* (handicap/invalid pension) which she paid the doctor at the health center put together for 100 pesos over 10 months ago. As I would find out, this type of pension quickly became the most common form of assistance in the barrio over the last year, complexly wiping out the plethora of other pension programs. I ask her husband Julian how so many people have come to get these invalid pensions in such a short time and he answers,

"The people learned about them, there's no tax on them, we're *aprovechando* (taking advantage of) this moment in time to get as much as possible. We're not allowed to have the welfare credit card they give the white people, so they gave us these. There's no obligation, you don't have to prove your kids go to school, or spend days making photocopies and going to the city registrar. You don't have to get a job. It lasts for life. *They just leave you alone.*"

Florinda adds, "We don't know how long these will last, but in the mean time were looking for other opportunities. I heard about this other project that I'm waiting to come through. *There are always other projects to look for.*" Indeed, there are tons of assistance projects going on in the barrio at any one time, from large-scale state pension programs, church-sponsored electricity and knitting classes, to anonymous trucks driving along the road giving out bread and yogurt. Often during election time, these projects are initiated to trade for votes, but once the vote is secured, the program often flounders and disappears; hence, social assistance in Nam Qom is in a constant ebb and flow, and the Toba find themselves in the occupation of scouting out and extracting resources when they can.

I ask her if she would rather have work or be pensioned and she says work:

"With a pension you aren't allowed to work in the city- like a real job. You just have to sit around all day and do nothing, especially with *invalidez* you can't do

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anything, and if they find out, they will tax you and if you don't pay the tax you'll go to jail. I don't do anything all day. But there's not any work anyway."

She explained to me the process of certifying her invalid pension, of how she had to swear under oath to a judge in the city that she was handicapped and could not work as a result of a lung disease, as the doctor had falsified on her papers. She documented that she was a single mother, even though she was legally married, because it would make the paperwork shorter. She was afraid and nervous and continues to fear getting found out and thrown in jail. "Lying to the judge is a *cosa fea* (ugly thing) to do," she explains and looks annoyed, "*but what else am I supposed to do?*" She quickly changes her tone and sharply says that she does not feel very bad about lying, because the discrimination of the past continues and "*those who don't take advantage of this pension invalid are going to just remain poor.*"

When her papers were approved, she had to get a certificate from the police station saying she was invalid. I ask her whether she thinks the police know that everyone is falsifying their papers and she lets out a short laugh and says, "of course". I ask her if she thinks its good thing that everyone in the barrio is pensioned and she says, "Yes because we don't have to depend on one another, on other people here," and I understand she's talking about not having to ask her relatives for food. When I ask her if she feels very managed by the government and she says, "The more money you have, the more you are managed by the government, the more you have to do what the government, or *whoever is giving you the money, tells you what to do.*"

With the decimation of their traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle, the way in which a family is to effectively navigate their new wilderness, the system of governmental

assistance, pensions, and welfare, greatly determines day-to-day existence. The ways in which indigenous people with no income form dependent and reciprocal relationships with the state through pensions make their manner of subsistence participation in politics itself. Their "jobs" become searching out and taking advantage of a continual array of new and often unstable social assistance programs and government pensions that often disappear as quickly as they are initiated. The dependence of a Toba family flows to and from government and family networks and is continually reformed as personal relationships flounder, as capital accumulates, and as new politicians and welfare projects came into existence and just as quickly disappear. However, some form of dependency seem to always exist in Nam Qom always exists, whether it is within kin networks of reciprocity or through government programs of social assistance, and mostly commonly, a combination of both. *Whoever is giving you the money, tells you what to do*, and that person often changes- whether it be the state, a local politician, a sister, or a nun- as personal and economic relationships continually evolve and change in both negative and positive ways.

Invalides and Invisibility

"They just leave you alone" - Julian

As Florinda says, *"whoever is giving you the money, tells you what to do,"* and the invalid pension gives you money and tells you to do nothing; literally to *"sit around all day and do nothing"*. It tells you to act handicapped, and because it disallows the

Toba from working in the formal economy. It essentially creates economic invalids among those who enact it.

In comparison with the family plan pensions of 2009, the invalid pension of 2010 does not require any documentation after it is approved and it lasts for life. There is no requirement of work for the parents nor school attendance or vaccination for the children. Further, children remain undocumented on the pension itself. There is no attempt, as in the plan *Jefe de Hogar*, to provide instruction and training to enter the labor market. The lack of documentation combined with the fact that many Toba told me that they knew police and judges that passed their papers knew they were lying about their disability status, represent a complete role reversal in the history of strict state control of indigenous people, specifically in forceful attempts to make them into manageable Argentinean citizens and laborers.

James Scott (1998) has noted that written documents (forms of personal identification, legal titles, letters, laws) have acted for centuries as mechanisms that make populations more visible and hence, more manageable. In the history of Toba contact with the state, documentation has been very powerful in imposing constraints on indigenous people in terms of both mobility and behavior. In the 1880s, the congress debated whether *indios* should be considered "second class citizens," "underage citizens," "nationals but not citizens," or "rebellious Argentineans". This legal ambiguity lingered for decades until they were given the status of *menores* (minors) because of "the widespread perception that they were childlike creatures unable to comprehend legal codes and, therefore, in need of state protection" (Gordilo 2006:165). In the early 20th century at the beginning of colonization by criollo settlers in the Chaco interior,

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local authorities and the military viewed the Toba as "Indians on the move" with suspicion and demanded that they produce a written document that would testify to their *buen comportamiento* (good behavior). In order to travel through the Chaco, the Toba were required to obtain these "certificates of good behavior", which outlined where they could and could not go. As Gordillo (2008), "the potency with which [the Toba] would imbue these texts was closely related to their view of the written word as an emblem of the power of the actors that had conquered the region." (166) Hence, by the state turning a blind eye proliferation of invalid pensions, they are essentially abandoning their attempts to shape the behavior of the Toba into manageable, laboring citizens; they are essentially making the population invisible to the state, and reverting back to early century attempts at segregation.

As Nancy Scheper Hughes (2004) explains, "All forms of violence are sustained by the passively averted gaze." (225)

"They just leave you alone" But why now?

In historical retrospect, what the state, religious missions, and non-governmental organizations have been trying to "do" with the Toba, or "make" of the Toba, has been continually changing- from complete extinction, to segregation, to forced labor, to integration, and back again to segregation and invisibility. The roles the government has tried to fit the Toba into range of roles from sedentarized agriculturalists, to entrepreneurs of parsimony, to laborers in the formal economy. Initial extinction campaigns in 1875, called "Conquest of the Desert", attempted to pacify and severely reduce the number of Toba in return for 500,000 pesos (Sanchez Ocassio 2003). Subsequent to conquest, colonization and missionization in 1880s, the Toba authority

over their own decision-making and autonomy sharply declined over a few decades. Externally made decisions were imposed upon the Toba involving land tenure, geographic mobility, access to traditional food resources, working conditions; programs concerning Toba health, education, welfare, legal documents for participation in Argentina society as well as for public assemblies. Even Toba social organization, the government instituted position of the *cacique general* was de-recognized and the Toba were rarely consulted on decisions involving their welfare. Laws restricting the Toba to the Chaco region in 1924 forced them into the role of the cotton wage laborer. Agencies in the 1950 attempted to make the Toba self-sustainable and sedentarized by providing seeds and equipment to plant cotton corn and vegetables in order to discourage traveling on hunting or harvesting expeditions (Miller 1980). Missions around the same time established stores and bank accounts for the Toba to teach them "the economic facts of life" of parsimony and saving (Miller 1980:68). Attempts to geographically and socially isolate the Toba in the 1960s from the general urbanized public resulted in resettlements restricting the Toba of Puente Blanco to Nam Qom because with the growth of the city "*they were always just staying put, and as the city was growing, [they] had to be removed*". "Certificates of good behavior" and ID cards of the colonial era, to the documentation of health and schooling in the era of the *Jefe de Hogar* pension thus represent an attempt to make the Toba into a manageable, visible, laboring citizen.

Whereas previously, the Toba were made manageable by the state by physically and legally constraining their land, requiring ID documentation, and forced entry into wage labor, the modern manner of managing the Toba seemed to be through pension and their required documentation and job training required. However, the

disappearance *Jefe de Hogar* pension and emergence of the invalid pension seems to betray the government's attempts to "fix", manage, and mold the Toba through these pensions, and perhaps an abandonment on any hope to turn the Toba into a citizen with the capacity for social mobility in the formal economy. Or perhaps, by giving up attempts at manageability, they are saying the Toba are unworthy of being "fixed" at all.

Many Toba said that this pension was favorable because it allows people in Nam Qom to live a calmer, more secure life without the hectic obligations of city life. However, pensions have the unintended consequences of maintaining ethnic difference and discouraging social mobility. It becomes economically insensible to seek more profitable and stable work in the city when provided with a pension, which leads to a condition of families living in constant material scarcity, just scraping by everyday.

Further many Toba said the invalid pension allowed them to preserve the traditional lifestyle; however so little of the productive aspects of the traditional lifestyle remain, as a result of constricting laws and ecological deterioration, that this appears unfeasible. They have been pushed and prodded into so many different roles away from their traditional lifestyles, suffering the disruption and warping of their culture, and made unable to self-sustain by the government's constricting laws. After being stripped of the ability to be provide for themselves, there appears to be no turning back to traditional culture.

This abandonment also can represent the government giving up on trying to place the Toba into some type of productive role. They are no longer trying to "do" anything with the Toba or "make" anything from the Toba.

Many Toba did indeed feel a sense of freedom from their invalid pensions. However, this sense of autonomy is restricted and limited, as it exists in the confines of state regulation and a history of subjugation that made the Toba both dependent on the state and unable to provide for themselves. In a sense, the Toba are dropped with their newfound sense of autonomy in a state-constructed economic, agricultural, and geographic wasteland- Barrio Nam Qom, where few opportunities for improvement exist. One can surreptitiously work in the informal economy selling food and basketry, washing clothes, or running a local kiosk, but the income from these types of jobs could not even a small family. This holds especially true considering that one's customer base is restricted to Nam Qom, where few have money to spend. Further, the pension money is not enough to both feed a family and save enough to start a business, as I will describe in the case of Florinda.

All one can truly do is "sit around all day and do nothing", waiting for your pension to be filled.

**Edith the Invalid:
Making Poverty Meaningful**

"Estamos una cosa, y los blancos son otros." - Edith
We are one thing, and the white people are another.

Edith, her parents, her numerous brothers and sisters and their children all live in a two room brick first-wave UNICEF house with dirt floors and a mud hut extension on the back that serves as the kitchen. Her family is one of the poorest and least connected families in Nam Qom, as opposed to Florinda who comes from a large-well connected family that continually circulates resources. Most of Edith's siblings rely on

the singular salary of their father who has a government job, and many of the children walk miles to the city to beg for bread. A few years back, she moved out across the road to an outlying extension of the barrio where she and her sister Carlina set up their own mud huts. When I walk into Edith's cramped one-room house, the walls are plastered together with mud, carton, and dry wood beams. The ceiling is slanted, the floor dug out, and the wooden shingles warped from the rain. There's a new flat screen TV perched on the dusty floor. I ask her where she got it from, and she says rather cryptically that her father loaned it to her. She points to the DVD player above and it said that that it was lent from another neighbor so they could listen to music of the evangelical church.

When I visited her in 2009, Edith had just left her job cleaning the school that was part of her *Jefe de Hogar* plan that required her to work and finish primary school. She had a *plan familia* in the summer of 2009 that covered her three children, but there had been a mix up with the spelling of her name on the pension form, so it was cut off. She spent a great deal of time trying to renew it; whenever I crossed her on the road, she asked me to check the spelling on her folder full of documents. However, she was never able to complete it because she lost her ID card when her home flooded. She was offered a job as a maid right before I arrived in 2010, but after calculating the cost of the two busses required to get to the city versus the money she would make, she turned it down.

I ask her about her pension plan and she seems uncomfortable when I refer to it as *invalidéz* (disability), and she avoids calling it by that name, which differed from the laughter and amusement that I often encountered when I asked other people about their

invalid pensions. Rather clumsily, I try to get at how she feels about lying on her forms to try to understand whether she has an antagonistic relationship with the state, or whether she thinks the state owes the Toba people reparations in the form of pensions. She says that when the nurse from the health center was putting together her papers and arranging for the lawyer and doctors signatures, she had to note that she used to have to take a pill everyday, but she doesn't tell me what for, but mentions she has problems with her hands, and that they hurt when it gets cold and she can no longer make baskets. I soon realize that she really believes wholeheartedly in her disability and her inability to work. I ask her what about all the other people who have invalid pensions in Nam Qom who are clearly not invalid, and she says that its difficult to tell whether a person is sick from how they look, they could be sick in their minds, or have an illness that isn't visible. She says her brother Jose was totally healthy until one day he came down with a fever and died the next day. "You often can't tell if a person from here is sick," she explains, "The health center they city built for us is so bad people don't go for check ups, illnesses go unrecognized and people die suddenly all the time. We all could be sick and we don't know it. *Estamos una cosa, y los blancos son otros.*" (We are one thing, and the white people another.)

She explains that the pension plan system was put in place for the aboriginal people when the president of Argentina, who she calls by her first name, Christina, came to Formosa and saw that the people in Nam Qom could not work. I ask her if she would prefer to work or be pensioned and she stops and doesn't answer immediately but then says that there just isn't work. She says that people here *no tienen ganas de trabajar* (they don't have the desire to work) and then she quickly corrects herself and

says that they do want to work but there is no work. I ask her what she buys first when her pension comes up, and she first she buys *mercaderia* (dry food groceries), then meat, and then other things like shoes and clothes. She says the money usually does not last her to the middle of the month, which is when she starts buying things on credit. I ask her how people are buying new motorcycles on just their pension salaries, and she says she has no idea but her eyes light up as she tells me the things she's like to buy if she had enough money. She mentions a motorcycle to drive to church, a new stove, a dresser, and a stand to dry her clothes. As in the case of Florinda, the pension elicits a productive hope of accumulation, one that will probably never materialize.

Edith says that her pension used to cover her kids when she had a *plan familia* last year, but now it only covers her, but that her life is *mas tranquilo* (more calm) than last year. She feels more secure. She does not have to spend huge amounts of time documenting her kids' attendance, especially her son who prefers to ask for bread in the city and collecting scraps at the dump, and traveling back and forth to the city making copies and fixing errors, or showing up to the bank to find out she had been cut off. The only issue is the day she goes to the bank to get her invalid salary, because she sometimes can't afford the bus out and is afraid they'll give the money it to somebody else. "*Mi pension produce mi vida*" (My pension produces my life) she says.

As Javier Auyero (2001) explains, through the Peronist way of solving problems, mainly through providing pensions and social assistance programs,

"A stomach can be filled, pain relieved, the flu cured, and a political identity revealed and transformed. In conceptual terms, this means that this informal institution is not only a network of distribution of material resources, but also a symbolic system, a structure that provides a way of ordering reality, thereby rendering the experience of poverty in a particular time and place meaningful." (27)

In the case of Edith, her experience of poverty and invalidity is historically and socially constructed; her pension superficially represents the idea that the *aborigines* are not well taken care of by the state; as she explains, because of the sub par healthcare available in the barrio: "*We all could be sick and we don't know it.*" Essentially, *We are all made sick by lack of attention by the government.* In a deeper sense, Edith, as well as many other Toba, consider their pension and social assistance programs as representing reparations for past abuses, literally repayment for being made unable to work through a history of discrimination, confinement, ecological deterioration of land, and the ejection of Toba from the formal economy work force. But for many Toba the general political systems mean nothing; politics is simply a meaningless conduit of resources, due to histories of broken promises and mistrust of the state. For others, the state has become entrenched in the Toba world, and with its wealth, it is obliged to share with the Toba, bringing the micro-level egalitarian enforcement of the distribution wealth in Nam Qom to the macro-level of the state.

SECTION III: THE CLASHING OF INFORMAL AND FORMAL ECONOMIES

The History of Labor: There can be no Rich Toba

"Because the life of the *AborigenToba* is to be poor. It's not like the whites."-sugar plantation worker

The conquest and colonization of the Chaco region irreversibly disrupted the traditional Toba lifestyle. Legal contracts allowing cattlemen to graze on Toba land led to ecological deterioration of smaller and smaller confinements of Indian property,

inflaming sentiments of exploitation and confinement. Soon after, lumbermen, cattlemen, and agricultural entrepreneurs infiltrated the Chaco seeking wage laborers, which they found among the Toba; economically weakened, geographically restrained, and hungry due to their restricted access to valued resources of meat, fruits, and fish, the Toba left their settlements in droves to enter the wage labor economy. With the money they earned from wage labor, the Toba bought the cheapest foods available, macaroni and noodles, from their *patrones* (bosses) who provided the wages in the first place. After the cattle raiding epoch, the corresponding increase in starches and decrease in protein made the Toba acutely and bodily aware of their economic deprivation (Miller 1980).

During the 1860s, saw mills began to operate at the eastern edge of the Chaco, in which the Toba were first subjugated into the role of a wage earner; they learned specific tasks required of them in exchange for food and clothing of an inferior quality that they had known traditionally. During the Centeno administration of 1925, the provincial government confined the Toba to the Chaco province because their labor was required in the cotton industry. Role ambiguity within the Toba culture was most acute in the cotton fields where traditional skills were no longer appreciated and women began to develop the same skills as men, upsetting the traditional gendered division of labor (Miller 1980).

Comment [v1]: Which provincial government? Formosa or chaco?

However, Gordillo (2002) recounts a more complex set of sentiments than simply mistrust and subjugation among the Toba with regard to their work as wage laborers in *ingenios* (sugar plantations). Specifically, the incorporation of Toba as wage laborers and the introduction of money itself into the Toba world led to conflicting sentiments of

"being partial participants in the wealth of capitalism and the simultaneous feeling of [being excluded] from it." (4) Gordillo interprets this contradiction as a generalized tension emerging from the practice of labor worldwide in which workers negotiate "income and the sense of identity provided by wage labor and the exploitation it entails." (4)

Many older Toba vividly remember returning rich from the sugar factory, excitedly listing the array of goods earned in the factory and endless coins that could be exchanged for a number of commodities, from store bought food to beef and horses. This mirrors the productive power of the pension, and by money by proxy, that exists today, and the way it conjures up hopes of consumption, as seen in the case of Florinda and Edith.

However, as the working Toba returned to their settlements, these goods entered the Toba informal economy of reciprocity, generosity, and sharing in which neighbors and relatives who stayed behind demanded a share of the earnings of the laborers. Consequently, those returning from the sugar plantations often bartered or gave away most of the goods they earned (Gordillo 2002).

In the traditional Toba worldview, economic responsibilities, social status, and aboriginal identity are rigidly conjoined; the distribution of goods among kin plays a more important role in Toba life than their acquisition. Individual prestige and perceptions of morality are determined not by what one is able to accumulate, but by how much they distribute. Given the obligation to share, surplus accumulation and conspicuous consumption are prohibited. Everyone professing Toba identity must share what he or she possesses, especially with regard to food. In the 1980s, Miller described

the tradition among the Toba of extracting food from a child's mouth and giving it to a sibling to emphasize the importance of sharing (Miller 1980).

This type of economic system has been extensively studied in the anthropology of primitive societies and has been termed "gift economies" by Marcel Mauss, in opposition to the commodity economies of industrialized societies. In commodity economies, there is a strong distinction between objects and persons through the idea of private property in which objects can be sold and ownership rights can be transferred to the new owner. In gift economies objects are loaned rather than sold, such that the identity of the giver is invariable bound up with the object given that causes the gift to have a power which compels the recipient to reciprocate. Gift exchange leads to a mutual interdependence between giver and receiver. Solidarity is achieved through the social bonds created by gift exchange (Mauss 2002). Further, this type of sharing economy has been documented in other cultures under intense pressure of poverty and discrimination. In her ethnographic investigation of inner city African Americans, Carol Stack surmised that these networks of exchange were so pervasive because her subjects could hardly survive racist oppression and economic marginalization without them (Stack 1974).

The conflict between former sharing values and contemporary accumulative possibilities became an unresolved problem for the Toba (Miller 1980). The new economy put no limits on how much one could accumulate nor did it provide rules for how wages would be shared, spent, or saved. Traditionally, the amount of game killed and its distribution followed strict rules that had operated in Toba settlements for centuries. Food sharing values within tight webs of generosity and egalitarianism

conflicted with attempts at entrepreneurialism, frugality, and parsimony, values the Toba observed were valued in mainstream, white society. In attempting to adopt parsimony, the Toba frequently failed to apply it to their best advantage and unable to save family funds when it would have been advantageous. Families that learned to cultivate cotton or extra amounts of vegetables found it impossible to save goods or plan ahead because less fortunate, or less entrepreneurial, relatives would often show up asking for a share of the surplus (Miller 1989).

With this deeply embedded mindset, "There can be no rich Toba." (Miller 1989, 641) As Gordillo (2002) noted from his interviews with *ingenio* workers in the 1990s, several workers expressed frustration at their ignorance about how to save and accumulate capital. This necessity of constant sharing and resulting material scarcity became tied to "their very condition as *aborigines*". (13) As one *ingenio* worker explained:

"Because we, *Aborigines Toba*, we don't know how to handle things so that we don't lack anything... We earn money; we earn clothing. What happens? When we come over here, we don't even think about making a business, we don't even think about having a store. Just spending money all the time... I wonder why people don't understand. I only understand when it's over. Because the life of the *AborigenToba* is to be poor. It's not like the whites." (Gordillo 2002:13)

Through experiences in the cane fields, the identity of poverty became closely tied with aboriginal identity, as class and identity become inextricably joined. The Toba and other indigenous groups from the Chaco- the Wichi, Chorote, Pilaga, and Nivakle- were grouped together in the lowest level of the labor force under the category *Indios* or *Aborígenes*. The indigenous workers were unskilled laborers who carried out tasks "complementary to cane cutting: clearing forests, shoveling ditches, weeding, planting cane, and chopping wood for the factory." (Gordillo 2002:7) Today the terms *aborigen*

and pobre (poverty) are used synonymously and interchangeably. When people talk about the aborigines, they are often referring to the poor of any ethnic background.

Because of the historical construction of a poverty-based identity through wage-labor experiences, many Toba argue that they lack the knowledge, customs, or skills to produce and accumulate wealth. They often cite the informal economy of reciprocity, meaning the custom of equally distributing food, as the reason for lack of accumulation and entrepreneurialism (Gordillo 2002).

Kin Networks of Reciprocity & Embodied Economies

"There's a lot of help here. I might have to send my son to ask my Aunt or my sister for pasta or rice, or the politicians will come looking for your for votes with boxes of food. Still we suffer a lot because of the hunger."-
Florinda

Through my previous investigation in contraception, it became readily clear that the manner of communally rearing children is part of the larger system of sharing, reciprocity, and exchange among the Toba that has persisted for generations. Families appear to circulate food and goods continually in a ring of exchange that links the impoverished households of the Nam Qom to each other, making sure no one goes hungry. The resilience of the community in the face of abject poverty is astonishing. While they remain very managed by the government, they maintain their own informal ring of solidarity and exchange outside the confines of the non-Toba economy. When I asked a Toba man, Rigoberto, about what happens when government assistance gets cut off, he answered, "Without government assistance, they always find a way to live, a

way to manage." In this way, they seem to hold on to their traditional indigenous system of gift-exchange buffer themselves from the harshness of the formal economy.

Through an elaborate informal economy of reciprocity has persisted for centuries, it has become warped as some residents become more integrated into the formal labor and make contacts in the life of the city while others become pressed by escalating poverty, leading to an incipient class stratification within the community. This social stratification has led to increased tensions between kin, intense surveillance of accumulation and distribution within the community resulting in intense jealousy and rampant rumors of hoarding. The tight linkage between ethnic identity, morality, and the nobility associated with poverty, distribution, and living in material scarcity becomes further complicated by social stratification in a formerly egalitarian society.

I first met Florinda in 2009 when her niece, Teresita, was holding the newly born blue-eyed baby of her cousin, asked me, "Do you want to meet my mean aunt or my nice aunt?" She handed the baby over and said, "We'll go visit Florinda." Indeed, she was the nice aunt, and became one of my primary informants due to the fact that she was incredibly open, frankly discussing everything from the stress brought about by her inability to feed her children to her embarrassment over clothing her daughter with clothes from the city dump. She was the first woman to offer me food and invite me to stay the night in her house; the first day we met she gave me the gift of a straw basket encased with colorful soda bottle wrappers filled with a stack of *torta a la parilla*.

In 2009, I noticed Florinda was constantly being visited by relatives, who provided most of the daily food she fed her family. Her great aunt received free food

from a local public kitchen and brought a pot of soup every Monday or Tuesday. Her brother brought her meat at the end of every week. She had her children's names noted at three different public kitchens, and they often went several times a day to get extra food. The godmother of her youngest daughter owned a kiosk and often sent her ingredients to make cake to sell. I brought her chicken or empanadas to cook every couple weeks, and she often asked me to buy diapers for her daughter.

She told me they usually do not go more than two or three days without eating, they usually get something. "There's a lot of help here. I might have to send my son to ask my aunt or my sister for pasta or rice, or the politicians will come looking for your votes with boxes of food. Still we suffer a lot because of the hunger."

However, she felt frustrated and jealous over her lower position in her kin network; after she had to leave her job to care for her new baby, her younger sister Amalia married a gaucho with a relatively high salary, her brother gained a municipal job, and her aunt that already had a job as a nurse gained an extra salary from working for a local politician. As a result of increasing economic stratification within her family, she expressed a desire to be more independent from her extended kin. While she was actively involved in reciprocal exchange networks, she was rarely able to provide as much as her relatives with well paying jobs, which both embarrassed her and intensified her identity as impoverished. When her second son was born, she had a job working as a maid in the city, and she looked ashamed to tell me that she now washes clothes for other women in the barrio, making about ten pesos each wash. She explained that everyone in the barrio washes their own kids' clothes everyday; to wash someone else's clothes was embarrassing, especially when she worked for her younger sister Amalia.

But she preferred washing to asking. Her husband Julian had no work besides small construction jobs and cutting wood from the *monte* to make straw mats. Her sister often offered her husband Julian work for 20 pesos feeding cows and pigs on their ranch, but she says he always refused, considering the pay too low for such a shameful job. The economic stratification between her and her sister was a constant source of jealousy that permeated and destroyed their relationship. She mentions she often felt so pressed by hunger that she sent her son Ignacio to ask to borrow food from Amalia because she could not face her. She mentions that Amalia's husband Gallo makes two-thousand pesos per month but she spends it on clothes, makeup, and prepared food. In comparison, she says she is always economizing and making her money stretch as far as possible. She snickers and adds that Amalia's such a bad cook that her husband, Gallo, secretly sends her ingredients to make him lunch.

However, when I returned 2010, her home was strangely silent and isolated; no family appeared at her home over the three months I spent in Nam Qom, a striking difference from 2009 in which relatives constantly passed through her house, despite the fact she lived at the edge of town. She told me tearfully that her brother had been murdered in a drunken dispute over the past year by a relative of her husband, and her family pressured her to divorce. When she refused, everyone in her family, which was particularly large and well-connected, stopped speaking to her and the food stopped coming. She became cut out of her kin network of exchange and she now relied entirely on her invalid pension and whatever she could derive from other welfare projects at the Catholic church and from local NGOs, which appeared relieving to her, as she did not

have to depend on other people in her family. She explains, "I mainly stay at my house, I don't wash clothes for anyone anymore."

While some days she went without food, other days she seemed to acquire a huge abundance when her pension filled or a neighbor helped her. Routinely when she cooked, she either threw the leftovers to the dogs, or offered it to a neighbor that regularly gave her sugar, *mate*, and flour or to the vendor at the kiosk where she had debts. "Sharing", she explained, "is the *lindo* (beautiful) thing to do. If I help someone now, they will help me in the future." She never saved anything, even after when she bought a refrigerator. When I brought her 3 kilos of meat to make empanadas, I asked her if she would sell the leftovers, and she said yes, brimming with a hopeful entrepreneurial spirit I had seen when I first arrived and she showed me her oven and little wallet brimming with pesos from the deserts she sold. But when I returned the next week, she told me she had made a cake for me with the money she had made, and I was strangely disappointed she had not turned any profit.

The next week I go to visit her again, and she's washing clothes alone in the back of the house. She seems upset and tells me she's sorry she doesn't have any food to offer me but she doesn't have any money today. She said she had just spent the rest of her month's pension on the last installment of her electric oven so she could cook food to sell but now she doesn't have enough money to buy any actual food. In fact, over the three months, I never see her sell any food or show the same excitement about her business as she did when I first arrived. She says she will never have enough money to buy all the ingredients to sell and feed her family at the same time. She says she'll just drink *mate* with lemon all day, "it curbs your hunger".

While informal networks of exchange can be buffers against the harshness of the informal commodity economy of the city, some residents of Nam Qom are beginning to feel the pressure of their dependency clash with the ideals of the morality of self-sufficiency present in mainstream culture. There are different gradients within the community of belief in the tenants of parsimony, independence, and providing for your family internally without participating in the sharing economy. For some, social stratification within Nam Qom has made participation in the informal sharing economy difficult to bear for those that must constantly ask, and can never provide. Florinda's embarrassment at constantly asking for food and her considerations about what constitutes a dignified job betrays her perhaps unattainable commitment to the ideas of the mainstream independent nuclear family and the increasing tension that results from social stratification in the community.

Florinda's incipient food business, which initially provided her with hope for a detachment from the informal economy of reciprocity and a path towards economic independence and hope, turned out to be logistically unfeasible. Further, her frequent trips to the San Antonio dump to collect cardboard for 70 cents per kilo, an extremely low payment for the amount of work and danger it required, often perplexed me because she could simply ask a relative for food or money or visit a public food kitchen. Her combination of partial participation within the informal economy, along with the pain it caused her to be in the lowered ranks of social stratification and her intense desire for independence and self-sufficiency, reveals the way in which tenants of both the formal and informal economy become embodied in singular residents of Nam Qom.

The transition to a money economy from a gift economy has been a long and difficult process for the Toba that is continually being renegotiated. In terms of gift economy theory, it appears that when dependence is equally distributed around a community it is not felt; it creates solidarity. However, when it disproportionably falls upon singular people, it becomes noticeably heavy, embarrassing, and painful. For others, being high on the ranking of social stratification is equated with immense responsibility. It often does not make sense for Toba people to seek jobs, to accumulate capital, or to attempt social mobilization, because aboriginal identity is so tied in with poverty, and money with responsibility and poverty with dependence and independence simultaneously. In other words, no Toba can accumulate wealth, or he is not *aborigen*. If he is to accumulate wealth, he has the responsibility to share enough to put himself back in poverty.

**Bringing your Groceries by Night:
The Inability to Accumulate**

"When times are really rough, we sometimes bring in our groceries by night, through the back woods. It's hard for us to accumulate. Its better to live day-by-day." –Eusabio

I met Guillermina on the bus out of Nam Qom. She said she recognized me from when I worked at the gynecologist center. She has a strikingly beautiful face, which was always framed by colorful dangling earrings along with a wrist cuffed with a number of string bracelets, making her seem much younger than her 28 years.

She seemed very distraught and asked me if I could help her. She brought me into her house and explained that her sons had no pants to go to school, and she heard

that the C.A.R.E. project often has clothing donations, which she received in the past. "The teachers in the schools, they're supposed to give away clothes but they just keep them for themselves or give them away to the teacher's aids. My son is always the lead actor in all the skits they do in the kindergarten, and he's not going to have any pants." We go together down to the market and pick out pants for both of her sons, with logos of their favorite TV show, Ben 10.

She explains that there's a play in the school tomorrow, about the *ante-aborigenes* for *Dia de los Pueblos Originarios* (Day for the Original Settlers), and she wants me to take pictures of her son Axel who will play the lead role. When we arrive, there is a teepee set up in the middle of the floor and a large banner celebrating "Dia de los Ninos" (Day of the Children). The teacher distributes a handful of signs describing the rights that each child in the world should have—right to a family, a house, education, food. She hands the signs to the kids and they stand confusedly in their apron-like uniforms holding the papers above their heads. Axel comes out and sits in the teepee with a little girl and they act out a scene of starting a fire. In exchange for the photos, she invites me to her house to eat dinner and to stay over. She also gives me a copy of her bible in the Qom language.

When I arrive, I notice that a little boy runs in through the back door and hands a sack of potatoes to Guillermina without a word. An older woman comes through the front door soon after with a box of tomato sauce. I ask her if she shares a lot with her neighbors and she says yes, that there is a woman, Saturnina, who cooks in the school's kitchen and brings her left over vegetables nearly every day.

I ask her if she shares a lot with her neighbors now and she says yes, if she has something that they need or if she needs something that someone else has, they will share but that it's not obligatory. Some people will just turn their back on you, she explains. She reiterates that there are some particularly close friends in the community that you enter into longer-term reciprocal sharing relationships with, in which they constantly exchange goods if one person needs and the other has it. I ask her if when she buys meat whether she shares it or saves it, and she says it depends on the kind of meat and the amount. She says that if she only has a little, she'll share it, but if it's a lot she'll save some of it. I ask her if people share more now than they did in the past and she says that people in the past asked for more and now they only ask for smaller portions, because everyone has less. When there is an economic depression, she says people keep to themselves, but when there's abundance, they are able to share. She says that sometimes people bring their *mercaderia* (groceries) by night so that other people in the community won't see it and ask to have some. She explains that sharing is *costumbre nuestro* (our custom) of the *aborigen*, and she smiles and tells me an interesting story that shows how outsiders cannot understand the custom:

"When my son Kevin was very young, about 5, he would go to the city and ask door to door for bread. There was a white man who always gave food to Kevin and he asked to meet his family. The man came one day with his son and family in his truck but I was too sick to go meet him but he told my sisters that he wanted to help our children, because children are innocent. He said he would give them food under the condition that Kevin went to school. He gave us notebooks and had us record exactly how much *mercaderia* (groceries) everyone ate in the family each day and he would bring exactly that amount, and that came for months. My neighbors began to see all the *mercaderia* that the man brought in and started to come and ask more and more from my family, but the man did not want us to share it, he wanted us to keep it for ourselves. I didn't know what to do, and sometimes I had to have a *corazon duro* (hard heart) and tell people I didn't have anything when I did. But sometimes people would tell me their stories and I felt I had to give them something. But the man became very ill and stopped

coming because he knew we gave away so much of the goods, but I always try to share when I can, because I have received so much help in the past."

Many Toba continually struggle to negotiate the gratification and feelings of benevolence and solidarity that come with sharing with kin with the hunger that they feel daily; hence "brining *mercaderia* by night". In startling opposition to the rumor mongering about accumulation about selfishness in the community, I also heard less often, but still poignant stories about "*las buenas*" (the good ones), or those who constantly shared; from the kiosk owner who sent Florinda all her extra cake supplies, to the cook that shared her vegetables daily with Guillermina, to myself when I provided birthday presents, dance costumes, and photos.

However, many Toba cite the informal economy of reciprocity, meaning the custom of equally distributing food, as the reason for lack of accumulation and entrepreneurialism. In the case of Kevin and Guillermina, it is evident that outsiders often attempt to mold Toba economic practices into mainstream, white values of parsimony, saving, and accumulating, and become frustrated when the Toba are unable or unwilling to carry out these practices. Within religious missions of the past, the Toba were believed to be incapable of managing their own economic affairs, ignorant of the value of work, and lazy; it was the obligation of the mission to teach them. The Mennonite missionary "Nam Cum" established a store in order to teach the Toba the "economic facts of life". Bank accounts were kept for individual families in order to instill the value of saving. The practice had to be abandoned as the Toba persistently complained that they were being cheated (Miller 1980).

Within Nam Qom, sharing is rarely outwardly discussed but subtly observed. I routinely saw spare food being given away to neighbors, even to dogs, instead of

rationed, stored, and saved. Children often enter the houses of relatives or neighbors and grab *tortas fritas* off the table without a word, and they are never chastised. When I brought a kilo of ice cream to Guillermina's house the next week for her son's birthday, several children showed up and she rationed the entire box for the children giving them double and triple cups for their brothers and sisters, even though she had a freezer. I noticed that most houses, refrigerators, and shelves were empty, despite the daily sight of Toba lugging huge bags of groceries back from the market on the bus. As one informant, Eusabio, one of the only students in the barrio to be enrolled in college, explained to me

"Its not worth it. You can't appear rich, or people will come and ask to share. That's why we eat all we can when we get food, because we're so hungry and because we can't save. When times are really rough, we sometimes bring in our groceries by night, through the back woods. It's hard for us to accumulate. Its better to live day-by-day."

Poverty, Jealousy, & Belonging

"You know, she doesn't even live here. She's always in the city. She doesn't know how we live. She doesn't know about la pobreza (the poverty)."- Ada

As Miller (1980) aptly surmises, "The adoption of a money economy has been a long painful process, one which continues to cause the Toba much misunderstanding and difficulty." (52) The historically constructed identity that emerged from the sugar plantations joining the condition of poverty with being *aborigen* combined with the moral obligation to share, and the consequence of living in day-to-day material scarcity circumscribes who is allowed to claim residence in the community of Nam Qom and

reinforces the inextricable connection between economic status, ethnicity, and belonging. The incipient social stratification in the Nam Qom along with the geographic isolation of community had led to close surveillance of sharing or hoarding behavior and extensive rumors about the morality, belonging, and ethnicity of those who disobey the system of egalitarianism. There's no such thing as a rich Toba, and residents of Nam Qom readily let you know who is breaking the rules.

Celestina comes from a well-connected family; her brother Augustin has a municipal job and her aunt Liliana serves as a *politico* (local politician), in that she is a broker between the indigenous people and politicians, mainly distributing resources and gifts in exchange for votes. Liliana lives next door to Celestina, and inside Liliana's house one can find a host of valued commodities: a fully stocked refrigerator, a cabinet full of blankets, several beds, a computer, a digital camera, and pristinely painted walls with paintings, and furniture. When I ask Celestina if her brothers and sisters share with her and she says her brother Augustin always attends her well when she visits him. She describes her aunt from the interior of the Chaco, "she always shares with my whenever I visit, regardless of how little she has. She's very *humilde* (humble)." When I ask about Liliana, she says "she guards most of her things. She's always in and out to the city, talking with the politicians. She's very *delicada* (delicate), not like the *aborigen*."

Not being in the geographical space of Nam Qom and traveling back and forth to the city is often declared as a proxy for not belonging to the community of poverty, and subsequently not *aborigen*.

I go to visit two sisters Mercedes and Yohanna, and they're sitting in a circle around baby Joel plopped inside a tire, under the shade of a tree. Three of their children

stumble through the fence with their plates from the public kitchen, chicken noodle soup and bread. The sisters placidly drink *mate* as their mother Ada weaves a basket. Mercedes turns the radio up, and a woman is heard vigorously complaining about discrimination in schools, about the poor treatment of the aboriginal students compared to the whites. Ada looks up to talk, and I expect her to agree with the complaining woman, but she looks down and says "*You know, she doesn't even live here. She's always in the city. She doesn't know how we live. She doesn't know about la pobreza (the poverty).*" On the way home I stop at the house of Dora, who comes from a relatively well-off family of expert basket weavers. They're also listening to the radio program and Dora says, "I know people are saying she's not *aborigen* because she's got light skin like me and she doesn't live here, that's not fair. I'm as *aborigen* as everyone else." Her mother Zunilda nods, and Dora jokes "its not fair that the *Reina* (prom queen) of the school is always *morrocho* (dark skinned), my daughter will never win." She looks at me and laughs, "We'll have to get you a *morrocho* boyfriend if you're going to stay here much longer."

Along with social stratification, the instability of the informal economy of reciprocity, and increased surveillance and rumors of hoarding comes palpable feelings of disunity among those in Nam Qom. The disappearance of community organizations and the lack of a unified Nam Qom political party or candidate perhaps unknowingly buffers this feeling of disunity. The internal tension within the community over who has what, where they spend their time, and how much contact they have with the city has led the Toba of Nam Qom to begin to define themselves vis-à-vis each other rather than their white counterparts, as in the past. As a result, there is a palpable, almost choking,

atmosphere of fervent jealousy, criticism, rumor, and gossip barreling through the community, present in almost every conversation I had.

Jealousy crystallizes around both material and immaterial objects: from a 15 year old girl demanding a pair of dentures for her quincenera because she saw pictures of other Toba girls with bright teeth, to jealousy over the reddish-brown hair color of the Cardozo sisters to jealousy over who invented the budding cake decoration business sweeping the barrio. As Eusabio, explains, "When it was my father's birthday last year, he had a nice truck come and pick him up. People swarmed the house in jealous asking question about how we got the truck, what it was for. It wasn't even worth it. He couldn't even get in the truck."

However, attention from outsiders in the community was the most palpable source of jealousy I encountered in my fieldwork. Often, I talked to Laura, who worked as a research assistant for a biological anthropologist several years back, about her need to leave the community. She felt as if people were jealous of her because she became the closest friend of a principal investigator, who continued to visit her every year after the study ended. One day when I visited her at her mother's house, she told me to go inside to see her daughter, Celia, who laid in the bed sweating, eyes upward, with twisted limbs. "It's witchcraft," she explained. When I inquired why someone would target Celia, she said, "its because you visit us more than other people in the community. They're jealous."

Attention from outsiders was not an uncommon source of jealousy: after staying the night at a quincenera in the back of the barrio, I returned to Florinda's house with mosquito bites all over my body. Her husband Julian laughs looked at my feet, "Don't

tell Florinda, she'll be jealous." He suddenly became more serious and says, "But you really shouldn't be staying with other families here. They could steal from you." I learned from that day to take the back road to their house.

Further, two research assistants to another biological study, Beatriz and Jorgelina from Nam Qom involved in a saliva collection project were said to have been jealous of each other's role in the project. After Jorgelina received her title as a *maestra aborigen* (aboriginal teacher), rumors abounded that Beatriz and her grandmother had performed witchcraft on her, causing the death of her parents and grandparents. Further, another student researcher often drove Toba women in her truck to the forest to collect wood. However, the student researcher did not invite Zunilda, a woman with both a job and relatively high income from basketry, because she had 3 motorbikes belonging to her children that could be used to bring back wood. This inflamed and intense jealousy in Zunilda, and she stopped allowing the student researcher to enter her house. Despite her ability to pick up the wood on her own, Zunilda's jealousy elucidates the egalitarian enforcement prominent within the community.

With jealousy comes intense surveillance and knowledge of other people in the community. One day while shopping in the center, I ran into Dora in the market. She saw I had baby clothes in my bag and asked why I had bought them. When I told them Florinda had asked me to buy them for her daughter, she laughed and said "You know, her and her husband, they're both well pensioned." When I visited Florinda later, she mentioned that Dora was her half-sister, but she hadn't seen her in years, but she knew that her pension was coming through in a few days.

Rumor, criticism, and jealousy have tangible force in the disunity of the community. As I was sitting on Elida's bed one day discussing the rumors about her hoarding food, as a public food kitchen owner, her voice rose with anger and extreme clarity as she declared: "This community is three things: chismoso (gossipy), maligno (malignant), and malicious. They're just plain bad and I am keeping to myself these days, I have no desire to talk to anyone or help anyone anymore." Elida considered herself a victim of a vicious rumor after her son committed suicide following the breakup with his girlfriend. Many people blamed Elida for spending too much time in the city, for being involved in politics. One woman told me, "She had a car. She was always in the city with the *políticos*. She never spent time with her son, or with the community, just in her car. She's now just starting to mourn because she's waking up to her role as a mother, which she never fulfilled in the past." Through tears of anger Elida explained,

"My son did not kill himself. Gossip killed my son. People made up vicious rumors that he raped his girlfriend, and the rumors escalated and he could not take the social pressure. People were jealous of him, of how good looking and personable he was, his curly hair and white teeth, of his talent in rugby. He died from the gossip and lies."

SECTION IV: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN TOBA AID HITS THE GROUND

Paternalism and Dependency

"When the políticos from the city come, they want something from the aborigines- votes, to participate in a rally- and they say just give them a small bag of mercadería (groceries) and they say that will suffice. They say we'll adjust just fine."- Florinda

Welfare paternalism has deep historical roots in Argentina among the native populations as the government, non-governmental agencies, and missions gradually

promoted dependency upon gifts and handouts. After the entrepreneur seeking laborers arrived in the conquered Gran Chaco, politicians arrived seeking potential citizens with votes to negotiate and land to consolidate. In the campaign for presidential elections in 1951, Juan Domingo Peron recruited several trains to travel through the Chaco Province with Peron decoys throwing money and gifts to the Toba (Gordillo 2002). Peron and the state were believed to be so rich and powerful, giving away mountains of goods, because he owned a "money factory" (11); many Toba tied the title of presidency to having ownership of this money factory. Further, Peron's popular slogan for the poor was "Alpargatas si, libros no." (Shoes yes, books no). Alpargatas are a type of cheap sandal worn in the rural areas by poor farmers and laborers, enforcing the importance of material goods in politics, being well fed and clothed, rather than actually involving the poor masses in the intellectual aspect of the political process (Personal Communication with Claudia Valeggia).

Comment [v2]: Not clear

Often soliciting Indian votes would make the difference in a close election so historically, each party tried to outdo the others in promises of justice and material wealth for the *aborigines*. However, centuries of broken promises taught the Toba to expect little from these offers, and each campaign reinvigorated emotions of disappointment and pessimism (Miller 1980).

As frequently occurred in agreements between Indians and whites, the government often promised to establish permanent settlements and gifts- supplies and equipment and failed to follow through (Miller 1980). With respect to the establishment of a permanent settlement for the Toba at Castelli, the Toba leader commented:

"It was written that this land, two leagues by two leagues must be given without charge to the aborigines; no white man was to be given permission to enter and

no one would ever remove us. 'Look son I will give you a definitive title do this land, two leagues by two. It is for your people, without charge for grazing; it is your *campo*'. To this day there is no charge for the use of the land, although they tried to collect taxes last year but I would not give in because I well remember ht promise and the contract. Each month free provisions were sent on two trucks. These involved sugar, tea, sandals, corn flour, grease tobacco, salt, matches and kerosene. We also received cotton seeds." (Miller 1980:55)

As the Toba leader further explains: "The Peron government did not call us Indians; they treated us like men." (Miller 1980:56) On his trip to secure the titles, he received free train passage, free hotel, money and clothing for the return trip which he distributed to his people. However, the gifts were interpreted differently by the Toba than by the governing officials. The Toba interpreted them as partial payment on a debt owed to them, and when they stopped coming feelings of ill will and resentment resurged.

Today, a large amount of both governmental and nongovernmental agencies provide assistance distributing food, clothing, housing and electricity to the Toba (Miller 1989a). Further, many Toba consider that it is the obligation of the government to provide such facilities (Miller 1989b). The historical root of the modern welfare arrangement lies with agencies that provided seeds and equipment to the Toba to grow vegetables and farm cotton in the 1950s. While the intention was for the Toba to pay off the loans, this seldom occurred and debts were systematically forgiven, resulting in the credit system being transformed into a subsidy. As a result, native communities understood these subsidies as gifts in exchange for the loss of land and the exploitation of labor during the time of sugar plantations (Miller 2000). As Miller explains from his early fieldwork among the Toba:

"The generation of elders who provided leadership in dealing with the doqshi [white population] during my first stay with the Toba in the early 1960s were unanimous in asserting that land and other natural resources had been

Comment [v3]: But I think there is another interpretation. The "gifts" by the government are only representations of the "sharing" the government is obliged to do because of its relative wealth when compared to the Toba. In a sense, it is taking the typical egalitarianism enforcement that occurs at the level of the small community to the macrolevel. The government (or the nuns or the NGO or any doqshe, by the way) is supposed to give because it has more than them.

misappropriated from them, and that what they received and continue to receive in return, whether as gifts or credit, represents inadequate compensation." (Miller 2000:6)

In Nam Qom, the Toba acquire water, electricity at little or no cost. This often leads to resentment from the neighboring criollo squatters who are often just as poor (Miller 1989b). The welfare available in Nam Qom has had the unintended consequences of both exclusion from the formal economy and reinforcement of ethnic identity and difference.

"Owing to the many programs designed for aboriginal people the Toba are sometimes designated the privileged marginals by migrant neighbors jealous of the benefits available exclusively to indigenous populations. Such differentiation in public policy also serves to maintain ethnic identity vis-a-vis the larger society." (Miller 1989a:642)

When I asked Florinda her if she pays bills for her house and she says that none of the *pueblos originarios* have to pay. She used to get bills in the mail and she used to pay them, but she simply stopped because she didn't think she should have to pay. The *cacique* (leader) of the barrio eventually told them to stop. She said that the white people from the city were angry that the indigenous people don't have to pay bills, and she heard rumors they were threatening to come and take away the electrical poles installed for free in Nam Qom. "They say they're already getting the boxes of food, why should they get other forms of help? When the politicians from the city come, they want something from the aborigines- votes, to participate in a rally- and they say just give them a small bag of *mercaderia* (food) and they say that will suffice. They say we'll adjust just fine." Many in the city refer to the Toba of Nam Qom as dependent complainers.

Within religious missions, Indians were believed to be incapable of managing their own affairs, ignorant of the value of work, and lazy, and it was the obligation of the

mission to teach them. The Mennonite missionary "Nam Cum" established a store in order to teach the Toba the "economic facts of life". Bank accounts were kept for individual families in order to instill the value of saving. The practice had to be abandoned as the Toba persistently complained that they were being cheated (Miller 1980). At another mission, food, clothing, and material for shelter were routinely given away to induce interest in conversion. One mission leader, Father Buenventura became so disgusted with the give-away technique that he set fire to a bundle of clothing sent for the Toba and then "grasped a horsewhip and forced them to work" (Miller 1980:64). There are frequent references to the laziness of the Indian and the difficulties associated with transforming him into a responsible laborer. A number of development projects were launched within missions to make the Toba self-sufficient, one major one being a sugar refinery. However, because of the low level of labor output on the part of the Indians, there was no profit and the Toba were essentially overpaid for the work they performed. (Miller 1980).

Today in Nam Qom, the *Capilla*, or Catholic Community Center, remains a central location in which feelings of mistrust and being cheated emerge regarding paternalistic treatment of the Toba. Celestina's husband Jose guards the *Capilla* at night and earns 300 pesos for the entire month. However, he does not get paid in cash by Hermana Rocio, the non-aboriginal nun in charge of the *Capilla's* activities. He gets paid with a ticket he can exchange only for groceries at a store that is roughly a 10-minute bus ride away from the town. As Celestina recounts this story, she shakes her head in disappointment,

"There are other things we need to buy that we can't get at the grocery store, but Sister Rocio is only allowing us to buy food. She thinks we're going to be

reckless and buy a *moto* or a television but what about our debts we need to pay, and our other bills?"

Zunilda, another teacher in the daycare of the *Capilla*, recounted a story about her plan to give away mother's day gifts of pots and kitchen appliances to Nam Qom mothers through the *Capilla* budget.

"I planned and found all the pots and pans and saw the equipment had been bought, but the nuns kept in their houses. I had asked them to give them to me to distribute, but they kept them, and we never saw them again. We also got three bags of clothing donations from Cordoba and Sister Rocio traded the clothes to the people for baskets instead of just giving them back. I asked the other nun that next time for the donations to go directly to me, because I don't trust Sister Rocio. There's a library in the *Capilla*, but she's the only one that has the keys."

I run into another employee of the *Capilla* the next day, Rigoberto and ask him about the donations, expecting similar feelings of mistreatment and lack of trust.

However, he explained,

"Hermana Rocio sold the baskets to get more money and supplies for the *Capilla*. She needed to do it to get supplies. And people here, they have enough clothes, sometimes they wear them once and throw them away. They just want things to want things, or because other people have them. It made sense to do what she did."

Toba Aid as Political Capital

"The people here, no hablan (they don't speak up), no piden (they don't know how to demand)" –Celestina

When I ride my bike to one morning to Nam Qom along a singular 11km route, that most important route to Paraguay, a huge mass of people are huddled on the side of the route near the petroleum depot. On the other side of the road stands a barricade of 200 policemen directing traffic and stopping people from crossing the road. When I

got to town, I stopped at the house of a friend Celestina, whose half-heartedly listening to the news of the protest on the radio, and asked what was going on. She said, "They're cutting the route. They're asking for the government houses." I ask if its people from Nam Qom, *gente aborigen*, and she says "Yes, and other poor people who aren't, were not the only ones who are poor or need houses." Her husband explains that the resources for the houses were sent for the *gente aborigen*, but they never made it to Nam Qom, they got caught up in the provincial government. He says, "because the people here, *no hablan* (they don't speak up), *no piden* (they don't know how to demand)".

"This happens with all of our things- our food, our houses", Celestina explains. "The president (*la nacion*) sends boxes of food monthly, especially for the *pueblos originarios* (the indigenous towns of Argentina), but they get sequestered by the provincial government. Politicians only give them out when its time for elections, to trade for votes, and by the time they get here, the food is spoiled. There are bugs in our flour, the tomato sauce is spoiled."

It became clear early on that governmental aid for Nam Qom has been increasingly used as a form of political capital by local politicians in power struggles between the provincial and national government, often with those in charge forgetting how integral these forms of aid are to Toba people.

In this case, political capital refers to the reputation and popularity-based gains politicians, their ability to make the newspaper, the amount of money, votes, and support they can raise, as well as the length of time people are willing to pay attention to them. In pursuit of mobilizing political capital, politicians employ a number of tactics

including promises of commitments, rewards and support in order to build up their ranks and resources and deplete those of adversaries, which are especially prevalent in Nam Qom. (Swartz et al. 2006)

Political capital accumulates in relational ties and is reactivated in systems of hierarchy within the government, in which agents compete for mobility in the their capital accumulation:

“Unlike social capital, however, political capital has the additional feature of being linked to the positional power of the politician, and thus it is rooted in institutional structures of the political order. When politicians transact with other politicians, their cumulative investment in political capital embeds itself both in the institutional arrangement of political exchange and in ongoing relationships among political actors.” (Nee and Oppenheimer 2010:4)

According to Nee and Oppenheimer (2010), political capital exists in a “duality, of existing as an attribute of both positional power and relational ties.” However, the fact that provincial politicians have sequestered food specifically sent to the Toba from the national government and transformed it into an instrument to enhance their own political capital, is essentially a form of theft and drags the Toba in this “institutional arrangement of political exchange”(4). The Toba receive nothing in this relation but spoiled tomato sauce and flour filled with ants, while utilizing food boxes as political capital becomes productive for politicians who are able to firstly gain the vote in exchange for the box of food, and secondly to enhance their reputation in political circles and among general public for helping the “poor indigenous populations”. Literally the Toba’s daily bread is being used as leverage in political power shifts orchestrated by outsiders with the intention of beefing up their social assistance credentials and obtaining the votes of the marginal poor who often need this food to survive. Residents of Nam Qom, anxiously awaiting the arrival of their flour, milk, and rice, are acutely aware of the detours their

food boxes take in travel from Buenos Aires to Nam Qom, becoming appropriated in the process to enhance the political capital of provincial politicians.



Nam Qom residents and other Formosa residents attempting to cut the central route to Paraguay to protest the lack of housing promised by the national government.

As evidenced by the amount of dissent within Nam Qom over spoiled boxes of food, the provincial politician's political capital is shattered within Nam Qom as people vote white (for no one) and often cut the central route to Nam Qom to protest spoiled food boxes, which due to the dizzying amount of police per capita in Formosa, are quickly deadened. This voice of opposition within the community is rarely heard and protests are rarely reported on local news, perhaps because of resentments of aid specifically intended for aboriginal *pueblos*, and these politician's political capital thus survives in the general public. Many have come disillusioned by the process of receiving this aid, and the inability of the aboriginal people to become united enough to ensure the aid that was promised to them arrives in a timely manner; when I asked Florinda, what the food box protest was about, she responded "I don't know, people asking for whatever old thing. Cutting the route never works anyway."

However, the fact that aid has become a bargaining tool between aid provided by the national government and provincial politicians who derive political capital from Toba aid has created a host of problems as well as opportunities for indigenous people to become involved in the politics that dictate their livelihood and confusing whether the Toba are active or passive recipients of aid.

Spaces of Autonomy in Clientelistic Networks

"People who run the public kitchens are only there to fatten themselves, not to help the community. Have you noticed how fat they are?"- Edith

Chacoan Indians have not been adequately represented in the government and their limited political participation has been thought to be simply negotiation for their vote (Braunstein and Miller 1999). This type of political participation, common in Argentina and termed political clientelism, has been defined as "relations of dependency based on the exchange of votes for favors, goods, and resources." (Gordillo 2008:336) Nam Qom is a hub of political clientelism; politicians frequent the barrio offering to pass pensions for residents, inclusion into specific assistance programs, jobs and material goods in exchange for votes. Clientelistic relationships are portrayed in most of the Argentinean literature as constituting "a realm of submission, a cluster of bonds of domination in opposition to a realm of mutual recognition of equality and cooperation" (Auyero 2001:22). While older accounts of political clientelism among Chacoan Indians portray the Toba as passively trading his vote for goods, foods, or jobs (Braunstein and Miller 1999), newer accounts have revealed indigenous participants actively manipulating clientelistic relationships resulting increased levels of autonomy (Gordillo 2008). As Auyero (2001) explains,

"In the contexts of extreme material deprivation, so the tale runs, clients are not blind followers, dupes in the grip of clientelistic politics: their support is calculated, a away to improve their lot by aligning themselves with the brokers and patrons who have the most to offer." (13)

Sharing and the distribution of wealth forms the moral economy that links diverse people together in Nam Qom- from white and indigenous politicians, to kiosk vendors, to indigenous families- in their search for daily sustenance. Those who acquire more are expected to share in Nam Qom, especially if they have a privileged position. Such is the

position of the wealth attributed to the Argentine national government and political representatives, especially the president who was historically thought of the owner of a "money factory" by the Toba (Gordillo 2002:11). The government, and non-governmental and religious organizations, with their perceived wealth, become obliged in the Toba worldview to share, taking the typical egalitarian enforcement of resource distribution that occurs in Nam Qom to the macrolevel of the state.

In spaces where indigenous people acquire statuses where they can accumulate yet they don't share, tension arises, especially in instances where Toba people get a foothold in politics, which has become the lifeblood of the community. One way in which indigenous people become active participants in the political network is through *comedores* (public food kitchens), in which Toba people become brokers in the political system, distributing aid in the form of food from the nation to other people in the community. Another way is through becoming a local *politico*, or a political broker between city politicians and the community; in these relationships residents support different party candidates in exchange for favors distributed by a member of their own community, especially food.

Rather than view this as a submissive client-broker relationship, Gordillo (2008) has found that there are spaces of relative autonomy in these systems whereby people can manipulate these relationships for gains- as he explained "a relatively under-analyzed aspect of indigenous political experiences on the continent: the immersion of indigenous actors within mainstream national political parties." (336). However, the inclusion of Toba people in this chain of brokers and clients creates a hierarchy of problems due to the emphasis on the importance of poverty and reciprocity as the

essential foundation of aboriginal identity. Hence, even when the Toba effectively mobilize their indigenous identities to accumulate resources for the community, the potential danger of hoarding breeds rampant rumor of hoarding in the mind of Nam Qom residents. Even when one is able to mobilize their indigenous identity for gain, this identity becomes in itself an ensurance of poverty.

Comedores (public food kitchens) have become a common way to extract money from the government (*la nacion*) using material signifiers of aboriginal identity; they have a certain number of children noted that they are required to feed, but many mothers note their children at several *comedores*, and the *comedores* in turn make double and triple copies of documents to inflate the number of children they're said to feed to increase the budget and provide more resources to the community.

However, rumors abound of all the local *comedor* owners hoarding food and resources from the community. Toba people appear to be used to discrimination at the hands of the outsider, but definitely not by their own people. In 2009, the most frequented public food kitchen belonged to Rosenda, which consistently provided daily food in the morning. In 2009, Edith described the food:

"When Rosenda gets the food for lunch, she puts it all in the meal. Not like Sandra's *comedor*, that's the worst. She gets a lot of vegetables but she never puts them in the food- or she puts small pieces. But Rosenda includes everything she gets, and right now, it has the most delicious food. She makes pizza, milanesa, many things that people here have never tried. I laughed watching them eat them in small pieces because I had never tried many of the things she made before. Most people here can't make food that good. And every day, another new flavor, and then another, and then another. I hope it continues."

However, her *comedor* unexpectedly shut down in 2010. It took me a while to wade through the rumors of why it had closed.

Florinda told me originally that Rosenda's *comedor* had closed because the people had become fed up and stopped going because Rosenda was robbing the community.

"People who run the *comedores* are only there to fatten themselves, not to help the community. Rosenda ordered sewing machines from the government from her budget for the women of Nam Qom to have jobs, but when they came, she sent them to San Carlo- her own pueblo, and now she's living the *vida tranquila* (calm life). She got scholarships from the president and gave them to her kids, and when my husband worked there as a cook, he got fired because he found stores of food that she had hidden. I would rather serve my kids plain polenta than send them there."

Guillermina told me, "The *comedor* ended because people got mad. The government sent toys for all the kids for *Día del Niño* (Day for Children) and she gave them to her own kids. Her kids in Buenos Aires. She's not even from here, she's *mestiza* (mixed race)." Edith told me that a man from the interior of the Chaco came to Nam Qom and reclaimed the land that Rosenda had stolen from him and built the *comedor* on and that's why it ended. Nida told me that Rosenda was stealing children to sell their organs, and the government found out and put her in jail. In the end, Rosenda's cousin told me simply that the contract ended, it was only intended for a few years, and she's planning on renewing it, nothing more.

Many people explained to me that when they went to the *comedor*, the administrators were only interested in collecting their ID document numbers. "They collect document numbers and don't give out food, and then show all the document numbers to the nation so their budget gets bigger. They want to show their parties how many people they are helping, but they aren't helping anyone." Alcira described it in the following manner: "It's all a big game- a *jugada*, they're playing around with the needs of

the people." However, in my trips to the *comedores*, I never saw documents being collected or asked for, nor did I see anyone being turned away.

All the public food kitchens followed the same general layout: a partially stocked kitchen inside a concrete building with long tables and benches located outside or behind the *comedor* or inside a palm and mud building to guard from the sun. However, I never saw any children ever sit down to eat, they simply brought their tupperware and plates, filled up the food, and went back home. The communal tables were rarely used, signifying the suspicion with which people regarded the *comedores*, but their continued desire to partake in the resources they provided.

There are four other *comedores* in the Barrio- Rosenda and Sandra's which are considered political fronts for Peronist candidates, La Capilla which is run by a Catholic church, and Elida's *comedor* which was said to be run by a priest, but actually was financed by a nongovernmental organization. In 2009, Sandra's *comedor* was completely out of use, and Rosenda's *comedor* consistently provided food everyday except the weekend. By 2010 Rosenda's was also shut down and Elida's *comedor* had run out of gas for about a month.

When I asked if the political affiliation affects the choice to pick one *comedor* over the other, Edith laughed and said, "They're all political". Her aunt is Sandra, one who owns the *comedor*. When she went, she was turned away when she attempted to pick the food she wanted, and she said she refused to be treated that way and would rather go hungry than go to a *comedor*. "Have you noticed the cooks at the *comdedor* are so fat? Its because they eat so well." She says sometimes her kids ask her for her ID to go, and she refuses to give it.

Becoming an indigenous political leader and carving out a space of autonomy, which places one hierarchically above other members of the community, almost always incites rumors of hoarding and a negative reputation coinciding with "not belonging to the community", "spending too much time in the city" and "enriching themselves". The idea of accumulation, even if it is toward their benefit, becomes dangerous in the minds of the Toba, as it grows into fears of hoarding and getting fat through politics. Hence, becoming a local political leader with the goal of extracting resources for their community often backfires, resulting in exclusion and criticism from the community itself.

Disunity and Fragmentation

"Se vende todo- los políticos- se vende su comunidad"
They sell everything here, the politicians, they even sell their
community. - Florinda

Political clientelism has been examined in other parts of Argentina to inhibit collective organization and discourage effective political participation (Auyero 2001). The inclusion of indigenous actors within this system as brokers for outside political systems has hindered the formation of a unified oppositional aboriginal political party or a unified barrio that supports specific causes of parties. All the indigenous politicians in Barrio Nam Qom come from the Peronist party, and thus only serve as brokers in the chain of resources from the political parties to the indigenous people, rather than standing for meaningful and differing issues.

As Eusabio explains, "They're just intermediaries that bring the resources, people here don't really care what they stand for. I know a lot of people just vote white (for no one), regardless. They're all Peronists" Further he explains,

"Sometime in the recent past, the leaders of all the indigenous communities got together in the center of Formosa with the governor and signed an ordinance that no one from *pueblos originarios* should pay for gas, light, or for housing, but that no one here really knows that this happens. So some people pay some people don't. In the other *pueblos originarios*, they have beautiful houses and they use their politicians for specific gains, but that doesn't happen here. We're too disunited."

As Gordillo (2008) notes, political clientelism results in the fragmentation of the electorate, and inhibits collective organization and real political participation. In Nam Qom, politics is only a conduit of resources rather than a meaningful endeavor, and one must maneuver to gain as much as possible, especially since the whole system could change or collapse with a new election.

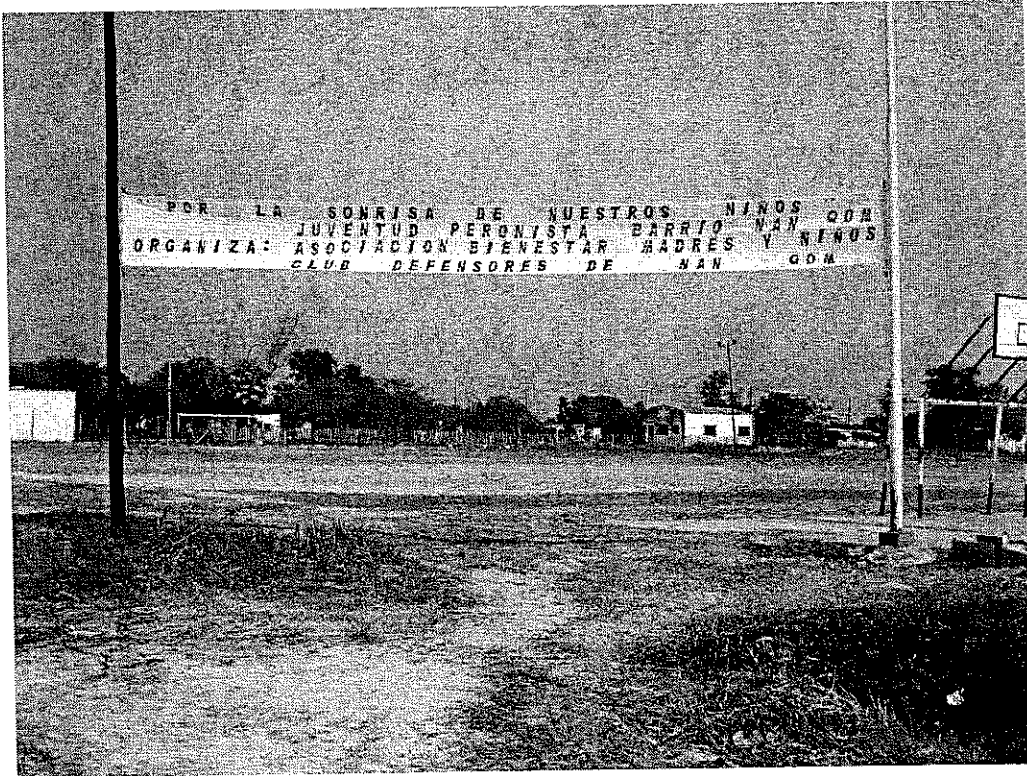
Many Toba do not support their own political candidates in provincial elections or local elections because they fear candidates would become rich through politics, which would fundamentally betray the Toba identity, which is closely associated with poverty (Gordillo 2008). In fact, I never heard anyone in Nam Qom refer to themselves as Toba, but rather always *aborigen*. Similarly, the word for a white person, *doqshi*, means wealthy. Buying, selling, and getting rich through politics, or simply having a job selling commodities, is a common way of communicating that someone lacks the Toba quality of generosity and sharing, and has moved outside the community and into the city life.

In 2010, there was a rumor that the *cacique* (indigenous Toba leader) of the barrio, Gregorio, had sold his position to a white policeman. As Florinda explained "Se vende todo- los politicos- se vende su comunidad. (They sell everything here, the politicians, they even sell their community). She explained when that when local

indigenous leaders are elected, white politicians come and tell them "stay in your house, don't do anything, enjoy your food" and they just wait for orders from the white politicians. "This doesn't happen in the interior, or with other *pueblos originarios*, only here." Surprisingly, the rumor turned out to be true. Eusabio, explained,

"It's true. Gregorio started out as a good person, but the pressure got to him, I don't blame him. When I entered into college, a military leader presented to me and offered to buy me a house, but I didn't want anything to do with politics. It was a temptation though, but it would only ostracize me from my people. Similarly, a friend got me a job at a tourism company in the city managing buses and people here criticized me for getting involved in politics, even though I hadn't. You know that family of teachers down the street who have a nice little car and house? They're criticized for being politicians, when everyone knows that they have good jobs and just save. It's hard for us accumulate capital, you can't appear rich."

"In the past," Florinda explains, "the barrio was more united. The caciques cared for the people and distributed everything they got. But now they only care about themselves, about city life. Everyone is disunited. Everyone just does what's best for him. Today everyone's their own *cacique*, and we as indigenous people are small in number. It's just terrible." That's why she votes white, for nobody, because she doesn't trust any of the *políticos*- white or *aborigen*. She became quiet. "But do you know why people do this? They do it because of the hunger."



A sign advertising a play. It reads

"For the Smiles of Our Children"

Young Peronist Youth of Nan Qom

Organized by: Association for the Wellbeing of Mothers and Children

Club of Defenders of Nan Qom

Nam Qom spelled incorrectly as Nan Qom twice

Are the Toba a resource for politicians, or politicians a resource for the Toba?

Are the Toba unknowingly or apathetically participating and reproducing a powerful web

of political domination? Both ~~depend on each other, but what get from the dependence~~

Deleted: mutually

is amorphous and unpredictable; ~~and dependence comes in many forms and functions~~

Deleted: it

in many ways in Nam Qom. As much as the Toba remain dependent on the government and forms of aid, they participant in and extricate from these political networks by carving out spaces of autonomy, yet their strong sense of identity and its link to poverty constrains the way in which capital ebbs and flows through the moral economy and kin networks when these resources hit the ground. They exploit and use politics mainly as a conduit of resources, but they are never fully in control of their own economic situations; it is never appears to be completely on their own terms, making them continually vulnerable to turnovers by the state, the cutting off of their pensions, and the termination of social assistance programs. Indigenous attempts at taking control of the political conduit of resources, specifically indigenous political leaders and *comedor* owners who attempt to use politics to extort resources for their on people, become trampled in their attempts by the community's fear of accumulation, of becoming rich, of hoarding. The economic stratification in Nam Qom has inflamed sentiments of mistrust, jealousy, disunity, and criticism within the barrio, resulting in a staggering disunity and the inability for collective social or political or economic mobility.

CONCLUSION

The dependence of a Toba family flows to and from government and family networks, continually moving as kin relations flounder and programs unexpectedly disappear. Food has become the lynchpin around which relationships of dependence and spaces of agency within these governmental aid and reciprocal exchange networks are constructed in Nam Qom. Identities of dependence are woven through these objects of exchange and consumption and crystallize as actors in the moral economy of poverty. The continual flow of resources and the identities of those who distribute them help recurrently construct link between belonging to the community of aborigines and the condition of living constantly in material scarcity.

The way in which a Toba family with no income family eats every day depends on their ability to extort resources from the abundant, yet fleeting systems of governmental assistance, pensions, and welfare. The job of the modern Toba has become scouting out the ebb and flow of social assistance programs, which are most often incipient and fleeting, intended only to increase the political capital of local politician in rather than actually exist.

As some Toba integrate into the formal labor market and gain employment, an incipient social stratification is developing in this former egalitarian society, warping the fluidity and productivity of kin networks of reciprocity that have lasted for centuries. The kin networks of reciprocity once produced social solidarity thorough mutual interdependence. However, with social stratification, the former ring of equally distributed dependence is beginning to fall unequally on different status members of the community, who palpably feel burdened or dependent- as some always have to ask and can never give, and some always have to give. As in the case of Florinda, this feeling

of being dependent and embarrassment of asking led her to attempt to retreat from the informal economy and adopt the mainstream ideals of self-sufficiency, parsimony and independence of mainstream culture. Her failed attempt at creating a business for independence, along with her concepts of what constitutes a dignified job and her embarrassment around asking for food from relatives betrays her perhaps unattainable commitment to removing herself from this network of dependency. On the reverse, acquiring wealth becomes equated with the immense responsibility of sharing, often to the degree putting oneself back into poverty. In addition to the demanding requirement of a job, considering all the obstacles that exist to getting formal employment, the prospect of gaining employment and accumulating only to immediately dissipate assets is a double burden and becomes illogical. Hence, It often does not make economic sense for a Toba person to seek jobs, to accumulate capital, or to attempt social mobilization, because aboriginal identity is so tied in with poverty, and money with responsibility and poverty with dependence and independence simultaneously.

As a result of the numerous barriers Alcira mentioned to finishing school or getting a formal job, it is further irrational for youth to attempt to finish school or acquire a profitable job when social welfare programs are easily acquired and opportunities so scarce. For those who are low on the scale of social stratification or lack access to the kin network of reciprocity, politics literally the only manner of subsistence. "My pension produces my life", as Edith says. The pension has many facets in Nam Qom, and unintended ramifications. In the mind of the pension holder, it often spurs productive hopes of accumulation of commodities that will probably never materialize, in the case of Edith and Florinda.

The pension is the newest tool the state used to manage the Toba, most saliently by requiring that the Toba enter into formal employment through the *Jefe de Hogar* pension. However, the unfettered proliferation of the invalid pension essentially creates economic invalids among those who enact it. This pension requires no documentation or requirements, and has been given to practically everyone in the barrio with one hundred dollars to spare. The lack of attention of the state essentially represents an abandonment on attempts to place the Toba in a productive role in formal economy. Essentially, the invalid becomes invisible to the state. This represents a complete reversal in the history of state control of the Toba- which ranged from complete extinction, to segregation, to forced labor, to integration, and back again to segregation and invisibility. While many Toba experience a sense of autonomy from the abandonment of the state, this autonomy is limited in that it is enacted in the state-constructed economic, agricultural, and geographic wasteland of Barrio Nam Qom, which has no opportunities for social mobilization, ensuring the loss of a productive culture. As one informally aptly said: "At least we used to go and beg for bread all day. Now we just listen to the radio waiting to hear when our pensions going to come up. We're bored all day."

The transition to a money economy from a gift economy has been a long and difficult process for the Toba that is continually being renegotiated. Many Toba struggle with the feelings of gratification and social solidarity that come from sharing with kin- an extremely valued attribute of aboriginal culture- with the hunger they feel on a daily basis, leading some to bring in their groceries by night, as described by Eusabio. The fact the condition of poverty became conjoined with the identity of being *aborigen* along

with the moral obligation to share and prohibition of accumulation, has led to the consequence of living in day-to-day material scarcity. Further, the increased social stratification in the community has led to close surveillance of sharing or hoarding behavior to make sure there is no rich Toba; rumors about the morality, belonging, and ethnicity of those who disobey the system of egalitarianism barrel through the community creating an atmosphere of fervent jealousy, criticism, and rumor. This has resulted in the creation of a moral economy of poverty through intense egalitarian enforcement by way of surveillance, rumor, criticism, and jealousy. In this sense, the moral obligation to share and the traditional gift economy of the Toba has become maladaptive with incipient social stratification and integration, as the jealousy and criticism have produced intense disunity within the *barrio*.

The people of Nam Qom render the experience of poverty and dependence in different ways; from Edith's thought that the *aborigen* deserves an invalid pension because he is not well taken care of by the state, to the idea that forms of social assistance represent reparations for past abuses, literally repayment for being made unable to work through a history of discrimination, confinement, ecological deterioration of land, and the ejection of Toba from the formal economy work force. However, for many Toba, made skeptical by histories of broken promises by politicians, the general political systems mean nothing; politics is simply a meaningless conduit of resources. For others, the state has become entrenched in the Toba world of egalitarian enforcement and distribution of wealth; with the immense wealth of the state, NGOs, and religious organizations, they become obliged to share with the Toba.

Sharing and the distribution of wealth forms the moral economy that links diverse people together in Nam Qom- from white and indigenous politicians, to kiosk vendors, to indigenous families- in their search for daily sustenance as actors in the moral economy of poverty. In spaces where indigenous people get a foothold in politics, tensions arise as they possess the possibility of accumulation, and consequently the lure of hoarding. As a result of the force of the moral economy of poverty and the obligation to share, the idea of accumulation for indigenous politicians, even if it is toward the benefit, of the community, becomes dangerous in the minds of the Toba residents, as it grows into fears of politicians getting fat through politics. Hence, becoming a local political leader with the goal of extracting resources for their community almost always backfires, resulting in exclusion and criticism from the community itself. In these cases of Toba leaders mobilizing their indigenous identities for resources, it becomes clear that this identity in itself consistently ensures poverty.

Further, the inclusion of indigenous actors within the client-broker system as has hindered the formation of a unified oppositional aboriginal political party. This disunity is further compounded by the intense egalitarian enforcement of the moral economy of poverty going on between citizens in Nam Qom. Indigenous leaders serve as brokers in the chain of resources from the political parties to the indigenous people, rather than standing for meaningful and differing issues. Hence, politics is only a conduit of resources rather than a meaningful endeavor, and one must maneuver to gain as much as possible.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Pensions

1. Writing/maintaining pension paperwork -
 - a. Does maintaining paperwork feel like a new job to you?
 - b. How much time did you spend doing your papers?
 - c. How did you pick which type of pension?
 - d. Who helped you?
 - e. Did you go through the politicos? Did they help you or take a cut?
 - f. Are there people in the barrio who are experts in filling out the documents?
2. Is your pension cut off a lot? How do you tell? How do you deal with the

interruption of resources?

3. Invalid pensions—

- a. Do you think that it is okay to lie to get a pension?
 - b. Are people lying on their pensions or are some not able to work? Why?
 - c. Does having a pension change the person and what they do everyday for work?
4. Is it an obligation of the government to give you the pensions? Why do you think the government is giving just the aboriginal people pensions?
 5. How do you treat the money from the pension? Is it a gift or a salary?
 6. How do people treat you at the bank when you go for your pension?
 7. Do you feel security with your income?
 8. How do you spend the money immediately or do you save it? Do you spend most it as soon as you get it? Do you mostly buy food or clothing? How do you find out about all the new types of pensions? How do you know what other people in the community have pensions?
 9. Would you rather be pensioned or have a job?
 10. Do you feel more independent from sharing when you get your pension or do you feel more obligated to share?
 11. Do you feel dependent on the state?
 12. Do you feel very managed by the government now that you have a pension compared to when you didn't? Do you think the community is more or less managed by the government?

Reciprocity

1. How do resources circulate in Namqom?
2. Do richer people have the obligation to share with poorer people? If you had money, would you share it with everyone else?
3. Is it more difficult to share more than you did in the past?
4. How does it make you feel to receive things from other people?
5. Do people share more now than they did in the past? In the past, when it was

more rural, and less people went to the city to buy things, you didn't use pesos to buy things, did you share more, or trade?

6. When you have no money what kind of things can you do to get food- how do you eat?
7. What kinds of things do people here do to get money when they don't have a job?
8. What things can you do to get food if you don't have money?
9. Do you depend on other people to bring you things? If so, what things and does this cause stress?
10. Are you always in debt?
11. Does the community help you survive? Are there people isolated who do not share? How does the community view them?
12. Are you much more hungry than you were in the past?
13. Is the community more united than it was in the past? If its less united, why do you think this is so?

Public Kitchens and Government provided groceries

1. Do the groceries provided by the government provide enough food to live? Is this a gift or an obligation?
2. What kind of food do the public kitchens make? Is it traditional or new? What is the difference between the different public kitchens?
3. Do you see it as the community providing food or the government providing food? Are the portions enough?
4. How do you feel about the different politicians who run the public kitchens? Do you go to a public kitchen because you like the food, or because you like the person who runs it?
5. Are you ashamed to go to the public kitchens? Are they just for children?
6. Does everyone have the right to food?

7. How do you feel about the provincial government vs. the national government? Who helps you and the aboriginal people more?

Past

1. What kinds of foods did you used to eat in the past? Were they healthier, better tasting? How do they compare with the foods you eat now? How are they different?
2. How do you feel about store bought foods vs. foods that you collect and make yourself like in the past?
3. Is there more dignity in getting your own food? Do you feel more healthy or less healthy? Were you as hungry in the past as you are now?

Employment

1. Do you currently have a job? What kind of obstacles do you have to performing your job?
2. Did you have a job in the past? How did you get it? What were the conditions like? Why did you stop?
3. Was it harder or more easier to get a job in the past?
4. Would you prefer to have a job in the barrio or in the city?

Ownership, payment, prices

1. Are you the owner of the land? How did you get the title? How did your house get built?
2. Do you pay for gas or electricity? If not, why not?
3. Is it an obligation of the government to provide gas and electricity for the aboriginal people? Why?
4. Do you pay for water? If not why not?
5. Is it an obligation of the government to provide gas and electricity for the aboriginal people? Why?
6. Do you get bills?
7. Why did you buy (refridgerator,oven,washing machine)? How are you paying for it?

Principal Families Involved in the Study (names removed for privacy)

- **FLIA 1**— both unemployed with invalid pensions, formerly pensioned *Jefe de Hogar*. He used to work as a cook in the food kitchen, she used to work as a maid. They both currently do not work, except she sometimes sells food she makes and he sometimes collects piri wood and makes window shutters and mats.
- **FLIA 2**- He is employed as a dental assistant, one of the few in the community with an advanced degrees. He has two posts, one in the city, and one Namqom. She has no job or pension.
- **FLIA 3**—Both are unemployed and were never employed. He works small construction and she used to sell baskets until suffering an injury
- **FLIA 4**- single woman with an an advanced degree but works as a kindergarten watcher.
- **FLIA 5** – Family of sisters that are unemployed but have some type of pension-invalid, family, universal. The children engage in begging in the city while one sister works as a prostitute. They depend on the salary of their father who has a municipal job.
- **FLIA 6**- both wife and husband are employed at a relatively higher level than the rest of the community. They support many of their grown children, who are unemployed.
- **FLIA 7**- Husband is employed as a Gaucho with a relatively high salary, she is a housewife.
- **FLIA 8**- Extended family involving a political broker, a husband with a municipal job, an artesania, and other unemployed women.