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Chapter 3

Wages, Patronage and Welfare: Thrift and its Limits in Argentina's Gran Chaco

Agustin Diz

Introduction

This chapter explores the ways in which Indigenous Guaraní communities in Argentina's Gran Chaco region engage with and manage wages, patronage and welfare. It argues that the temporal and spatial scales at which welfare policies, extractive cycles and even democratic politics operate drive the experiences of Guaraní households, imbuing economic resources with gendered social potency. The chapter shows how resource flows come together in ambiguous ways that weave together households and political communities. Contrary to arguments that posit thrift as a universal and pervasive strategy, the Guaraní case demonstrates how different resources are managed differently depending on the sets of social relations within which they circulate. Specifically, we will see that 'anti-thrift' (see the Introduction) – a logic more attuned to generosity, sharing and even excess in the short-term – is key to Guaraní livelihoods. Thrift and anti-thrift thus become central to the way in which Guaraní populations are integrated into broader political and economic structures. As they play out in the context of everyday life, the macro-scales of extractive industries, national welfare, and even global financial markets articulate with local ideas of gender, household, and community.

Similar to the forms of thrift discussed in the introduction to this volume, thrifty practices among the Guaraní tend to reflect an ethical stance of restraint, typically in opposition to forms of consumption and expenditure that are deemed irresponsible and wasteful. In this sense,

thrift is understood as a future-oriented strategy for the management of scarce resources; one that is most closely associated with the household economy. However, we will see that settlement-level politics rejects thrift and that anti-thrift emerges as a desirable political practice that prioritizes the circulation of resources in the present over their accumulation for the future. While thrift characterizes the intrahousehold management of resources and the family, anti-thrift is central to the conduct of interhousehold relationships and closely related to notions of provision and redistribution. At first glance, the distinctions between the separate realms of intra- and interhousehold life seem to hold. However, these contrasts dissolve over the courses of everyday life and such neat separations become increasingly difficult to tease out when we look at arrangements within individual households. In as much as thrift and anti-thrift emerge as interlocked aspects of Guaraní life, they are not so much opposite and opposing logics as they are entangled strategies for managing distinct resource flows (see Introduction).

After contextualizing the analysis within Guaraní history, I describe three distinct resource flows that are central to contemporary subsistence: wages, patronage, and welfare. Each flow generates unique logics of thrift and anti-thrift and mobilizes and valorizes different sets of social relations. I then take the case of a particular family to show how these three flows play out within an individual household. Over the course of this chapter, I argue that acquiring, managing and spending different types of resources requires distinct circuits of labor and cooperation, which has the effect of inscribing the different resource flows within separate yet overlapping spheres of mutuality. In a sense the chapter tracks the economic spheres of ‘house, community, commerce, finance and meta-finance’ as set out by Stephen Gudeman (2016: 14). In doing so it shows how these spheres combine locally to generate tensions and articulations between mutuality and market logics (Gudeman 2008).

The Guaraní and the 'Post-neoliberal' Moment

The Guaraní populations who are the focus of this chapter descend from labor migrants who travelled from Bolivia to Argentina and from war refugees who fled Bolivia in the 1930s (Hirsch 2004). The settlements I worked with between 2012 and 2017 lie in the northwestern province of Salta, near the Bolivian border. Settlement populations ranged from roughly 200 to 2000 individuals. While more than 20,000 people self-identify as Guaraní in Argentina (INDEC 2004), they remain an under-represented minority when compared to the larger non-indigenous populations that inhabit nearby towns like Tartagal and Aguaray (Diz, 2017).

Historically, the Gran Chaco has been one of Argentina's most important commodity frontiers. The successive booms and busts of sugar cane plantations, saw mills, haciendas and hydrocarbons have played an important part in both regional and national economies and they have been of central importance to the livelihoods of Guaraní settlements and households. At various points in the Chaco's history, Guaraní workers found employment on sugar cane plantations, saw mills, and haciendas, and oil and gas fields. However, these extractive industries are currently in decline and demand for Guaraní labor has waned. Most recently, the Chaco has seen the rapid expansion of soy bean production, an industry that capitalized on a recent global commodities boom (2000-2014) and provided the basis for a marked increase in redistributive welfare under a post-neoliberal government (2003 and 2015). During the time of my fieldwork a lack of infrastructure and market access made autonomous agriculture risky and unprofitable. Instead, people's livelihoods were most often secured through an assortment of unstable jobs, patronage and welfare payments (Diz, 2018).

I conducted fieldwork among the Guaraní at the height of Argentina's post-neoliberal era. After the political and economic meltdown that engulfed Argentina in 2001, a neo-Peronist

coalition, under the guidance of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández, governed the country between 2003 and 2015. This new center-left political force, known as the Kirchneristas in reference to their first leader, was part of the so-called ‘post-neoliberal turn’ in South America (Grugel and Riggirozzi 2012). Capitalizing on the global commodities boom, post-neoliberal governments favored neo-extractive development, in which states, rather than private corporations, took on a greater role in natural resource extraction and used revenues to expand social spending and distribution (Savino 2016). This redistributive tendency earned the Kirchneristas the label of ‘export-oriented populists’ (Richardson 2009) for their ability to forge broad-based electoral coalitions and gain popular support, while furthering extraction and deepening dependency on global markets (Svampa 2015).

While the Chaco’s traditional industries are in decline, the region has seen a boom in soybean production (Lapegna 2016). This boom, which was replicated in various parts of the country, was central to state revenue during the post-neoliberal era and it enabled the creation of new redistributive welfare policies. As we will see, these policies had a crucial impact on Guaraní settlements which had never before had such regular access to government benefits. As with similar forms of welfare throughout the Americas (Peck and Theodore 2010; Lavinás 2013), the relatively small payments Guaraní people received were designed to be investments in human capital that would enable poor citizens to join and contribute to the market. At the national scale, the logic exemplifies an attempt to combat Maynard Keynes’ ‘paradox of thrift’ in the sense that it sought to incentivize expenditure and financial inclusion among the poorer segments of the population who might otherwise be inclined to accumulate and save (see Introduction to this volume). At the local level, though, programs worked to curb profligacy by locating their expenditure within a model that assumed thrifty household management. Here we find an important scalar tension in how thrift plays out within policy and lived experience.

Guaraní people's increased incorporation into waged labor markets, their receipt of welfare benefits, and, most recently, their increased access to credit, have transformed the material conditions of their lives. As a result, people often told me that their grandparents and great-grandparents, 'the ancients' as they were often called, lived a life of poverty and dependence on forest resources. In contrast to 'the ancients', people felt that they were now better off and experienced access to money, store-bought food, cell phones, motorcycles, or sound systems, as clear indicators of progress. The following sections examine the different ways in which sources of wealth are managed and experienced in Guaraní settlements. Starting at the level of the household, I will expand outwards towards the political community and national politics, showing how the different levels articulate with each other on the ground.

Houses, Wages and Thrift

Perhaps the most visible indicator of the shift between the ancients' poverty and today's relative affluence can be found in the change that Guaraní houses have undergone over the last two decades. In this section, I will provide two portraits of individual families and the houses they live in. We will see thrifty strategies of saving, accumulating, and investing that have enabled people to upgrade their houses, but we will also see that these strategies of thrift are closely entwined with non-market obligations of mutuality.

The first portrait is that of Indalecio's family. Indalecio is a Guaraní man who was in his late 60s. His life history reflects the boom and bust cycles of the Chaco's economy. In his youth he worked as a logger in the nearby forests, but his fortune changed when he found a job with an oil and gas subcontracting company in the late 1990s. Over a fortunate run of four years, he was able to string together several jobs with this company. But when the hydrocarbon industry hit hard times, he was laid off. By the time I met him, he no longer had an income

and dedicated most of his time to a small agricultural field which yielded some crops, but was not enough to sustain his large family.

Indalecio's house was home to five of his unmarried sons and daughters and was composed of three different kinds of buildings. The first had a thatched roof, supported by wooden beams, and closed off on one wide by a wall of irregular wooden slats. Adjacent to this was a bare-bricked, rectangular house with a corrugated iron roof and shuttered windows. Finally, there was another rectangular house with white-plastered walls, a similar corrugated roof, and glass windows. The house was surrounded by a carefully maintained swept dust patio and shaded in parts by a number of mango trees. To one side of the three buildings stood a pile of bricks, wire coils and rebar mesh. Indalecio had accumulated these materials because he hoped to continue to expand his house. Walking past the house and towards the edge of the patio, stood Indalecio's son's house, a small hut with mud brick walls and a thatched roof.

The second portrait is of Angela's family. She is a single woman who was in her late 20s. When I lived in her settlement, she worked as a teacher in the settlement's primary school and lived with her elderly parents and three younger siblings. She also helped her married sisters who lived in houses near the parental household and took care of their children. Like Indalecio, Angela's father tended to a small agricultural field that did not provide for the family's subsistence. Her two brothers were unemployed, as were her brothers-in-law. The family depended heavily on her income. Every month Angela handed most of her wages to her parents for the family's subsistence, but like Indalecio, she also spent part of the money to pay for small amounts of bricks, cement, iron sheets, and steel bars that would go towards building a new house for her family.

While Angela paid for the materials because she had a job, her unemployed father, brother and brother-in-law were in charge of building the new house. The whole process of house building was slow and gradual since Angela could only buy the materials in piecemeal fashion and her male relatives only worked on the house sporadically. In fact, while work had begun before I arrived in the settlement in 2012, the house remained incomplete in 2017 when I last visited. In the meantime, Angela, her parents, sisters and some of her nieces and nephews still lived in the old wooden shack that they had built in the 1980s. Angela's judicious management of her wages and her careful purchase of construction materials exemplify the kind of thrifty house economy in which 'slow accumulation' enables savings to be 'put into the house,' and illustrates an overarching ethos is one of 'making-do' (Gudeman 2016: 16-17).

In comparing these two examples, we can begin to tease out situated and historically inflected understandings of thrift among the Guaraní. Until recently, most families lived in mud brick huts like Indalecio's son's or wooden shacks like the one Angela lived in. However, over the last couple of decades, sporadic access to temporary employment and wages has enabled families to upgrade to brick-walled houses like Indalecio's or the one Angela was slowly having built. People refer to these houses as *casas de material* (material houses). While mud huts and *casas de material* are both functioning houses, they are not equivalent to each other in as much as they index different degrees of access to income. Mud houses were generally associated with poverty and backwardness, a vivid reminder of how 'the ancients' used to live, and most people I spoke to aspired to live in *casas de material*. The most striking of these brick houses had been built in the early 2000s following a minor surge in employment opportunities in the oil and gas industry. They had smooth cement floors and some even had glass windows and insulated roofs. A few included small annexes with iron-barred windows that could double as a small shop for everyday goods. While the oil jobs facilitated house

construction for many, other families took a more piecemeal approach, portioning off a fraction of their pay to invest in their house. The most visible reminder of this were the stacks of bricks, cement bags, steel rods, and corrugated metal sheets that stored near older houses (see Figure 3.1).

While a mud hut could be built with minimal monetary expense—mud, wood and thatch were all readily available and could be collected from the forest—bricks and cement had to be purchased with money. Indeed, when it came to house building, many Guaraní people demonstrated a real knack for speculation and investment. Aware of the fluctuating value of the Argentine peso, I knew of many people who kept a constant eye on the variable prices of building materials in both Argentina and Bolivia in the hope of finding a bargain. In other words, being able to build a *casa de material* depended on the happy coincidence of low prices, the availability of cash and a favorable exchange rate. Unsurprisingly, in my host settlement practically all of the *casas de material* had been built between five and ten years ago—a time when the peso was strong relative to the boliviano, and when many men landed jobs in the oil sector.

While construction materials had to be purchased from external vendors, the work of actually constructing a house was most often performed by the men of the family who would inhabit it or by close male kin who did not expect monetary compensation. However, given the current lack of jobs among men, some of these patterns seemed to be changing and some men had started to build houses in exchange for money. On the one hand, these monetized transactions appeared to commodify kinship networks, but there was also a sense in which these payments constituted a form of reciprocity that resonated with past practices of collective agricultural labor known as *mötiro* or *minga* where individuals would compensate relatives with food for

their help during busy harvest times. In this sense, although paid, builders worked at their own inconstant tempo and ‘employers’ did not pressure their kin to get on with the work. These practices suggest that the mere exchange of money does not necessarily result in a market logic.

Unlike the peasant household described by Gudeman and Rivera (1990), Guaraní household economies are not geared towards self-subsistence and survival. Instead, in a context marked by unemployment and uncertain agriculture, house economies react to the labor market’s unpredictable oscillations. Investment in the physical structure of a house offers a stable platform for improvement and durable shelter, but this investment also aims to capture the allure of progress and wealth. As a form of consumption that relies on temporary moments of wealth, house construction requires a thrifty disposition that is imbued with ethical considerations about the proper use of resources.

Indeed, for those families who still lived in mud huts and ‘humble houses’, the very walls they inhabited and the roofs that sheltered them were a constant reminder of the resources they lacked or had squandered. Thus, Indalecio often lamented that his son, who had enjoyed several stints of oil employment, had squandered his wages on alcohol and status items, and could now only afford to live in a mud hut with his young family. In this father’s eyes, his son had failed to manage his wages in a thrifty manner that would have enabled his young family to move beyond a state of shameful poverty into what he felt was a more dignified existence. For his part, the young man found solace in expensive consumer goods, including an audio system and motorcycles, that appeared to be congealed markers of the wealth he had once had access to. Contrary to the observations made among peasant households elsewhere (Gudeman and Rivera 1990), these expenditures were not an attempt to establish a resilient or

stable household that would endure over time.¹ Instead, they constituted an appeal to the status associated with employment, typically for men.

Houses constitute long-term plans, their construction melds market and non-market considerations. The kind of thrifty house construction I have described relies upon wages, the quintessential scarce resource in today's Guaraní settlements, and a speculative attention to price fluctuations and exchange rates across the Argentina-Bolivia border. It is also reliant on the 'mutuality' (Gudeman 2016) of kinship relations that appear to rely on commodifying market-based logics, but which simultaneously enfold intimacy, care and reciprocity. As a project, thrifty house construction extends into the long term as an always-unfinished task that is attuned to aspirations for material progress and a kind of 'expectation of modernity' (Ferguson 1999) that would break with the poverty of the past. Houses are plotted out over time, always under construction, always potentially improved. They are also markers of status, incorporating elements of style, consumption, and aspiration that are contrasted with the huts of 'the ancients' or the poor. Thus, houses are as much about creating forms of balance and mutuality as they are about ranking social values and demonstrating a family's ability to achieve desirable material wealth.²

In the next section I move to a different kind of house, *casillas* which are government-donated houses, and constitute a valuable form of political patronage. By contrasting patronage with the kinds of thrift deployed for building brick houses, I want to draw attention to how the different ways in which Guaraní people access patronage, and how they go about redistributing

¹ Thanks to Catherine Alexander for this observation.

² Thanks to Daniel Sosna for this observation.

it within their own communities, leads to a form of anti-thrift, imbued with its own temporality and moral force.

<Insert Figure 3.1 here>

Figure 3.1 A house with three distinct phases of construction; in the foreground, a pile of bricks signals the intent of future construction (Photo by Author)

Community, Patronage and Anti-Thrift

The houses discussed above were unfinished projects, constructed over the long run and reliant on wages, kinship, and speculation. By contrast, the government-donated houses or *casillas* I will discuss here were fully formed and constituted an important form of patronage. With their white brick walls and identical format they were instantly recognizable. As we will see, the temporality surrounding *casillas* typically operated in the short term, mobilizing and creating political solidarities beyond and within settlements, but also generating discontent and suspicion. These distinct temporal and social traits placed patronage outside the realm of thrift and inscribed them, instead, within a form of anti-thrift. To understand why this is so, it is helpful to contextualize *casillas* within everyday Guaraní politics.

Most of the government houses that I saw during my time in the Chaco were sponsored by the Federal Program for Housing and Habitat Improvement among Native and Rural Peoples, which was approved at the national level in 2010 (Secretaría de Obras Públicas 2010). This program required the co-ordination of a national ministry and various secretariats and subsecretariats within it. In the Province of Salta, it was executed by the Provincial and Municipal governments, who in turn worked alongside the Provincial Institute for Native Peoples (IPPIS) and the Provincial Institute for Housing (IPV). However, as the mayor of one

of the towns in the region explained to me, resources only reached the ground when political allegiances at the various levels of state were in place. The result was a complex institutional matrix, one that Guaraní leaders had to learn to navigate. Using their existing contacts, forging new ones and applying pressure at the right points, Guaraní leaders had to find ways of convincing bureaucrats and politicians that their settlements were particularly needy; all while managing people's expectations back home.

As is the case among many indigenous societies in South America (Clastres 1989; Killick 2007), Guaraní leaders have no coercive authority and people are loathe to follow their orders. Nonetheless, the state recognizes them as official representatives when dealing with external actors, including politicians and private interests. This means that leaders occupy an important brokering role (Diz 2020b). Guaraní people expect their leaders to know how to 'speak well' and, increasingly, how to produce effective documents. These skills are useful in as much as followers also expect leaders to display a sense of courage and assertiveness when dealing with external actors. Ultimately, these skills and attributes allow leaders to 'bring down' (*bajar*) resources for their followers. The use of the spatial metaphor of 'bringing down' for describing political leadership reinforces the idea that the Guaraní feel themselves to be at the margins of an external *criollo* world of abundance: a world of non-indigenous politicians, engineers, lawyers and company representatives that need to be pressured, spoken to, and confronted.

In the context of the *casillas* mentioned above, then, Guaraní leaders were expected to 'bring down' housing modules, to negotiate with the municipal government, the IPPIS and IPV offices, so that the needs of their particular settlements would be recognized. When successful, Guaraní leaders were granted a small number of houses for their settlement. Assemblies were called and the houses were allotted by lottery among the families that were deemed to be most

in need—large families with no employed members and living in adobe huts, were typically favored. However, the families that would inhabit the *casillas* did not always work on their own house. Instead, the construction jobs were also distributed by lottery among a leader's followers. In the settlement where I lived, the jobs were distributed among a group of unemployed young men who had self-organized into what they called a Centre for Unemployed Workers (see Diz 2020a). Each house provided short-term jobs for a handful of men whose wages were paid with national government funds. In other words, these houses had the double advantage of providing new houses *and* wages.

Leaders were not always successful, however, and, even when they were, they were often accused of favoring their extended family, or worse, accumulating and pursuing their own self-interest. In fact, such accusations were so prevalent that factional conflict was a recurring feature of life in all of the Guaraní settlements I worked with (see also Diz 2020b). The cause of conflict always revolved around the apparent maldistribution of resources. Because they were the primary conduits for resources, leaders built a following by eliciting and redistributing goods among their supporters. At the community level, there was a widely-held expectation of equitable redistribution and vigorous condemnation of any leaders who seemed to be accumulating for their own gain. Where a family might portion off some of its limited resources to spend on future house construction, people kept a constant eye on their leaders to ensure that they did not accumulate resources for their own 'personal ambitions'. Leaders did not request that settlement-dwellers contribute to a communal fund, nor did the people I worked with expect 'The Community' as a corporate entity to have a reserve it might draw on. Lest they be accused of selfishness or even witchcraft, leaders were expected to immediately redistribute any resources they elicited. While people recognized the ties of mutuality that ought to inform communal life, they were also acutely aware of the tensions and jealousies

between households and of how fraught notions of a common good were. The constant surveillance of leaders, the moral injunction for redistribution and a deeply-held desire for equitable sharing combined to create a space of anti-thrift. Leaders had to redistribute in the short-term and they did not accumulate for personal or collective gain. Politically virtuous resource management, in other words, was akin to immediate redistribution.

Casillas, then, articulated politics at two separate levels. At one level, they drew on party politics and the alignment of state institutions at the national, provincial, and local level. As a powerfully visible form of patronage they played an important part in formal democratic politics, particularly during election times, when non-indigenous politicians felt the need to persuade potential supporters. But on another level, they were also an important part of the less formalized internal politics of Guaraní settlements, which were marked by the injunction to redistribute. Because patronage in the form of government housing combined both of these scales it sheds light on an important form of anti-thrift.

Contrary to house construction reliant on access to employment, the temporalities of electoral campaigning shaped the construction of government housing. It also created a distinction between the world of *criollo* government and politicians and the Guaraní settlements that needed to find ways to elicit the wealth held by non-indigenous actors. The fact that these two worlds were ethnically distinguished, palpably underscored the distance between wealthy *criollos* and poor *indigenas*. It also had political implications because the Guaraní felt that *criollos* inhabited a world of abundance, from which resources could be elicited. This has had the effect of imbuing Guaraní efforts with a short-term dynamic in which they sought to acquire and elicit resources whenever a chance materialized. Additionally, there was the need for quick redistribution and the avoidance of accumulation. Combined, these two traits rendered

communal economies a site of anti-thrift: an arena in which rapid redistribution trumped long-term planning and communal accumulation as a viable political strategy. This made sense given the dependence of Guaraní communities on external sources of wealth, particularly resources like *casillas* which materialized sporadically at electorally convenient times. Combined with widespread unemployment and unprofitable local agriculture the lack of locally autonomous production meant that pursuing thrift was politically unpalatable. Anti-thrift built on an assumption of abundance, rather than scarcity, and emphasized elicitation and redistribution over production and accumulation.

Welfare, Gender and (Anti-)Thrift

So far, I have described how the thrifty management of sporadic wages enabled Guaraní people to upgrade their houses and discussed the distribution of patronage as an instance of anti-thrift. In this section, I will discuss forms of welfare payments that blur the boundaries between thrift and anti-thrift. These welfare payments were relatively new and closely associated with the post-neoliberal government (2003-2015). They were also directly related to the global commodities market, for it was from revenues derived from the soy boom that the national government financed its redistributive program.

As of 2009, Guaraní households have been receiving payments from a conditional cash transfer scheme known as the Universal Child Allowance (*Asignación Universal por Hijo* or AUH). The AUH distributed small per-child payments to families without formal employment. Funds managed at the national level and distributed to local welfare offices, who in turn deposited payments into bank accounts that beneficiaries could withdraw with their bank cards. In exchange for these payments, parents had to ensure that children attended school regularly and that they received periodic medical check-ups. Given the prevalence of unemployment in

Guaraní settlements, practically every household in my host settlement had access to these benefits.

Policy makers envisioned the AUH as a supplementary income that was not designed to provide a living wage. Thus, in 2015, AUH payments were worth AR\$670 (about US\$75) per child, which was roughly equivalent to 10 per cent of the Argentine minimum wage. A single household could claim payment for up to five children, meaning that families could only earn up to about 50 per cent of a minimum wage through the AUH (Alonso and Di Costa 2015: 49). While these amounts were modest by design, they had a strong impact upon the Guaraní who had rarely enjoyed access to regular and dependable sources of cash. Although men were legally able to collect these allowances, I did not know of any Guaraní men who collected child allowances and the allowances were effectively the preserve of women.

If wages were sporadic and patronage determined by the rhythms of electoral cycles, AUH payments were monthly and dependable. Such a regular form of income was unprecedented in Guaraní settlements and the AUH soon became one of the most crucial resources for Guaraní households. Families often used it to cover everyday expenses, especially food, but it was also often used for aspirational consumer goods. Like *casillas*, AUH payments were a government-donated resource. However, bureaucratized collection processes and individualized payments meant that Guaraní leaders had no role to play in acquiring them. The tactics of elicitation, brokerage, and ‘bringing down’ resources were superfluous in this context, and welfare payments did not feed into factional divisions. Nonetheless, these benefits were still evaluated in moral terms.

As others have noted (Morton 2015), conditional cash transfers often cast recipients in a morally ambiguous light. Unlike wages, which are paid out in exchange for work, CCTs are received in exchange for meeting simple criteria. Anxieties about people's motivation for work are common because they raise questions of moral desert (Diz 2018). Importantly, programs like the AUH have also been highly gendered. Among the Guaraní, the AUH's gendered connotations have granted women managerial control over payments, but they have also circumscribed the discretion with which women can spend them. The association of CCT payments with women and specifically, mothers, reinforced surveillance over expenditures and created a dichotomy between 'good mothers,' who spent their payments in a responsible manner to benefit their children, and 'bad mothers,' who were accused of wasting benefits and indulging in vanities. This moral evaluation was fundamentally about thrift understood as responsible intrahousehold planning aimed at future ends. Notably, it burdened women with the responsibility for long-term planning and resource management.

At the same time, people worried that the AUH could incentivize excess. For instance, the Guaraní nurse who worked in my host settlement's first aid room once admonished a group of women for having numerous children, suggesting that, although they would receive AUH money for each child, this money would not be enough to cover the expenses associated with child rearing. In this understanding, resources were finite and their management had to extend into the long term. I also heard people accuse neighbors of wastefully spending most of their payments within the first few days of receiving them. In addition, the fact that AUH payments were made regularly enabled people to become increasingly in debt and often left them at the mercy of loan sharks who charged exorbitant interest rates. Finally, while a majority of my Guaraní friends and neighbors valued the AUH program as an indicator of the national government's concern for the poor, they also wondered whether the Argentine President was

squandering valuable resources. Some were concerned about what would happen when the money ran out and several even suspected that the CCT program was merely an effort to buy people's votes. Not unlike the Guaraní leaders discussed in the previous section, the sense that the President might be thinking in the short term raised the possibility of anti-thrift. These doubts and concerns reflected yet another instance of anxiety about recipients' and the state's responsibility to manage resources in a thrifty manner.

The AUH provides fascinating insights into the ambivalence of thrift and anti-thrift and how the two can often be hard to distinguish. Here again we encounter issues of scale. Welfare was at once creating a relationship between the government personified by the figure of the president (see also Eger and Damo 2014) and between the members of beneficiary families. These monetary exchanges established relationships of mutuality that could be fulfilled through sharing and redistribution, but they also created obligations and expectations of thrifty expenditure that carried moral weight. The fact that these relationships were so strongly gendered in the Guaraní context, made them all the more powerful for they could effectively reinforce stereotypes that created two separate, and differently evaluated, realms of thrift and anti-thrift. In the next section I explore how these two realms come together within a particular household.

Thrift and Anti-thrift within a Household

The preceding three sections have schematized the three most important kinds of resources that Guaraní people live with today. For each of these resources I have shown how considerations of thrift and anti-thrift came into play, often in relation to ideas about temporality and scale. While I have distinguished between wages, patronage, and welfare, in everyday life most households juggled between the three kinds of resources. In as much as each resource

generates different kinds of mutuality and political loyalty, they combine in powerful ways and play a significant role in the social life of Guaraní people. To illustrate this process, this section will focus on the case of Ana and Hernán's household.

Ana had had her first daughter at the age of fifteen; however, the father of her five children had passed away when she was in her early thirties. Her two youngest sons attended secondary school in a nearby town, while two of her three daughters were unemployed. Her third daughter worked part-time and dreamed of joining the police force. Now in her forties, Ana had remarried. Hernán, Ana's current husband, had spent fifteen years as a migrant agricultural worker and had taken jobs all over the country before returning to the settlement and moving in with Ana. Upon his return, Hernán fell in with a logging crew and was able to support the family with the wages he earned. Soon he began investing in construction materials and upgraded Ana's wooden house. By 2012, the family lived in a unique and relatively large brick house.

But, as the amount of available wood near the settlement dwindled, Hernán was forced to find alternative ways of generating income. He joined in with a group of politically active unemployed young men and landed a short-term job as part of a highway paving crew that was hired by the municipal government during the run up to local elections. However, he soon felt he was being purposefully excluded from other job opportunities and became disillusioned with the settlement leader who he accused of pursuing his own selfish interests. Drawing on his experience on plantations, Hernán cleared out a patch of forest, installed an ingenious irrigation system, and planted an impressive vegetable garden. In this he demonstrated admirable resourcefulness, re-using old tools by fashioning new grips out of branches and repurposing lengths of hose that had been donated by politicians a few years back. Hernán

exemplified a form of thrift that minimized expenditure (Gudeman 2001: 38) and enabled him to work with what tools and materials were readily available.

Unfortunately, the garden proved short-lived as a forest fire destroyed it before he had a chance to collect the first harvest. By the time I arrived in the community, Hernán had cleared a new patch of forest and was in the process of sowing a large field of maize. At the same time, he was busy raising pigs, hoping to fatten them for sale at Christmas time. Despite Hernán's best efforts, a cattle herd destroyed his maize fields and diseases decimated his drove of pigs. Ultimately, he admitted to me, he wanted to make a profit and he hoped his projects would make him rich so he would not have to work ever again.

While Hernán struggled to earn wages and found himself excluded from the patronage that leaders generated, Ana found alternative ways of supporting the household. Her youngest son was fifteen years old, which meant that he was entitled to an AUH allowance for three more years. Ana was a staunch supporter of the Kirchnerista government and expressed wonder at how the President had transformed her role in the household. She also supplemented Hernán's paltry and inconstant income with a small disability subsidy that she collected in the name of one of her daughters. In addition, Ana began baking bread for sale. She stayed up until the small hours of the night baking small round loaves. Over the course of a night, Ana would bake about 200 loaves, ignoring the pain in her scoliotic back as she bent over to stoke the fire in her clay oven. By six in the morning, as women throughout the community began lighting the fires in their lean-to kitchens, children were sent to buy bread from Ana. The demand for bread was high and Ana always managed to sell all of the bread she made. At two pesos each (0.15 GBP at the same), Ana made roughly 400 pesos, or the equivalent of a monthly state-granted child allowance, every day. The work was extremely hard and she managed to keep

up the routine for two full months, sometimes making two batches of bread a day and only taking breaks when the pain in her back became unbearable. Ultimately, Ana gave up on her bread-making enterprise after Hernán, who struggled with alcoholism, found her cash and disappeared for a week.

With the money she earned from bread and welfare payments, Ana bought bricks, a bag of cement, tiles and a porcelain toilet with which she hoped to build what she called a ‘first class bathroom’. For this, she enlisted her unemployed uncle’s help and paid him a small wage in exchange. However, Ana’s in-laws felt that her ambitions to upgrade her house would lead her to neglect her children’s needs. Even more damningly, Ana’s mother felt that she should be using the money to support her younger sister, Clara, who had a serious but undiagnosed illness and was struggling to take care of her own three young children. Ana, however, felt that Clara was an irresponsible mother and lamented that she misspent her AUH payments to go clubbing in a nearby border town, instead of providing for her own children.

Ana and Hernán’s toils, their daily division of labor, and the tensions they endured shed light on the internal workings of Guaraní households. The story is a complex one, with multiple layers of obligation, mutuality, and responsibility, as well as intersecting forms of income, patronage, and welfare. Hernán’s variously shifting jobs, from agricultural migrant to logger, from highway paver to failed agriculturalist, accurately reflected the kinds of jobs available to men. For her part, Ana demonstrated an heroic capacity to keep the family afloat and she succeeded in feeding the family while paying for her sons’ education and guarding her resources from Hernán. It is worth noting that while Hernán’s obligations to provide were restricted to his immediate family, Ana’s extended family judged and laid claims on the

resources she generated. Similarly, Ana evaluated her sister's use of resources along gendered lines.

We can see here how Hernán and Ana attempted to establish thrifty strategies, particularly in their work to upgrade their house. But we also see how hard they struggled to maintain their strategies and how often they had to come up with new endeavors. Party politics and communal politics came together for Hernán in the form of temporary employment and while this created momentary loyalties, the anti-thrift expectations of fair redistribution rendered these political allegiances fragile. Meanwhile, Ana experienced welfare payments as a personalized act of care from the government. To the extent that thrifty accumulation and long term planning intersected with short term redistribution and expectations of abundance, the case of Ana and Hernán demonstrates the fundamental tensions between forms of mutuality and market logics. As individuals negotiate and grapple with the temporality and scale of various resource flows they are able to forge social relations, while also coming up against the limits of both thrift and anti-thrift.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the three most important resources that Guaraní people depended upon for their livelihoods during Argentina's post-neoliberal regime. This was a time of comparative abundance for the Guaraní, one in which resources were relatively easy to come by. However, it was also a time in which extractive employment had come to an end due to resource depletion. In this situation, wages had become relatively infrequent, but patronage and welfare had increased.

I have shown how people approached house construction in a thrifty manner, by accumulating resources with a view to future construction. These construction projects were often informed by a sense of how material conditions had changed over recent years and the construction of brick houses was felt as a move away from the poor living conditions of ‘the ancients.’ Thrifty approaches to house construction drew on speculation and careful attention to market prices, but they also built on existing ties of kinship and mutuality, thus blurring understandings of thrift as cold, self-interested, calculation.

On the other hand, I have shown how government-donated housing was a particularly desirable form of patronage and one that Guaraní leaders worked hard to elicit. Unlike wages, though, patronage did not rest on ideas of work and production. Rather, it built on an understanding of how non-indigenous *criollos* inhabited a world of abundance, from which resources could be ‘brought down’. As a result, community-level politics were a site of anti-thrift. The emphasis was not on communal accumulation, or even on creating a form of commons or ‘base’ (Gudeman 2001: 27), but rather on egalitarian redistribution which resulted in its own forms of political competition. The problem with this anti-thrift understanding of politics, was that it generated discontent with leaders because of suspicions of favoritism and unmet expectations of equal redistribution.

Finally, I looked at post-neoliberal welfare payments and suggested that these blurred the realms of thrift and anti-thrift. Their regular payment created new material possibilities for many Guaraní households and they also generated political loyalty towards the national government. The way in which these policies were designed as small contributions to the household created disciplinary pressures, particularly for women who were expected to spend resources in a thrifty manner to maximize benefits for their children. They also generated

moral anxiety around questions to do with deservingness and raised concerns about whether they incentivized excess. Intriguingly critics and pundits who decried what they saw as a populist strategy for buying off votes, levelled similar sorts of accusations at the presidency. By contrast, from a developmental perspective, conditional cash transfers are often interpreted as a thrifty way of spending national resources – one that builds human capital gradually, with a view to boosting development in the long term.

Each of these resources operated at different scales, linking employees and employers in face to face interactions, connecting Guaraní leaders with regional and local government, and even creating loyalties between distant presidents and citizens on the ground. In moving across these scales, different resources created ambivalent ties of mutuality and obligation. Similarly, the fact that these resources had very different temporalities imbued them with socially powerful rhythms. In exploring how these resources, scales, and rhythms combined in a particular household I illustrated how the different forms of thrift and anti-thrift generated tensions within and across Guaraní households. These tensions often worked along gendered lines, reinforcing women's obligations to manage the household in a thrifty manner, while simultaneously, bracketing off community politics as a space of masculine anti-thrift.

Overall, this chapter has shed light on how people's engagements with wealth and resources constitute a movement in and out of thrift. It has also demonstrated that not all resources, not even all kinds of monetary payment, are the same and suggested that how resources are sourced, managed, earmarked and distributed often determines their social possibilities and limits. In the Guaraní case, we find that such an approach reveals paradoxical ambiguities surrounding the analytical distinctions between thrift and anti-thrift. Despite a context of poverty, thrift does not emerge as the preferred strategy for economic security in Guaraní

households. Rather thrifty household management works alongside the anti-thrift of local politics and national welfare as people navigate the scales and rhythms of resource flows.

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