

Hunting Chimera: The Politics of Rugby Participation among the Qom of Argentina

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Abstract: This paper examines indigenous rugby participation as a reflection of the ambivalent relationship between Qom indigenous athletes and the Argentine state. The analysis begins with geographic analysis of the ethnographic location, a peri-urban homogenous Qom ghetto. From this starting point, the founder's effect of neo-Nazi Loco Rossi, an ex-professional *criollo* Argentine rugby player, is examined. In 1993, Rossi started the first indigenous rugby team near Formosa, Argentina. Over the ensuing decade, Aborígen rugby club gained traction and international visibility, culminating in a successful independent film entitled "A Chimera of Heroes" by Daniel Rosenfeld. Their success, occasioned retrenchment within the indigenous community, which formed an all-indigenous team-Qompí to compete with Aborígen. The conflicting aspirations of indigenous athletes are then examined through the lens of Batesonian schismogenesis. In conclusion, for the Qom the kind of schismogenesis exhibited by the competing formations of Aborígen and Qompí is an instance of complimentary schismogenesis, for rather than existing in equivalent contexts, Aborígen and Qompí reinforce competing indigenous ideals. In this way, they reflect Qom anxieties about their place vis-à-vis the Argentine state.

Key words: Argentina, Qom, Indigenous community, Rugby, Schismogenesis.

Resumen: En este ensayo se examina la participación del rugby indígena como representación de la relación ambivalente entre los atletas indígenas de los Qom y el estado argentino. El ensayo comienza con el análisis geográfico de la ubicación etnográfica, un barrio Qom homogéneo y periurbano. A partir de este punto de partida, se examina el efecto del Loco Rossi, un ex-jugador argentino de rugby criollo profesional. En 1993, Rossi fundó el primer equipo de rugby indígena. Durante la década siguiente, el club de rugby Aborígen ganó tracción y visibilidad internacional, lo que acabó culminando en una exitosa película independiente titulada *La quimera de los héroes* de Daniel Rosenfeld. Este éxito ocasionó una reacción en la comunidad indígena, que formó un equipo totalmente indígena, Qompí, para competir contra el equipo Aborígen. Las conflictivas aspiraciones de los atletas indígenas se examinan a través de la lente de la esquismogénesis Batesoniana. En conclusión, para los Qom la especie de cismogénesis exhibida por las formaciones competidoras de Aborígen y

Qompí es una instancia de cismogénesis complementaria, ya que en lugar de existir en contextos equivalentes, Aborígen y Qompí refuerzan ideales indígenas antitéticos. De esta forma, reflejan la inquietud de los Qom sobre su lugar frente al estado argentino.

Palabras clave: Argentina, Qom, comunidad indígena, rugby, cismogénesis.

Introduction

Dust is kicked up as the trucks make their swift passage down provincial highway 80. A group of us are walking along the road's shoulder, with lawn chairs in tote toward one of the local rugby fields. The match pits Qompí, an all-indigenous rugby team, against one of the other many non-indigenous, *criollo*, teams from the local adult league. Halftime has ended, and Qompí stands ready to receive the ball while the opposition stands in a line, prepared to kick. Sitting on the midline of the field, the spatial contrast occasioned by the game's rules brings into relief other differences between the battling squads. The stark ethnic contrast on either side of the ball reminds me of the reluctance of the Qom ethnic group to mix with non-indigenous Argentines and the in-road that rugby was originally intended to be. As the ball is kicked, and teams begin to communicate, another reminder is audible — Qompí switches from casual Spanish, in which they had their halftime meeting, to the Qom language as a means of talking around their opponent. Despite this misdirection the final contrast is a familiar one — a score heavily lopsided in favor of the stronger, bigger, and better-trained opponent.

The ongoing rivalry between Qompí and Aborígen highlights tensions of identity, geography and nationalism in the northern Argentine province of Formosa. While they both are known locally as the only teams that are composed of indigenous Qom athletes, their differences cast light on the sociopolitics of indigeneity in northern Argentina. The members of Qompí, donning less professional garb, communicate noticeably in the Qom language. More professionally dressed Aborígen, on the other hand, fields some non-indigenous players who are unable to speak Qom. Thus, the team members communicate in the Argentine lingua franca, Spanish. As others have noted (McDevett 262, Reid 112) the local language use highlights differences in player and community aspirations. Indeed, the players of Aborígen have aspired to professional rugby careers, playing in larger Argentine cities and even representing Argentina internationally. These players are particularly useful to producing positive international perceptions of the Argentine

State relationship with its indigenous people. The members of Qompí, by contrast, enact defiant indigeneity and active non-participation in Aborígen, and by extension, Argentine nationalism.

This analysis addresses how geography, local history and team composition reflect ambivalent Argentine aspirations for the Qom integration/homogenization and how those contrast with parochial indigenous sensibilities that protect indigenous community integrity. The narratives of indigenous rugby center upon the influence of ex-European rugby player and Argentine nationalist Eduardo “Loco” Rossi and his forays into team formation and coaching. Following his “conversion” from apparent Nazism (Young, Review: The Chimera of Heroes), Rossi founded Aborígen Rugby Club in 1993, gradually guiding the team to international success. While the success of the team was not debatable in terms of wins and losses, his coaching approach to Aborígen polarized discourses concerned with rugby, indigeneity and nationalism. On one hand, European and Argentine journalists praised the attention Rossi gave to the Qom players and the successes his team achieved. Positive sentiment waxed with the release of the documentary film, *A Chimera of Heroes*, by Daniel Rosenfeld, which went on to win an independent film award. However, within the Qom community, Rossi gained a reputation for authoritarian coaching techniques, promulgation of performance enhancing drugs and exploiting his players’ talents for money (though the veracity of these claims are highly dubious). Moreover, the location of his training facility — in the no-man’s land of bush that rings Formosa — initiated a panic among the Qom that their children were being stolen to be stripped of their indigenous identities and reworked into *criollo* (Argentines of European descent) rugby players. In response, an all-indigenous rugby team, Qompí, coalesced on the fields in the center of the Qom settlement, Lot 68, as players fled Rossi’s regimen and recruited other would-be players to their team. To this day, Qompí maintains its most bitter rivalry with Aborígen, reflecting the two teams’ importance as a microcosm of the on-going colonial encounter.

It’s Not About Winning

In the vignette that begins this analysis, Qompí players would be perceived by context-unwary observers as languishing in a doomed project. They seem slight and poorly trained compared to their robust opposition. Their uniform is makeshift by each player, usually ill-fitting and well-worn. However, the Qompí team would disagree with this

assessment, as if their counterpoints were self-evident. They have always appreciated the more gracile frames of foragers for whom speed and endurance were more important than rote strength and weight. They look upon the bodily poetics of their oppositions' as derivative of rugby's European context, but not appropriate to indigenous praxis of rugby.

For the *criollo*, the national purpose of the sport is not so different than the social agenda of the present government or the political goals of the colonialists before them: Qom ethnocide through compelled integration. The Qom have learned by generations of losses how to express their transcendence of the opposition by other means than fixating on the kinds of victory fetishizes by their various state oppressors. The internalizing of a separate and alternative mentality regarding sports indicates that the people who can socialize such independence may also be able to consolidate a separate and viable identity, indefinitely.

Not only does the rivalry of Qompí and Aborígen reflect local anxieties about the integrity of group identities, it is paralleled on national and international scales. Domestic Argentine rugby players have traditionally been groomed towards civilized temperaments in an atmosphere of amateurism (Dunning 9); they face a catch-22 when weighing local allegiances versus international aspirations. For example, a promising young Argentine rugby player must gauge the monetary gains and worldly experience of playing in Europe against the loss of social capital back home. A positive reputation at home could translate to more stability long term through business partnerships and deep familial ties. This social safety net, in many cases, could lead to greater economic vitality than the promised riches of an athlete's life, as the fortunes of professional athlete are contingent on performance and remaining injury-free. This tension is now global in scale (Esson 84, Darby et. al. 142, Besnier 491). Neoliberal internationalization in the sports economy has created a socioeconomic pull on playing talent toward global competition centers, which promise monetary gain and international notoriety for players that expatriate to practice sports professionally. However, local movements against this flow are also quite common (Vaczi 21). These movements luxuriate in the subversive power held in athletes' refusal to participate in globalized flows of athletic talent away from motherlands toward the corrupting influences of money and fame. When players practice the arts of refusal, their actions bolster nationalist or localist movements by upending the economic logic of the international sporting industry. Not only this, but they achieve the communal respect of those who demonstrate the individual character to

abdicate individualistic prestige in favor of commitments to communal integrity.

In order to understand the use of public recreational space by the Qom people, we must first examine their sedentarization and resultant delineation of spaces, the arrival of rugby to the indigenous sphere, and the ways in which history and space have interacted in the interim. The current outlook of the Qom community is reflected not only in the spatial organization and utilization of fields in and out of Lot 68, but also in opinions and actions related to rugby and its practice.

By 1970, many of the Qom (then using the ethnonym Toba, which is now shunned as a pejorative) ethnicity, displaced from their lands, disrupted of their semi-nomadic foraging cycle, had loosely gathered on the outskirts of the provincial capital, Formosa, in search of assistance, work, and influence. This apparent loitering caused them to be corralled by the Argentine Army and placed on a remote lot, roughly equivalent to four city blocks located alongside a provincial route and comfortably separated 5 miles beyond the city limit. Aside from its location relative to the city, the internal geography of the *barrio* (literally neighborhood, but in this context, exurb) continues to be largely dictated by government management and intervention. Despite numerous tokens of governmental involvement, this exurb, Lot 68, is nevertheless a distinctly indigenous space. The overwhelming majority of the population, estimated at about 5,000, identifies as part of the Qom ethnic group, one of several indigenous ethnic groups in north central Argentina. The remainder of the population consists of members of the other indigenous groups, the Pilagá and the Wichí, with an occasional spouse of non-indigenous heritage. The private lands immediately surrounding the *barrio* are occupied by *monte* (bushcountry), livestock grazing land, a police checkpoint, and a gas station. One must travel several miles to the southwest to again encounter occupied land, and another several miles to reach the city center.

The geography of Lot 68, decided upon in the 1970s, continues to produce vigorous “integration debates” on both sides of the *monte* buffer. Many Qom inhabitants maintain that even the relative distance they have to the city is a cause of many communal ills, including violence, alcohol and drug use, and loss of traditional knowledge. Therefore, they contend greater integration, spatial or cultural, will serve to further existing problems and generate new ones. In Formosa, the contested flow of talent is from the bush country, an indigenous space, to the decidedly non-indigenous provincial capital of Formosa. It is

not solely associated to the politics of community, however, but also with Qom narratives that indicate a continuum of health from the bush (healthy, healing) to the city (contagious, sick). The Qom maintain a reflexive belief in contagion that is chthonic to specific locales and can affect or be spread by individual that leaves such a place and moves elsewhere. One man described the interstate road system thus,

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.

This highway analogy epitomizes traditional Qom beliefs regarding the city: that it is a source of communal and social diseases that are particularly dangerous to indigenous interlopers. Such a conception of city-related contagion, then explains the community's ambivalence to rugby. Some inhabitants claim that it is good exercise, while providing an outward sign of indigenous strength. Others lament its European origins, and recall that most of the things given to the Qom by Europeans have been instruments of violence and communal turmoil.

On the *criollo* side of the buffer, the isolation of Lot 68 fosters negative *criollo* opinions of the lack of motivation, professionalism, intelligence, and capacity of the indigenous people. The Qom are perceived to persist with coddling and without social improvement, ideas which foment continued racial enmity. For city-dwellers, the solution is for greater integration of Qom society with *criollo* society. It is the "solution" that the Qom contingency takes as a euphemism for ethnocide. This debate, ultimately concerning the nationalist politics of ethnic integration, has played out in the public space of rugby matches from remote Lot 68, Formosa all the way to the pitches in New Zealand.

A Chimera of Heroes: Rossi Introduces Rugby to the Qom

In the early 1993, an ex-professional rugby player Eduardo "Loco" Rossi, introduced rugby to Lot 68. Born in a nearby Chacoan city, Rosario, he played professional rugby in Buenos Aires, France, Spain

and Wales. Upon retiring, he became a coach. Soon after experiencing a conversion away from right wing Nazism after a visit to a French holocaust museum he decided to offer his sport and assistance with it to the Qom by forming a team he named Aborígen Rugby Club, the first registered indigenous rugby club in Latin America. In the beginning the team lacked funds and training entirely. For instance, Rossi notes that a dearth of funds required that the team practice in unconventional ways like pushing a pick-up truck instead of practicing the scrum using more common, modern equipment. Rugby found fertile ground in the Qom population. During the 1990's, unemployment skyrocketed among the Qom of Lot 68 during the mechanization of Formosa's agricultural sector. This led to widespread unemployment and, accordingly, free time. Rossi's discourse around prospects of a better life through discipline, teamwork and selflessness resonated with the Qom youth of the time. Therefore, despite early monetary limitations, Aborígen quickly advanced beyond provincial borders with matches against other teams outside of Liga Formoseña de Rugby, such as Tucumán, Tierra del Fuego and Rosario. In a step which all members remember vividly, Aborígen made its international debut in New Zealand in 1998, where it went 1-1 in two local games.

Eventually Aborígen won sufficient success that it was made subject of a 2003 documentary by Daniel Rosenfield "The Chimera of Heroes." The film won international success for its dramatic portrayal of Loco Rossi's foundation of 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 [Qom] tribesmen, and train and manage Argentina's first indigenous team." Despite this success (it secured award at the Venice Film Festival Official Competition), scholars (Salamone 12) have criticized the film for marginalizing the voice of the indigenous people it portrays in favor of a focus on Rossi's interesting journey from right wing extremist to indigenous rugby coach. Despite seemingly noble intentions, even the director's description "A white man is the leader of a group of the socially excluded Toba [Qom] tribesmen. He has taught them to play rugby, creating the Aborígenal Rugby Club, and to defend their dignity and their rights." indicates anti-indigenous sensibilities describing Rossi's ability to assist them in defending their dignity (implying that the Qom might not have dignity without rugby) or their rights (by additional participation in white Argentine pastimes).

By the time I interviewed Loco Rossi and toured his home and training facilities in 2011, his recruiting and training practices had shifted to suit the goals he had for the team. As he and I strolled through his extensive collection of World War II memorabilia, I asked him what his role is *vis-à-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.

Rossi went on to explain Aborígen's current recruiting practice that pulls players from both Qom and *criollo* centers. Towards the explicit end of "integrating 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. When I asked what the purpose of the team is, Rossi responds, "It is a goal of a better life of self-improvement. There are some [indigenous people] that integrate not having to do with rugby, but not many. In New Zealand, the aboriginal people are much more advanced and integrated into society. That is the goal here."

As we proceeded with the facilities tour we saw one-story dormitory housing available for players. The players live at the facility. To the left of the fields is the main building complex, also one-story. This includes of visitor locker room home locker room, a mess hall, kitchen, his office, and a pantry. The grounds are very well tended, with grass mowed, pantry organized, no graffiti on any walls — everything in its place. The first thing we do is go to the pantry, where Loco distributes flour, cornmeal, milk, honey and other high calorie food that the rugby players need. Rossi turns quickly to the importance of organization in running such an enterprise.

Yes, some of it my own money, but I get some money from the government to. The government matches my contribution. I think it's a good investment, because my organizational skills prevent much from being lost. Clubs like Qompí get money from the government and they just eat it. This club, my club, got money directly from the president. The teams that are only made up of Toba [Qom] now, Qompí, they aren't going anywhere, and they're reinforcing discrimination.

In his statement, Rossi furthers his nationalist agenda by insinuating that Qom players who do not participate in his recruiting practices, rather preferring to enact what they consider to be an unproblematic indigenous identity, are reinforcing discrimination. In this manner, proponents of traditional indigenous practices — including the integrity of Qom communal life, are accused of isolationism.

Ex-players who have stayed with Rossi through their development echo his call to have Qom individual live among the *criollo* city dwellers and take on a Westernized life. One of Rossi's original Qom players named Carlos, 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 68 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 68 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.

Carlos' narrative reflects the ideals instilled by Rossi's program: discipline, intentional integration, independence and work. He has come to feel as though the people who remain in the indigenous enclave of Lot 68 are responsible for their poverty by willingly, fearfully isolating themselves from the broader Argentina population.

Overall, Rossi's boarding-style training facility and pro-integration stance support a nationalist agenda — one that incorporates Qom community members to create a superficially diverse Argentina at the expense of the indigenous sovereignty. However, local responses to Abo-rígen's heterogeneity have been mixed. Within the city, I attended dinner parties where guests desecrated or questioned Rossi's recruiting practices saying, "Its remarkable, but I doubt it can be kept up. Can the Toba boys keep up with the Spanish of the others? I think they should have their own team. Why go through the trouble?" There is apprehension among the people of Formosa that the team can be made disciplined and functional enough for rugby — the first aversion to Rossi's chimera. Where Rossi's methods truly come under fire, however, are within Lot 68 where Rossi is considered a despicable child stealer and drug peddler (see next section). To them, the chimera that

Rossi has created to further integrate the Qom unremittingly under the Western umbrella is reprehensible. Indeed, it is a monster worth fighting against.

Qompí Competes

While the 1998 New Zealand trip inspired some indigenous players, such as Carlos, to pursue a life in the city because he saw that “the Maori of New Zealand were far more part of society,” circumstances surrounding the trip, including allegations of embezzlement, verbal abuse of players, and alleged Nazism, caused some Aborígen players to move back to Lot 68 and form their own, ethnically uniform team (even including an indigenous coach who was previously a player for Rossi), grounded literally and metaphorically in the fields that lie in the center of Lot 68.

By the time I arrived in Lot 68 in 2009, Qompí was a fixture of communal life in Lot 68. Every evening as the sun set, rugby players would leave their homes and begin tossing around on the fields under the lights. They would divide up into teams and scrimmage for several hours, before breaking for some cold *mate* and *torta frita* (fried bread). As rugby is played, singing emanates from the evangelical churches of Lot 68 while motorcycles buzz up and down the streets of the *barrio*. In the vision, we see how centrally rugby fits into the communal life of Lot 68. The players of Qompí reinvented rugby as an activity through which they enact their indigeneity in the context of their *barrio*. Even aside from the location of the fields and the composition of the teams, Qompí reflects other aspects of Qom culture. As one important example, the egalitarianism of the Qom comes through, as there is a women’s rugby group that scrimmages on the field parallel to the men (this is not the case in non-indigenous Argentina, where female teams associated with rugby clubs play field hockey instead).

The team name, Qompí, is a Qom word meaning “many of us” and is simultaneously a trope on the Spanish word *competición*, or competition. Qompí, cited as a racist money pit by Aborígen players and coaches, is viewed instead as a source of communal wealth, health and indigeneity within the *barrio*. One player who played for both Aborígen and Qompí 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 Lot 68 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.” While Aborígen is putatively non-racial in its recruiting practice, its name, now taken by the Qom as a pejorative, and its location, in the city, suggests the team’s purpose — to perpetuate the extermination of their culture and remedy the “social problem” they present, all through the seemingly benign path of integration. To hunt Rossi’s chimera, deserting players started teaching the boys of Lot 68 how to play rugby on the soccer fields in the center square. They innovated a kind of touch-rugby pickup game for practicing without the violent hitting and heavy use of scrums that Rossi reported utilized in his practices. Eventually, this group of players also joined the *Liga de Rugby Formoseña* to play against *criollo* teams and Aborígen.

Considerable pride in the performance of Qom athletes is the rule. “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 and places. These are wholly grounded in the use of otherwise unused public land surrounding the *barrio*. As other authors such as Gaston Gordillo (88), have noted, the *monte*, for former foragers, is a strong symbol of indigeneity. A strong sense of ethnic space permeates the training regime of Qompí 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 Aborígen, 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. In his statement, Daniel makes apparent that for indigenous players, the *monte* is a source of strength that supersedes what can be had from what he considers to be a synthetic, toxic and individualistic path to competitive success.

As Daniel implied, Qompí loses with much greater frequency than Aborígen. In fact, they often appear near the bottom of the general standings in both the youth league and the adult league. Yet recruits

to Aborígen 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 people here.” I asked how prodigal players would be treated if they switched back to Qompí. However, in a fluid pragmatism typical of Qom narrative, I received answers such as, “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. Some guys get lured by promises of money, fame, or trips. He (Rossi) never shows his face in Lot 68. 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.

There is a rebellious enjoyment that accompanies playing or routing for Qompí. As one of the only non-indigenous players on the team, I felt while playing that I was somehow furthering the cause of Qom self-determination in the Argentine context. What I felt surely pales in comparison to how the players feel. In fact, there is a strong rebellious streak that runs through the players that have played exclusively for Qompí. Members of Qompí tend, more often than does even the typical population of Lot 68, to publicly display tokens of rebellion. T-shirt, decals, stickers bear the revolutionary image of Che Guevara. Boom boxes thump with the music of Rage Against the Machine, 50 Cent and other musicians whose lyrics rail against the establishment. Such anti-establishment, anti-nationalist tendencies are not only absent at Aborígen camp, but instead the rigorous discipline of the dutiful team member is enshrined and valorized.

Qompí 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 68. This pattern indicates that playing for Qompí — performing identity in the public space of the field— strengthens ethnic solidarity to an even greater extent than simply living in Lot 68. Rather than integration, as was the explicit aim of Aborígen, this parallel development, with its maintenance of an indigenous recreational space within a veritable reservation, is the ongoing counterpoint offered by Qompí’s players and alumni.

Agnosticism towards losing games, while maintaining a mindset of anti-compliance, is at the heart of Qompí players’ and alumni’s social life. This happens to align in high concordance with much else in the Qom identity cluster. Since 1507, from the introduction of the horse, to guns, to alcohol and how rugby, the Qom predictably repurpose

cultural artifacts loaned from *criollo* neighbors into powerful modes of indigenous resistance. Thus, the weekend tournament pitting Qompí against Aborígen and *criollo* teams becomes a microcosm of the colonial encounter, with indigenized modes of colonizer practices being appropriated and utilized to generate alternative forms of meaning, resistance, and hybridity with and against colonial oppressors.

Local Pleasures Confront National Aspirations

In biological science, a chimera is “an individual, organ, or part consisting of tissues of diverse genetic constitution; a hybrid created through fusion of a sperm and an egg from different species.” Daniel Rosenfeld’s title for his film on Loco Rossi’s involvement with the founding Qom players anticipates a useful lens for understanding the complex hybrid flows and counter-flows that Aborígen’s formation and evolution have occasioned within Lot 68, Formosa and Argentina more broadly. Aborígen’s formation comports well with the notion that it is a hybrid formation derived from two distinct parental pools; a long history of colonial contact indicates that the foundation of Aborígen is the latest in a series of hybridities between cultural markers of Qom derivation with those of European origin.

What then causes Aborígen to be important enough to trigger filmmaking, international competition, and the formation of a second indigenous team to compete against it? I argue that its formation violated extant local imaginations of ethnic geographies. In essence, its formation opens up a “third space” between Lot 68 and Formosa that did not exist before.

The intervention of the Third Space, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is continuously revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People (Bhabha 54).

Clearly, in Formosa ethnic narratives reinforce Qom and *criollo* identities as separate and distinct, a sense that is further buttressed by the geographic reality of ethnic separation. By training in the interstitial space between Lot 68 and Formosa, Aborígen embodies and enacts a sporting Third Space (Ruddock 369) where alternative identities come

into being. In turn, the formation of Aborígen in the *monte* outside of Lot 68 led to the creation of a competing Third Space in the center of Lot 68. These liminal spaces open up possibilities for reintegration or disintegration.

What is at stake, then, is whether or not members of the Qom ethnicity are willing to participate in reflecting a heterogeneous vision of Formosa within Argentina, or if they prefer the local pleasures of resistance and indigeneity. In navigating the dichotomy between the ethos of self-determination and that of ascendant indigenous participation within Argentine society, Qom players circulate between the teams that serve as the embodied markers of the two alternatives.

In that Qompí and Aborígen remain as fixed entities with players circulating between them based on their particular moments in personal aspiration and affiliation, it is fruitful to consider how the teams function as competitive hubs in a bureaucracy of identity politics in Formosa. On the one hand, Qompí represents localist, domestic aspirations that place communal integrity and grass roots development above all. This is even better illustrated when realizing that many of the bilingual teachers of the Qom school tasked with ensuring the survival of the Qom language and teaching myths, are involved in Qompí, while no members of Aborígen are present in the community whatsoever. By contrast, Aborígen represents a global pull on talent that invites Qom players to enjoy the world's stage as few indigenous people do. It provides exemplars, in the form of the Maori of New Zealand, to show Qom youth a pattern demonstrating strong, successful indigenous men living and competing in a context that is largely European-derived.

Stemming from his study of a New Guinean group, Gregory Bateson elaborated (1975) the term *schismogenesis* to describe a “process of differentiation in the norms of individual behavior resulting from cumulative interaction between individuals.” Schismogenesis has been used to describe the various kinds of social rifts that occur in the various societal strata, and remains useful in describing the ways in which Qompí and Aborígen bureaucracies are formed by the cumulative actions of the players that pass through them. Bateson described two types of schismogenesis, complementary and symmetrical.

Complementary schismogenesis is enacted by hierarchical, unequal, segments of a society; as exhibited between the competition of economic classes. While there is contest between individuals and segments, the tensions still exhibit an overall institutional continuity, and ultimately reinforce the hierarchical social whole. *Symmetrical* schismogenesis,

however, is a more common pattern seen in sporting environments, where a kind of arms race for superiority ensues. With symmetrical schismogenesis in Western (and by extension, *criollo*) sports, each team has the same rules, belongs to the same overarching federation, and represents analogous territorial segments. All teams seek the same goal: to win. The enthusiasm of winning, or the disappointment of loss, both serve to reinforce the ethos of the game. In that sense, the ethos itself seems to be more important than other potentially divisive practical forces; and for this reason, sports are often thought to integrate peoples together who are otherwise unduly given to other more practically injurious contest.

While Western athleticism ostensibly promotes character building, personal perseverance, camaraderie, integrity and a host of other values, frequently enough such an idealization is not the case in practice. The Aborígen Club is clearly seeking to integrate, if not, subordinate, Qom athletes, and the community to which they are attached, to the subculture of sport, which conjoins territories of Argentina together. Rossi hopes to engender the discipline of the game, such as it has evolved in Argentine society, into popular Qom behavior. Outside Western observers are hardly able to be critical of Rossi's efforts, as athleticism and sports competition holds an uncritical pride of place in globalized popular culture.

That a documentary about the Aborígen Club was awarded by the Western cinema is unsurprising given the shared value system at play. For many of the Qom people, the Aborígen Club is not serving to integrate them into Argentine society on the idealized level playing field of rugby. The mentality of sport associated with Argentine rugby in general, and the Aborígen Club in particular, is not play on neutral ground. For the Qom culture resistance, the Aborígen Club exhibits yet another prong of the national program of ethnic suppression. Yet it is precisely here in this program that the Qom exhibit particular ethnic traits of a yet more dramatic effort for community survival.

Exhibiting a different somatic type than the Aborígen Club; practicing in an alternative location; cultivating a different set of skills; displaying a different kind of uniform, and speaking a chthonic tongue, team Qompí is content to play on their own, unapologetic terms. As others have noted (Vaczi 37), for the Qom, even the ultimate goal of the national game, and the international sport cult, is subordinated to the indigenous ethos. In this heresy of organized sport, a more essential layer of play is foregrounded; one by which the dominant standards of

the ascendant classes are subverted even by the very act of their ritual presentation in the common ball field. A kind of subversive prestige is thus earned when traditional prestige cannot be practically won.

Conclusion

Qompí has exercised indigenous self-expression sufficiently to shift the goals of sporting practice, at least among the residents of Lot 68. While Aborígen Club et alia are aiming for the fetishized goal of standard victory by the acquisition of scores, Qompí has adapted its modern game to its anti-nationalist aesthetics. Qompí “wins” by its enjoyment of a confidence that it genuinely represents its people’s heritage. Lot 68 affirms them in this regard, while they are labeled racists by Aborígen players. Qompí players reinforce the value of fraternal bonds over individual stardom. Qompí is able to find satisfaction in connecting the game they play more to the heritage they esteem than to the fetishized victory others crave. Such a cultural disassociation of the collective desire for victory is quite rare, and only subject to cultivation from a culture with a tenacious grasp of its smaller scale heritage. René Girard writes of the kinds of endogamous rivalries in globalized sports:

Rivalistic desires are all the more overwhelming since they reinforce one another. The principle of reciprocal escalation and one upmanship governs this type of conflict. This phenomenon is so common, so well-known to us, and so contrary to our concept of ourselves, thus so humiliating, that we prefer to remove it from consciousness and act as if it did not exist. But all the while we know it does exist. This indifference to the thrust of runaway conflict is a luxury that small ancient societies could not afford (9).

For the Qom, therefore, especially for the Qompí team, the kind of schismogenesis exhibited by the competing formations of Aborígen and Qompí is an instance of complimentary and NOT symmetrical schismogenesis, as is more commonly seen in sporting rivalries. Rather than playing on a truly level field with the same rules, the context of Aborígen’s emergence, and the social mobility its players might utilize, is quite different than the context and possibilities of players who are currently on Qompí’s roster. The rivalry of Qompí and Aborígen is a reflection of the class struggle typical of indigenous-state relationship. The movement of players between the teams reflects the ambivalence of the indigenous community to the state — they are Argentines by

birth, but are generally not beneficiaries of a nationalist agenda. They play their games by an alternative set of rules. Indeed, the Qom have perceived that sport was not just a game by which they could learn valuable social skills to survive in a larger society. For them it was initially a *criollo* trick, but one which they unmasked by an indigenous sensibility, and turned around to their own best advantage.

A secondary definition of chimera is also appropriate to reference: “a thing that is hoped or wished for but in fact is illusory or impossible to achieve.” (oxforddictionaries.com) A team that has a goal well beyond winning is “playing” its league, in the performative sense of that word. It succeeds by its compelling show of its people’s ethos. The players of Qompí are rewarded not by the league podium, but by Lot 68’s pride and gratitude. The very capacity of the indigenous people to reward athletic youth with affirmation that competes with national allurements it itself powerfully reinforces the local community’s indigenous identity.

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