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Fighting With Wine: Ruin, Resistance and Renewal in a Qom Community of Northern Argentina

Abstract

This study examines public binge drinking among the Qom (Toba) ex-foragers of Formosa, northern Argentina. Based upon 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork in a peri-urban Qom barrio (Lot 84), this analysis relates binge drinking to Qom ethnohistory, community life, and interactions with the Argentine state. The public, performative nature of Qom binge drinking is explored; intoxication is shown to convey in sometimes violent public spectacle the pathos of their socioeconomic marginality, reinforce non-indigenous Argentines' entrenched perceptions of violent "Indians", and paradoxically provide the Qom with vehicle for continued colonial resistance. Many Qom view drinking problems as rooted in Lot 84's close proximity to the city (Formosa) relative to more rural Qom villages. Thus they reference a continuum of health that runs from urban, non-indigenous spaces to the rural bush country where foods—including home-brewed alcohol—are healthful rather than harmful. In kind, the violence and perceived chaos associated with public binge drinking has led to the development of programs intended to stem alcohol use in the community. Locally, counseling efforts are woven in the missions of evangelical churches and the Catholic chapel, while top-down efforts focus upon state-run psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is explored as a paternalistic form of governmental domination and attempted assimilation. Rather than relying upon state-run methods for personal and communal re-integration, many Qom centrally position a period of alcohol use within their personal development narratives, during which alcohol allowed them to find personal responsibility or an improved relationship with God. On a communal level, fighting against public alcohol use among youth has led to increased community solidarity and capacity building through sport, education and indigenous-led program creation. In summary, public binge drinking is manifest in the Qom community not through acculturation or personal pathology, but rather as a multi-valent, ritualesque performance that levies resistance against prevailing social conditions and, despite the profound tax of violence, occasions personal and communal transformation.

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FIGHTING WITH WINE: RUIN, RESISTANCE AND RENEWAL IN A QOM
COMMUNITY OF NORTHERN ARGENTINA

Christopher A. F. Golias

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FIGHTING WITH WINE: RUIN, RESISTANCE AND RENEWAL IN A QOM
COMMUNITY OF NORTHERN ARGENTINA

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Christopher A. F. Goliás

Dedication page

I dedicate this work to my "traveling partner" Cindy; may it serve as a comely stone upon
the cairn marking this waypoint of our life.

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If it takes a village to raise a child, then indeed both a village and a cadre of additional support are needed to write a dissertation. I first thank my committee members for their patience, commentary, and assistance through each stage of the graduate program, especially the dissertation research process. I am particularly appreciative of the advice and encouragement offered me by Philippe Bourgois, Ph.D., without whose step-wise guidance it is unlikely this work would have even come to fruition.

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ABSTRACT

FIGHTING WITH WINE: RUIN, RESISTANCE AND RENEWAL IN A QOM
COMMUNITY OF NORTHERN ARGENTINA

Christopher A. F. Golias

Philippe Bourgois, Ph.D.

This study examines public binge drinking among the Qom (Toba) ex-foragers of Formosa, northern Argentina. Based upon 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork in a peri-urban Qom *barrio* (Lot 84), this analysis relates binge drinking to Qom ethnohistory, community life, and interactions with the Argentine state. The public, performative nature of Qom binge drinking is explored; intoxication is shown to convey in sometimes violent public spectacle the pathos of their socioeconomic marginality, reinforce non-indigenous Argentines' entrenched perceptions of violent "Indians", and paradoxically provide the Qom with vehicle for continued colonial resistance. Many Qom view drinking problems as rooted in Lot 84's close proximity to the city (Formosa) relative to more rural Qom villages. Thus they reference a continuum of health that runs from urban, non-indigenous spaces to the rural bush country where foods—including home-brewed alcohol—are healthful rather than harmful. In kind, the violence and perceived chaos associated with public binge drinking has led to the development of programs intended to stem alcohol use in the community. Locally, counseling efforts are woven in the missions of evangelical churches and the Catholic chapel, while top-down efforts focus upon state-run psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is explored as a paternalistic form of governmental domination and attempted assimilation. Rather than relying upon state-run methods for

personal and communal re-integration, many Qom centrally position a period of alcohol use within their personal development narratives, during which alcohol allowed them to find personal responsibility or an improved relationship with God. On a communal level, fighting against public alcohol use among youth has led to increased community solidarity and capacity building through sport, education and indigenous-led program creation. In summary, public binge drinking is manifest in the Qom community not through acculturation or personal pathology, but rather as a multi-valent, ritualesque performance that levies resistance against prevailing social conditions and, despite the profound tax of violence, occasions personal and communal transformation.

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PREFACE

The graduate school passage capped by this manuscript on how alcohol relates to performativity, contagion, and ambivalence in an ex-foraging community began as an interest in the evolution of bipedal pre-adaptations in Miocene ape skeletal structure. Its course wound through two interdisciplinary departments, with University of Pennsylvania's four-field curriculum providing the most of the waypoints on my journey from evolutionary anatomy to symbolic anthropology. After coursework across anthropology's traditional four fields, I transitioned from evolutionary anatomy to a research agenda aiming to link testosteronal modulations to environmental conditions. This in turn morphed into a bio-cultural research plan attempting to integrate a study of cortisol variation with extended ethnography concerned with the embodiment of social marginalization. In the end, alcohol use as an embodied form of social inequality took precedence, while the complementary biomarkers were effaced from the planned research.

But topical vacillations are endemic to graduate school, so why should I include these defunct research permutations in this preface? In short, my experience in conceiving them continues to inform what I consider to be salient to the study of indigenous alcohol use—and what is not. While there remains important research to be done on the role of genetics, epigenetics, and endocrinology as they relate to substance use, I regard emphases on the politics and perceptions surrounding indigenous alcohol use to be more illuminating than biological analysis. Frustrated at one stage of research planning that I could not measure the genetic copy-number of the gene coding for alcohol

dehydrogenase across different human sub-populations, I realized that the ability to process alcohol has little influence on the desire to drink alcohol, especially to excess, and drastically pales in comparison to social context in influencing alcohol-related behavior. It occurred to me, for example, that fraternity membership would likely overshadow ethnic provenience in any multiple regression analysis of alcohol consumption on college campuses. For the scale and type of questions I was asking about the Qom, ethnography presented itself as a superior tool to bio-analysis. After all, genetics are never thought to influence, for example, the heavy drinkers of present-day Russia who, despite a long history of spirit consumption and presumable genetic adaptation, drink until they are drunk no matter how much is required. Similarly, the drinking of indigenous people such as the Qom should be primarily understood as nested social phenomena, with biological factors providing complementary or corroborative data.

In consideration of alcohol consumption as a social phenomenon, the confidentiality and protection of individuals participating in this study was one of its primary risks, and thus warrants explanation. Formally, University of Pennsylvania IRB Protocols 812070 and 814840 represent third party verification of this research's compliance to ethical standards for human subjects research. Pursuant to these ethical standards are protections of participants' privacy and confidentiality. Great care has been taken in this manuscript to anonymize collected data. In this particular case, a high level of obfuscation is necessary to protect information participants shared about drinking. Such a goal is complicated by the small, intimate nature of my fieldwork site and the

potential for this work, or parts of it, to be translated into Spanish and disseminated to the research community. These considerations led me to use multiple pseudonyms for certain individuals in some cases, and one pseudonym in other cases for the thoughts and experiences of multiple individuals. Additionally, I use vague identifiers such as “an acquaintance of mine” or “a teacher” instead of “a kiosk vender” or “a second grade teacher” because the social fabric of the community would allow a knowledgeable reader to deduce who said what—potentially to the detriment of one of my respondents.

Despite such great lengths of anonymization, I hope that the reader finds this to be an intimate account of alcohol’s multi-valent social life in a community of ex-foragers. The research referenced within this manuscript is exclusively my heretofore-unpublished work.

CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1: Fighting with Wine: Ruin, Resistance and Renewal in a Qom Community

Introduction

This study focuses upon the Qom¹ ex-foragers of northern Argentina, specifically public binge drinking in a peri-urban *barrio* as it relates to aspects of their history, community life and articulation with the Argentine state. On the local level of analysis, I suggest that the public nature of Qom binge drinking is profoundly performative, as public intoxication conveys the pathos of their ruination² and continued socioeconomic marginality. In explaining the root cause of drinking, community residents consider alcoholism to be a social dis-ease stemming from contact with the city and abstraction from the bush country while recognizing the role of their systematic exclusion from both foraging and wage-labor activities. The fight against alcohol is central to prevailing Pentecostal Qom discourses on sobriety's role in personal, communal and youth development, while paradoxically, drinking is simultaneously a mode of continued rebellion against the Argentine government. In an analysis of macroscopic power relations, I argue that top-down sobriety interventions among the Qom are attempted techniques of domination. Such a reading recasts drinking and refusal of therapy as acts

¹ The ethnonym "Qom" is used in place of "Toba", despite the latter's general use in anthropological literature, at the request of my participants who view of the word "Toba" as a

² I use the terms ruin and ruination not as acculturation or capitulation, but as the living analogue of Gordillo's (2014) notion of rubble—that which is left in the Chaco following multiple waves of colonial ingress.

of continued resistance rather than epiphenomena of acculturation or personal pathologies. Indeed, overcoming drunkenness and achieving sobriety has become an important personal transition for many community members, which galvanizes personal identity as maturity is achieved. Community leaders are able to capitalize upon the urgency created by public intoxication to marshal funds and resources from congregations, government agencies, and other public institutions.

Of course, drinking among relocated, economically marginalized indigenous groups has been a subject, if not the focus, of anthropological inquiry for the entirety of the discipline's history. Even excluding studies on non-native groups, the number of studies of native drinking practices have not only been voluminous, but also arguably contains anthropology's most important contributions to the cross-disciplinary umbrella of alcohol studies (MacAndrew and Edgerton 1970; Douglas 1987; Eber 1995; Mitchell 2004). As the following chapters outline, alcohol's use among the Qom is similar, but not identical, to other indigenous groups of similar history. Like these other groups, the Qom borrow aspects of drink from non-indigenous society—in this case Argentine—yet evidence a clearly Qom mode of drinking itself and ways of making sense of drinking. Given this backdrop, what might the Qom case contribute to anthropological corpus, aside from simply tendering another case-study? Said another way, what uniqueness does the Qom case offer and what might be elucidated by its treatment?

The particular Qom case of Lot 84 offers a unique situation able to address several ongoing concerns in anthropological approaches to drink:

1) Their sedentarization, proletarianization, and post-industrialization occurred recently and rapidly. Such a situation allows better understanding of the relationship of economic dislocation to alcohol use. Moreover, the mechanism through which drinking habits are developed—i.e. contact with lower-class colonists with drinking habits of their own (MacAndrew and Edgerton 1970; Taussig 1993)--is more transparent and can be examined ethnographically rather than inferred historically. This furthers the idea that substances, including alcohol, were and continue to be central to understanding the workings of colonialism (Courtwright 2001).

2) The Qom are one of few New World foraging societies to have utilized alcohol in pre-Columbian times. It is sometimes suggested that unfamiliarity with alcohol contributed to the development of problematic drinking patterns in foraging groups ranging from central and western North America, to sub-Saharan Africa to Australia. Alcohol production among foragers is indeed uncommon due to a typical absence of surplus carbohydrates, lack of storage facilities and nomadism. The Qom represent a unique case in this regard, with their customary utilization of *algarroba* pods and honey fermented in a hollowed tree (*yuchán*). The eventual similarity of the Qom's case to other foragers' struggles with alcohol should point to repression and changes in economic base as more important causal factors than unfamiliarity in the development of problematic drinking patterns. Additionally, this pattern weakens (but does not refute due to the low proof of the alcohol previously consumed) deterministic arguments that suggest a genetic basis for population level addiction risks.

3) There exists a profound influence of traditional beliefs and continued ethnic resistance in modulating alcohol use. In contrast to those that explain alcohol use among indigenous groups as a matter of cultural change through acculturation (anomie-based arguments), the Qom case suggests rather that alcohol is more akin to a technology to be utilized and interpreted using existing cultural frameworks. In this case pre-existing Qom beliefs strongly apply to all aspects of usage, treatment and explanation. Drinking groups, especially gangs, are arranged based upon traditional sub-ethnic distinctions. The method of drinking, characterized by sharing boxed wine in public while sitting cross-legged on street corners, is something unknown to non-Qom drinkers in Formosa. In this way they make ostentatious spectacles of drinking that reinforce traditional anti-white resistance. Traditional ideas of contagion combined with Pentecostal beliefs form the emic basis of analyzing binge drinking as a uniquely Qom social problem. In order to solve this problem, healing through shamanic practice, Pentecostal conversion or personal epiphany is utilized in lieu of state funded psychoanalytic treatments. Meanwhile the long-standing practice of state resistance is taken up both by drinkers and pastors, though in quite different manners. Even pragmatic resource accrual, characteristic of foragers worldwide, factors into the ways in which Qom are able paradoxically to build capacity and affect community development using the urgency that alcohol construed as a social problem provides.

4) With few exceptions³, the ubiquitous transnational presence of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) renders its tenets central to most discussions of reservation drinking. In

³ Chiapas, for example see Eber 1995

Formosa specifically, and Argentina more broadly, the absence of AA is notable. As Buenos Aires is largely Catholic, and most imports to Argentina, cultural and otherwise, begin there, the Catholic Church's presence has diminished the quasi-religious appeal of AA in Argentina. In its place, nearly-exclusive reliance upon Freudian psychoanalysis serves to dictate the institutionalized recovery processes throughout Argentina, north to Formosa and even to indigenous contexts.

More generally, the role of power in the production of addicted subjectivities has only recently begun to be explored. As Hunt and Barker state, "it is a rare anthropological study indeed which situates problem drinkers in a familial, occupational, economic, social religious, political or educational context, especially one that takes gender and age/life stage or ethnicity into serious account" (2001, 69). By examining the effects of power asymmetries in Qom-state interactions, this research offers an underutilized perspective to the anthropological literature on alcohol. Anthropologists have long understood alcohol's importance in performative identity construction, but have only recently begun to consider the role of power structures in shaping consumptive sensibilities. In order to provide multi-layered analysis, the research retained a local focus on personal narratives and Qom beliefs while incorporating consideration of the role of the state in shaping indigenous substance use patterns through complicit economic marginalization, attempted cultural assimilation, and the structures of domination thus implied.

Drinking within Medical Anthropology: Local Beliefs and Global Connections

Inasmuch as alcohol tends to rest at the nexus of health and disease, its study is appropriate to medical anthropology. Alcohol has been employed as medicine and still generates debate regarding its health benefits and unhealthy side effects. However, with western biomedicine involved in medicalizing and, in many cases pathologizing, the use of alcohol (Foxcroft 2007, 176) and exporting this insight for over a century, it has allied most social sciences (i.e. psychology) in this vision while reproducing it through authoritative production of knowledge. As a result, anthropologists' approach has often been one of critique or the study the "leftovers" (Heath 1987,113). In the vein of critique, Stein states that alcoholics "are the chief players in the longest standing morality play in American history." (1994, 209). In turn, the "leftovers", like identity construction through drinking and moderate/normative drinking, receive less funding (Hunt and Barker 2001) and "airplay" (Wilson 2005).

At its root, medical anthropology focused upon local understandings of illness in particular contexts (Lock et. al 2001). In terms of medical anthropology, this is primarily the vein in which this research falls. Qom conceptions of health, illness and healing, namely that many illnesses stem from communal dissonance (Miller 1980) (usually as a result of colonial intrusions) and that its promulgation is by means of contagious spiritual infection, are central in understanding Qom perspectives on binge drinking within their community. In Lot 84, the dissonance is created by the "cultural clash" between the nearby city and the indigenous *barrio*. Ironically, the mimetic faculty associated with

contagion based religious beliefs, is strongly implicated in the process of natives acquiring drinking habits. It has been noted (Taussig 1986) that the colonial encounter facilitates a mimetic “mirror of production” in which the colonists are enabled by their separation from natives to project their fears upon them, in this case well-worn stereotypes of drunken violent Indians. On the other hand, the natives learn the technology of alcohol through their contact (here on cotton plantations) with lower class colonists (MacAndrew and Edgerton 1970), famous for prodigious, lawless alcohol consumption.

Recent work has called for greater incorporation of macroscopic factors, such as political economic drivers of inequality that undergird negative health outcomes, into the rubric of medical anthropology (Baer, et al. 1997; Farmer 2003; Farmer 2005; Scheper-Hughes 1990; Singer 1986). These scholars emphasize the role of the global political economy in shaping local consumptive patterns through the power disparities they generate and reinforce. The singular narrative of Juan Garcia (Singer, et al. 1992), an immigrant to the urban United States eventually develops a drinking problem that, without proper global and personal context, would appear as like personal pathology. Rather, seen against the backdrop of power spectra, his drinking problem is made intelligible. Does this perspective hold sway in the Chaco, (in)famous for isolation and insularity?

The relatively few Chaco scholars, even the Argentine ones (Tola, Wright, Gordillo), are given to characterize the Chaco as isolated and rural. Fieldwork in dusty hamlets, arrived upon via muddy roads running through hectares of tangled thorny

scrubcountry solidifies this impression. It is certainly indubitable in some regard—I spent the better part of a week waiting for a vehicle to pass through one remote village in which I worked so I could hitch a ride. The tangibility of this impression obscures the global connections that continue to profoundly shape the nature of the Chaco’s inhabitants.

Paradoxically, its marginality increases its susceptibility to global movements. World systems approaches indicate that periphery regions tend to evidence profound socioeconomic influences originating at the core (Wallerstein 1992); the Chaco case supports such a reading. As a case in point, consider the early arrival and adoption of Pentecostal Christianity among the Qom. While the Pentecostal movement in the global South has by now been well established and amply documented, nearly every Qom settlement had an established Pentecostal *culto* by the mid-1940s (Miller 1980, 147), less than 50 years after the movement’s genesis in the southern United States circa 1900 (Miller 1980,100). The Qom have also been profoundly affected by the arrival of agricultural machinery from Brazil (1990s), and Argentina’s dealings in international currency markets (~2000), the former causing for the Qom widespread unemployment and urban flight, the latter precipitating the formation of gangs with attendant drinking and violence.

This is not to say that the Qom have been entirely stripped of agency and antecedent by global macroscopic movements. Other Chacoan scholars (e.g. Elmer Miller, Gastón Gordillo, Marcela Mendoza) have found quite the opposite to be true and I agree. Regarding the western Toba, Mendoza (1999, 105) writes, “I have the strong impression that two or three generations of immersion into the Argentine nation-state

have not actually transformed the egalitarian characteristics of Toba indigenous society.”

The Qom have displayed remarkable coherence and fortitude in negotiating and reframing their rapidly changing situation. In this dissertation, such independent stances are constantly displayed in their relationship with alcohol use. From the public modality of drinking, to their etiological interpretations, their refusal of state sponsored psychotherapy and their normalized paths to sobriety, Qom binge drinking is understood within their particular portmanteau belief system.

In this work, macroscopic forces provide the necessary context, even perhaps the most parsimonious *cause* of drinking, by linking it with economic dislocations. Quite obviously there would not be binge drinking as it is currently instantiated if the previous foraging order had been maintained, relocation and sedentarization had not occurred, or if greater socioeconomic integration (perhaps even without assimilation) had been achieved. It is nearly so obvious as to be prosaic. However, the manner of fieldwork ethnography generates a more subtle, less unidirectional picture of Qom articulation with global trends, in many cases the ways in which they rail against the prevailing social order. While the Qom and I both point to these macro trends as the deepest root of binge drinking, other factors including local particularities, beliefs, narratives and politics constitute the ethnographic paints that I apply on the ever-present backdrop of macro risk factors.

Drinking, Rituals and Cultural Change

There is one certain thing about alcohol: it is sure to change perceptions. Beyond that, certitude is difficult to achieve. Humanity carries on a profoundly ambivalent⁴ relationship with the small organic molecule, found to naturally occur when carbohydrates are fermented through the action of yeasts. Alcohol has been construed and understood in every manner imaginable as the nectar of gods and the serum of Satan, often simultaneously. States have run nearly exclusively on its production, while others have sought to prohibit its use entirely. It kills; it heals. It reminisces; it forgets. It celebrates and it laments. Perhaps no other technology is as variously utilized and interpreted as alcohol. As that army of intoxicating molecules alters the transmission of electrical impulses within our neural apparatuses, how do our perceptions, and those of others, change? How do the sober perceive the intoxicated, and vice versa? Perception becomes belief; beliefs lead to actions and these actions, constituting interpersonal performances, construct lived reality. Alcohol is a quintessential change agent.

I argue that alcohol owes its ability to affect change to its tendency to be utilized in ritualesque manners. Turner's view of the ritual process casts it as an agent of upheaval and challenge to social structure, which after renewal contributes to the formation of subsequent orders (Turner 1969). Liminality⁵ and the *communitas* it engenders are

⁴ i.e. simultaneously very positive and very negative, with little middle ground

⁵ Much discussion has surrounded Turner's adoption and popularization of the term liminality. An old concept, originally discussed by Van Gennep at the turn of the 20th century, liminality means simply that which is in the threshold. In ritual contexts, the liminal period is the one after ritual participants are abstracted from normal life and before they are reinserted. With the extension of the term ritual to include more than formally codified rituals, liminality has been increasingly applied to other contexts which are

conceived as anti-structural—in opposition to the current social order. The process is iterative as structures created by attempts to capture ritual *communitas* “in turn provokes revolutionary strivings for renewed *communitas*” (1969:129). Hence, ritual and ritual-like performances are central to societal adaptation and modification.

Upheaval of various degrees attends social change, thus causing participants to experienced feelings of chaos. Intoxication has been similarly misinterpreted as causing chaos, which it produces through dis-inhibition of people’s normal self-control. Alcohol is no super-ego solvent, though. It does, however, tend to bring with it a different set of acceptable and unacceptable social conventions. MacAndrew and Edgerton called the ability of alcohol to constitute a different social reality “time-out” (1970). Tim Mitchell (2004) calls it, due to the time depth and of profound binge drinking among his Mexican subjects, “time-warping.” In fact, alcohol drinking is rarely truly chaotic because to be so it would occur in a random manner each time.

On the contrary, alcohol consumption is typically quite ritualized, and thus often carries with it aspects of ritual, *sensu largo*. While it has surely been used in institutionalized ritual practice, it has also been utilized in less obvious *de facto* rituals, such as the passage from work to home (Gusfield 1987) or any drinking pattern that is highly regularized and circumscribed. In the sense of the *de facto* ritual, Qom binge drinking is ritualized. The groups, locations, times and methods are highly routinized and predictable. Not only this, but their public nature causes them to be regularly viewed and

outside everyday life and nurture and environment of transition, egalitarianism, and bracketing of social stratification (e.g. sporting events, concerts). This lack of structure and equality is described in Turner’s framework using the term *communitas*.

interpreted by the *barrio* at large. Mitchell states, “What Victor Turner found in rituals goes double for ritual drinking.” (2004,11) In this regard, Qom drinking fits the interpretation (Lurie 1971) of reservation drinking as the “oldest ongoing protest demonstration”, a characterization I will visit thoroughly in Chapter 3.

In Turner’s conception, Qom drinking would not be truly ritual and thus liminal process, but rather a ritual-like institution with liminoid aspects. Such liminoid practices fulfill “the need for escape from or abandonment of structural commitments” (Turner 1974, 260). The sharing, egalitarianism, protest and abstraction from other social institutions attendant to Qom drinking are strongly suggestive of liminoid phenomena, as Turner conceptualized them. Alexander compiled the ways in which liminoid phenomena differ from the liminal rituals, *sensu stricto* of rituals in small scale context: 1) frequently secularized, 2) not concerned with biological or calendrical rhythms, 3) not obligatory for all members of society, 4) a part of leisure, not centrally integrated into the total social process, 5) removed from a rite of passage, and 6) offer radical critiques of central structures (1991, 21). The Qom binge drinking “ritual” is liminoid in all these respects, except that a personal passage is not a part. By contrast, leaving alcohol for the alternative protest conduit of protest and ecstatic escape (Miller 1980, 135) offered by Pentecostal congregational participation is a common enough phenomenon in Lot 84 to be considered akin to a traditional rite of passage to personal maturity of the kind frequently found in AA testimonials (Antze 1987). It is precisely the liminality associated with alcohol use that lends it such power in existential pondering. Both the Qom street drunk and the recovered congregation member use the liminality of drunk space to

contemplate larger questions of existence as an indigenous person, personal purpose and intended life paths.

Challenges to social orders are met with resistance from entrenched stakeholders and institutions. Rebellions are put down, separatists are assimilated, blasphemers are excommunicated, and dissidents are disciplined. As it is in the interest of the state to maintain its population as unified and productive, disciplinary mechanisms are often enforced to ensure the proper participation of the populace (Foucault 1977). In the case of Qom binge drinking, its public, violent nature leads to calls for intervention—yet the intervention comes in ways that constitute disciplinary tools aimed at assimilating the long-resistant Qom into broader Argentine society. Offered only in Spanish speaking clinics located in the center of the city, psychoanalysis based programs touting self-knowledge, bodily health, and communal virtues rooted in the Christian valuation of temperance, have been largely ineffective, either in stemming alcohol use or assimilating Qom. By contrast, such programs have had the effect of strengthening *criollo*⁶ notions of indigenous inferiority and ingratitude.

Fieldwork in Formosa

Our context (see Figure 1) lies in a perceptual *lacuna* for most North Americans and Europeans: the Gran Chaco of South America. Lying south of the Amazon, north of

⁶ As Miller (1980:149) states, “The term *criollo* is not used consistently in Argentina or elsewhere in South America. Here it refers to lower-middle and lower class individuals living in northern Argentina who claim no immediate ancestry either to aboriginal peoples or Europeans.” In my experience, *criollo* enjoyed an even broader definition with usage extending to include every northern Argentine inhabitant with no indigenous heritage.

the Pampas and east of the Andes, the broad hot scrubby plain remains mostly forgotten by academics and laymen, much as it was for large portions of the colonial period.



Figure 1: Map of Fieldsite within Argentina

From first contact, the Qom people considered here occupied the area of the Chaco near the confluences of the Pilcomayo and Bermejo Rivers with the Paraguay River, an area now under the jurisdiction of Formosa and Chaco provinces, Argentina. Members of the Guaycurú linguistic group, these semi-nomadic foragers lived in bilateral bands of extended families which fished, hunted rhea, and gathered honey and *algarroba* for their subsistence under the leadership of chiefs and shamans (*pio'xonáq*). Following initial interest in alternative routes to the riches of the Andes, the part of the Chaco under consideration was largely left alone until the national consolidations of the 19th century warranted its subjugation at the hands of General Benjamin Victoria in 1884. This delay

allowed the Qom to resist missionization, sedentarization and incorporation for much longer (~350 years (Miller 1980, 37)) than most groups. The lag time provided opportunity to develop appropriate distrust of Europeans, locate trade for weapons and develop facility with the horse. Following Victoria's conquest, the Qom were proletarianized in the lumber (*quebracho* for tannin) and cotton industries wherein they worked as wage laborers. Though not uniformly or entirely, their proletarianization generally meant at least seasonal sedentarization. It is during this time that traditional religious structures began to morph of necessity (Miller 1980) and Pentecostal Christianity mixed with the antecedent animistic balance-oriented belief system to form the particular Pentecostal cosmology which remains a central feature of Qom communities until now. The balance of semi-urbanization, Pentecostalism and wage labor was once again upset in the early 1990s when Argentina mechanized its agricultural complex thus removing the labor demand upon which the new Qom economy depended. Since then, even through Argentina's *corralito* currency crisis, the remaining Qom, unable to forage or work, have become an increasingly urbanized, eschatologically oriented *lumpenproletariat*.

Lot 84, an ethnic Qom ghetto on the 8km outside of Formosa city, was my primary research site. Formed in 1974 when the Argentine army rounded up various Qom squatters on the outskirts of Formosa, it is one of the largest Qom settlements with a population of ~5000. On the one hand, Lot 84 is far from the city. Its ethnic composition is nearly 100 percent indigenous people. Inhabitants are fluent in Qom from a young age, learning Spanish later in school. Properties are held communally. It has its own

institutions such as schools, a health center, sports teams, political representation and churches. On the other hand, it is much closer to provincial capital, Formosa, than other Qom settlements. It is accessible via public transportation to the city center and is listed as one of the neighborhoods in the Formosa census area. The ambivalence engendered by its simultaneous separation from and proximity to the city, along with its melting pot history, are integral context for understanding Lot 84's relationship with alcohol.

I first traveled to Formosa in summer of 2009, as a biological anthropology graduate student poised to conduct pilot research for a biocultural, reproductive ecology project concerning life history theory and testosterone variation. Due to an impulse to learn which topics were meaningful and potentially useful to my study population, I probed communal interest. As a result of such discussions during this trip and a subsequent summer in 2010, my research questions gravitated toward topics such as political violence, economic transition, indigeneity, and substance use. I settled upon public binge drinking as my central touchstone, for it touches upon so many aspects of community life that a synthetic view of Qom life in Lot 84, with a focus on alcohol, might be able to emerge.

During the primary period of research, from November 2011 to October 2012, I employed a multi-pronged qualitative research methodology. Research methods centered upon open-ended, semi-structured and structured interviews, print and electronic media research and participant observation. Geographically, research was also conducted in Formosa city to ascertain *criollo* perspectives, and in Mission Laishí, Ingeniero Juarez, and Vaca Perdida to understand differences between peri-urban and rural Qom

populations. Qom research participants included drinkers, ex-drinkers, church goers, pastors, health workers, university students, parents, sport participants and community leaders. *Criollo* participants included merchants, Formosa residents, police officers, medical doctors, government officials, psychoanalysts, nurses, mental health workers and tourism representatives. Unique participants exceeded 120, with the number of discrete interviews more than doubling that. Of course, I also had my closer Qom friends, with whom I was in daily contact.

Due to concern regarding alcohol's use in the community, recruiting participants was quite easy. Everyone was willing and enthusiastic to talk with me and volunteer an opinion on the hot-button issue. However, because of its polarizing nature among the Qom, alcohol centered research also presented several unique challenges. For one, I noticed that people were more likely to drink in my presence before my topic was explicitly known to the community—that is, during my first two summers of pilot research (fortunately, I was able to note several important trends in alcohol use during this time). Second, most people tended to think that I was conducting an applied anthropological/psychological intervention and presumed that I was morally opposed to the use of alcohol. Despite modifying the description of my research with which I began every semi-formal and formal interview, this perception was never much altered. Due to these attitudes, coupled with the concerns of pastors and community leaders regarding the use of alcohol in the community, I found it challenging (but not impossible) to spend participant observation time with street drunks. In the end, I found that I was required to lead a double life—the presumed sobriety loving social scientist/social worker by day,

the rarified drinking buddy or sounding board for those drinking in the streets by night. While the latter presumed my role *vis a vis* the former, they did not divulge our associations, and I did manage to successfully retain my good social standing. A recurring nightmare, never instantiated, had me under communal inquisition for just wanting to study alcohol to party with the rebellious youth.

Summary of chapters

In order to examine the relationship of public binge drinking to Qom history, community life, and articulation with the Argentine state, I have structured this book in three remaining sections, each containing two chapters.

Section 1, containing Chapters 1 and 2, provides context.

Chapter 2 surveys the ethnohistory of the Qom, from contact until the present. The geography of the Chaco and Qom foragers in this context are explored using early historical and ethnographic sources. The traditional subsistence and religious practices are recounted as accurately as may be, given the substantial time frame and dearth of data in early centuries post-contact. The relations of the Qom with European settlers is described, moving from initial contact to their subjugation by General Benjamin Victoria's Vice Campaign of the 1880s. Following this defeat, the Qom were incorporated into the wage economy, many being sedentarized on *colonias*. It is during this period that traditional modes of leadership and resistance failed, most notably at the Napalpí massacre. This failure opened the door for the adoption of Pentecostal Christianity, a syncretistic form of which has become a prominent feature of Qom culture

until now. De-industrialization of the 1990s is described in figures, and migration from rural to urban areas is noted. In this context, Lot 84 is presented: both its founding and a snapshot of the village to serve as the location of most of the ethnographic detail presented in later chapters.

Section 2 provides analysis of binge drinking, first how it is perceived within and outside the community, and next how members of the community understand its genesis and persistence.

Through ethnographic accounts and descriptions I seek, In Chapter 3, to substantiate my claim that the public nature of Qom binge drinking is salient to its analysis. Many Qom claim that alcohol would not be problematic if consumed quietly in the home. Public displays of intoxication serve to cement the idea in the minds of Formosans of Lot 84 as dangerous and chaotic due to alcohol and drugs. Though drinking may cause chaos, it is itself very proscribed and predictable in occurrence, course and action. The fact that people do not stay inside when drinking, but instead take to the streets when drinking (or even committing suicide) speaks to a desire to be seen and for the unacceptability of the current situation to be known as a matter of common knowledge within Lot 84 and beyond. Next, I examine the violent aspects of alcohol use among the Qom. First, I review the history of Qom resistance to the Argentine state and touch upon the ways it is remembered among different age groups in Lot 84. Moving to the present day, I relate ethnographic data regarding gang violence, domestic violence, and police crackdowns to demonstrate that alcohol use is presently central to Qom

resistance—a feature of Qom society which has not changed since contact and has persisted through sedentarization and post-industrialization.

Chapter 4 concerns the ways that Qom people, especially adult members of society, perceive increased use of alcohol in their community. It begins with an analysis of the Qom cosmology and practitioners who interface with the supernatural world. Alcohol use, which they consider to be a kind of social ailment, is understood as an evil affliction deriving from geographic contact to nearby Formosa. For context, drinking is examined in mainstream Argentine culture and more specifically in Formosa. The Qom counterpose the problems associated with contact with the city to healthful, restorative, indigenous-friendly Chacoan bush country.

Section 3 details the interventions taken against binge drinking and their personal and communal effects. The public nature of Qom binge drinking has prompted various institutions to intervene in Lot 84. Chapter 5 details those entities (the national government, the provincial government, a Catholic chapel, various evangelical churches, individual residents of Lot 84) and explores the efficacy of those programs. Grass-roots, community conceived and implemented approaches are found to be the only ones with appreciable adherence and effectiveness, as the others are not appropriately indigenized—nor does the responsibility of implementation reside within Lot 84, but rather in the city. As rituals are often commentaries on social order, so are they are subversive catalysts for change, be it individual or social. In Chapter 6, I examine how on a personal level, heavy drinking often provides the opportunity to question the direction of one's life and turn it around. Self-actualization through leaving the habit of alcohol is a

very common theme among adult Qom people, especially men, to the point that it is nearly a *de facto* coming of age ritual that must be passed to reach adulthood. Spiritually, the fight against alcohol is considered within Pentecostal circles to be a collaborative fight against the devil and his workings on the community. On a communal level, alcohol and substance use have caused the community to rally in solidarity, and thus to begin to develop greater ethnic consciousness and better advance their contemporary circumstances within the Argentine state. Evangelical Christian *cultos*, Catholic vocation school programs and sports teams serve to provide generative alternatives to binge drinking and to integrate a heterogeneous community in commonality of purpose: to insulate youth from taking up alcohol and other substances and provide the next generation with improved employability than the last. Paradoxically, binge drinking is able to provide expedience to break gridlock and bolster both human and economic capital in Lot 84. Chapter 7, the conclusion, will serve as a recapitulation of the common theme: that ritualized public binge drinking is a protest against the prevailing social order, which by its visibility, manages to consolidate resources and support to generate change in both individuals and the community. Directions, both for additional research on the study of substances in social context and for more effective social program implementation, are offered.

In general, this study is intended to convey and explain the destructive force of binge drinking within the community, which can certainly not be denied and should be noted explicitly. The subject should be treated with urgency and gravity—alcohol can and does carry with it the highest of stakes. However, I endeavor to accomplish the task

of representation and analysis without relying upon models of acculturation, anomie or biomedical addiction. Moreover, the nature of drinking is, as mentioned above, always changing. Rather than the symptom of a moribund society, binge drinking is a dynamic and highly symbolic change agent in Lot 84. It is my hope that the reader will receive the complexity, dynamism and profound ambivalences that I experienced during my Chacoan fieldwork.

CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2: From *El Monte* to *El Barrio*: An Ethnohistory of Lot 84**Introduction**

I reclined in the shade of a grapefruit tree and sipped cold *mate* tea from a hollowed bullhorn. All around our island of shade, the sun shone brightly, drying the *chaugar* fibers used by the Qom women of the neighborhood to weave baskets for sale in the local markets. Cesar, a Qom man in his sixties, with whom I was chatting, had ducked inside his small white stucco house to fetch a paper he had written about the founding of Lot 84, the indigenous Qom exurb of Formosa, Argentina. He returned grinning with a paper waving in his hand. I finished the *mate* and returned it to him for refilling. The paper read: “The still untold story of the original people of Lot 84.”

A census was carried out late in the 1960s of aboriginal brothers settled in the city of Formosa and surrounding areas (Puente Blanco, Laguna Oca, Chacra 41, 42 Villa Kety). In addition to their numbers, it describes a pattern in which the great majority did not have a fixed abode, for they came from different places in the interior where emigration began. For reasons of health or, in other cases, pressed by a lack of resources to minimally satisfy the basic necessities of their families, some followed the footsteps of friends or relatives who had already established themselves in close proximity to the capital city (Formosa). They lacked their own parcels on which to build their dwellings and were paupers. They did not have consistent employment, only occasionally odd jobs. The precarious mud huts they inhabited, which lacked a minimum of inhabitability and hygiene, the clash of cultures or as it is said “the indigenous inability to adapt to city customs”, being forced to beg like animals in the streets, were the conditions that led them to seek viable “estate” solutions. Thus was born the proposal of a collection of lands large enough to give each family a suitable space where they could build a house and operate a family garden.

Cesar patiently waited as I read the short history. When I looked up, he sipped his *mate* and leaned back in his chair and said:

Yes, everybody has his piece of land: 25 x 50m. We don't have our culture, though. We've lost the majority of it. How can we practice our culture without the ability and space to hunt and fish, to gather and move? An indigenous person without his culture is like being in a cell without belonging (he mimed a box enclosing him). Culture is not just a language [but practices too]. This is the "clash of cultures". That is what is happening here. The lack of culture represents a grave problem for the younger generation. Formerly a woman would cut her hair in mourning if her husband or somebody close to her died, rather than wearing black. When an animal is killed, the hunter takes up the meat that is hunted. As for the rest, he covers and leaves it for other things to eat. Lamentably, the kids don't have this; it has been mostly lost.

The Qom are certainly not unique among indigenous peoples in the sense that their traditional ways have been suppressed, intentionally diluted and transmogrified. Land loss, forced resettlement, proselytization, crowding, new and pressing health concerns and various forms of political-legal interference have all contributed to rapid social change. The Qom of Lot 84 are now experiencing the latest stage of a four century campaign to preponderate, sedentarize and subjugate the native peoples of the Gran Chaco. Through the outright force of violence, and the more subtle violence exerted by disadvantageous policies and economic marginalization (i.e. structural violence), the Qom are now unable, due to legal restrictions and various forms of racism, to practice their old lifestyle or to participate fully in mainstream Argentine culture, respectively. Many say that the old ways of life were relatively intact as recently as 1950 (here is implied that Pentecostal Christianity is considered one of the old ways), while the current generation is the first to have no experience with foraging, hunting, fishing or other traditional practices. For many whose lives span temporally across the final sedentarization process, the watershed moment was the formation of the *barrio* in 1970, when various Qom families were gathered on a plot of land called Lot 84, given individual titles to the small plots of land, and left without the help of hunting or fishing

rights, sufficient land or agricultural knowledge. Many shake their heads in contemplation saying, “Much has change, yes. Much has changed.” In these lamentations, the inhabitants of Lot 84 sharply recognize their history is simply the most recent chapter of a centuries old struggle for political-economic control of the Gran Chaco.

A History of the Chacoan Foragers

“Christopher Columbus did not discover America, it’s a lie. I’m an Indian-I’m aboriginal. We know better.” –Irina, manager of a community kitchen and a late chief’s widow

Geography and Prehistory

The Gran Chaco is a large, sparsely populated plain that comprises the upper parts of the Rio de la Plata watershed region, specifically the region drained by the Paraguay River and its major tributaries, the Bermejo and the Pilcomayo. Its name derives from the Quechua word *chaku*, meaning “land of hunting”. Currently divided politically among Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina, the Gran Chaco encompasses roughly 650,000 km² of alluvial sedimentary plain situated to the east of the Andes Mountains, south of the Amazon Basin and north of the southern cone’s temperate grasslands (Pampas) and forests. In terms of latitude and longitude, it spans 17° - 33°S to 65° - 60°W. Ecologically, the Chaco is sub-tropical scrub of two varieties, *Chaco Humido* and *Chaco Seco*, depending on annual rainfall and concomitant plant species. Both are characterized by a mixture of riparian hardwood forests, open grasslands dotted with palms and *algarroba* trees, and thick thorny bush country, known as *monte*.

Human habitation of the Gran Chaco probably extends prehistorically to the initial peopling of the Americas at the end of the last glacial maximum (6,500-13,000

years ago), although this cannot be corroborated by unequivocal archaeological evidence due to unfavorable taphonomic conditions that expunge evidence of habitation. Such things include a lack of stone implements (due to a lack of suitable stone raw materials in the area), humid conditions (in the eastern Chaco specifically) and rivers of rapidly changing course that tend to wash away evidence of habitation. A dearth of archaeological evidence coupled with such a short (biologically speaking) population time-depth stymies attempts to use mtDNA and Y-chromosome data to characterize pre-Columbian local migrations or population dynamics of groups within the Gran Chaco and its adjacent areas.

Traditional Lifeways

When the first professional anthropologists arrived in the Chaco around the turn of the 20th century, the process of relocation, eradication and subjugation were already three centuries old. While these ethnographers certainly encountered something substantially altered from what a pre-contact Chacoan groups would have been, the Qom themselves assert that the “old culture” was still very much intact, or at least within a generation’s memory of those living during the early 20th century. Early anthropologists’ cultural descriptions are still quite valued among more ethnohistorically oriented Qom people. I was surprised to be shown various ethnographic editions and translations that I did not know existed and to be given ethnographic reading recommendations by my informants! If for no other reason than this, it is appropriate to discuss these early accounts.

As of the early 20th century, the peoples of the Gran Chaco were still found to operate a sexual division of labor. Men obtained various animal products, while women

procured food from vegetal sources. The hunter, in this case, concerned himself with a battery of year-round activities including honey collection⁷, hunting of peccaries, deer, rheas, anteaters, tapir and various small game (armadillos, sloths, rabbits, various rodents, fowl and reptiles), and perhaps most importantly, fishing (Miller 1980). Men utilized bows and arrows, fire circles and traps for their hunting needs. Suitable stone was unavailable in the area so traditional hunters used wooden arrow points and bone tipped projectiles until hunting was altered by importation of iron, guns and horses. Fishermen collected shad, cackereel, *bagre*, *pacú*, *surubí*, *dorado* and eels. These fish were harvested using nets hand woven from plant fibers, trapped using dam and barrier methods (inevitably stoking the ire of the downstream fisherman for the upstream one), strung through the eyes for transport, and in cases of plenty, smoked for future usage (Braunstein and Miller 1999; Alvarsson 1999).

The Chaco's dual seasonality—dry warm winter and wetter hot summer—governed women's collecting activities and group nomadism (Mendoza 1999). Women collected wild foods, processed them and wove clothing and fishing nets from plant fiber (Miller 1980). Foraging focused on, but was not limited to subsistence. The fibers derived from the *chaguar* were woven by the women into various bags, slings and nets (Miller 1980). Food items collected by the Qom include the carbohydrate rich pods of the *algarroba* tree (*Prosopis sp.*), the fruits of the prickly pear cactus called *tunas* (*Opuntia sp.*), *chañar* fruits, Barbary figs, *mistol* and starchy tubers. The *algarroba* tree was the primary carbohydrate staple for its easily gathered, abundant pods (Gordillo 2004,

⁷ There are ~14 types, depending on who was asked then or now. Some Qom in the western regions of Formosa and Chaco provinces produce honey for market as a result of a mid-20th century program to promote apiculture.

Alvarsson 1999). These pods were traditionally brewed by Qom women into an alcoholic beverage to be consumed during ceremonial drinking bouts (Karsten 1970 [1923]). Women were also responsible for brewing algarroba beer⁸ (Gordillo 2004, Karsten 1970 [1923]) and collecting medicinal plants. The exploitation and utilization of plant species varies from group to group (probably within linguistic groupings as well). One account records the Chorote of southwest Paraguay as having used 57 native plant species as a source of food, consumed 118 different ways (Arenas and Scarpa 2007).

The dichotomy of health and sickness is often superimposed upon the differences between foraged diets and the Qom's current diet of white flour, rice, potatoes, vegetable oil, chicken and beef. People remember the tastiness of armadillo, the lean healthfulness of *rhea*, and of course, the diversity and deliciousness of fish. One of my informants recalled the way his grandfather regarded fishing:

He enjoyed everything about fish; it gave him the energy he needed. Like Popeye had spinach, my grandfather had fish. He enjoyed everything about it, from catching, to cooking it, the odor of it. Eating in this way, the blood of the ancient ones was pure and healthful, whereas the younger generation has high levels of fat and sugar in the blood, and hypertension from not eating foods from the *monte*. The Qom have a different metabolism and are not suited to the diet we have now.

In addition to describing subsistence patterns and preferences, anthropologists were interviewing the indigenous people in an attempt to glean or extrapolate the components of cultures and their inter-relations. Much of this work was carried out in the genre of anthropological writing known as the "ethnographic present", in which the cultural practices of a group were abstracted out of its historical context. Paradoxically,

⁸ *Algarroba* beer is now called by the Spanish word *aloja* by most all of the Qom. However, there are varying reports regarding its traditional name. I was told *ita'iguate* and *lecte'guaná*, (Trincherio et. al. 1992,78) reports, *latagá*, Gordillo reports and the Buckwalter and Litwiller de Buckwalter recorded *ayi nqa'apaxa* (2004, 210).

these writings also have allusions to a teleological progression in societies. Accounts evidence a desire to place societies on a continuum ranging from small bands to civilizations. From historical accounts mentioned below, it is clear that indigenous cultures had already underwent profound upheaval prior to the ethnographic efforts carried out by Rafael Karsten and Alfred Métraux among others.

Karsten states that, “the Tobas seem to me to occupy an intermediate place between the primitive Matacos [Wichí], Chorotis, and Ashluslays on the one hand, and the somewhat more civilized Avas or Chiriguanos on the other, however drawing nearer to the latter than to the former.” (Karsten 1970 [1923], 14) The organization to which Karsten refers is that of the band, a grouping of extended families related by blood, under a chief. These chiefs, among the Qom at least, received their rank hereditarily unless they proved to be unsatisfactory in the eyes of a council of elder men in characteristics such as valor, skill, war-making, intelligence and eloquence (*ibid.*). Regarding intragroup relations, there were no social strata or classes, although children of chiefs “received higher estimation” than did other individuals (*ibid.*). The inter relationship of the Chaco groups to one another appears to be the result of oscillations between unstable alliances for warring or trading and the raiding of enemies or enemy coalitions.

Typically, Qom bands were comprised of several related family groups that practiced their nomadic or semi-nomadic foraging strategy. Monogamy was the norm, although no prohibition existed against able men taking multiple wives (except the jealousy and aggressiveness of Qom women, documented in (Mendoza 1999, Karsten 1970 [1923])). In fact, this practice was common for chiefs. The sexuality of young people following pubertal rites of passage, like the behavior and education of children, was not

strictly proscribed or rigorously restricted in recent times. Dances, a tradition later exported to migrant labor plantations, in earlier times were a meaningful way to allow sexual commerce (Gordillo 2004). Marriage was contracted between two young people when the young man solicited the girl's parents and, upon their approval, performed a requisite ceremony of supernatural protection of his intended. With regard to birth customs, several rules applied: children of non-married mothers were unknown; children numbered 3-4 and were spaced over several years and the second-born of a set of twins was put to death (Karsten 1970 [1923]). All of these parameters were accomplished by mechanical abortion or infanticide.

The Qom spiritual life (described in more detail in Chapter 4), while considering the existence of two highest gods and an evil deity, was a "practical" religion that concerned itself with spirits of a lower order, their behavior and the ways humans may interface with them (*ibid.*). This lies in contrast to the more animistic or nature-centered religions practiced elsewhere in South America. According to Karsten, Qom mythological opinions differ as to whether the world was created by a good or bad deity. Qom men were created first from the earth, complete with fire making abilities and fishing skills, opposed to women, who were released by the men from a sling hanging down from the heavens. Regarding the end of the world, the Qom believed that it would occur either by fire or by ice (a myth sometimes taken to reflect a more southern prehistoric provenience for the Qom) (Karsten 1970[1923]). Qom myths include an array of animal characters such as the giant snake that carved the riverbed of the Pilcomayo, the cunning, wise culture hero *Chi'iquí* (the crested Caracara or *Carancho*) or the typically ill-fated machinations of the fox (Métraux 1946). These myths provide a venue

for philosophical thought (Karsten 1970 [1923]) and, like all myths, inform the everyday logic and thought processes of the group. Many of these myths, originally recorded by anthropologists, continue to be taught by bilingual, Qom school teachers, as legally prescribed by Formosa Provincial Law 426 (see section “De-Industrialization, Diaspora and Legal Reform: 1980-2000”). 31

The previously mentioned lower order devils, known as *payák* or *peyák*, can wreak havoc on individuals and communities with such manifestations as disorder and illness, if the proper precautions are not kept (e.g. being wary at night when the *payák* are more active) and if a *pio 'oxonáq* (shaman) is not available to interface with them (Gordillo 2004; Karsten 1970 [1923]). This was traditionally accomplished by hereditary *pio 'oxonáq* who would chant repetitively in a low voice while shaking a rattle made from a gourd (Karsten 1970 [1923]).

As shall be accounted henceforth, the traditional subsistence patterns, belief systems and healing measures were to be modified extensively during the colonial encounter.

Early Colonial History (1500-1880)

The colonization of the Chaco region took more than 350 years to complete, owing to the fluid organization of its inhabitants, their adaptability, and the difficult, undesirable regional geography. By the time the Spanish had succeeded in securing a route through the Chaco, some indigenous groups (such as the Qom) had mastered horsemanship and obtained firearms through trade, thus enabling them to engage in protracted resistance. As the state's attention upon the Chaco (1500-1820) moved

elsewhere due to economic crisis and civil war (1820-1880), and returned again, an oscillating experience of successful resistance and occupation proceeded until the Chacoan indigenous people were finally conquered and made to work in the Argentine agricultural sector. One of the grade school teachers in Lot 84 commented:

When the first ships came from Spain, they killed many indigenous people because they wanted the gold that they thought was here. For us, gold was just an accessory; it didn't have any monetary value like it did for the Spanish. They did make some exchanges with the Spanish using precious stones from the monte. The Spanish made peace because they couldn't stand up to the indigenous. Instead, they started giving them clothes that were laced with disease. They also poisoned the food that they gave to the original peoples.

The colonial history of the Qom begins in 1524, when Alejo García, a member of Pizarro's party of *conquistadores*, became the first European to cross the Chaco (Miller 1980)⁴. In the ensuing years a blurry picture of the Chaco gradually emerges. The lack of historical resolution regarding the Chaco's indigenous inhabitants stems from the ethnic mixing and restructuring that occurred during the early colonial period, (the Chaco, then as now, served as a place of asylum for groups who more fully received the blow of initial conquest) and biased or incomplete accounts by priests, wealth-seekers or military personnel who often used different names to refer to the same group or the same name for different groups (Braunstein and Miller 1999). Leading up to the 17th century, it is probable that the Qom, along with other groups, formed alliances to resist the initial establishment of Chaco urban centers (*encomiendas*), such as Guacará and Matará, and the first wave of Jesuit missions (Miller 1980). By the 17th century, maps of the region began to resemble today's arrangement, with eastern Qom occupying the area near the confluence of the Pilcomayo and Paraguay rivers, the Pilagá and western Qom residing

upstream to the west, the Wichí (Weenhayek) farther west, and the Nivaclé to the north in Paraguay (Braunstein and Miller 1999). 33

War, Subjugation, Sedentarization and Massacre (1880-1920)

Benjamin Victoria's Vice Campaign

After ongoing civil wars, two constitutions and economic crises affecting Argentina for much of the 1800s, had been stemmed, the Argentine state sought to secure its northern border with Paraguay. Toward this end, it launched the first systematic attempt to occupy the Gran Chaco and subordinate its indigenous residents. The area inhabited by the Qom was annexed by Argentina in 1879 as part of their general campaign against the indigenous peoples from far northern Formosa to the southern tip of *Tierra del Fuego*. This conquest became euphemistically known as *La Conquista del Desierto*, or the Conquest of the Desert.

General Benjamín Victoria was tasked with managing the northern theater of *La Conquista del Desierto*, which was directed against the Qom and their neighbors, while Julio Roca focused his attention against the Mapuche and Tehuelche peoples of the west-central parts of the country, near present-day Neuquén. Victoria's 1884 Vice Campaign decimated indigenous populations in the southern Chaco as well as Qom resistance farther north (Braunstein and Miller 1999, Miller 1980). Following this victory, the governance of the area by indigenous chiefs (*caciques*) and their organized resistance waned as indigenous groups were assimilated into the Argentine nation state (Beck 1994) while estates (*estancias*) appropriated massive tracts of potential agricultural land in northern Argentina and western Paraguay.

Following the effectiveness of the Vice Campaign, both economic utilization of indigenous labor and missionizing efforts began to achieve greater efficacy among Chaco native groups. The indigenous population came to be viewed by businessmen as a vast untapped labor reserve. Chaco indigenous people had no choice but to articulate themselves with industrial production of several types: the timber (for wood and tannin⁹), cotton, sugar and cattle industries (Braunstein and Miller 1999).

Proselytization

During the process of colonization, Western religious groups were compelled to try to convert the Chacoan people, though whether this was to swell their own ranks, or provide protection within the missions to prevent full-blown genocide, or whether in the end the Chacoan peoples welcomed a new religious practitioners to replace ineffectual *pio'oxonáq* (Miller 1980) remains an open question. In 1889, the South American Missionary Society established a mission among the Lengua of the Paraguayan Chaco (Gordillo 2004). The efforts first of Catholic Jesuit missionaries and later by Franciscan missionaries in the Chaco, all defunct by the mid 1800s, left a void that began to be filled by different Catholic orders (Franciscans, Salesians), Anglican missionaries and evangelical Protestants around the turn of the 20th century.

In 1900, San Francisco de Laishí (named after a great Qom chief of that time, Laishí) was established in southeastern Formosa in coordination with a sugar refinery. In

⁹ Several participants noted to me that these industries were avoided when possible, due to a sense of reverence for *Quebracho* (*Schinopsis lorentzii* and *Aspidosperma quebracho-blanco* from which tannin was extracted, *Algarobba* (*Prosopis sp.*), and *Palo Santo* (*Bulnesia sarmientoi*) trees.

1914 the Anglican mission founded at Algarrobal, in Salta province (Grubb 1931,1936).

As the western Qom recently expressed the story, “[The ancient ones] were fighting a lot and had no peace. [...] [They said,] ‘We have to go look for a father because over there [in San Andres] the people are living in peace.’” (Gordillo 2004, 75). San Andres was an Anglican mission founded upstream among the Wichí in 1927 by Alfred Leake who would soon, at the request of the western Qom, found a mission (Misión el Qom) among them in 1929 (Gordillo 2004). The Anglican “The Emmanuel” Mission began ministering to the eastern Qom in 1934. John Lagar began the first Pentecostal-type mission (Go Ye Mission) among the eastern Qom during the same time period (Miller 1980). Lagar’s role in sparking the Pentecostal movement still remains important in understanding eastern Qom spiritual dynamics. Ultimately, although the Anglican and Catholic churches retain presences among various Chacoan groups, among the eastern Qom, their proselytizing can be regarded as a failure in comparison to Pentecostal movements (Miller 1999).

The missionization process is not synonymous or continuous with the conversion process, although the success (and uniqueness) of evangelical Christianity among the Qom, in particular, has been particularly important. In the case of the western Qom, Misión el Qom was valued more as a safe-haven from government oppression than it was valued for religious insight (Gordillo 2004). The missionization process contributed to the sedentarization of the Qom and of other Chaco groups (Nivaclé, Pilagá, Enxet) by giving them safe permanent centers around which they could congregate and to which they could return after their forays as wage laborers in the industries of the rapidly developing Chaco (*ibid*). Ultimately, the conversion process was contingent on white

occupation of the land and the resultant sedentarization and dependence of the indigenous people on wage labor (Braunstein and Miller 1999). 36

Napalpí Massacre

Although Benjamin Victoria's campaign was the final war formally declared and directed against the Qom and other Chacoan groups (like the Wichí and Pilagá), these groups have since been subject to ongoing violent repression when their actions or even their existence do not align with the interests of *criollo* settlers or the Argentine state. In the 20th and early 21st centuries, violence has been most likely to occur over land or labor disputes.

The most infamous of these violent episodes occurred in a labor settlement known as Colonia Aborígen Chaco (Chacoan Aboriginal Colony) or Napalpí (Graveyard). The surrounding area was primarily devoted to the cotton industry. Tracks of land originally foraged upon by the indigenous people were expropriated, while the people were relocated either to a Mission or to a Colonia (a labor settlement). One of these settlements was Napalpí, founded in 1911, and populated with Pilagá, Abipón, Qom, Charrúa and Mocoví families.

In 1924 a tax was imposed on the cotton crop, which was passed down the supply chain serving to lower living conditions rather than profits. In retaliation, a strikes and demonstrations were undertaken, some of which included killing livestock and vandalizing crops. This escalated when a *pío 'oxonáq* was killed by police and his peers avenged him by killing a French colonist.

In response to this incident, Chacoan governor Fernando Centena commissioned a violent military suppression. On July 19, 1924 one hundred thirty police and militia

opened fire on lightly armed indigenous people of Napalpí, killing an unknown number of men, women and children. The killing continued for several weeks afterward, reportedly (Trincheró 2009) to eliminate witnesses who may have spoken unfavorably to a commission formed to investigate the incident. Witnesses said that the wounded, regardless of age or gender, were killed with machetes while gruesome trophies such as testicles, penises, ears and scalps were taken for public display in Quitilipí to serve as an example to others (Trincheró 2009).

Still, no authority or *criollo* participant was punished or found guilty. One elderly Qom, after discussing with me this and other instances of force against the native peoples of the Chaco, summarized the violence of colonization and sedentarization:

Genocide has much to do with the state, contrary to what one would believe with names such as the “Secretary of the Ministry of Well-Being”. General Julio Roca had a campaign to exterminate the indigenous peoples of Argentina. They call it the Conquest of the Desert, as if the land were empty! The war was against indigenous groups from Salta, Chaco, Formosa and Santa Fe. Our ancestors were on the run and were warned of the location and intentions of the general through bird messages. From these messages 300 to 400 people were able to escape the military. However, they saw that the indigenous took a different route and being as they were downstream they poisoned the river so it killed whomever drank the water. The ancient ones learned to give the water to their dogs first to see if it would do any harm and if the dogs were still fine in an hour they could drink it also. This happened until 1945. They also learned not to accept the gifts. In interactions with the government they knew not to take bread handed out by the government which had been poisoned. From 1920 to 1950—for thirty years the government waged war against us and the Pilagá in Primavera. We have not and continue not to trust in justice when the state that is addicted to power is the one administering it.

In sum, the military, spiritual, and industrial conquest of the Chaco was complete by the mid-20th century leaving the ethnic and natural landscapes fundamentally and irrevocably altered. Initially the Chaco was explored as a potential source of precious metals, and later as an alternative route to the riches of the Andes. In the end, its utility

was its cheap land and labor, only to be unlocked after the Chacoan inhabitants had been rendered acquiescent after decades of war.

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Proletariatization and Pentecostalism (1920 -1980)

Between 1920 and 1970, the Gran Chaco in general, especially the provinces of Formosa and Chaco, experienced an agricultural-industrial boom related primarily to cotton production. The labor power of the subdued indigenous groups was integral in powering this revolution while keeping prices competitive. The Qom learned the rigors of agricultural life, but also became familiar with its cyclicity, oppression, and wages. People with whom I talked exhibited mixed feelings about this time period. While some sneered at the pittance earned by their ancestors, others reminisced ruefully about past employment by way of comparison with the present dearth of work. Norberto recalled those times:

Sure, people used to be poor, but they had enough. People were occupied during the week with work and it wasn't a problem - either with a formal job or with the crops. One of my grandfathers worked in the tannin factory in Formosa for many years until it closed. There also used to be many cotton plants, but nobody grows anything anymore. They used to be able to make money this way, but they just have subsidies (government welfare support) now.

During the mid-1940s, the Pentecostal church experienced rapid growth among the Qom, leading to what has since been contextualized and explicated in anthropological literature as the Toba (Qom) Pentecostalism movement. The Pentecostal Church of God of Buenos Aires allowed Chief Pedro Martinez to travel through the Chaco and appoint Pentecostal church leaders to perform the primary rite, a *culto*. *Cultos* combine traditional symbols and ways of thinking with Christian ones, in the context of an impassioned rhetorical service, sometimes combined with dances. Reyburn considers that many

previous facets of Qom culture were at this time being lost to acculturation and this vacuum was filled by Pentecostalism as it helped with the “serious economic mal-adjustment” experienced by the Qom since the 1930s (1954). Elmer Miller, a prominent Qom scholar and an expert on Qom Pentecostalism, characterizes the Pentecostal movement as ranging from revitalization to millenarianism, generally oriented toward re-approaching a societal homeostasis with increased cohesion and value when previous institutions had failed to stave off colonial advances (Miller 1980).

During the 1960s and 70s, poor living conditions and a consistently repressive labor arrangement caused many Qom to migrate in hopes of finding improved living conditions and alternatives to agricultural labor. They moved south from Chaco and Formosa, primarily to the city of Rosario (Argentina’s third largest) located in the southern part of Santa Fe Province.

De-Industrialization, Diaspora and Legal Reform: 1980-2000

Indigenous migration was to continue in the wake of the devastating floods of 1982 and 1983 and the importation of mechanized cotton harvesting equipment in the 1990s. The mechanization of the cotton industry, which had for decades been prevented and postponed to buttress the rural agricultural economy, was now sought by the Argentine government. The government fixed a low exchange rate to allow the purchase of artificially inexpensive machinery from Brazil. The already well-trodden trail to Rosario was now tracked again. It is reported that 10,000 Qom journeyed to Rosario in those days (Bou 1997). The Qom residents of Rosario now say there are 20,000-25,000 of them there, though that is not confirmed by official numbers of which there are none. By the turn of the century, the Qom were more urban than the previous generation, yet

more socio-economically marginalized by unemployment and dependence on interventions.

Despite worsening employment conditions seen in the 1980s and 1990s, these decades saw several significant legal victories for the indigenous peoples of Argentina. In 1983, a democratic contingency reformed the Argentine government, facilitating the passage of legislation to address the rights of Argentina's indigenous population. These laws differed slightly by province, but in general they guaranteed culturally appropriate education, legal representation, and a voice in the management of natural resources found on tribal lands. Two Qom students of my acquaintance summarized the history of this evolving legal landscape as it pertained to the Qom during the 1980s and 1990s, with special reference to the fact that the passage of the correct laws does not necessarily mean that said law will be followed or enforced.

With the advent of democracy in 1983, we highlight the beginning of a time of advancement in the recognition of indigenous rights in our country. The *Instituto Nacional de Asuntos Indigenas* (INAI), considered one of the victories of the indigenous movement and the fight for their rights, was created. The enactment of law 32.302 in 1985 in response to the indigenous question was also a step forward. Progressive steps have been taken in the practical dimension, small steps in the efficacy of rights, and a general sensation that the issue does not only exist in legislation, but rather it is one that is affected by the social order. Many of these steps only serve to reinforce the lack of credibility enjoyed by the state regarding indigenous people due to broken promises and a lack of seriousness among government bodies responsible for carrying out agreements. Where we live in Formosa, the comprehensive indigenous act, law 426 written with the participation of the indigenous community, was passed in 1984. When the National Constitution was formed in 1994, indigenous people were consulted to write their rights, but it was not easy because many people were in opposition to them; various months passed before the government accepted their projects and so managed to incorporate article 75.17. The rights included in these articles are: the right of an indigenous person to identity, a bilingual and intercultural education, a legal representative of in indigenous communities, and to participation in the refereed management of his natural resources and in other interests that effect indigenous communities. Having these rights, the indigenous people can

participate for example, in the writing and planning of educational materials to guarantee a bilingual and intercultural education. However, they were rarely consulted, and in the schools they taught more white, western cultural than the culture of the natives of these lands. In the classrooms they do not treat the other part of the history which is not found within the textbooks and traditional lectures. We can affirm that our rights are being met partially. In Formosa, stemming from ley 426, the comprehensive indigenous law, the indigenous people were to have an *Instituto de Comunidad Aborigen*, ICA, but it is an ineffective tool to enforce the rights of indigenous people to participate in matters than concern them. The president of ICA is appointed (not elected) by the provincial government, and has never been a native—a situation typical of all things undertaken by the provincial government. The indigenous representatives are selected in elections but they have no weight in the exercise of authority to intervene in decisions, but recently also these elected officials have turned their backs when they were needed. The agreements and laws achieved in 1983 and hence, were partially put into practice. Although many rights were incorporated into law, their demands having become more visible and stated more forcefully, the historical debt to the native peoples remains unpaid (Mendez and Segundo 2012).

As Mendez and Segundo outline, the legislation of the 1980s and 1990s was a landmark victory for the Qom people in that it provided for them specific rights which would not be relevant or pertinent to the majority of the Argentine population. However theoretically handsome this may be, the implementation, execution and practice of these laws has been uneven and incomplete, leading to tension, anger, dismissal and cynicism.

Current Status

The gradual settlement of the area by non-indigenous settlers and control exercised by nation-states applying governance to the area has contributed to a pattern of sedentarization coupled with cultural and linguistic assimilation. Regarding the Chacoan peoples as a whole, the remaining indigenous population is 260,000 as of 1999⁷. They speak eighteen surviving languages, which in turn belong to six linguistic families (Braunstein and Miller 1999). The *Mataco-Mataguayo* language family includes *Wichí/Weenhayek (Mataco)*, *Nivaclé (Chulupi)*, *Manjuy (Chorote)*, and *Maká*. Secondly, the *Mascoy* language family includes the *Enxet (Lengua)*, *Sanapaná*, *Angaité*, *Enxet*

(*Qom-Mascoy*), and *Kashkiya* languages. Next, the *Zamuco* language family encompasses the *Chamacoco* and *Ayoreo* tongues. The *Lule-Vilela* family is only represented in contemporary times by the *Vilela* language. Fifth, the *Tupí Guaraní* family includes *Chiriguano* (*Guaraní-Guarayo*), and *Tapieté* (*Guaraní-Nandeva*). Lastly, the *Guaycuru* language family contains *Qom*, *Pilagá*, *Mocoví*, and *Mbayá* languages (Braunstein and Miller 1999). Typically indigenous groups are divided and referenced via indigenous tongue or self-identification, though today most Chacoan indigenous people are bilingual Spanish speakers.

The present day roster or arrangement of Chacoan groups should not be assumed to mirror or approximate pre-colonial times. This is apparent upon considering that the Chaco has long served as an indigenous safe-haven for tribes displaced elsewhere, although it can also be inferred that even indigenous outsiders may not have been welcomed freely. Due to the fluid nature of this region during the colonial and post-colonial periods resulting from voluntary or forced migrations in search of quarter, labor, resources or opportunity, the above groupings are based on ethnohistorical or present-day self-identification.

Since European contact, two of these groups have dominated the Chaco numerically and politically: the *Mataco-Mataguayo* and *Guaycuru* (Miller 1980), the latter of which includes the eastern and western Qom and the *Pilagá*. On a finer level of ethnic analysis particular to the group in question, the Qom consider there to be ten Qom subgroups, each with specific physical traits, practices, dialect and places of residence. These include the *No'olgaxanáq*, *Huagiilót*, *Dapicoshéc*, *Yolopí*, *Qolpí*, *'Eraxaicpí*, *Teguesanpí*, *Pioxotpí*, *Tacshéc*, *La'añaxashéc*. Most of these subgroups are represented

to varying extents in contemporary Lot 84, with old sub-ethnic belonging still relevant in arenas of political or informal alliance making, feuding and reciprocity (Sanchez 2006). 43

Qom villages and *barrios* (adjacent to larger towns and cities like Formosa, Rosario, Resistencia, and Ingeniero Juarez) are scattered through the provinces of Formosa, Chaco and Santa Fe. As of the 2005 census conducted by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos de Argentina* (INDEC) there were 69,452 people of Qom ethnicity living Argentina. Of those, 47,591 or 68.56 percent lived in Chaco, Formosa, and Santa Fe, 14,466 (20.8 percent) in Buenos Aires, and the remainder (7,395) in other provinces (probably the adjacent Chacoan provinces Santiago del Estero and Salta). The Qom are the third largest indigenous ethnic group in Argentina, following the Mapuche, who number 113,680 and the Kolla (an Andean ethnic group) who number 70,505 (http://www.censo2010.indec.gov.ar/resultadosdefinitivos_totalpais.asp). Of the Qom living in Formosa, Chaco and Santa Fe, 57 percent (27,127) live in “urban” settings or *barrios*. The largest such *barrio* in Formosa Province is Lot 84 with a population of approximately 5,000¹⁰.

Lot 84

Formation

Lot 84 was founded in 1970, when the Argentine army gathered into one place the indigenous people who were squatting in the hinterlands around Formosa. One of the Qom people who was present for the original annexation and allotment of lands was Juan, who recalls the events:

¹⁰ Official statistics are not kept on a neighborhood specific basis. This estimate was given to me during an interview with the head of ICA *Instituto de Culturas Aborígenes* (Institute of Indigenous Cultures)

It was founded in 1970 under military governance of Augusto Sosa Laprida. This is when they founded Lot 84. There were 21 families, many from Puente Blanco in the Interior. The people from the military came and cooked for them while they set up their houses. They started a school; at first it was made of palm logs and mud. In 1973 and '74 they opened the *Casa de Artesania* (artisanal goods shop) where the police station is now (he gestures in the direction of the Police Station). 1975 was the first problem with the police, when the police opened fire on the indigenous people. One policeman and one Qom person died. By 1977 or 78 [the authorities] had forgotten about us. Maybe they were preoccupied with the Falkland Islands... By the early 1980s, the government divided the land into 25 x 50 m lots. They created blocks out of the lots 34, 56, 71, and 12. The people thought that this was a good idea. But they should've been given a reserve that has a forest and river perhaps, that would have been better. The government gave all of these reserves to the state. In 1991 they continued issuing these blocks. In 2000 they started giving deeds for each parcel and the number of parcels increased. By 2006 everyone had deeds except for 13 families. There are 520 parcels.

There were seven people that founded Formosa itself in the 70s. I am the only living member of this group. It has grown much since those days. Lot 84 is full of people from different parts. They also had to add Lot 84 across the road. People are moving over there to the east too--where my son has his house. They came to Lot 84 to avoid their misery. There used to be open country, and you could find a place to hunt. Now it's prohibited. You can't hunt or fish. Some people that live in the *barrio* have a salary, but not all. People still go hungry.

Although the Qom were given houses and small plots of land (see Figure 2), and poor living conditions continue to this day. UNICEF published a project log in 1996 that described in detail the poor conditions experienced by the urban Qom of Lot 84. It characterized Lot 84 as “an indigenous community of the Toba ethnicity, in a situation of extreme poverty, with unsatisfactory access of all of its inhabitants to the necessities of life, elevated indices of malnutrition and infant mortality/morbidity, high levels of unemployment, a deteriorating environment and generalized sanitary risk.” (Delucci et. al. 1996, 7). Although sanitation and health care have improved substantially in the interim, Lot 84 is well known to be among the poorest *barrios* of the city of Formosa,

which is the one of the poorest provinces in Argentina

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(http://www.censo2010.indec.gov.ar/resultadosdefinitivos_totalpais.asp.)



Figure 2: Lot 84 Health Center

At the time of its foundation, the residents of Lot 84 appointed Lucio Rodriguez to be chief, as no linear chief could be named in the traditional fashion because of the aggregate complexion of Lot 84. Lucio Rodriguez persists in the collective memory of the community as a defender of their rights, principally their land rights. Chiefdom in Lot 84, however, differs substantially from its analogous rural settlements. Because it is not passed lineally from chief to son, the appointment process for a new chief becomes a political struggle, made worse by the melting pot nature of Lot 84. One informant told me that all sub-ethnicities of Qom people were present in Lot 84. In these cases, the appointment of a chief from the statistically dominant subgroup is sometimes viewed as

an unfair political advantage for people of that chief's subgroup by people of other subgroups, although these feelings are dissipating as people intermarry and children put less emphasis on traditional ethnic divisions.

Lot 84 Today

As I wait at the station, the Number 30 bus rounds the corner and approaches the bus stop. Before I can see the sign designating its number, I know which one it is because all of the Qom people waiting with me have risen and prepared their fares (they leave the market when it passes there, and cut through the market district, reaching this bus stop just in time for it to arrive). The 30 is also notable for its outdated vehicle model, non-permanent sign and perpetual dustiness/muddiness from traversing the non-paved streets of its terminal location: Lot 84. We board an almost empty bus, pay our fares, and ride northwest toward the outskirts of town. As we do, the bus gradually fills up with Qom folks who have completed today's errands at the downtown market. *Criollos* tend not to ride the 30 except for brief transfers between other lines. By the time we have reached the city limit and merge onto provincial route 81, the bus is filled to capacity. The urban scenery of the bus-stop has been replaced by low lying lagoons and expansive palm speckled grasslands used for grazing cattle. On the route ahead of us can be seen a metal scaffold arch marking the police control point (see Figure 3) for vehicles entering or leaving the Formosa capital district. Forty minutes after the bus rounded that corner, and 15 after merging onto route 81, we arrive in Lot 84.



Figure 3: Police Checkpoint

Lot 84 is a diamond shaped neighborhood bisected by provincial route 81. Near the main entrance to the *barrio* is a small police station which operates a government checkpoint (Route 81 eventually reaches Bolivia and Paraguay as it crosses the Chaco on its west-northwest trajectory. As such, the control is necessary to monitor the flow of goods and people) and also administers to Lot 84. To walk down the central street, completely from one end to the other, takes about 15 minutes and amounts to almost exactly 1 mile. Proceeding southward down the main and only paved road of Lot 84, there is a newer elementary school, an older high school, and a five-room community health center (see Figure 2). Billboards advertise the names of politicians who secured funding for these public works, *obras sociales*. The walls surrounding the schools are scrawled with graffiti of numerous artists, the work of adolescents who still or had once made a habit of hanging out there. Continuing for the remaining four blocks, one passes a large rugby field (see Figure 4), dilapidated basketball courts, soccer fields, a small kiosk selling cigarettes, candy, junk-food, ice, and alcohol, and two Pentecostal churches (though there are several more nestled throughout the *barrio* (see Figure 5). Down the

cross-cutting side streets, residences line the roads in both directions for about a quarter mile.



Figure 4: Rugby Fields and Basketball Courts



Figure 5: A Pentecostal Church

Houses in Lot 84 are of two types. The first is the one made by government contractors, which is simple and rectangular, made of clay masonry blocks, mortared together, painted in white stucco, and roofed simply with metal sheeting (see Figure 6). A separate outhouse and water tank accompany houses like this, because “the Indian’s custom is to have the bathrooms outside”, as one city dweller told me. The other kind of house is erected without capital or government assistance, usually of felled and split palm trunks mortared together with cob, a structural mud-grass mixture. Windows are covered in old sheets and blankets, while palm fronds and salvage metal are used for roofing. Privies are constructed likewise, using free available materials to mimic the style of the government houses. The government houses are considered to be nicer and more desirable, as are larger plots, but everybody realizes that the difference between the nicest and worst houses in Lot 84 is not great.



Figure 6: Government Housing

Because both kinds of houses are quite small (a main room and two bedrooms), much activity occurs in the small plots outside of them. The front yards are frequently fenced, either with wire or with split palm trunks. A small shade tree, often a citrus tree, punctuates one side of the front yard, and people can be seen sitting in plastic chairs in the shade, sipping *tereré* (see next paragraph), chatting and/or listening to music, a mixture of Latin drum beats, Argentine folklore, American Hip Hop and trans-Atlantic hard rock. Chickens, along with various scrawny ill-coated dogs and, to a lesser extent, cats, live among the people with seemingly little notice, except occasional harassment as targets for children's homemade slingshots. In the backyard, children can be seen playing or bathing while women wash dishes and hang clothes.

Tereré, or cold *mate*, is an integral part of everyday social discourse in Lot 84 (see Figure 7). *Yerba mate*, or simply *mate*, is a drink made by passing hot or cold water through the pulverized dried leaves of a tropical holly relative, *Ilex paraguariensis*. The leaf pieces are packed into a receptacle, also called a *mate*, which is traditionally made of a gourd or hollowed bullhorn, although a decapitated soda can is nowadays a popular fix. The leaves are packed around a metal straw with a sieve for a bottom, called a *bombillo*; then water is added from the top. *Mate* and *tereré* are often shared by pairs or small groups. In these cases, a particular person, called a *cebedor*, is designated, to whom the empty *mate* is returned after its contents have been drunk. The *cebedor* never pours more water than a sip; after one person finishes her sip, it is returned to the *cebedor*, refilled, and handed to the next person. When he is finished, the same occurs in circular fashion until either the *yerba* is exhausted or the water is depleted. *Tereré* or *mate* accompany the majority of conversations and are toted everywhere—to rugby practice as a sports drink,

on the backs of mopeds, on bicycles, and to church *cultos*. In fact, the majority of my fieldwork was spent drinking *tereré* or *mate* with people.



Figure 7: The Author sharing tereré

At all times of day except the early hours of the morning and the midday *siesta* (sometimes as long as noon-4PM during the hottest months), the main paved street and the grid of dirt paths and athletic fields are busy with people strolling and drinking *mate*, bringing items to or from the market via the bus stop, or zipping to and fro on mopeds. The morning is characterized by the migration of children from home to Lot 84's public school, from school to one of two government provisioned community kitchens (*comedores*), and then home for *siesta*. The *siesta* is rigorously observed, being justified during the summer because of the oppressive heat and in the winter for the comforting warmth bed gives from the cold. When activity resumes in the late afternoon, the thumping of stereo systems pulses the air, people leave for the market on mopeds, and

many (of both sexes) engage in sport--rugby and soccer are most popular, but basketball and volleyball are also played. As darkness falls, one can hear competing admonitions and urgings of various pastors preaching their messages over loudspeaker. As these fade into dance music (the later stage of most *cultos*) peer groups of young people stoop in circles on blocks' corners passing cigarettes, *mate*, or alcoholic drinks as the case may be. The thirty bus makes its last pass at around 10PM after which activity gradually dies down until a general quiet eventually arrives, though when it arrives depends on the weather, time of month (more activity early in the month), and day of the week (weekends are latest).

My friends and family residing in the United States, familiar with the North American reservation model, frequently ask if Lot 84 is a reservation. While the isolation (see Figure 8) and ethnic homogeneity are reminiscent of reservations, Lot 84 is in other ways very dissimilar to a reservation. One of the most salient ways in which it differs is its size. The total area of Lot 84, almost all of which (except for sporting fields) is taken up by housing plots, is only about half of a square mile. As of 2013 the population of Lot 84 is estimated to be approximately 5,000 people, having increased substantially from its 1996 census level of 1,745 due to improved child health care, higher birthrates, and continued immigration from more rural parts of Formosa and Chaco provinces (personal communication with lot inhabitants, 2012). Thus the population density of Lot 84 is about 10,000 per square mile, an urban, if not overcrowded, density uncharacteristic of rural reservations.



Figure 8: Geographic Separation of Lot 84 from Formosa

Conclusion

Lot 84, the primary research site for this study, is an ethnically homogeneous indigenous Qom ghetto located on the outskirts of the city of Formosa, Argentina. It is the largest Qom settlement in Formosa province, which is the most indigenous and one of the poorest Argentine provinces. Following initial contact in the early 1500s, the semi-nomadic, foraging Qom were persecuted, displaced, sedentarized, Christianized, and eventually (by the 1920s) employed as labor in the cotton, tannin, and sugar industries. Since this time, they have adopted Western music, clothing, monetary system, religions, sports and housing arrangements, though even still “integration” is a highly debated topic. Following the mechanization of Argentina’s agricultural sector, many Qom were without work and thus migrated to larger cities in search of work. Today, unemployment is still an issue, and most Qom depend directly or indirectly on the Argentine state to provide, food, shelter, education, and sanitation.

Chapter 3: Publicity in Qom Binge Drinking

Introduction

On January 10, 2012 the Chacoan sun set on the unfolding existential drama of a 14-year old Qom girl named Maria Gomez. She was two months pregnant by her boyfriend, who had recently ended his relationship with her upon hearing the news of the conception. Despite knowing the dangers that alcohol might have for her baby, she began to drink. When the sun appeared again on the horizon, she climbed onto the roof of a house and from that point jumped over the fence encircling a large radio tower (the radio tower is not strictly part of Lot 84 but exists as an island within its boundaries. See Figure 9). From the base of the tower, she began to climb. As she cleared the roofs and treetops of the village, she was spotted, and an emergency rescue squad was called to the scene. They came with a net and adjured her to come down. People began to assemble near the base, while others noted the drama from across the village. After reaching a great height, onlookers watched in horror as she plummeted to the earth. She was unable to be caught by the crew and was taken to Formosa hospital where she soon died of her injuries.



Figure 9: Antenna

Surety regarding Maria's death proved to be difficult to achieve. The people with whom she may have been drinking were underage and therefore unwilling to tell the entirety of actual events to authorities, or were too intoxicated themselves to remember. Her father had moved from the *barrio*, and her mother was disengaged. Maria left no note or other explanation. Some people claimed that the event was not a suicide, but rather an electrocution accident borne out of inebriation.

The girl climbed the tower as a dare. People in the community saw her and called the fire squad so the firemen came and they had a tarp to catch her. She was starting to come down when she grabbed the antenna which electrocuted her. Because of this unexpected move, she fell in the opposite direction to her death. Drugs or alcohol were probably involved because it was morning--they had been out all night drinking. Her mother had a new man, and she stays with him in another *barrio*. She also drinks a lot--it's public knowledge. Her father has a new woman in another village and he's also an alcoholic. Her brother is 16 and charged with homicide. He also consumes. There's a 10-year-old kid in the family who drinks too. The kids basically live alone because their parents are living in different places.

Another eyewitness saw events transpire differently:

Maybe 7:30 or 8:00 AM she leapt to her death from the radio tower right across the way (she points in its direction). I was outside watching it! She had been drinking or using drugs, you know. She had had a fight with her boyfriend and was upset so she threw herself off.

A third witness accounts the known and the unknowable of Maria's death:

She was said to be two months pregnant. She was drinking and she and another girl climbed to the roof of the house and then grabbed onto the antenna. She ended up falling with burn marks on her hands and legs. It isn't clear whether it was a suicide or not. I could see the incident. Although, this same girl tried to commit suicide before. Once she tried jumping off the roof of the house but survived. Another time, she tried to use a noose, but people caught her before she could do it. She had problems in the home. Whenever bad things happen it takes control of a person. Often, it's a road for alcohol to come in and then problems multiply.

Maria's death was tragic yet remarkable in that with nearly a whole village watching, no one could discern whether her intention was to kill herself, or if she, in a bout of drunken irrationality or clumsiness, died of a misstep. Out of this murky uncertainty, alcohol emerged as killer and motive, scourge and scapegoat. Residents of Lot 84 came to the conclusion that alcohol was her family's problem and her problem-in the end it took her life.

Despite the diversity of viewings held by the numerous witnesses (the only thing in which all were in agreement was the involvement of alcohol, a boyfriend and family issues), Formosa's news outlet framed the story as an intentional suicide, without mention of either the known aspects of her personal drama or the blurring effects of potential intoxication. The headlines and subsequent news story read:

“14 Year old girl dies by throwing herself off antenna”

An adolescent of 14 years died as a consequence of grave injuries suffered after throwing herself from a radio antenna in Lot 84.

The event occurred minutes before 9 AM when police personnel gained knowledge that a woman had gained entry to the property of the [local communications network] ... and had ascended the 60 meter antenna with clear intentions to take her life. Before this situation, residents of Lot 84 indicated the situation to the police: an adolescent girl was at the top of the antenna, for which they requested a rescue team that arrived and deployed a rescue net with the intention of helping the girl.

According to the police inspector Cirilo Bobadilla, once in place, the rescue team members quickly ascended the antenna to try to help the youngster, but in the middle of the rescue procedure, she fell into the abyss (*produjo la caída al vacío*).

In her descent, the girl crashed against the tension wires that support the antenna, causing her to fall about 15 meters from the rescue net and sustain grave injuries.

While Qom narratives regarding Maria’s death revolved around her tragic drama, her family’s problems or the scourge of drugs and alcohol, these threads did not cross the *monte* buffer. Rather, in Formosa, residents’ interpretations of the news tended within the vein of Lot 84’s social problems. Such explanations included fearful visions of profound drunkenness, glue sniffing, fatherlessness, lack of values, loss of culture, poverty and chaos. “Lot 84. . .”, they muttered shaking their heads in pity, disapproval and frustration with the apparently dysfunctional peri-urban *barrio* , is “too fucked up to behave even with a police station right there.” One bookkeeper echoed many of his fellow *Formoseños*, “They just aren’t made for the modern world.” In some opinions, frustration welled to anger. “How bad could it be,” asked a shop owner, “to have the government pay for everything for you?” In commenting online on the newspaper article translated above, Maria is portrayed as committing suicide to enjoin the government to provide additional social assistance to Lot 84.

“[I] worry about what the reason is for a group of people to opt for climbing antennas and risking their lives to get something. By this way of thinking, tomorrow if they don’t give me a Coca Cola, I am going to threaten to climb a mango tree and throw myself off. There are many psychologists that should study these motives and *ad honorem* offer the findings to the authorities.”

To *Formoseños*, Lot 84 is chaos at arm’s length; to the Qom, Formosa the source of contagion that is ailing the bodies and toxifying minds of their people. The aural fields of Lot 84 and Formosa are felt as diametric and repellent yet attracted by each other’s Others. Cast in the sparsely populated Chaco far from Buenos Aires, Formosa and Lot 84 continue with their peculiar relationship, whereby their distance allows the fears of each to be projected onto the unknowns of the other. To the Qom, Formosa is abundant, yet sullyng. To *Formoseños*, the Qom are unproductive parasites; panhandlers sullyng streets, protesters halting highway commerce, and tight-fisted conservators of potentially productive land.

Within Lot 84, discussion moved outward from Maria’s particular case to the troubles of the *barrio* more widely conceived. Her death cast Lot 84 into mourning, speculation, introspection and resentment. Psychologists were brought to the school to counsel Maria’s peers. Tears were shed and hymns chanted at an evangelical church as her life was celebrated and her death mourned. Many women, fearful that their children might suffer a similar fate, created a women’s group to brainstorm ideas about what might be done from a preventative angle. “We need to convene. And to talk. We want to know what can be done to better occupy the youth,” said one mother of four. The death of a young person is considered by all people to be a particularly difficult tragedy, especially if it may be the young person herself who took it.

Out of the discussions surrounding Maria's death came rueful comparisons and oppositions. This would never have happened in the old culture, many said. "If young people like her had more opportunities, things like this wouldn't be happening." "If we weren't so poor, and the government didn't ignore us, then things like this wouldn't happen." "In the interior, away from this city, things like this still don't happen."

Publicity in Qom Drinking

We asked about the difference between aboriginal and *criollo* drinking. "The *Aborígen* consumes more in public and their tolerance is minimal. The *criollo* surely consumes more in quantity, but it is more private" we were told in response. Drinking among colonized and displaced indigenous groups has been well documented in the ethnographic record (Heath 1987), although there is no consensus regarding interpretation. Drinking has been variously attributed to contact on colonial frontiers, economic dislocation/marginalization, ongoing rebellion, unhinged traditional cultural moorings and simple boredom. In public health circles, it is a well-recognized and researched social problem, worthy of numerous community interventions and social projects by religious, private and public institutions (Room et. al 2005). For the most part, Anthropologists have traditionally avoided judgment regarding even excessive drinking practices (Heath 1987), sometimes in the face of derision from public health scientists (Room 1984). Despite this relativist stance, public binge drinking and the disorder it brings seem to constitute a social problem if ever there was one. Even still, some anthropologists have sought to understand binge drinking using a lens that emphasizes it as a powerful method of meaning and identity generation both for those who drink and those who don't (Douglas 1987).

Despite seeming chaos and disorganization uncharacteristic of rituals in general, I 60 contend that public binge drinking can be viewed as a publicly performed ritual whereby the Qom make their own ruin visible to themselves, visitors and authorities. Although ruin is apparent in many other ways (e.g. high unemployment, poor sanitation, government dependence, poor public health outcomes, co-opted political agency, lack of land ownership, diminishing language use, high suicide rates, etc.) public drunkenness encapsulates and repeatedly demonstrates beaten Qom society in an evocative manner which no one, inside or out of the community, can deny. The scripted, uniform nature of binge drinking in Lot 84 leads me to characterize and interpret it as one would a more formal ritual, regardless of the disorganization it causes. Said another way, the ritual is not disorganization, but rather *is the impetus* for chaos.

In many general regards, Qom drinking practices resemble the drinking practices of other sedentarized foraging groups documented by anthropologists and other observers. Shkilnyk (1985, 21) describes several ways in which the binge drinking patterns of her Ojibwa population differs from the patterns of drinking and addiction found in the neighboring Canadian town. I found all of these to be equally true about Lot 84 and its distinction with Formosa. 1) The great majority of drinkers are not dependent on alcohol, and intersperse extended periods of sobriety between binges, 2) Drinking is a social activity, 3) Binge drinking is continuous (made explicit in the Spanish term for such a person, *continuado*), including periods of unconsciousness and re-intoxication until liquor/money is exhausted, 4) Binges are detectable in the communal landscape to a casual observer. Similarly, social rules change, and culpability is often altered. Indeed, among the Qom I found corroboration in that responsibilities are ignored during drinking

bouts, leading to malnutrition, child neglect or lost job opportunities. Drinking often continues until all the money is gone. “If they had all the money in the world, they would keep drinking every day until the money ran out.” said one Qom woman. Another community leader also highlights that Qom binge drinking does not neatly map onto the categories established by Western psychology. “With indigenous people there are no people who are truly addicts. They have money they drink until the money is gone. An addict drinks day after day, he wakes up and has a drink. There's no one like this in the community.”

The Qom agree with Shkilnyk’s analysis and consider the public nature of drinking to be among drinking’s most problematic features. In order to better analyze this set of differentiators, I offer the term *publicity* as a moniker for these related aspects of binge drinking. It stands in intentional opposition to privacy, for privacy is associated in Western contexts with problematic alcohol use. For example, in the United States, people will monitor a friend if he seems to be increasingly withdrawing in private in order to consume alcohol. For the most part, privacy in individual drinking patterns is considered a leading indicator that such an individual is lapsing from acceptable alcohol use to unacceptable use. This is equally true of *criollo* society, where individuals who drink substantial quantities of alcohol will defend the acceptability of their consumption by saying that they do not drink alone. While obvious public drunkenness is discouraged, there are acceptable festivals, concerts and clubs where considerable inebriation takes place. This lies in sharp contrast to Qom society, where private drinking is often viewed more favorably than the public sort.

Indeed, publicity was the most common response when I prompted respondents for the most troubling aspect of alcohol use. One man summed up the thoughts of the community when he lamented,

Yes, alcohol is not the problem. If someone wants to have a beer in a relaxed way (*tranquilo*) in his house, there's no problem. I know someone who likes to have a beer with his friends in his house and listen to music. That's totally fine. But that's not what happens. You see on the street corners, people sit around drinking boxes and boxes of wine. They have weapons and get violent, fighting in the street. It's dangerous.

Publicity in Qom binge drinking has important social implications. For instance, it carries arguably more widespread semiotic effects because it is visible to the community at large. As we saw at the opening of this chapter, public binge drinking is extremely performative, dramatic and devastatingly tragic. On the stage of Lot 84's commons, the existential drama of its people unfolds. Here, we are given a window to the struggle of a community to find a new direction, both as a whole and as individuals, in a sociopolitical environment that is unable to offer avenues to tolerant collaboration.

Anthropology and Performance

For social scientists, viewing social phenomena through the lens of performance is not a recent development. Shakespeare, early inspiration to early dramaturgical sociologists (i.e. Burke 1966; Goffman 1959), famously wrote that "the world is a stage, and all the men and women merely players." In sociology, Erving Goffman (1959) solidified a dramaturgical approach to social interactions by considering the way that people manage others' perceptions in the course of everyday social life. In anthropology, the study of performance as a primary topic began in the 1970s. Victor Turner, who attributed its consideration to a shift in anthropology's focus from structure to process,

noted the linkage of public performance of rituals to social order, meaning generation and cultural expression (Turner 1974, Turner 1982, Turner 1986). He argued that the practice of ritual opens up a transformative arena of “becoming” betwixt past states and future ones—a space he called liminal. During such a ritual, an individual’s public status, and thus identity, is irrevocably altered. Outside of ritual *sensu stricto*, some have developed the notion of the performance of self in everyday contexts (Schieffelin 2013).

Anthropological approaches to performance have been applied to ethnic identity (e.g. Royce 1982) and the gender identity, which is conceptualized as a performative phenomenon achieved through behavioral repetition (Butler 1988). Though sociology has retained its interest in the public performance of self (Brissett and Edgley 1975), anthropology has evidenced lessened interest as the centrality of ritual studies has waned, though this should not be taken as indicative of ritual’s relevance or utility. Rather, I contend that the publicity of repeated social actions renders them akin to public texts or narratives, which are “read”, understood, and commented upon by the community.

Though anthropologists have considered performative lenses as they pertain to alcohol use in ritualized contexts (Colson and Scudder 1988), only one study (to my knowledge) explicitly engages what I consider to be a central question to the study of indigenous binge drinking: “What kind of ethnic expressions or identities might be conveyed as the repeatable cycle of binge drinking continues?” In her short exposition, Nancy Lurie (1971) likens binge drinking to an ongoing political protest, where disdain for marginalization is enacted through disruptive behavior. Indeed, such a reading of binge drinking carries with it advantages. For instance, the difficulty of placing the drinking phenomenon within the structure-agency paradigm frequently associated with

power analyses is no longer problematic due to the implied freedom of action associated with performance coupled with the presence of an adversary to whom the performance is directly or indirectly directed. In fact, the publicity of their actions is a source of subversive power. While this lens has limitations—such as a relative lack of actionable insights and de-emphasis of the domestic sphere—it illuminates the power of perception, location and identity in the binge drinking process. Rather than the hidden drinking of the American alcoholic or the surreptitious nature of other illegal drug users, the “in-your-face” nature of reservation drinking conveys both pathos and anger. Rather than the public providing a guise of acquiescence with private resistance occurring in secret (Scott 1986) the everyday forms of resistance among the Qom take place in the streets.

The Tragic, the Quotidian

This Sunday morning at about 10 in the morning, I walked briskly through the depopulated streets of Lot 84, as I was slightly behind schedule to see the 2011 World Cup game at Raphael’s house. On the right side of the road past an abandoned field I see a young (~20 yr old) male passed out leaning against a lamppost. As I continued, I found many more. There were passed-out bodies littered around Lot 84 along with empty boxes of wine. Half clothed, dusty bodies breathed shallowly on roadsides and fields. There was a young couple passed out together, the girl with her pants unzipped. No one so much as stirred as I passed by. I wondered why they didn’t stumble home to sleep in a bed—it is not as though their homes are terribly far away.

I was rapidly initiated into the graphic, evocative nature of drunkenness in Lot 84. The daily public view of alcohol is neither as shocking nor as punctuated as the view of Maria falling to the earth from the communications antenna. Yet an important aspect of alcohol’s power in the community’s life is that it is quite literally omnipresent. Someone is publically drinking most times of the day on most days. If not, then the physical artifacts of drinking (i.e. wine boxes, beer bottles, graffiti) replace the actors as constant

reminders of drinking's mundane ubiquity. Thus, the results of marginalization are evident. Men are neither working in the formal nor informal sectors. Children are neither in school nor at play. A layer of wine boxes juxtaposed to the emptiness of a community kitchen underscores the failure of assistance policies. The evidence of structural violence, both ethnic and caste, is ubiquitous yet mundane.

In contrast to some other groups (Auyero and Swistun 2009), the Qom maintain a relatively accurate ethnic consciousness of their location within the socioeconomic matrix of Argentina—thus a critique of structural inequalities that continues to strain the basic institutions (e.g. family organization) of the community is able to be embedded within day-to-day drinking as drinkers converse about jobs, politics, and identity.

On the way through the *barrio* to meet a friend early on a weekend morning, my wife and I saw a group of 3 men about 15-20 years old sitting cross-legged at the intersection. From their location and comportment I could tell that they were drinking. One was clearly drunker than the others (the youngest of the group) and as we approached, we saw him standing, trying to reach of the box of wine, and nearly falling over. We walked towards them and the drunker one walked towards us. The second drunker of the three, with disheveled hair, was relatively few of words. The most sober one remained clean cut, and seemed new to drinking (better teeth, appearance and smell).

The group gave us a handshake with varying degrees of success, the most uncoordinated being from the drunker. The handshakes went on for quite a bit of time and continued during the conversation, almost as confirmation that we were still okay with talking. The sober-ish one introduced himself as Juan, and the disheveled one, Miguel. They told me that the drunker one was Carlos, who was slurring nearly incomprehensibly through the entire interaction.

Carlos: You know, I have three Brazilian t-shirts? [pauses to drink] My uncle is a pastor, and he has gone to Brazil several times. [shakes Cindy's hand again].

Juan: [Laughing] I'm really sorry about him, he's not acting very well.

Cindy/Chris: Oh, it's no problem.

Carlos tried to light a cigarette to no avail. Juan had heard that I was doing a study, and implored his friend, "They are doing a study, just say 'hi' to them and

no more.” Carlos would not be dissuaded, asking us where we were from and speaking about how nice it is in the United States.

Carlos: Oh, from the United States? It must be nice there. Everyone is rich there, right?

Chris: Some places are nice, others not--

Carlos: I'd like to live in the United States.... my father is a pastor. He's been to Utah to collect donations. The houses are huge. They can give so much away; this, and that, and this. They have everything they need. When he went to Brazil, he brought me back this jersey. [Laughter from Juan and Miguel] During the whole conversation, the drunkest one was trying to get a cigarette out and really didn't succeed.

Following this interaction, Juan and Miguel managed to redirect Carlos' attention elsewhere, and said goodbye. While I thought that this mundane interaction had not been watched, I received a text by 11AM from a good friend. He asked what happened in the morning. we asked what he meant and he said his mother had told him that we had been harassed in the street by drunkards.

The interaction with the three young men is typical in several regards. First, politics or economics are conversations drunken people had with me frequently. Though I recognize that this may have been related to my status as ethnographer, it still demonstrates that they wanted me to understand the linkage between their drunkenness and socioeconomic status. Second, they were drinking in a group. Third, there was little effort to hide drinking, especially when it is conducted in the Lot 84-specific way—in groups on street-corners. Drinking groups consisting of somewhere between three and eight people (not gender specific necessarily, but men were more common) could form at nearly any time of day. Frequently, they sit cross-legged at the intersection of two roads or paths, and pass the drink receptacle among themselves until it was finished. If money

and desire for drink persisted, then one or more group members might make a trip to a kiosk to buy more wine or beer. Alternatively, they would go to the home of a person known to stock additional alcoholic beverages.

Though drinking by young adults in the fashion described above is vexing to some in Lot 84, it is also customary to respect people's free will; even for children to do as they please. Without disciplinary resistance from adults, the last decade has seen an increase in substance use among children. The most common response is to watch in horror while lamenting contributing circumstances.

Before 2006, those people who drank were generally older, in their 20s. Starting in 2008 there was a change, and now there are younger people ages 10 to 12—girls included—who are drinking. In addition to using alcohol, children of the same age are sniffing glue. There are also social changes. Previously people used to drink just on the weekends. It might be that people were studying at the university had employment during the week, or just used to drink on weekends, but the youth have abandoned this. They can be found drinking any day of the week. The free selling of drinks is harmful to the community. The young people who choose to drink buy it from minimarts. Kids say they are getting alcohol for their parents—wine for example. At the house-businesses they are able to get alcohol in this way. There used to be more initiatives. For example, if a kid wanted to be the rugby player he would be set up with a rugby player to learn. Today kids sit on the street corner drinking and as others pass, they back up and end up getting into the drinking groups. I don't know a single family with firm employment. There is no group that helps kids with recreation. There's no other option. There's no group to tell kids enjoy themselves, recreate, draw, or that they should have a better path. Moreover there's nobody that tells kids they're doing something good... Or bad for that matter. The parents have no opinion. Everybody thinks that you finish high school and that's it, you're done for life. In fact it's a psychological problem; they can't find hope in more than what they already have. They can't dream of doing other things. They just drink all the days of the week. Once they make a habit of it, it's very hard to break.

Local concepts of culpability vary. Some residents lay blame at the feet of teachers, while others consider parents to be the culprits. Regardless, many respondents conveyed stories of child savagery, abuse and abandonment. I was talking around Lot 84

one day with a friend, discussing this issue, when we came across a child who was abandoned. He had no shirt and no shoes, and his eyes were glazed, staring straight ahead. He had a bag in one arm. He barely seemed to notice us as we passed because he was so high on glue. My discussant commented,

That kid. I don't like his look. The stepmother of this child adopted him in order to get more government assistance that comes with having another child. After getting the check, she abandoned him to the street. So he sits there and other kids pass by, and he shows them how to use the drugs. Kids are falling one by one every day because parents aren't involved. After youth drink, their behavior changes a lot. They make fun of each other and it ends badly. Around 2000, the kids also got weapons and you couldn't walk around at night. There were not drugs at that time though. Drugs are now present in the neighborhood. When the whites came into the neighborhood, they brought drugs. Kids are able to get drugs from the city.

Youths who drink though will steal money to drink from their own mothers. They will sell their mom's merchandise for alcohol. They will spend it all at once - until it's gone. Moms may get upset but "they get used to it" and drop the topic. They can't punish their kids because they are in fear. If a mother raises her hand at her kid, the kid will fight back. Sometimes parents actually get sick with worry and preoccupation and do try to say something.

Here we see the degradation of familial roles and responsibilities, which social scientists have found to be notable in populations undergoing substantial change (Shkilnyk 1985, Gutman 1999). In the absence of established social norms, parents and children act in ways that would not have been tolerated in the past (and likely will be unacceptable in the future) but prevail in the interim. Some members of the community cited a lack of legitimate leadership as an enabling absence. Like removing a lynchpin, the removal of legitimate authority ripples through chains of responsibility, effectively undermining familial harmony and defanging parents' attempts at discipline (which were very uncommon traditionally in Qom society). More often, however, the lack of life-purpose following high school was cited as the most salient explanation for children's

related the following experience he had during a visit:

So one day we went to the school. We went around and asked kids what their life dream was. The majority had no ideas. When they were asked why they didn't have ideas they gave these reasons. One: they can't go to school because they don't have money. Two: school and careers are just for the white people. Kids see no reason to continue going to school and studying. The first thing they do is drink because there is no motivation. When they stop going to school it's clear they no longer have a goal. They either turn to robbing or drinking.

And it's true. We send our children to school. They go. They leave the school, and they don't have any work or employment afterwards. They've suffered for this degree through rain and mud and exams, but they have no employment afterwards. They put a little of their welfare check aside for food and use the rest for alcohol.

Indeed, discussion concerning public drinking patterns, especially those of youth and young adults, revolves around prospects and opportunities. Another Qom community member indicated a direct link between the existential crises of Qom youth and the public drinking habits of young people.

Kids eight to 15 and even older can't get work, therefore they have no responsibility or motivation. Older people have responsibilities so they can't drink everyday. The problem isn't having a beer and relaxing at home. It is the drinking habits of youth, when they drink in their groups. Within these groups, they drink and then they start fights, either within their group or against other groups or people. They carry knives and other weapons. They know that if they hurt or kill someone, nothing will happen to them. They will not be incarcerated because they are minors. It's become popular to go out, trap and kill. This especially happens when there are a lot of parties such as Christmas and New Year's. The kids will try to trap an older person in the house, to make the person give them money. Sometimes kids will steal from their parents and sell things—TVs, radios, stereos, bikes—to get money to continue drinking. In one case, the kids trapped their parents in a house and set it on fire to make them give them money. Violence is a game and something to do. A diversion with no consequences.

The children of these stories find themselves in such situations in no small part because of the effects of alcohol use on domestic and sexual life in Lot 84. Alcohol use is implicated in domestic violence, rape, prostitution and casual sexual behaviors that end up placing the resulting unwanted children at risk. Nurses have particularly poignant and candid perspectives on the involvement of alcohol in these contexts, as one who worked at the center in Lot 84 describes the cycles of abandonment and abuse among spouses, partners and children. While many of the events described did not take place in public, they still contribute to the publicity of Qom drinking patterns, as people openly talk (it is difficult to say what part exaggeration might play) about alcohol as a root cause of gender violence, rape, abandonment and promiscuity.

We see adults sometimes for alcohol related problems. We see the consequences, too. Addiction is associated with drugs and promiscuity, sex in whatever way. We even see the young with STDs and the results of violence. Lots of gender violence. Drunk men are responsible for this. We see the results with the kids because the parents don't take care of them, which is a kind of psychological violence rather than a physical kind. There's also physical abuse. The victims of domestic violence or gender violence usually give some false excuse for their injury rather than calling it domestic violence. Some of these have been pretty bad, and they've all been women. Sometimes the kids are left to the streets when there is domestic violence and the woman leaves to go somewhere else, maybe with a new man. Though women are usually the victims, sometimes they are violent to each other and to kids when they are drinking.

There's a lot of sexual abuse of little girls, and in these cases the stepfather sometimes impregnates them. One time, a girl who came in who was impregnated by her stepfather. The girl said she was 13 years of age, but I thought she was 11. By the time they are 13 years of age they are living in couples, these pairs of adolescents. And being a very bad situation however, the whole family is in one room. Even in the other cases, girls are getting pregnant younger and younger. There aren't consequences though, because the grandmothers will just take the kids in. I wonder what will happen when these girls are the grandmothers...

Again, from a Qom friend's girlfriend, we see the link between economic marginality, risky sex and precarious childhood.

In Lot 84, girls start to prostitute themselves from age 13. Prostitution is more common in single mothers who need money. These women may go to the Esso station or to the center. I have an aunt (age 34) who is a single mother who was doing prostitution. I talked to my aunt and told her that it wasn't good to do this. This aunt stopped for two-three months but now has returned, because she needs the money for her and her child.

Just yesterday I went to the jail to see one of the brothers who had been charged. He says that he is innocent and he doesn't know why God would let this happen and he has to be there. I said that things happen for a reason and that God has a plan for him. The backstory is that he had been a drinker, gave it up, and then returned to it. He was staying at the house of his sister. His sister adopted a child many years ago. When the child grew up and learned that he was actually adopted he became bitter. He sold his mother's house, but in order to sell it, he needed her to vacate it. So, one night when his uncle was there and passed out from drinking, he came and hung his mother.

Alcohol indeed casts a deathly shadow in Lot 84. For its residents, alcohol use is not simply a risk factor for other illness with potential onsets far in the future. Alcohol is a powerful omen of endings. Everyone in the community is touched by alcohol's destructive force. Most of them are directly affected by a friend or family member. Even if through a stroke of luck one managed to avoid its direct personal sting, its effects on the community evoke empathy and pity for suffering. Binge drinking is the occasion of excruciating personal existential introspection from which some do not emerge.

We visited Cristobal for our normal Qom lesson. He gave us the news that two adolescents in the community had committed suicide in consecutive days. The first was a 14-year old boy. Cristobal did not understand this case very well because the kid's parents were employed and there were no issues known to the community about this family. The boy hung himself in his house when no one was home. The second case is of a young man about 22 years old. He killed himself in the same way as the 14-year old. This guy had a job, but his parents were not together. He would drink frequently and talk about how his father abandoned him.

Pathos, pain, and blame are glaringly on public display as those of Lot 84 “act the part” of being a community in ruin. One could argue that Benjamin’s vice campaign had laid the foundation of this ruin 100 years ago, eventually enabling what it claimed the Chaco to be: a wasteland.

I saw a man walking who looked like a walking skeleton. His eyes were sunken and the skin on his cheeks hung, and seemed stretched like leather over a saddle. He walked about in confusion, not seeming to know where he was going. He shuffled like people do when their balance has been impaired for a long time, and they are fearful of falling. He smelled strongly of liquor and had a box of wine in his hand. He had no teeth. I was told that this is the end stage of the *continuado*. They don’t have a family anymore and they are alone. They don’t have anything else to occupy them in their lives; they’ve lost everything.

Subversive Profligacy

Public drinking, in its mundane and its extraordinary forms, is a political critique rather than chaotic anomie. The power exerted by the state, visibly present at the entrance to Lot 84 in the form of a police station, is challenged by the actions of the binge drinkers. Feldman (1991), in his spatial analysis of ethnic conflict in Northern Ireland reminds us of the intersection of power, spatial command, and individual bodies.

In modernity, political power increasingly becomes a matter of regimenting the circulation of bodies in time and space in a manner analogous to the circulation of things. ...[Power] is contingent on the command of space and those entities that move within politically marked spaces. The body becomes a spatial unit of power and the distribution of these units in space constructs sites of domination. (Feldman 1991, 8)

When considered in this manner the indigenous drinkers performance is clearly one of resistance and power critique. Public drunkenness of Norwegian youth in squares has been analyzed as a performance of non-conformity (Garvey 2005). In the same vein,

the drinking of the Qom contains aspects of the ongoing war against incursion that has characterized their existence since the arrival of Europeans. Binge drinking is not then considered to be a result of a furtive yearning for the relative affluence of middle-class Western existences (Lurie 1971), but rather as a scripted form of non-compliance and intentional waste aimed at disrupting the state's desired orchestration of public space and personal action. In the following interaction, it is clear that dependence and pain are woven in the bodies of these Qom drinkers along with a spirit that refuses capitulation (a persistent mark of Qom identity). Notice how the conversation shifts seamlessly from piteous begging to the subversive pleasure of using state funds to voyeuristically get drunk in front of authorities that are legally powerless to intervene.

I walked up the main street, I saw a group of three guys ages 22-25. On the left there was a fairly drunk Qom man, Juan, in the middle was a drunk but very well demeanored Qom friend, Sebastian and on the right was a drunk man named Fernando. As we walked by, they greeted me and they waved me over. They smelled strongly of sweat, vomit and liquor. Their clothes were dirty, torn, and in one case, stained with vomit.

Fernando: Can you buy us another box please? Just one little box!

Chris: You know I can't do that—what if people heard that the anthropologist was buying wine for everyone on the street?!

Fernando nodded, and the other two guys, Juan and Sebastian, seemed to have expected this and continued to squat, and stare ahead. In one last effort, Juan pleaded, "Just one little box?"

Fernando: So you are from the United States? So far away, huh? How strange you're down here. The United States! I bet the people aren't poor there...there aren't people like us there. Nothing changes—the indigenous person is walked upon. Always the same, nothing changes. Cristina [Kirchener] doesn't change either. It's the re- re- re-election now, I guess!

Juan: Another box, would you please?

Fernando: This (pointing to the wine) is our only vice. We like it; we don't go for drugs or cigarettes. Our only vice, it is. I wanted to study law at the university here, but I wasn't allowed to enter. We are the lowest here—the indigenous

people are the lowest of the low. We aren't respected, and we can't get into school or get jobs because we are discriminated against.

Chris: Some people are going to the university. Did they tell you why you weren't admitted?

Fernando: They never tell you. You just don't get in. That's how it is. [pause]. Here we are fighting with this wine. We have been drinking since Friday [that would be a 36+ hour binge]. This wine is warm, and we are almost out (he gestured to the boxes in queue). Could you get us some ice? This is our vice. It hurts the body and hurts the community. But if the government can't give us work, I will waste my time on this. Sons of bitches! I'll sit here and drink on this corner so that everyone can see. The police can't do anything.

The multiplicity of Fernando's comment would be the prism through which I viewed Qom binge drinking from then until this writing. The immediacy of his desire for drunken oblivion is conveyed by his insistence to continue force-feeding himself warm, tannic, unappetizing boxed wine. Far from desiring to mirror Western sommeliers or connoisseurs, he disregards these trappings in favor of pursuing alcohol's physiological effects. What he does next does not indicate anomie or acculturation however. As has been noted elsewhere in Latin America (Pine 2008), drink is one of the few venues where structural violence is extremely visible and surfaces in terms that are discussable.

In addition to drinking more publically than the wealthy, the poor consume different alcoholic beverages than the wealthy. [...] Even if they do consume similarly to the poor, wealthy drunks are insulated from the stigma of alcohol abuse by virtue of class. [...] The lower class drinking environment is one of the few public arenas where disparities between rich and poor and the structural violence that keeps the poor in place are routinely and openly discussed. (Pine 2008, 95)

It indicates political insurgency using any means possible. From one side of his mouth, he guiltily admits the individual and communal burdens his behavior exacts. He

treats them as a revolutionary would consider collateral damage, while from the other side he explains his social exclusion using political critique. When nepotism clearly outweighs merit (i.e. university admission), public alcohol consumption comes to be rebellion by-any-means-available. By squandering government welfare money intentionally drinking in plain view of police, Fernando underscores the elements of resistance implied in Qom binge drinking.

Protestant Parades, Insurgent Intoxication

“I’m tired. I was up until 1:30AM last night playing video games with my friend. He got a netbook from the school. We played a game where we killed the police. I shot like 1,000 of them and only 15-20 of them got me. [So you don't like the police?] No.” – Street Child

To the Western audience, alcohol can often be found in the hand of the rebel. While the roots of the image of drunken rebel probably descend to the bedrock of Judeo-Christian temperance, the real or perceived tendency for insurgents to use intoxicants connects nodes of resistance from the Irish countryside, to the rock stars’ backstage bacchanal, to the American Frontier. For the Qom, continued colonial resistance was a permeating feature of Qom society before any social scientist had the opportunity to collect ethnographic data. In fact, knowledge of the values of Qom society that predate colonial warfare will never be available, so long and profound is the influence of resistance in Qom ethnic consciousness.

From two angles then, the deep-seated history of resistance and the influx of Western tokens of youthful rebellion (e.g. rap music, gang membership), it should come as no surprise that young people are using alcohol to enact their anger toward the ethnic violence exerted against them using a tool, alcohol, which is depicted as an necessary

accompaniment to rebellion in the cinematic and musical media they eagerly consume to the chagrin of their elders. Such sentiments were summed up, ironically, by a police officer administering Lot 84;

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The other problem is that the aboriginal culture is mixing with the *criollo* culture. They used to be very resistant to change in their culture, but they are changing now. The problem is that they are picking up the bad habits of the *criollos*. They copy alcohol consumption and listen to that music at very high volumes (with this, he threw back his head and squinted his eyes closed). They are not listening to the music of Formosa, but that of the *villas* of Buenos Aires. They are listening to bands such as Fuerte Apache (an Argentine rap group from Buenos Aires). This music has messages about sex, violence, rebelry, and always the topic of drugs is in there.

What the police officer fails to notice is a nuance that has eluded many who have studied Indian Drinking, namely, that the use of a Western technology for an indigenous purpose represents a novel indigeneity in many cases rather than the erasure of the indigenous. It is not the adoption of Western cultural markers with all their implied meanings. This misconception rests on a reified understanding of indigeneity, the same kind of essentialization which is peddled by National Geographic and Co.; that indigeneity is synonymous with immutability. Far from being “frozen in time”, the Qom have repurposed innumerable weapons of colonial manufacture to serve the purpose of their ongoing resistance. In the earliest decades, they adopted the horse and traded for firearms. In the 1920s, they repurposed Pentecostalism as a more effective manner of interfacing with the unseen world (Miller 1980) when their *pio 'xonáq* failed repeatedly, most notably setting the stage for the Napalpí massacre. In this light, I suggest that young drinkers in Lot 84 marry what they view as a contemporary tool of resistance with manners of resistance that are distinctly Qom.

Through my network, I befriended a young man who was fond of thinking of himself as a rebel and was loosely part of one of the gangs (which tend to be relatively fluid in composition and regulation). He would brag to me about smoking marijuana, “treating girls like prostitutes”, and was keen on asking me to translate 50 Cent songs. The following interaction illustrates the comingling of indigenous rebellion and intoxication.

I was sitting at the bus-stop at night waiting for the last bus back to the city. Since it was late at night, and everyone else was where they needed to be for the day, I was alone. I was starting to become concerned that I had missed the last bus, when Miguel came up to me on his motorcycle. He was dressed in a black leather bomber jacket and offered me a cigarette. In the process, he smiled as he flashed two 700mL bottles of beer the he had in his inside-breast jacket pockets. He played the 50 Cent song P.I.M.P on his cell phone headphones and asked me to translate it. By the time we finished, it was clear that the bus wasn't coming. He asked if I needed a ride, and I said that I did. I got on the back of his motorcycle and, before going back to the city, stopped at the gas station. When I dismounted, as he put the nozzle to the tank, I noticed a Che Guevara decal near the gas cap. He saw that my eyes lingered on it, and chose to explain.

“You know this was a great man. A hero. Someone who stood up to authority and did something about it. Here, we need more of this. I put this here to remember the importance of this.”

We got back on the motorcycle, and he told me that he needed to stop at his house before taking me back. As we went inside, he took the bottles of beer out of his jacket and put them on the table. He excused himself for a moment and I looked around. On the far wall is a picture of five Qom men wearing camouflage Army uniforms posing. No other family picture is in view. As I look around the apartment, I see behind me that the uniforms are here, in the closet...

The decal, photograph and the uniform convey tangibility and physicality with reference to rebellion. Qom resistance is palpable in the community through highly sensory tokens of its ever presence such as graffiti and blasting rock/rap music. To the Qom, resistance has always been an active endeavor in the form of cunning sorcery,

fervent prayer, and strategic politicking. That the Qom lay claim powerfully to this small piece of land afforded them, was made unambiguous—perhaps least ambiguous when a middle-school-aged child pulled out a knife in anticipation of my walking by him and whispered as menacingly as he could, “And now whitey (*gringo*), what are you doing here?”

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The questions of indigenous space/time are central to understanding the *public* nature of binge drinking in the *barrio*. It is indeed a social occasion that is ethnically proscribed and reenacted in a way that seeks intimidation and domination. In the historical moment in which my fieldwork occurred, the Argentine government was attempting to assign deeds to particular houses and plots in Lot 84, when they had been held communally until then. This was interpreted as a mechanism of governmental control whereby the community would become further divided if the *criollo* poor were able to purchase houses from Qom families even more desperate for money. During my time, a protest area maintained occupation against this agenda. Similarly, intoxicated young people effectually waged a parallel territorial war on the streets.

After an evening game of pickup rugby, Rafael and I stand on the main street sharing some water and walking toward the community’s evangelical church. I can hear the noisy bass of a two-step jam and see light streaming from the open church door as we approach. Children are playing outside, men are gathering in circles in the street, and women and girls are dancing to the music in the church. Beyond the illuminated main street, however, figures sit in shadow on the street corners just outside the light. The dim light of embers burning momentarily illuminates the adolescent faces encircling a few boxes of wine. As my eyes adjust, I can see one arm reach into the center, fetch a box, and cut its corner with a pocketknife. The box is passed slowly from arm to arm, round and round, until it is deposited over the last drinkers’ shoulder. The second box begins circulation. Picking the third up for the road, the group gets up, turns away from the main street and walks together—arm to arm—down the street, passing cigarettes and wine as they go. As Raphael and I walk to the bus-stop several blocks down the lighted road, I keep an eye to the side-streets. Up and down, I see groups sitting,

walking, drinking, smoking, relocating. I asked Raphael, “So, what’s the deal with those groups?” He said, “After the economic and currency crisis in 2001, adolescents formed gangs. For a while, the violence was pretty bad. It has been better lately, but you should still be careful with them at night, especially when they are drinking.”

Inhabitants of the *barrio* view this practice variously, as microcosmic re-enacting of the old nomadism with particular emphasis on continuities of reciprocity and evasion of authorities, nascent drug gang formation, unnecessary perpetuation of sub-ethnic divisions, unacceptable public embarrassment, physical danger to non-participants, and even a matter of no concern—simply teenagers seeking a place to drink when they cannot drink at home.

The ambulatory drinkers evoke a wide variety of opinions within the Lot 84. One man—a founder and leader of the community—summed up much of what I confirmed during my own interviews. He said,

You know it is a strange thing, these kids drinking in the street at night. Drinking and walking and smoking. Some people say that it got worse when they opened the road to Bolivia. They say that brought drugs to the community. Others blame the corralito in year 2001. But I tell you, the violence! People were knifing each other, beating each other, killing each other. Kids! They were on alcohol and doing drugs. Teaching the little kids to drink and smoke. They arranged themselves by ethnicity - Dapicoshéc against Yólopí, ‘Eraxaicpí against Tacshec, No’olgaxanáq against Qolpí.” Why? We don’t fish the river anymore. They want an excuse to fight. It’s something to do, drink on the corner. And when you didn’t work for the money and you have no job cannot get a job. Why not?” I asked him, as was my custom by then, if adolescent drinking would be as problematic if it were conducted the same way, just in someone’s backyard instead of in the *barrio*’s streets. His response, universally corroborated, was no.

As mentioned earlier, the public nature of the drinking is central to its constructed meaning in the *barrio*. Protestors lose their teeth in private.

For our purpose, these drinkers' perambulations point again to Power as exercising control over the movement of people through space. When taken with the common more overt protest mechanism of sitting on lawn chairs in across the provincial highway to damage shipping commerce enough to gain political leverage (*cortar la ruta*), the "protestant parade" which snakes through Lot 84's streets at night indicates that this everyday ritual is one that reinforces ethnic identity while defying the land (thus power) claims of the Argentine state. The youths utilize the liminal interstices of the *barrio* to stage a protest by retaking the colonized space using a uniquely indigenous display. "Gangs"¹¹ take on the names and composition of old sub-ethnic identifies and compete against one another in a manner that harkens, in a kind of drunken time-warping (Mitchell 2004), to the old manner, both through drinking (like *pio 'xonáq* resistance missionary disciplinary action) and reinforcing sub-ethnic boundaries.

Residents of Lot 84 are concerned with the violence associated with the "gangs" and their drinking patterns. Within my social network, one person was killed and another sliced with a knife on the head during my time conducting fieldwork. Indeed, Qom on Qom violence is a primary concern of community leaders. A young community leader opined on the subject, "We are concerned about the recent event that took place (where a young man was stabbed very close to my house.) There were about five guys, all ages 14-16. They were drinking between friends, but after drinking disowned each other and began to fight."

¹¹ I use the term gangs loosely, because they are not organized crime for illegal profit in most cases, but rather a stylized violence by which groups exert claims over parts of the *barrio*. One respondent claimed that some young men tried it out, didn't see the goal, and thus ceased.

While this is interpreted by both Qom and *Criollo* observers as chaotic, it is better understood as in a communal bracket of self-harm akin to the protest using public self-immolation in Tibet (McGranahan and Litzinger 2012). In fact, the performance of resistance is not organized, or truly thematized as such. Macroscopically, the violence associated with public drinking is the type stems from the “inert” violence (Bourdieu 1997, 233) of economic structures and everyday social functioning. In doing so, he contends that through lifelong exposure to violence, a member of a dominated class is more likely to inflict violence upon one of his “companions in misfortune.” Certainly, among the Qom, if violence is intended to have direct effect against the architects of misfortune, it is indeed misdirected. Even so, the performance of protest has alternative meanings. One of these, central to discourse surrounding public drinking, is that the momentum of its wave gives grounding to continued Qom resistance by emphasizing Qom agency: even if the exercise of agency is masochistic self-harm. It is indeed social integration through desecration (Stein 1985). While this is one of the social implications of Qom drinking publicity, another is the perpetuation, both within and outside the community, of drunken Indian stereotypes. Such readings reinforce the naturalness of social inequality, as the next section describes.

Of Narrative and Perception: Lot 84 and the City

If the nocturnal movements of Qom drinkers are indeed contesting state power, then one would expect territorial gains and losses to accompany the movements of drinkers. In fact, this is the case. As viewed by the police, the problem of Qom drinking is their own problem, to be dealt with internally to the *barrio*. Officers told me that they are instructed only to bother policing public drinking among people who were obviously

below the legal drinking age unless other illegal activities, such as violence or drug use, were suspected. The police rather focus their activities on paternalistic, disciplinary educational materials, addressed separately in Chapter 5.

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Yet, there are bound to be incidents cast in the uncertainty that comes with heavy drinking in the middle of the night with no witnesses. A younger Qom man who had connections to members of drinking groups once instructed me on this subject,

Eduardo: The police make rounds sometime around 12 or 1. For this reason, people usually go to their houses for a little bit at this time. The people are generally looking for intoxicated minors. If they are found, they take away their stuff—whatever they're consuming and might take them to the station until they sober up. The police may hit the people—girls too. They might take you to the station even if you aren't drunk.

Chris: Why do you think they hit people?

Eduardo: They probably hit people because they are fighting back when the police try to take them in the first place.

Chris: Have the police ever killed anyone?

Eduardo: There are suspicious cases of this. Sometimes the stories don't make sense. But it's hard to tell what happened when its what one person says against what another drunk person says happened. Nothing legal ever happens. There are just rumors.

Stories of police brutality abound in Lot 84, including stories in which police beat men, abduct children and impregnate women who are too afraid of retaliation to divulge their secrets. These narratives are of questionable veracity but are consistent with Qom experiences with Argentina's government. Similarly, stories cross the *monte* buffer and surface as matter-of-fact narratives in Formosa. One Formosan, who worked at the Ministry of Tourism in Formosa, cautioned us to avoid Lot 84 due to the presence of drugs, alcohol and violence.

If you want to go there, you need to get someone to take you, or you could ask the police at the station and they could show you around. But you need protection. It just isn't safe. If you enter and they don't know you, they might mug or kill you. Especially at night, after a certain hour, you can't enter unless you are one of them. Others from the Ministry have gone there a couple times and talked with a woman about selling her baskets to tourists. She said that drugs and alcohol are becoming a big problem and that it's starting younger and younger.

By contrast to the chaos related above, a taxi driver, who I asked to drive me to Lot 84, had a different take, when I asked him what he thought about the indigenous people of the *barrio*. He seems to consider that the Qom have secured a level of state-sponsored affluence.

Taxi: They are very well off, even rich, the indigenous are. They make a salary from government welfare. They have new schools and everything is beautiful. Have you been there? I have clients from there that call me to pick them up sometimes. They have cell phones. They have beautiful new houses given to them by the government. No, they have a ton of land. They have lots of 25 by 50 meters. They have new *motos* that they get with the money they receive. I get up at 5AM to work and I don't even own a bicycle! Meanwhile, I see them drinking and gambling at the casino. If they are integrated, why don't they work in the city? They don't want to work. Why would I go looking for a job if I could sip *mate* all day and not have to work? You have to go and see the *barrio* for yourself.

In these accounts and those surrounding Maria's apparent suicide mentioned at the start of this chapter, it is clear that colonial fears of the Qom as violent and cunning are able to persist through substance use narratives, which are fueled by *criollo* perceptions of public drinking in the *barrio*. Rather than an enactment of melancholic pathos or resistance to colonial authority, as many Qom drinkers view themselves, public binge drinking is perceived very differently by the "audience" of this performance. The

drinkers of Lot 84 harken to the *muchachos* described by Taussig (1986) as mediating between the traditionalists of Lot 84 and the *criollos* of the city.

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Mediating as semicivilized and semirrational Indians between the savages of the forest and the whites of the rubber camps [...] and dependent on the whites for food, arms and goods, the *muchachos* typified all that was savage in the colonial mythology of savagery—because they were in the perfect social and mythic space to do so. [T]hey embellish[ed] fictions that stoked the fires of white paranoia...(122)

Likewise, the drinkers of Lot 84 are not only feared for the perception of their intoxicated brutality, but also hated for their perceived cunning in manipulating the political system into providing for affluence. Here we see a token of how the Qom, dominated by the hegemony of centuries of Argentine colonialism, continue to hold a place in the rarely spoken nightmares of city dwellers. While some *criollos* have been instructed in the respect of Indian culture, what is respected is a reified noble savage icon that, if located anywhere, is in the *monte*. The drinkers of Lot 84 are like the *muchachos*: maligned by their own, and deeply feared by their oppressors. By performing ruin and resistance, the Qom indeed exerts power over their dominators, but in paradoxical and contorted manners.

Fighting with Wine: Paradoxes of Violence and Drink

*Y que me traigan más botellas,
para quitarme este sabor de sudor,
y que me apunten en la cuenta,
toda la desgracia que dejo...*

*Caminando por mi barrio ya no se que pensar
por que se que a mi lado vos ya no vas a estar
solo me queda tomar
para poder olvidar
las palabras que decías
que siempre serias mía*

*que nunca te olvidarias
 todo eso era mentira
 una puta mentira
 – Esos Malditos, Fuerte Apache*

And bring me more bottles
 To take away the taste of this sweat from me
 So they may write me in the story
 All of this disgrace that I leave

Walking through my neighborhood I don't know what to think anymore
 Because I know that you will no longer be at my side
 The only thing that's left to do is drink
 To be able to forget
 The words that you said
 That you'd always be mine
 That you'd never forget
 All of that was a lie
 A fucking lie
 – Those Damned ,
 Fuerte Apache

It is unsurprising that Fuerte Apache's words found receptive ears among the youth of Lot 84. In its stanzas, this piece of gangster rap conveys much of what this chapter attempts to analyze: the intertwined multivalence of the structural violence-substance abuse-physical violence complex. In *Esos Malditos* (The Damned), the thugs of Fuerte Apache infamous for their roots in one of the most violent neighborhoods of Buenos Aires, invoke pity, disgrace and resignation within a genre more notable for violence, anger and rebellion. In their music, the interrelation and ambivalence of these phenomena, however, is not self-contained in a Buenos Aires or Formosan ghetto, however, but rather blared from the proverbial public loudspeaker. The public nature of both the media created by Fuerte Apache and the drunkenness of Qom youth is then received and perceived by the public in general in ways that inflame public fears of the

poor as angry, violent, and addicted. They are pitiable yet do not remain pacified. As

Mitchel notes of Mexican binge drinkers in Mexico City, drinking and suffering are for marginalized populations, part of a daily repertoire of resistance:

Careaga overlooked daily ritual resistance inside the capitalist megacity, not to mention the creative self-construction inside the self-pity. Note how alienation did not keep a Careaga drunkard from reaching intense degrees of introspection; unhappiness was one of their raw materials, one of their foods for thought, the sand of trauma that produced the pearl of identity. It is as if each were saying, “I suffer, therefore I exist.”

It is obvious that the identities that are constructed, in part through the use of alcohol, are fraught with contradictions. While alcohol may not be an ego solvent, it may serve to dissolve theories which point to singular foci or functions of alcohol within a body, community or society. For instance, despite what he considers to be clear ambivalence among his research subjects, Spicer (1998) observes that conceptualization of ambivalence in the anthropological study of alcohol was entirely lacking as of his writing. In response, he calls for a (dys)functional anthropology of alcohol indicating a need to accommodate multiplicity in conceptualizations of Native American drinking patterns. Indeed, my experience corroborates Spicer’s experience; the ethnographic experience is clearly multivalent. Though he touches upon geography of drinking among his subjects in Minnesota, I offer that the locality and visibility of drinking has much to do with the development of drinking fields of valance. In Lot 84, it is precisely drinking’s public location that builds its fields of pathos, struggle, violence and resistance. In the contested geography of the street, the anticolonial struggle continues to take place. From

the countervailing perspective of the state and city-dwellers, visions of violent drunken Indians roaming the street stokes the embers of a centuries' long colonial conflagration.

For the Qom are indeed fighting with wine. On the one hand, it is what many consider a vice—a social trouble that continues to bring ruin and violence on the community. On the other hand, alcohol is a weapon that is not easily blunted. Like the gun and the horse before, alcohol is readopted in an indigenous manner and utilized to terrorize the Qom's colonial oppressions. In this reversal of structural violence, another unexpected layer is uncovered: the subtle power of the oppressed over the minds of the oppressor. Rather than presiding as comfortable victors, Formosans remain unnerved by what they observe as the cunning and violence of the Qom. As for the Qom themselves, they understand perhaps better than social scientists, the range of reasons alcohol is used. Vincenzo, a pensive and understated migrant from the rural village in the *monte*, told me once:

Why people drink? All reasons. Some people like it. Some people are trying to make up for something. Some people lost work or something. Some just get into it bit by bit. Some people end up living for alcohol. Men and women alike. The majority know that it's not good. I think that it's not good in general, but it's good to know how to control yourself. A glass is fine. It can be okay. Once one starts to fight though, he often can't stop and this is bad. If one doesn't know how to control himself, it's terrible.

CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4: The Contagious City: Conceptualizing Communal Illness

“An alcoholic is someone you don’t like, who drinks as much as you do.”

–Dylan Thomas, Welsh Poet

Having previously spent time in other poor *barrios* along the fringes of Formosa, I was initially surprised by the relative tidiness of Lot 84. In other parts of Argentina, particularly in the capital of Buenos Aires, poor neighborhoods on the urban fringes are characterized by a profusion of trash and litter. Such *barrios* on the outskirts of Formosa are much the same in this regard. In contrast, the streets and ditches of Lot 84 were mostly devoid of food wrappers, tattered clothing, soda bottles and other cast-offs prevalent in other boroughs. Early in my fieldwork, I inquired why this was the case and was told by a close friend, “The people are concerned about witchcraft (*brujería*). These things still have some of your saliva on them after you eat them. Using that, someone could bewitch (*hacer brujería*) you.”

“Here, We are Sick with the City”: Alcohol Problems Explained

Given the prevalence of ideas surrounding the concept of contagion and its relevance to understanding personal affliction, it is not surprising that many inhabitants of Lot 84 utilized these principles to explain the communal problems of Lot 84, including what is viewed as problematic alcohol use. Especially, older Qom people view the presence of the city as a contagious one and wider Argentine culture as a subversive siren

song which the youth, in their ignorance, cannot help but mime. Those from Lot 84 regard the bush as the source of the ancient ones' (*los antiguos*) strength, health and longevity, even to the point that alcohol created in the bush using its products, is healthy, while the alcohol bought from *criollos* is a bane.

In some ways, the city and its extensions, such as the interstate highway system, are quite physically contagious. Diseases like syphilis and AIDS are infiltrating the population of Lot 84 via the physical contact of Qom people with *criollos* from the city. Foods given or available to the residents of Lot 84 do not lead to long-standing health, but rather to hypertension, obesity and diabetes.

Although improvements in infrastructure are often regarded as necessary to community development, infrastructural development has been the kiss of death to indigenous communities, especially if relocation is involved. Route 81, built to connect Formosa with northeastern Argentina and Bolivia, was completely paved only as recently as 2007. The completion of this system completes the circulatory system that pumps diseased blood through lands which were traditionally indigenous strongholds. The highway system is the way that the contagion from the cities metastasizes and infects the *monte*. As the old Qom leader Chalo told me in an extended metaphor, the highways allow the circulation of *criollo* culture to traditionally Qom places:

The road system is like the circulatory system of a human being. It can bring good things. Nutrients, oxygen. The road brings motorcycles, and better health supplies. But the veins can let cancer spread too. Since the route has been completed, drugs and disease have come into the community. The road brought the gas station, and now the gas station brings trucks from Bolivia. They bring

drugs, on their way through to Buenos Aires. Women and girls prostitute themselves at the gas station. Before, there was no syphilis. Now, yes. It's only a matter of time before AIDS comes into the community.

While simultaneously recognizing these physical connections, the Qom conceptualize the proximity of the city as marring social and personal health through spiritual contagion. Just as the Qom at other points in the colonial process have conceptualized particular geographic areas (e.g. the hills surrounding the cane fields in Salta) as harboring the contagious "breath of devils"(Gordillo 2004), so do the Qom of Lot 84 believe that the city's vibe (*onda*) and essence is responsible for social problems, most notably, substance use.

A sense that the younger generation is distanced from its cultural roots is a common sentiment among older members of Lot 84. They talk about the predilection of adolescents and young adults for mainstream movies, music, cell phones, name brand clothes and party culture over traditional music, mythology and the ways of the *monte*. Lacking motivation to learn the old ways of being and modes of thinking, those generations born since Lot 84's inception in the early 1970s have widely adopted Argentine popular culture instead. They now, for the most part, eat, dress, play and are entertained much the same as their lower class *criollo* counterparts. A significant and influential portion of the population remembers the "old ways" and laments the gradual loss of knowledge and appreciation of the youth. This sentimentality is not without debate. Among the old guard of Lot 84, the formation of Lot 84 assured that today's events would come to pass, granted the nearby city and the contact that would necessarily

ensue. Irina demonstrates that the knowledge of the city has resulted in disaffected, alienated youth:

Before, families would talk around the fire. And the kids would ask the adults questions, 'how was it before Mama?' And stories would be exchanged. It was a family reunion-- a sign of the family. Now people have gas and electric kitchens in which they keep their food and their water. We've lost the custom of cooking over fire and reuniting. The people here are in a time of family change, but I haven't changed...and I am not going to change. I have to cook, but I cook over a fire because that is my culture. They say we need to integrate. The younger generation is completely integrated, but they've lost respect for their culture.

The residents of Lot 84 regard their contact with and proximity to their colonizers to be the source of various social maladies, especially problematic alcohol use. Despite the infusion of music and video media, clothing, electronics, motorized vehicles, building techniques, language, and foodstuffs, the presence of alcohol and other drugs (marijuana, glue) is most widely scapegoated as sinister gifts of the city. The kids need to value what the man did, what the grandfather says about various things. Now they don't care anymore. The contact of the village to the city is the problem. Now discrimination is based on clothing and social status. Such situations frequently locate the indigenous population, especially the younger generations groping for avenues to self-actualization and economic stability, in a no man's land where traditional roles, values and skills are either extinct or without use but modern counterparts are also not available or sufficiently developed. In turn, disconnect perpetuates the structural violence that bore it, increases tensions and violence, puts pressure on families and creates a poor environment for

children to mature. As they grow up, they reflect and continue familial and communal instability.

The Invisible World of the Qom

Shamanism, sorcery and sympathetic magic have occupied a place in Qom folk religion since pre-Columbian times (Karsten 1970 [1923]; Métraux 1946). Early anthropological accounts relate this long tradition, which continues to inform contemporary Qom thought, including explanations of such disparate phenomena as social change, individual health, political elections and substance use. Traditionally, three categories of supernatural specialists were reported (Miller 1975): *pio 'xonáq* (shamans, *chamánes*), *natannaxunáq* (curers, *curanderos*), *'enuxunaxuí* (sorcerers, *brujos*,) each differing in expertise, methods, moral orientation and power.

Shamans, both male (*pio 'xonáq*) and female (*pio 'xonaxá*) are able to heal by removing objects or spirits that afflict the body. The power of the *pio 'xonáq* derives from their relationship with a tutelary spirit, *ltuxuy'uxuu*, literally translated as “speaking companion”, a framing that highlights the power of words in the shamanic healing processes. The term *pio 'xonáq* derives from the Qom root *-pigaq*, “to suck”. During the performance of shamanic healing, the *pio 'xonáq* locates the spirit (*payák*) or object (*bicho*) and through incantations, songs, blowing and sucking, expels or extracts the problem, often in the physical form of small objects, such as splinters, rocks or teeth. The life of a *pio 'xonáq* is characterized by constant power struggles with other *pio 'xonáq*. In such contestations, emerging as loser in the battle for healing diminishes power while

successful practice increases power at the expense of the losing adversary. Though *pio 'xonáq* are still present in Lot 84, most people regard their power and influence to pale in comparison to *pio'xonaq* of traditional times, explaining this state partly because Lot 84 is removed from the bush (as described later in this chapter, the bush has always been considered an indigenous, and thus shamanic, stronghold), and otherwise because of molestation by, conversion to, and competition with evangelical churches.

Natannaxunáq/curanderos, curers, represent a long-standing adaptation of the Spanish folk healer, *curandero*, role, still prevalent in Paraguay. These curers were noted for their knowledge and use of herbs, their association with evangelical *culto* movement, and their suspicion of *pio 'xonáq*. They employ a portmanteau of traditional Qom, evangelical Christian and *criollo* folk practices and beliefs.

'Enuxunaxuí, sorcerers, are almost always female. Derived from the Qom word, *'en*, “to mock or injure”, *'enuxunuxui* cast deadly spells using contagious magic funneled using particular rituals. These sorcerers' works are greatly feared, and are only able to be counteracted by specialists. Even then, recovery is often impossible.

'Enuxunuxui work by obtaining an object that has had close contact with the person to be attacked then burning it in *quebracho* wood along with the bones of frogs, snakes or cats in order to curse, and even kill, the target person. When residents of Lot 84 spoke of witchcraft (*brujería*) it is assumed that this is the kind of magic at work.

The effectiveness of sympathetic magic rests on the fact that the Qom person is not co-terminous with his/her physical body, but extends across a landscape of those

things with which a person has had contact. Similarly, the physical body is not always inhabited only by one's self, but can be infiltrated and adulterated with harmful spirits and objects (Tola 2005). Extensions of the physical body, such as bodily fluids, hair, fingernail clippings, cigarette butts, expelled fruit pits, are all prime targets to serve as starting materials for the practice of sympathetic magic (Tola 1999).

In addition to the magical projectiles used by shamans and sorcerers, the invisible world is populated by various spirits, known as *payák*. Rafael Karsten, an early anthropologist of religion and one of the earliest to provide social scientific accounts of Chacoan peoples, found that disease was nearly always caused by evil spirits, which inhabited the body and must be expelled by shamans (Karsten 1970 [1923]; Karsten and Westermarck 1926). When dealing with evil *payák*, afflictions does not need to be actively perpetrated by another person upon the unlucky recipient, nor can one ensure safety by taking care of one's fluids or possessions. As Gaston Gordillo recounts among the western Qom certain places seem to exude disease and discord, as if the geography itself is noxious:

Men and women alike agree that countless *payák* (spirit devils) inhabited the peaks overlooking the cane fields. Invisible and like a silent breeze, they came down from those ridges and spread disease among the people. On the hills circling the plantation, they sometimes adopted the shape of short and hairy humanoids. According to Nicacio, a shaman in his eighties, disease also descended from the mountains as a hot and slow-moving fog, crawling down the slopes like a deadly breath: "There was a plague, very bad, hot. At night, the high mountain looked like a hot fire. Some people stunk. The plague came down from the hill, smoke of the devils. Many people died." In Nicacio's account, the devils' deadly force blended with the *ingenio's* geography, to the point that the mist often shrouding the jungle was inseparable from the smoke of the devils (Gordillo 2004, 124).

Especially among the older generation and younger immigrants from rural areas, beliefs and behaviors surrounding *brujería* persist strongly in Lot 84 despite the adherence of the majority of Lot 84 as Pentecostal Christian. Curers' potions and shamans' visits are frequently used by the Qom to re-harmonize bodies or relationships, which have lost balance, while *brujos* destabilize the health or interpersonal dealings of enemies. In traditional Qom fashion, witchcraft in Lot 84 can be performed on a body if other "prolongations" of the body are in possession of a *brujo*, for the Qom conceptualize the person as extensive beyond the physical body (Tola 2014).

While belief in supernatural affliction and healing persist in Lot 84, I found that traditional distinctions between practitioners no longer entirely hold. Competition, both among traditional practitioners and with biomedicine, has caused each category to blur into the realms of the others. This diversification of roles is evidenced by a particular exchange I had with a good friend regarding his serious girlfriend:

Cristobal: The way that it works is that if you go to see a *brujo*, you mustn't tell anybody about it or the treatment or spell won't work. But people do use them a lot here.

Chris, joking: Did you see a *brujo* to make your girlfriend fall in love with you?"

Cristobal: Actually, Isabella accused me of doing that. I was really hurt by this because I did nothing of the sort. I told her this and that I would prefer not to see her anymore. It was a very serious accusation. About a year passed, and at the moment when I least expected it, she showed up at my door and asked forgiveness. *Brujería* is dangerous and it often produces the opposite effect than originally intended. For example, in the case of trying to make someone fall in love, when the herb or spell wears off, the person feels tricked. He feels empty inside for having been tricked by someone close to him. Instead of being in love with the other person, he or she begins to hate for feeling betrayed. Anyway, knowing what herbs do what, and particularly the combinations, can be very powerful. I remember one time a family member was bitten by a snake. He was

about to die because of the venom. The *pio 'xonáq* made three cuts in his leg and applied a mixture of a plant. He said that within three days, he would be better. Sure enough, in three days he had recovered entirely. I know that I had heard about our ancestors using this type of cure and that it worked, but I guess I had my doubts about how it actually worked. It was amazing to see it in person.

In this case, it is clear that the *brujo*, traditionally an *'ennuxuuxai*, and the *pio 'xonáq* both have knowledge of plants/potions, formerly the province of curers, *curanderos*. It is also apparent that the *brujo* is not unambiguously evil, as Miller portrays the *'ennuxuuxai* to be, but is dangerous and potentially evil due to the unintended consequences that come with spiritual manipulation after spells and potions have been used, and then wear off.

This account additionally demonstrates that healing/affliction, contact, simulacra and consciousness coincide in Qom magic in complex ways. While ideas regarding contact and effigies are similar to those examined elsewhere by anthropologists, the Qom routinely present awareness as a protection against spells and an aid to healing. If one knows that a malicious spell is being cast, that spell loses its potency. Knowing the source of the sorcery de-potentiates it—for this reason *brujos* will often hide their faces when casting spells (Miller 1975) so their location and identity cannot be discovered by a seeing *pio 'xonáq*. However, Cristobal account suggests that the consciousness of the target is enough to nullify certain potions and spells. It is also worth noting that spells and potions gradually wear off, “like the smell of smoke from a fire fades with time.” Both of these distinctions—consciousness and ethereal influence—remain central in an investigation of individual and social disharmony in Lot 84.

To understand what bilingual Qom speakers may be thinking when they gloss the city as “contagious”, it is useful to consider the Qom word *nauoxa* roughly translated as *contagiosa*. Florencia Tola, in an examination of Qom spiritual beliefs, explains:

Nauoxa is the Toba term that synthesizes the consequences that the human person-body suffers if one does not respect the rules which govern the relationship with non-humans during moments of "corporal formation and transformation. Some Qom translate *nauoxa* (-uoxa root of the verb ‘to heart’) as “contagion” in an attempt to define the process of transmission of the formal characteristics of behaviors between human and nonhuman entities. A Toba man translated it as “imitation”, expressing the similarities between human and nonhuman entities after a moment of excessive proximity between them. Another young man, trying to transmit the amplitude of the *nauoxa* phenomenon, used the term “influence”. I think that the idea of influence gives more account of the implied process. According to his reflection, “influence” refers to the process carried out between two beings that “crossed paths”, which left a trace on their corporal-vital constitution. This trace is lived as an influence susceptible to transform the corporal regime, the behaviors, and the personality of the implied person (Tola 2014, 81).

Thus, for a Qom speaker to say that the city is “contagious” is to imply a kind of coercing, subtle but compulsive mimesis, or of a surreptitious influence that continues to affect behaviors after moments of proximity that fades with time. Examination of this word is the lynchpin that explains why the placement of Lot 84 relative to the city is uniformly viewed as unhealthy. It is the process by which Lot 84, through influence or imitation, a kind of contagion as they translate it, “takes to heart” the city in its “corporal regimes” of health and behavior. Irina’s sentiment relates the idea of contagion as it applies to the city’s works. Julia intimated such sentiment:

Before, we didn’t know of alcohol or drugs. But now they’ve caused us to lose half of the community. The young people are on a different planet entirely. Our community’s main worry is that of alcohol and also drugs. More than anything,

these. We now know (*conocemos*) alcohol--the taste of it; the smell of it. There are people that come in the night from other neighborhoods. They say they come to sell noodles or candies, but they also bring with them alcohol and drugs to sell. They have their carts full of sweets, but what is underneath? More vigilance and control is needed. We're losing the old culture. We are very close to the city here in Lot 84. The city is contagious. We used to be healthy--and clean! We used to live to be 100 years old or more. Now we are obese, we have tuberculosis, hypertension, diabetes, cancer, addictions. Now life here is slow suicide.

In her statement, Julia also links the loss of the old culture with unhealthiness—communal and personal pollution with unhealthy foods, foreign customs and corrosive substances. It is revealing that Irina chose to use the word *conocer* rather than *saber* regarding the knowledge of alcohol. For the familiarity with alcohol and drugs is an intimate one rather than a denotational knowledge as the verb *saber* would have suggested. It describes a knowledge, deriving from intimate contact, that cannot be unknown, much as the perfect state of Edenic naivety could not be reentered after forbidden knowledge was attained.

The idea of alcohol being contrary to good health not only applies to avoiding personal affliction (e.g. cirrhosis), but also extends to those who heal, as if the disease of alcohol could be passed to the sick person when the healer is curing the patient. Elmer Miller, in a conversation with a Qom healer during the 1970s, found this to be true.

(Excerpted from a longer account):

I always met him (his tutelary spirit) in the field; he must have come from the sky (*piguem*).[...] He gives me power. It is not my power but his. He has a loud, heavy voice and he always says, 'If you take care of the sick, I will take care of you.' His name is Sevestino. He approaches me speaking in Spanish but also speaks *Toba*. I always see him but the rest of the family only hears him. Only when there are sick ones, then I call him and he comes. He will not come unless I call him for

the purpose of healing someone. I never call him for exhibitionist or fraudulent purposes. I am not stupid. His only work is to heal. He advised me to quit drinking wine, calling it poison. If I drink he will get very angry. I do not even smoke. Nor do I work with medicine. He simply announces there is something inside the person that needs to be extracted. He always announces, 'Let's heal' (*vamos a sanar*), and in two or three days the person becomes well. Occasionally he looks at a sick person and says, 'This one will not get well.' He does not remain and the person dies. However, this rarely happens. He always speaks the truth. When I heal, I do it in the following manner: 'First I sing (*so'on*), then I blow down (*sequichijfi*) on my hand and place it on the sore spot; after that I suck and extract (*Aoqot*) the illness. However, I only suck where the intruding object (*bicho*) is located. Only these three things. When I sing the first song I listen where the *bicho* is going in the body of the sick person. On the second song, I extract the *bicho*. When I get it out, the sick are healed. I do not work alone; there is always my companion.' (*iroxoYoxoua*) (Miller 1975)

Miller considers the prohibition against drink to be derivative of Pentacostalism, rather than pre-existent in Qom culture. This is consistent with the fact that traditional *pio'xonáq* were fond of drinking *aloja* in the bush. What the account lacks, however, is the distinction between European alcohol and *aloja*, which is generally considered to be healthful rather than "poison", as the companion spirit describes wine.

The Qom are not unique in their conceptualization of alcohol use as a disease. In Western psychological and medical fields, a movement toward a disease-concept of substance abuse has long been gaining momentum, culminating in attempts to link addiction to particular genetic loci to identify individuals at risk. Rather than being a heritable or infectious disease, alcoholism in Lot 84 is viewed as a social sickness which is related on a regular basis to changes in subsistence and employment, family stability and economic marginalization. Considering individual alcohol use as subordinate to social or structural conditions that presage it is an approach consistent with

anthropological readings of addiction. Additionally, this particular analysis of the spiritual nature of the influence of cities is particular to the Qom, though other authors have noted that their informants regard proximity to colonizers' cities and access to global infrastructure to be antithetical to the persistence of traditional modes of being and thus social harmony.

One older man, Chico, well versed in Qom lore, claims that the real distinction is between the areas surrounding the city, and the *monte*, dozens of miles to the west.

Surely Lot 84 is integrated. The real difference isn't between Lot 84 and the city, but rather the area close to the city and the monte. When I go to the monte they pass smoke over me so that it takes away the bad vibe (*onda*) or essences I may have picked up in the city. Then I can relax. And we can go hunting.

In viewpoints such as this, a dichotomy is erected between the healthfulness, plenty, purity and magic of the old ways/*monte*, and the dirtiness, poverty, sickness and corruption of the city. Poverty, violence and sickness are more pronounced in Lot 84 more than they are in the bush. Lot 84, unlike Chico himself, do not have the luxury of periodically returning the *monte* to remove the traces of city life. In proving their points regarding coerced auto-adoption of unhealthy habits, many compare the current situation to the current state of smaller *barrios* in the *monte*, or a remembered life closer to the *monte*. Before examining the *monte*, let us turn to Formosa and Argentina's drinking cultures more generally, the accused source of social contagion afflicting Lot 84.

Left-Handed Gifts: Drink in Argentina

Although archaeological evidence is scant in the Chaco (see Chapter 3), it is likely that traditional Qom modes of alcoholic beverage brewing were obtained via contact with Andean societies and Amazonian societies, which have long-established traditions of brewing carbohydrate-rich foods into alcoholic beverages and drinking them in ceremonial or religious contexts. The beverage, *chicha*, can be made from manioc, barley, amaranth, quinoa and corn depending upon local tradition and the availability of starting materials. Over time, Chacoan foragers learned to utilize their staple carbohydrate sources—*algarroba* and honey—to craft their own brew and incorporate it into their yearly foraging routine. Indeed, smaller bands which ranged widely during the hungry season consolidated with other extended family groups during the abundant summer and fall seasons—the season of the *nimatáq*, drinking feasts (described later in this chapter).

In the 20th century, European beverages and ways of drinking have gradually influenced and mostly replaced traditional forms of drinking among the Qom. As such, present-day drinking in Lot 84 can only be properly treated with reference to the wider frame of drink in Argentina. As the Qom no longer brew and drink *aloja*, the traditional beer made from fermented *algarroba* pods and ceremonially consumed, they instead drink alcohol brewed, fermented, distilled and mixed in ways that have roots in Europe. Alcohol is drunk in bars, clubs, sporting events and in the home, or in the center of the *barrio* rather than in the *monte* or village. Alcohol is now available year round in

limitless quantities, where it was previously only available seasonally and in quantities permitted by *algarroba* surplus. These changes are substantial and weigh heavily upon current Qom drinking practices.

Recently, Argentina has garnered attention in circles with viticultural interests for the quality of its wine exports, with the 2010 vintage of *Achával-Ferrer Malbec Mendoza Finca Bella Vista* breaking the top 10 list (#10) of the wine connoisseur magazine *Wine Spectator* (<http://2013.top100.winespectator.com/list/>). Argentina is currently the fifth largest producer of wine in the world, and until the 1990s, was the largest producer of wine outside of Europe, though most of it was consumed domestically (Locals are fond of drawing the dichotomy between Argentine beef and Argentine wine: the former is so good that it was never exported, the other was so bad that it was never exported). Domestic consumption of wine, declared to be the national liquor of Argentina, continues to be strong as Argentines drank 25.16 liters of wine per capita (<http://www.wineinstitute.org/files/PerCapitaWineConsumptionCountries.pdf>) to be eighth worldwide in absolute wine consumption as of 2009 (it is 45th worldwide in per capita alcohol consumption).

Like its cuisine, the drinking habits of most Argentine people hearken to the country's ethnic Spanish and Italian roots. Viticulture was established early in Argentine colonial history by Christian missionaries, and morphed as Argentina blended early Spanish influences with later Italian influences. The great majority of production has been located along the leeward foothills of the Andes Mountains, from Jujuy province in

the north and south to Rio Negro. Centrally located in this swath, the Mendoza growing region is now famous for Argentine viticulture's signature varietal, the (originally French) Malbec grape that is used to make a full bodied red wine. As it was in Argentina's progenitor cultures, wine is a common accompaniment to meals, either lunch or dinner. It is especially valued as part of Argentine barbecue, *asado a la parrilla*, to complement variety of beef cuts (*bife de chorizo, costillas, lomo*), offal (*mollejas, riñones, chinchulines*), and sausages (*chorizo, morcilla*).

Despite its widespread popularity, wine is not the exclusive alcoholic beverage of choice in Argentina: beer and liquor can also be found, each specific to Argentina. Ubiquitously available *Quilmes*, a light American style lager, is the most popular beer, holding 75 percent of the market share. Though it is now a brand within the massive international beverage conglomerate, InBev, *Quilmes* was originally founded in the town of *Quilmes* in the province of Buenos Aires, and is named for the extirpated *Quilmes* indigenous group of Tucuman Province.

Once again revealing its deep ties to Italy, a strong *aperitif/digestif*, *Fernet*, is very popular in Argentina. *Fernets* (of which Fernet Branca and Fernet 1882 are most popular) are made from a base of clear grape brandy flavored with a combination of myrrh, aloe, rhubarb, saffron, cardamom, chamomile, colored dark brown to create a strong (40 percent, alcohol by volume) bitter opaque liquor which was used in Italy to assist digestion. In Argentina, where domestic consumption is 25 million liters, it is a

standard bar/club drink when mixed with cola, *fernet y coca*, and is sometimes sold premixed alongside wine and beer at outlets that sell alcoholic beverages.

Fernet y coca is a very popular choice in Argentina among those attending dance clubs (*boliches*). As is the case in much of the globalized urban landscape, contemporary youth culture in Buenos Aires has much to do with late-night partying, expansive dance clubs, and hook-up culture. Though all cities of any size in provincial Argentina have at least one *boliche*, they are based upon prototypes found in Buenos Aires. The following is excerpted from my field notes describing one of my experiences in a *boliche* in Buenos Aires:

Last night, Cindy and some of our friends went out to a dance club in Buenos Aires. We were able to catch a tango show beforehand, as the *boliche* really only starts to get hopping at about 11 pm. We were able to find the club easily because there was a long line forming outside of the entrance, which was guarded by bouncers. I was lucky in that I was with a group that was mostly women—otherwise I might not have been let in. After I paid my additional gender tax on the relatively reasonable entrance fee, we were inside. Dance electronica pounded so that it shook the viscera. Strobe lights splayed their rays, whirling around the large room inside the converted warehouse. Projectors displayed accompanying music videos on a large screen on one wall—the other had a second mezzanine floor that overlooked the main dance floor, which itself was ringed in bars. Antonio and I went to buy drinks for our group. We shuffled through the crowded floor filled with sweaty bodies, eventually to the bar. We yelled our order to the bartender—I took the chance of being gypped on a weak *fernet y coca* lite, while others decided to play it safe with *Quilmes* beer. While we waited I looked at the others leaning on the bar. It was mostly occupied with young men buying drinks, presumably for buddies, girlfriends, or potential dance partners, but there were also several couples embracing and kissing deeply (as there were along the walls and outside on the sides of the building). We ended up staying longer than anticipated—it is quite easy to lose track in the foggy, humid, thumping darkness. When we finally left as the party was winding down, the sun was rising and others leaving with us were going to breakfast.

This account highlights the salient aspects of *boliche* as space and experience: prolonged drinking, liminality achieved through disorientation and lack of connection to the outdoors and a feeling of acceptance toward sexual expression (dancing, kissing). However, as is often the case, the blending of youth culture and significant alcohol consumption is often considered to be a social problem by parents, media and the professional counseling community. An example of such public outrage occurred Oct 13, 2012 when a party of 500 adolescents in Cordoba, Argentina was discovered and dismantled by local police. The party, which was collectively arranged by teenagers via the social networking site Facebook, brought young drinking culture onto the national stage, especially because of the young age (as young as 14) of some of the partiers. For days, news outlets buzzed with the accounts of policemen, concerns of parents, the admonitions of psychologists and the promises of politicians. As I watched this programming on the television at Lot 84's gas station, I gazed out the window only to see a group of Qom teenagers stroll by, finish a box of wine, toss it to the ground, and continue on, highlighting the similarities and differences of their consumption patterns, explored in the previous chapter.

For our purpose here, this juxtaposition illustrates that Formosa (and by association, Lot 84) are quite connected to Buenos Aires as well as happenings and trends in other provinces. Formosa, in particular, and the Gran Chaco more widely, display surprisingly strong influence from Buenos Aires to the south—I found Formosan drinking culture to be nearly identical to that of Buenos Aires, except that wine was commonly diluted with ice or seltzer water, to create a cooling spritzer. The characteristic

alcoholic beverages of Paraguay (*caña*) and Brazil (rum and *cachaça*) do not approach the popularity of fernet, wine, beer, and to a lesser extent, whiskey, in Formosan drinking situations. Beers are shared over lunch, wine offered with *asado*, whiskey and *fernet* offered as *digestifs* following meals.

Formosa itself has several of nightclubs as described above, but with a flavor that is uniquely its own, as this analogous account of a *boliche* in Formosa demonstrates:

We got there at about one or 1:30 in the morning, and the club was nearly empty. Admittance cost 30 or 40 (6 or 7 USD) *pesos* total. We set ourselves up in prime real estate on the small banister that lines the club's main dancing floor. This club has two levels and a third story catwalk around the top with live girls in bikinis dancing. There are two bars: one to the right of the main dance floor and one to the back side of the raised section. Cindy endeavored to obtain a *Fernet* and Coca-Cola, but when she brought it back she said that she could barely taste the alcohol. She went back to the bartender on the lower level saying this to her she topped off the drink with more *Fernet* and asked if this was okay, almost anticipating that it wasn't. Cindy tasted it, but it was still quite dilute. She told this to the bartender and the bartender filled it even more to an appropriate amount. At this point we went back up to our perch and observed people mainly milling around on the dance floor. We watched the highly provocative Spanish and Portuguese videos. There were images of people dancing in bikinis on beaches, dancing scantily clad in clubs, and the guys and girls singing together. More people came in and they joined the others in milling about. They formed groups, shared large bottles of beer or oversized mixed-drinks (seemingly extending mate sharing protocols to alcohol consumption) and, around 2:30 began dancing, mostly singularly in Paraguayan shimmy fashion. The overall experience was much more reserved, though very similar, to night clubs in Buenos Aires.

Both the common link with Buenos Aires and the provincial flavor of Formosa are evident in *boliche* culture. Similarly, Formosa shares links with the rest of Argentina as far as drinking problems and youth party culture are concerned. One bike shop owner,

forthcoming with his examples and analysis, weighed in on changes in youth drinking in

Formosa:

I was born and raised in Formosa—I can tell you how drinking has changed over time. Children, in particular, consume more than they did before, whatever they can get their hands on: beer, tequila, *fernet*, wine. They hide beer in the thermoses for *tereré* so they can drink in public. They will get together at about seven in the evening and will start drinking to get ready to go out later. They will go to the *boliche* at midnight or one and stay until five in the morning when it closes. There was a problem with drinking too much when clubs were open until 7am so they had to scale back the hours. But the only effect that had was to have people drink more intensely during the hours the club was open! Or just began earlier. My friends and I used to get together before going out to get ready and become more presentable, but we didn't drink before going out. Alcohol wasn't a necessary feature of every party like it is now. If there isn't alcohol, there isn't a party. This is even true for young kids gatherings, even grade schoolers will say 'There's no alcohol at this party; it's lame. This is true for girls and boys—although it wasn't always this way; girls drink more now because their drinks are cheaper at the *boliche*. They will drink up to three times as much as guys! After the kids go to the club on Friday night and stay out until five in the morning they often just go to somebody's house and continue drinking until seven or so. Then they sleep until three. When they wake up it's two things: texting via cell phone and drinking *mate*. They already want to know what they're going to do for the next evening. Kids are actually developing liver problems and problems with nutrition because they drink all night, wake up after lunch and they don't eat lunch, and then they return immediately to drinking. They're able to buy alcohol in stores without a problem because if the store owner tries to dissuade them they simply reply 'it's my body.' Guys drink to get the girls to drink in order to have sex with them. It's always this way. Some parents think that their children don't drink. These people are naive. The children just say they are going to a friend's house. Other parents just don't care and don't have the constitution to discipline children.

Although alcohol and other substances are considered by *Formoseños* to constitute a burgeoning problem, they have only a temporal scale by which to measure their dysfunction; they set up a Golden Age problem wherein their culture is experiencing decadence from a previous high point. By contrast, the Qom speak primarily of a

geographic scale that poses the *monte* as the opposite and antidote to the problems of the city.

In the *monte*, the ancient ones were healthy...

The present *monte* (Chacoan bush country) and a remembered historical *monte* are common used points of comparison for Qom people making sense of the changes which have occurred over the last century. To the Qom, the *monte* has become a powerful symbolic component of several salient dichotomies. To wit, the *monte* is regarded as providing a healthier life than the city for the people who can live there. It is an indigenous space, in which the Qom enjoy a freedom that they do not have near the city, where the police checkpoint is constantly surveilling them. Without sources of mainstream Argentine media, the children tend to learn more of the old ways than children who grow up in Lot 84.

With particular regard to alcohol, it is not that alcohol is present in the city and not in the *monte*, but rather that the alcohol produced in each place has different properties which derive from its place of origin. Simply stated, alcohol from the city is unhealthy to Qom people because the city is unhealthy, whereas alcohol from the *monte* IS healthy because the *monte* is a source of solace, shelter, freedom and healthful subsistence for the Qom people.

Other anthropologists studying the Qom have found similar dichotomies to be operative, even in rural villages. For instance, Gaston Gordillo's informant relates that that in the *monte*, "you can do anything: chew coca, drink *aloja*, sing.... You can look for

a *yuchán* tree to make *aloja*.” (Gordillo 2004, 97) Gordillo’s informants viewed the bush in contrast to Alfred Leake’s Anglican *Misión Toba* present in their community: the *monte* was where their rules, rather than the missionaries’ rules, applied. It was where they were independent; they could obtain their own food rather than work for wages to pay for food, where the *pio ’xonáq* could heal, where they could have sex freely and where they could drink. In rural areas, the bush is still a place of sexual encounter for uncommitted adolescents and young adults, perhaps owing to this history. However, importantly for our discussion, a person was free to drink *aloja* in the *monte*.

While large scale alcohol production is typically the province of agricultural societies due the fermentability of grain surplus, the Qom produced an alcoholic beverage which was brewed from the carbohydrate-*algarroba* pods and honies which served as two of their staple food sources. There are varying reports regarding its traditional name. I was told *ita ’iguaté* and *lecte ’guaná*, (Trincherro, et. al. 1992, 78) reports *latagá* (alternatively spelled *lataxa*), and Buckwalter and Litwiller de Buckwalter recorded *ayi nqa ’apaxa* (2001, 210). Whatever its name(s), during the hot season (around late November or December) the *algarroba* harvest would occur. As the harvest peaked, a tree was hollowed out in preparation for fermentation. To the hollow trunk would be added mashed *algarroba* pods, water and honey. The *yuchán* tree (*Ceiba insignis* or *Ceiba speciosa*) is the heavily preferred species for this practice, (its common name is *palo borracho*, the drunk tree), due to its hourglass-shaped trunk it creates a natural bowl of high volume.

Accounts of the old *aloja* ceremony vary based on report and remembrance. All agree that *aloja* was brewed once a year in a *yuchán* tree, and that it was drunk until finished in a ritual feast, which could extend for days. If a participant became argumentative, belligerent, or otherwise violated appropriate behavioral norms for the occasion, he or she (people of both genders drank *aloja*) was sent home. One contemporary Qom blogger, “tobaschacomarta” relates her familial remembrance of the *aloja* ceremony:

Naimatac (the ceremony of brewing and drinking *aloja*) is the name of the largest festival of the year signaling thanksgiving for the gifts offered by nature. Each individual is to bring a little honey and *algarroba* fruit to contribute to filling the trunk of the *Palo borracho* (*yuchán*) [...] where together is placed flour of *algarroba* pods and bee honey, thus beginning the fermentation of *lataxa na amap* (*aloja*). The convocation begins with the sound of the drums of the fermentation experts who rhythmically sing the traditional songs that, just as the cicadas do, announce the maturity of the algarroba amidst the bedlam of the different families arriving over the course of several days to celebrate the season of fertility and abundance.

[Hearing the drums] the errant families stop at the indicated place for this summer meeting and when the *apishi lo'o* (responsible with the preparation of the *aloja*) announces that everything is ready, then commences the festival of happiness.

The drink is available to all, and after a few sips, the tone of the conversation increasingly rises, and greetings become conversations, testimonies, anecdotes, myths, exploits, traditional dance, and contraction of new marriages. The adults and elders go to the other side of the fires to talk about politics, leadership, and disputes with other band leaders along with other matters of general interest.

In these traditional festivities also have the provision to name children of both sexes who until this moment were nameless. The naming of names is approved by a counsel of ten elders, experts in psychology, who after examining the children and with consent of the parents, choose the name that they will keep. Once the ceremony ends, the children give gifts to the councilmembers.

The festival continues, and with happiness overflowing, the jokes of the *nayicpi* (friends, qualified jokesters) commence, that address their friends with insults and a provocatively mocking tone to intended to publically offend [...]” (Balbi 2009)

By 2010, people in Lot 84 remembered *aloja* in opposition to other forms of alcohol as a symbol of the freedom and healthfulness of lost life in the *monte*.

Chris: Did the ancient ones have a way to drink alcohol that wasn't problematic?

Rolando: We used to have a healthy drink made from fermented *algarroba* made in November or December of each year. All of the steps in the process of making this fermented drink, a kind of *chicha*, were ritualized. When it reached a certain point, it would ceremonially drink it. They would get very drunk but just one time a year. It's called *chicha*. But it wasn't alcoholic in the sense that it was healthy. And it was drunk by the whole community—not just individually. Now they occasionally have alcoholic drinks, maybe in leaders' meetings, but they don't do this in Lot 84. They've lost this practice of brewing our own *aloja* here at least since 1970. And even then they were losing already.

In this quote, Rolando alludes to the differences between the old drinking ritual and new drinking rituals. New "rituals" tend to be practiced individually or in small groups, while the old ceremony was experienced by everyone in the community at the same time. During the old ceremony, overt violence was not tolerated, whereas violence is very commonly associated with contemporary drinking in Lot 84. The old ways were much more ritualized, to the point that the regularities and meanings of contemporary drinking are not regarded by many Qom as a ritual at all, but rather impulsive indulgence and vice. The old ceremony also could not be "addictive" because it happened only once a year. Another Qom friend told me of addiction: "I had a friend who was addicted to alcohol. It wasn't a big addiction, but it still was one. Every Friday he had a bottle of beer. One bottle. But I knew it was an addiction because if he could not have that one bottle of beer, he would become angry." However, to get very drunk once a year could not be considered "addictive"—and still is not, for Christmas and New Years each year

one can see people who normally do not drink, get drunk to celebrate contemporary summer feasts.

Just as the city is considered to be actively assertive upon the bodies and minds of the people living near it, so the *monte* is accorded ongoing influence over its inhabitants. I learned of several people, each with poor records going to therapy at outlets in the city, who were sent to live with relatives in the *monte*, where they all eventually recovered. I asked if this was simply because alcohol was less available when living in more rural areas. In general, people considered the impulse to drink to be less strong in the *monte*. One of my informants said “Sure they could still take alcohol there. But it’s so tranquil out there. You wake up and you are not anxious like here in Lot 84. The addict gradually loses the urge to get intoxicated.” Note the implication here that the influence of the city gradually wears off the way a spell does, “like smoke from a fire,” as mentioned previously.

In addition to its ability to cure individual afflictions, the *monte* is considered to buffer entire communities from the ills of alcohol. In one rural community, alcohol began to become a problem, so local *caciques* (chiefs) attempted to apply a plan prohibiting the sale of alcohol to indigenous people within the village area. The laws were implemented and upheld, despite the fact that there was probably much money to be made by selling alcohol in that locale. People in Lot 84, upon hearing of this, claimed that the *cacique*’s wishes were upheld because of *Vaca Perdida*’s location in the *monte*—they argued,

probably rightly, that such prohibitions would never work in Lot 84 due to the ease by which alcohol could be obtained just minutes away in Formosa.

Summary and Conclusion

As mentioned in the previous chapter, most of those who drink in Lot 84 consider their drinking to be a negative behavior, but continue for various reasons. Not only this, but many drink in the streets—a behavior which is regarded as symptomatic of the larger communal illness expounded upon here. This is a crisis, brought about by the incursions of *criollos*, that has distanced generations from one another just as economic dislocations and structural violence have altered the skills necessary for basic subsistence. As many of the old traditions related to subsistence, the new economic model does not necessitate the enculturation of youth in its rubrics and praxis. Under this realm of generational apartheid, the youth rebel and display, while the adults explain the current conditions using the models passed down from elders and vetted in the last century of upheaval. Thus, the Qom (elders especially) consider the contagiousness of the city to be the source of negative conditions, both individual and social.

CHAPTER 5

Chapter 5: The Indian on the Couch: Therapeutic Domination

We want them not to think anything more about us. The government says that it is looking to overcome alcoholism and drug addiction that scourges the Toba community but their program is foreign to Qom customs. [...] And none of what they promise will solve problems of alcohol or drugs. The solution would be to give us work, training, and more land. –Timoteo Francia (Francia and Tola 2011, 36)

Introduction

While conducting fieldwork, I was warned many times by *criollo* (Argentines of European descent) friends that I was reckless for talking with drunks in Lot 84, and that I would be prudent to avoid being present in the *barrio* after dark, or even unaccompanied by police. While these fearful enjoinders were based in ignorance and rumor, it is true that Lot 84 suffers from high levels (but not higher than other poor, marginalized Argentine communities) of social problems resulting from excessive, often public alcohol consumption. In predictable fashion, popular opinion in the 2000s led to the implementation of public psychological services programs to stem the spread of binge drinking and to rehabilitate alcoholics. In these matters, the Qom of Lot 84 conform to a familiar pattern that has been documented on every inhabited continent (Durrant and Thakker 2003; Heath 1983). In contrast to much of Latin America, where the 12-step mode of Alcoholics Anonymous is the dominant therapy (Mitchell 2004; Brandes 2002), interventions among the Qom are decidedly psychoanalytic in nature owing to the profound popularity and importance of psychoanalysis in Argentina. Only in Argentina

are “savages” psychoanalyzed by the colonizing state. Psychiatric and psychoanalytic process have been valuable tools of civilization and homogenization since their introduction from Europe in the 1880s (Rodríguez 2006), and continue to be important, yet understudied, in understanding the government’s stance regarding alcohol use among native populations. In effect, psychoanalysis will either civilize the drunken Indian, or justify his continued social exclusion.

According to the Qom and, incidentally some anthropologists (e.g. Sagers and Gray 1998), alcoholism’s grounding in structurally violent conditions—socio-geographic marginality, racism, unemployment, under-education, and theft of traditional lands—remain unaddressed and are causal in alcoholism’s continued occurrence. Moreover, psychoanalytic approaches’ egocentric focus find little commonality with traditional conceptions of a “dispersed self” (Tola 2014) or prevailing Pentecostal discourse on self-improvement through a mixture of prudence and *culto* attendance. Thus, psychoanalytic approaches have been poorly received and have proven ineffective in mitigating alcohol related issues. Self-admission to public psychoanalytic programs is uncommon due to inconvenience and a track record of poor effectiveness. Most Qom alcohol users undergoing therapy are doing so because of familial pressure and/or police referrals yet even under these circumstances of social or legal pressure, “completion” of the standard two-year program is very rare.

Despite these failures, discussions or suggestions to explore different therapeutic approaches are not initiated among public health officials. I address this curious situation

by examining the logic implied by policies that treat indigenous alcoholics only with psychoanalysis while also addressing the social significance of users' refusal or cessation of such treatments. In doing so, I demonstrate that psychoanalysis, the favored psychological approach to mental illness in Argentina, is a technology of power utilized in the continued domination and exclusion of indigenous groups such as the Qom. Ethnographic data collected during fifteen months of fieldwork in northern Argentina show that psychoanalytic services, rather than providing an accessible (if not necessarily effective) culturally appropriate public health strategy, are more effective at homogenization (turning "savages" into Argentines) and domination (marginalizing and dispiriting) than they are at achieving mental health outcomes. Most commonly, its fruitlessness reinforces local stereotypes which depict indigenous populations as "recalcitrant" and "don't want to be helped" while reflecting positively on a government that "gives them everything and they give nothing back." As I detail below, the power-politics of treatment are evident as grassroots interventions are subsumed and effaced; therapy locations are relocated to urban (i.e. non-indigenous) hospital settings under the direction of university-trained psychoanalysts; Spanish remains the exclusive language used in therapy despite indigenous requests for Qom-speaking therapists, and alternative methods from indigenous or religious-based interventions are eschewed. In light of these processes, I conclude with a discussion of the importance of power in therapy, specifically its implications for culturally appropriate therapies.

Psychoanalysis, Power and Governmentality

While some anthropologists have examined interdisciplinary similarities and even common roots of anthropology and psychoanalysis (Bonilla 1969; Hollan 2000; Throop 2012; Csordas 2012, Paul 1989), other thinkers (Foucault 1978; Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1972]) recognized the potential for psychoanalysis and other psychological methods of discipline to be utilized in a way that effectively serves the state through therapy's power over individual actors. They consider psychoanalysis to be compatible with fascist governments' domination of their subjects. Social scientists (O'Malley and Mugford 1991; Bourgois 2000, Smart 1984) have engaged with Foucaudian notions of discipline, governmentality and bio-power when considering the agendas of governmental interventions that seek a sober/clean, productive populace. As Bourgois and Schoenburg mention (2009, 19) "The topic of substance abuse is ideal terrain for a critical application of biopower, governmentality, and deconstruction of the knowledge/power nexus." This theoretical orientation finds practical application in the case of Argentina where psychiatric notions of "social hygiene" have permeated the civilization process, including characterizations of heavy alcohol use (Rodriguez 2006, 79-84).

Regarding the mechanisms of disciplinary power, Foucault portrays them as ubiquitous in the conscious and unconscious operation of societies' civil institutions. As an example (Foucault 1978, 51-75) he cites psychoanalysis as a secular analog of Christian confession, itself having a history of instilling discipline. This juxtaposition is

of particular interest in the Argentine case examined here, where state-sponsored literature on substance abuse prevention displays overt Christian imagery and discourse that, though ostensibly medico-secular, is clearly borrowed from Argentina's Catholic tradition. Police, church, and psychoanalysis cross-pollinate one another to create effective apparatuses for indigenous domination—even if civilizing them proves evasive. Deleuze and Guattari note synergistic oppression that comes with combining police action and psychoanalytic treatment: “As to those who refuse to be Oedipalized in one form or another, at one end or the other in the treatment, the psychoanalyst is there to call the asylum or the police for help. The police on our side!—never did psychoanalysis better display its taste for supporting the movement of social repression, and for participating in it with enthusiasm.” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1972], 89). Such is the case in Argentina, where I observed police arrest indigenous drunks and drug users and compel them to seek psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis enjoys profound popularity in Argentina and has been central in the search for both individual and national identity from the mid-20th century until the present (Hollander 1990; Bass 2006). Argentina boasts a greater number of psychoanalysts than the United States despite boasting a population only roughly a quarter as large (Plotkin 2001). Thus, psychoanalysis is not *specifically* directed at indigenous groups, but is widely available and valued by the general public in a way that does not equate therapy with individual pathology, but rather a process of self-knowing and maturity (Bass 2006). In this context, Argentine political and psychological authorities regard the accessibility of psychoanalysis to the Qom as a step toward greater

equality and an end to racial exclusion, but the context of intervention implementation including the language in which therapy is conducted, location of clinics, hijacking of prior Qom—conceived and—implemented projects, and refusal to cooperate with indigenous Pentecostal churches, cause the Qom to question this narrative and reconsider therapeutic self-determination as a mode of continued resistance against an authority that does not consider their best interests. Such a consideration is particularly important in imagining what a culturally appropriate intervention, in their case, might be.

Although discipline is one desired psychoanalytic effect, homogenization is even more germane to the Qom case. Superficially, most Argentine patients undergoing analysis feel that it is personally tailored and allows them to pursue various avenues to self-knowledge or actualization. Despite many paths, the end results of psychoanalysis are similar, just as in confession the goal is the same despite individualized spiritual direction by confessors. In indigenous contexts, the homogenizing tendencies of psychoanalysis become clear when therapy is incompatible with certain sensibilities (e.g. age grade dynamics, lack of respect for degrees) and would require perceptual realignment on the part of the indigenous patient for therapy to be effective.

Historically, diversity has been an enemy target of nation-builders. In Argentina, dilution of any remnant of native populations through immigration (Helig 1990), or forcible civilizing through medicine and psychological intervention (Rodriguez 2006) have been central to Argentina's endeavors to attain its nationalistic goals. Argentina has been particularly reluctant to acknowledge and eager to eradicate indigenous diversity

within its borders. Such an impulse dates at least to the 1880s ethnic cleansing called *Conquista del Desierto* (Conquest of the Desert), which bluntly refuses to acknowledge even the existence of the people occupying the “desert” (Brownstein and Miller 1999: 9,12-13). Forceful discipline and homogenization has continued through proselytization, massacres, resettlements, sedentarization, surveillance, police murders and even the contemporary difficulty of obtaining statistics on indigenous populations. During these processes, psychoanalysis as a chosen therapy has itself become an important identity marker of the Argentine citizenry, thus reinforcing and clarifying its role in contemporary nationalism. As such, psychoanalysis is another tool employed by Argentina to construct herself in a manner which either effaces indigenous populations and ideas by subsuming them or justifies their exclusion as based on natural inferiority.

The Qom have a long continuous history of resisting attempts by Argentina's political-economic apparatuses to destroy or exploit them. Following initial contact in the 1530's, the Qom marshaled one of the longest and most successful anti-colonial resistances in the New World, only being settled part-time onto agricultural *colonias* in the early 20th century. As one Qom man told me when asked about the benevolence of the government's intentions, “This is the same government that poisoned the (Pilcomayo) river upstream of our camps. They gave us bread, but we fed it to the dogs as a test—and they died. This is the same government that killed us at Napalpí and sat watching in the 1990s when no one had work. Why should we believe now that they have our best interest in mind?” When considering the widespread presence of such colonial memory and resentment-filled rhetoric, Qom alcohol users reluctance to comply with top-down

psychoanalytic approaches is an unsurprising continuation of Qom suspicion and resistance. In remarkable corroboration of social thinkers concerned with the reproduction of power hierarchies (i.e. Bourdieu), they consider current psychological policy to reinforce status quo power dynamics, including social and economic marginality, political dependency and negative stereotypes of indigenous people as unproductive violent drunkards.

Psychotherapy in Argentina

When I arrived to Buenos Aires, I encountered my first psychoanalyst with haste: the airport taxi driver formerly practiced psychoanalysis prior to the 2001 economic crisis. In the meandering conversation which ensued, he linked a lack of self-introspection to such disparate topics as global politics, climate change, and my own broad interest—cultural change among Argentina's indigenous population. He claimed in no uncertain terms that if psychotherapy were more widely employed, especially among global policymakers, who increased self-reflexivity would render macroscopic challenges easier to resolve. When he dropped me off at Retiro, Buenos Aires' expansive bustling bus station, I suspected that this primer in the centrality of psychoanalysis would prove crucial to my research. A profusion of popular psychology magazines wallpapered the newsstands of the bus station. Indeed, upon inspection, even periodicals not ostensibly devoted to psychoanalysis contained unmistakable markers of psychoanalytic thought. As I was beginning to learn, Buenos Aires is the psychoanalysis capital of the world. Its reign is reflected both in global reputation and in statistics that tell of a world-leading prevalence of psychoanalysts with 145 per 100,000 inhabitants nationally (Alonso 1996).

The popular consciousness of Buenos Aires and of wider Argentina is catalogued and molded in the therapy room.

While in Buenos Aires, I frequently heard that “In everything Argentina looks toward Europe ... except for tango,” said tango composer Astor Piazzola. While the veracity of this statement regarding tango is questionable, it is otherwise quite true for many things, including psychoanalysis. Like many Argentine entities and people, psychoanalysis in Argentina traces its roots to the European continent. It diffused with its practitioners across the Atlantic Ocean beginning in the late 19th century and was established in intellectual and academic circles by the 1920s (Plotkin 1997). Despite its deep past, Argentine psychotherapy did not begin immediately to permeate Argentine daily life. Even with the formation of the APA (Argentine Psychotherapeutic Association) in 1942, interest in psychoanalysis and demand for psychotherapists at that time were not higher in Argentina than in other Latin American countries. Not until the 1950s, against the backdrop of increasing disillusionment and distress resulting from Argentina’s failure to attain its national expectations, did psychotherapy began to expand its visibility and importance.

In the ensuing decades, psychotherapy consolidated its power and expanded in reach and relevance. Expert psychoanalysts contributed significantly toward these ends by reaching the public through high visibility works and opening departments and degree granting programs at Universities of Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Mendoza and Rosario. Extending these gains, “psychology culture” emerged and flourished in the 1960s (Balan

1991; Hollander 1990). During this time, psychoanalysis was made accessible to many more Argentines with its introduction in public general hospitals. In addition to its wider availability, psychotherapy demonstrated its considerable adaptability and fluidity by managing to remain palatable and practicable under the military fascism that ruled Argentina until 1983. The political, social, or economic factors that may have contributed to Argentina's especially enthusiastic adoption of psychotherapy during this time though its temporal coincidence with rising fascist tendencies in Argentina are perhaps deserving of greater study. However, it is evident that under oppressive political circumstances, psychotherapy was consumed and repurposed by differing political regimes, both for resistance and for refortification (Plotkin 2001). Even after democracy was effectively reinstated, psychotherapeutic influence continued to grow, buttressed by the relative affluence of the 1990s that provided spare capital for citizens to spend on psychotherapy and during the post-crisis years (2001-present) with personal and national narratives to discuss with one's therapist.

While the influence of psychotherapy on Argentina is obvious to the outsider, perhaps the most telling fact is the dearth of Argentine auto-examination on the topic. Though this demonstrates the extent to which psychoanalysis is embedded in Argentine culture as a constitutive feature of everyday life, other scholars have examined Argentine psychoanalysis from historical, ethnographic and cultural perspectives which link it to phenomena such as building national consciousness (Rodriguez 2006; Plotkin 2001), a sense of exile from the European continent (Bass 2006) and as a replacement for religion during secularization processes (Geertz in Plotkin 2001, 6; Foucault 1978). This paper

examines Argentine psychoanalysis from a less examined perspective—through the psychotherapeutic experiences of a community of sedentarized ex-foragers being treated for substance abuse.

Though it was not originally my central research question during my fieldwork, psychotherapy as a means of treating substance abuse emerged as a central theme of experience. I was able to document a trend toward greater social problems associated with substance abuse converging with greater availability and utilization of state-sponsored health care services to address lines of inquiry regarding: 1) the role of psychoanalysis in nation building, in this case through continued subjugation and imposed discipline; 2) how providing psychoanalysis, a clearly culturally inappropriate therapy, serves to reproduce indigenous domination; 3) the types of valorized dialogue created by psychoanalysis during indigenous treatment and its opposition to other forms of dialog, present and absent, which would be valued by indigenous interlocutors; 4) the resistance/capitulation dichotomy felt by indigenous people when deciding to utilize services provided by top-down intervention; 5) the importance of power asymmetries in conceiving and implementing culturally appropriate sobriety interventions.

Grassroots Interventions: Churches and Peer-Counseling

Rather than seeking the communal consensus necessary to implement a singular grassroots program in Lot 84, members of evangelical churches or schools have taken the matter of intoxication, especially among youth and adolescents, into their own hands by attempting, on a small scale, to effect desired change in the community. As in other

regards, the Qom have largely endeavored to solve their own problems due to the absence, impotence or distrust of Argentina's various departments. Given the lack of consensus and great heterogeneity in Lot 84, however, most grassroots efforts have been low-cost, discontinuous, low-manpower operations by informal groups, churches or even lone individuals.

The Pentecostal churches of Lot 84, as they are in nearly every facet of community life (Miller 1980, 1999), have been important though not cooperative in their efforts. Lot 84 is serviced by at least eight Pentecostal churches which compete with one-another for parishioners and influence. While all of these churches and their congregations regard alcohol consumption as morally problematic in excess, they vary both in their views of occasional lighter drinking and in their level of service-oriented involvement. Illustrating the seriousness of the stance taken by some churches, one congregation member told me when asked about the role of religion in restoring the health of the community that, "fighting against alcohol is fighting against the devil." Though not the norm, powerful members of the churches may attempt to exorcise the devils of addiction through prayer and laying on of hands. In alignment with traditional beliefs regarding immature selves being open to inhabitation by spirits (Tola 2014), people had only ever seen this performed on children. When I inquired about this trend, I was told that, "Adults have the freedom of will to leave an addiction or remain with it. They are full people. The kids don't know what they are doing—sometimes an addiction will consume them." True to this explanation, I never witnessed or heard of an attempted intervention on a drinker over the age of twenty.

In another example of devout evangelical Christian individuals implementing mini-interventions without institutional affiliation, is that of Alonzo's children ministry. Alonzo, a 50-year old long-time resident of Lot 84, volunteers on an *ad hoc* basis to help whoever needs assistance or whichever entities are implementing projects. He described his approaches to me:

I work with kids with addictions who have taken to the streets. I've been working like this for six years now. These kids aren't originally from the streets—there is a time when they decide to leave home. There is a lot of worry among parents but none do anything. I want to do something to help the problem. I work through the (Catholic) chapel—I am evangelical—and with the ministry of the community. I try to help many people, but I can't do it myself. It is too much to confront without the help of the parents. I can't take anybody to be held by the police without parental consent. I don't know how they get drugs and alcohol, but they do. Anyway, the standard intervention with a street child is this: First I have to get the police. The person is taken to the police station right in front of Lot 84. The police and I talk to the parents—they must sign and then they can take the kid. Once the kids are home, they escape anyway though. There are a couple of people who work with me, but between five people we can't do much. When we do counsel a child it is a three-level approach. First we talk with the child, make friends with him and take two weeks to develop confidence and rapport. Secondly, we talk to the child about his right to health, right to education and right to love and care of parents. Lastly, and this might take a while we help the child come to grips with his adulthood. We help in choosing a profession after high school. We work with the child to examine if addiction was a problem—was it the mother or stepmother or father or stepfather who used a lot of alcohol, and perhaps therefore didn't have enough money to buy clothes which caused the child to end up on the street in the first place?

Alonzo's description sums up what I viewed of his work during my fieldwork: on one hand, he is profoundly appreciated by most people in the community, is the subject of eternal thanksgiving for children he helps and is able to perform a fulfilling function despite his own unemployment. On the other hand, the problem has worsened over the

time he has been volunteering, making a Sisyphean task of his daily work to help and protect the community's youth.

Regardless of religious leaning or affiliation, teachers in Lot 84's schools view daily youth and young adult substance use. They witness poor class attendance, regrettable post-graduation outcomes, young/unwanted pregnancies, drop-outs, parental substance abuse and resultant neglect and corporal violence. One teacher spoke for many when he commented to me, "I am sad to see the next generation suffer this way when they are so young." In response to a worsening tide, in 2008 teachers were instrumental in a project aimed at stemming alcohol and drug use among youth, adolescent and young adults. Mario, one of the teachers who himself had left behind a bacchanalian adolescence, described his experience in helping to set up a novel peer-counseling program (i.e. therapy sessions and ongoing monitoring were accomplished by peers who had previously had alcohol/drug problems but had since ceased use) under the umbrella of a loose NGO, *Cultura Mas Saludable* (Healthier Culture). The project was called *Casa Feliz* (Happy House), the primary grassroots non-religious intervention attempted in Lot 84 to date:

In 2008 there was actually a project to dry up the kids. We created an NGO and were always trying to help kids get away from vices. In this project they gave shirts, clothes, balls, and other things to the kids to help them first. The NGO was called *Cultura Mas Saludable*— it tried to keep kids away from drugs, alcohol and prostitution. The kids were heavily involved in this project because they found it to be feasible and viable. Their first project was called *Casa Feliz*. It was a project where drug and alcohol addicts were going to be integrated and they would be able to get psychological help, and the key to this was peer help, peers who are former addicts and knew what they were going through. It was very successful, but they didn't have the resources to continue or expand, so they applied for

government funds. Apparently the government thought it was a very good idea and they took control of the project but their version lacked the key element — peer counseling. It only provided psychoanalyst doctors and the hospital setting. The people who are in charge of this were given a governmental salary and the NGO was left with nothing. Our program was innovative, but in the time that this happened since the NGO was left with nothing the kids left the project. They used to have eighty kids working or volunteering what have you. They don't listen to what the community wants or needs nor do they listen to their plans. Counseling. *La Casita* (The Little House) in the city is what has become of *Casa Feliz*.

Peer counseling—a novel idea in Argentina given the ubiquitous nature of psychoanalytic approaches— is an innovative solution to a vexing problem. It re-imagined the counselor-patient relationship as an egalitarian endeavor conducted in the language of their choosing in their common place of residence, an indigenous space. Counsel was based on commonality of experience, not university training (other authors e.g. Prussing 2007 have noted that indigenous patients prefer common experience to professional training). Due to age similarities between mentor and mentee, neither was it a punitive experience conducted across a power gradient. Many viewed the usurpation of La Casa Feliz as a direct theft, not simply just of funds or outcomes, but of a nascent sort of indigenous knowledge on how to help community members with alcohol problems. That the very facet which was most clearly indigenous—peer counseling—was omitted from the version of the clinic offered back to the Qom after the government phagocytized and transmuted it--indicating indigenous knowledge's low social capital. Indeed, by the time I was conducting fieldwork in 2009-2012, there was no indication of La Casa Feliz or any formal peer counseling in Lot 84.

The Indian on the Couch: Top-Down Approaches to Alcohol

The search for *La Casita*, the scion of *La Casa Feliz*, took me to downtown Formosa's general hospital. After circumnavigating the hospital twice and failing to find *La Casita's* proper entrance, I enlisted a hospital employee to escort me to the door, an unmarked add-on to the large hospital complex, distinguishable from the rest of the building only by the bars on its windows. I entered a small lobby in which sparse decor, unadorned walls and poor lighting did little to improve my initial impression. I explained my project to the secretary who told me that the "doctor", director of therapy at *La Casita*, happened to be available and would be able to talk with me immediately. The doctor was an effusive man who crooned with enthusiasm and drama. "Tell me about yourself!" He leaned over his desk. "From the United States?! You must be learning so much. Quite an experience to work in Lot 84." The good doctor, trained in Buenos Aires, was already analyzing me.

Therapeutic experiences at *La Casita* could not have been farther removed from peer counseling in Lot 84. It is located in the largest urban center in the province; it is relatively unfamiliar to the Qom, difficult to access from Lot 84, and staffed with Buenos Aires-trained psychoanalysts. The contrast between putative therapists could also not have been greater. The emotional, performative, inquisitive head psychoanalyst had no Qom analog; Qom men of his age are almost universally much more reserved. While not the only psychoanalyst on staff, Qom informants agreed that his personality could not be more at odds with their sentiments regarding what a therapist should be. A young

adolescent who discontinued therapy based on the psychoanalyst's personality joked, "Doesn't he play guitar in the theatre in town? I didn't know I was going to get psychoanalyzed by a celebrity!"

When I asked the doctor if he thought that psychoanalysis, relative to other therapeutic techniques, is the best choice to assist Qom individuals, I was surprised by his reaction. He became uncomfortable, as if the question I posed was a trick one. He proceeded to emphasize the equal racial footing of the indigenous communities relative to *criollo* ones and to defend psychoanalytic interventions as a reaffirmation of Qom human rights and an indication that long-standing prejudices were improving:

You know that the people from Lot 84 used to be very separate and there were many hurdles for them. Some people still think that the indigenous people lack intelligence or other mental processes, but this is not correct. But, now they have their own laws and their own legal representation up to national congress. They didn't have these previously. Now they are treated as human beings—as they should be, for they are very special persons indeed! However, because of their culture and its interaction with the larger culture, they have many obstacles and hurdles. Making sure they have equal access to psychological services is part of this process of development—of equal respect.

The doctor's interpretation of my question indicates that he considers the availability of psychoanalysis for the Qom to be a marker of equal mental capabilities for introspection and personal growth. That is to say, to provide the Qom with psychoanalytic services is to humanize them. In this light, it is clear that Argentine beliefs regarding belonging and citizenship are bound to the practice of psychotherapy.

As others (Plotkin 1997) have perceived, to be Argentine is to be able to undergo

psychoanalysis. For the entire history of the Argentine nation state, to be Argentine was also to be Catholic. Until now, despite the practice of Catholicism has declined to only twenty percent of the population, 92 percent of Argentina's population self-identify as Catholic, including many psychoanalysts. The rise of psychoanalytic practice has proceeded inversely to the decline of Catholic practice, a correlation that aligns with the idea of confession as a post-religious equivalent of confession's public discipline (Foucault 1978). In Argentina, technologies of discipline have been borrowed among Catholicism, fascism and psychotherapy resulting in a syncretic secular psychology that continues to display tokens of Catholic disciplinary processes, which in turn serve state purposes.

Police outreach by the Argentine state utilizes these techniques to attempt to incorporate the Qom. Rather than the police being called by the psychoanalyst as soon as the subject refuses to be "oedipalized", Christian symbols of harmonious community living are couched in psychoanalytic terms and distributed to citizens at in school and community meetings centered around the dangers of alcohol and drug use. As an example of this confluence, take the Angel of Responsibility, pictured in Figure 10 excerpted from a publication dispersed by Office of Dangerous Drugs Division of Prevention. Based loosely on Catholic guardian angels, supernatural beings with which individuals souls are endowed at conception who look after the individual both bodily and spiritually for the length of his/her earthly life, the angel of responsibility promotes a range of personal dispositions, community virtues (*virtuas comunitarias*), which closely resemble Catholicism's cardinal virtues (cooperation, self-esteem, good manners, respect,

coexistence, honesty, solidarity, perseverance, responsibility and friendship). Human values that one should develop include Christian values honesty, punctuality, responsibility, family, decency, learning, sensibility, constructive criticism, communication, compassion, service, volition, patience, simplicity, friendship, respect, happiness, gratitude, sincerity, generosity, honesty, solidarity, prudence, self-control, sacrifice, detachment, optimism, love, perseverance, understanding, goodness, loyalty, forgiveness, empathy.--these community values are cited as the personality traits toward which gird individuals against the damaging effects of drugs. While guardian angels are not considered to be disciplinary beings in themselves, their constant vigilance is received as an injunction when presented by police representatives in schools and other public settings.



Figure 10: The Angel of Responsibility

Although the police disseminate information to students and the wider public through presentations and pamphlets, these informational materials are not prepared by the police department members but rather psychologists. The Head of the Division of Prevention detailed to me:

Here, take a look at these papers. We have trained psychologists make these materials. For example, I can show people what happens to the lung of a smoker. It's not that people aren't intelligent. If all it took were people being smart, nobody in the world would smoke. There is a warning sign right on the box of cigarettes with a skull and crossbones. But there are lawyers who smoke cigarettes. There are probably even lawyers who smoke marijuana or inhale cocaine. It's not that they are not intelligent, but they lack consciousness. Through our preventative education, we seek to bring consciousness. The root of the prevention workshops is really to help to build accurate self-image. Kids often have a poor or inaccurate

opinion of themselves. If you teach a kid well, you probably won't have problems. If people actually knew what was good and bad for them, we wouldn't have problems. Everybody could say no. Formation of person is important. The contact is inevitable, so you have to teach a kid what is good and what is bad for him.

Inspector Mendoza illustrates that while Christian-like disciplinary virtues may be the end goal, the process by which one attains them is through the development of accurate self-consciousness. The discipline necessary to reject the impulse to do drugs, a pleasure principle, is arrived upon enlightened self-consciousness, a state that psychoanalytic theory can help the individual to pursue. Inspector Cordoba would surely agree with the pamphlet he promulgates when it states, "Having a precise self-image is the most important factor for personal well-being and the key to relating with the surroundings in a satisfactory manner." At its highest level, like the highest levels of Catholic asceticism, personal responsibility through pacific recognition of fault, is the desired outcome. "When you are willing to take responsibility for the existence of the ego, you have put aside anger and attack, as these arise as a result of your desire to project onto others the responsibility for your own mistakes," states a different offering from the Office of Prevention.

Preventative materials manifest psychoanalytic roots through a powerful emphasis of the importance of open interpersonal feelings-based dialogue as a critical component of all stages of substance addiction from prevention to sustained recovery. Dialogue in the psychoanalytic space of northern Argentina contains an element of magic in that the mechanisms for its healing efficaciousness are, upon inquiry neither articulable or

relevant. In its absence, psychologists rue the continued illnesses of lost Qom patients, “He came to therapy and I greeted him, but he wouldn’t talk with me. He didn’t say anything. He says he wants to get better [from addiction], but how can he if he doesn’t speak to me?” Statements like these coupled with profound dependence on the catharsis of free-association techniques—the process itself of articulating memories, stories, motivations, and feelings—show that the magic of cathartic telling in psychoanalysis, like confession, is unquestioned and highly respected.

When I asked Lot 84 residents if they found anything off-putting in the materials emphasizing virtue and education through parent-child dialogue, they said no. In fact, I nearly always received quizzical looks and statements such as one from one mother whose adolescent son was worrying her with his absence, “How obvious. Of course these things are what people in a peaceful community should do.” On the other hand, residents enthusiastically derided the methods of intervention and their administration for their overt displays of control. Lack of authenticity and dependability in interactions was particularly common (treaty breaking *et cetera*) in colonial times. Rather than a necessary component of therapy, the Qom consider psychoanalytic fixation on dialogue to be another example of meretricious commitments.

“They are always saying that they want dialogue, they want conversation. Why didn’t they ask us about *La Casa Feliz*? Why don’t they ask us what types of therapy we want? Which language they will use in the therapy room? Where the clinic is located? They want us to talk, but we know they won’t listen.”

Florencia, a Qom social worker in Lot 84, touches upon all of the major points of contention cited by Qom patients. The Qom patients I interviewed universally found the psychoanalytic therapy conducted through *La Casita* to be an uncomfortable experience. To begin, the cost of commuting 45 minutes into the city dissuaded many from even beginning treatment. For those who did make it to *La Casita*, the experience was awkward and fruitless. Manuel described his therapeutic experience:

I went into therapy and the doctor was there. He greeted me and I sat down. I didn't know what to expect. I felt like he might think less of me for drinking, for being drunk. Then he asked me to talk. I said, 'About what?' He said that I have to talk for the therapy to work. It was very uncomfortable! I never went back.

Manuel's experience of alcoholism therapy is quite normative. Narratives typically begin with a tentative openness to therapy, continue with a narrative of interactional miscommunications, and conclude with cessation of therapy. Another man, more sarcastic in his criticism of free-associative practice quipped, "Sure, I would like to converse if he were speaking Qom!"

Qom patients relate experiences in the therapy room of the Other as a microcosm of the colonial encounter. The Indian is abstracted from the *monte* (Chacoan bushcountry) and placed on the therapist's couch. In contrast to being healed under the chanted prayers of a *pio'xonáq*, they instead find their pathologized psyches examined under the silent observation of the psychoanalyst. As Jimenez (2010) notes, the power of psychoanalysis hinges upon the shared cultural experiences of the patient and the therapist. In the absence of shared knowledge, a space of alterity opens wherein Qom

patient becomes uncomfortably aware of his indigeneity. In this space, therapeutic questioning takes on a structurally violent, interrogative air.

“I felt like he was judging me. I felt guilty. I thought, ‘Why do we have this problem?’ It would have been good to speak in our language instead. Maybe to someone from the community,” related one ex-patient.

The therapist too begins to think that the mind he is analyzing is different in type, rather than degree. He momentarily questions the suitability of free-association in the Qom case.

They are very reserved, different in their thoughts. Treatment is difficult though and they sometimes get bored and leave. The therapy we offer is generally conversational and supportive so that makes it difficult. It’s a different culture. They’re quiet and tranquil. We have had some patients from Lot 84, but the most but they don’t come. They come for one or two times and then they abandon their treatment. They are static quiet people. I wonder if they have something so they can help themselves? Self-reflexivity, when surfaced, is quickly subdued through recommitment to psychoanalytic principles.

An excerpt from another interview reveals psychoanalysis’ own rationalizations which protect it from its discontents and reinforce its perceived flexibility:

Chris: “Are there any psychologists on staff who speaks the Qom language?”

Therapist: “No. But everyone in Lot 84 speaks Spanish, so it’s not a problem. We can understand them and they can understand us perfectly.”

Ethnocentrism as a form of cultural violence (Galtung 1990) justifies and legitimizes perpetuation of indigenous inequality in Argentina. The availability of

psychoanalysis is a double-bind (Bateson 1972) in which Qom patients select between two options, neither of which address alcohol as a social problem. On the one hand, they may submit to a peculiarly Argentine form of therapy that is quite foreign to their senses of self and psychological healing. On the other hand, if they choose against utilizing psychoanalytic services, such a choice is widely perceived as a failure or inability to help themselves. Even more, the origins of *La Casita* as an indigenous NGO are not commonly known to the public, enabling widespread misrecognition of Lot 84's substance issues and their treatment.

Remembering how *La Casa Feliz* was commandeered has spawned fatalistic attitudes regarding self-administered therapy. I once asked, "Why doesn't the community just start something like *La Casa Feliz* again? Wasn't it mostly a volunteer organization anyway?" to which a Rugby friend of mine responded, "Why? They will find a way to rob us of it again." Acquiescence such as Gregorio's demonstrates that in some, the violence of Other-administered therapy has resulted in feelings of powerlessness and subjugation. Of course, deepening indigenous dependence on the provincial government is a useful outcome for local politicians, who regularly manipulate the Qom with bribes during elections. In every regard, hijacking, relocating and overhauling *La Casa Feliz* has benefited provincial administration at the expense of Qom mental-health outcomes and ethnic autonomy.

Some have described structural violence as having the ability to mask and naturalize social inequality, thus perpetuating it (Galtung 1969; Bourdieu 1990; Farmer

et. al. 2006). Such is the case here. Although officials contend that access to therapy is important to public health equality, the silent standoff in the therapy room serves to reinforce persistent ideas of indigenous people as mentally underdeveloped and child-like. “So you really think that they [the Qom] are as intelligent as everyone else?” I was asked at an *asado* in Formosa once. “Yes, of course.” I replied. The *criolla* woman leaned back in her chair and considered my statement. “I just still can’t see it. They just seem like children to me.” Such attitudes, while they may be well intended under the banner of “civilizing” and giving “equal access to natives”, echo old colonial discourses of the same paternalistic savior complex that, intentionally or unintentionally, put them in this situation to begin.

Complicating Cultural Appropriateness: Resistance to and Resistance through Therapeutic Self-Determination

Since the mid 1990s the concept of culturally appropriate therapy has been gaining ground in public health outreach, in large part due to criticism levied by social scientists. As a response to critiques of top-down interventions, anthropologists have argued that greater self-determination increases participation in health projects which, in turn, leads to better health outcomes. By this writing, at least some level of community participation is becoming standard practice in many development interventions (e.g. USAID best practices). On the other hand, some (Brady 1995) have suggested that culturally appropriate services are in danger of essentializing the indigenous itself as therapeutic (Weibel-Orlando 1989). For instance, to think that one therapy, found to be successful among an the urban Qom in one context, would be equally for Qom people

across many situations simply because the ethnic self-description of the group is identical is a dangerous cultural reification trap. Beyond this difficulty, to localize therapy requires a great deal of tailoring and flexibility, to which the rigidity and codification of some accreditation process are antithetical.

Though some have noted the difficulty of defining and implementing culturally appropriate therapies, such misgivings are particularly relevant in the Qom case. To begin, as I mentioned earlier, Qom identity is largely constructed in contrast to Argentine culture. Non-participation in many aspects of Argentine culture is expected and justified by self-imposed notions of indigeneity. For example, I attended a class offered through the school in Lot 84 that was designed to introduce children to computers. One of the children, roughly age seven, rejected the exercise out of hand. He commented, “Why do we need to know about computers? We’re Indians.” His classmates clamored in agreement, “Yeah! Why do we need to know this?” Such deep sentiments of alterity hamper the efforts of any proposed intervention, no matter how “culturally appropriate” it is or claims to be.

Active non-participation is cited with pride by some drinkers, such as Ernesto, a 20-year old rugby player (not by profession, but he mostly spent his time drinking, smoking and playing rugby). As I was waiting for the late bus one night in 2010, he pulled up to me on his motorcycle (which proudly displayed a sticker of revolutionary Che Guevara). He unzipped his leather jacket to reveal a 40 ounce beer and a pack of cigarettes. He winked at me, and sat down to keep me company until the bus came. He

said, “I’m sure they [nodding his head toward the police station] think I am bad or dangerous for these [the beer and cigarettes] but I don’t care. Don’t care what they think. Fuck those sons of bitches, I’ll drink and smoke their money away. They are all about control. But not me.” Ernesto’s taught refusal to be controlled morphed over time. In 2012, I noted that, rather than destitute, he was a teacher at the school in Lot 84. When I talked with him, he didn’t mention his former bad-boy persona. I sensed, I shouldn’t prod, but I suspect it was very like what I later heard from his younger brother (who might have even been following in his footsteps), “Yeah, at one party I woke up in the middle of the night and everyone was passed out around me. It smelled of tequila and wine and cigarettes. My head hurt. And I thought to myself, ‘what am I doing to myself? What am I doing to my parents—they are awake and worried. And after that I just stopped.’”

Understandably, resistance to government programs is quite nearly an inborn reflex in Lot 84. As a young community leader noted, “Look, it’s not like the government has been able to effectively manage a currency, stabilize the *Chacoan* environment, bring economic vitality to the region or anything else, so why would these projects [*La Casita*] be appropriate and be effective? They can’t even have success in things they want. We don’t matter to them, so why would they care about our health.” For many of the Qom, nothing is culturally appropriate unless they conceive and administer it. Such a stance seems to require parallel mental health programs, which themselves raise additional problems of funding, consensus, legitimacy, effectiveness, standardization and racial-segregation.

In the end, many from Lot 84 advocate a compromise similar to those who endeavor to make the AA-12-Step Program more intelligible to Native Americans. In Formosa, Qom representatives continue to advocate for a psychological clinic in Lot 84, staffed with practitioners fluent in *Qom*. Though they would still be educated within the ubiquitous psychoanalytic framework, many residents would consider these to be steps in the right direction. Isabella, an artisanal entrepreneur and head of a community kitchen, articulated her ideas for a “culturally appropriate” compromise and the work necessary to realize it:

I have a dream; a dream for the community. I want a home for kids from the street—an orphanage or a halfway house—here in Lot 84. The kids could go there, get clean, have a bed, and be away from their parents. They could get the psychological help they need from a psychologist who speaks *Qom*. I know there are funds available, and they should be used for something like this. We will continue to fight until our dreams become reality.

CHAPTER 6

Chapter 6: Renewing Local Worlds: Spirituality, Identity and Re-creation

I used to have a job and money. I would have *asados* every weekend with my friends. And then we would drink all night after that. Later, bad things happened to me and I lost my job and my family. I was very depressed. My hair was long and I had a long beard. Pastor Daniel was the first person to sit down and talk with me and to help me make sense of what had happened in my life. I have confided in him very much. There is no need to advertise my sins throughout the whole *barrio*. He knows what I have done and I have repented. And every day I ask God for forgiveness. Cindy asked if he knew the Pentecostal church before Pastor Daniel came and he said no. Pastor Daniel is a very good man. He entered the church at 15 or 16. He never tried alcohol or drugs or anything. He has lived a very healthy (*sano*) life. – Chalo

Introduction

This chapter addresses alcohol's paradoxical yet powerful effect in occasioning personal, spiritual and community development in a social environment characterized by limited economic opportunity. In personal and communal commentary, alcohol recurrently plays the role of adversary, demonstrating resources of character/spirituality in the case of individuals. Similarly, in the case of the community, the cause of alcohol abuse prevention, especially among children and adolescents, attracts to its cause the monies and efforts of various internal and external stakeholders. The community pulls together, through religion sport, and activism, to renew itself while attempting to protect its future. While the negative social effects of alcohol cannot be denied, the secondary effects in Lot 84 provide the community with greater solidarity, investment and development than would have been likely to occur otherwise.

Not only is the individual fight against binge-drinking a central marker in personal development, it is similarly an important rally cry for community development in spite of broader social conditions. In that sociopolitical marginalization is important in understanding the genesis of binge drinking, it is a political issue, and the resulting violence of various types are species of political violence. Thus, a subversive streak runs through the re-creational properties of church, sobriety and sport as responses to political oppression. Qom pastors lead the fight against devolution in the culto, ex-alcohol drinkers attest to a great pleasure in friendship with Jesus Christ, students quit alcohol and finish programs in a display of ethnic worthiness, and rugby players keep their bodies pure for competition against *criollo* teams.

Such characterization of alcohol in the community is consistent with Miller's (1980) viewpoint that the Qom's syncretic version of Pentecostalism is an extension of pre-Christian views regarding societal balance. Prior to proselytization the *pio'oxonáq* would assess the harmony within the spirit-world, and if harmony could not be restored with shamanic practices, then the band would relocate to new territory. Until now, this harmony, or health, does not relate only to physical or psychological health, but rather seeks physical mental and social harmony for health to be considered complete. Given that alcohol's use has been responsible for considerable communal dissonance since its introduction, Miller asserts that unlike other aspects of Pentecostalism "group restraint on drinking and smoking in an attempt to keep the body clean as a 'temple of the Holy Spirit' represents a completely new Toba value, although it should be interpreted in the

light of excessive drunkenness following initial stages of prolonged contact with colonists.” (141-2)

The social problem that alcohol presents the community assists members in overcoming other internal differences--such as the sub-ethnic ones mentioned elsewhere--and creating an ethnic consciousness against a common enemy. Whereas constant disagreement and countervailing intentions characterize most other community issues in Lot 84, public binge drinking is nearly unanimously viewed negatively. To stem it fosters a sense of community and teamwork that would not otherwise be as felicitous. In this regard, alcohol use in the community is an integrative, rather than destructive, activity despite its indisputable tolls.

While social suffering due to a wide variety of plights has been treated extensively by anthropologists, there exists a relative dearth of scholars examining the ways that people attempt to resurrect themselves and their communities in wake of tragedy. A notable exception to this trend is the work of Das et. al. 2001, which completes a trilogy focused upon “the relation of violence to states, local communities and individuals.” (2001:2) (see also 1997, 2001). Regarding the recovery phase of social suffering--which need not necessarily be temporally discrete in the case of ongoing trauma--the authors pose the question “What is at stake ... in the everyday after such overwhelming experiences of social suffering, and how do people learn to engage it? Is it possible to speak of this re-engagement as a healing at the level of the community and of the individual?” They go on to note that in an attempt to answer these questions

ethnographically it behooves the anthropologist to examine them “by paying close attention not only to the content of narratives but also to the process of their formation within local communities.” This chapter seeks to address, using just such a method, the question of how the crisis of binge drinking precipitates local and individual renewal among the Qom.

Indeed, focusing exclusively upon violence and suffering is itself a kind of misrepresentative violence, for it obscures the audacity of the Qom in striving to reconstitute livable reality. Such have been too many portrayals of indigenous drinking, which in so thoroughly addressing drinking as a result of political violence renders the object of study (and an empathic reader for that matter) as powerless against the destructive, reinforcing alcohol use patterns.

Inasmuch as the process implied in communal reconstruction--beginning with the end of a previous order, transition into fragmentation and crisis, and finishing in re-creation--mirrors the trajectory of individual transitions, an understanding of individual passages is useful in understanding this phenomenon. As go individuals, so goes the community.

Coming of Age at Any Age: Alcohol and Transitions

I had my first alcoholic drink when I was 14. It was a spiked licuado (fruit juice puree). From there I had tequila at a party, then beer, then wine. Within the year, I was having every kind of drink. I was drinking every night, and sometimes during the day. Everything was a party. I stopped studying and didn't listen to my parents. I didn't always come home at night and started smoking. To me at that time, everything seemed like a party and it was better with alcohol. I couldn't go out without alcohol being present. It didn't seem like a party if it wasn't there.

This went on for three years, but it all changed one day. I was drinking with friends and all of them passed out except for me. Still being awake, I kept drinking until I passed out. When I woke up, I couldn't remember what happened or how I got there. I looked around, and everything was dirty. I felt dirty. There wasn't a future in this way of life. I realized that my parents weren't sleeping because of me, because I wasn't coming home at night, but they waited up for me anyway.

I decided to go back to high school. I was 17 by then. (at the time of the discussion he was 21) I just realized there was no future in drinking everyday. This helped me get back on the path of studying. I finished high school and, although I still have friends who are drinkers I only hang out with non-drinkers because if there is alcohol present, there is pressure to drink too. I don't even drink on holidays." – Tito, an Ex-drinker

I had been chatting with Tito's father who stepped inside to attend to a dinner question posed by his wife. Tito, overhearing that I was interested in learning more about drinking in the community, decided to sit down in the empty chair and give a kind of testimony in the form of a personal development vignette. Tito's story is the rule rather than the exception in Lot 84. Given the levels of adolescent drinking in the community, the majority of young adults are either part of drinking groups or were in the past. For the latter group, a period of alcoholism is the potentially self-destructive gauntlet through which one must pass to achieve standing as a conscientious adult. Rather than being an on-going source of shame and discomfort, passing through a party stage and emerging with dignity is an important badge of self-actualization; it was worthy of volunteering on this occasion and bore repeating at least one other time during my fieldwork.

Tito's narrative concerning his particular period of adolescent partying is typical of young adults in Lot 84. With adolescent binge-drinking inculcating itself in the 1990's as an ubiquitous phenomenon, it is expected yet scorned, figuring prominently in maturation stories told by parents and now-adult children. The narrative most often begins in late middle school or early high school when peer groups of slightly older adolescents introduce their younger peers to alcohol. From there, a period of bacchanalia holds for a time, isolating the individual from school, productive pursuits, family, and church participation. For most, a particular moment marks an epiphany which lays bare the emptiness of the drinking lifestyle (in Tito's case, both emptiness and dirtiness). The individual then reintegrates the renewed, better version of him/herself into the institutions from which he/she was abstracted.

This characteristic pattern is consistent with the three-stage model of rites of passage originally proffered by van Gennep (1960 [1909]) and extensively explored within anthropology during most of the 20th century. In this model, the first stage is marked by abstraction from the typical social environment, sometimes into a peer group or into a separate geographic space. In the case of adolescent drinking, the peer group is a drinking circle, and the geographic shift occurs from the parental home to the street or monte, often including ongoing spatial shifts (see other chapter).

The second stage is marked by liminality, the status of uncertainty, disorientation and change that persists while the individual remains on the threshold. Anthropologists have noted the association of altered states of consciousness with the liminal period; Qom

adolescent drinking can be explained well with this framework. The liminal period is frequently characterized by *communitas*, a state of direct intimate sociality, equality and lack of structure. Qom drinking patterns reflect this sense of direct contact and solidarity. As one Qom man put it, “When you are drinking with your friends, it feels like you are with your brothers. I don’t know how, but we always had the money—it would come from here, from there, and we would share everything.”

The final stage is the reintegration of the individual into the community structure with a new social status. Not only is the liminal stage often characterized by equanimity and liminality, but also it sometimes incorporates the transition from pollution to purity. As in Tito’s case, where he woke up from a drunken stupor with a feeling of dirtiness, binge drinking is commonly associated by the Qom with dirt, contagion, vice, dis-ease, and demons. Thus, following the epiphany of dirtiness and unsustainability, the person embarks on a plan to become healthy, partake in constructive rather than destructive activities and reintegrate. This rarely involves participation in the standard psychological treatment arena provided by the Argentine state, but rather through resumption of high school, enrollment in vocational courses, a stint in the monte with relatives, or joining a Pentecostal congregation. As one church-goer observed,

People here are just able to stop drinking all at once. They don't do it through rehabilitation. There is just the ability to stop. For example, there was a guy that everyone knew as the town drunkard. He was always drinking. He showed up to church one Sunday and said that he was going to stop drinking. I don't know if God had anything to do with it. People didn't believe him though because he was always drinking. But he did as he had said and he showed up at church on Wednesday completely *sanito* (sober). People couldn't believe because this was the guy who was always drinking on the street corner. Then he showed up again

on Saturday and was still sober. It was amazing. He stayed sober for about three or four years until he died.

While becoming sober in Lot 84 is not a rite in the strict sense of the term, it is a process which shows many similarities with more codified sobriety programs, broadly conceived as medico-psychological rites, that are constructed to shepherd drunkards toward improved forms of themselves, often under religious or quasi-religious oversight. In Lot 84, the rite is not codified, but the pattern is distinct, owing in large part to the prevalence of youth drinking in the late 1990's and 2000's. Just as a time spent away at a four-year college/university is a coming of age ritual in much of the world (even if one is older it reflects a transition to a more professional, and thus, more mature personhood), managing drinking and sobriety is an outward sign of personal passage and development in Lot 84.

In contrast to the youthful *continuado* who is a sickened slave to his impulses, the emergent adult who has rejected that lifestyle is seen as enlightened, virtuous, and mature. Indeed, this transition is frequently referred to as *dejar la adiccion* implying a shift of place—or even construing addiction as a place that continues to exist, occupied by others, even once one leaves. Just as the City is contagious, and the monte at the heart of indigeneity, addiction lives in *la calle*, the street.

Others (Prussing 2001, Quintero 2000) have noted narratives of personal psychological and moral development in sobriety narratives of indigenous former drinkers. In fact, similar rhetoric surrounding a process sobriety being akin to maturation. One of Prussing's informants, echoing sentiments I found among Qom ex-drinkers, said

(pp 178) “It’s like growing up—growing up all over again. That’s how I look at it—learning to do this, and learning to do that. Because no one taught me them skills, when I was small” (2001).

Although not applicable in every case, a lasting sober lifestyle coincides with a resumption of faith-based activity through participation in one of Lot 84’s evangelical churches. Mario describes such a journey,

I used to have a job and money. I would have cookouts every weekend with my friends. And then we would drink all night after that. At that time, bad things happened to me and I lost my job and my family. I was very depressed, so I was drinking. Pastor Daniel was the first person to sit down and talk with me and to help me make sense of what had happened in my life. I have confided in him very much. There is no need to advertise my sins throughout the whole *barrio*. He knows what I have done and I have repented. And every day I ask God for forgiveness. Pastor Daniel is a very good man. He entered the church at 15 or 16. He never tried alcohol or drugs or anything. He has lived a very healthy (*sano*) life. My kids are now living in the city with a Catholic nun. I get to see them every Sunday from 4-5:30. The nun is very nice and takes good care of them. I am thankful to her. The kids were living at their Grandma’s house and there were always other kids there – smoking, drinking. I didn’t want them to fall into this, and have to learn things the hard way, like I did. Now I am much more mature and healthy.

Indeed, Mario’s story touches upon many of the themes associated with dropping an alcohol habit: narratives of improved health, need to make recompense to friends and family, reconciliation with God, and the equation of alcohol use with darkness and illness, instead of a connotation of partying, which instead is a common sentiment of adolescents when they begin drinking. In contrast to AA programs, and other instantiations of Pentecostalism (van Dijk 2002) where identity construction comes with pinning one’s past self as an alcoholic (Cain 1991), alcohol-using stages for the Qom

appear more as a gauntlet through which passage occurs than as a previous self to be re-examined. The vast majority of such passages occur in the Pentecostal Churches on Lot 84, which consider the spiritual fight against alcohol to be central to re-ordering the community.

Fighting Against the Devil: Pentecostalism and Alcohol Use

As mentioned elsewhere, the role of various evangelical Pentecostal churches in Qom society cannot be overstated. Churches constitute the primary extant social institution of Qom origin, and a network for social and economic integration and exchange across the continuum from rural to urban Qom communities. In the mid-20th century, the presence of culto-practicing churches across the Chaco enabled the formation of a united ethnic consciousness that had not held previously. Pentecostal churches also provide a cadre of community leaders, which serve to fill the power vacuum left by the lack of a legitimate chief or powerful *poi'xonaq*. This is especially in the case of migratory heterogenous urban or peri-urban *barrios* such as Lot 68. The churches are involved in the process of community development by providing meeting places, a shared mission among parishioners, and a new manner of redistributing resources from those who can spare to others in need.

These churches have their origins in the diffusion of North American Pentecostalism which arose around the turn of the 20th century (Miller 1980, 100). Like analogous churches stemming from North American sect-type movements, an ascetic morality is considered virtuous. Prohibitions include drinking, smoking, extra-marital

sex, gambling, stealing etc. As such, many churchgoers include alcohol-related instances as part of testimony or prayer requests. As the *culto* is the nexus of the church, with membership conferred based on attendance, familiarity with the ambience of *culto* (though they vary in formality and stringency based on pastoral leadership) is integral to understanding Pentecostal rhetoric surrounding alcohol, how the churches go about fighting against the adversary they see in alcohol.

When I arrived, people were dancing to the first song, while the pastor broadcasted to the rest of the *barrio* over megaphone asking people to join. I joined the ranks of the observers on the dirt mounds outside of a wooden fence surrounding the churchyard. The pastor announced that a dance group from Rosario was with them. In the open-air churchyard, there were a total of 100-120 people, mixed gender, but slightly more female. All ages were present, but the smallest kids tended to play on the periphery. A few try to join in the dancing but they couldn't keep up. Young men and women with fast, quick strides were on the outside to help the wheel turn. The costumes were a base of red, yellow, blue, or white with auxiliary pieces of fabric cut into fringes. These were present on the chest, back, and very much on the leg. Women wore skirts, Men wore pants. I saw some small girls twirled on the side, imitating what they saw and seemingly hoping to be able to dance someday. The older women were near the center because they could not move as quickly. A few people were in business clothes, but not many.

There were three dance songs with the shortest being five minutes and the longest being 30 minutes. The music was live with two synthesizers, an electric base, a drum machine, and singers. There was no *criollo* guitar. During the songs, the pastor walked around the outside of the circling dancers, often in the opposite direction of the group with a large flag, blessing the group.

Between the first and the second song was the time when people put up the mandatory offering. The "treasurer" danced in the middle of the dance floor in a circle as people brought up their offerings. The pastor said that the offering is mandatory for all members. They need \$4,500 pesos for the new church. Carlos (last name not said) put in 100 *pesos* and was referred to during the whole *culto* for his generosity.

Following the dancing songs, there was oration and preaching. Following the dancing, 15 percent left immediately. During the following oration, another 15 percent trickled out. Some people leave and come back, for example a young

couple of about 16 left and came back with water. There was a guest pastor, the local pastor, and an “evangelist” that they had invited. One read from Romans, Chapter 6, as some in the congregation flipped to the page in their personal Bibles:

“I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Shortly after, the floor was opened for petitions and testimony. Different congregation members piped up.

“Parents respect your children, please.”

“Lord Jesus Christ, please grant us jobs.”

“Lord, take away alcoholism from our community”

“Today is Alonzo’s birthday, please grant him and all of us health on this day.”

This led to a discussion about why to celebrate birthdays. Another member of the community got up and spoke about how he would like to dance more but sometimes his knee hurts “under all this weight” so he hoped for good health for all members of the community.

The *culto* closed with hymns. All of the members of the community gathered closely and stood at the front. They received the pastor’s blessing and sang together.

The *culto* concluded at 11:00 PM, roughly two hours after it began.

In this example, it is illuminating that alcohol’s presence in the front of congregation members’ minds when the time came for petitions. Indeed, alcohol is central to the prayer-life of the community, especially in the form of petitioning God for health or material goods. The place of alcohol within moral rhetoric seems to have

remained unchanged for years, as five testimonies recorded by Miller (1999) between 1959 and 1963 bear mention of alcohol's in relation to 1) the self-harm caused by Qom pagan history (116), 2) the causal association of sobriety with manhood (118), 3) in a shaman's conversion narrative emphasizing the orderliness of a sober life.

Yes my brothers, we had our ancient customs, our practices. There were days when these customs had us congregated together under the control of pythonic magicians; we stood before shamans who cured; we united in the frog dance to the music of drums. During the night we would stumble over drunkards in the paths. They way of wine is to cause harm, the same for drums and dance, the pythonic magicians. But now only one thing guides us, our gospel work. It is not superstition, it is not bad habits, it is not magic. (1999, 116)

Elsewhere in his testimony, Aurelio emphasizes that the *pio'xonáq* displayed selfish motives and harmful actions; in contrast the Word places emphases on generosity and care. Recall that some sorcerers (*'emuxunaxuí*, some *pio'xonáq*) specialized in causing harm. In this testimony, wine is implicitly linked to the death-dealing sorcerer who injures his/her own people for self-aggrandizement.

In the testimony below, Gregorio chooses to lump his parents' prescriptions against drinking with prophylactics against sorcery, and the skills necessary to come of age. While grammatically, he does not say that sobriety was a prerequisite for marriage—usually predicated on a man successfully completing rites of passage—the text implies that learning sobriety was a critical part of the education of a Qom man growing up in the 1940's.

My parents taught me not to hunt without a license and to marry only one woman. They taught me to work and no to steal and not to drink, because one can lose a

great deal, nor should I smoke because when I throw away the cigarette butt, someone could pick it up and do harm and kill me [sorcery]. [...] This is not gospel but it is knowledge. One was not to get married unless he knew how to hunt, to ride a horse, and build a house. When one had learned all of this, then he could marry. (1999, 118)

In the third testimony recorded by Miller, a former *pio 'xonáq* re-emphasizes the difference between the harm and chaos implicated by the traditional ways, while implying that personal existential affirmation as well as familial harmony accompanied his conversion to Christianity and his adoption of farm-based agriculture.

[Pedro speaking in the third person] Well, our brother Pedro Martinez arrived at the church of our brother Thomas Palmer and ask for his blessing. “Give me work,” he said. Tomas Palmer said, “It would be better for you to follow the gospel that is good so that when your brothers are gathered together, you will not grab a bottle of wine in your hand, only the Word of our Father you will grab. Because I know that you, Pedro Martinez, are a drinker. And now, you who do not pretend to follow the Word of our Father, who then will be your helper? It will be the person who is called Christ. This same person will save you. Afterward, you will demonstrate the work of our Father God.”

Our brother Pedro Martinez said, “I will do it. Truly, I will do it, because this will represent my complete change, in order than my sons will also change, so that they will know where to find their peace and their life. But when I do this, if my children are against it, then I will be the same to them. It is better for them to be separated out, standing before the World of our God, standing before the work of our Lord Jesus And I will carry around the message but not only this. I have asked for a place in La Pampa. I am going to La Pampa. When I arrive, I will build a house. Then I will unite my sons who love the Word of God, and to those signaled out I will distribute our blessings. I am content because I know this. And now I am very happy that you showed me this way. Thus, when I arrive to where I am going, then I will go among the young people advising them about the Word of our God. Yes, there where I am going I will do it. I will do it. I will reveal the truth. And not only will I reveal it, I will make available this land so that they might cultivate; then no one will ever be at fault. I am completely overjoyed. You, Tomas Palmer, have shown me the Word of our Father God.” (123)

The testimonies shared by Aurelio, Gregorio and Pedro ring true through the years and remain remarkably consistent with Evangelical Christian narratives I gathered during my fieldwork. In my time, I was able to converse with several leaders in local churches, all of whom offered similar accounts. Interestingly, as ethnic consciousness has grown (Miller 1999) and pastors have become involved in political facets of community life, the characterization of alcohol has evolved from that of a vice toward that of an enemy against whom a fight can be waged. When alcohol is personified in this manner, the enemy combatant is often framed as the Devil or one of his host, as an influential churchgoer relates in the following:

I used to consume alcohol. My husband and I would even host New Year's celebrations with many people. We would provide the wine and alcohol. In the morning people would be passed out all over the lawn. It was ugly. People would get drunk and fight instead of celebrate. This year we had a very large celebration for New Year's at the Evangelical Church. Everybody had a good time and no alcohol was consumed—it was very nice. The pastors need to preach more about the evils of alcohol. I have seen the change that churches can make! I feel a difference in my body, in how I feel and how I think. I have former alcoholics living in my house now. When they entered the church they left their alcoholism. I can see the change in these people. Religion and Jesus Christ have a very profound ability to change people for the better. Those who work against drugs and alcohol work against the devil, and the devil doesn't like it; that's why it's such hard work! However, it's written in the Bible. I wish that some of the churches in the neighborhood would be less dedicated to dancing and more focused on helping with drugs and alcohol.

Among Qom concerned with community development—and most are—there are a series of “fights” that predominate their advocacy agenda. These include the fight for indigenous rights, the fight for maintaining government welfare checks, the fight to keep the land code working as it had, and the fight to secure better education and

employability. In the case of the fight against alcohol, pastors consider the struggle to be a spiritual one that we wage within ourselves for the betterment of the community. One of the pastors, when I asked him about the paradox of Christ turning water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana, Christ's first public miracle, he responded in a way that turns what seems like a paradox into a justification of sobriety:

It was a Jewish tradition to have wine at weddings. When the party ran out of wine though, it was Mary who said to follow what Jesus said and Jesus said "woman, it is not yet my time." He was following what his mother said, who was also human and could have been mistaken. Also in the story, the wine taster tried the wine that had been changed and asked the MC why he had saved the best wine for last. Normally the best is served first and then later the lesser wines. This shows that if God is going to do something, it will be perfect. There are people who store and taste wines – save them for a special occasion. But there will always be somebody who know more or who has done better. When God does it, it is perfection. And he shows it by taking the worst of the things to drink – water – which they would only have served after all the wine was gone, and converting it into the best wine. It also shows that the MC didn't plan the party well. If so, he would have had enough wine. It shows that humans also make mistakes, but God does not. Jesus also didn't change the water into wine and they say "get drunk." He didn't even say, "drink." I know a guy in the center who likes very much to drink. He says to me, "pastor, but what about Jesus' first miracle or the Last Supper." But not every day is a special occasion like a wedding or the Last Supper. Jesus does not tell us to get drunk. Because also the Bible also says in Peter chapter 5, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

The pastor manages to relate sobriety as an appropriate mechanism for weathering the challenges of the world. Moreover, this verse weaves together personal prudence, both to temptation and to adversaries ("Be alert and of sober mind. Resist him, standing

firm in the faith...”), with Christian worldwide solidarity in suffering. It also implies by juxtaposition that an un-sober mind allows one to be devoured by the devil¹². For his purposes, this is a fortuitous coincidence of Judeo-Christian imagery of wilderness-as-chaos and Qom conceptualizations of devils (*payák*) as authors of chaos (Gordillo 2004). Whether alcohol is itself the devil, or whether it is a conduit for devilry is unclear, but its implication in chaotic events occurring as a result of giving in to temptation is illustrated by the following vignette, told to me by another pastor.

Just yesterday I went to the jail to see one of the brothers who had been charged [with a crime]. He says that he is innocent and he doesn't know why God would let this happen and why he has to be there. I said that things happen for a reason and that God has a plan for him. He had been a drinker, gave it up, and then returned to it. He was staying at the house of his sister. His sister adopted a child many years ago. When the child grew up and learned that he was actually adopted he became bitter. He sold his mother's house, but in order to sell it, he needed her to vacate it. So, one night when his uncle was there and passed out from drinking, he came and hung his mother. Then, the uncle was there and was easily blamable. Technically the uncle didn't have any guilt, but we also know that God forgives but if we fall into that sin again, his fury will come seven times as strong. Even though the he was technically innocent, this wouldn't have happened if he hadn't returned to drinking. This was the terrible punishment for returning to this vice. Having to spend time in jail may be what he needs to get clean again. For people who drink, drink, drink, they become filled with this spirit. They need to clean their hearts....they need to order their hearts.

Before, we used to drink wine, but the wine didn't "take us". Now, people don't have a drink and then retire to their houses. They beg for money to keep drinking. I have a cousin who started drinking when his father died. When he realized (that he was drinking too much), he couldn't stop. Their ancestors said that when somebody dies, we shouldn't smoke or drink. This stays in my head. But some people look to fill up that empty glass after a death. It's a spirit that possesses the children. Even kids of evangelicals are consumed. Not sure if this is our error for not being united. The Gospel is for all. I would love to do a big campaign with the other pastors to fight against this war.

¹² Interestingly, some intoxicated persons are referred to as "consumed" e.g., "The girl was completely consumed."

Indeed, the common desire of Pentecostal churches is enough to create united, harmonious front against the dissonance and ambivalence that comes with alcohol use. The particular interests of the various pastors are typically better served through competition for congregation members and the associated dues, however. This presents a barrier to collaboration that has not yet been overcome.

Pastors used to guide people though, and now they don't. They used to care for families and not play favorites. Now, they can't help but let their feelings get in the way and play favorites. The other problem is that people are just free to do whatever they want. The pastors don't really guide on how to live.

Despite the limitations that derive from limited collaborative action between churches, their efforts still represent important strides to community development and public health. More active church members volunteer their time trying to assist street children in getting some kind of psychological help, usually with best results through a social worker who is based at the local Catholic chapel, itself instrumental in leading efforts to increase the number of community residents able to secure employment in the formal economy. In addition to direct assistance to those with harmful alcohol consumption patterns, churches provide answers to the existential questions often mulled by street drinkers in their cups. Given the common narrative of leaving alcoholism and joining a church, the two can be viewed as no-overlapping domains within the *barrio*. As Miller (1980) noted,

The release from the crises of everyday existence was at one time sought in alcoholism. It is of interest to note in this respect, that it is generally accepted

knowledge that the *culto* has largely, in many instances entirely, replaced the need to rely on alcohol. This may explain the ready acceptance of Pentecostal preaching against drinking.

Toward this end, the church provides informal support and vibrant social groups for drinkers who choose to sober up. As Chalo mentions, the social support is an important determinant in staying sober, “My old drinking friends pressured for a bit, but that I found new friends through my church that he could never have found only through counseling services. The social aspect is very important.” While Lot 84 is currently devoid of AA programs, the support lent through church groups bears similarities to what others (Brandes 2002, Antze 1987, Cain 1991) have noted about AA groups, namely that self-improvement, attendance, exclusive adherence, and recognition of a higher power are essential for leaving alcohol behind. Yet notably, the indigeneity of the Pentecostal churches lend an air of indigenous identity to their support, in the manner that has been noted elsewhere in native American communities (Baird-Olsen and Ward 2000, Prussing 2011) and more broadly (Morjaria-Keval and Keval 2015).

Subversive Re-creation

In the early 1990s, an ex-professional rugby player Eduardo “Loco” Rossi, introduced rugby to Lot 84. Born in a nearby city, Rosario, he played professional rugby in Buenos Aires, France, Spain and Wales. Upon retiring, he became a coach. Soon thereafter, he decided to offer his sport, and assistance with it, to the Qom as a means of instilling discipline in their society and promoting greater equality and integration between indigenous and *criollo* populations. Toward this end, he formed a team he

named Aborígen Rugby Club. As he and I strolled through his extensive collection of World War II memorabilia, I asked him what his role is *vis a vis* the Qom community. In return, he stated solidly:

You will hear a lot about me. Let me tell you first though, that I am hard—quite demanding. The second thing is that I am a teacher, and not a politician. I am a former of lives, a life guide. I put myself as an example. Rugby, like other sports, is a direct form of discipline for people, and a way to integrate society. Like it was in World War II and all warfare, the result is what matters—the methods can be justified. Alcoholism is difficult and easy at the same time. I have to put myself out as an example. For instance, I've had offers of sex and alcohol but I refuse them these things aren't for me. Alcohol is an easy way to dominate people. It's a way to rein in people use it—it promotes simplemindedness. The parents leave them and they get planted by alcohol. Given these cases grow like plants without attention. I integrate them using strict, hard methods. First, by example. No alcohol with playing. Maybe it parties and the like. I'm very hard. If I catch someone twice they are pardoned, three times suspended.

Towards the explicit end of integrating minds, bodies, and society, Rossi and his coaching staff soon began to populate Aborígen with both indigenous and *criollo* players, housing them away from their respective home-*barrios* in a dormitory setting. At these dormitories, the players would live, socialize, practice, eat, and study.

Not to be outdone in terms of results, Rossi's Aborígen Rugby Club has had remarkable success within the sphere of Argentine rugby, and in maintaining sobriety among his cohorts. This success came to fruition when they earned the honor to compete internationally in New Zealand in 1998. One of Rossi's original Qom players named Jose, still contributing as a dedicated coach while living in the city of Formosa, describes his path to integration provided by Rossi and his club:

Lot 84 should be mixed in. I live in a regular neighborhood in Formosa and my kids are integrated. I have my own life with a woman, and we build something together. This is an example of integration that works. If I have a wife, I must be independent, so I have a trade. The people in Lot 84 can't live in fear of the city. They are integrated already, even if they don't know it, with motorcycles and cell phones. It's been 15 years since I broke out from the inside. I think it's the fault of the people who live there for isolating themselves.

In 2003, a documentary called “The Chimera of Heroes” by Daniel Rosenfeld won success in Argentina for its dramatic portrayal of Loco Rossi and his Aborígen Rugby Club. It has been summarized by one film critic as “a white rugby coach, a one-time avowed racist collector of Nazi memorabilia, who saw the light and took it upon himself to venture into the jungle, teach the game to Toba tribesmen, and train and manage Argentina's first indigenous team.” Rossi's beast of admixture was not long to go unhunted. Perhaps predictably, the residents of Lot 84 recognized the potential of sport to provide protection from youth alcohol and drug use. They also observed Rossi's criticism of their desire to maintain a separate culture, and sought to create a rugby program that provides the social, physical and health benefits of rugby but in a way that subverts Rossi's paternalism. By extension, this form of re-creation subversively turns a colonial sport into an indigenous identity marker that calls into question the chaos, intoxication, and unemployment by galvanizing Qom identity as disciplined, strategic, and healthful.

Qompi Competes

Residents of Lot 84 were quick to point out to me that “away from home” is not the same for someone born there as it is for someone born in the city. “For one of them, to be born in the city and then to live and train there is easy. It is like being at home. For

one of our kids, it is different.”, said a member of the current *Qompi* team. While Aborígen is at putatively non-racial in its recruiting practice, its name, now taken by the Qom as a pejorative, and its location, in the city, suggests to Qom a nefarious purpose—to perpetuate the extermination of their culture and remedy the “social problem” they present, all through the seemingly benign path of integration.

While the 1998 New Zealand trip inspired Jose to pursue a life in the city because he saw that “the indigenous people of New Zealand were far more advanced and integrated”, circumstances surrounding the trip, including allegations of embezzlement, verbal abuse of players, and Nazism, caused some Aborígen players to move back to Lot 84 and form their own, ethnically uniform team (even including the coach who was previously a great player for Rossi), grounded literally and metaphorically in the field that lies in the center of Lot 84.

The new all-indigenous team name, *Qompi*, is a Qom word that means “many of us” and is simultaneously a trope on the Spanish word for competition. *Qompi*, cited as a dead end and money sink by Aborígen players and coaches, is viewed otherwise within the *barrio* which bore it. One player who played for both Aborígen and *Qompi* commented to me, “Maybe it was good that there was Aborígen back then, but since we did so well at rugby, I think it is only fitting that we have our own now. Rossi was abusing players—yelling at them. He showed me his Nazi flag.” He shivered visibly. “Now the kids can play and live in the same place—our community.”

Residents of the Lot also rapidly observed the potential utility of sport for giving the youth alternative aspirations in lieu of academic/professional achievement to keep them from falling into youth drinking culture. One teacher noted the protective aspects of sports for youth:

For my part, I work at the school and we are always worried about kids going into the street. We are always concerned with what is going on outdoors. Sports are healthy, soccer and volleyball—especially rugby. Recreation is important so they don't use their time and energy on things that aren't good. Until 2005 it was older people 17 and up who were consuming alcohol but then it changed and now kids of seven or eight are consuming all kinds of substances. The domestic problems are more widespread than before. They don't have a way to take responsibilities the grandmother now has to take care of the kids. The kids don't have a place to stay then if she passes away. Before it was not this way, with girls getting pregnant so early. This is why it is important that we have youth sport programs. They are also good for adults, as something healthy to do.

With protections against alcohol enacted, a shift occurs toward pride in the performance of Qom athletes. “Our players are different. You can see one of them [*criollo*] taking a rest on the sideline, and it takes him minutes and minutes to catch his breath. In contrast, we take a couple seconds and we are ready to play again. I believe it is something different in our bodies.” The essentialization of indigenous rugby skills extends to the results obtained by distinctive indigenous training techniques. This are wholly grounded in the use of otherwise unused public land surrounding the *barrio*. As other authors such as Gaston Gordillo (2004), have noted, the *monte*, for former foragers, is a strong symbol of indigeneity. A strong sense of ethnic valor permeates the training regime of *Qompi* players. Daniel says, “We run and we train in the bush. We can't afford

to lift weights at a gym. It's also hard to get into the city for people here. We get strong by building houses, and running these old trails. They are stronger and larger, but we are fast. They can have their steroid injections and weight rooms." I asked if all the other teams, including Aborigen, use performance enhancing drugs. "Oh yes, of course! But, we don't," he said shaking his finger emphatically. "Where do they get the injections?" "Rossi," he replied.

While a minority of Lot 84 residents count the violence associated with rugby as a problem, or note the occasional players who like to party as a team (which occurs, but never reaches the public extent of *continuado*-style drinking), general consensus is that participation in sport is a protection against drinking. Mariana thinks that recreation for kids could really help, including the library. "Recreation gives them motivation. We have to think more in the culture that we are losing. We have to save this. Sport is a way to help"

Hilario Camancho, coach of *Qompi* while I was conducting fieldwork, maintained a blog for his rugby team (Camacho 2010). On it is stated the mission of the club, which directly relates emphasizes on personal development, ethnic pride, and providing an alternative to substance use and marginalization.

The *Qompi* rugby team is a space for recreation and for social inclusion for the young Toba-qom of Formosa who develop sporting activities and find in it a place for participation and, in many cases, an alternative for drugs and marginalization. We participate in regional leagues, using the sport as a social space; a community experience, for both competition and competitiveness.

The *Qompi* Rugby Club of Formosa rugby team was founded in 2000 in the heart of a self-summoned youth assembly which was trying to create a management

unit for sport and social activities for Qom youth, with the objective of generating a unit in the Formosan communities. It has to do with a recreational space where the community had a new channel of expression. “In our club one of the objectives is cohesiveness and also the aim for participation of all of the indigenous here in Formosa so that they integrate. We use the sport as a tool for this” tells Hilario Camacho, president and technical director of the club.

Qompi Rugby Club is located in *barrio* Lot 84, on the outskirts of Formosa, also known as Lot 68. There are about 140 players in the categories of pre rugby, children, youth, adults, and women, who participate in numerous officiated tournaments and in more than 50 inter-club summer tournaments. More than just the sport, the club functions as a meeting place for the social group. “We have achieved many things, not just in rugby but also humanely, with the members. We have kids that were into drugs and we took them from there and now they are playing, and they are some of our better players. We have people that were in the trash and we took them from there. For me as director, it gives me much satisfaction, much encouragement, and much strength. For this reason we will continue,” expressed Camacho. (2010)

Despite the achievements, however, when they play one another, *Qompi* loses with much greater frequency than Aborigen. In fact, they often appear near the bottom of the general standings in both the youth league and the adult league. Yet recruits to Aborigen are seen as traitors to the ethnicity, rather than simply as motivated athletes. “Yes they win, but I would never want to be part of that team. I can’t stand the arrogance. I would never walk away from my the people here.” I asked how prodigal players would be treated if they switched back to *Qompi*. “Everyone makes mistakes. If anyone wants to come back, live here, and play for us, he will be welcome. People switch back and forth all the time. Promises of money, fame, or trips lure some guys. He never shows his face in Lot 84. He recruits players by bribing them. When they realize Rossi’s lies, like I did, they come back.” The essential ethnic identity outweighs the performed identity gained, but only transiently, by defection.

Qompi players, while competing and afterward, tend to take on leadership roles in the community, such as being one of the bilingual teachers at the primary or secondary school in Lot 84. This pattern indicates that playing for *Qompi*—performing identity in the public space of the field-- strengthens ethnic solidarity to an even greater extent than simply living in Lot 84. Alfred and Cornthassel (2005) recently posed the following question in the context of indigenous resistance to contemporary colonialism, “how can indigenous communities regenerate themselves to resist the effects of the contemporary colonial assault and regenerate politically and culturally?” In the case of the Qom, certainly one manner of continued resistance is the performance of indigenous identities through sport in public spaces. This is noted here as an important alternative to the public performance of militant self often taken up by street drinkers described in Chapter 3. The central debate—negotiating the frontier between protectionism, resistance, ethnocide, substance abuse and capitulation-- is reflected not only in the spatial organization and utilization of fields in and out of Lot 84, but also in the circulation of ideas regarding the two competing rugby clubs to which a young Qom athlete may belong.

Though social scientists of sport remain dubious as to whether sport is a general protection against substance use (e.g. Haldorsson and Thorlindsson 2014, Arvers and Chaquet 2003) ethnic-recruiting practices have otherwise been considered to be a subversive phenomenon (Vazci 2011). Vazci describes how the Bilbao Athletic Soccer team is intended to counterpoint contemporary Bilbao and conjure something more purely Basque, *Qompi* now reflects the indigenous space that is Lot 84, highlighting it as a indigenous counterpoint to Formosa and not just a destitute, addicted satellite to the

city. As she (2011) states “Games generate a liminal period of re-creating truths and open up a possibility for either disintegration or reintegration.” Like the liminal spaces of street corner drinking and *culto*, rugby and other sports¹³ rather reinforce Qom identity through *Qompi* cultural competitions against Aborígen and other Formosan teams. Even if the fetishized goal of sport, winning, is only sometimes achieved, the putative goal of maintaining the stickiness of the Qom ethnicity and protecting against alcohol use has thus far been rather successfully attained.

Turning Wine into Water: Aboriginality and Renewal

All of this sounds interesting, but can it be real? Do, in fact, broken communities that have been fractured by war and structural violence ever regenerate? [...] The chapters in this book suggest that at the level of the ordinary, the everyday and social realities, states of rebuilding and accommodation are as complex as are the networks of individual lives of victims, perpetrators, internal resisters, and critics and witnesses. There is usually no clear-cut victory, no definitive crossing over into safety and renewal. But if that sounds like too bleak a conclusion, think of it the other way around: there usually is no complete defeat, no ultimate breakdown and dissolution. [...] Social life continues. And that is a source both of possibilities and of very deep complexities. --Das and Kleinman (2001, 24)

There is indeed no definitive crossing into safety, nor is complete renewal possible. When I say that alcohol use paradoxically occasions renewal in Lot 84, I mean that it is an impetus for embarking upon and continuing *processes* of renewal not that a destination state is ever reached. Indeed, capitulation has never been the Qom way. As other indigenous authors have noted (Adelson 2001, Prussing 2011, Quintero 2000) continued enactment of valorized markers of indigenous identity—in our case *culto*,

¹³ I played rugby during the second summer of my fieldwork, so have a much more nuanced understanding of this space.

rugby, or career—reinforces community self-images and solidarity in positive ways.

“Aboriginality” (Archer 1991), the negotiation of indigenous peoples’ politics, sociality, and identity with the nation state, is a useful construct for understanding how indigenous peoples promote their evolving agendas, and thus occasion community development.

In the case of the Qom, alcohol use and its resulting violence have led to increased social work by the Catholic Church, decisions of Qom students to go to the university and study social work, the creation of *Qompi* rugby club, the maintained vibrancy of Pentecostal churches, and a new generation of political leaders who aim to re-negotiate structural issues in a way that positively reimagines Qom aboriginality within the state. One of these students, who himself dropped drinking to become serious about his studies, related the following:

My professors kept trying to look for explanations for why I do so well in school. They say something like, “Well, your father must be a doctor or a lawyer,” implying that they have more economic or academic resources at home compared to other students. I proudly say that this is not the case and that I am actually the first generation in my family to go to university - the first generation to even finish secondary school. I do this so that I can eventually make a better impression of my people, and to help them in the struggle for rights, land, and respect.

While stories like this one do not undo the tragedies experience by others (notably the awful suicides, murders, rapes and maiming mentioned throughout this text), bringing to light that this academic journey, very likely may lead to a position among the leaders of Lot 84, began with an adolescent’s decision to stop drinking and work for something larger than himself. In this example, we see renewal of this man and his community

occurring concomitantly with the ruins of lives strewn around him in the *barrio*'s streets.

It is an illuminating microcosm of the paradoxical ways that alcohol operates within Lot

84.

CHAPTER 7

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Directions**Continuing the Fight; Remaking Local Worlds**

The sun rose on Lot 84 on October 1, 2012. I was nearing the end to my fieldwork and many of my discussions became increasingly panoptic. My interlocutors sought to sum up both my time among them and the issue of alcohol against a broad range of time, space and opinion. Rather than the urgent rallying of ministers, or blithe dismissals of the old guard, what emerged in my latter days was acknowledgement of the relevance of understanding drinking within historical cycles of Lot 84 and the life cycles of her residents. People talked of changing alcohol use patterns as inescapable logical follow-ons to the drastic cultural changes that have occurred over the 20th century. Similarly, there was a circumspect nonchalance to some conversations. In one such case, a good friend told me, “Yes, the question of alcohol is a difficult one. But so was leaving the bush. It was also a fight to have representatives in government. Alcohol is just one of the fights that we, as a community, have in this life.” Rather than placing emphasis on the damage caused by alcohol, many Qom decided to summarize alcohol in terms which emphasized the achievements and empowerment of people who had overcome their addictions, rather than in fatalistic terms emphasizing the destructive force of alcohol in their community.

Readings like these came from many of the same people who described to me the horrors of alcohol—including birth defects, unwanted pregnancies, suicides, financial ruin, domestic abuse, incarceration, robbery, knifings, muggings and gang formations. Such dichotomy reinforces alcohol’s multivalence, an attribute which I have highlighted throughout this text. This ambivalence was emphasized by a man whose present faith was ignited through a period of heavy alcohol use, “For me, my drunken days were a dark period of my life. But without that period, I don’t know if I would have found Jesus Christ. Like the Bible says, ‘God’s ways are not our ways.’”

Despite the general positivity of most of my “exit interviews,” with Lot 84’s residents, fighting with alcohol is part of daily struggles on the margin of Argentine society. In one sense, those drinking alcohol utilize it as a tool to compel discussion surrounding social issues important to the Qom. Through their conspicuous unemployment, misuse of welfare checks, and violent displays, they are more effective than most other protest modalities in gaining official attention. Their visibility, inside and outside the *barrio*, has been critical to the modest success of grass-roots initiatives and Catholic employability training. On the other hand, official interventions aimed specifically at alcohol have served to emphasize the extent to which *criollo* officials and administrators are distanced from the needs and opinions of their Qom constituency.

The presence of countervailing narratives conveys that the social suffering caused by alcohol is continually being managed and renegotiated by Qom society. Rather than resulting in “a community destroyed” (Shkilnyk 1985) the Qom remake and repair their

local worlds in the wake of violence, unemployment, and addiction. The Qom recreate themselves and their community through vibrant Pentecostal *cultos*, individual vignettes of epiphany and deliverance, and focused preparation and execution of sport. As Adelson (2001) notes regarding a similar population in Canada, that aboriginality is a response to the social suffering attendant to her Cree population. Similarly, the Qom cope with their residual colonial yoke through their indigeneity, using patterns that have served them through their long period of resistance. Retreat to the bush, comings of age, interface with the spirit world, and deliverance at the hands of healers remain the ways in which the Qom continue to heal themselves of social illnesses stemming from colonial contact.

Generalizability, Applications, and Directions

Generalizability

The generalizability of the study is largely self-evident. Many social scientists and most of the public are aware of the correlation between poverty, marginality, and substance use. In this sense, much of the data presented here serves to reinforce a well-understood phenomenon. Scholars working in indigenous Russia, with dispossessed populations in the United States and Canada, and relocated and sedentarized foragers in Africa and Australia will find, as I found in reading their works, numerous commonalities of experience between the Qom and ex-foragers in similar political-economic situations around the world. The presence of substance abuse in these communities is utterly predictable based on extant data; its absence in certain communities, such as Vaca Perdida mentioned in this work, is arguably more notable.

Despite such strong similarities across continents and cultures, social scientists have failed to achieve consensus regarding the causal mechanisms of the fidelitous correlation between substance abuse and marginality. In this way, the phenomenon in question is well-known but less-well understood. Explanations range from politico-economic to existentialist, from coping with alienation to numbing anxiety, and from meaning-making to anomie. Since the turn of the century, anthropologists have become increasingly amenable to the etiological and epistemological multiplicity in various substances' social lives. In this vein, I hope to relate the Qom's predictable substance use problems with multiplicity and multivocality; the data presented to me during fieldwork resisted neat interpretation, instead being circuitous and sometimes maddeningly contradictory, ambivalent and emergent. I assert that the lack of consensus is not the result of more contestation, but rather suggestive of the nature of the subject itself.

Regardless of the explanatory framework employed, it is clear that the most effective interventions for substance abuse among the Qom and similar populations would focus upon ameliorating structural marginality. Alcohol finds continued use in circles of youth alienated from valorized opportunities, and in adults alienated from both traditional cultural praxis and present labor. My fieldnotes were peppered with moments of attenuated opportunity. Though some of these stories ended with epiphanies that validated greater worth than worldly opportunity could give, their similar beginnings suggest opportunity absence as a common social experience among the Lot's residents.

Anthropologists and other social scientists can easily and rightly point to marginality as a correlate of substance use. However, public policy has shown that such pervasive structural issues like diminished opportunity and indigenous integration are quite difficult to effectively address on the ground. Anthropologists were among the first to critique sobriety interventions for their institutional utilization of power asymmetries and rather to suggest incorporating more nuanced techniques into psychological interventions. However, culturally appropriate services, as they came to be called, have evidenced tendencies to treat culture itself as an emollient, reify culture into something that people have or have lost, or obfuscate differences of opinion within self-identifying ethnic groups. Outside of indigenous problems of inequality, United States policy measures aimed at its reduction have had little success, indicating the substantial difficulty in politically addressing marginality and its effects.

Applications: Toward Good Enough Critically Applied Anthropology

Thus, in the absence of thoroughgoing or uniformly effective solutions, applied anthropologists have argued for a “good enough” critically applied anthropology which seeks to “redress the useless suffering” that is imposed politically and institutional on the socially vulnerable” (Bourgois and Schoenburg 2009, 298). Rather than the heroin prescription programs considered there, I ask, and gently proffer what a harm reduction strategy might look like regarding alcohol use among the Qom? The analysis I proffer, which are also offered to the community’s leaders for their consideration, attempt to address four major areas of concern: 1) Locus of Treatment Control, 2) Media of Care Communication, 3) Locality of Care, and 4) Redress for Unemployability.

The Locus of Treatment Control currently lies firmly outside Lot 84, on both social and personal levels. Protocols pursuant to alcohol-related incidents are crafted in police departments (no indigenous officers). Legislation is passed on a provincial and national level where the level of indigenous representation is little. Within the realm of treatment, the primary modality, psychoanalysis, bears little in common with Qom conceptualization of self, understandings of addiction etiology, or sensibilities for treatment. Indigenous involvement in the development of protocols and legislation pertaining to substance use is necessary. However, inviting current indigenous officials is insufficient to deliver the insights necessary for effective program development. Choosing from those who have had direct experience with substance use mitigation programs would be ideal, so that experiential knowledge, rather than the politics of “chiefs,” official representatives, and pastors, drives discussion from the indigenous perspective. On a personal level, many treatment plans result from police incidents which are escalated to official care outlets. From there, social workers and psychoanalysts dictate the nature, pace, and trajectory of care with little patient collaboration. As I have explicated elsewhere, this arrangement results in lack of engagement, punitive doctor-patient interaction, and ultimately poor adherence to treatment. Patient involvement in the construction of the patient care trajectory would shift the locus of control more firmly between caregiver and patient, though the present gulf between indigenous and criollo conceptions of appropriate care is so substantial that the suggested collaboration is presently impossible, though any shift in the current locus of care would constitute the beginnings of a harm reduction strategy.

Not only is the locus of control presently problematic, but also the way in which prevention and care are delivered. Beginning with prevention, information is disseminated to Lot 84 by the police, *criollo* social workers, and the health clinic. While this is not problematic in itself, the manner of communication is distinctly non-indigenous, an arrangement that exacerbates treatment based tensions. While flyers and videos are generally received well by community members, the absence of any Qom-language communication was repeatedly cited as problematic. Difficulties related to language use are even more evident during therapeutic interventions. Qom respondents repeatedly referenced a desire to conduct the intimate sharing required for effective therapy through the medium of their mother tongue, rather than through Spanish, despite perfect fluency in both languages. The use of the Qom language in-and-of itself is associated with healing, especially in the sense of colonial redress.

As treatment progresses, the interpersonal gulf created by linguistic hegemony widens due to clinics' location in the city of Formosa rather than in Lot 84. Public psychological services, including those indicated for substance use, generally are not available in the *barrio* (although there are occasionally social workers assisting at the Catholic chapel). In order to access psychological services, one must wait for a bus, ride for ~40 minutes to downtown Formosa, and walk several blocks to the clinic. Even though many people travel frequently to the city center to purchase goods at the marketplace (which happens to be fairly close to the psychological services clinic), Qom respondents universally thought that government social services should not take such inputs of time and money to obtain. The location of care negatively affects its

availability, which thus diminishes adherence and effectiveness. Though rumors circulate of planned local care options on the horizon in Lot 84, collective opinion remains cynical that such changes will be made.

Residents of Lot 84 are actively involved in describing the control, language and geography of psychological services devoted to alcohol use. Yet most were quick to clarify that treating individuals is not sufficient redress for decades of postcolonial marginalization, itself considered to be a potent contributing factor to alcohol's use within the community. They cite a lack of capacity building programs, low communal employability, lack of job search assistance, and discriminatory hiring practices as matters whose importance to alcohol use supersedes the specifics of available alcohol treatments. The education provided in Lot 84's school system neither prepares students for work, nor for university. As a result, a potent risk environment for problematic alcohol and drug use is created. Nevertheless, trade schools to shepherd youth toward productive employment, currently do not exist save the small trade school initiated through the Catholic chapel.

Recommendations

It is clear from the structural nature of these areas of concern, that this complex matter cannot be addressed both singularly and effectively. Many of the difficulties mentioned above cannot realistically be fully countered at this time. I will offer several recommendations for harm reduction, meant to initiate dialogue and iteration by indigenous stakeholders and public policy officials. These recommendations are crafted

so as to require few resources, no funding, and no legislation. Their “light” nature makes them implementable with agreements and collaboration, rather than through formal litigation, legislation, or lending.

1. Have professional social workers train and mentor indigenous apprentices

In order to address linguistic and other communication shortcomings, *criollo* social workers should include Qom apprentices on their intervention teams. This would presumably have the effect of putting the patient at greater ease, providing translation services if necessary, giving the apprentice work experience/connections and moving the locus of control toward the Qom. Though authority would still rest with the social worker, the indigenous voice would be amplified through numbers and, likely, location. This measure would represent little or no cost to state authorities, and would both improve therapeutic interactions and build the professional capacities of Lot 84.

2. Reinstigate peer counseling program in parallel to state offerings

The hijack of the Qom conceived peer counseling program, *La Casa Feliz*, continued to be a source of resentment and frustration during my fieldwork. As it is in other cases, indigenous momentum is broken by state involvement, which inadvertently robs the indigenous community of agency and autonomy. The grass-roots organizers stop their work as the proverbial baton is handed to the state, which in turn morphs, co-opts and essentially terminates the program leaving less effort than before their interference. This recommendation encourages Lot 84 to reinstitute a similar peer counseling to the one that was commandeered, and to have its communal ownership and lack of formality

be essential aspects, i.e. the purpose of it is to provide a parallel alternative to state run treatments. While this peer counseling program could become more robust, past experience teaches that it is best run as an amateur volunteer organization (much like the Big Brother, Big Sister Program in the United States) within the community to past problems and maintain its indigenous focus, character, and administration.

3. Seek synergies through various religious partnerships

The evangelical churches of Lot 84 are its strongest social institutions, yet official interventions seeking to prevent and treat problematic alcohol use fail to develop partnerships with these stakeholders. The police administering Lot 84 recognize the value of individual church members in assisting with interventions, but established partnerships would reach more people. Although politics surrounding which churches interface with state officials would certainly ensue, these problems already exist and should not dissuade collaborative attempts; the possible material benefits to the community outweigh the potential risks. If these partnerships are found to work well, substance use prevention/intervention need not be the only topic of focus for a state-church collaboration.

4. Initiate secondary school internship program to build skillsets

Improving substance intervention is superficial compared to addressing the causes of problematic substance use. The lack of vocational schools in Lot 84 negatively affects perceived employability among at-risk youth, who cite lack of opportunity as logic for deciding not to avoid involvement in frequent drinking groups. In an effort to improve

youth employability, Lot 84 schools should place students in businesses, both within and outside Lot 84, to shadow workers to learn about workplaces and the various skills needed to retain secure work. As many internships-especially externships-tend to be unpaid, this recommendation carries with it very little investment, while its implementation could result in substantial capacity and morale building within the indigenous community. My fieldwork revealed that much workplace discrimination can be attributed to poor employee training, either on the job or prior to hire. The failure of workers to meet expectations then maps onto *criollo* notions of inherent indigenous inferiority, where the (admittedly) poor performance stems from lack of training instead.

Challenges

The implementation of such programs, however, faces internal challenges beyond the structural impediments described above. We now move from what might work, to the why past prevention and intervention attempts—of various sorts—have failed.

As explored in detail elsewhere, an important consideration in Lot 84's political condition is the failure to achieve internal consensus that undermines the ability of urban Qom to negotiate their local health world with leverage necessary to effect change in the appropriateness of services. Lack of a unified ethnic consciousness causes the Qom to be viewed as lazy/incompetent that reinforces stereotypes, increases state paternalism and decreases sustainable capacity-building. While disparate opinions are unavoidable in populations the size of Lot 84, their disagreement results in inaction. This phenomenon can be linked to Qom ideals surrounding the necessity of consensus preceding political

action. In large part, the lack of consensus in Lot 84 stems from a leadership vacuum which exists as a result of its unique melting pot history. No sanguine chief has ever existed for the area of Lot 84, a reality which renders each self-proclaimed or political chief mostly inert from the onset of his “term.” Lack of legitimate leadership then fails to galvanize opinion within the community. When viewed from the outside, the political agenda of Lot 84 is received as chaotic, contradictory, or non-existent (a reality which reinforces the paternalist tendencies of the Argentine state). Moreover, external politicians try to fill the power vacuum of the relatively populous Lot 84 at election time to gain the “indigenous vote”, during which they attempt to rally support, only to disappear following the election.

In turn, the geographic placement of Lot 84 represents unique challenges in the implementation of substance related programs. Its ready access to the city makes prohibitive measures impossible to reinforce. Where more rural Qom communities report relative success with alcohol prohibition, such measures are unfeasible in the case of Lot 84. Paradoxically, Lot 84 remains distant enough from the city to render inconvenient measures implemented in Formosa.

Research Directions

Alcohol may very well be the most studied substance in human history. During the research planning phase of my dissertation, I wondered to myself what light I might be able to shed on such already well-surveyed terrain. In the end, however, there remain interesting and important directions within the realm of alcohol studies, itself nested

within the larger anthropological examination of the roles of psychoactive substances in human societies.

Regionally, very little recent ethnographic research has been conducted on the indigenous peoples of the Gran Chaco or the Southern Cone (Chile, Argentina, Uruguay). This study falls within that gap, yet the need for further study is pressing. Apart from some Argentine ethnographers (Wright, Tola, Gordillo), there is little scholarly production. As one might expect in this case, the number of studies examining alcohol and substance use among the indigenous populations of the Southern Cone is similarly small; it utterly pales in comparison to the treatment of indigenous North and Central Americans, and indigenous Australians. The indigenous populations of the Southern Cone are worthy subjects of study, however, having the interesting historical accident of possessing Pre-Columbian alcohol production, despite evidencing a foraging subsistence strategy. In addition, the ways in which they have interfaced with their government during the colonization and (for many) the sedentarization process is unique in many ways from the better understood experiences of North American, Australian and even Siberian populations.

In turn, the relationship substance use and power has only begun to be explored in any population. Critical medical anthropology has argued for greater consideration in the role of political economics and their attendant power structures in understanding health, this view has not yet been appreciably extended to include either problematic or recreational use of substances. While some work has been done on linking power

asymmetries to substance-related outcomes (Bourgois and Schoenberg 2009, Pine 2008), the area remains severely under-researched despite the growing number of volumes which utilize a Foucauldian lens for viewing various social phenomena.

Changing leadership structures in indigenous populations worldwide represent an understudied factor in achieving gains in indigenous rights under the aegis of right to self-determination. Indigenous rights to self-determination, championed by organizations such as Survival International, Amnesty International, and others, are more complex within given societies than they appear to outsiders. Although some societies certainly have clear and pressing needs which govern their political agendas, others like the Qom are quite divided or agnostic in their opinions regarding the direction of their communities. The role of leadership and its effect on governmental interface, health outcomes, and societal direction is virtually unstudied. Transitions in political organization, long the province of archaeologists and other anthropologists, is notably absent from the corpus of contemporary indigenous studies. Rather than representing a hackneyed artifact of anthropological heritage, the study of political transitions of scale remains urgently relevant to indigenous populations seeking greater agency, autonomy, and stability and should thus remain has a focal point of indigenous studies.

Lastly, the frame employed by this study of public drunkenness—that of performance—promises greater applicability in the realm of social intoxication. The case of the Qom, the public nature of drunkenness constructs the problem as it is socially understood. By expanding the definition of ritual, social intoxication using any substance

can be understood performatively. The private intoxication of methamphetamine, the proclamation of back-stage drug use by the rock star between songs, and the florescence of violent Irish drinking during British occupation are brought into focus using the lens of performance. Just as psychoactive substance change our subjective perception of world, our social personas are viewed by others based on what substances we use and how we use them.

Concluding Remarks:

At twilight along lot 84's main road it is possible to view much of the phenomenon of alcohol use at once. Walking toward the exit of the *barrio*, the glares of adolescents, drunk and defiantly smoking along the school wall graffitied with the band name "Fuerte Apache" dominates the foreground. Passing me on their way to *culto*, Qom residents in colorful dress heed the calls of the pastor calling over megaphone to a service that will inevitably descry the use of alcohol. Rugby, with its ambiguous place in the drinking story, is played under lights on the fields across the street. In the shadows surrounding the field, groups can be seen squatting and drinking on street corners. All the while, the police station, tangible symbol of ongoing colonial occupation with its implied ability to enforce discipline, is visible as the silhouettes of officers check vehicles entering greater Formosa. These juxtapositions and their implied contradictions are emblematic of the cycle of alcohol use that I have described in the preceding chapters.

However, I did not always view it thus, and others arriving to the community see fracture and chaos instead of the nested and overlapping cycles as I have traced here.

Even from this snapshot, it would be difficult to downplay the “problem” that alcohol constitutes for the Qom—people drink to excess and often behave violently, often harming themselves and others. This is undeniable. Equally undeniable, is that many believers have used a period of drinking as a fulcrum to elevate their spiritual lives. This not only improves their souls, however, but many find their faith’s expression in voluntary community service, one of the only sustainable, no-strings-attached community development initiatives present in the neighborhood. In overarching fashion, the subtle but profound influence of the ongoing colonial encounter looms in the disciplinary, civilizing sobriety narratives of psychoanalysts and police chiefs. In opposition, youth brandish the bottle against the colonial authority of their oppressions, often harming themselves in public spectacles that rail against the social order as it is. The immediacy of this encounter invites a folk-conceptualization that considers the presence of the city to be seeping venomous intoxication. Alcohol use in Lot 84 is simultaneously all these phenomena—not the chaos it would appear to be prior to disentangling numerous threads.

In the end however, this ethnography says more about the Qom than it does about alcohol. The Qom have transitioned from a conservative, relatively homogenous society—the kind much studied by ethnographers of the early to mid 20th century—to a society of diverse opinions, lifeways, beliefs, and undercurrents. This is reflected specifically in alcohol, yet I suspect it would apply equally well to a thorough examination of local Qom economies, political thought, dating patterns etc. Though they therefore may superficially resemble *criollo* society in these manners, closer inspection

reveals that they have not undergone assimilation or acculturation, but rather they have actively changed and adapted to fluid circumstances in a uniquely Qom manner. Indeed, the violence of the colonial encounter is ubiquitously palpable—perhaps more so concerning alcohol use than in other areas. Yet here also on display is the forever-indomitable constitution of the Qom.

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