

# MONEY, DEBT AND VIOLENCE

## Some reflexions from the Argentinian *trueque*<sup>1</sup>

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Hadrien Saiag

**Abstract:** This paper addresses the theoretical issues raised by the workings of two very different Argentinian local currency systems (also known as *trueque*) in Rosario and Poriajhú. The inter-workings of these monies (*crédito*) alongside the national currency (peso) are examined in terms of debt as a concept. Debt is central to the analysis because accountability and settlement can only exist in the context of a debt structure. Money indeed constitutes a social relation of itself. The nature of this can vary greatly, however. In Rosario, there is a wide disparity in the extent to which participants are able to juggle between monies (profiting from the relative differences in the evaluation of goods in the two monetary spheres). This underscores the potential for violence in money as a social relation, forging social statuses on an unequal basis. In Poriajhú by contrast, far more harmonious monetary relations are fostered thanks to parity between the different accounting systems (peso and *crédito*). As a result, differences in status outside the *trueque* are not reproduced within it. The differences between these regimes are caused by the differing authority positions held by the two *crédito* systems. In Rosario the group is indebted to individuals because of its settlement issue modalities. There are few opportunities to develop a principle of command and trust, and no authoritative capacity to manage power struggles. This brings about the orchestration of the group by individuals. In contrast, in Poriajhú the *crédito* serves as a creditor, and can contribute to a perpetuation of authority. On such a basis, it can preserve its ethical foundation and maintain parity between accounting systems.

### Address

IRISSO (UMR 7170)  
Université Paris-Dauphine,  
Place du Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny  
75775 Paris

**Author's status :** PhD candidate

**Email :** [hadrien.saiag@gmail.com](mailto:hadrien.saiag@gmail.com)

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## MONNAIE, DETTE ET VIOLENCE

### Quelques réflexions à partir du *trueque* argentin

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Hadrien Saiag

**Résumé :** Cette communication revient sur les enjeux théoriques soulevés par deux expériences contrastées de monnaie dite « complémentaire » en Argentine (ou *trueque*) : Rosario et Poriájhú. L'étude des articulations entre ces monnaies (*crédito*) et la monnaie nationale (peso) souligne la centralité du concept de la dette dans le rapport monétaire. En effet, le compte et le paiement n'existent qu'en relation à celle-ci. À travers elle, la monnaie met simultanément en jeu des rapports de pouvoir et d'autorité. En cela, elle constitue un lien social premier. Cependant, la forme du rapport monétaire varie fortement. À Rosario, les capacités hétérogènes à articuler les monnaies et à profiter ainsi des différences relatives dans l'évaluation des biens entre les sphères monétaires dévoilent la violence du rapport monétaire : il forge les statuts sociaux sur des bases inégalitaires. Au contraire, à Poriájhú le maintien de la parité entre les systèmes de compte (peso et *crédito*) donne au rapport monétaire une forme plus pacifiée : les différences de statuts existant à l'extérieur du *trueque* ne sont pas reproduites en son sein. Ce contraste est dû aux relations qu'entretient le *crédito* avec l'autorité. À Rosario, les modalités d'émission de moyens de paiement mettent le groupe en position de débiteur vis-à-vis de ses membres. Par là, le groupe est instrumentalisé et il émerge difficilement un principe faisant autorité capable d'englober les relations de pouvoir. À Poriájhú, en revanche, le *crédito* participe directement à la reproduction de l'autorité : le groupe est en position de créancier, et peut ainsi donner un fondement éthique au maintien de la parité entre systèmes de compte. Ce faisant, le *crédito* s'inscrit ici dans le cadre de l'économie sociale et solidaire.

## MONEDA, DEUDA Y VIOLENCIA

### Algunas reflexiones acerca del *trueque* Argentino

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Hadrien Saiag

**Resumen:** Esta ponencia trata de las cuestiones teóricas suscitadas por dos experiencias contrastadas de monedas "complementarias" en Argentina (llamadas *trueque*): Rosario y Poriájhú. El estudio de las prácticas de articulación entre estas monedas (*créditos*) y la moneda nacional (peso) pone el énfasis sobre la centralidad del concepto de deuda. En efecto, el conteo y el pago sólo existen en relación a esta. A través de la deuda, la moneda pone simultáneamente en juego relaciones de poder y de autoridad. Por eso, la moneda constituye un vínculo social de alta importancia. Sin embargo, las relaciones monetarias varían notablemente. En Rosario, las capacidades heterogéneas de articulación de monedas (y aprovechamiento de las diferencias relativas en la evaluación de los bienes entre las distintas monedas) revelan la violencia potencial del vínculo monetario: forja estatutos sociales diferentes sobre bases desiguales. Al contrario, en Poriájhú el sostén de la paridad entre los sistemas de cuenta (peso y *crédito*) logra generar una relación monetaria pacífica: las diferencias de estatutos que existen fuera del *trueque* no se reproducen en su seno. Este contraste se debe a las relaciones que mantiene el *crédito* con la autoridad. En Rosario, las modalidades de emisión de los medios de pago ponen al grupo en posición de deudor frente a sus miembros. Así el mismo es instrumentalizado en el cual difícilmente podría emerger un principio capaz de englobar las relaciones de poder. En Poriájhú, en cambio, el *crédito* participa directamente en la reproducción de la autoridad: el grupo ocupa la posición de acreedor y dando un fundamento ético al sostén de la paridad entre los sistemas de cuenta.

## INTRODUCTION

Debates on the nature of money have inspired highly diverse interpretations. Some authors have focused on the spatial dimension of money (see Gilbert, 2005 for a literature review). Several of these authors have highlighted the reconfiguration of time and space arising from the development of financial derivatives as a new form of money (Dick and Rafferty, 2007; Pryke and Allen, 2000; LiPuma and Lee, 2005). Dodd (2005) has meanwhile argued that the Euro has both stimulated monetary homogenisation and the proliferation of new local monetary forms. Zelizer's (1994) interest in the social appropriation of monies through earmarking practices has been criticised by both Ingham and Fine, and Lapavistas (see Zelizer, 2000 and 2005 for her responses). Fine and Lapavistas (2000) (see also Lapavistas, 2007) favour the Marxist conception of money over Zelizer's sociological approach, taking commodities as a “starting point” for their analysis of money and market. Ultimately, Ingham rejects both Fine and Lapavistas and Zelizer's viewpoints, arguing that they consider money as “essentially a ‘thing’ or as a direct symbol of a ‘thing’” (Ingham, 2001: 317 – see also 2004 and 2006). Ingham instead highlights the importance of money of account, which is determined from outside of the market, through the decision-making capacity of an “authority”.

This paper aims to contribute to this debate by analysing the form monies take in two contemporary Argentinian *trueque*<sup>2</sup>, local currency systems (also known as “complementary currencies” - Blanc, 2006) which emerged in Argentina in 1995. These underwent rapid growth in the 1990s, and reached their quantitative peak in 2002 before experiencing a crisis. Since then, they have partially recovered on more localised levels. The majority of the *trueque* system in fact relies on paper money denominated in its own unit of account, the *crédito*. This analysis' insights are based on a five-month period of fieldwork carried out from August to December 2009 in two settings: Rosario and Capitán Bermúdez<sup>3</sup>. In Rosario, the *trueque* is held in three localities, referred to from now on as *feria*. They firstly take place three times a week in a wasteland known as “el campito”, secondly, twice a week in Alem square<sup>4</sup>, and thirdly, twice a week at a neighbourhood association, St Cristobal. Each *feria* attracts between fifteen to approximately one hundred people. No formal organisation runs the *trueque* in Rosario. This low degree of institutionalisation contrasts starkly

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<sup>2</sup> *Trueque* literally means “barter”. The Spanish term is used to highlight that it is conceived here as a monetary system. See Gómez (2009) on the history of the *trueque*; and Plasencia and Orzi (eds, 2007) for its current situation.

<sup>3</sup> Rosario is the third most populated city in Argentina. It is located on the Parana River, 400km from Buenos Aires. Capitán Bermúdez is a small town close to Rosario (one hour by bus). This information has been obtained through observations of monetary practices and from seventeen interviews seeking to reconstruct households' budgets.

<sup>4</sup> The names of the places as well as those of the interviewees have been changed.

with the system used in the small town of Capitán Bermúdez. Here, the *trueque* is integrated into the wider activities of an association created for the “liberation of the poorest”, Poriajhú (which stands for “the poor” in Guarani). Three *ferias* are held in Capitán Bermúdez, each attracting approximately ten to thirty people, most of whom also benefit from microcredit (in peso) from Poriajhú.

In applying the fieldwork carried out, this paper uses debt as the starting point for a non-instrumental theoretical approach to money (in Orléan’s (2008a) terms). With respect to the debate between Fine and Lapavistas and Ingham, it adheres to Ingham’s conception of money as a “credit-debt relationship” (Lapavistas (2005) explicitly rejects this approach). It also goes further, however, because if, as shall be argued in the next section, money is a system of account and debt settlement, it implicates society as a whole. Money is a key component not only in the perpetuation, but also in the power struggles of groups (which are understood as the “authority”, using Dumont’s (1983) terms). This paper argues that according to the society in which money is embedded, it can embody either violent or peaceful social relations. This hypothesis is deeply rooted in the French interdisciplinary approach to money (a “school” that has brought together economists, anthropologists and historians for research seminars since 1993 – see Aglietta and Orléan (ed., 1998) and Théret (ed., 2007)).

In its structure, the first part of this paper presents empirical observations confirming the link between money and debt, discussing this position in relationship to the literature on money. The second part considers the ambivalent nature of money, examining the ways in which the *crédito* and the national currency (i.e. the Argentinian peso) interrelate. It shows how in Rosario, monetary violence results from differing abilities to juggle between monies. In Poriajhú by contrast, status differences from outside the *trueque* are not reproduced within it, the *crédito* embodying more harmonious social relations. The third part of the article looks to explain this disparity in terms of the place of money these two collective’s workings, drawing on Louis Dumont’s distinction between power and authority. The paper concludes by highlighting the role modern of “private credit-monies” in bringing about unequal societal statuses.

## **BEHIND MONEY: DEBT**

This section will seek to explain how money relates to the concept of debt, arguing that account and settlement only exist in relation to debt. Although this argument could be made using a literature

review, it takes a slightly different route. It considers the *crédito* monetary practices prior to considering their implications for different theories of money. These monetary practices will now briefly be described.

The observer might be surprised by the wide variety of monetary practices taking place within the realm of the *crédito*. Transactions are carried out in many different ways. The most obvious is the use of paper money denominated in *crédito*. (In Capitán Bermúdez, this is issued by the Poriajhú organisation, whilst in Rosario, the couple who used to issue money when the *trueque* were at the height of their success still do so). As with the peso, the transfer of this paper money permits an immediate payment equivalent to its nominal value. Paper money is used for almost all transactions in Poriajhú. In Rosario, its usage coexists with two other kinds of monetary practices. Quite frequently, debts there are not incurred and settled in the same *feria*. In such cases, indebtedness allows each participant to carry over their account balance (calculated in *crédito*) from one *feria* to another. These accounts are cleared over time, either by transferring the corresponding amount of paper money, or by transferring a commodity whose estimated value (in *crédito*) is equal to the outstanding balance. This practice usually demands previous clientele bonds<sup>5</sup>. Recollection of past transactions is essential given the requirement for debtors to be committed to settling their debts in the future.

*Trueque* participants in Rosario also pointed out another very common monetary practice, '*trueque directo*' ("direct barter"), which is a central concern to this paper. At first glance, this might appear to belie this paper's thesis. If "direct barter" is so widespread, why would money be so central? The situation is more complex, however, as is illustrated in the details of one such transaction between Eleonora, Stefani and Luis<sup>6</sup> (see also Table 1). Luis works in one of Rosario's wholesale fruit and vegetable markets. The fruit and vegetable produce he acquires exceeds his household's consumption because he is partly paid in kind. He therefore offers the surplus for sale in *créditos*. As soon as he arrives at "el campito", he seeks out Eleonora and Stefani, with whom he has clientele bonds. Eleonora picks out the fruit and vegetable products that interest her, and Luis does likewise with Eleonora's products; in this case picking out salt, sugar and soap. Luis then returns to his *feria* sales stand he is established during the *feria*. In a second time, Luis and Eleonora evaluate the value of the goods exchanged in the transaction in *créditos* (with Eleonora calculating the goods she transferred to Luis, and vice versa). Luis then returns to Eleonora and they compare accounts,

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<sup>5</sup> Clientele bonds here mean the perpetuation of a trust-based commercial relationship over time (Servet, ed., 1999: 121-134).

<sup>6</sup> Names have been changed in order to guarantee participants' anonymity.

establishing that the value of the goods Luis transferred to Eleonora exceeds those Eleonora transferred to Luis by 3500 *créditos* (transactions are almost always imbalanced). To settle the accounts, Eleonora transfers 1 kilogram of sugar to Luis with an evaluated value of 3500 *créditos*. This operation is then carried out in the same order between Stefani and Luis.

This is the point at which it is worth asking which theoretical framework can enhance an understanding of these practices. The predominant approach of economists to money can be described as instrumental (Orléan, 2008a), where money is conceived as an instrument that facilitates exchanges. Its most well known formulation is arguably the following: money serves the “real sphere”, with three main functions: a standard of value, a means of exchange and a reserve of value. The essence of this conception of money is explicit in Menger's (1892) famous article (the basis of “search” theoretical models which are now widely used in economics – see for instance Kiyotaki and Wright (1993)). Menger argues that money's primary function is to serve as means of exchange, whereas in the past, exchanges were carried out through barter (the “barter fable” according to Servet (2001)). Certain individuals are thought to have come to realise that they could profitably exchange certain commodities for others that were more “saleable” (in Menger's terms) than the commodities they owned (or produced), rather than exchanging them directly for those they wanted to consume. In time, others began imitating these “pioneers” and started using the same practices. Through this, the value of the commodity chosen as an exchange intermediary increased, and this good became money.

The majority of researchers adhering to the instrumental approach to money implicitly share this viewpoint. It coheres to the mainstream economic view of social relations, according to which money is the unexpected outcome of decentralised exchanges motivated by the maximisation of individual utility . From such a perspective, money and commodities follow the same logic. This view has three important implications. Firstly, money is quantitatively, but not qualitatively neutral. In Samuelson's (1968: 3) words, “money is like a catalyst in a chemical reaction, which makes the reaction go faster and better, but which, like the oil in the widow's cruse, is never used up. To push the analogy beyond endurance, only an iota of catalyst is needed for the process.” (This is why it can be qualified as “instrumental.”) Secondly, any functional approach allows a dichotomous approach to the economy (real/monetary) in which the real takes precedence (Théret, 2008). In other words, the instrumental approach views money as secondary, because it has nothing to do with the determination of “value” (from an economic “theory of value” perspective). Thirdly and most importantly, this story does not take account of any relationship between individuals and a

collective entity: as André Orléan (2002: 27) highlights: “The only enduring and deep relationships known to the walrus-like *homo oeconomicus* are those he forges with commodities”.<sup>7</sup>

This instrumental approach is unsatisfactory for explaining the monetary practices described above. Its popular three-functional version does little to explain why money in some situations would appear to be a “means of exchange” (paper money), and in others a “standard of value” (indebtedness and *trueque directo*). More importantly, the challenge raised by the above-mentioned monetary practices is to understand why accounting still happens when “only” commodities are in circulation. In the so-called *trueque directo*, neither paper money nor any other “means of exchange” are used, but the transaction still relies on “money of account”. This observation refutes the instrumental approaches’ argument that money is *first and foremost* a “means of exchange”. As Ingham highlights, the instrumental approach takes the means of exchange as logically anterior to the mean of exchange.

“Money of account is taken for granted in mainstream economics, which has assumed that it evolves as the natural consequence of the use of a commodity as a medium of exchange. The primeval market produces a transactions-cost efficient medium of exchange that becomes the standard of value and money of account” (Ingham, 2001: 309 – see also Polanyi, 1968: 180-185 and Maurisson, 2002).

Moreover, as the next section discusses in more detail, the relative evaluation of the transaction commodities depends on the accounting system on which the transaction is based (*credito* or peso).

I would argue that the above monetary practices can only be understood on the basis of debt as a concept. This is key because it transcends the individualism (using Dumont's (1983) definition) that is central to the instrumental approach to money. Two important observations can be made about the transactions between Luis, Eleonora and Stefani in this respect. Firstly, there is a time lapse between the point at which Eleonora is given the commodities by Luis, and the moment when she transfers them to Louis to clear the account. This is the case for all “trueque directo” transactions: commodity transfers between the two partners are never simultaneous. “Something” therefore has to happen during this time lapse. Secondly, something other than the actual commodities themselves is accounted for: the “relative” values of commodities differ according to whether they are evaluated in *créditos* or pesos (see also Section 2). It follows that something the commodity circulation depends upon, and which lies outside the world of commodities, underpins the transaction. This “something”, which comes into existence during the time lapse, is debt. From this perspective, the final commodity exchanged in the “trueque directo” is a means of settling the debt

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<sup>7</sup> My translation from French. “Commodity” should be understood in the sense of “merchandise” (also “marchandise” in French). For further explanations, see Jean-Pierre Warnier's translation note in Appadurai (2009: 1-2)

incurred from the first commodities in the transaction (see also Ould-Ahmed (2008); Aglietta and Orléan (2002: 69-74) and Blanc (1998: 278-279) for a similar argument). This only settles the debt because the value of the transaction commodities has already been calculated, however.

These arguments show the value of approaching money as a system of accounting and settling debts (Aglietta and Orléan, ed., 1998). It marks a significant rupture from the instrumental approach in that the dichotomy between the “monetary” and the “real” is no longer relevant. Indeed in this new approach, debt (and money) takes precedence because it allows for the “real” to be decided upon. Settlement and accounting are not equal in status, however. As institutional economists have argued, “Money-of-account [...] is the primary concept in a theory of money” (Keynes, 1930: 3; quoted by Ingham, 2001: 124; see also Courbis, Froment and Servet, 1990; Ingham, 2004a; Wray, 2004; 2010). Indeed, the account can be seen as the way in which the pay community<sup>8</sup> evaluates the supplier's commodities. This brings a third party to the transaction, namely the group (pay community) as a whole. There is, in other words, social recognition of credit by the community. Beyond accounting, settlement should be seen as a “generic propriety” of money: it gives the tissue of debts its dynamic character (i.e. debts are perpetually repaid and incurred - Théret, 2008; see also Ingham, 2004a). The key point, however, is that the means of settlement is defined through its relationship to accounting: as Ingham (2004a: 70) argues: “Moneyiness’ is *assigned* by the money of account, not by the form of money”. In other words, any commodity or other material can be used as a means of settlement (irrespective of its intrinsic quality - paper, metal, wood, etc.), when it is implicated in the practice of the accounting of debts (see also Blanc, 1998: 279-281).

The relationship between the concepts of debt and money is a key debate: many theoretical alternatives to the instrumental approach to money are debt-based. Innes (1913; 1914) was perhaps the first author to construct a theory of money using the concept of debt, and was certainly influenced by some of the representatives of the Chartalist school (Keynes, 1930; Ingham, 2004a; Wray, 2004; 2010). As already discussed in the introduction however, this paper relates debt closely to the recently developed interdisciplinary approach in France to money<sup>9</sup> (Aglietta and Orléan, ed., 1998; Théret, ed, 2007). This school’s first published book raised much debate on the appropriateness of the concept (Breton, 2000; 2002a; 2002b; Caillé, 2002; Grenier; 2000; Piron, 2002 and Théret, 2009 –space constraints prevent closely detailing the debate here; see however

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<sup>8</sup> According to Knapp, “A pay community is concerted action of creditors and debtors in setting up a procedure for the release of debts” (Commons, 2005 [1934]: 457).

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, both Innes and the Chartalist views have some slight disadvantages. As Ingham (2004b) argues, Innes tends to completely assimilate money with debt. On the other hand, the Chartalist school emphasises the role of the state (which is not however involved in the *crédito*).



Théret, 2009). Two points raised by Théret (2009) are key to grasping the coherence of both the school's and my own argument. Firstly, in accordance with John Commons' (1934) institutionalism, debt can have diverse origins. It can be incurred and settled within merchant relations, or derive from human indebtedness to supra-human entities (e.g. the gods, the state, etc. – contexts in which it can never be repaid, but must be regularly settled). It can also arise as a form of compensation for such events as marriages, injury, death, etc. Théret also points out that debt should be considered as an “objective concept” rather than a “subjective notion”. As such, it does not matter whether money is perceived by its users as a relation of indebtedness. As shall later be argued (in line with Karl Polanyi's framework – Servet, 2009), the *concept* of debt makes it possible to understand interdependencies within the pay community.

## **THE AMBIVALENT SOCIAL RELATIONS OF MONEY**

The ambivalence of money as a social relation will now be addressed (see also Aglietta and Orléan, 2002, as discussed at the end of this section). Such ambivalence is closely linked to debt. Several studies have highlighted that debt can have very diverse outcomes. It can be the motor for a relatively peaceful outcome (as in Jean-Michel Servet (1996)'s description of rotated saving and loan associations (“tontines”), where each member is debtor and creditor successively (see also the French SEL: Servet, ed., 1999). Money can however also exert power over people and serve as an instrument of submission to a stronger influential figure (see Fontaine's (forthcoming) analysis of indebtedness in Europe during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries). Debt can moreover lead to over-indebtedness (see Guérin and Morvant-Roux, forthcoming) and, in some cases, bondage (see for example Berman, Guérin and Prakash, ed., 2009). Since money is a system of account and settlement of debts, it is debt itself that gives money its ambivalence. In Rosario and Poriajhú, the key elements to this ambivalence are the ways in which the *crédito* and peso differently relate to one another.

### *Juggling monies*

The conditions of access to means of settlement are grasped through the application of the money-ing regime with respect to the social relations in which transactions are embedded. A money-ing regime sets out the modalities of issuing and concluding the means of settlement over time (see Théret, 2008 – for instance, on issuing and repaying credit in private banking monies). Money-ing and access conditions to the means of settlement are not one and the same thing, however. Some

groups can access newly issued means of settlement, whilst others not.<sup>10</sup> (In the case of private banking monies, only those able to access credit in order to finance economic activity, “capitalists”, can access newly issued means of payment – see Cartelier, 2007). In the *trueque*, the modalities of access to the means of settlement are mainly based on group membership (in Poriájhú), or (in Rosario) the use of commodities as a means of settlement, such usage being impossible outside the *trueque* (i.e. in the *trueque directo*). (In Rosario paper money can be accessed either by exchanging 10 peso for 8.000 *crédito* - a man is in charge of this operation in each feria, - or by selling a commodity for paper money payment). However, as shall be examined in detail later, not everybody can access the commodities used as a means of settlement, due to the system of account used. Thus some groups, using their ability to juggle systems of account, gain privileged access to certain commodities in the peso sphere (such as soap, flour, tomato puree, etc.), which are then used as a means of settlement denominated in *crédito*. Though this, they can hold a privileged position in the *trueque*. (This system echoes Pierre Alary's (2006) analysis of monetary pluralism in Laos, where traders derive revenue through their privileged access to the juggling of various monies). To understand this mechanism in more detail, it is necessary to distinguish three types of participants in Rosario's *trueque*.

In Rosario, the *crédito*-denominated settlement means can be favourably accessed when it is fairly well integrated into the peso sphere. Eleonora, her daughter Angela and her friend Stefani are a good example of this. Their household budgets and *trueque* usage have certain common points. Firstly, their *trueque* participation is not primarily motivated by economic necessity; they have relatively easy access to the *peso*. In Stefani's case, this is chiefly due to her husband's income (he owns a small road haulage contracting business, a car wash in a residential neighbourhood, and sells part of his fishing catches from the Paraná River). Her daughter is meanwhile an employee in a mutual insurance company. Stefani also has direct access to the peso thanks to the various services she offers to elderly people in her neighbourhood (e.g. taking them to the doctors or the pharmacy; helping them with administrative tasks, etc.). Angela and Eleonora meanwhile run rather distinctive small businesses (“microemprendimientos”) for which there is a strong demand (chiropractic and massage therapy in Eleonora's case; catering, epilation and make-up services in Angela's).

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<sup>10</sup> See Blanc (2000) for more detail on the importance of the monetary *practices*.

**Table 1: Summary of transactions between Eleonora, Stefani and Luis**

Rafael => Marta		Marta => Rafael		Rafael => Yoli		Yoli => Raphael	
Tomatoes (2Kg)	5000	Salt (2 packets)	2000	Courgettes (2 small)	1500	Oil (2l)	14500
Courgettes (2)	2000	Sugar (3Kg)	10500	Apples (2 Kg)	5000		
Garlic (3 cloves)	4500	Soap (1)	4000	Mandarins (1Kg)	2000		
Apples (1Kg)	2000	<i>Total before compensation</i>	<i>16500</i>	Carrots (1Kg)	1500		
				Strawberries (1Kg)	2000		
Mandarins (2kg)	4000	Sugar (1Kg)	3500	Tomatoes (1Kg)	2500		
Marrow (1)	2500						
<b>Total</b>	<b>20000</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>20000</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>14500</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>14500</b>

Source: fieldwork

They therefore have a strong position in the *trueque* thanks to having relatively favourable access to the peso. To better understand this, let us return to the transaction between Luis, Eleonora and Stefani described in the previous section. As Table 1 recapitulates, Luis gave fruit and vegetables to Eleonora, and she gave salt, sugar and soap to Luis in return. Then, Luis also gave fruit and vegetables to Stefani, who gave two litres of oil back to him. Note that Eleonora and Stefani both acquired the commodities they transferred to Luis in peso from a wholesaler. By settling their debt to Luis like this, they juggled the peso and *crédito* spheres, which is why the transactions were so profitable. The following extract from a discussion between Stefani and myself about the transactions testifies to this:

Me: Luis gave you two courgettes...

Stefani: Courgettes, apples, tomatoes, carrots, strawberries, mandarins, worth 19.500 *crédito*. And I gave him two bottles of oil. [...] I sold them to him at 7.500 *créditos* a bottle, but I only paid 3 peso each for them. That was my profit.

Me: Would have it been possible to sell each bottle for 7,5 pesos?<sup>11</sup>

Stefani: Noooooooo!

I: So that's why *crédito* are more convenient for you?

Stefani: Of course! It's written on the bottle that I paid three pesos for it [...]. And yet, Luis would not have given me all of this for six pesos! Look at everything he gave me: courgettes, apples, strawberries, carrots, tomatoes, and so on. You can't imagine the quantity I obtained!" (interview with Stéfani, St Lorenzo, 03/11/2009)

In other words, the peso/*crédito* evaluation ratios of the commodities offered by Stefani and Eleonora are much higher than the evaluation ratio that Luis offers. Stefani and Eleonora therefore have an interest in transferring certain commodities from one monetary sphere to the other. It is hard to produce precise quantitative data about the disparities, but our fieldwork suggests that the

<sup>11</sup> During the discussions, the implicit ratio peso/*crédito* was 1/1000 at *el campito*..

commodities imported to the *trueque* from the peso's sphere are usually evaluated in a more favourable way in *crédito* than other commodities are (such as fruits, vegetables and other foods donated by church and municipal social assistance schemes). Table 2 compares these monetary evaluations in greater detail.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 2: Monetary evaluation comparison (crédito/peso)**

<b>Commodities</b>	<b>Créditos</b>	<b>Pesos</b>	<b>Créditos/peso</b>
<b>Except subsidies in kind and vegetables</b>			
Flour (1 kg)	3500	1.30	2692
Sugar (1 kg)	3500	2.20	1591
Salt (1kg)	2000	2.20	909
Soap (1 piece)	3500	1.50	2333
Tomato puree (1 caton)	3500	2.00	1750
Pasta (500g)	3500	1.50	2333
<b>Mean</b>			<b>1935</b>
<b>Subsidies in kind</b>			
Dry milk	8000	>10	<800
<b>Vegetables</b>			
Tomatoes (1Kg)	2500	4.00	625
Onion (1Kg)	2000	1.10	1818
Carrots (1Kg)	1000	0.75	1333
Pumpkin (1Kg)	2000-2500	5.00	400-500
Courgette (1 piece)	1000	1.00	1000
<b>Mean</b>			<b>955</b>
<b>Second hand clothes</b>			
Various	>1000		

Source: fieldwork

Juggling between the peso and *crédito* as described above is not common, however: in Rosario, few people attend the *trueque* if their household does not depend on it (for daily food, for instance). There are however other participants who do not have privileged access to the peso (in quantitative terms), but whose activities nonetheless lend themselves to juggling monetary spheres. Even if their household incomes are partly denominated in peso, their budgets highlight strong interdependencies between the two spheres: access to the peso relies on activity in *crédito*. A couple called Celina and Jorge exemplify this. They have relatively limited access to the peso, and depend firstly on selling cardboard Jorge recuperates from the trash. This earns very little money, however.<sup>13</sup> Two of their three children also receive scholarships covering some of their school expenses (for notebooks, photocopies, etc.). Last but not least, Celina's mother owns a small general store (*kiosko*) in a residential neighbourhood in Rosario (close to the Parana River). A few years ago she fell deeply into debt and was no longer able to advance money for stocking the *kiosko*, so she asked Jorge to

<sup>12</sup> The differential between the evaluations in *crédito* and peso observed in Rosario appear to be quite widespread (even if the privileged commodities vary): Drelon (2009: 199-239) and Gomez and Helmsing (2008) mention them in other types of *trueque*.

<sup>13</sup> During my fieldwork, it was sold for 0,30 peso (a bus ticket costs 1,75 peso).

help her. They now share the profits between them according to the commodities sold: income generated from the sale of Jorge's commodities goes to him, and vice-versa.

Jorge's *kiosko* work allows the household greater access to the peso, by juggling it with the *crédito*. His work greatly overlaps with the couple's participation in Rosario's various *ferias*. Apart from second-hand and new clothing (unsold items from the small clothing business Célina's sister runs), they also offer aerosol sprays (deodorants, mosquito repellents, etc.) and perfumes. From 2005 to 2008, they recuperated perfumes and aerosol sprays from the rubbish depot of the firm producing them. These products were in a poor state and could not have been sold, so the couple were able to freely collect and then "repair" them (by reassembling a single product from the pieces of various broken ones of the same type). At the *trueque*, Celina is in charge of the clothes and seeks out all kinds of food (yoghurt, pasta, rice, fruits, vegetables, canned food, various sauces, etc.). Her husband is in charge of what he describes as the "transformation" of aerosol sprays and perfumes into food. In this way, peso and *crédito* are juggled through ongoing return trips between the *trueque* and their *kiosko*. Two examples illustrate this. Firstly, Jorge buys three soaps to sell from a supermarket at 1.40 pesos each, and then sells them at the *trueque* for 3500 *créditos* apiece. With 3000 of the 3500 *créditos*, he buys three sponges (at 1000 *créditos* each), and sells them for two pesos apiece in the *kiosko*. He explains: "out of 1,40 pesos I [he] got to 6. And I [he] still have[s] 500 *créditos* left!" With the income generated by selling the sponges, he buys an aerosol with missing pieces for 3 pesos. With the pieces he collected, he repairs and sells on aerosols for 15 pesos in the *kiosko*. This *crédito* / peso juggling is also useful for "multiplying" *crédito* (in Jorge's terms), as the following transactions highlight. Firstly, Jorge buys some biscuits for 2000 *créditos*. In the *kiosko*, he divides those biscuits between two boxes, selling them at 1.8 pesos apiece. With 1.50\$ of the 3.60\$ he buys a bottle of vinegar, which he then sells for 4000 *créditos* in the *trueque*. Juggling between *crédito* and pesos is clearly highly profitable for the couple: Celina estimates the value of the food obtained at each *feria* to be worth around 70 pesos (or 560 pesos per month – 70 per week). This does not include the "transformation" of *créditos* into peso via the *kiosko*, moreover.

Meanwhile, those who are not in a position to juggle the two monetary spheres constitute a third group. The *trueque* has a marginal place in their household budgets. As they cannot juggle the peso with *crédito*, they have no privileged access to the means of settlement denominated in *crédito*. These people generally survive through poverty relief aid. Andrea's situation exemplifies this kind of *trueque* participation. She lives with her partner, Esteban, and their child in a poor

neighbourhood of Rosario. She only brings second-hand clothes to the St Christobal *trueque*, which are either no longer used by the household, or donations from relatives. Some clothes are also given to Esteban as part payment for daily contingent labour (“*changa*”). Using the *créditos* they earn through these sales, Andrea mostly acquires other second-hand clothes and second-hand domestic products (curtains, mosquito repellent, cheese graters, etc.). Due to the very low sale price of second-hand clothes in relation to other products (see Table 2), she can only occasionally and in restricted circumstances obtain groceries (potatoes, apple, oil, flour, milk, pasta, etc.). The couple's access to the peso is also limited. Esteban’s only income in peso comes from contingent (manual day) labour (*changas* – painting, all kinds of repair work, etc). This amounts to a very limited amount of hours worked per week. He is sometimes paid in peso, at others in building material (for his house extension work), and at others in second-hand clothing. Meanwhile Andrea cleans the toilets at a factory next to her house for two hours each Saturday. The couple's main income in peso comes from washing cars, which they do in front of their house (having “equipped” their garden for the job). Again, however, income from this activity is highly irregular and relatively low.<sup>14</sup> The couple “meets” the majority of the household's food needs by juggling several sources of poverty relief aid. This comes from a neighbourhood association (for *vecinal* – dry milk), the Rosario municipality (for *bolson* – oil, maté, sugar, salt, pasta, rice, etc.), and from the Church (for canned tuna, canned meat, sugar, maté). These resources are all the more important given that they are the only regular ones they have. This is not however enough to balance the household budget. Hence, the couple is falling into chronic indebtedness owing to their irregular income (denominated in *crédito* and in peso).

This final group’s exclusion within Rosario, stemming from heterogeneous conditions of access to the means of settlement, only greater highlights the exceptional situation in Poriájhú. Here, juggling between the peso and *crédito* is extremely rare. Every participant moreover has access to the means of settlement denominated in *crédito* (in the form of paper money) prior to their first transaction in the *trueque* (see Section 3 for more detail). During my fieldwork, I did not hear of any organized or planned resale in peso of commodities purchased in *crédito*, nor vice versa. Some commodities are certainly sometimes offered at the *trueque* because they have not attracted buyers in peso. (For instance, food is commonly prepared for sale in peso at events that attract visitors from neighbouring towns. When, owing to weather conditions or for other reasons fewer people attend than anticipated, much of the food cannot be sold and is then offered at the *trueque* a few days

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<sup>14</sup> The couple declares washing on average 4 to 5 cars each Saturday, plus one per day during the week. At 15\$ per wash, this represents 510 pesos per month. In addition, they wash a truck once a week, for 150\$.

later). In spite of the heterogeneity of the *trueque*'s participants (the *trueque* attracts a “relatively important” number of clothing vendors, women offering fairly well-remunerated service-based home-businesses, small businesses struggling by on microcredit, and the poorest populations, who do not receive any microcredit), no exclusion arises through unequal access to the means of settlement denominated in *crédito*, unlike in Rosario. On the contrary, participants are on an equal footing, because the conditions of access to the means of settlement do not depend on the ability of particular social groups to juggle *crédito* and pesos. This is due to the maintenance of a strict parity between the peso and *crédito* (1/1 for *all* commodities). As such, there is no interest in juggling between the different monetary spheres.

### From exclusion to violence

It still remains to be explained why violence has been chosen as the term to describe monetary relations in Rosario. So far, it has just been demonstrated that some groups in Rosario are excluded from juggling monetary spheres. To clarify the use of the term, we need to turn to the violent discourse of those who are in a position to juggle the two monetary spheres towards those who cannot, and to understand how money tends to reproduce this violence.

The supposed equality of the “market place” (de La Pradelle, 2006; Servet, ed., 1999) conceals violent discrimination against those who are unable to juggle the two monetary spheres. This group consists of former “favela” (slum) dwellers and is not hard to identify. Those who are able to juggle monetary spheres direct discriminatory discourse against them. The following discussion between two sisters who used to attend the *trueque* and of one of their husbands (Sabina's) illustrates this:

“Sabina: There are people that... we do not like them, because they are full of lice, or because...

Eleonora: ... they are dirty, *negros*<sup>15</sup>

Sabina: they can steal from you [...]. For instance, this girl you were talking about, have you seen how her husband came? By [horse] cart! And he had quite a robber's look.

Hernan: It is so unsafe here that when you see a poor person of... It looks bad...

Sabina: You are scared [...] of the illnesses.

Eleonora: When there is underwear, shoes, etc., you must pay attention to whom you buy from, because you always [have to] think about the diseases they could transmit.

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<sup>15</sup> It is hard to translate the term “negro” in this context. The persons referred as “negro” do not have a black skin, but they are seen as dirty, poor, etc. On the other hand, “negro” carries a racial connotation: the white is seen to belong to the upper class, and the mixed races [métis] to the lowest (“negro” cannot refer to a “nice blond young lady”, even if she is poor).

Sabina: AIDS, syphilis, etc. [...] So , you stay away from those people [...] It's not to discriminate, but there are many people full of tattoos; they have been to jail because... it's typical: people who are full of those tattoos, the Chinese ones, the blue ones...

Eleonora: they've been to jail because they killed, or they robbed, or... you understand, so you can't be around people like this, because, perhaps you say something and they take it bad and they shoot you. [...] You see this pregnant girl, full of tattoos, we won't say "come to my house, let's to have some tea" to her, because you know how she looks...

Sabina: you know that if you would do so, they would come back later with others and they would steal everything from you [...].

Eleonora: we always have our guard up.

Hernan: it is not discrimination... it is to be selective. You understand? [...] It is knowing how to select people because... because there are people that don't have clear values, you see, and you, who do have clear values, [...] you do not hang with a person that is the opposite of you: that is a thief, that rips people off, that scams.

Sabina: in the trueque there are many people like this.

Hernan: Unfortunately because, it [the trueque] is poor people" (Interview in Rosario, 18/11/2009)

This is perhaps the most violent discourse against those unable to juggle the monetary spheres that I encountered during my fieldwork. However, the poorest people (amongst the *trueque* participants) are regularly seen as lazy, dirty, unproductive (depending on the government's subsidy) and abusive of children in working relationships.

In Rosario, money serves to reproduce such violence, with two points in particular illustrating this argument. Firstly, the violence of exclusion (from the juggling of monetary spheres) occurs because the (very relative) "prosperity" of those who are able to juggle the two spheres depends upon such exclusion. In other words, juggling different monetary spheres is only beneficial because others are unable to do so. As such, the differential in the *trueque* outputs (between those who are able to juggle the spheres and those who cannot) acts as a spoliation mechanism. Secondly, the *crédito* are forced onto people who are unable juggle the spheres: they cannot choose their monies, nor escape spoliation in the context of the *crédito*. The following quotation underlines this:

Jorge: the people coming to the *trueque* have changed. Before, the Tobas<sup>16</sup> often used to come. And they got everything through the *caja*<sup>17</sup>: pasta, tomato, oil, etc. It was given to them. They had also received another "plan" [subsidy in kind] from the "provincia", and milk from the hospitals. But they did not need it: because they were poor, the food was given away to them. For instance, the children were given food at school. Therefore they did not use it to cook: they used to sell *everything* [in the *trueque*] they received from the *caja*.

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<sup>16</sup> Toba stands for a pre-Colombian ethnic group living originally in the Gran Chaco region (between Bolivia, Paraguay and northern Argentina). The Tobas mentioned by the interviewee migrated to Rosario's slums (favelas) during the 1980's, having faced starvation in the Argentinian Chaco.

<sup>17</sup> The *caja* stands for different subsidies *in kind*, proposed by the municipalities or the provinces to low income households.



[...] When the municipality stopped distributing the *caja*, the *trueque* petered out. All the mercaderia [mercaderia stands for non-cooked food, such as pasta, rice, sugar, tomato puree, etc.] vanished.

Celina: Now they are issued a [debit] card. So they go to the supermarket where they can buy 85 pesos worth of mercaderia [...] So they do not come to the *trueque* any more. (Interview with Jorge and Celina, 18/11/2009)

In other words, the Toba used to offer commodities at the *trueque* when they had highly restricted access to the peso and received aid not in cash, but in kind. But once they began receiving aid in cash, they no longer offered commodities at the *trueque*, as they were able to avoid the spoliation caused by their inability to juggle monies by purchasing goods directly at the supermarket. This example demonstrates how *créditos* have been forced onto those having very limited access to the peso and who are unable to juggle monetary spheres.

The ambivalence of money as a social relation (violent in Rosario, but peaceful in Poriajhú) should be understood in terms of debt as a concept. Firstly, the juggling of monies (or its absence) is synonymous for the transfer of credit from one accounting system to another. In other words, in Rosario not every social group can juggle debts denominated in different units of account in the same way. Secondly and more importantly, the spoliation resulting from variable capacities to juggle monetary spheres in Rosario can be viewed as a form of debt settlement by those unable to juggle *crédito* and peso to those who can. The spoliation resembles a tribute paid by the least well-off members to those whose economic situation is slightly better. Money then plays a role in forging social status on a highly unequal basis. This is certainly not unique to the *trueque*, as Karl Polanyi has highlighted:

« Payment was due alike from the guilty, the defiled, the impure, the weak and the lowly; it was owed to the gods, and their priests, the honoured, the pure, and the strong. Punishment, accordingly, aimed at diminution in power, sanctity, prestige, status, or wealth of the payer, not stopping at his physical destruction » (Polanyi, 1968: 181).

## **MONEY: BETWEEN POWER AND AUTHORITY**

The differing relationships between the two systems of accounts in Rosario and Poriajhú (*crédito/peso*) arguably (partly) stem from the position occupied by the *crédito* in the reproduction of collectives. In Rosario, the *crédito* is at the level of a power, whereas in Poriajhú it is also at the level of authority. These two concepts (authority and power) are not used synonymously here. Following Dumont (1983), and drawing on Daniel de Coppet (1998), *La monnaie souveraine* (Aglietta and Orléan, ed., 1998) conceives of authority as the constitutive value of the social beyond

its individual parts. It hence differs from power, understood as a relationship of domination:

“Authority is a complex of collective values, in the name of which the coherence of a society is affirmed and maintained. Norms of individual behaviours originate in those values. It is said that authority subordinates power in value. Power is a relationship of domination based on the possession of means, enabling some individuals to dictate the conduct of others” (Aglietta *et. al.*, 1998: 11)

In other words, authority is what cannot be touched without impacting upon the definition of the collective as a whole. In Dumont's terms, authority incorporates power relations: rivalry, power, and conflict taking place within a wider space that is delimited by authority.

(Trust is central to this argument. Indeed, when applied to money, the French word “*confiance*” has three meanings in English: confidence, credibility and trust (Theret, 2008: 817). Confidence (or “*confiance méthodique*” in Aglietta *et al* (1998)) is horizontal and methodical: people accept the means of settlement because everyone else does. Credibility (or “*confiance hiérarchique*”, *ibid*) refers to the role played by the institution in charge of the smooth running of the monetary system (for instance, central banks). Finally, trust (“*confiance éthique*”, *ibid*) refers to the fact that money (in its uses, modalities of access, etc.) must conform to how the collective represents itself (sovereignty). The argument can therefore be reformulated as follows: Poriajhu has managed to maintain parity between the peso and *crédito* across all commodities because the *crédito* enjoys strong levels of trust, in contrast to the situation in Rosario).

It is important to specify that beyond the constitution of a collective (totality), what counts is the representation of the collective entity *as such*. Indeed, it can be argued that the holistic dimension of money is unavoidable (Orléan, 2002): through the account, debt evaluations go beyond private evaluations to take on a social status. In other words, an objectification of value occurs via the account and through this, a collective entity comes into being (a society of merchant individuals). Thus, private debts (which might be repaid over the course of a whole lifetime) can be taken as inter-individual relationships that inscribe both debtors and creditors within a *social* division of labour (Aglietta, 2007). A collective entity therefore comes about, but it is not perceived of as such. Arguing that the *crédito* is not located at the authority level in Rosario implies that it plays no role in the *conscious* construction of any collective entity<sup>18</sup>.

The previous section has highlighted that in Rosario the *crédito* is located at the level of power. Thanks to their privileged access to the means of settlement, those able to juggle *crédito* and peso

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<sup>18</sup> I hence come back to Karl Polanyi's main interest, as developed in his early works (Polanyi, 2008: 281:481).

dominate over those who cannot. In Rosario, the *crédito* is not at an authority level, because no coherent collective body emerges from the *trueque*. Two observations highlight this. Firstly, the issuers of paper *crédito*-denominated money cannot control its inflation (which they condemn, but can only keep track of by issuing a means of settlement whose nominal value increases over time). This highlights the lack of “ethical trust” that the *crédito* there enjoys: its issuers are unable to mobilise a unified collective front to impose acceptance of the rules of the monetary game.

The following example also highlights the lack of authority for creating a coherent collective entity in Rosario. At one point in Alem square's *feria*, two men arrived by motorcycle and set out various cheap clothes on the ground for sale in peso. A crowd of women quickly gathered. Some of the women involved in the *trueque* tried to explain to them that there was no way to use the peso there, whilst others did not see it as a problem. Eventually the men left, probably realising that they were creating trouble amongst the women participating in the *trueque*. Strangely the coordinator, Graciela, kept her distance and did not take part in the discussion, although explaining in private that it was important not to accept transactions in peso at the *trueque*. (Indeed, the acceptance of peso at another *feria* – “el campito” – is considered to have led to its decadence). But if Graciela had been able to command a principle of command and trust (authority), she could have drawn on this to defend her position. The group would have sided together, explicitly reaffirming the principle of trust and command (which is only implicit when the collective as such is not under threat).

In contrast, the Poriajhú project is part of a collective whole acknowledged as such, and which the *crédito* tends to help perpetuate. The fact that such a constructed, coherent, collective whole is upheld could be seen as surprising. Indeed the wide variety of Poriajhú's activities might make one imagine that each activity would stick to a particular goal. For instance, radio, murga<sup>19</sup> and projects for the appropriation of native languages in a Tobas-populated shantytown<sup>20</sup> of Amerindian might aim for the collective appropriation of public space. IT, cooking, sewing, and craft workshops might look to increase the skills of the “poor”; school tutoring and adult literacy schemes might aim to raise education levels; *trueque*, microcredit schemes and shops selling some of the products created using microcredits might aim to raise the poor's income, etc. Those who embody authority and the principle of trust and command in Poriajhú do not have such a fragmented vision, however:

Marita<sup>21</sup>: Poriajhú's goal, its mission, is to create participatory spaces for the people [pueblo, meaning close to

<sup>19</sup> These are music and dancing bands that are quite popular around the Rio de la Plata.

<sup>20</sup> See note 16.

<sup>21</sup> Marita plays a key role in the Poriajhú. She gained great recognition among the poorest (even far away from Capitán Bermúdez) thanks to her militant actions in the field from the beginning of the 1980s. She does not in fact have any official function in Poriajhú, but her reflections strongly influence the organisation's decisions.

“working class”), in order to proclaim and maintain its role as protagonist in the transformations of reality coming from critical education<sup>22</sup>. [...] All of the actions we carry out [...] have to pass through the quality control of this mission. It means asking: are we creating spaces for the participation of the people [idem] so as to proclaim and maintain its role of protagonist in the transformation of the reality from the critical education? If not, what should we change in our practices in order for it to be the case? All of the projects are in line with this mark. [...] Poriajhú seeks to leave its mark by way of several projects in the neighbourhoods [quartiers, barrios] [...] that implicitly allow them to fulfil this mission” (Entrevista with Marita, 12/2009)

Marita also highlights how recuperating the lost power of excluded people through the creation of a group based on shared values is central to the Poriajhú project.

The activities running alongside the *trueque* as part of Poriajhú help to create a group based on the principle of reciprocity. Reciprocity is understood here from a Polanyian perspective (Polanyi, 2001 [1944], 2008, Polanyi, Arensberg and Pearson, ed., 1957 - see also Servet, 2007; Hilleknamp, forthcoming), as a particular form of interdependency. More space than is available here would be needed to fully develop this, but it is useful to mention just one of those activities. This can be illustrated by going back to two days after the death of the famous popular Argentinian singer Mercedes Sosa (10/04/2009). Before the *trueque* opened that day, those present listened to and then read the lyrics of the song “Maria Maria”, interpreted by Mercedes Sosa (composed by Milton Nascimento). The song depicts Maria in the image of a universal mother with whom everyone present could identify. The song serves as a call to revolt, as Maria struggles daily against a painful existence. After a group discussion about the text as a whole, each woman commented on a particular part of the text, drawing on her own personal experience. Through this, everyone appropriated the song and last but not least, personal stories were told and discussed. Through this, *there was recognition of the individualities within a collective taken as a whole*.

In Poriajhú, *credit* is constructed in the image of the group and plays a role in its reproduction on a reciprocal basis. This firstly takes place through a process Michel Aglietta (1988) defines as “symbolic substitution”: money takes on the attributes which gives the group its cohesion, even if it takes its essence from elsewhere. Such symbolisation processes take three paths. They firstly go through the name of the unit of account. *Crédito* means “credit”, and, as in English, it has two meanings: credit / loan and credit / faith (Blanc, 1997). And yet, the faith dimension of credit implicitly refers to the constitution of a collective entity, since with money, it is a matter of faith in the group as a whole (Aglietta and Orléan, ed., 1998). Faith equally exists in an implicit reference to

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<sup>22</sup> “Critical education” stands for the Spanish “educación popular”, and the French “éducation populaire”. It refers to Paulo Freire's field of action.

Poriajhú, without which the collective construction promoted would have no meaning. The iconography of the means of settlement is also mobilised (see Appendix 1). It features the legend “Banco Popular de la Buena Fe”, “Poriajhù”, its logo, and an ant. “Banco Popular de la Buena Fe” means “Popular Bank of Good Faith”. This is the name of the organisation that, at the national level, is responsible for the allocation of microcredit. The sole reason it is there is to maintain faith: the Banco Popular de la Buena Fe is not per se involved in the *trueque*. The inscription of the name of the organisation, “Poriajhù”, is an explicit reference to authority. Because it also means “the poor” (in Guarani), it contributes to the self-referential process of constructing the collective. The organization’s logo consists of a daisy rooted in South America, some bricks, the organisation’s name and the legend: “another world is possible” (in Spanish). The daisy represents hope, its roots the (utopian) unity of South America, and the bricks the construction of the “other South America”, in keeping with the Poriajhú project. Meanwhile the ant symbolises group work and unity against possible enemies. Finally in a speech given for the issuing of the new means of settlement (in September 2007), Marita sought to link the *crédito* to Poriajhú, whilst comparing the *crédito* to the peso. She began by listing the peso's advantages: it enables one to have food, clothing, electric lighting, to use the telephone, etc. But she also presented the peso as a vehicle for vices such as organ selling, greed, injustice, poverty, power struggles, etc. She went on to say that it befell the group as a whole, in its daily use of the *créditos*, not to reproduce the peso's vices.

Above all however, money plays a role in the reproduction of the group in terms of the modalities of access to the means of settlement, because those who agree to Poriajhú's general goals are placed on an equal footing. Besides the fact that monetary spheres are not juggled, the means of settlement (in *crédito*) are distributed to each *trueque* participant (as paper money) before their first *feria*. The “value” of the means of settlement does not depend on the quantity of goods offered at the *trueque*, but on their quality: those offering commodities that they produced themselves receive between 8 to 5 *créditos* (depending on the *ferias*), in comparison to 2,5 to 4 *créditos* for those reselling commodities they did not produce themselves. This rule was made to encourage a lack of dependence on poverty relief aid: it is seen as a condition for the establishment of a political force for promoting the poor’s collective aspirations. Furthermore, access to the means of settlement does not depend on individual circumstances, but on one’s relationship to the group. Thus the money-ing regime tends to serve as a reminder that the group as a whole is always present.

Secondly and most importantly, equal access to the means of settlement presents the relationship between the individual and the group as one where the group comes first, the group in effect acting

as creditor to its members. Indeed in Poriajhú, *créditos* are given to new members *before* their first participation in any *feria*. In other words, *trueque* participants receive the means of settlement before getting involved in any transactions. Thus the authority, on a hierarchical principle, enables *trueque* participation; its participants are indebted toward the collective. In Rosario, the reverse is the case. To obtain the means of settlement (commodities used as means of settlement and paper money) one has to give up commodities or peso (because as discussed above, 10 pesos can be exchanged for 8.000 *créditos*). But given this makes the group indebted to its members, individuals can more readily orchestrate it. It is thus much harder for the group to constitute itself beyond its diverse private interests than in the opposite case. In Poriajhú, individuals are more likely to conform to the principles promoting group cohesion.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of money from the perspective of debt leads one far away from the mainstream economic view of money as a “neutral veil”. Money in Rosario, and especially money of account, is the driving force of spoliation. Money is still more complicated however, and need not necessarily lead to violence. Rosario contrasts greatly with Poriajhú, where no sub-group is excluded from juggling monies (as no one is able to do so). As such, money in Poriajhú embodies a far more peaceful form of social relations. This paper has argued that the differing forms taken by money as a social relation depend on its relationship to the group. In Poriajhú, parity has been upheld in the same ratio *crédito*/peso ratio across all commodities because the *crédito* enjoys an ethical foundation based in a clear conception of the group. Money tends to reproduce such a link to the group. Owing to how means of settlement are issued, the group acts as a creditor toward individuals. Poriajhú’s work on the ground gives a concrete sense to jointly recognised interdependencies, which are integrated into a consciously thought out social whole, giving rise to the principle of reciprocity.

Even in Poriajhú however, the peso serves to establish unequal social status. Indeed, the *trueque* participants are almost never wage earners (i.e. they are not “salaried” and their main income does not come from a regular wage). And yet, due to the marginal position of wage earners in Rosario's suburbs (due to neo-liberalist policies of the 1990s), they are doubly dominated by private credit monies' money-ing regimes: their income depends on the spending of wage-earners, who in turn depend on the spending of the owner of the means of production (the capitalist). Indeed, only capitalists have access to credit for pursuing their productive activities (Cartelier, 2007; Orléan,

2008b). Part of their spending constitutes wages, which must then be spent by the wage earners in order to constitute the income of those who are neither wage earners nor capitalists. Conditions of access to the means of settlement become all the more pressing a question. This configuration is not unique to Capitán Bermúdez: it can be considered that wage earners hold a marginal position in many southern countries, where what Keith Hart (1973) describes as “informal income opportunities” prevail. In many cases, large income fluctuations (and the subsequent necessity to resort to indebtedness) result from unequal access to the means of settlement. Future research should address this question more deeply.

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