

## 1. Description

### 1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

Toba, Qom, Argentine Toba of the Guaycurú language family

### 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): [tob]

**1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):** The Gran Chaco Region (Western Paraguay, Eastern Bolivia, and Northeastern Argentina). Stretches from about 17° to 33° South latitude and between 65° and 60° West longitude

### 1.4 Brief history:

Traditionally the Toba people lived nomadically/semi-nomadically in the regions of what are now the provinces of Formosa, Chaco and northern Santa Fe. In the past couple of decades Toba peoples have been migrating to settlements closer to cities, such as Rosario and Buenos Aires (1).

Up until the late 1800s the Toba people were successful in the resistance against European colonization as well as the maintaining of traditional hunter-gatherer ways of life. It wasn't until few decades into the 20<sup>th</sup> century where Tobas began migrating to more urban areas for means of subsistence. This is also around the same time where the first ethnographic approaches had been taken towards the Toba people. (2)

In 1919, a Toba chieftain, Mezguezochí, led a war against European colonizers and was successful in many battles, or skirmishes. The Europeans finally caught Mezguezochí, which brought about a myth of him and his fellow chieftains being given to a cannibal woman (*nsoe*). The woman turned out to be Indian as well, and ended up helping the chieftains. Another version of the myth has Mezguezochí escaping from the Europeans then plunging into the Bermejo River, never to be seen again. (1)

As a result of European colonization, Criollos (whites of pure Spanish descent) began pasturing cattle in the grasslands of Toba territory. Once the grass was over grazed, the cattle began eating fruits from the thick, natural bush. Having moved the cattle about the landscape, seeds were spread, resulting in the emergence of bush and the disappearance of the Toba grasslands. This had a huge effect on the subsistence of the Toba; animals such as the rhea Americana (a flightless, ostrich-like bird of the grasslands) were no longer available to be hunted, which was done on horseback. (3) For a little history on the grasslands see 1.6.

With the displacement of the Toba and the exploitation of the land, many Toba men and women began working on plantations (sugarcane) up until the 1990s. Men and women would seasonally migrate west for the low wage, labor-intensive job from the recently settled villages. As mentioned before, the Toba traditionally lived as hunter-gatherers, but now live in scattered 'hamlets'. (3)

### 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

Presence of missionaries has brought about syncretism of traditional religious views with Pentecostalism and other Christian practices (4). The landscape has been taken over by cattle ranchers as well as farmers of many crops. The Toba have come to rely on these farms for work. (3)

### 1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

The savannah-like grasslands, or *nónaGa* had come about from centuries of the Toba and other indigenous groups setting fire to the landscape for purposes of sending messages, hunting, and warfare. As mentioned in 1.4, the Criollos and the pasteurizing of cattle was the result of the landscape making its return to its natural state. The areas of bush that were once grasslands are noticeably less thick than that of the natural forest; the Toba still refer to this as *nónaGa* (open grassland), as a way to remember how it once was. The bush that has always been bush, and never grasslands is referred to as *viáq ádaik*, or 'large bush.' (3)

### 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

Recent accounts (late 1990s) have the villages, or *hamlets* consisting of less than 100 people, although some are large, one consisting of over 600 people. The larger hamlets usually consist of an adobe church, a dispensary, a primary school, and a building of the *Instituto Comunidades Aborígenes* (ICA) with adobe houses scattered about. Due to recently created public sector employment, leaders and state employees reside in brick houses with iron roofs. (3)

## 2. Economy

### 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

### 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Hunting: men go on short trips not far from the villages to capture small animals such as rabbit, viscacha, and charata birds. For larger animals, men venture further into the thick bush to hunt corzuela (deer) and peccary. (3)

Fishing: this activity takes place during the dry season where fruits, honey, and animals are not as plentiful. Fishing was done in the rivers and marshes of the area; nets were used in the rivers, a depth net (*uanaganaGát*) and a surface net (*heélaGae*). (3)

**2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?** Bow and arrow. *Boledoras* are throwing balls that were used to hunt Rhea (3). It is unknown if these were used as weapons against other humans.

### 2.4 Food storage:

**2.5 Sexual division of production:** Men hunt and fish while women (especially older, non child bearing women) gather. (3)

### 2.6 Land tenure:

### 2.7 Ceramics:

### 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

### 2.9 Food taboos:

### 2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

### 3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): unknown

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): unknown

### 4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f): unknown

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): Studies have recorded the age at first birth was at about 21.5 ( $\pm 4.5$ ) in the 1930s and 40s. Last recorded in the 1980s, age at first birth had dropped to about 15.5 ( $\pm 1$ ), (2).

4.3 Completed family size (m and f): unknown. A household would consist of a nuclear family. (2)

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): Accounts from 1967 (Karsten) and 2001 (Valeggia & Ellison) both report the inter-birth-interval to be around 28 months. There is a taboo that restricts the parents from engaging in sexual intercourse until the most recently birthed child is able to walk on his or her own, (2).

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: It is not uncommon for marriages to end early on in the relationship. When this happens, the wife (or mother by this time) will go to live with her parents to raise her children there, (4).

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Most marriages are monogamous, although there are some accounts of polygamy. In these cases, it is common for the wives to live in separate communities, (4).

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry? Unknown

4.9 Inheritance patterns: There are no significant patterns of inheritance.

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: Unknown

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: Unknown

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): Toba tend to be exogamic, although there are no strict rules enforcing this (4).

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?

There are no accounts found on partible paternity.

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")

In order for pregnancy to take place there needs to be the presence of a *baby spirit* along with successive acts of conception (see below), (2).

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

Conception is an incremental process where semen builds up over 'successive depositions', mixing with intrauterine menstrual blood. This ritual is strictly between the mother and the father, (2).

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: None found/unknown

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? Once a woman becomes sexually reproductive (first menstruation), there is a ritualized period, lasting up to a few years, in which she is not held with childbearing responsibilities. Not to be confused with abstinence, she is to have sexual freedoms before finding a husband to have a family. Traditionally, if a woman were to become pregnant during this ritual period, it would often result in abortion or infanticide. Now that these practices are seen as unacceptable there are a large number of unmarried, young mothers. (2)

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? Often the grandparents (commonly the parents of the mother), (4).

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

4.24 Joking relationships?

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

Bilateral; Ethnographer, Elmer S. Miller, describes kin relations of the Toba as such:

"In the absence of unilineal descent groups, community organization primarily follows family lines.

Descent (bilateral) is of little importance in the social structure; it neither assigns status nor functions significantly in property inheritance," (pp. 194).

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

#### **4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?**

Traditionally individuals only had one name and children were given names by the chief of the community or the head of the family in which the child was born. The name was often that of a 'deceased ancestor or intimate acquaintance', (Miller 199). Since the impact of the Christian church, today families have Spanish surnames and individuals have Spanish given names. (4)

#### **4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)**

Outside of the village, within the Toba community.

#### **4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?**

Marriages are not arranged, although couples usually need approval from elders/parents, (4).

#### **4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:**

### **Warfare/homicide**

#### **4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:**

#### **4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:**

#### **4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:**

In ancient times warfare was very prevalent among the Toba. Violence would take place between neighboring tribes of *TegaGaikpi* (Nivaclé) and *KaGaikpi* (Wichí). Grasslands were known places for this warfare to take place. Toba men would also raid villages in order to capture sheep, weapons, and women and children. Another reason warfare would take place would be due to the blocking of fish upstream through fish fences. This was done by the *TegaGaikpi*, (3). The warfare had been put to a stop due to the arrival of missionaries.

#### **4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):**

#### **4.18 Cannibalism?**

While working on plantations, far into the time of colonization, there had been accounts of people who came from the mountains to perform cannibalism as a means of subsistence. These people were called *KiyaGaikpi* ('big eaters'). These people were not known to inhabit the land of the Toba, only the areas in which the Toba men and women had migrated seasonally to work the fields. It is said that they are not of indigenous descent, or that they are 'very white'. They were known to be very rich and even drive trucks. Also, to the luck of the Toba, it has been known that these people prefer white people and not Indians. (3)

### **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

#### **5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:** Description of villages given in 1.7

#### **5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):**

Today, the Toba are sedentary and live in communities of extended family. Traditionally, the Toba would be semi-nomadic, living in exogamic bands led by a headman/shaman. During the fishing season, groups would settle on the banks of rivers (Pilcomayo) and during the summer, at the peak of gathering season, Toba would converge into larger villages. (3)

#### **5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):**

Traditionally the Toba were egalitarian and led by a headman, who was also a shaman and a warrior. These men were called *haliaganék*, (3). Another source states that traditional headmen often acted as leader only in times of crisis, further emphasizing the importance of egalitarianism. Younger individuals also take action as leaders, as this can be viewed with suspicion by other individuals (4).

#### **5.4 Post marital residence:** Post-marital residence usually consists of a short time living with the parents of one of the spouses. Though rules are not strict, this usually tends to be the parents of the wife. After this period, the couple will build a place of residence usually near the dwelling of the parents. (4)

#### **5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):**

Traditionally, ancient Toba peoples had been very active in defending a wide range of territory. (3)

#### **5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):** Women never enter the bush alone for fear of other men and wild animals (3).

#### **5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:**

#### **5.8 Village and house organization:** Villages usually consist of large extended families. Households consist of nuclear families, with individuals of the second generation growing up to adulthood until finding a spouse. (4)

#### **5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):** No traditional specialized village structures. In modern day these structures can be seen as churches and schools (see 1.7), (3).

#### **5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?**

#### **5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:** Egalitarian with a headman. Lineages are unimportant (see 4.25), though the son of a headman may have better chances of gaining respect than that of any others. (4).

#### **5.12 Trade:**

#### **5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?** No.

### **6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)**

## **6.0 Time allocation to RCR:**

### **6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):**

Shamans are present and are known to have healing powers. Shamans are also commonly the headman of a village, or family. Since the missionaries and influence of Christianity has on traditional religion, the 'devils' that roam the bush are not only responsible for the deaths of individuals, but transfer their power to shamans which turns into healing power, (3).

### **6.2 Stimulants:**

**6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):** Rite of passage for young women described in 4.18.

### **6.4 Other rituals:**

### **6.5 Myths (Creation):**

There are many creation or etiological myths made up through animism (ex: The Pilcomayo river was dug up by a giant water snake). (3)

### **6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):**

### **6.7 Sex differences in RCR:**

**6.8 Missionary effect:** Christianity has been combined with traditional views. God now replaces divine spirits in whatever sort of ritual (3)  
Ex: the *baby spirit* necessary for mothers to become pregnant has long since been replaced by the presence of God (2). Most myths continue to take on their original form.

### **6.9 RCR revival:**

### **6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:**

**6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?** No. Children are often named after those who have recently died.

### **6.12 Is there teknonymy?**

### **6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)**

Traditionally religion was animistic where animals and humans are responsible for the formation and changing of most things. With the influence of Christianity, came the presence of devils that roam the bush and have come down from the mountains. These devils are also known to be responsible for all deaths relating to disease. (3)

## **7. Adornment**

**7.1 Body paint:** Body paint was used in the dressing of warriors. (3)

### **7.2 Piercings:**

### **7.3 Haircut:**

### **7.4 Scarification:**

**7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):** Feathers, jaguar furs, and chagüar fiber masks were worn by warriors (3)

### **7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:**

### **7.7 Sex differences in adornment:**

**7.8 Missionary effect:** Toba now wear westernized clothing.

### **7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:**

## **8. Kinship systems**

**8.1 Sibling classification system:** Individuals with the same parents are considered siblings. There are specific words for older and younger brothers and sisters, (4).

### **8.2 Sororate, levirate:**

### **8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):**

For a detailed account on kinship terms and concepts, read "Toba Kin Terms," by Elmer S. Miller. (4)

## **9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):**

### **Numbered references**

1. Terán, Buenaventura. "Mezguezoichi: History, Myth and Messianism Among the Toba." *Latin American Indian Literatures Journal* 4.1 (1988): 61-65. Print.
2. *Encyclopedia of Medical Anthropology: Health and Illness in the World's Cultures*. Ed. Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember. New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004. p564-572.
3. Gordillo, Gastón R. *Landscapes of Devils: Tensions of Place and Memory in the Argentinean Chaco*. Durham & London: Duke UP, 2004. Print.
4. Miller, Elmer S. "Toba Kin Terms." *Ethnology* 5.2 (1966): 194-201. *JSTOR*. Web. 16 May 2013.