Commoning, community, and citizenship: an analysis of Esquel's No a la Mina, a socio-environmental movement against mining in Argentinian Patagonia

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Acronyms

ATECH	Asociación de Trabajadores de la Educación de Chubut
CAMA	Red de Comunidades Afectadas por la Minería en la Argentina
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
FPE	Feminist Political Ecology
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MACH	Movimiento Antinuclear de Chubut
MMDIBV	Movimiento de Mujeres Indígenas y Diversidades por el Buen Vivir
MTD	Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados
NYC	Nacido y criado
UACCH	Unión de Asambleas Ciudadanas de Chubut, now renamed Unión de Asambleas de Comunidades de Chubut
OCMAL	Observatorio de Conflictos Mineros en América Latina
VYQ	Venido y quedado

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Abstract (English)

This thesis examines the *Asamblea de Vecinos Autoconvocados por el No a la Mina de Esquel* (Assembly of Self-Convened Neighbours against Mining in Esquel, also known as Esquel's No a la Mina), a socio-environmental movement against mining in the province of Chubut in Argentinian Patagonia. The movement in Esquel emerged in November 2002 in response to the imminent commencement of the gold mining project known as Cordón Esquel and by early 2003 had succeeded in stopping the project. However, as the pressure to install mining in the province has continued and expanded since, the movement has remained active for 20 years now.

Based on a feminist qualitative methodology that combined on-site and remote research methods due to COVID-19 and a theoretical framework that brings together an anthropological perspective on citizenship and a feminist political ecology lens, this thesis examines the movement as a process of community-making – what is motivating and sustaining it over such a long period, as well as how it is impacting the way people practice citizenship. It argues that four practices (or everyday actions) of the movement are central to this question: mobilising politically as *vecinos* (neighbours), 'informing' about mining, appealing to dignity, and rethinking human-nature relations. By building place, knowledge, wellbeing, and nature as shared – that is, as commons – these practices have set in motion various processes of 'commoning'. As these processes support the making of a community in Esquel, they are also shaping it as one that is horizontal, epistemically self-sufficient, oppositional to the state, and structured around care.

The thesis also examines how commoning is embedded in the relation between people and the state, as well as in local power relations organised around social differences. It argues that the processes of commoning at play contest the ways in which the state and private sector have tried to install mining in the province, reshaping the subjectivity, agency and rights associated with citizenship. Yet, as multiple tensions underlie these processes, they have simultaneously reproduced exclusions along axes of social difference within the emerging community.

In putting forward these arguments, this thesis contributes to our understanding of the ways in which socio-environmental movements can be productive sites not only of citizenship transformation, but also of commoning. It develops a theoretical link between commoning and citizenship – a relation which is under-theorised in existing literature – as well as further develops

the theoretical links between commoning and community-making. By approaching this analysis through a concern with power – vis-à-vis the state and within Esquel – the thesis also contributes to literature on commoning and power. It shows how successfully contesting extractivism over time may require changes in the way people relate to the state, and thus shows how citizenship transformation can be crucial for environmental justice. It also shows how attentiveness to power relations shaping the process of commoning is crucial in order to create *just* commoning-communities.

On an empirical level, the thesis contributes to existing literature on Esquel's No a la Mina by providing an analysis of the movement from 2003 through the end of 2021. It is also the only study to draw on the understandings and experiences of its members, and thereby provides a more complex understanding of the movement's internal dynamics than previous studies. In doing so, this thesis also contributes to literature on socio-environmental movements in Argentina, by illuminating the challenges of coalitions between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.

Abstract (Danish)

Denne afhandling undersøger Asamblea de Vecinos Autoconvocados por el No a la Mina de Esquel (forsamling af selvindkaldte naboer mod minedrift i Esquel, også kendt som Esquels No a la Mina – nej til minen), en social miljøbevægelse mod minedrift i provinsen Chubut i det argentinske Patagonien. Bevægelsen i Esquel blev formet i november 2002 som reaktion på den forestående påbegyndelse af guldmineprojektet kendt som Cordón Esquel. I begyndelsen af 2003 lykkedes det at stoppe projektet, men da presset på at udvikle minedrift i provinsen forsat vokser, har bevægelsen været aktiv i 20 år.

Baseret på en feministisk kvalitativ metodologi, der kombinerede on-site og fjernforskningsmetoder (på grund af COVID-19) med en teoretisk ramme, der samler et antropologisk perspektiv på medborgerskab og feministisk politisk økologi, undersøger denne afhandling bevægelsen som en proces af lokalsamfundsudvikling – hvad er motiverer og opretholder bevægelsen over en så lang periode, samt hvordan det påvirker den måde, folk praktiserer medborgerskab på. Afhandlingen argumenter for, at fire praksisser (eller hverdagshandlinger) i bevægelsen er centrale i dette spørgsmål: at vecinos (naboer) mobiliserer politisk, 'informerer' om minedrift, appellerer til værdighed og gentænker relationer mellem menneske og natur. Ved at skabe fælles steder, viden, velvære og natur – altså som fællesrum – har disse praksisser sat gang i forskellige processer af 'commoning' – 'fælleskabgørelse'. Disse processer understøtter skabelsen af et fællesskab i Esquel, et som er formet horisontalt, epistemisk selvforsynende, oppositionelt til staten og struktureret omkring omsorg.

Afhandlingen undersøger også, hvordan 'commoning' er indlejret i relationen mellem mennesker og stat, samt i lokale magtforhold organiseret omkring sociale forskelle. Den argumenterer for, at de 'commoning' processer der er på spil, udfordrer de måder, hvorpå staten og den private sektor har forsøgt at introducere minedrift i provinsen, hvilket ændrer subjektiviteten, handlefriheden og rettighederne forbundet med statsborgerskab. Imidlertid, da flere spændinger ligger til grund for disse processer, har de samtidig reproduceret eksklusioner langs akser af sociale forskelle i det nye samfund.

Ved at fremsætte disse argumenter bidrager denne afhandling til vores forståelse af de måder, hvorpå sociale miljøbevægelser kan være produktive steder, ikke kun for transformation af

medborgerskab, men også for 'commoning'. Den udvikler en teoretisk kobling mellem 'commoning' og medborgerskab – en relation, der er underteoretiseret i eksisterende litteratur – samt videreudvikler de teoretiske koblinger mellem commoning og lokalsamfundsudvikling. Ved at inddrage magt som begreb – over for staten og inden for Esquel – bidrager afhandlingen også til litteratur om commoning og magt. Den viser, hvordan succesfuld organisering mod ekstraktivisme over tid kan kræve ændringer i den måde, mennesker forholder sig til staten på, og viser således, hvordan transformation af medborgerskab kan være afgørende for miljømæssig retfærdighed. Det viser også, hvordan opmærksomhed på de magtrelationer, der former 'commoning' processen, er afgørende for at skabe retfærdige 'commoning' fællesskaber.

På et empirisk niveau bidrager afhandlingen til eksisterende litteratur om Esquel No a la Mina ved at analysere bevægelsen fra 2003 til udgangen af 2021. Det er det eneste studie, der trækker på medlemmernes forståelser og erfaringer, og giver derved en mere kompleks forståelse af bevægelsens indre dynamik end tidligere studier. Derved bidrager denne afhandling også til litteratur om sociale miljøbevægelser i Argentina, ved at belyse udfordringerne ved koalitioner mellem oprindelige og ikke-oprindelige folk.

Introduction

In 2020, I travelled to the Argentinian province of Chubut to meet, participate in, and understand Argentina's landmark socio-environmental movement against mining. The *Asamblea de Vecinos Autoconvocados por el No a la Mina de Esquel* (Assembly of Self-Convened Neighbours against Mining in Esquel) emerged in November 2002, in the town of Esquel, to block an open-pit gold mining project known as *Cordón Esquel* because of its negative environmental and social impact. People in Esquel succeeded in blocking the project by early 2003; but they did not cease. The interests of the Argentinian state and mining companies have expanded from Esquel's gold to silver, lead, and uranium deposits elsewhere in the province. As a result, the push has been an ongoing and relentless one. No mining project has commenced in Chubut, however, in the last twenty years. Since that summer of 2002, *vecinos* (neighbours) of Esquel take the streets on the 4th of every month – without fail – to express their rejection of mining as a development pathway for the town and province.

At the outset of my research stay in Esquel, I was intrigued by the movement's long-term success: how has it managed to prevent the installation of mining in the province for over two decades? I found that my own experience of being in Esquel and participating in the movement (to which I will refer from now on as Esquel's No a la Mina) was central to my answer to this question.

Since my very first few days in Esquel I was drawn in by the sense of community that I perceived within and around the movement. In the street protests I was part of, I saw a community coming into being. People of all ages – teenagers, men and women (some with small children or baby strollers), older adults and retirees – and both non-indigenous and Mapuche-Tehuelche people came together for a few hours. At the town's main square, everyone greeted and hugged, as they immersed themselves in lively conversations while waiting for the protest to begin – a dynamic that was repeated at the end of the protest. I also witnessed a community at the movement's information stand (known as the '*localito*'), located on one of Esquel's main avenues, and in which I spend many hours over the first few months of 2020. In the stand, which is used by the movement to distribute information and fundraise, two or three members gathered at a time for a few hours every day, sharing a *mate* or a *tereré* depending on the season, and were joined for little bits by other *vecinos*.

Equally significant to the sense of community I perceived was the care that I received, as a young woman, from *vecinos* in the movement (especially older *vecinas*). Before events, or shifts at the *localito*, I was often offered a car lift from or back to the house where I was staying, during events people shared food and drink with me, and knowing that I would be in Esquel for a few months two *vecinas* prepared me with a thicker jacket and a set of *Maitena*'s comic books. When the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, and while I was in lockdown in Argentina, members reached out constantly asking how I was. And when I had to leave Esquel in May 2020, amidst the lockdown, it was leaving this sense of community what proved particularly difficult and left me for many months a sense of loss and nostalgia.

Alongside my interest in the sense of community I perceived in Esquel's No a la Mina, I was also intrigued by the contrasting stories I heard from members of the movement about its diversity and internal politics. Existing literature describes and affirms the movement as one where people across gender, class, and especially ethnicity, have come together, where people naturally converged and seamlessly cooperate (see for example Marin, 2009; Musacchio, 2013; Svampa, 2008, 2017; Walter, 2008; Walter & Martinez-Alier, 2010; Walter & Wagner, 2021; Weinstock, 2006). Yet, I frequently heard about contentious issues within the movement, especially from, and in relation to, the participation of indigenous Mapuche-Tehuelche people. In fact, my very first interview with a member of the movement brought this to my attention. As we sat down in a coffee shop that overlooked the road connecting Esquel a neighbouring town and I began to explain my interest in understanding the movement from a feminist lens, she was quick to point out that gender was not the only axis of difference worth paying attention to and that indigeneity was a crucial site of contention. I became interested, as a result, in understanding the process of community-making at play in light of how social difference shapes power relations among people in Esquel. In my view, rather than glossing over these tensions, it is crucial to attend to them. Not only does doing so render the movement's success all the more impressive – showing how political convergence and alliance is not natural nor easy, but rather the result of challenging and continuous work – but it also underscores how important it is for socio-environmental movements to be critical of their own dynamics in order to avoid reproducing injustice.

In this thesis, I unpack what I came to understand as the processes driving the making of the community I witnessed and experienced, its characteristics and challenges, and its role in the movement's success. The argument I put forward is that four practices of the movement are each driving a process of 'commoning' – that is, a process of creating new arrangements of shared

access, use, and/or responsibility around both tangible and intangible resources or 'commons' (Gibson-Graham, 2006). These processes of commoning are driving, in turn, the making of a community and reshaping citizenship in Esquel – that is, the terms and conditions of the relationship between people and the Argentinian state. These have been processes, however, fraught with internal tensions, as the practices of the movement and processes at play are embedded in local relations of power, shaped by dynamics of social difference.

Symbolic of the various dimensions of my analysis is the history of the banner with which the movement marches.

Figure 1. The banner of Esquel's No a la Mina from 2002 to 2021

Source: Retrieved from the movement's Facebook page (Noalamina Esquel). Protest February 2018**.**

Until 2021, members of the movement marched with a five-metre-long banner that alludes to the Argentinian flag, replacing its central emblem with the words 'NO A LA MINA' (NO TO MINING) inscribed in bold black capital letters (see Figure 1). Their choice of banner was influenced by the historical protests of December 2001. As the protests expressed popular discontent with the ongoing economic crisis at the time, and the role of the government therein, the use of the Argentinian flag was inspired by, and expressed, a burgeoning citizenry with a desire to reclaim back and rebuild a country that was perceived as institutionally flawed – or, in words of Ramos & Delrio, to 'refound the nation' anew. While other social movements that also used the Argentinian flag in their banners – such as *Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas* (MNER) and the *Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas Recuperadas* – were not necessarily motivated by the same citizenly sentiment present in the 2001 protests, Esquel's No a la Mina was, as this thesis will

show.[1] As such, the use of this banner symbolises how the movement has been embedded in dialogue with the state, as well as speaks of the way in which it has sought to build unity among members from very different backgrounds.[2]

The change of their banner in 2021 is also symbolic of my analysis: of the processes of commoning at play and the power tensions within the movement. In 2016, Mapuche Tehuelche members questioned the movement's use of the baby blue and white banner. They expressed their discomfort marching behind a banner that featured the symbol of a nation-state that sought to eradicate *pueblos originarios* (indigenous nations) throughout its territory (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4) and that has marginalised them since. They proposed that the movement marched too with the Mapuche-Tehuelche and Wiphala flags (the flag that represents indigenous peoples across Latin America) as official banners. The debate on this proposal was heated, according to all members to whom I spoke, and though it was ultimately accepted by the movement, over time it proved unsatisfactory to members on both sides of the issue. Some members who had opposed the incorporation of the additional flags left the movement as a result, while indigenous members felt that even though this agreement was in place, the Argentinian flag retained pride of place, always displayed at the front of marches, with the other two flags positioned behind it and in some cases not present at all.[3] The topic was brought up for discussion again and in March 2021 the movement decided to launch a call to local artists for designs of a new banner. It was also agreed that alongside this new banner, any flag could be present at movement events, but not in an official capacity. That same year the movement began to march with a banner showing the same words in bold capital letters but now inscribed over a depiction of Chubut's nature – its mountains, forests, river, penguins, and whales (see Figure 2).

The history of the movement's banner, thus, speaks of the various elements my argument examines and brings together: the relationship of struggle between *vecinos* and the Argentinian state,

[1] In these workers' movements for company/industry recuperation by workers, their allusion to, or use of, the Argentinian flag, rather than speaking about a citizenly sentiment to reclaim the state, speaks of a desire to reclaim the workplace: to change the configuration of socio-economic power relations in and through production and to build autonomous spaces, independent of the capitalist market and (to some degree) the state (Sitrin, 2006; Palomino, 2003; Pizzi & Brunet Icart, 2014). The *asambleas barriales* that emerged in 2002 in Buenos Aires and other major cities of the country used the Argentinian flag too. As expected, given they were closely linked to the 2001 protests, their use of the flag shared in the 2001 desire to rescue and rebuild the nation. However, as I show in this thesis, differently to Esquel's No a la Mina, the *asambleas barriales* aimed to do this by building autonomous alternative spaces to the state – resembling in this regard the workers' movement for company/industry recuperation (see Sitrin, 2006, 2012).

2 Di-Filippo (2018) makes a similar argument about the meaning of the flag regarding unity and diversity - in his case, in the Frente Popular Darío Santillán Rosario, a leftist political movement.

[3] The exception was one protest in 2020, for which it was agreed (in response to members raising this point) that the indigenous flag would be at the front of the march for one occasion.

the processes of commoning that have emerged as the result of that struggle, and the internal tensions deriving from social differences within Esquel, largely between indigenous and non-indigenous members.

Figure 2. The movement's new banner

Source: Retrieved from the movement's Facebook page (Noalamina Esquel). Protest August 2021.

To develop this analysis, I draw from onsite fieldwork conducted in 2020 (interrupted by COVID-19), as well as remote research methods conducted in 2020-2021 (see Chapter 3). While I did not interact in person with the movement for as long as I had originally planned, I was able to gain – through my stay in Esquel in 2020 and my accompaniment of the movement for the following year and a half while conducting remote research – a solid snapshot of the movement and the opportunity of becoming interested in the processes resulting in and from it. Thus, while COVID-19 limited my project in some respects (see Chapter 3), it also proved to be an advantage, as it led me to reflect on the causes and impacts of the snapshot I got to witness (in person and at a distance) for a duration of two years.

To develop the argument that I present in this thesis, I also draw from a theoretical framework that brings together feminist political ecology and an anthropological perspective on citizenship. The argument I lay out is rooted in an understanding of how the everyday discourses and actions of the movement – what I call its practices – have come to support processes of commoning and community-making, and how this has reshaped, in turn, the way people practice citizenship. Simultaneously, it is also rooted in attentiveness to difference and power, and thus a concern with how these practices are embedded not only in relations of power vis-à-vis the state and the private sector, but also in those within the movement, shaped by its dynamics of social difference.

Four questions, then, have underpinned my analysis:

1. How have the movement's practices created processes of commoning?
2. How have these processes of commoning supported and shaped the making of a community?
3. How does the making of this community impact upon the way people practice citizenship?
4. How is commoning and community-making embedded in power relations outside and within the movement?

In addressing these questions, I identify four practices of the movement relevant to its modes of commoning:

1. *Mobilising as vecinos* (neighbours): participating in the movement under the political identity of neighbour and the specific meanings given to this.
2. *'Informing' about mining*: acquiring and sharing information about the risks and harms of open pit mining.
3. *Appealing to dignity*: framing the movement's actions and people's decision to reject mining through a narrative of dignity.
4. *Rethinking human-nature relations*: re-imagining different ways of relating to, and valuing, nature.

Each of these four practices has motivated a process of commoning, of: place, knowledge, wellbeing, and nature, respectively. Making and managing commons motivates, in turn, the making of a community, as building something as shared requires creating and nurturing social relations between those who will access/use/care for the commons in question (Federici, 2012a; Gibson-Graham, Cameron, & Healy, 2016; Mies, 2014a; Sato & Soto Alarcón, 2019; Velicu & García-López, 2018). As such, by setting in motion processes of commoning, these four practices have supported the making of a community in Esquel. This is a community that is horizontal, epistemically self-sufficient, oppositional to the state, and structured around care, as I will show in this thesis.

These processes of commoning galvanised by Esquel's No a la Mina and the resulting community have, in turn, impacted citizenship as belonging, membership, and agency. In other words, the processes at play are transforming the way members of the movement relate to the Argentinian

state by reshaping the political subjectivity, rights and duties, and political agency associated to citizenship.

There is an important caveat, however. While these processes have successfully and against all odds contested the ways in which the state and private sector have sought to install mining in the region, they have nonetheless been beset by internal tensions deriving from social differences within Esquel, largely between indigenous and non-indigenous members.

Bringing together an analysis of 'commoning' and citizenship transformation may appear unusual, or even contradictory, at first sight. As much of the literature has focused on processes of commoning that emerge as a consequence of deliberate efforts to make a commons, where these are concentrated in the 'cracks' (Holloway, 2010) of both state and market and which are geared towards the creation of autonomous spaces, the relationship with the state has been understood at best irrelevant and at worse contradictory to commoning (see for example, Linebaugh, 2008; De Angelis, 2010, 2013; Holloway 2002, 2010; Caffentzis & Federici, 2013, 2014; Bollier & Helfrich, 2012). Commoning, however, does not occur in a political vacuum. Even when it aims to create autonomous spaces, it necessarily changes the way people relate to the state – in that case through disengagement. This understanding of commoning and citizenship, moreover, does not account for: 1. when commoning results not from deliberate efforts but from everyday practices; nor 2. for when commoning does not emerge in the cracks of the state, but in sites of contention with the state and thus in direct opposition to it. This is the case of the struggle at play in Esquel. While the movement does not explicitly seek to create any forms of 'commons', processes of commoning have been brought about through a relationship of opposition to the state (more specifically, through four of the movement's practices). Moreover, as these are processes that are emerging in the face of, and in response to, the state's attempt to impose mining, the knock-on effect of commoning on people's relationship to the state is all the more evident and a logical site of inquiry.

In putting forward these arguments, this thesis contributes to existing literature on the ways in which socio-environmental movements can be productive sites not only of citizenship transformation (Merlinsky & Latta, 2015), but also of commoning. This argument contributes, in turn, to the development of a theoretical link between commoning and citizenship – a relation which is under-theorised in existing literature for the reasons already discussed (see Chapter 2 for more details). The thesis also further develops an understanding of both commoning and

community-making themselves, each with their own logic and history, and then goes on to strengthen an understanding of the link between the two – that is, of why commoning produces community – and how the specificities of the processes of commoning shape the content and organisation of the emerging community. Lastly, by approaching this analysis through a concern with power, the thesis contributes to literature on how processes of commoning are embedded in power relations – vis-à-vis the state and within the commoning-community. This shows how successfully contesting extractivism over time may require changes in the way people relate to the state, and thus shows how citizenship transformation can be crucial for environmental justice. It also shows how it is crucial to pay attention to power relations shaping the process of commoning in order to create *just* commoning-communities.

On an empirical level, despite the challenges of COVID-19, the thesis illuminates how a socio-environmental movement is functioning as a site of commoning and what the resulting commoning-community looks like – an idea that has thus far been posited in the scholarly literature in theoretical terms only. In so doing, as I discuss later in this introduction, the thesis also contributes in original ways to the existing empirical literature on Esquel's No a la Mina. My study draws on the understandings and experiences of the movement's members – a dimension of the movement that existing literature has not explored – as well as provides an analysis of the movement that considers the movement beyond its initial years. The result is a more complex understanding of the movement's internal dynamics, and a more contemporary study, than is otherwise available.

This thesis also contributes to literature on socio-environmental movements in Argentina and social movements in Latin America more broadly. To the first, it contributes by surfacing and examining the tensions that may exist in, and thus that must be attended to and addressed by, movements and/or coalitions involving both indigenous and non-indigenous people. This adds nuance to existing literature on the positive impact of socio-environmental movements on indigenous recognition in Argentina (see for example Álvarez, 2019; Galafassi, 2012). As discussions of commons are associated to discussions on autonomy, the thesis contributes to the second body of literature by echoing the argument put forward by Yashar (2005) on how the politics of autonomy associated with some Latin American movements since the 1960s (particularly urban and indigenous movements) does not necessarily aim to transcend the state – an argument developed by various authors such as Zibechi (2012), Sitrin (2012), and Dinerstein

(2010, 2015).[4] Thus, an analysis of Esquel's No a la Mina contributes to literature that shows how a movement's politics of self-determination do not have to be directed at building autonomous spaces, independent from state governance, but can be expressed instead within people's relation to the state (see Ng'weno, 2007) – in this case, through a desire and demand to transform the social contract between people and the state into one that allows people to define and pursue socio-environmental wellbeing.

The remaining sections of this introductory chapter lay the foundation of this project by discussing a brief account of extractivism and citizenship in Argentina, as this is the context in which the movement is embedded and to which it responds. The following section then discusses the history of the movement, and the final section contains chapter summaries that demonstrate how the argument of the thesis is developed.

Extractivism and citizenship in Argentina

The extraction of natural resources has pervaded the history of Latin America (Bebbington, 2009). The economic model that accompanied the project of colonialism (see Galeano, 1973) revolving around the extraction of gold, silver, tin, nitrates, petroleum, cacao, rubber, and coffee (among other resources) has persisted since then, albeit in a different form. Extraction was reformulated and incorporated into Latin American national projects following their independence in the 19th century and continuing through their industrialisation in the 20th century (Bebbington, 2009; Carruthers, 2008; Chasteen, 2011).

However, it is particularly since the 1990s that Latin America has increasingly functioned in the global economy as an exporter of natural resources, irrespective of the ideology of national political regimes (Arsel, Hogenboom, & Pellegrini, 2016; Gudynas, 2009b; Svampa, 2012). To attract foreign direct investment into the region in the 1990s, governments increasingly chose to pursue resource extraction as a development strategy – specifically oil extraction, open-pit mining, shale gas extraction, and industrial agriculture. A 'Commodities Consensus' emerged across Latin

4 Zibechi (2012) argues the pursual of autonomy as a trend of social movements can be traced back to Chile and the 1960s, when a land occupation movement eventually known as *La Victoria* – after the settlement of the same name – occupied state-owned property to build a self-organised and self-governed community (see also Cortés, 2014; Rolston, 2010; Giannotti, 2017). In Argentina, this form of demand/project has been attributed, for example, to the *asambleas barriales* (Sitrin, 2012), the unemployed workers' movement known as *piqueteros* (Dinerstein, 2010) and the MNER (Rebón, 2008). Elsewhere, it has been attributed to the Landless Worker's Movements, the rubber tappers' movement in Brazil, water cooperatives in Bolivia, and the Zapatista movement in Mexico (see Zibechi, 2012; Hines, 2021; Holloway & Pelaez, 1998; Vergara-Camus, 2009).

America (Svampa, 2017, 2019) as governments across the region continue to embrace and celebrate resource extraction as a path to create economic boons. This Commodities Consensus has been supported not only by the soaring prices of raw materials in the international market during most of the 1990s and 2000s, but also by technological change which allows for the intensification of natural resource extraction. This transformed these industries to become fundamentally 'extractive' – that is, they appropriate nature as resources for export at a large scale and high intensity (Gudynas, 2013, 2015). This is clearly seen in the case of mining, where new technologies have allowed the move from underground mining techniques towards surface mining that allows for the extraction of more diffuse deposits of metals and minerals – a form of mining known as open pit mining. As a result, the Commodities Consensus has promoted the development of a landscape of extractivism, and the framing of extractivism as development.

Extractivism has posed a challenge to Latin American democracies as it is a mode of appropriating nature that has been continuously imposed on communities rather than proposed to and agreed upon by them (Svampa, 2019; Svampa & Viale, 2014). Communities across Latin America have thus seen their natural and social worlds reconfigured, and often devastated, without having sanctioned the decisions shaping their lives. Building on the exclusionary character citizenship has historically had in Latin America, extractivism has simultaneously profited from, and reproduced, exclusionary forms of citizenship.

As has been the case throughout Latin America, citizenship in Argentina has historically been an exclusionary category (Taylor, 2013). The populations politics pursued by the Argentinian nation-state in the 19th century to effectively occupy its territory were inherently racialised, as Argentina's indigenous peoples or *pueblos originarios* (as they refer to themselves) were eradicated and/or marginalised, and white European immigration was promoted. A racialised notion of citizenship was thus central to the Argentinian nation-state, as across Latin America (Ng'weno, 2007; Yashar, 2005), relegating indigeneity to a lower tier and valorising whiteness. This has crystallised in, and persisted through, a national myth of European-ness (of Argentina as a country that 'descends from ships') – a myth that obscures altogether the existence of indigenous peoples, who comprise 36 nations and account for 3% of the country's population (Briones, 2005a; Rasmussen, 2021).

Exclusions from citizenship have not only occurred along racial lines. Looking at how land property rights were adjudicated also reveals the primacy assigned to being a capital-owning male (Rasmussen and Figueroa, 2022; Taylor, 2013). For example, throughout Argentina's Patagonia,

the right to property was almost exclusively assigned to a white citizenry, and within that group to those with the ability to 'improve' the land (see Chapter 4) – an ability that was inherently tied to the ownership of capital, which through the 19th century remained mostly (if not solely) in the hands of the male population (see Mendoza, 2020; Oriola, 2014). Thus, as in other Latin American countries (see for example Holston, 2008), status as equal citizens has historically been also denied on the basis of class and/or gender.

Throughout the 20th century, however, legal changes expanded the recognition of citizenship to the working-class, women, and the *pueblos originarios* – driven for the most part by the demands of social mobilisations.

The first government of Juan Domingo Perón (1946-1952) was crucial for the expansion of the recognition of the working class, with trade and workers' unions emerging as 'a prime site for active citizenship' (Lazar, 2017) supporting a notion of citizenship which "relied, rather than on individual citizen's rights …. on social justice through the expansion of workers' rights" (Dinerstein, 2001, p.113). It was, in fact, the politics of Perón's government around workers' struggles that gave citizenship a collective dimension during this period –though it was co-opted by the state, used as a means to mobilise political support by framing the *pueblo* (or 'the people') as in opposition to the elites (James, 1988, 2002; Svampa, 2017) or as the basis of clientelist relations between people and the state (Taylor, 2004). This was also the period in which social rights took root in Argentina, as Perón's government developed a network of social protection institutions – though mostly around the figure of the (formal) worker (Levín, 2016).

However, the resurgence of workers' struggles in the 1990s and 2000s – through the movement of unemployed workers (known as *Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados* or MTD) and of company/industry recuperation (known as the *Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas* or MNER) – shows that the recognition of the working-class remains precarious (see Gracia, 2013; Svampa & Pereyra, 2009).[5] Moreover, while the period of the transition to democracy in Argentina in the 1980s saw the notion of citizenship re-emerging "as a way of talking about how people interact with the state and the kind of power exercised by them" (Taylor & Wilson, 2004, p. 154), as elsewhere in the region, its 'de-collectivization' that begun with the period of the military

[5] A faction of the MTD became known as the *piquetero* movement, for its main form of protest was that of the *piquete* or *corte de ruta* – a permanent blockade of roads or highways; an action that the movement claimed to have drawn from European immigrant anarchists (Di Marco et al., 2003; Svampa & Pereyra, 2009). The MNER split into two factions in 2003, which created the *Movimiento de Fábricas Recuperadas* (Gracia, 2013; Gracia & Cavaliere, 2007).

dictatorship (1976-83) has continued. It deepened throughout the 1990s due to Menem's neoliberal reforms, and the 2000s-2010s with the increasing criminalisation of social protests (especially that of the *pueblos originarios*) during the Kirchner governments (Svampa, 2008, 2017; Galafassi, 2012; see Chapter Four). As Taylor (2004) and Díaz Rosaénz (2017) argue this period has seen the emergence of a neoliberal form of citizenship, "whereby power (and indeed freedom) is equated with personal, individualised agency articulated through private, social and voluntary interactions … or through legal or economic transactions (exercising one's civil rights or buying and selling in the market) … [and] which places responsibility for … inequalities in the hands of the individual … outside the realm of politics" (Taylor, 2004, p. 222-223).

The terms of Argentinian citizenship have also been shaped by struggles over women's rights. In 1947, also while Perón's government was in power, the women's movement (greatly supported by Eva Perón) achieved the passing of Law 13.010 which recognised women's rights to vote and be elected as public officials (Romero, 2012). In the following decades, the feminist movement, organised through the Argentinian Feminist Union (1970-1976) and the National Women's Encounters (1986-2019), continued to mobilise for the expansion of the recognition of economic and social rights (Di Marco, 2011; Lenguita, 2021; Nari, 2002). This history, along with the central role that women occupied in the protests against the political dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s through the movement Mother of Plaza de Mayo (or *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*), has strengthened women's presence as political actors in Argentina (see Giannoni, 2014; Gorini, 2015). The recent burgeoning of the feminist movement since the 2010s – especially around sexual and reproductive rights and gender-based violence (Cabral & Acacio, 2016; Lenguita, 2021; Pis Diez, 2019; Di Marco, 2011) – highlights the work that remains to be done.

Following a regional trend where the notion of territory is increasingly central to culturally defined communities and increasingly relevant in the relationship between people and the state (Ng'weno, 2007), indigenous mobilisations in Argentina begun demanding, by the end of the 20th century, the recognition of their cultural rights and the restitution of their ancestral territories (Svampa, 2017). Indigenous struggles achieved the recognition of the prior occupancy of Argentina's territory by the *pueblos originarios* and of their right to identity in the 1994 Constitution (Art. 75) (Ramos & Delrio, 2005; Taylor, 2013). They further achieved the national ratification in 2000 of ILO Convention 169 on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Galafassi, 2012). While these legal changes were accompanied by a set of laws – such as Law 26.160/06 on Indigenous Communities – whose objective was to facilitate the access of indigenous communities to land, these have not been

implemented to date (Briones, 2017). Moreover, while their demand for territory is central to the cultural recognition of indigenous peoples as a culturally defined group, it has remained a contentious one as it is tied to a demand for self-determination. This is a demand that would profoundly affect the Argentinian nation state – territory being the basis of the sovereignty and authority of the modern nation state (Ng'weno, 2007).

Moreover, this is a claim that inspired by the indigenous movements in Ecuador and Bolivia, where they have achieved recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and the transformation of both states into plurinational ones, in 2008 and 2009 respectively (see Acosta & Martínez Ortiz, 2009; Colloredo-Mansfeld, 2009; Postero, 2014), has grown tantamount to a demand for plurinationality. Thus, it has become all the more explicit about the transformation of the Argentinian state that it demands (Ramos & Delirio, 2005; Walsh, 2008). Challenging a historical notion of citizenship that has sought to homogenise the national population (Postero, 2014), the demand for plurinationality contests the racialised notion of citizenship that underpins the Argentinian nation-state and thus the historical misrecognition of the *pueblos originarios*, and seeks the recognition of different political subjectivities, political structures, and cultures (Galafassi, 2012; Ramos & Delrio, 2005).[6] As such, territory is currently a crucial site of struggle with the state, over collective recognition and self-determination. It presents a paradox as it encompasses a demand of political autonomy from the state while simultaneously demanding it recognises a specific set of rights (Restrepo, 1996 cited in Ng'weno, 2007).

In the face of extractivism, environmental justice or socio-environmental movements – that is social movements concerned with the inherent connection between human wellbeing and environmental health – have emerged across Argentina, as throughout Latin America (see for example Aranda, 2015; Bustos, Folchi, & Fragkou, 2017; Carruthers, 2008; Gatehouse, 2019; Henighan & Johnson, 2018; Lakhani, 2020; Latta & Wittman, 2015; Merlinsky & Wagner, 2019; Svampa & Antonelli, 2009; Walter & Urkidi, 2017; Walter & Wagner, 2021). The Environmental Justice Atlas – a collaborative platform documenting environmental conflicts around the world (see Temper, Del Bene, & Martinez-Alier, 2015) – has a record of 70 socio-environmental conflicts in Argentina to date – 33 of them related to mining and which can be traced back to Esquel's No a la Mina (Marin, 2009; Walter, 2008; Walter & Martinez-Alier, 2010; Weinstock,

[6] In other Latin America countries, this has been done instead through an imaginary of racial mixing or mestizaje (see, for example, Moreno Figueroa, 2010; Postero, 2014).

2006).[7] These movements, which for the most part oppose extractivism for its negative consequences on the environment, human health, local economies, and culture, are thus embedded in a history in which social movements have been key, particularly since the 1970s and 1980s, in contesting and expanding notions of citizenship (Dagnino, 2007; Tulchin & Ruthenburg, 2007).

Besides being influenced by labour, feminist, and indigenous struggles, socio-environmental movements have also been shaped by the *asambleas barriales* of 2001 and the resurgence of a collective practice of citizenship. The economic crisis that detonated in December 2001 (see Chapter 4) prompted a cycle of protests against the Argentinian state caused by the perceived widespread failure of political institutions, expressed in the demand '*¡que se vayan todos!*' ('all must go!') (Sitrin, 2012; Svampa, 2008). Amidst the protests, *asambleas barriales* or neighbourhood assemblies were created in Buenos Aires and other cities throughout the country, first as spaces where people gathered to discuss recent events, their experiences of the crisis and their subsequent needs, and later as spaces for autonomous social, economic, and political organisation (Borland & Sutton, 2007; Di Marco et al., 2003; Korol, 2015; Ouviña, 2002b, 2002a; Sitrin, 2012). However, unlike workers' struggles (supported or embraced by the state), the *asambleas barriales* pursued a politics of autonomy that sought to build self-organised urban spaces (Stirin, 2012) and thus to transcend the state rather than work within it.[8]

It is this history of citizenship in which the movement of Esquel's No a la Mina is embedded, and to which it responds. The movement has been greatly influenced by the *asambleas barriales* and the movement of unemployed workers and is thus embedded in a history of collective citizenship – though it differs from them in many regards as the empirical chapters of the thesis shows. The protagonism of women in Esquel is made possible in part by the trajectories of the feminist movement and of women's movements in Argentina. Likewise, the tensions the movement faces with respect to Mapuche-Tehuelche people reflect, and are embedded in, Argentina's racialised state building and current demands for a plurinational state.

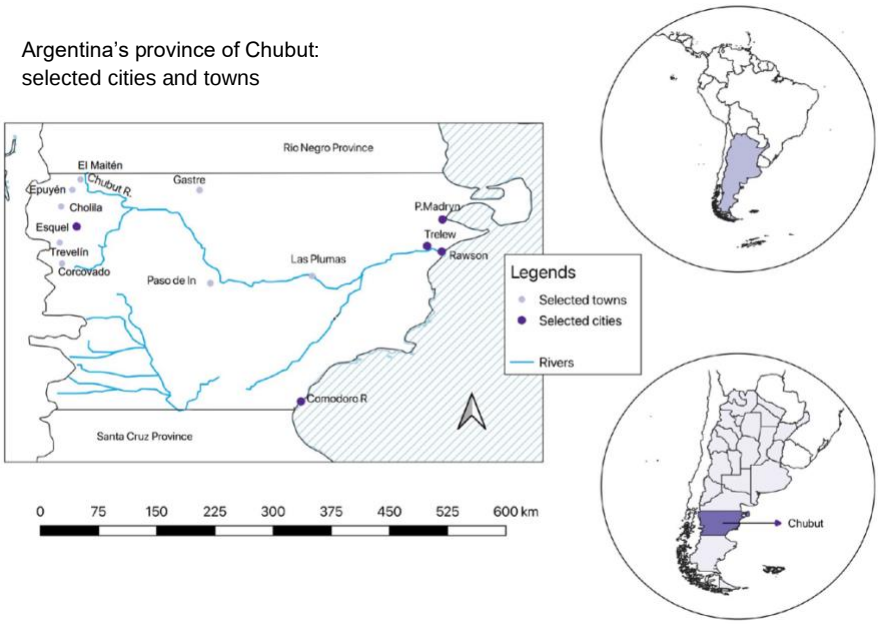
[7] The exact period covered by the database is unclear. Documentation also may not exhaustive. These figures correspond to an updated search made in January 2023. Socio-environmental conflicts concentrate in Argentina around agriculture, oil, shale gas, and mining (Machado, 2009; Saguier & Peinado, 2016; Svampa & Antonelli, 2009; Walter & Martinez-Alier, 2010). In Latin America, the EJ Atlas has recorded 1008 such cases in Latin America centred around mining, fossil fuels, agriculture, water management, infrastructure, tourism, industrialisation, waste management, nuclear development, and conservation. The Observatory of Mining Conflicts in Latin America (OCMAL) has to date documented 284 conflicts in the region solely around mining – most of which are specifically around open-pit mining.

[8] The *Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas* also pursued this form of politics by establishing control over previous state companies (see Gracia, 2013; Gracia & Cavaliere, 2007).

The *Asamblea de Vecinos Autoconvocados por el No a la Mina* in Esquel

The province of Chubut, designated as such in 1955, is located in the Argentinian Patagonia – a region which also encompasses the provinces of Neuquén and Río Negro to the north and the provinces of Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego to the south. The town of Esquel is in the Northwest of the province, in what is known as the province's cordillera (see Figure 3). According to data from the 2010 census (the latest available), Esquel has a population of approximately 32,000 people. The arrival of the telegraph in 1906 is used to mark the town's founding date, although Mapuche-Tehuelche communities had long been settled in the area (Oriola, 2014). Being close to the border with Chile, Esquel had a crucial role in the population politics of the Argentinian nation-state in the late 19th century and early 20th century, demarcating the space under Argentinian control. It is unclear what percentage of its population identifies as indigenous, but Esquel is in previous Mapuche-Tehuelche territory. Like other cities in the cordillera and along the coast, it has received members of nearby Mapuche-Tehuelche communities who have been displaced (such as that of Nahuel Pan), as well as indigenous peoples from the interior of the province (ibid.; see Chapter 4).[9]

Figure 3. Map of Chubut



Source: Made by the author. Location of cities and towns obtained from Google Maps.

[9] The community of Nahuel Pan was created as people were dispossessed of their lands during the Conquest of the Desert. However, despite having a formal land concession (given by the Argentinian state in 1908), the community was violently displaced in 1937. In 1948, the state reinstated the land concession, but for less than half of the land previously recognised. The community is currently involved in a land dispute over the remainder of the land (Claro, 2022; Oriola, 2014).

Esquel's No a la Mina emerged in 2002, in response to the gold mining project known as *Cordón Esquel*. Exploration work for this mining project, undertaken by the American company Meridian Gold and its Argentinian subsidiary Minera El Desquite, began in 1997. Mountain Willimanco was to be mined, locating the mining site 7 km from Esquel as the crow flies. The project was estimated to cover an area of approximately 1.25 km^2 producing a minimum of 4 million ounces of gold during its 10-to-15-year lifespan (Comisión de Prensa y Difusión, n.d.). Articles from the local newspaper *El Oeste* between 2001 and 2002 speak of the project as part of the development of a mining corridor between Esquel and Cholila and the concomitant creation of an industrial park on the outskirts of the town, as well as a hydroelectric dam (a project that would eventually be known as *La Elena*) on the Carrenleufú River near the town of Corcovado.

Figure 4. Esquel: a view of its main avenue and from the old train station

Source: Taken by the author in January 2020

In January 2001, the Mapuche-Tehuelche community of Huisca Antieco, located 50 km from Esquel on territories it had secured a few years before, flagged the presence of the mining company in the area.[10] After the company entered their communal territory to conduct exploratory work without following the procedures mandated by the national and provincial constitutions and by ILO Convention 169, as well as disregarding the community's clear opposition to their presence, members of Huisca Antieco began to organise and demonstrate against Meridian Gold. Protests

[10] The community of Huisca Antieco faced an attempted eviction in 1993, when a logging company sought to make valid its legal ownership over the community's ancestral territory and a resorted to a judicial court in Esquel to order the eviction of the community. The community organised a series of protests, which became the first indigenous mobilisation to take place in Esquel. Through these actions, they first achieved the temporary suspension of the eviction, and later reached an agreement with the national government where the state would buy the legal property titles from the logging company and transfer them to the community. While for a long time this was considered an important landmark of Mapuche-Tehuelche land recuperation, it is now perceived as a failed agreement as the compensatory payment to the company recognised the validity of the company's claim over indigenous ancestral territory (Ramos & Delrio, 2005).

and media campaigns took place in Esquel, supported by the Mapuche-Tehuelche organisation *11 de Octubre* (October 11th), against the governmental authority that had issued the exploration permits to the mining company: the Office of Mining and Geology (*Dirección de Minas y Geología* in Spanish).

The company maintained a low profile after these mobilisations until mid-2002 when, supported by the municipal and provincial government, the company began to promote the mining project through a series of public talks (Agüero & Macayo, 2019). The company's resurgence that year and its urgency to start the mining project by December of that same year was likely motivated by a steep increase in the price of gold on the international market in 2002, after it had (along with other precious metals) reached an all-time low during the preceding decade (Dougherty, 2018).

While articles from *El Oeste* attest to an emerging concern with the open pit mining project in Esquel since 2001, it was not until this moment that it took hold in earnest. Concern took hold as two women professors from the University of San Juan Bosco in Esquel noticed that Meridian Gold was disseminating erroneous information to residents of the town. The company exaggerated the economic benefits of the project for the local population, who were at that time still reeling from the 2001 economic crisis with approximately 18-20% of them unemployed (Cifuentes Valenzuela, 2015; Walter, 2008; Walter & Martinez-Alier, 2010).[11] In addition, Meridian Gold played down the health issues associated with its mines, insisting that cyanide – the chemical agent most used to leach gold ore and the issue most likely to be contentious – was innocuous to human health.

Concerned with Meridian Gold's claims, these two university professors began to research open pit mining, and organised meetings to share their findings with people in Esquel. At first their talks only covered the process of cyanidation that would be used in the project and the health and environmental risks this process would entail (from the transportation of cyanide into the province to the storing of residues in tailing dams). However, they soon expanded to include other potential negative aspects of open-pit mining (and hence other experts), such as acid mine drainage, the depletion of overground water sources (namely the Chubut River), and lack of local economic benefits (UACCH, 2018).[12]

[11] Cifuentes Valenzuela (2015) estimate 18% of people in Esquel were unemployed by the beginning of 2003, while Walter (2008) and Walter & Martínez-Alier speak of a 20% figure for 2002.
[12] As a result of their actions, both women – as a few other members of the movement – received constant anonymous threats during this period. There were also a few instances of physical violence being perpetrated against *vecinos*.

In October 2002, with increasing public pressure, the mining company presented its Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). However, residents complained about the process (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5), which was to conclude on December 4th 2002 at an *audiencia pública,* where experts reviewing the EIA would make their evaluation public and where doubts and concerns from residents could be expressed and answered.

It is unclear whether neighbourhood-based gatherings (known as *juntas vecinales*) to discuss people's concerns about the project (Weinstock, 2006) were galvanised by the discussions and worries surrounding the EIA, or whether they had already been happening in parallel with the talks organised by the two university professors and others (which begun in June 2002).[13] In any case, in October 2002, the *Asamblea de Vecinos Autoconvocados por el No a la Mina de Esquel* was formally created in a gathering/meeting (known as an *asamblea* or assembly) where its 600 participants unanimously voted in opposition to the mining project (Comisión de Prensa y Difusión, n.d). The resulting movement had primarily middle-class members (male and female), but also included representatives from poorer neighbourhoods of the town and indigenous Mapuche-Tehuelche peoples living in Esquel and nearby communities (Walter & Martinez-Alier, 2010).

The movement's *raison d'etre* was to expose the various detrimental environmental and social effects the mining project would have on the surrounding areas of Esquel, as well as the economic plundering (which they call in Spanish *saqueo*) people perceived the mining project to be. Their opposition to mining was also informed by their experience, and that of residents of the nearby town of Trevelin in the 1970s, of the construction of the Futaleufú hydroelectrical dam – a project that failed to fulfil its promise of improving local development through increased employment and energy accessibility (Musacchio, 2013; Walter & Martinez-Alier, 2010).[14]

The following months of 2002 saw Esquel's No a la Mina organise various strategies against Meridian Gold's mining project. In the same month of the movement's consolidation, it began to pressure Esquel's local authority (namely its municipal president or *intendente* Rafael Williams and Chubut's government José Luis Lizurume) to postpone the date of the *audiencia pública* to allow the public to have more time to form an opinion. In the same month, the Assembly began to collect

[13] Existing literature shows different accounts of this part of the history of the movement, echoing the variations I heard during the interviews I conducted with members of the movement, as well as the different accounts that coexist in documents by the movement.

[14] In fact, the hydroelectric dam proved to have the sole purpose of supplying energy to the aluminium company ALUAR located in Puerto Madryn. While infrastructure to take power generated in the Cordillera region to the coast traverses Chubut's plateau, it does not provide a single community with electricity (Oriola, 2016).

signatures under the slogan '*No al cianuro'* (No to cyanide) to demand that the local authority conduct a binding referendum on mining. In November, the Assembly organised the first street protest against the mining project with the participation of around 1500 *vecinos,* as well as occupied the local government (known as *Concejo Deliberante*) offices to demand local authorities back popular opposition to the mining project. The repetition of this protest on December 4th (the date that the *audiencia pública* would have taken place), this time with about 2800 people, began the movement's strategy to occupy the streets on the 4th of every month, following advice given to them by the movement of *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (*Línea Fundadora)* to never abandon the streets.[15] In December 2002, the movement supported a *vecina* to present a judicial appeal for environmental protection (called in Spanish *recurso de amparo ambiental*) asking for precautionary action against the mining project. During these months, the Assembly also began to put together its iconic leaflets called '*VeciNos informan a VeciNos*' (or Neighbours inform Neighbours)[16], to coordinate *escraches* against local authorities, and to organise artistic events and interventions to gather support against the mining project (Comisión de Prensa y Difusión, n.d.; Svampa & Viale, 2014).[17]

In February of 2003, despite pressures from Esquel's Commerce Association and the Argentinian Building Workers' Union (which amounted to the threat of physical violence against *vecinos*), the Assembly succeeded in pressurising Esquel's municipal authority to hold a referendum on mining on March 23rd 2003 – a demand that was inspired by the experience of Tambogrande (Peru) where the first mining consultation in Latin America took place (Svampa, Sola Alvarez, & Bottaro, 2009; Walter, 2008; Musacchio, 2013).

With a turnout of 70% of the municipality's population, the opposition to mining won the referendum with a very convincing 81% of the votes – a day that has been commemorated since 2004 as Esquel's *Día de la Dignidad* (Day of Dignity). The referendum was not binding (despite the protestors' demands to the contrary), but Meridian Gold decided to halt the project nevertheless, recognising public pressure. They sold the project to the Canadian mining company *Yamana Gold,*

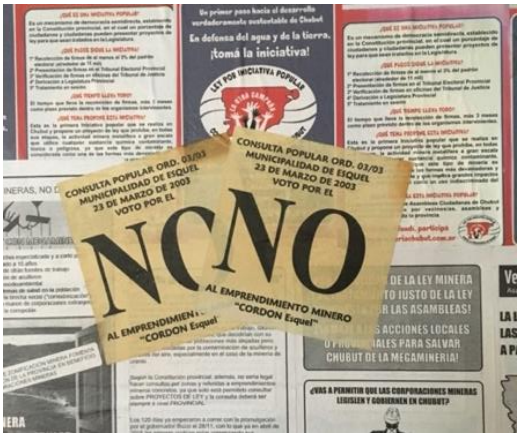
[15] In 1986, the movement of *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* divided due to an ideological rift into *Madres de Plaza de Mayo Linea Fundadora*, led by Nora Cortiñas among others, and the *Association of Madres de Plaza de Mayo* led by Hebe Bonafini (see Giannoni, 2014; Gorini, 2015).

[16] In Spanish, the title of the publication is a play on words. It takes the syllable 'no' contained in the word 'vecinos' and capitalises it to signal how this is a publication aimed at sharing the reasons to oppose mining – that is 'to say no'.

[17] An *escrache* or to *escrachear* someone consists today of going to the home address of the person against whom the protest is directed to name and shame them for their role in a particular issue. This was a protest strategy developed by H.I.J.O.S, who would visit people involved in the abduction and torture of people during Argentina's military dictatorship, and shout, paint on walls, dramatise performances or chant denouncing the person to express and rally moral condemnation for their acts – what Keck & Sikkink (1998) would call 'naming and shaming' – as well as to keep history and memory alive (Di Marco et al, 2003; Kaiser, 2008; Sitrin, 2012).

who renamed the project *Suyai* (meaning hope in Mapuzugun). Soon after the referendum, a provincial law was passed (then Law 5.001, now Law XVII-Nº 68) prohibiting open pit mining with the use of cyanide in the province.

Figure 5. An interior wall of the *localito* with the voting cards used for the 2003 plebiscite



Source: Taken by the author in January 2020.

Law 5.001/XVII-Nº 68 has since been crucial in halting the development of open pit mining in the region. However, while it prohibits the exploitation of minerals through cyanidation, it does not prohibit exploration works, nor other forms of mining and ore leaching. Because of this legal ambiguity, the movement remains active to this day, as pressures to initiate the mining project near Esquel have continued, and interest in installing other mining projects across the province has emerged since. Moreover, as Law 5.001/ XVII-Nº 68 created the legal notion of 'sacrifice zones' – areas where environmental regulations would not apply – Law 5001 has specifically encouraged a mining horizon in the central part of the province where there is a lower population density, mostly comprising Mapuche-Tehuelche communities (discussed in more detail in Chapter Four). As a result of the growth of mining pressures across the province, the movement has spilled from Esquel to other towns of the province, most of which now have their own assembly against mining.

In 2014, these various Assemblies came together to form the *Unión de Asambleas Ciudadanas de Chubut* (Union of Citizens' Assemblies of Chubut, also known as UACCH), today renamed as the *Unión de Asambleas de Comunidades Chubutenses* (Union of Community Assemblies of Chubut). Esquel, in coordination with other assemblies through the Union, has sought to strengthen Chubut's legal framework against mining since 2012, when it began to craft a law project to replace Law 5001/XVII-Nº 68 with stronger legislation and to collect the necessary signatures to present

it to Chubut's congress. This effort was made possible by the provincial mechanism known as *Iniciativa Popular* (Popular Initiative), established in Art. 263 of Chubut's Constitution, which allows citizens to directly present law projects to Congress, provided they gather 3% of the provincial electoral roll in signatures. In 2014, with 13,000 signatures, the UACCH succeeded in presenting the legal project to the corresponding authorities. However, Chubut's Congress did not give it due treatment, leaving its discussion to the very last day before the period for pronouncing on it had expired. The Congress also committed what assemblies have labelled a legal fraud, where the Congress changed the content of the proposal – de facto turning it into a proposal *supporting* mining – before approving it in November 2014. Popular outrage in the period that followed pressured the then-governor of Chubut, Martín Buzzi, to withdraw the newly passed initiative (UACCH, 2020).

Over the years, Esquel's No a la Mina widened its activities. It created a webpage (noalamina.org) and various radio programmes (at local station Radio Kalewche and Radio Nacional Esquel), through which the movement aims to share news of, and discussions about, mining in Chubut, as well as throughout Argentina and Latin America more broadly. It also published a guide in 2015 about the social, economic, and environmental impacts of mining titled *Hablemos de Megaminería: manual de educación y difusión sobre las implicancias [sic] de la megaminería* (Let's talk about mega-mining: a guide for the education about and dissemination of information on the impact of mega-mining). In recent years, it has also become prominent on social media (Facebook, Twitter, and more recently Instagram), and has maintained a constant presence in the town through a manned information stall – known as the *localito* – which the movement uses for its activities and which is key for the movement's fundraising (which occurs mainly through the sale of t-shirts with logos and/or messages related to the movement).[18]

The lockdown period caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the first half of 2020 saw increasing pressures to install mining in the region. In May and June 2020, Yamana Gold sold part of the *Suyai* project to the Argentinian conglomerate Grupo Elsztain, who become in charge of securing legal and political support for the project (No a la Mina, 2020). In response to this, and to growing rumours about increasing pressure on the provincial government to abolish Law 5001/XVII-Nº 68, the Union of Assemblies created a second Popular Initiative project under the slogan '*Nos deben*

[18] During this period, members of the movement have also been subject to surveillance from the state. In 2015, the judicial dispute over the territorial recuperation of the Mapuche-Tehuelche community Vuelta del Río revealed that various members of Esquel's No a la Mina had been unlawfully surveilled by Argentina's Intelligence Agency (known as AFI). The movement achieved in 2023 in taking this case to court (to be held in 2024-2025) (No a la Mina, 2023).

una ley' ('They owe us a law'), alluding to the legal fraud that surrounded the first initiative. Despite the lockdown, the Union collected more than 30,000 signatures in support of the project and submitted it to Congress in October 2020. As the Second Popular Initiative Project passed to Congress in November 2020, the now governor of the province, Mariano Arcioni, presented a contrary executive law project which sought to minimise regulations for the creation of sacrifice zones for mining (Law project 128/20, also known as *Proyecto de Zonificación* or Zoning Project).

For about a year, both law projects were discussed in Congress – albeit under unequal treatment, with the Popular Initiative being subjected to more bureaucratic procedures than the Executive project and with numerous anomalies in the Congress' online sessions.[19] On May 6th, 2021, despite popular pressure from the Union of Assemblies, the Second popular initiative was dismissed by Chubut's Congress. As the likelihood of the Zoning Project being approved in the following months grew, protests intensified across Chubut.

Figure 6. First and second popular initiative – leaflet and digital invitation to event

Source: From left to right, taken by the author & retrieved from the Facebook Page (Noalamina Esquel).

Despite being against the law – Law 5001/XVII-Nº 68 only allowed for the creation of sacrifice zones in the 120-day period that followed the date the law was ratified (2004) – the Zoning Project was approved by the provincial Congress on December 15th, 2021. The approval of the project in the face of mass popular opposition to it, led to massive mobilisations of all the assemblies against mining throughout the province, but especially in the province's capital of Rawson where Chubut's

[19] Due to COVID-19, the sessions were online and livestreamed via Facebook, without official records and removing audio from the stream whenever voting takes place.

Congress is located. These protests, especially those in the capital, faced violent retaliation by Chubut's armed forces – a pattern that has emerged since the end of 2020. Increasing popular pressure forced the government to withdraw the newly approved legislation once again, with the governor's decision announced on December 20th, 2021. Since then, Esquel's No a la Mina, again in coordination with the rest of the assemblies across Chubut, has been engaged in a third attempt to replace Law 5001/XVII-Nº 68 with a Popular Initiative law project.

Since its success in 2003, Esquel's No a la Mina became a key reference for the opposition to mining in Argentina, in what has been named by various scholars as the 'Esquel effect' (see Svampa, Sola Alvarez & Bottaro, 2009; Wagner, 2011; Renauld, 2013, 2016). Through its formation of the National Network of Communities Affected by Mining (CAMA for its name in Spanish), it inspired and advised struggles against mining around the country. This culminated in the banning of mining in another 6 provinces – Río Negro (2005), Tucumán (2007), Mendoza (2007), La Pampa (2007), Córdoba (2007) and San Luis (2008) – and in the creation and approval of the National Glacier Law in 2008 which prohibits mining in glacier and periglacial zones (Walter & Martinez-Alier, 2010; Machado, 2009; Marin, 2009). Moreover, as already discussed, the movement in Esquel has inspired the creation of Assemblies against mining across Chubut and the resulting Union of Citizen Assemblies, in which Esquel's movement is a key a member.

Throughout the years the movement has seen a change in its composition. While the movement's core – the people who are involved in the movement's daily organisation and activities – continue to be mostly middle-class and non-indigenous, its visible leadership is now mostly effected by women and is increasingly intergenerational. Moreover, it is clear from the number of people that joins for the street protests (some of which have had the participation of over 2,000 people) and events that the movement extends to other segments of the population in Esquel.

The movement has also seen a change in its organising principles. While for most part of the movement's history its underlying agreement has been to focus solely on rejecting mining (see Chapter Five), it has more recently begun take up, or offer support to, other causes under an understanding that all justice struggles are linked – what they refer to as '*la lucha es una sola*' or 'the struggle is one and the same'. However, despite this change, the movement has remained purposefully focused on rejecting mining and uninterested in the creation and/or management of any alternatives to mining as development – that is, in planning and managing any form of self-

organised alternative socio-economic project – as they perceive this to be an obligation of the state, not of *vecinos*.[20]

Because Esquel is considered the "birth of the anti-mining movement of Argentina" (Walter & Wagner, 2021, p.7) and because of its successful history, various scholars have been interested in understanding the movement more fully. Existing literature on Esquel's No a la Mina can be divided in two groups: studies that look specifically at Esquel, and those that analyse it in relation to other conflicts and/or movements. The studies that solely examine Esquel's No a la Mina have focused on the reasons behind their opposition to mining (Walter, 2008, 2014; Walter & Martinez-Alier, 2010), the political discursive possibilities of 'saying no' (Marin, 2009), the movement's struggle as an act of territorialisation (Weinstock, 2006), and its impact on local electoral politics (Mussachio, 2013). Within the body of literature that examines Esquel's No a la Mina through a comparative lens, there has been a focus on understanding how the movement has influenced struggles in other parts of the country (Svampa et al., 2009; Renauld, 2016), what the common characteristics of conflicts around mining across Argentina are (Wagner, 2016; Walter & Urkidi, 2017; Walter & Wagner, 2021), and what factors account for the different outcomes of mining interests in different provinces (Reboratti, 2012; Torunczyk, 2013, 2015, 2016).

Most of the studies, however, focus solely on the foundational years of the movements (2002-2003) and do not draw from the experiences, understandings, and interpretations of the movement's members. Moreover, while some of these studies have examined the movement as a conflict of decision-making structures and exclusion (Walter, 2008, 2014; Walter & Martinez-Alier, 2010; Torunzcyk 2015, 2013, 2016), an examination of the impact of Esquel's No a la Mina on commoning and citizenship practices is – as of yet – missing. An examination of the movement with an interest in understanding how it has made a community and changed the way people relate to the state is all the more relevant in light of ongoing discussions in the Latin American context about the link between extractivism and democracy, and in light of the demands for plurinational states (Svampa, 2013, 2017; Latta & Wittman, 2015; Acosta & Martínez, 2009). The particularities of Esquel's No a la Mina, vis-à-vis the trend of social movements to pursue autonomy from the state that Zibechi (2012) and others find in Latin American social movements, allows for an examination of how central it is to environmental justice to transform the relationship between people and the state into one that allows people to exercise control over their place and lives.

[20] This stands in contrast to what Zibechi (2012) argues has been the trend of Latin American social movements: the pursual of self-organised and self-governed communities autonomous from the state (see also Cortés, 2014; Rolston, 2010; Giannotti, 2017).

Thesis structure

The argument put forward in this thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter Two discusses the theoretical framework on which this doctoral thesis draws, and to which it aims to contribute. It builds a theoretical dialogue between feminist political ecology and the anthropology of citizenship, arguing that bringing these two bodies of literature together allows an approach to environmental movements as 'productive sites' (Merlinsky & Latta, 2015) of commoning and citizenship transformation, while being attentive to the way in which these processes are shaped by power relations. The chapter proposes a theoretically new link between the literatures on commoning and citizenship, which addresses in turn theoretical gaps in each of these literatures.

Chapter Three discusses the methodology of the doctoral thesis which draws upon a feminist qualitative methodology. It discusses why a qualitative methodology was the most appropriate for the project, and how following a feminist approach therein shaped the research process. It also discusses my choice of research methods and sampling strategy, along with the impact and various challenges of conducting the research during the COVID-19 pandemic. It discusses too the methodology followed for analysing the material shared with me by members of the movement. Lastly, in line with a feminist research methodology, this chapter includes an account of the position to which this research project is accountable, as well as the ethical considerations I took.

Chapter Four traces the history of extractivism in Argentina and the regional history onto which it has mapped in Chubut. In doing so, the chapter aims to trace the national and regional history of extractivism in which Esquel's No a la Mina is embedded – that which shaped its emergence and trajectory, and that which it contests. It argues that the movement is embedded in a history where resource extraction has been linked, since the 1990s, to discourses of economic crisis – where it is framed as key for the country's economic recovery and subsequent development – as well as in a history of settler colonialism and thus of marginalisation of *pueblos originarios*.

The following four chapters make up the thesis' substantive core, analysing the four practices that comprise the process of commoning by which community is made and citizenship re-shaped.

Chapter Five examines the practice of mobilising as *vecinos* in Esquel's No a la Mina. It argues that mobilising as *vecinos* motivates the commoning of place through the creation of new arrangements of responsibility. By building a community where people relate to each other in a horizontal manner, and which offers containment through a sense of proximity, solidarity, and care, participating as *vecinos* has supported the creation of a strong collective political subjectivity that is functioning as a language for the emerging commoning-community, as well as reshaping the way people engage with the state. The chapter argues that to mobilise as a *vecino* roots citizenship in place. This form of citizenship puts into practice an autonomous collective citizenship and contests the individualised model of citizenship that would permit the imposition of extractivism, transforming historical practices of collective citizenship in Argentina, and emphasising people's democratic collective right to decide over their place and lives. However, as mobilising as *vecinos* relies on a depoliticised individual sense of self that conditions participation on people's ability to divest themselves of other collective interests, mobilising as *vecinos* runs the risk of creating a homogenous community that unwittingly reproduces existing patterns of exclusion along social difference within the movement – namely, for the recognition and participation of Mapuche-Tehuelche people, as well as for the recognition of women's labour in the movement.

Chapter Six examines the movement's politics of 'informing'. It argues the movement's practice of 'informing' has encompassed two parallel processes for members of the movement: making oneself an expert (what they call 'information') and sharing that expertise with others (what they call 'dissemination'). These processes have culminated in a commoning of knowledge that responds to the enclosure of expert knowledge and to the ways in which the state and mining companies have relied on it to impose mining. In turn, the commoning of knowledge has supported a process of community-making through the creation of epistemic networks, as well as shaped the emerging community as one that aims to be epistemically independent. The commoning of knowledge is functioning as a critical emancipatory component in people's relationship with the state, by introducing an epistemic agency into the way citizenship is practiced by members of the movement. However, as the commoning of knowledge has mostly referred to expert knowledge, while it has bridged differences of class and supported women's role in the movement, it has reinforced the exclusion of Mapuche-Tehuelche members by reproducing colonial attributions of knowledge and ignorance.

Chapter Seven analyses the movement's appeal to dignity. It argues that appealing to dignity has entailed the 'commoning' of wellbeing leading to a process of community-making that seeks to

bridge differences of class in particular. It has also contributed a moral grammar that provides values and affect around which the emerging community can coalesce. By commoning wellbeing, the movement's appeal to dignity seeks to contest too the ways in which the state and mining companies have exploited people's needs and appealed to notions of crisis to impose mining in the province. In doing so, the movement's appeal to dignity speaks in the context of citizenship of agency and a right to wellbeing. While appealing to dignity presents an opportunity to further the recognition of Mapuche-Tehuelche people in the movement, it also holds potential risks for the creation and/or reinforcement of exclusions within the movement.

Chapter Eight examines how members of the movement are rethinking human-nature relations. It argues that the movement is re-imagining nature as shared, cared for, and entangled with human wellbeing, commoning nature as a result. In doing so, it is challenging the ontological underpinnings of extractivism, and supporting a process of community-making: in this case, one based on care and one that goes beyond anthropocentric understandings – what I have called a 'kin community', following Haraway (2015, 2016). This impacts people's relation to the state by putting forward an understanding of citizenship as caring and being cared for. This continues to root citizenship in place, re-shape people's sense of agency and to expand their demands for a right to a wider notion of wellbeing – that is, socio-environmental wellbeing. However, while this form of commoning creates opportunities for the epistemic recognition of Mapuche-Tehuelche people, and for the convergence of struggles, it has two underlying tensions around the appropriation of indigenous worldviews and the valuation of nature as landscape.

The concluding chapter brings together how the four practices of the movement have supported processes of commoning, the making of a community and re-shaped the way citizenship is practiced by members of Esquel's No a la Mina. It also brings together how these processes have been fraught with tensions, at times reproducing exclusions along the lines of social difference, and how these processes contest the ways in which the state has sought to install mining in the province. It argues, however, that the movement – despite its reproduction of exclusions – is opening opportunities for the recognition of social difference and thus to address historical inequalities. For this, the conclusion returns to the issue of the movement's banner, as the change of banners is indicative of the ways in which the movement is responding to and redressing its misrecognitions. As the notion of community acts as what De la Cadena (2010) calls an 'equivocation' – that is, as a notion that "enable circuits between partially connected worlds without creating a unified system of activism" (p.351) – the notion of community is being

increasingly used as an alternative language of citizenship as it is perceived as recognising and encompassing Mapuche-Tehuelche claims to plurinationality. This shows how, while commoning can in fact reproduce power injustices, it can also open paths to create *just* commoning-communities.

Chapter Two

A dialogue between feminist political ecology and the anthropology of citizenship

This doctoral project rests on a theoretical dialogue between the feminist political ecology and the anthropology of citizenship that allows approaching socio-environmental movements as 'productive sites' (Merlinsky & Latta, 2015) for commoning and citizenship transformation, while being attentive to power throughout. This approach to Esquel's No a la Mina is made possible in turn by the influence of post-structural thought in both literatures, which allow for an approach to citizenship and commoning as processual and thus as performative – that is, as subject to change in and amidst the continuous repetition of everyday practices.

Aspects of this approach bring a novel focus to the study of social movements and citizenship, in which a feminist political ecology has been relatively rare, and even more so in tandem with an anthropological perspective on citizenship. In taking this approach, the thesis aims to understand not only how socio-environmental movements re-make the terms of citizenship, but also how these changes are a function of socio-environmental processes. In doing so, this thesis contributes to anthropological literatures on citizenship, the emerging literature in (feminist) political ecology focusing on citizenship, and feminist political ecology work on commoning. Moreover, in line with feminist political ecology's concern with power, this thesis also aims to understand how the socio-environmental and citizenship transformations at play respond to the workings of the state and private sector, as well as to local power relations organised around categories of social difference. As a result, this project also aims to contribute to scholarship highlighting the crucial role of environmental movements in the quest for environmental justice (see Scoones, 2007; Temper et al., 2018).

To outline this theoretical framework, the chapter first discusses feminist political ecology and two bodies of work therein: scholarship on environmental movements and scholarship on commoning. It then discusses what an anthropological lens on citizenship entails. Lastly, the chapter brings the tenets of an anthropology of citizenship and feminist political ecology together to outline the framework and key concepts used in this thesis: performativity, commoning, citizenship, social difference, and power relations.

Feminist political ecology

Feminist political ecology (FPE), consolidated through the work of Rocheleau et al. (1996), is a subfield of political ecology that has focused on understanding how gender shapes: 1. Resource distribution, access, control, and use; 2. Environmental knowledge and practices; and 3. Environmental grassroots politics. FPE literature builds upon the understanding in political ecology of the social and the environmental as co-constituted – which has been referred to as socionatures, naturecultures, and socio-environmental relations, to name a few examples – and thus of an understanding of the environmental as political.[21] A feminist approach to political ecology furthers this analytical focus on power by calling attention to the ways in which social difference shapes and sanctions power inequalities. FPE scholars have, thus, long called attention to relations "of conflict, cooperation, complementarity, or coexistence" (Rocheleau et al., 1996, p.13) within households, communities or movements in relation to environmental issues or practices: to how social difference influences these dynamics (Elmhirst, 2011a; M. Wright, 2010), and how they are shaped by multi-scalar politics that overlap in space, "…from the global to the micro-politics of the household" (Jasroz, 2001, p.5472; Rocheleau, 2015b).

FPE and environmental movements

FPE scholarship examining grassroots environmental politics has shown how movements are sites where gender roles and relations are (re)produced, but also where they can be contested and renegotiated. FPE literature has examined the gendered motivations underlying environmental activism (see Agarwal, 1992, 1994, 1997; Asher, 2004, 2007; Campbell, 1996; Li, 2009; Veuthey & Gerber, 2010), as well as gendered experiences of political mobilisation (see Asher, 2004, 2007; Brú-Bister, 1996; Campbell, 1996; Jenkins, 2015, 2017; MacGregor, 2006; Pineda & Moncada, 2018; Sundberg, 2004; Wastl-Walter, 1996).[22] It has shown how: women's participation is at times a public extension of women's caring responsibilities in private spaces and thus of the distribution of gendered labour (see Brown & Ferguson, 1995; Di Chiro, 1992; Hallum-Montes, 2012; Krauss, 1993; Miller, 1996); how it may lead to renegotiations of gender roles and relations (Asher, 2007;

[21] Socionatures is used, for example, by Nightingale (2019); naturecultures by Haraway (1997, 2008), and socio-environmental relations by Rodriguez (2020, 2015), Rodríguez & Inturias (2018), and Ulloa (2016). Other terms used are: socioecological assemblages (Rocheleau, 2015b), environmental formations (Sundberg, 2008), social nature (Di Chiro, 2015), and second nature(Escobar, 1999).

[22] A smaller subset of this literature has focused on how women's mobilisation can be facilitated by their exclusion from economic and political structures and the little interest they may have in maintaining the status quo, following Hart (1991) (see Asher, 2004, 2004, 2007; Deonandan, Tatham, & Field, 2017).

Jenkins & Rondón, 2015; Jiménez Thomas, 2018; MacGregor, 2006; Sundberg, 2004, 2010; Wastl-Walter, 1996); and how it may be intertwined with gender-based violence (Pineda & Moncada, 2018; Ulloa, 2016; Marchese, 2019). A feminist political ecology lens thus allows for an understanding of socio-environmental movements as sites where relations of inequality can be reinforced or challenged, disrupting homogeneous and static understandings of "arenas of assumed common interest" (Rocheleau, 2008, p.722).

Moreover, the incorporation of the concept of intersectionality in this body of work (see for example Mollett, 2010; Nightingale, 2011; Sundberg, 2004) has highlighted how dynamics of conflict and/or cooperation are influenced not only by gender but also by other forms of social difference.[23] The concept of intersectionality – originating in the work of Crenshaw (1989, 1991) and others (A. Cooper, 1988; King, 1988; Terrell, 1940) – calls attention to how racial and gender identities are mutually constituted, rather than separate or even cumulative identities. Intersectionality has been used as an 'analytical sensibility' and a 'heuristic device' (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013) within feminist scholarship to understand how social difference configures power asymmetries and exclusions through notions of 'otherness' and how this operates in historical and "place-specific ways *everywhere*" (Mollett & Faria, 2018, p.571).[24] Within FPE scholarship, Sundberg (2004) and Nightingale (2011) have used social interactions and material practices – respectively – as optics through which intersectional identities can be examined.

An intersectional approach to gender has been supported by the incorporation of feminist post-structural thought by a second generation of FPE scholars who have sought to understand how "gender is not only central for delineating differentiated outcomes of environmental changes, but how it is also itself an effect of such changes" (Harris, 2006, p.188; Elmhirst, 2011a, 2011b; Ge, Resurreccion, & Elmhirst, 2011; Nightingale, 2006, 2011; Sultana, 2011; Truelove, 2011). This entails an approach to gender as an 'identity-in-the-making' (Sundberg, 2004) – that is, as an identity that is constantly (re)produced through practices of the self and its relations with others (rather than an *a priori*), being both a process and an effect.

[23] Although, scholars like Mollett & Faria (2013) argue incorporating an intersectional lens is not yet the norm in the field, as many studies still prioritise gender as the most salient form of identity and disregarded it as embedded, context-specific and co-constituted by/with other forms of difference.

[24] In attempts to avoid the depoliticization of the approach, intersectionality scholars (Alexander-Floyd, 2012; B. Cooper, 2015; Hopkins, 2019; Nash, 2008) have debated whether intersectionality can be used to analyse other markers of difference or if race and gender need to be *always* present. My use of intersectionality follows Mollett & Faria (2018) who approach it as "a sensibility and way of knowing [that] travels" (p. 571) and which is useful to extend to other markers of difference in order to understand power dynamics through a historical lens.

Central to this approach to gender is Butler's (1990) concept of performativity. Being concerned with how gender identities are central to maintaining a heteronormative order, she argues that "gender is not a noun… but always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed" (1990, p.35). In other words, as Gibson-Graham (2006) explain, the concept of performativity signals the "productive tension between being and becoming" (p.24) in an understanding of "subjection as an active process that is always ongoing and never completely successful" (ibidem.) as it is composed of a "continuous repetition and reiteration of ritualized practices that necessarily involve interruptions and productive intervals of discontinuity" (ibidem.). Thinking of gender as performative entails understanding it, therefore, as a process composed of everyday practices and thus subject to change.

FPE and commoning

As discussed above, most of the scholarship within FPE on socio-environmental movements has focused particularly on dynamics of conflict rather than on dynamics of cooperation or co-existence (see for example, Asher, 2004, 2007; Campbell, 1996; Deonandan et al., 2017; Jenkins, 2015, 2017; MacGregor, 2006). While some FPE scholars have engaged with the concept of commons (see Beban & Bourke Martignoni, 2021; Rap & Jaskolski, 2019; Shrestha, Joshi, & Clément, 2019; Tummers & MacGregor, 2019; Zwarteveen & Meinzen-Dick, 2001), only recent work within FPE has called attention to 'commoning', and thus to the ways in which environmental issues can be at the centre of, and motivate, processes of community-making (see Clement, Harcourt, Joshi & Sato, 2019; Nightingale, 2019; Sato & Soto Alarcón, 2019; Velicu & García-López, 2018).

This body of work within FPE draws on the work of Marxist feminist (Federici, 2012c, 2012b, 2012a; Mies, 2014a; Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 2001) and postcapitalist scholars (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Gibson-Graham, Cameron, & Healy, 2013; Gibson-Graham et al., 2016) who have all extended the work on the commons by Ostrom (1990) and others.

As elaborated by Ostrom (1990), the notion of the commons directly challenges the economic paradigm of the 'tragedy of the commons' outlined by Hardin (1968) which concludes selfish behaviour will inevitably lead to the depletion of that which is shared. Hence, the concept of the commons in Ostrom's work challenges the behaviour that is attributed to the figure of the 'rational

economic man' which underlies mainstream economic theory: "solitary, calculating, competing and insatiable" (Raworth, 2017, p.81). The notion of the commons calls attention, instead, to the possibility of collective cooperative action to manage and maintain a shared resource – the 'commons' – the institutions or rules that sustain this type of action, and the resulting governance arrangement. Ostrom's work has been criticised for continuing to rely on a rational choice model, placing at the centre an understanding of human behaviour that is still individual and concerned with utility maximization. This obscures the ways in which commons are embedded in power: how they can emerge in opposition to a set of discourses and practices, as well as call for the transformation of power relations among those managing the commons – what Velicu & García-López (2018) argues is a relationship of interdependence and mutual vulnerability (see also Caffentzis & Federici, 2014; Stavrides, 2015).

A critical scholarship on the commons emerged in response to the critiques of the institutional character of the work of Ostrom and others. Authors such as Linebaugh (2008), De Angelis (2003, 2010, 2013), Holloway (2002, 2010), Caffentzis & Federici (2013, 2014), Mattei (2011), Bollier & Helfrich (2012), Hardt & Negri (2009), and Dardot & Laval (2015) posit the commons as a political project that aims to transcend both the state and market. They build on an understanding of the state as a hierarchical, coercive, and repressive institution (crucial for the safeguarding of private property), of the market as a site of exploitation and oppression, and of both as complicit in furthering enclosure, dispossession, and elite interests (Angel & Loftus, 2018; Bianchi, 2018, 2022; Cumbers, 2015). As a result, these authors articulate the commons as a revolutionary and emancipatory paradigm to bring about just societies (see for example Hardt & Negri, 2009; Dardot & Laval, 2015) or a political project that can be pursued at the margins – or what Holloway (2010) calls 'cracks' – of the state and the market and that makes it possible to "live without the violence of the state" (Barbagallo, et al. 2019) and bring about alternative "collective and non-commodified relations outside of capital" (Loftus & Angel, 2018, p.126). In this scholarship, the commons are understood not as a mere form of collective resource management, but as a political project and social practice (Bianchi, 2018) that aims for, and that brings about, self-governing cooperative and non-capitalist societies. As such, the notion of the commons is strongly linked, in this body of literature, to an "anti-capitalist imaginary" (Cumbers, 2015, p.64) where alternative social, political, and economic relations and institutions that are based on self-determination, cooperation, and reciprocity can be pursued (see for example, Federici, 2012).

FPE scholars have drawn in their theorization of 'commoning' from this critical anti-capitalist scholarship on the commons. More specifically, within this literature, they have drawn from Marxist feminist and postcapitalist scholars.

Marxist feminists have emphasised the link between the commons and social reproduction – or "the intersecting complex of political-economic, sociocultural, and material-environmental processes required to maintain everyday life and to sustain human cultures and communities on a daily basis and intergenerationally" (Di Chiro, 2008, p.281). This body of work has, therefore, emphasised how the commons stand in opposition to the principle of accumulation that underpins capitalism, as well as how efforts to maintain them are directly related to an effort to resist private enclosure (Barbagallo et al., 2019; Federici, 2012a; Mies, 2014; Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen, 2001). Moreover, an inherent link between commons and community has been emphasised in this body of literature, by which "no commons can exist without a community" (Mies, 2014, p.106). However, unlike postcapitalist scholars (discussed next), Marxist feminist scholars have highlighted the connection between commons and community as one that is based on reproductive labour. While Mies (2014) has argued that maintaining commons always requires voluntary collective labour, Federici (2012a) has emphasised how this labour refers more specifically to reproductive work – that is, the affective and material labour that enables the reproduction of a given collective, and which has historically subsidised the formal economy through its unpaid character (see also Fraser, 2017; Mies, 2014).

Postcapitalist scholars, in turn, have engaged with the notion of the commons from an interest in community economies and the disruption of "the economy as a singular capitalist system or space" (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p.xxi).[25] As Marxist feminist scholars, authors such as Linebaugh (2008), Gibson-Graham (2006), Gibson-Graham et al. (2013, 2016), and Amin & Howell (2016) have also highlighted a connection between commons and community. However, for these authors the connection is one that occurs through relations of negotiation, responsibility, and care. Strongly influenced by (feminist) post-structural thought, postcapitalist scholars have furthermore conceptualised commons 'as an activity' (Linebaugh, 2008), as a process that takes place through everyday practices, and thus as a verb: 'commoning'. Commoning, as Gibson-Graham et al. (2016)

[25] The interest in post-capitalist scholarship on transitioning away from a capitalist (patriarchal) economy towards other forms of economies is characteristic of literature on the indigenous notion in South America of *Buen Vivir* – which is expressed differently in each indigenous peoples (see, for example, Bremer, 2012; Chuji, Grimaldo, & Gudynas, 2019; Gudynas, 2011; Huanacuni Mamani, 2012; León, 2010; León T., 2010; Mamani, 2010; McGregor, Whitaker, & Sritharan, 2020; Melià, 2012). However, work on commoning from within feminist political ecology has not drawn from this body of literature.

define it, speaks of "a relational process … of negotiating access, use, benefit, care, and responsibility" (p.195) that results in what they term a 'commoning-community'. In approaching commoning as a relational process, as 'being-in-common' (Nancy, 1991) this body of work, provides a more solid processual understanding of the link between commons and community, compared to Marxist feminists.

As a result, FPE scholars approach commoning as a relational process that is shaped through everyday practices and which is deeply intertwined with relations of interdependence and vulnerability, community-making and re-subjectivation (Sato & Soto Alarcón, 2019; Velicu & García-López, 2018; Wichterich, 2015; Clement et al., 2019; Nightingale, 2019). Sato & Soto Alarcón (2019) propose that there are three ways in which commoning can occur: commoning previously enclosed spaces, maintaining existing commons, and creating new commons. They approach the concept from what they call 'a postcapitalist feminist political ecology' and a concern with "attend[ing] to how humans and nonhumans engage in the reappropriation, reconstruction, reinvention of available resources, practices and knowledges that strengthen community wellbeing" (p.4, citing Harcourt & Escobar, 2005). These authors propose understanding commoning, thus, as a socio-natural process that encompasses not only biophysical resources – where they argue most attention within FPE on commons has been – but that also encompasses non-tangible ones such as knowledge, culture, and practices. As such, they show how commoning "need not be bounded to ownership" (Sato & Soto Alarcón, 2019, p.56) and thus notions of property. Nightingale's (2019) analysis of community forestry in Nepal furthers this approach to commoning by showing how commoning entails not only new subjectivities but also new affective relations, as emotions ties individuals to collectives as well as build a sense of ethical behaviour (see also Nightingale, 2014).

As these authors tend to understand commoning as a process that entails, and is made possible by, human (inter)dependency with/on others, scholarship on commoning within FPE tends to focus on care. For example, Sato & Soto Alarcón (2019) also define commoning as revolving around "joint practices of caring" (p.38) between humans and nature. Care, as defined by Tronto (1993), refers to the "maintaining, continuing, and repairing living webs of interdependent relations" and as a result can be understood as composed by "labours of everyday mundane maintenance, and repetitive work, requiring regularity and task reiteration" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2015, p.710). However, as Puig de la Bellacasa (2015), Abrahamsson & Bertoni (2018), and Ticktin

(2011) caution, care is not an innocent relation but rather one that is inherently political, as it can legitimise power and control over others, as well as occur within exploitative contexts.

Central to work on commoning within FPE is also a concern with power – although this has for most part remained a theoretical concern. For example, Velicu & García-López (2018), who build on Butler's notions of 'bounded selves' and 'mutual vulnerability' to approach commoning as a form of 'relational politics', stress how commoning entails "not a mere technical management of resources (in space) but a *struggle* to perform common liveable relationships (in time)" (p.66, my emphasis). This, they argue, entails "being mutually vulnerable in power relations which are enabling, albeit injurious" (ibid., p.55). In a similar vein, Nightingale (2019) – the only empirical examination of commoning and power to date – understands commons as political communities, and commoning "as a set of practices and performances" (p.21) that make socio-natural relations "always contingent, ambivalent outcomes of the exercise of power" (ibidem.). Her work on community forestry in Nepal calls attention to how commoning inherently entails constant renegotiations of who and what belongs to the community and thus to how commoning cannot only create inclusions but also exclusions, as "any moment of coming together can be succeeded by new challenges and relations that un-common" (ibid., p.30.; see also Nightingale, 2014). This is also echoed by Wichterich (2015) in her work on commoning, as she cautions that "communities that are constructed in the process of commoning must not be imagined as homogeneous and power-balanced entities…. [as they don't] automatically harmonize the interests within a community nor balance power relations" (p.90). Wichterich (2015) proposes understanding commoning as a process of negotiation for new social contracts, in which power asymmetries need to be directly addressed "respecting and negotiating different interests and identities" (ibidem.).

Work within FPE on commoning, however, is incipient and there are multiple theoretical and empirical opportunities.

Firstly, there is an opportunity to empirically explore the connection between commoning and community-making – that is, how processes of commoning produce community – as this has remained a theoretical proposition in both postcapitalist and FPE scholarship.

Secondly, there is an opportunity to understand how social movements can drive processes of commoning. While Marxist feminist and postcapitalist scholars have linked social movements to efforts to protect and maintain commons (as a noun), an FPE perspective allows examining how

social movements can be sites of commoning (as a verb). The work of Sato & Soto Alarcón (2019) is the only study to date that pursues this analytical avenue. Examining a women's cooperative in southern Mexico, Sato & Soto Alarcón (2019) show how collective action can lead to, and is sustained by, the commoning of nature, knowledge, language, and land. However, their analysis draws empirically from an agricultural cooperative rather than a social movement in its most traditional definition. As such, there is an opportunity and need to explore how social movements – especially those that do not aim to create and manage self-organised economic activities – can drive processes of commoning.

Thirdly, there is an opportunity to analyse how processes of commoning and community-making impact the way people relate to the state. While the work of FPE scholars draws on critical scholarship on the commons in various ways (as discussed above), they have not adopted a view of the commons as a political project that is antagonistic to the state. As such, various FPE scholars working on commoning have alluded to connections between commoning and citizenship. As mentioned, Wichterich (2015) talks about how commoning can result in new social contracts and democratic processes, and Velicu & García-López (2018) and Sato & Soto Alarcón (2019) describe commoning as involving 'citizen' engagement or participation. However, this connection can be further elaborated, building on the call by Sato & Soto Alarcón (2019) to think of commoning beyond binaries – that of (non)capitalism and (non)state.

The under-development of the link between commoning and citizenship is reflective of two trends within FPE scholarship: the influence of anti-capitalist commons scholarship (discussed above) on FPE scholarship on commoning, as well as of the little attention there has been within FPE literature, more generally, to citizenship.

As already discussed, FPE scholarship on commoning draws on the critical anti-capitalist tradition on the commons. As Angel & Loftus (2018), Bianchi (2018, 2022) and Cumbers (2015) point out, scholars within this school have framed the commons as antithetical not only to the market but also to the state. The commons – and thus commoning – are framed as incompatible with it, and not able to occur within or through the state due to its hierarchical, repressive, alienating, and elitist character. As a result, critical scholars on the commons have not considered citizenship – or people's relation to the state – as a relevant site of analysis.

Moreover, FPE literature has not always linked its analysis of socio-environmental movements as sites of transformation to changes in the wider political context (Asher, 2007; Brú-Bister, 1996; Deonandan, Tatham, & Field, 2017; Jenkins, 2015b, 2017). Instead, works clearly situated within FPE tend to restrict their attention to specific spaces – usually feminised spaces such as subsistence economies, the household, and the community – approaching them in analytical isolation from others. As a result, FPE literature has not sufficiently attended to the ways in which environmental movements can be productive sites for transformation that go beyond the micro-politics of the household or the collective. As a result, while there is a wider body of literature examining citizenship within political ecology (Gilbert & Phillips, 2003; Gudynas, 2009a; Latta, 2007; Latta & Wittman, 2015a; Sundberg, 2003, 2015; Wittman, 2009), only MacGregor (2004, 2006, 2010) has engaged with this theme from an FPE perspective.

Echoing the connection between commoning and citizenship held by Wichterich (2015), there is a growing body of work within commons literature that makes the case to keep the state as a relevant site of analysis. Authors such as Cumbers (2015), Angel (2017, 2019) and Angel & Loftus (2018) agree with anti-capitalist commons scholars that the commons cannot be a top-down process, initiated and implemented by the state as this is likely to depoliticize its meaning and practice. However, they question the dismissal of the state in critical anti-capitalist literature, arguing that the commons can express a demand for a radical democracy and thus seek to reclaim the state, away from violent and repressive relations towards "more democratic, participatory and collaborative forms of human relations" (see Cumbers, 2015, p.62) Moreover, studies on new municipalism and water anti-privatisation activism show, empirically, how building commons can expand the realm of citizen action vis-à-vis and/or within the state and reshape the state as a result (Robins, 2019; Bianchi, 2022; Wenderlich, 2021). For example, Robins (2019) argues that the defence of a public spring in Cape Town can be read as an exercise of 'hydraulic citizenship' – that is, a form of belonging enabled by social and material claims to water infrastructures (following Anand, 2017) – that demanded the state to change its water management practices for a "just, equitable and sustainable water plan by and under direct community control, based on regeneration and conservation' (p.13). Likewise, Wenderlich (2021) shows how urban social movements in Germany and the United States attempt to install a notion of energy democracy by advocating for public municipal energy utilities.

Cumbers (2015) and others point out, however, that in order to maintain the state as a site of analysis it is important to understand it differently than anti-capitalist commons scholars have.

While the latter tend to reify the state, Cumbers (2015), Angel and Loftus (2018) and Wenderlich (2021) argue for a more fluid understanding: of the state as a "terrain of struggle" (Wenderlich, 2021, p.65) malleable "through time and space through processes of contestation" (Cumbers, 2015, p.72).

Hence, to further the connection between commons and citizenship, the most fruitful is to create a theoretical dialogue between FPE and an anthropological approach to citizenship, which brings an akin understanding of citizenship and the state through its post-structural lens.

An anthropological approach to citizenship

Citizenship is a contested concept (Lister, 1997a; Taylor & Wilson, 2004). In its Western modern definition, coined by Marshall (1950), it refers to the status of full membership in a (national) community which confers equal rights and (minimal) duties upon individuals. The emphasis in this definition is, due to its root in liberalism, on the individual as the holder of rights, a minimal role of the state as the guarantor of those rights, and an emphasis on civil and political rights – which have also been conceptualised as 'negative' rights since the state is mostly non-interferant (Lazar, 2013a; Taylor, 2004).

Contesting notions abound. Communitarian thought contests understanding the individual as *a priori* to the collective and thus highlights the role of the collective in notions of citizenship; civic republican thought places more emphasis in the relation of duty between individuals and the state as citizens, and thus conceptualises citizenship as requiring individuals to actively participate in political life; and socialist notions have expanded the duties of the state towards its citizens, imbuing citizenship with social, economic, and cultural rights – which are conceptualised as 'positive' rights in that they require the intervention of the state for them to be fulfilled (Dobson & Bell, 2005; Lazar, 2013a, 2013b; Taylor, 2004). These different conceptualisations of citizenship entail debates about individual versus collective rights, the relationship between rights and duties, and the relation between civil and political rights on one hand, and social, economic, and cultural rights on the other (see Kabeer, 2005b). Underpinning these debates is, however, a consensus that citizenship speaks of political membership in a national community, and of the terms and conditions of that relationship.

Holston (2008) and Holston & Appadurai (1996) take this definition one step further by arguing citizenship is a composite. Membership in a political community and the terms that structure that membership have a formal dimension (legal membership in a political community and the array of rights associated with it) as well as a substantive dimension (the content of those rights and the capacities of those to whom they are formally allocated to exercise them in reality). As such, citizenship can be more broadly understood as being not only about membership of a political community and the quality of such membership, but also about its actual and potential character (Lazar, 2013a; see also Taylor, 2004). In this sense, citizenship speaks of the social contract between people and the state – which in democratic models entails the principle of popular sovereignty, by which citizens are the ultimate holders of sovereignty under a relationship of equality between people and the state (Taylor, 2004; Robins, et al., 2008).

Understanding citizenship as a composite makes it possible to unpack how, while "the historical development [of citizenship] has been both revolutionary and democratic" (Holston & Appadurai, 1996, p.187), it has also been exclusionary at its core. In fact, as Lazar (2008) highlights, while citizenship might promise universal equality, it has been a notion used to differentiate between people. It has functioned as a category to discriminate between those who belong and do not belong to the national community, as well as a normative notion through which those who do not fit preconceived ideas of the citizen have been excluded and misrecognised. Moreover, citizenship has historically been linked to virtue, with citizens often framed as "virtuous, good, righteous and superior…from strangers, outsiders and aliens who [citizenship] constitutes as alterity" (Isin, 2002, p.35; see also Lazar, 2013a). Both citizenship and exclusions thereof have thus commonly carried moral connotations, and exclusions justified on moral terms (Isin, 2002, Gustafson, 2009; Lazar, 2010).

Feminist scholarship on citizenship has focused intently on this exclusionary nature. It has called attention to how liberal notions of citizenship have been based on a universal abstract individual which "is in fact a very particular white male property-holding individual citizen" (Lazar, 2013a, p.8, citing Barrón, 1993; see also Lister, 1997a, 1997b; Molyneux, 2010; Mouffe, 1993; Voet, 1998; Young, 1990; Yuval-Davis, 1997). By drawing attention to the gendered assumptions underpinning ideas of citizenship, 'making universal what in actuality is a rather particular form of subjecthood' (Lazar, 2013a, p.8), feminist scholars have further unpacked the notion of citizenship in two ways. They have called attention to how those who are excluded from formal and/or substantive citizenship are precisely those that are constituted and perceived as the 'Other' (see also Taylor,

2013). They have also shown how citizenship, when functioning as a 'disciplinary category' (Lister, 2003), is closely linked to "cultural processes of subjectification" (Ong, 1996, p.737), such as schooling, through which nation-states have sought to eradicate 'Otherness' and transform those 'Others' into 'good citizens' (Bénéï, 2008; Moser, 2016; L. Parker, 2002).

As citizenship has been inherently linked to exclusion, the relationship between people and the state has also historically been one of struggle (Kabeer, 2005b). In other words, because of its exclusionary character, citizenship has been both the terrain and subject of contestation (Holston, 2008; Kabeer, 2005b; Lazar, 2013a). It has been a "means of articulating claims [that usually] name a claim on rights" (Lazar, 2013a, p.12) – a way to mobilise a 'right to have rights' (Arendt, 1951) – as well as to "redefine, extend and transform given ideas about rights [and] duties" (Kabeer, 2005b, p.1). Thus, as Taylor (2004) argues, citizenship is both the practice and demand of a relationship of equality between people and the state.

Understanding citizenship as a "dynamic space of struggle" (Latta & Wittman, 2015, p.6) calls for an understanding of citizenship as fluid and uneven. This is the approach that Yashar (2005) calls for through the notion of 'citizenship regime', which helps locate how citizenship is not a monolithic category, but one that can encompass many different constellations of meanings and practices (Lazar, 2012), how dominant notions of citizenship change (often in response to social struggles), and how different understandings of citizenship can co-exist in space and time (Isin & Nielsen, 2008a). The strong role that empirical realities have had in shaping recent debates and re-conceptualisations of citizenship – such as, 'inclusive citizenship' (Kabeer, 2005b), 'cultural citizenship' (Ong, 1996; Rosaldo, 1994), 'embodied citizenship' (Beasley & Bacchi, 2000), 'biological citizenship' (Petryna, 2003), 'insurgent [urban] citizenship' (Holston, 2008, 2009), 'transgressive citizenship' (Earle, 2012), 'differentiated citizenship' (Young, 1999), 'hydraulic citizenship' (Anand, 2017), 'environmental citizenship' (Dobson & Bell, 2005; Gudynas, 2009a), and 'feminist ecological citizenship' (MacGregor, 2010), plurinational citizenship (Acosta & Martínez Ortiz, 2009; Postero, 2014; Ramos & Delirio, 2005), 'client-ship' (Taylor, 2004) and 'decolonial citizenship' (Taylor, 2013) – is a testament to how citizenship has been and remains a dynamic space of struggle.

Understanding citizenship as both the terrain and subject of struggle calls, moreover, for an understanding of citizenship as the relationship through which public authority is constituted. Ng'weno (2007) shows how the territorial claims made by various Afro-Colombian communities

in the country aimed, precisely, to reconstitute authority within the Colombian state. As Lund (2011) and Kabeer (2005) highlight, citizenship is a relationship that has been at its core about recognition – or the social and political acknowledgement of, and respect for, social difference (Honneth, 1995). As Lund (2011) argues, this is not a unilateral relationship, but a dialectic one as both citizens and the state come into being – 'becoming' – in relation to each other. The state recognises citizens (or not) through the adjudication of rights and duties and citizens recognise the state by adjudicating duties and legitimating its public authority.[26] Thus, to speak of citizenship is not necessarily to presume the *a priori* existence of the state and citizen, but to speak instead about the relationship that co-constitutes them and through which they are in constant transformation (see also Isin & Nielsen, 2008b; Isin, 2008). In consequence, this understanding of citizenship holds the state is not a monolithic entity, nor indeed as an 'entity' of any kind, but the result of the ongoing series of encounters between people and those vested with public authority (Lund, 2006, 2016).

To understand citizenship as the terrain and subject of struggle, and as the co-constitution of public authority, tightly links citizenship to political agency (Taylor, 2004; Taylor & Wilson, 2004). In the words of Taylor (2004), "citizenship is founded on autonomous political agency" (p. 214); it is founded on political rights and the exercise of such rights are an exercise of citizenship. As such, citizenship can be understood as the combination of formal and substantive rights (Holston, 2008; Holston & Appadurai 1996) "with a sense of identity as a political being which brings to life the sleeping potential of [such rights]" (Taylor, 2004, p. 214).

While there are various forms of political agency, social mobilisation has been central to struggles around citizenship (Kabeer, 2005b; Lister, 1997a; Isin & Nielsen, 2008b; Isin, 2008, 2009). Social movements can be understood as 'acts of citizenship' (Isin & Nielsen, 2008b): as creative acts that have the potential of "rupturing social-historical patterns" (p.2), of "creating a sense of the possible" (p.4) and producing new political projects, "new modes of citizenship that can respond to the challenge [in question]" (p.4). As such, social mobilisation is as "alternative act of power" (Robins et al., 2008, p.1073) that contest a specific pattern of power relations within a given political community with the aim of bringing into being a new pattern of power and a "new social contract" (ibidem.). Hence, citizenship can be understood as a dynamic space of struggle that "involves constant efforts to both delimit and to question who has the 'rightful' power over

[26] As Lund (2011) argues, this is particularly clear in analyses of property: "the processes of recognition of political identity as belonging and of claims to land and other resources as property simultaneously work to imbue the institution that provides such recognition with the legitimation and recognition of its authority to do so" (p.1).

whom" (Taylor & Wilson, 2004, p.156) in the context of state sovereignty and its monopoly of coercive power (Papadopoulous & Tsianos, 2013).

In developing this more nuanced and complex understanding of citizenship, an anthropological enquiry has been crucial. This theoretical lens has allowed moving beyond the nation-state to recognise other political communities at different scales (local, regional and supra-national). It has also illustrated how the nation-state is not necessarily the only political community of importance to people but how the local, regional, and supra-national can also be sites of citizenship, as well as shown how people may resort to other languages, different to citizenship, to articulate claims and political belonging. More importantly, it has allowed focusing on empirical enquiries rather than normative theorizations and approach citizenship as the process through which public authority is produced in a given political community and through which political belonging is (re)claimed and transformed.

The body of literature that comprises an anthropology of citizenship is located within the broader field of political anthropology and has emerged from two scholarly trajectories therein – the anthropology of the state (see for example, Aretxaga, 2003; Lund, 2006, 2016; Sharma & Gupta, 2006) and the anthropology of democracy (Lazar, 2013a; see for example, Gutmann, 2002; Paley, 2001). Both have relied heavily on a qualitative methodology and more recently on post-structural theory. The ethnographic method, in particular, has allowed for a "grounded analysis of political practices of what people actually do, [rather than] …reading political practice through normative ideologies" (Lazar, 2013a, p.5). In turn, post-structural scholarship has shifted the analytical focus within this body of work from structure to practice, underscoring a performative understanding of citizenship (ibid.). As a result, anthropological enquiries of citizenship are characterised by understanding citizenship as a process and as a set of practices associated with producing, being part of, acting in, and transforming a given political community, rather than a formal reified category – that, is to study it as a process that is precisely brought into being and shaped through practice. As Lazar (2013a) points out, three main analytical concerns within this scholarship are subjectivity (Gill, 1997; Isin & Nielsen, 2008a; Lazar, 2008, 2010, 2012; Ong, 1996; Petryna, 2003; Rosaldo, 1994), political membership (Glick Schiller, 2005; Holston, 2008; Sassen, 2002; Siu, 2005; Stack, 2003) and scalar dynamics (Isin, 2007; Nguyen, 2005; Ong, 1999; Siu, 2005).

Anthropological studies on citizenship begin with a recognition of the multiplicity "of possibilities for the organisation of political life that exist in any given context" (Lazar, 2013a, p.5), and from

an interest in understanding "the actual constitution of political membership and subjectivity in a given context" (ibid., p.2). Scholars in this tradition have thus unsettled homogenising theories of citizenship – whether liberal, civic republican, communitarian or socialist – widening the study of citizenship to the ways people understand, practice, and transform it.[27] Kabeer (2005) argues, for example, that placing an analytical focus on people's understanding of citizenship shows its association to values such as justice, recognition, solidarity and self-determination – the latter understood not necessarily as autonomy from the state, but rather as "people's ability to exercise some degree of control over their lives" (p.5).

In addition, given the abiding theorisation of citizenship as processual, anthropological inquiries do not understand citizenship merely in top-down terms, allocated and managed by the state, but as a set of practices and as a process that can be produced or transformed in a bottom-up fashion. Lazar's (2012) analysis of trade unions, self, and citizenship in Bolivia and Argentina has shown how union activism "both created and required particular forms of [individual and collective] political subjectivity, which in turn impacted upon citizenship" (p.357). Likewise, Holston (2008) in his study of slum-dwellers in Brazil showed how inhabitants of the urban peripheries of Sao Paulo have challenged their exclusion from political membership through disputes over urban spaces and rights to property – challenging liberal notions of citizenship and building new understandings 'from below', what he calls 'insurgent citizenship'. Thus, an anthropology lens highlights how citizenship is a process both "of self-making and being made by power relations" (Ong, 1996, p.737) and proposes an analytical focus on agency. It calls attention to bottom-up processes to understand how citizenship is not only brough about by practices of the state (or other relevant political communities) but also shaped by people's everyday actions as they live in, and engage with, that political community (Lazar, 2013a; Lazar & Nuijten, 2013).

Thus, an important subset of this scholarship has focused specifically on how citizenship is articulated (explicitly or implicitly) in, and through, social movements (Albro, 2005; Castle, 2008; Dagnino, 2005; Kabeer, 2005a; Lazar, 2008; Nuq, 2005; Robins & von Lieres, 2004; Yashar, 2005[a]; Ng'weno, 2007). It has shown how claims articulated from, and by, social movements have contested both formal and substantive citizenship and/or shaped political subjectivity,

[27] As discussed, liberal and republican theories of citizenship stress a notion of the individual in political communities. However, while liberal theory understands the role of the individual as that of bearing rights and responsibilities, republican theories of citizenship stress a more participative role where the individual has crucial responsibilities towards the state. In contrast to both theories, communitarian citizenship places its attention on the collective, understanding individuals as nested within (Dobson & Bell, 2005; Lazar, 2013a).

membership, agency, and the scales for political action – that is, how organising politically can shape citizenship *in practice* (Lazar, 2008, 2012). For example, Lazar's (2008) ethnographic study of the relations between residents of El Alto and the Bolivian state shows how political community is created and maintained at a local level through collective organisation, and how local and national forms of citizenship interact with each other. Hence, an anthropological lens on citizenship echoes the understanding of social movements as 'acts of citizenship' (Isin & Nielsen, 2008b), and hence as 'productive sites' (Merlinsky & Latta, 2015) and as agents of citizenship transformation.

Yet, there are various limitations in this approach and body of work. Anthropological enquiries into how social movements understand and practice (and potentially transform) citizenship have not yet specifically paid attention to socio-environmental movements. As a result, questions remain of how socio-environmental processes shape citizenship and what citizenship practices are emerging as key for bringing about environmental justice. Moreover, this body of literature has not yet paid sufficient attention to how changes in the way in which citizenship is understood and practiced by social movements are embedded in power relations, not only between people and the state, but among citizens as well. These gaps can be bridged by bringing together an anthropological approach to citizenship with a feminist political ecology lens.

Key concepts in my theoretical framework

Creating a dialogue between FPE and the anthropological literature on citizenship makes it possible to examine Esquel's No a la Mina as a site of commoning, community-making, and citizenship transformation.

Using an anthropological lens to citizenship makes it possible to adopt the more fluid understanding of people's relation to the state that critical commons scholars argue is necessary to explore the connections between commoning and citizenship (see Cumber, 2015). Hence, the theoretical dialogue I propose makes it possible to approach commoning not as an inherent anti-capitalist anti-state project, but as one that entails a "serious attempt to challenge hegemonic power structures and shift towards a more radical and democratic alternative" (Cumbers, 2015, p.71), which can happen "within, against, or beyond the state" (ibid.). The dialogue allows me to explore how socio-environmental struggles can be creative political acts that have the potential of rupturing power relations and produce new power patterns and new political projects, and what

the broader political effects of commoning and community-making can be. The dialogue also makes it possible to incorporate an analytical focus on power relations – those between people and the state and within the community itself – and how these power relations may impact commoning, community-making and citizenship. Pursuing this theoretical dialogue contributes, therefore, to the work of Cumbers (2015) and others who have sought to understand commoning vis-à-vis the state, as well as to existing literature on social movements and community-making (see Colloredo-Mansfeld, 2009; Urkidi, 2011; Wolford, 2003) in which there has not yet been an analysis of community-making in relation to commoning and citizenship.

Drawing on, and summarising the discussion above, the concepts of performativity, commoning, citizenship, social difference, and power underpin this thesis. I understand these key concepts as follows:

Performativity: Butler's (1990) concept of performativity called attention to gender as a process composed of a "continuous repetition and reiteration of ritualized practices that necessarily involve interruptions and productive intervals of discontinuity" (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p.24) and thus never complete and subject to change. More recent work by Butler (2015) shows how performativity is not only a useful tool to understand processes that relate to the individual, but also the collective. In her work, *Notes towards a performative theory of the assembly*, she proposes performativity as a useful tool to locate and understand the political potential of social movements – what she calls 'assemblies' – as it allows approaching discourse and actions as practices that can effect change on political subjectivities and relations through their continuous repetition and reiteration. Placing performativity at the centre of an analysis of Esquel's No a la Mina allows analysing how the movement's practices are shaping a process of commoning – in other words, how commoning is 'becoming' through the movement's practices. Moreover, placing the notion of performativity at the centre of the analysis provides a stronger theoretical foundation to locate how citizenship is dynamic: how it can result from bottom-up processes by being subject to change through the continuous repetition of everyday practices.

Commoning: I take a feminist political ecologist lens to commoning and understand it as a socio-environmental relational process of creating new arrangements of access, use, and/or responsibility around both tangible biophysical resources and intangible elements such as

knowledge, culture, and wellbeing.[28] I approach commoning, thus, as a form of 'relational politics' (Velicu & García-López, 2018) embedded in "a struggle to perform common liveable relationships" (ibid., p.55). As authors like Gibson-Graham (2006) have argued, it is precisely because commoning is a form of relational politics that there can be no 'commons without a community' (Mies, 2014). Thus, I approach commoning as a relational politics that entails building ways of 'being-in-common' (Nancy, 1991) and thus building community. It involves developing political subjectivities and affective relations (Nightingale, 2019), as well as epistemic relations and moral grammars as this thesis will show. In approaching common as a relational politics, I also understand commoning and community-making as processes embedded in power relations that shape the community-in-the-making, as well as impact the relation between people and the state under extractivism. As such, I also follow Wichterich (2015) who proposes to understand commoning as a process of negotiation for new social contracts, in which power asymmetries need to be directly addressed "respecting and negotiating different interests and identities" (ibid., p.90). In doing so, I draw from commons scholars, such as Cumbers (2015), Wenderlich (2021), Angel & Loftus (2018), Robins (2019), and Bianchi (2022) who have shown how grassroot processes of commoning can transform the state and notions of citizenship. As a result, I approach commoning as a set of relations that necessarily impact or transform the way people relate to the state – even when it does seek to build autonomous spaces, independent of the state and by market, as this entails withdrawing recognition from the state as a form of public authority.

Citizenship: I approach citizenship as a notion to be empirically explored (Lazar, 2013a; Kabeer, 2005b) and from a concern with the nation-state as the political community in question. I understand citizenship as a performative process that is enacted through the continuous repetition of everyday practices, and which as a result is constantly subject to contestation and transformation (Lazar, 2013a; Isin & Nielsen, 2008; Isin, 2009). Thus, I understand it as a dynamic process that can be shaped in a bottom-up fashion by people's everyday actions as they live in, and engage with, the state (Lazar, 2013a; Lazar & Nuijten, 2013). I approach citizenship as also speaking about the relationship through which both citizens and the state come into being (Lund, 2011). As such, I approach citizenship as speaking of the terms and conditions of the relationship between people and the state – that is, about the social contract underpinning this relationship and shaping patterns of power therein (Taylor, 2004; Taylor & Wilson, 2004; Robins, et al., 2008). Hence, I understand citizenship as related to political membership (individual and/or collective rights and duties), but

[28] Unlike Gibson-Graham et al. (2016) however, I do not understand commoning as a result of new arrangements of care in themselves, but rather I understand care as an underlying principle of commoning – one which motivates in turn new arrangements of access, use, and/or responsibility.

more generally to subjectivity, recognition, and public authority. Lastly, as I am concerned with bottom-up processes of change, I approach citizenship as a relation of struggle. I understand citizenship as a performance of agency – as a doing – that may seek to expand or renegotiate people's ability *to do*. Drawing from an understanding of agency as the ability to choose and to act upon that choice (Kabeer, 1999), citizenship speaks of people's ability to have a certain degree of control over the lives (Kabeer, 2005b) within the context of the state, as well as of their struggles to expand this ability– a struggle that may involve renegotiating the social contract that underpins and constitutes the relation between people and the state. To differentiate between these different aspects, I use Taylor and Wilson's (2004) conceptualisation of citizenship as composed by three dimensions: belonging (political subjectivity), membership (rights and duties), and agency.

Social difference: I follow Young (1990) in my understanding of social difference as that which informs social relations and power. Social difference speaks thus of the categories that are used to constitute people as 'Others', as well as of the ways in which a denial and/or suppression of difference contributes to the oppression of those 'Others' (ibid.). In light of a tendency in Western thought "to reduce political subjects to a unity and to value commonness and sameness over specificity and difference" (ibid., p.3), I approach social difference as an analytical tool for a "critique of unifying discourse" (ibid., p.7). In other words, I use the notion of social difference to engage critically with the unifying tendencies of commoning, community-making, and citizenship and to be attentive to how these are shaped by power relations. Thus, it is also a tool to avoid homogenising Esquel's No a la Mina, as well as to avoid romanticising commoning and community-making. Approaching citizenship through this framework responds to feminist critiques to citizenship studies (more generally) and to communitarian citizenship theory (more specifically) that problematize: 1. how citizenship has been conceptualised on the basis of an abstract notion of the individual, ignoring as a result how exclusion has been central to political communities and belonging (Mouffe, 1992; Lister, 1997a, 1997b; Yuval, 1997; Voet, 1998), and 2. how a strong focus on the collective tends to reify communities by leaving no space for an analysis of how power and difference precisely shape "what 'a community' is and what it thinks" (Lazar, 2013, p.9; see Young, 1990; Pateman & Shanley, 1991). Lastly, incorporating a concern with social difference is also a tool through which to engage with feminist political ecology under an intersectional approach that decentres gender as the only and/or the main axis of social difference and power, as well as one that operates in isolation to other forms of marginalisation. Because of the regional/national history and political context that informs the movement, the forms of difference that I found to be most relevant for members of Esquel's No a la Mina is that of

ethnicity, and to, a lesser degree, gender and class. When speaking about ethnicity, however, I speak of processes of racialisation following Quijano (2000), Silverblatt (2004), Sundberg (2008) who argue Spanish colonialism was rooted in a process of racialisation – that is, in the construction of social hierarchies and the naturalisation of the 'Othering' of groups of people "through the lens of descent" (Silverblatt, 2004, p.18). This is a legacy that remains to this day throughout Latin America as this form of 'racial thinking' informed the way in which "the new Latin American republics codified citizenship" (Sundberg, 2008, p. 571; see Introduction for a discussion of this process in Argentina).

Power relations: I am concerned with power in the context of the relation between people and the state – a relationship in which corporations have also increasingly become relevant, especially when discussing socio-environmental conflicts, creating what authors such as Ødegaard & Andía (2019) call the state-corporate nexus. I am also interested in an examination of power in the context of the relations within the movement itself. While there are many different conceptualisations of power in social theory[29], I understand power in accordance with post-structural and intersectional feminist thought – more specifically, in accordance with the notion of social difference and performativity – and focus therefore on power relations. As already discussed, I understand power as operating through processes of social differentiation, processes which come together to co-constitute specific constellations of power/oppression. By understanding power vis-à-vis performativity, I also understand power following post-structural Foucauldian thought. This means I approach it as linked to discourse and practices, rather than as an attribute of particular individuals or structures, and thus understand it as diffused and ubiquitous (Butler, 1990; Gaventa, 2003). Understanding power in this way means refusing to read social reality through a binary (those with and without power), as well as understanding power not only as oppressive but also as productive, and never total but open to contestation (ibid.).

Conclusion

A dialogue between feminist political ecology and an anthropological approach to citizenship begins in their shared interest in understanding the ways in which "we live with others in political

[29] For example: structural theories tie power to property and thus to class struggles (Bidet, 2016); both Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1980) understand power as both shaped by structure and individual agency (although with differences in their approaches; Bourdieu also theorises a connection between culture, language and power); actor-network theories approach power as the effect of situated social processes (see Gaventa, 2003); and Gaventa (2006) seeking to produce a useful tool for advocacy has proposed to understand power as operating through four expressions (power over, power for, power with and power within) and three forms (visible, invisible and hidden).

community" (Lazar, 2013a, p.1), as well as their shared post-structural approach that sets analytical attention on processes, understanding them as constituted through practice.

This chapter argued that bridging these two bodies of literature together allows for an empirical analysis of how Esquel's No a la Mina has set processes of commoning in motion through their practices, how these processes have built community, and how they have impacted the way citizenship is practiced and understood by members of the movement. In doing so, this framework builds a theoretical link between commoning and citizenship as the central theoretical ambition and contribution of this thesis – one that is attentive to ways in which these processes are shaped by power and difference. As a result, it allows me to explore commoning as a process that is not necessarily antithetical to the state, but that can be geared in fact towards its transformation. In building this link, I highlight how commoning does not function in a political vacuum, but necessarily impacts the way people relate to the state.

A dialogue between the two literatures allows me to address gaps within the two bodies of work. It allows me to extend the work within FPE on commoning by empirically showing how social movements can be sites of commoning and how commoning produces community. It also enables me to extend FPE scholarship on socio-environmental movements by examining how the changes created by social movements connect to a wider political arena – showing how these changes contest and/respond to power relations at different levels. It enables me to show how citizenship transformations can be shaped by socio-environmental processes and how the socio-environmental process in question (commoning) is shaped by, and shapes, power relations at different levels: within the commoning-community, and between the community and the state. It allows me, lastly, to extend anthropological and feminist political ecology literature on citizenship by exploring how socio-environmental movements can be productive sites in bringing about changes in the way people relate to the state – changes that are necessary to advancing environmental justice.

As Chapters Five to Eight argue, it is four practices of the movement - mobilising as *vecinos* (neighbours), 'informing' about mining, appealing to dignity, and rethinking human-nature relations – that have prompted a process of commoning and community-making and impacting the way members of the movement engage with the Argentinian state.

Chapter Three

Methodological considerations

This doctoral research project is based on a feminist qualitative methodology and a toolkit of research methods composed of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, archival research, and document analysis. Interviews have been the cornerstone of the project, and the other methods have served a purpose of data triangulation. Following Janesick (2000), the research project is based on an approach to qualitative methodology as choreography, that is as an iterative process between research methods, findings, and analysis. It is also based, more specifically, on a *feminist* qualitative methodology, which focuses on experiences and practices, that produces situated knowledge, and that analytically reads for social difference.

The chapter begins by outlining why a qualitative methodology was the most appropriate for the project and how I approached it as 'choreography' (Janesick, 2000) from a feminist standpoint. It then discusses the choice of research methods for this project, the challenges of implementing them during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the analytical strategy I followed. Lastly, in line with a feminist research methodology, this chapter includes an account of the position to which this research project is accountable, as well as its ethical considerations. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the research project.

A feminist qualitative methodology

The project is based on a qualitative research methodology – that is an approach of interpretation-through-interaction (Fontana & Frey, 2000) that is concerned with "the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants" (Bryman, 2001). I chose a qualitative methodology as, thus, the most appropriate choice for this research project given its focus on understanding meanings and processes, its holistic intent, its concern with the personal, and its attention to connections (Janesick, 2000).

Moreover, in this project I approached qualitative research as choreography, that is, as an ongoing effort to give shape and structure, rather than a fixed and ready-made plan from the start. Janesick (2000) argues qualitative research resembles choreography as attending to social complexity

requires an approach that is simultaneously open-ended and rigorous – that is, that functions as a simultaneous minuet and improvisation. This means that while research needs to be prepared and organised in advance, there is always an opportunity – and necessity – to be flexible during the process, "to improvise, to find out more about something in particular that might emerge as interesting, to include more people, to revise more documents" (p.381). Thinking of research as choreography highlights how research needs to be simultaneously intentional and reactive (Blom & Chaplin, 1988). As discussed in the following section, I had to be flexible in this project in two main ways: by adapting its research methods in response to COVID-19, and by reformulating its research questions in the light of what members of the movement wanted to talk about and share with me (and what they did not), as well as to follow my own intellectual curiosity once I got to know more about the movement.

Approaching qualitative research as choreography, thus, meant I approached the research process as an iterative process between research methods, findings, and analysis, adapting the former considering the latter to "situate and recontextualise the research project within the shared experience of the researcher and the participants in the study" (Janesick, 2000, p. 380). Thus, I also adopted a grounded theory approach: an inductive research approach developed by Glaser & Strauss (2009) which relies on a constant iteration between research methods and findings, as well as an analytical openness to recognise important emerging categories and themes (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). As explained by Clarke (2012), grounded theory entails going "back and forth between the nitty-gritty specificities of empirical data and more abstract ways of thinking about them" (p.3). As using a grounded theory approach had direct implications on how I analysed what I observed in the movement and what was shared with me, I return to a discussion of this approach in the section on data analysis.

I adopted in this research project, more specifically, a feminist approach to qualitative methodology. I approached qualitative research, more specifically, through three feminist principles: emphasis on "actual experiences and practices—the lived doingness of social life" (Clarke, 2012, p.392 citing Star, 2007), attention to the body through an appeal to situated knowledge (Hanson & Richards, 2019; Haraway, 1988), and attention to social difference (Clarke, 2012; Gibson-Graham, 2006). These are not the only principles driving feminist methodologies. Characteristic of feminist methodologies is also a concern with women's knowledge in order to counter the epistemic exclusion of women and challenge "traditional male constructions of knowledge" (Landman, 2006, p.430), as well as a concern with transformative research that makes

a tangible contribution to women's wellbeing and/or contributes more generally to bringing about gender justice (Acker, Barry & Essveld, 1983; Landman, 2006). However, I do not incorporate these principles in this research project, as my concern is with Esquel's No a la Mina as a movement and not only with women participating therein. Moreover, while the original research design planned to produce a useful output for the movement and their struggle, I decided to forgo of this component of the project in light of COVID-19 (see following section for the discussion of this point).

Attention to 'lived doingness' means feminist research aims to engage with both representation and analysis. Representation entails centring the experiences of the people and/or groups with whom the project is concerned, while analysis aims to understand the social processes motivating them or of which they speak (Clarke, 2012; Riessman, 2008). This entails, in the words of Rocheleau (2015), to write as both a listener and a thinker. It does not mean, however, approaching experience as natural or inherent, but to understand it – as Scott (1991) argues – as discursively constructed at the moment of retelling and as historically situated. To incorporate this principle in the research project, I centred the experiences and testimonies of members of the movement (by making interviews the cornerstone of the project, as discussed in the following section) and built my analysis of the movement around them.

Paying attention to the body means feminist qualitative research is attentive to, and critical of, the position from which knowledge is constructed and of its embeddedness in power relations. It also speaks of its approach to the body as a site of knowledge in and of itself, which is made possible through a variety of research methods such as body mapping.[30] My approach to this principle focuses on the former implication, rather than the latter, though my own experiences in and of the movement (i.e. my body) have been central in many regards to the analysis I present in this thesis. As a I discussed in the introduction, it was my experience of a sense of a community, and a sense of loss when I was forced to leave due to COVID-19, that shaped the research questions I ask in this thesis and that shaped, therefore, my analysis of the movement. Likewise, my own experiences in the movement were central in locating the practices that are driving the processes at play of commoning, community-making and citizenship transformation, as the subsequent empirical chapters show (see Chapters 5 to 8).

[30] It also means feminist methodologies often place analytical attention on the body through a variety of research methods, such as body mapping. This however was not done as part of this research project.

Paying attention to the body challenges claims to exhaustiveness, universality, and neutrality produced through what Haraway (1988) calls the 'god-trick' – that is, "the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation" (p.581). By being attentive to the body, a feminist approach to qualitative research challenges the 'vocal silence' (Hanson & Richard, 2019) about the impact of the body on the research process which is central to the 'god-trick' and which results in homogenised and sanitised narratives of the research process (ibid.). By challenging the notion of research as disembodied, a feminist methodology challenges the principle of "disembodied scientific objectivity" (ibid., p.576) as grounds for methodological validity, arguing this hinders rather than advances research. Holding a disembodied notion of objectivity closes the door to further interpretations and/or explanations, as it obscures how research is always partial and invested. By being explicit about "which kinds of experiences are informing our positions in academia" (Da Costa & et al., 2015, p.279), the resulting account is rather always one of 'partial perspective' (Haraway, 1988). Feminist methodology relies thus on what Haraway (1988) calls 'situated knowledge', calling attention to how research is influenced by the researcher's 'standpoint' (Harding, 1986) or 'location' (Haraway, 1988) – for example, of how it is shaped by how the researcher is perceived by the people they encounter and by what their own beliefs and worldviews are. Unlike disembodied objectivity which relies on obscuring the place from which research is made, the 'embodied objectivity' (ibid.) proposed by feminist methodology holds objectivity is about accountability and about transparency of the partiality of our accounts, about "becom[ing] answerable for what we learn how to see" (ibid., p.583-584).

To incorporate the principle of being attentive to the body, I adhere to Haraway's call for 'situated knowledge' and appeal to the principle of 'embodied objectivity'. To do so, I incorporated the principle of positionality – that is, an enquiry and account of the location from which research is produced and to which it is accountable; the position from which see, think, and speak (see Harcourt, 2015; Nazneen & Sultana, 2014; Rose, 1993). I was reflective of how my identity shaped the research process and I am explicit in this thesis about the position from which research is carried out and the partiality of my account and analysis (see subsection on positionality). Incorporating this principle, allows me to simultaneously have "an account of radical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognising our own semiotic technologies for making meanings and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a real world" (Haraway, 1988, p.579). In other words, it allowed me to recognise the existence of a

material reality that can be grasped, while identifying how our understanding of it is influenced and constrained by the position I occupy.

A feminist methodology, because of its emphasis on embodiment, also calls attention to the political embeddedness of research. It challenges how sanitised versions of the research process obscure the power dynamics that are entangled in this practice. A feminist methodology thus prompts engaging with and reflecting on what type of knowledge we are interested in, who produces it, how it is collected, analysed, and presented, and what the goals and implications of this are, as "research relations are never simple encounters, innocent of identities and lines of power" (DeVault & Gross, 2012, p.10). Recognising and engaging with the power dynamics embedded in research entails adopting the principle of reflexivity which calls for paying constant attention to, and addressing, power inequalities in the research process – from its research methods and analysis to the dissemination of findings (Apffel-Marglin, 2011; Faria & Mollett, 2016; Madhok, 2013). In this sense, a feminist methodology resonates with concerns and proposals to decolonise research (see for example, Smith, 2012) – which seek to address and redress the role of research in (re)producing relations of inequality. As such, the reflexive approach in feminist methodology entails a concern with devising more just research processes and producing socially-engaged knowledge (Jackson, 2006).

My attempt to render this research project as just as possible was to approach research as a process of encounter and sharing (Da Costa et al., 2015; Smith, 2012; Tsing, 2015; Warin, 2010). In this sense, this doctoral thesis should be understood as a result of the experiences and knowledge members of the movement decided to share with me during our conversations and the position from which I listened. Further implications of incorporating the principle of reflexivity in the research process is discussed in the section on ethics, as plans to present the doctoral research to the movement seek to redress the tendency for research to be extractive (see Da Costa et al., 2015).[31]

Attention to difference means feminist research 'reads for [social] difference' (Gibson-Graham, 2006) by being attentive to power relations within the social reality that concerns the project – an

[31] Feminist methodology and an approach to qualitative research as choreography converge in their attention to the body and the importance of the principle of positionality. Understanding research as choreography also highlights (rather than obscures) how qualitative research tends to be a very personal enterprise, as the researcher acts as an instrument that produces a unique interpretation of that which they observe, which in turn allows for "a much more modest than arrogant approach to the production of new knowledge" (Clarke, 2012, p.390 citing Haraway, 1997).

issue to which I return to in the section on data analysis as it is central to the way in which I read the movement and the understanding I developed.

Researching in times of COVID-19: research methods and their adaptation

This research project developed from my personal interest in a feminist analysis of the politics of socio-environmental movements in Latin America. After considering various social movements in different countries, I chose to research Esquel's *Asamblea de Vecinos Autoconvocados por el No a la Mina* (Assembly of Self-Convened Neighbour Against Mining) for various reasons. First, the movement is a landmark in the history of environmental resistance in Argentina, having influenced the emergence of other socio-environmental movements in the country (see Introduction). Second, it has a trajectory of almost 20 years, which provides the opportunity to understand the impact of the movement over a longer time frame. Thirdly, and most importantly, members of the movement expressed interest and willingness to host me for a few months when I first contacted them in 2019 – an issue to which I return when discussing my positionality as a researcher.

The initial focus of the project was to understand the way in which gender had shaped and been shaped by the practices of Esquel's No a la Mina. However, as I learned more about the movement, and interviewed more of its members, I became aware of how community-making is at the centre of the movement's practices, and I became interested in how these practices have brought about community and how this has changed the way members of the movement relate to the Argentinian state. Moreover, having had fieldwork interrupted because of COVID-19 (discussed in more detail ahead) hindered gaining an in-depth understanding of gender relations in Esquel and within the movement. Gender analyses require careful attention and nuanced contextual interpretation, and a high degree of trust to witness and speak about what is usually considered private interactions. Thus, having to leave after only two months of fieldwork limited what I could directly observe within the movement, as well as restricted the rapport I could build over time with members of the movement. Though, by relying on a grounded theory approach, I was able to adapt my research project to respond to what I observed and to what people shared with me.

The research methods used in the project also changed as a result of COVID-19. Initially, the project planned to combine qualitative and visual participatory methods. Within qualitative methods, I set out to use an ethnographic approach with a 'toolkit' (Renfrew, 2018) consisting of

document analysis, archival research, and semi-structured interviews, and within visual participatory methods, I wanted to potentially use photovoice (see Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1997) if the movement considered it to be a useful process for them. I chose these methods because they would allow for the inductive and interpretative approach, focusing on meanings and processes, needed to answer the project's research questions (Arce & Long, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Janesick, 2000). My choice of nesting document analysis, archival research, and semi-structured interviews within an ethnographic methodology – usually defined as prolonged participant observation and 'being there' (Bradburd, 1998) – was based on the long-term and immersive nature of ethnographic research (ibid.; Malinowski, 1922), as well as its relational character (Da Costa et al., 2015; Tsing, 2015). I chose to use this methodology, thus, to gain a good contextual understanding that would allow for grasping and understanding details in meanings and processes, as well as building rapport and trust with people of the movement.

COVID-19, however, impacted my research in Esquel, halting it after two months and a half. While I was in Esquel for a total of 5 months, I was only able to use half of this time to conduct ethnographic observations. In mid-March all of Argentina went into a strict lockdown which continued for a few more months after I was able to leave the country in May 2020. I decided to leave Argentina due to personal medical reasons, thinking, however, that I would be able to come back to Esquel a few months later, as international travel restrictions into Argentina were to be eased in September 2020. However, as entry restrictions into Argentina for non-nationals were continuously postponed (only lifted in November 2021), I decided to adapt my research methods to be able to continue learning about the movement from the UK.

Adapting my research methods entailed moving semi-structured interviews online, working in collaboration with Esquel's Municipal Library to get relevant archives, and using whatever resources were online – analysing the movement's past and then-current radio programmes, their written content (whether in the form of formal statements or content on their website) and following the movement through its social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram). Moreover, it meant that interviews became the cornerstone of the project, and the other methods were mostly used for data triangulation – as the following sections in this chapter discuss in more detail. It also meant I decided not to use participatory research methods since COVID-19 motivated the mining sector and government to push forward once more the mining agenda in the province (see Introduction). As a result, the movement's activity greatly increased since June 2020 and I did not

feel comfortable proposing an activity that would ask them to invest even more personal time in activities related to the movement.

This adaptation of the research project to online methods due to COVID-19 was greatly facilitated by the urban context of the movement, which meant internet connectivity was already available for members of the movement – though it limited (as the last section of this chapter discusses) my ability to understand more in-depth Mapuche-Tehuelche views of, and experiences in, the movement as many of the communities involved with the movement are based in rural areas with low or no connectivity.

Moving to online methods proved challenging, however, in many ways. Firstly, as I have already mentioned, it presented an emotional challenge as I had to deal with uncertainty (unable to know when and if I would be able to go back to Argentina) and a sense of loss after I left Esquel abruptly without having a possibility of emotional closure. It also proved challenging to remain connected to the movement despite the distance. As a I retake in Chapter 5, I felt I lost a right to participate in the movement when I left Esquel. I was only able to interact with members of the movement as an outsider through scheduled interviews (not anymore by also sitting in their general meetings (called assemblies) – then online – or other activities) nor support them in other ways besides re-sharing information via social media. I tried, however, to remain in contact by sending messages of support in particularly difficult times to members of the movement that I got to know better, as a way of letting them know that I was thinking of them and was accompanying their struggle even if at a distance. Witnessing the intense period that COVID-19 brought about for their struggle (see Introduction) from the UK provoked in me, though, a feeling of impotence that caused me to email in numerous occasions – without success –international media outlets in the hope that they would cover the events in Chubut.

As the next subsections discuss in detail each of the research method I used, I elaborate further on the challenges I experienced due to COVID-19 when carrying them out.

Encounters in Esquel

I approached my time in Esquel as a process of encounter, rather than of 'fieldwork'. This approach is based on feminist and decolonial critiques to the power-laden imaginary that underlies the notion of fieldwork. Speaking of 'fieldwork' categorises a particular place and group of people

as 'being out there', in a distant elsewhere (Di Chiro, 2015), and thus as 'other' (see also Da Costa et al., 2015), which runs the risk of objectifying the place and people that it refers to, portraying them in a static and detached manner and obscuring the role of the researcher (Warin, 2010). Approaching research as 'fieldwork' can moreover encourage a disembodied approach to research, "to see and not to be seen, to represent while escaping representation" (Haraway, 1988, p.581), as well as an extractive practice under which research is "…about gathering the fruits and eating them" (Da Costa et al., 2015, p.266).

Figure 7. Cycling against mining on February 4th 2020

Source: Taken by the author in February 2020.

Speaking of a process of encounter, rather than of fieldwork, reflects the fluid and shared nature of the process. It allowed me to recognise how the relationships that formed during this process were bilateral rather than unilateral, as well as to recognise the epistemic role of members of the movement, and thus to understand research as a process of collective thinking (Tsing, 2015) – albeit to different degrees. As a result, approaching ethnographic work as encounter encouraged me to dissolve "the sharp separation between the academic space as the space of knowledge generation, and the field as a place to extract raw materials" (Da Costa et al., 2015, p.270) and to make "a move from doing research about people to doing it with people" (p.271). Thinking of encounter rather than of fieldwork allowed me, therefore, to recognise how research projects are always processes of co-creation, even if to different degrees (Tsing, 2015; Da Costa et al., 2015), as well as to maintain positionality and reflexivity as central in the research process. Thus, while this project is not participatory, it is not only the result of my interests and analytical role. It is a process of co-creation in the sense that is greatly shaped by what members of the movement decided to share with me and considered relevant when speaking about the movement.

As briefly mentioned, my ethnographic participation comprised two and a half months, from January to mid-March 2020. During all my stay in Esquel, I lived with a family, whom I initially found through an online platform, and who made my time in Esquel memorable. Between January and March 2020, I participated in 6 meetings (*asambleas*) of the movement, 4 monthly street demonstrations, various community events (such as a cycling event, see Figure 7) and workshops organised by the movement, 3 festivals against mining in Esquel and elsewhere in the province, the annual festival celebrating the foundation of the town (in which I helped run the movement's stand, see Figure 8), artistic interventions across the town, as well as accompanied members in their daily shifts at the movement's information point (the *localito*) in the town. This meant that almost every day I was involved in some way or another with the movement. I also began interviewing various members of the movement during this period, as well as collecting documents from the movement such as leaflets, posters and statements. An opportunity also arose for me to attend an event – a climate camp followed by a protest in Esquel – organised by the *Movimiento de Mujeres y Diversidades Indigenas por el Buen Vivir* (Movement of Indigenous Women and Diversities for Buen Vivir or MMIBV) in the nearby Mapuche-Tehuelche community of Pillán Mahuiza in February 2020. Being part of these events was crucial for my understanding of Mapuche-Tehuelche struggles in the province, and on-going tensions between them and Esquel's No a la Mina.

Figure 8. The movement's stand at Esquel's anniversary festival

Source: Taken by the author in February 2020.

Spending these few months in Esquel also allowed me to have a good number of informal conversations with members of the movement and other residents of Esquel, which in turn

allowed me to tune my interview questions and archival research criteria. As shifts were usually covered in groups of two or three and they lasted 3 or 4 hours, spending time at the *localito* (see Figure 9), selling t-shirts, listening to members of the movement provide information to visitors, and drinking mate together provided me perhaps with the best opportunity to ask questions about the movement and about Esquel, get to know *vecinos* and their experiences, and for them to get to know me. Moreover, having spent these few months with members of the movement was fundamental in setting the conditions that allowed me to continue my research online from the UK, as it allowed me to create a foundation of trust with the members of the movement whom I met and interacted with. Having met in person numerous *vecinos* of the movement and being personally referred to members of the movement who I didn't get to meet while I was in Esquel but who I was interested in interviewing, was key for them to agree to online interviews. Moreover, these months proved invaluable in terms of the insights I was able to gain, which allowed me to redirect my research focus, tune my questions, and better understand the testimonies of members of the movement.

Figure 9. The movement's *localito* on Avenida Ameghino

Source: Taken by the author in February 2020.

I kept a research journal during this period, which I used to keep track of my daily activities and encounters, as well as of emerging questions and insights. In this sense, I used journal writing as an exercise during which I could begin to reflect on and analyse events and conversations, as well as reflect about the development of the research process – of where I was at and of what I wanted to drop and/or include. Journal writing was also adopted as a "technique to accomplish the description and explanation of the researcher's role" (Janesick, 1999, p.507) and reflect on my positionality at different points in time. In this sense, journal writing was crucial to my approach of qualitative research as choreography, and my use of a grounded theory approach and a feminist methodology.

Semi-structured interviews

Interviewing as a research method holds "that knowledge can be produced in structured encounters organised around telling about experience" (De Vault & Gross, 2012, p.4), functioning thus "as a method of making experience hearable and subjecting it to systematic analysis" (ibid., p.5). Within this research method, I adopted a semi-structured approach. This mode of interviewing is characterised by being guided by a predetermined list of questions in a non-restrictive manner. This means a list of question was used as a guiding axis during formal conversations with members of the movement, but questions were not asked necessarily in the same order throughout interviews and additional questions were added (or omitted) in response to the way in which each interview developed (Bryman, 2001). Using semi-structured interviews, thus, allowed me to cover the same set of questions with all the people I interviewed, while giving them space to raise issues particularly relevant to them and their trajectories (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Spradley, 1979). Unstructured interviews, while also being open-ended and conducive to empirical richness, were not considered as I needed to cover a specific set of issues with each person in order to be rigorous. Annex 1 includes the interview guide used.

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews as this mode of interviewing is the most compatible with a feminist methodology and an approach to qualitative research as choreography and thus with an approach to research as a co-creative process (see DeVault & Gross, 2012). Its open-ended character allowed members of the movement to incorporate in the research processes what they considered relevant – which I aimed to strengthen by always asking at the end if there was anything else that they considered important that I should know, and we hadn't discussed, or if there was anything else they would like to share with me. This, in combination with the flexibility of this mode of interviewing regarding the order of questions, allowed me to constantly rethink and adapt "how to organize interviews so as to produce more truly collaborative encounters" (DeVault & Gross, 2012, p.9).

I also chose to conduct individual interviews, over group ones, to strengthen confidentiality in the research process, as well as to create a more unrestricted environment in which people would not be biased by the presence of other people. Conducting individual interviews also avoided the logistical difficulties of organising a common time and place for members of the movement. Thus, most interviews were conducted in this manner, except for 3 interviews in which members emphasised they wanted to be interviewed together (in the case of one couple) or showed up to

the interview with another member (in the case of another couple and two women from the movement whom I asked to interview separately in a following opportunity).

I interviewed a total of 50 people connected to Esquel's No a la Mina. 9 people whom I contacted chose not to be interviewed for this project – either explicitly or by not responding to messages to arrange a time and date after initially accepting. Out of the 50 people I interviewed, 44 were members of the movement and 6 were connected to it in different ways. Interviewing people related to, but not belonging to the movement, was important for me to gain a better understanding of the movement, as speaking to members of other assemblies and Mapuche-Tehuelche leaders brought to my attention elements that became key for my analysis of Esquel's No a la Mina. Of the 44 members I interviewed, 26 identified as women, 1 as gender fluid and 17 as men. Most people in this group are very active in Esquel's No a la Mina, and are part of its organizational nucleus – what members call the movement's *piloto del calefón* (pilot light) – with the exception of five people who tend to participate only in street protests and/or events rather than assemblies.[32] Three of the members I interviewed also participate in the assembly against mining of Trevelin, a nearby smaller town and which is very interconnected with Esquel as people may live in Trevelin but commute to Esquel for study or work. Annex 2 includes a list of all people interviewed for this project.

The difference in the numbers of the women and men I interviewed reflect the composition of the movement's organizational core at this point in time, as this was in most part comprised of women.[33] I focused my interviews on this nucleus of the movement as these members were the ones with whom I was able to build a relationship while I was in Esquel, as well as because they were the ones who could speak more in-depth about the movement's history and practices, and about their experiences therein. Thus, I used purposeful sampling to interview a group that would be representative of the "social body [of the movement] … and its heterogeneities" (Clarke, 2012, p.391). I selected interviewees based on their role and participation within the movement at the time I was in Esquel, and thereafter through their participation in the movement's radio programmes and social media. Additionally, I also sought specifically to interview members who identified as Mapuche-Tehuelche, as they are a minority within the organizational nucleus of the movement and as the first interviews I conducted pointed to existing tensions between indigenous

[32] One person participated for many years in the Assembly of Esquel, while the other two members - because of the geographical proximity between Esquel and Trevelin – participate in both assemblies.
[33] While in past research projects, interviewing women was more challenging than interviewing men because of a reluctance to assume themselves as 'speaking subjects' (DeVault, 1990), this was not the case in Esquel.

and non-indigenous members. I interviewed the three women in the movement's nucleus who identify as Mapuche-Tehuelche. I complemented purposeful sampling, moreover, with snowballing. Following recommendations of who to speak to allowed me to reach out particularly to people who were not active when I visited Esquel, but who had been key in the past, as well as to interview key informants outside of Esquel's No a la Mina.

The 6 people I interviewed which were not members of Esquel's No a la Mina were selected through a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling. Included in this group of people were a few members of other assemblies against mining in Chubut, as well as key Mapuche-Tehuelche activists in the region. The interviews with members of other Assemblies provided an external view of Esquel's Assembly and were useful to understand its particularities. The interviews with Mapuche-Tehuelche activists were important to complement the testimonies of indigenous members in the movement. In interviewing Mapuche-Tehuelche activists that are not part of the movement I was thus looking to understand the tensions that may be behind the small participation of Mapuche-Tehuelche people in the movement. Yet, I could not interview as many indigenous people as I would have liked due to gatekeeping and lack of connectivity in rural areas. Spending two months and a half in Esquel was not enough time to build a strong sense of rapport with various Mapuche-Tehuelche leaders, who would have needed to connect me with Mapuche-Tehuelche communities near Esquel. The lack of connectivity in the rural areas of the province made it even more necessary to count with the support of these gatekeepers, as I would have also needed their support to implement alternative means of communication to videocalls.

I conducted most of these semi-structured interviews remotely due to COVID-19. Only 6 were in person in Esquel. For the face-to-face interviews, I organised these at the time and place preferred by the person in turn. Some of them preferred to talk at their houses, while others preferred meeting in coffee shops or green areas. Given that all the members I interviewed in person were women, I didn't have to confront a dilemma about whether going to their houses for the interviews could pose a risk for my safety or cause any sense of discomfort.

Most of the online interviews were conducted over Whatsapp video calls, with a couple organised instead through Zoom. I first contacted members by text message over Whatsapp or Facebook and agreed by text message on the time and date for the call. I primarily chose to call people through Whatsapp as I thought having to log into a virtual meeting room could give the interview an unnecessary feeling of formality which could stifle the conversation. Instead, I thought a

videocall would not only be the easiest, but also the most familiar to people, and thus help me create a casual and comfortable environment for the both of us (or three of us, were couples decided to join the interview together).

Carrying out the interviews by online video due to COVID-19 was challenging in various ways. To begin with, there was often a difficulty with the quality of the connection. When this occurred, the flow of the conversation was interrupted as either of us needed to ask the other to repeat what had just been said. However, in some cases where the connection was weak or when there was a problem with the microphone/speakers, I didn't feel comfortable to keep asking people to repeat what they had said. This meant in those cases, I unfortunately missed fragments of the conversations. In some cases, to improve the connection, we choose to change from a video to an audio call, increasing the distance between us as interlocutors. Moreover, doing interviews remotely meant I was constantly 'travelling' to and back from Esquel and this caused constant feelings of nervousness before, and of nostalgia after, every interview that often prevented me for days from transcribing interviews.

I approached all interviews as conversations rather than one-sided dialogues in an effort to build rapport with members of the movement, as well as to put into practice a feminist research methodology (discussed previously) as much as possible. Approaching interviews as conversations meant that I shared personal experiences and history when relevant, similarly to the proposal of DeVault & Gross (2012) of 'strategic disclosure'. I paid attention, however, that approaching interviews as conversations did not hinder my role as a listener (Blee, 2003; Senhgal, 2009) – that is, to primarily listen with the aim of learning from the other and taking a 'non-argumentative approach' (Klatch, 1987). On the contrary, approaching interviews as conversations allowed me to actively listen, to take in what was being communicated, process it, and respond to it even if just in acknowledgment (DeVault & Gross, 2012).

As discussed in more detail in the Ethics subsection in this chapter, I began all interviews by introducing myself and the project, and asking whether they had any questions for me, and finished all interviews by asking them if there was anything else they wanted to add. On average, interviews lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours; a few were as short as 30 minutes and others as long as 4 hours. Most interviews were completed in one call; however, some required having a follow-up conversation where the time we had initially agreed on was not sufficient. All interviews were audio-recorded only as video recordings can be perceived as more intrusive, as well as make people

more self-conscious and more uncomfortable during calls. I took notes of all interviews, at times during and at times once they had concluded. Doing this allowed me to begin reflecting on the content, as well as to keep track of my insights. In this sense, taking notes of interviews was instrumental to approaching research as choreography. Taking notes allowed me to build an iteration between questions and responses, and thus to modify or refine questions for following interviews, as well as to begin analysing interviews immediately (which is crucial for a grounded theory approach).

All interviews were transcribed. I hired a research assistant, Gabriela Gómez, based in Mexico City, and shared the recorded audios (encrypted for security). While we divided the number of transcriptions roughly equally, I relistened to all the interviews she transcribed to fill gaps (as there were many terms and names unfamiliar to her) and make sure the text was accurate. I then coded all interview transcriptions using Nvivo (see subsection on data analysis).

Due to impact of COVID-19, these 50 interviews became the cornerstone of the research project, as they allowed me to understand the issues that I was, or became, concerned with, learn about people's experiences and the interpretations and meanings they assign to them, as well as to listen to what members of the movement considered important.

The interviews are supported and triangulated by the following research methods.

Supporting methods

Radio programmes: The movement has had throughout the years radio programmes at two local stations: Radio Kalewche and Radio Nacional Esquel. I listened to those that were available in the movement's online archive in ivoox (a digital podcast platform): 33 episodes from 2013[34] and 35 programmes from 2019[35] aired as part of the No a la Mina programme in Radio Kalewche; and 59 episodes from two cycles (2020 and 2021) of the programme *Voces por la Tierra*, aired at Radio Nacional Esquel. The 2022 cycle of *Voces por la Tierra*, while also available online, was not analysed as part of this research project as it was out of the project's timeline. I approached radio programmes as a way to keep learning about the movement's history and its politics (especially once I had left Esquel). Given the time difference between UK and Argentina, I only once listened

[34] Available at https://www.ivoox.com/en/podcast-programa-no-a-mina-esquel_sq_f169909_1.html
[35] Available at https://www.ivoox.com/escuchar-no-a-mina-esquel_nq_41955_1.html

to the radio programmes live. Instead, I listened to the online recordings of the programmes – in some cases later that same week and in others a few weeks after. Listening to the recordings proved useful as it allowed me to pause the program and make detailed notes of relevant parts with the corresponding location (hour/minute) and assign a code. When reviewing a particular theme/code, I re-listened to the sections under this category and transcribed verbatim those to be used in the write-up.

Archival research: My intention in using local newspaper archives was to gather more information, beyond interviews, on the initial years of the movement to understand the discourse and actions that surrounded the mining project, have a more detailed account of how events developed and understand the historical/political context in which the movement emerged. Due to COVID-19, I was not able to carry this out myself as the records are physically held in Esquel. I decided therefore to work with a research assistant based in Esquel. First, I worked with Romina Villafañe, and later with Daniel from Esquel's Municipal Library in 2021, who helped me collect relevant newspaper articles. I relayed to them my interest in looking at the two then-existing newspapers– *El Oeste* and *El Sur* - from July 2001 to May 2003. I chose July 2001 as the starting date of my search criteria as I wanted to see what the lingering effects of the 2001 crisis were in Esquel, as well as what the political context looked like in Esquel a year prior to the movement's formation – a period in which interviews suggested teachers' unions were particularly active and thus an important precedent and influence over the movement. Moreover, I chose this period as it was when interviews suggested rumours started about the mining project and Meridian Gold's presence in Esquel. I choose May 2003 as the end date for the search criteria as by then the movement's first stage had concluded, and the website offer coverage (approximately) since 2005. I asked them both to gather relevant articles with four themes in mind: 1. The impact of the 2001 economic crisis, 2. The struggle of teachers' unions, 3. The mining project and Meridian Gold, and 4. Resistance against the project. I received between February and July 2021 scanned copies of the relevant newspaper pages, which I then read and coded as relevant.

Webpage and documents: I also analysed content in webpage entries and various documents produced by the movement, such as statements or declarations crafted for the monthly protests or the various law projects they have proposed. However, as the number of entries in the webpage categorised under the label of Esquel and Chubut is more than 500, I could not do a systematic analysis of these, but rather resorted to this source of information when I wanted to have more detail about a particular event or topic. Likewise, the documents that I could read and draw upon

for my analysis are not exhaustive, but rather the ones to which I had access between the years of 2020 and 2021.

Methodology of data analysis

Approaching research and choreography, and thus applying a grounded theory approach, requires simultaneity between the implementation of research methods and analysis. As Charmaz (2006) explains, this entails coding particular themes/issues/events with temporary labels and deciding overtime whether labels in one source appear elsewhere. Whenever this is the case, the corresponding labels are then densified into analytic categories – with a memo explaining its scope – and used to generate a more abstract but empirically grounded analysis. It should be noted that using a feminist political ecology lens meant that when analysing the material I purposefully 'read for [social] difference' (Gibson-Graham, 2006) in order to understand more fully the dynamics within the movement.

For this I used the qualitative research software Nvivo, where I stored and coded interview transcripts, radio programmes, newspaper articles, and relevant webpage entries and documents. An Nvivo file provided a space where I could concentrate all available material and organise it under codes. Using Nvivo allowed me, therefore, to follow a grounded theory approach more easily, as it facilitated an inductive analysis as well as a constant revision and reorganisation of labels/categories. Moreover, it also allowed me to triangulate my analysis, as it facilitated looking under thematic categories through different sources at once. I did not use Nvivo, however, beyond these two functions: storing and coding. Following the discussed approach to qualitative research, I started analysing and coding data immediately (even if in a provisional manner), rather than waiting until all my research methods had concluded (see Clarke, 2012). Using any of the analytical tools offered by Nvivo – besides coding – would have produced, therefore, an incomplete and thus skewed analysis as themes prominent in parts of the material would not have been necessarily representative of all the material I eventually collected as a whole.

The written product this doctoral thesis represents aims to perform two tasks – representation and analysis (Clarke, 2012; Riessman, 2008), following Rocheleau's (2015) definition of feminist methodology as writing as both a listener and a thinker. On one hand, based on my position as listener, it aims to represent the movement and its members by centring their experiences. On the

other hand, based on my role as a thinker, it aims to present an analysis of elucidating processes of social phenomena therein.

For this reason, as the original material is all in Spanish, I have translated it to English when directly cited in this thesis. I have paid careful attention when doing so, so that the translation remains as true as possible to the original words in Spanish and the original Spanish quotes are included and referenced in Annex 3. For this reason, each direct quotation from the material I produced/collected is followed by a reference Roman number in superscript; this corresponds to the list in the Annex. As language is central to one's worldview, I decided to include the original Spanish quotes in order to minimise the loss or alteration of meaning through translation, a problem identified by Malinowski (1922) (also see Monaghan & Just, 2000). This is also why I have decided to keep the use of Spanish words throughout the text such as *pueblos originarios* and *vecinos*.

The material directly cited in the analysis presented in the following chapters was chosen because it is representative of shared experiences, beliefs, and opinions unless otherwise stated, in which case material is used to show the breadth of, or variation in, meanings and processes. As I conducted all interviews under an agreement of anonymity and confidentiality, the names of the participants are not mentioned, and I have omitted details that could allow for their identification.

Positionality

As previously discussed, feminist research is characterised by being accountable to the location or position from which research is produced. This doctoral research project is influenced by my identity as a young Mexican middle-class woman at a British and Danish university and by an 'intellectual biography' (DeVault and Gross, 2012) characterised by an interest in feminist scholarship and environmental justice.

As positionality is contingent on the context and people with whom we interact (Da Costa et al., 2015; Warin, 2010), the impact of my positionality changed depending on who I was speaking to in the movement. I believe, in general, my identity helped me to build rapport and trust with members of Esquel's No a la Mina. Being Mexican gave me the opportunity to be external to local power dynamics, while having me some linguistic, cultural, and historical commonality with members of the movement. Being Mexican (while I had to enquire and learn about expressions particular to Argentina) allowed me to conduct the interviews in Spanish, rather than using a

research assistant or interpreter. This avoided adding more layers of interpretation and meaning in the research process, as well as meant I was more equipped to be attentive to the nuances of people's expressions (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

Being external to local power relations was important particularly when talking to Mapuche-Tehuelche people. Being Mexican meant I was not equated with non-indigenous Argentinians and located within an antagonistic logic. To be perceived as an outsider to this historical relation created the possibility to be perceived as an ally for Mapuche-Tehuelche members, with my questions prompting non-indigenous members to reflect. Being an outsider, moreover, was what led me to reflect on the movement's appeal to the Argentinian flag in their banner and people's participation in Esquel's No a la Mina as *vecinos/as* – as both of these elements are uncommon in Mexican socio-environmental movements. Being Mexican was also central to what led me to reflect on the movement's appeal to dignity. Conversely, as this is a vocabulary that is present in the Zapatista movement in Mexico, I was intrigued to understand its meaning in the context of another social struggle.

Being a young woman, specifically, helped me, I believe, to be perceived as non-threatening by a movement that is concerned about infiltration by mining companies and the state – an advantage that has been documented by other female researchers in other contexts (see Fontana & Frey, 2000). It also informed the way in which I was able to build rapport with members of the movement, which in some cases involved talking about feminism or asking if they could teach me how to prepare jams and cakes and how to knit or crochet. Moreover, my identity as a young woman allowed a relationship of care to develop between members of the movement and me, as at times I felt cared for by older female members. This does not mean in any way that my gender was enough to relate to the women I met – as other researchers have emphasised (M. Parker, 1995; Riessman, 1987) – but rather that the way in which I could build rapport with some of members of the movement was gendered. Furthermore, as I have discussed in the introduction, it is the care that I felt and received from members of the movement – which I believe was motivated by my identity as a young woman and our shared language – that greatly shaped my analysis of the movement and that provided me with an insight into the community-making at play. Thus, my being a young Latin American woman, is at the heart of this research project.

It should be mentioned that the movement's strategy of 'informing' about mining (see Chapter Six) was also crucial in allowing me to interact and talk to members of the movement, as they

understood my research project as something that would contribute towards the dissemination of their struggle. In this sense, my identity as a researcher was central to the movement's acceptance of my presence and participation, as well as key to my attentiveness to the consequences of this practice.

Yet, at times my positionality was also a cause of discomfort. My attendance to a meeting of the UACHH – the network of assemblies against mining in Chubut – exemplifies some of the challenges it presented. I travelled to the meeting as part of the group attending from Esquel, after asking if I could join them. Once the meeting started, we all introduced ourselves. However, after the round of presentations, a discussion ensued about my presence. I was asked why being Mexican I was interested in Argentina, placing me as an outsider and my interest in the movement as less legitimate. I was also asked to repeat what my university affiliations were, and a conversation followed about the persisting colonial character of research, highlighting how while being Mexican created some commonality, my ties to Global North institutions did not. This incident, as Chapter 5 discusses, was also central to my attention to and my understanding of what participating as a *vecina* means in the movement.

Being a young woman could have also presented challenges during research – as discussed by Hanson and Richard (2019). However, I did not feel the need to play disempowering roles – such as performing ignorance and inexperience – to have access to the movement or to build trust with its members, as other female researchers have felt (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Senhgal, 2009). Neither did I experience instances of sexual harassment and/or violence while in fieldwork, and thus concerns with my personal safety did not influence my mobility in the way they have affected female researchers elsewhere (see Hanson & Richard, 2019).

Lastly, as DeVault and Gross (2012) argue, one's positionality does not only affect the limits and possibilities of research methods, but also how one reads or listens. My personal interest in feminism (which is influenced in turn by my identity as a woman) and environmental justice does not only inform the choice to research environmental movements and to follow a feminist qualitative methodology, but also the choice to use a feminist political ecology lens. In this sense, my positionality did not only shape what was shared with me, but also how I understood these events and accounts – as "telling requires a listener and… [that] listening shapes the account as well as the telling" (ibid., p.219). My interest in intersectional feminist scholarship thus influenced

my choice to pay attention to difference and local power relations within the movement, being careful not to approach the movement as a homogenous identity.

In sum, this is the location from which this doctoral research project was carried out and to which it is accountable as a form of situated knowledge.

Ethics

The ethical considerations of the project range across concerns with informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, data protection, safety, and reciprocity.

I asked for informed consent orally, as I anticipated participants were likely to feel uneasy signing written forms as would I. I asked for consent at the collective and individual level. First, I asked for consent from the movement as a collective. This entailed having an initial conversation with various members of the movement back in 2019 when I was writing the research proposal to ask whether they would be interested in the research project as well as be comfortable with my presence in the movement. Then, once I arrived in Esquel in January 2020 and was able to attend one of the movement's meetings, I asked once again for their collective consent. Lastly, before every interview I asked for individual consent, being clear how I would use the experiences and opinions shared with me and asking people before and after the interview if they had any questions or doubts that they wanted to ask me. When asking for consent, I also emphasised that they could withdraw consent at any point during the subsequent year and that they could stop the interview at any point if they felt uncomfortable, without having to explain themselves. Following, I asked separately for their consent to record our interviews, clarifying the recordings and transcripts would be anonymised and used solely of the purpose of the research.

I paid careful attention to confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process, as well as to maintaining safe all the material related to the movement I had in my possession. Confidentiality however does not extend to this written research product, as I draw on interviews here where relevant. However, when I do, quotations are anonymous to prevent any situation that could put the movement and people at risk. The safety of the members of the movement has been a paramount concern during the research process. When working with Gabriela, who assisted me with a portion of the transcriptions, I encrypted the files before sharing them with her as well as instructed her to delete all files once her job was completed.

I offered monetary compensation for both the support I received from Gabriela, Romina and Daniel. We decided together what was the most appropriate compensation within my means beforehand. I paid Romina a fixed monthly amount and Gabriela a fixed rate per interview transcript, except for interviews over 2.5 hours for which I paid an additional sum. Daniel asked as compensation for his assistance a donation in kind to the library of approximately 45 books.

Finally, in line with my concern to follow a feminist methodology and to make a humble attempt to decolonise the research process, I shared the outcome of the research with the movement in March-April 2023. I prepared a short version in Spanish of this doctoral thesis which I gave them in digital and physical copies (along with copies of the full thesis in English), and I also presented its contents orally to the movement.

There is one way, however, in which this doctoral research project 'stays with the trouble', to borrow a phrase from Haraway (2016). As briefly discussed already, throughout the years there has been a concern in the movement – and the UACHH – about infiltration by mining companies or the state. For this reason, some members expressed concerns about the research project and its potential to make available knowledge about the movement that could be used against them. However, as I have also already mentioned, the movement in its majority values opportunities to make known their struggle, which aligns with their own emphasis on 'sharing information' as an activist strategy. I have thus been as cautious as possible not to place the movement or members in harm's way, omitting details of contentious issues that would add little to the analysis. I write this doctoral thesis with the intention to honour their wishes and help disseminate their struggle even if there are risks in doing so.

Limitations of the research project

The doctoral research project here presented has various limitations.

Firstly, the analysis focuses specifically on the members of Esquel's No a la Mina, rather than on Esquel's residents. As a result, the analysis speaks about a process that concerns members of the movement specifically. A following study would be needed to understand if the processes here theorised are also occurring beyond the movement, or how they have influenced residents who are not, or are less engaged, in the movement.

Second, the study is limited in its understanding of Mapuche-Tehuelche communities – their views and experiences. As already discussed, COVID-19 impacted my access to Mapuche-Tehuelche communities because of a lack of rapport and connectivity. In this sense, the project captures best the views and experiences of Mapuche-Tehuelche members in Esquel's No a la Mina, as well as of politically active Mapuche-Tehuelche leaders – as these are the people that I could talk to within this group.

Third, while COVID-19 prompted the participation of younger members, this is a group that is largely absent in this project. As it was a result of COVID-19, I did not get to participate in the movement when this was happening, and while I tried to interview this group, this opportunity did not consolidate. Despite agreeing to interviews, young members repeatedly did not show up at the agreed time and date or stopped replying to my messages when trying to organise a date.

Fourth, the archival research did not produce any results on two topics: the impact of the 2001 economic crisis and the political presence of the teachers' unions. As a result, more work is needed to understand how the movement connects with a wider local history of resistance, which the doctoral project does not capture in its entirety.

As this project relies mostly on interviews, it is also limited in its understanding of how the movement interacts with other local actors – especially the *sociedades rurales* (unions of predominantly people of European descent concerned with strengthening rural production and which are influential local actors especially over decisions on land distribution and use, see Rasmussen & Figueroa, 2022).

Conclusion

This chapter has set out the methodology on which this doctoral thesis rests. It has discussed how the project followed an approach to qualitative research as choreography (Janesick, 2000), why a feminist qualitative methodology was chosen for the research project and how this shaped the process. It has also discussed the choice of research methods for this project – semi-structured interviews, participant observation, archival research, and document analysis – and the various challenges of implementing them during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has also discussed the methodology followed when analysing the events and accounts members of the movement shared

with me, as well as an account of the position to which this research project is accountable, the ethical considerations taken, and the limitations of the project.

The following chapter traces the history of extractivism in Argentina and the regional history unto which it has mapped in Chubut to provide a historical background for the discussion of the movement's practices that follows.

Chapter Four

Extractivism in Argentina and the constant making of frontiers in Chubut

As in the rest of Latin America, the exploitation of natural resources has been central to imaginaries of civilisation, progress, and development in Argentina. Dreams of wealth have been tied, since the colonial period, to the exploitation of commodities – in particular those in the agricultural and livestock sector (Bebbington, 2009; Svampa & Viale, 2014; Briones, 2005). The resources of Patagonia were not centre stage, however, until the 19th century, when the young Argentinian nation-state began to consolidate. Since then, what Rasmussen (2021) calls 'frontier imaginaries' have been shaping the social, economic and political landscape of what became the province of Chubut.

Frontiers have historically evoked images of vast expanses of land, empty and pristine, and consequently images of land that can be claimed and "put to good use at will" (ibid., p.3). Moreover, frontier imaginaries usually have an underlying 'racial grammar' (Stoler, 2016) as "frontier tales seem to always include the primitive, the savage and the irrational, whose destruction is inevitable in order for the frontier to be conquered" (Rasmussen & Lund, 2021, p.80). As a result, the process by which frontiers cease to be – that is, by which the space is incorporated and the frontier pushed further out – entails the erasure of prior social orders and their creation anew (ibid.). The Argentinian Patagonia was long conceived as the frontier of the emerging nation-state, as lands which had to be occupied through state presence, settler colonies, and resource production/exploitation, erasing Mapuche-Tehuelche peoples. The imaginary of Patagonia as a frontier, however, did not cease when it was incorporated into Argentina's national territory. In the case of Chubut, this imaginary has continued to justify development plans for the province.

This chapter traces the history of extractivism in Argentina and the regional history onto which it has mapped in Chubut. In doing so, the chapter aims to trace the history of extractivism which has shaped the emergence and trajectory of Esquel's No a la Mina. This is a history that has been characterised by settler colonialism, the marginalisation of indigenous peoples, and increasing indigenous and socio-environmental mobilisations. To do this, this chapter first discusses a brief history of extractivism in Argentina, showing how this mode of appropriating nature has been a constant in national development plans since the 1990s and how it has been continuously framed

as key for the country's economic recovery from crisis. It also discusses, more specifically, the set of national reforms and policies that have promoted mining in the country. The chapter then discusses a brief history of Patagonia generally, and of Chubut in particular, to trace the presence and consequences of frontier imaginaries from the formation of the Argentinian nation-state to the present issue of mining.

Extractivist trajectories in Argentina

Extractivism refers to a mode of appropriating nature as resources at heightened scale and intensity for their export (Gudynas, 2013, 2015). Since the formation of the Argentinian nation-state, resource exploitation has been central to imaginaries of national progress and development. This has remained somewhat constant despite changes in the country's economic paradigm, which has oscillated between the export of natural resources in the 19th and early 20th century, industrialization in the mid 20th century, coming back with full force to the export of natural resources at the turn of the century (what has been termed Argentina's 're-primarisation'). It also remained constant despite changes in the country's political regime, which oscillated between democracy and authoritarianism throughout the 20th century. Since the 1990s, moreover, technological change has allowed for the exploitation of resources to increase in scale and intensity. Over this period, the salience of extractivism has persisted through political shifts from left-wing to neoliberal governments; their ideological differences only providing different terms in which to justify extractivism.

The current extractivist regime is rooted in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Argentina's economy began again to rely heavily – and almost exclusively – on the extraction and export of natural resources. The government of Carlos Menem (1989-1999), who belonged to the Justicialista Party, undertook a series of structural reforms under the Convertibility Plan of 1991, rhetorically presented as the only way for the country to overcome the economic crisis of the 1980s.[36] Influenced by the international political climate in favour of economic liberalisation policies (epitomised in the set of ten economic prescriptions known as the Washington Consensus), this plan sought to promote foreign direct investment through the privatisation of state companies (among the most important ones being the oil company *Yacimientos Petroliferos*

[36] This was the country's first debt crisis. It led to hyperinflation and the collapse of financial markets (Romero, 2012).

Fiscales or YPF), the reduction of import taxes, and the deregulation of the national market (Machado, 2009; Saguier & Peinado, 2016; Svampa & Antonelli, 2009).

Menem's government also reformed the National Constitution in 1994 to transfer the governance of natural resources from the federal government to the provincial level. This established minimal environmental regulations at the national level, leaving provincial governments largely in charge. The reform also supported the privatisation of extractive state companies set in motion by the Convertibility Plan, as provincial governments did not have sufficient funds to acquire them from the national government (Pou, 2000; Svampa & Antonelli, 2009; Svampa & Sola Alvarez, 2010).

The government of Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) and then that of his wife, Cristina Kirchner (2007-2015) – both also belonging to the Justicialista Party – oversaw an intensification of resource extraction, despite their agenda to support industrialisation (Antonelli, 2011). Their governments placed resource extraction at the centre of Argentina's development model, in response to a new set of economic prescriptions which sought, at the turn of the century, to consolidate Global South countries as the source of natural resources for the Global North (and increasingly China) – what Svampa (2008, 2017, 2019) calls the Consensus of the Commodities.

The Kirchner agenda also took shape within a regional trend of the newly elected leftist governments in Latin America (what has been termed 'Latin America's Pink Tide') embracing 'a productivist vision of development' (Svampa, 2019). As Svampa (2019) elaborates, this is a vision which was supported by a boom in the prices of natural resources from 2000-2013, which helped to highlight the comparative advantages of resource extraction and export, and the use of revenues for social policies to alleviate poverty while denying the negative socio-environmental consequences of the model. The embrace of extractivism by the governments of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner has thus been understood as following a model of neo-extractivism – that is, a variation of extractivism, in which resource extraction is coupled with a more active role of the state for the distribution of revenues for development (Acosta, 2013; Svampa, 2008, 2017).[37]

[37] The term of neoextractivism has been criticised for homogenising approaches to extractivism: mainly the conditions set for foreign investment, labour rights and the degree of state participation (Ellner, 2021). In the case of Argentina, it is debated whether neoextractivism under the Kirchner government represents a departure from neoliberalism (as in other Latin American countries where scholars speak of post-neoliberalism, as states transition towards a more active role of the state) or not (see Gezmiş, 2018; Wylde, 2016).

The extractivist enthusiasm of Néstor Kirchner's government (2003-2007) was greatly influenced by his support for the mining industry during his period as Governor of the province of Santa Cruz (1991-2003) (Bonasso, 2011). Another significant factor was the economic crisis of 2001 – an economic period which was characterised by massive capital flight, soaring external debt, and increasing levels of unemployment (Smick, 2021; Svampa, 2008). While the crisis began as early as 1998-1999, it reached its peak in December 2001 when then-President Fernando de la Rúa imposed a series of restrictions on bank withdrawals (known as *'El corralito'*). This episode detonated a very strong wave of social protests (mentioned in the Introduction) and an institutional crisis, as the presidency changed hands five times in a two-week period.[38] As a result, Néstor Kirchner's government was based on, and informed by, a demand for a return to 'normalcy'. Supported by the reintroduction of export taxes in 2002, extractivism was embraced as the only means through which a 'normal country with hope and optimism' could be rebuilt (Svampa, 2017; Wylde, 2016).[39] Some degree of success was achieved: poverty and unemployment were reduced during his presidency (for example, poverty decreased from 52% in 2002 to 20.6% in 2007) (Svampa, 2017). But inequality worsened along with an increasing concentration of wealth – especially in foreign hands – from 2004 onwards (ibid.).[40]

Cristina Kirchner's two terms in office (2007-2011 and 2011-2015) continued in a similar vein, only her support for extractivism became even more explicit. This occurred in various ways: her veto of the Glacier National Law (*Ley Nacional de Glaciares, 26.418*) in 2008[41], her support for the mining industry in the conflict of 2012 between the residents of Famatina (in La Rioja) and the company Barrick Gold[42], and her partial re-nationalisation of YPF to exploit shale gas in Vaca Muerta (Bonasso, 2011; Christel & Torunczyk, 2017; Svampa, 2017). Moreover, during her tenure she sought to solidify the role of extractivism as an important source of state income, as she set out to increase export taxes for the agricultural and mining sector; succeeding in the case of the mining sector (dictating between 3% and 5%) and failing in that pertaining the agricultural industry (Svampa, 2017).[43]

[38] As President Fernando de la Rúa fled Argentina in December 2001, the presidency was assumed by Ramón Puerta. Two days later it was assumed by Adolfo Rodríguez Sasa, and 7 days later by Eduardo Camaño. Finally, Eduardo Duhalde assumed the presidency in January 2002 and served as Interim President until the 2003 elections.
[39] The quote belongs to his opening address to Congress on May 25, 2003.
[40] Around 61% of firms in the country are non-national (see Svampa, 2017, p.222).
[41] The law was presented again after the veto and finally approved in 2010. The law defines glacier and peri-glacier formations as public goods and seeks to preserve them as strategic water reservoirs.
[42] See Giarraca & Hadad (2009) for more details.
[43] The attempt to increase export taxes for the agricultural industry is known as Resolution 125 *(Resolución 125),* which prompted a strong wave of protests during 2008 (Rosati, 2008; Svampa, 2017).

Increasing poverty (escalating to 29% by the end of 2015) and inflation (reaching 38% in 2014-2015) during the government of Cristina Kirchner prompted a change of ruling party in the 2015 elections (Palmisano, Wahren, & Hadad, 2021; Svampa, 2017). In line with a conservative turn in other Latin American countries, the conservative government of Mauricio Macri (2015-2019) was elected in Argentina. His government reverted to a neoliberal agenda, seeking to promote the increase of foreign direct investment through the deregulation of the exchange market and the elimination of export taxes for most agricultural, mining, and oil products (except for soybean) in 2015, 2016 and 2017 respectively (Palmisano et al., 2021).[44] Once again, extractivism was centre stage, with new measures to expedite approvals for genetically modified crops, increased lobbying for international capital for fracking, and a Ministry of Energy and Mining headed by an ex-CEO of the oil company Shell (ibid.; Svampa, 2017).

In 2019, the Justicialista Party returned, with Alberto Fernández as President and Cristina Kirchner as Vice-President, with no reduction in the extractivist project. This government has continued to push for the expansion of industrial agriculture and livestock, oil, shale gas, and mining – this time as a means for the country to pay the soaring external debt inherited from the government of Macri (Anino, 2019; No a la Mina, 2021).

As the result of these last three decades, extractivism has taken a central place in Argentina's economy. As evident in the discussion so far, this has occurred mainly around four sectors: agriculture and livestock, oil, shale gas, and mining (Svampa & Viale, 2014). A key factor promoting extractivism in these sectors has been the historical absence of agrarian reform in the country and thus a strong concentration of land ownership in the hands of national and foreign elites, to the detriment of indigenous peoples in particular (Svampa, 2017).[45]

Agriculture and livestock – the most important of these four sectors in terms of national GDP (Gross Domestic Product) contribution and concentrated in the province of Buenos Aires and its neighbours – has increased in recent decades particularly due to the expansion of soybean and the introduction of its genetically-modified variety (Lapegna, 2016; Leguizamón, 2016; Vanoli, 2018). Oil, mostly concentrated in the provinces of Santa Cruz, Chubut, and Neuquén, has been central

[44] Taxes were reintroduced in 2018 through an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (Palmisano et al., 2021)

[45] As mentioned in the introductory chapter, there has been a lack of political will to enforce Law 26.160, passed in 2006, which prohibits the eviction of indigenous communities from their lands as well as mandates a territorial survey of indigenous lands which has not been carried out to this date (see Svampa, 2017).

to Argentina's development and national imaginary since the beginning of the 20th century, as well as to its state's machinery (Savino, 2016; Narahara, 2021). The nationalisation of oil supplies has been carried out twice (1933 and 2017) under the banner of national economic sovereignty (Svampa & Viale, 2014). Shale gas, too, has recently – for the same stated reasons – become a key industry of interest since the discovery of one of the biggest deposits of Latin America – that of *Vaca Muerta* in the province of Neuquén (ibid; Narahara, 2021). Finally, the mining industry has increased its presence in Argentina since the mid-1990s. The provinces of San Juan, Catamarca, and Santa Cruz house the emblematic projects of Veladero (see Antonelli, 2016; Giovannini et al., 2009; Godfrid & Damonte, 2020; Larreta et al., 2017), La Alumbrera (see Machado, 2009; Svampa, Sola Alvarez, & Bottaro, 2009; Lamalice & Klein, 2016) and Pascua-Lama (Bonasso, 2011; Urkidi, 2010).[46]

Mega-mining in Argentina

Although the role of mining in Argentina is not comparable to that of other Latin American countries, such as Chile, Bolivia, and Peru, the reforms pursued since Menem's government have greatly contributed to increasing the presence of mining at the national and provincial level.

Between 1993 and 1995, the government of Carlos Menem passed changes to the Mining Code and related legislation as the interest of mining companies shifted to countries in the Global South – a shift motivated by tightening environmental regulations in the Global North and a favourable international market for metals in the early 1990s (Dougherty, 2018; Svampa et al., 2009).[47] This was the first time the country's Mining Code was amended since its creation in 1887.

The Mining Investments Law (*Ley de Inversiones Mineras*, 24.196) was passed in 1993 to create a favourable climate for foreign investors. It granted fiscal stability to mining companies for 30 years after the presentation of a project's feasibility report, eliminated taxes on imported inputs, exempted company's actives from taxation and capped the maximum provincial tax rate at 3%. The Mining Reorganization Law (*Ley de Reordenamiento Minero*, 24.224), the Mining Actualization Law (*Ley de Actualización Minera*, 24.498), the Federal Mining Accord (*Acuerdo Ley Federal Minera,*

[46] This is a cross-border mining project involving both Chile and Argentina. Its exploitation is facilitated by the Mining Integration and Complementation Treaty (*Tratado de Integración y Complementación Minera* in Spanish), approved in 1996 and in vigour since 2000. The Treaty established an independent territorial unit independent from national sovereignties, and with extraordinary fiscal regulations (see Caffi, 2001; Svampa & Viale, 2014).

[47] Precious metals were during the 1990s at all-times low prices. However, these began to quickly recover from 2002, reaching its highest point in the decade by 2005 (Dougherty, 2018).

24.228) and the Finance and VAT Devolution Law (*Ley de Financiamiento y Devolución Anticipada del Impuesto al Valor Agregado*, Ley 24.402), also set no obligation for mining companies to exchange foreign currency in the country, a deduction of 100% of the investment amount on utility taxes, no limits on the territorial extension of mining concessions, and longer concession periods (Straccia, 2006; Svampa, Bottaro, et al., 2009; Svampa & Viale, 2014; Walter, 2008).

During the Kirchner governments, mining was explicitly supported by the national government – what *asambleas* against mining refer to as mining becoming *política de estado* (state policy). For example, as already mentioned, Cristina Kirchner was closely associated to the mining company Barrick Gold, for which she actively lobbied on various occasions (Bonasso, 2011). During the Kirchner period, the total export of gold went up from 0.35% to 2.8% between 2000 and 2010, the contribution of mining to the GDP overall doubled from 7 billion USD to 15.2 billion USD between 2003 and 2013, and the mining portfolio in the country expanded during their governments from gold, silver, and copper to also include lithium, molybdenum, and uranium (Saguier & Peinado, 2014; Svampa & Viale, 2014; Torunczyk, 2016).

The following two governments have continued to support mining. The government of Mauricio Macri lobbied (though unsuccessfully) to amend the Glacier National Law, and began to work towards the creation of the *Nuevo Acuerdo Minero Federal* (New Federal Mining Accord). During his government, moreover, the mining of gold and lithium greatly expanded (Murguía & Godfrid, 2021; Palmisano et al., 2021).[48] Likewise, the current government of Alberto Fernández has supported provincial governments in their efforts to reform current provincial legislation that prohibits or limits mining activities (such as in Mendoza and Chubut), pre-emptively assuring international companies that these were going to be successfully modified (No a la Mina, 2021).[49]

A brief history of Patagonia

The history of Patagonia, like elsewhere in Latin America, has been greatly shaped by how the land and natural resources therein have been imagined. However, while resource exploitation in other parts of Argentina can be traced back to Spanish colonial occupation, in the case of Patagonia it

[48] Gold mining intensified with the approval of two key projects, Lindero in the province of Salta and Chinchillas in Jujuy – projects which emerged in light of the exhaustion of the mining projects of *Bajo la Alumbrera* and *Cerro Vanguardia (*Palmisano et al., 2021; Murguía & Godfrid, 2019).

[49] This was also the case for the province of Mendoza in 2019. However, after Law 7.772 was repealed by the provincial government popular unrest forced the government to reinstate the legislation (see Merlinsky & Wagner, 2019). For a more detail history of the conflict in Mendoza, see Wagner (2019, 2014).

can be traced, rather, to the post-independence period and the formation of the Chilean and Argentinian nation-states. During the Spanish colonial period, Patagonia remained outside of the control of colonial authorities and under the authority of Mapuche-Tehuelche peoples. This is not to say the region did not experience any changes due to Spanish presence. Merchants, traders, and missionaries were long present in the territory, and established small settlements and trading networks with the Mapuche-Tehuelche (Mandrini, 2006). However, as the Spanish Viceroyalties revolved around trade between the colonies and Spain, attention was set on Buenos Aires as a key trade port and little interest existed in expanding territorial control southwards (Bandieri, 2014; Rasmussen, 2021).

This changed, however, in the post-independence period as nation-states began to form and as territorial disputes arose between them (Mandrini, 2006; Bandieri, 2014). Consolidating control over the country's so-called interior thus became key for the emerging Argentinian nation-state. Under a dichotomous imaginary of land that divided the port of Buenos Aires from all territory beyond close proximity to the port, the 'interior' was conceived as an empty and desert-like land that needed to be occupied and put to productive use. In other words, it was conceived of as a frontier that needed to be claimed and subsumed under a national order. Populating the interior thus became central to the formation of the Argentinian nation-state; best exemplified in the political thought of Juan Bautista Alberdi and the idea that 'to govern is to populate' (*gobernar es poblar* in Spanish) (Bandieri, 2014; Brienza, 2019).

Figure 10. Map of Argentinian Patagonia

Source: Original from Wikipedia, modified by the author.

As is common in frontiers, the designation of much of the country as the 'interior' and the political project of populating it, strongly relied on a racial grammar (Briones, 2005b; Rasmussen & Figueroa, 2022). Thinking of these territories as empty and desert-like not only negated the ancestral presence of numerous indigenous communities in these lands, as well as their economies and ways of life, but also sanctioned their eradication. As such, the port of Buenos Aires was equated with civilisation, progress, and whiteness, while the interior was conceived of as indigenous and backwards. Hence, the process of populating the interior was framed as the expansion of the former over the latter, of progress over backwardness – an enterprise in which white European migration was central. As Alberdi elaborated, to populate was not merely to have human presence in a given territory but 'to populate is to educate, to improve, civilize' (cited in Taylor, 2018).

During the 19th century, Argentina's Patagonia was the epitome of the frontier. Tales emerged during the colonial period of the region as a space of mythical nature and precious metals, and during the postcolonial period, tales of legendary criminals and exiles also became prominent (Galafassi, 2011; Gatica et al., 2005; Gavirati, 2006; Nouzeilles, 2007). For this region, then organised as a National Territory, the state precept of populating its imagined vast desertic land was carried out through white European migration, integration into national and international markets, and finally through military campaigns.[50]

Since the mid 19th century, European migration has been encouraged by the national government. White settlers were considered to be the ideal subjects to help populate the country (Galafassi, 2019), embodying virtues of hard work and high moral standing (Taylor, 2018) and thus framed as able to "rationally exploit the land" (Ramussen & Figueroa, 2022, p.13) – unlike indigenous peoples. The settlement of different European migrant communities was encouraged by the Argentinian state throughout Patagonia through a variety of schemes enabled by Law 817 (1875) which facilitated their access to land (ibid., Rasmussen, 2021).

As these schemes tied property rights to the transformation of land, the settlement of migrant communities was key for the simultaneous occupation of Patagonia through resource exploitation – in this case, through an emerging export-oriented agriculture and livestock sector. Exploitation of Patagonian land through the production of cereals, wool, and other related goods was thus central to the integration of the region into national and international markets. It oriented the

[50] *Territorio Nacional de la Patagonia* in Spanish.

regional economy towards the port of Buenos Aires, rather than across the newly formed national border between Chile and Argentina, supporting the transformation of the region into national territory (ibid., Ramos & Delrio, 2005; Rasmussen & Figueroa, 2022; Pérez Álvarez, 2016).[51]

In the area that would later become Chubut, Welsh immigration was explicitly motivated as a means of improving agriculture and livestock rearing (Rasmussen, 2021; Taylor, 2017). The first settlers arrived in 1865 to Puerto Madryn, and in the early 1870s began to move eastwards looking for precious metals, incentivised by tales of gold, establishing settlements in the valley and cordillera.[52] The colony consolidated when a second immigration wave arrived in 1874, a year after which a national decree was passed doubling the land given to Welsh settlements (Galafassi, 2019; Gavirati, 2006; Trotter, 2020).

The settlers initially co-inhabited the region alongside Mapuche-Tehuelche peoples, who retained control and authority over the land. This indigenous political control of the region not only represented a barrier to the state project of occupying Patagonia through migration and land exploitation, but also represented part of that project's motivation.

From 1878 to 1885, Argentina waged the *Conquista del Desierto* (Conquest of the Desert), a military campaign led by General Julio Roca, to gain control over the Argentinian Patagonia. The military campaigned decimated the Mapuche-Tehuelche population and led to the dispossession of their lands. Surviving members were sold into slavery in Buenos Aires, placed in labour camps elsewhere in the region, or relocated to indigenous reservations or infertile lands throughout Patagonia (Briones & Delrio, 2007; Gavirati, 2006; Ramos & Delirio, 2005). The Argentinian state carried out a systematic effort to 'de-indigenise' the region, aiming to (re)produce and consolidate the image of Patagonia as a desertic frontier in need of European settlers (Briones, 2007).

In practical terms, the military campaign allowed the state to assume de facto ownership over Patagonian land transferred to state ownership a few years prior through Law 817 and to subsequently re-distribute it. Land was given to military elites in exchange for their services, to

[51] Until this moment, the region had been characterised by a vibrant trade network, as Mapuche-Tehuelche people retained control of the territory which eventually became the Chilean and Argentinian Patagonia (see Mandrini, 2006). Instrumental in this process was also the creation of infrastructure during the first half of the 20th century, especially the railway (see ibid.; Galafassi, 2019).

[52] Of the settlements in the cordillera, one of the most important is that of the colony *16 de octubre,* what today constitutes today Trevelin. Now located near the town Esquel, it was founded in 1988 (Gavirati, 2006; Oriola, 2014).

settler communities through the expansion of their land allocations, as well as sold to foreign entities (Bandieri, 2014; Rasmussen & Figueroa, 2022), and Mapuche-Tehuelche peoples were subsequently framed as intruders or invaders in the region to justify their land dispossession (Ramos & Delrio, 2005). As a result, the military campaign was crucial to setting in motion the land concentration that continues to characterise the region to this day (Bandieri, 2005, 2014; Blanco & Mendes, 2006; Galafassi, 2008).

Also instrumental has been the negation of a complex indigenous history in those lands. The historical accounts endorsed and espoused by the state describe the Tehuelche and Mapuche peoples as separate discrete entities before the mid-19thcentury, framing Tehuelche people as the original inhabitants of Argentinian Patagonia and Mapuche people of Chilean Patagonia. Their version of history explains the presence of Mapuche-Tehuelche people in the Argentinian Patagonia as the result of the violent conquest of the Tehuelche by the Mapuche in the mid-19th century. By writing then-non-existent borders into this history, the state's narrative both frames the Tehuelche people as a thing of the past, while framing the Mapuche people as invaders from across the cordillera. Their narrative implied that the surviving indigenous peoples were not the original inhabitants of the land, but rather "the last immigrants to arrive to the province" (Ramos & Delrio, 2005, p.83) and of Chilean, rather than Argentinian origin – and thus had no claims to Argentinian land (ibid.).

The formation of the Argentinian nation-state thus involved simultaneous processes of emptying Patagonia through the decimation of indigenous peoples and its occupation through settler migration and export-oriented agriculture and livestock-rearing (Gavirati, 2006). In other words, the Argentinian Patagonia underwent a process of whitening (Rasmussen, 2021) that has been instrumental to the national myth that frames the country as 'descending from ships' ((Briones, 2005a). It has also been constitutive of the formation of a settler state where "original inhabitants have a role prior to the nation-state but none in the present tense" (Rasmussen, 2021, p.3 citing Povinelli, 2011).

The successful territorial integration of Patagonia into the Argentinian nation-state did not, however, signify the end of the imaginary of Patagonia as a vast empty land ready to be occupied. Rather, despite the implicit contradictions, the region continues to be framed both as desertic and inclement land, and at the same time as one of pristine nature and aesthetic landscapes. As a result, throughout the 20th century, this imaginary motivated new patterns of national and international

migration and guided patterns of resource exploitation and extraction through agriculture and livestock, energy, and mining, while simultaneously driving the exploitation of natural landscapes through tourism and real estate (Galafassi, 2011, 2019).[53]

Mapping extractivism and resistance in Chubut

Chubut was created in 1955 with the political reorganization of the National Territory of Patagonia into provinces. Since then, frontier imaginaries have continued to shape its development trajectory. Not only has the imaginary of Patagonia as a vast empty land to be occupied persisted, but this same imaginary has been replicated at a provincial level – separating the coastal and Andean region from the plateau.

The development trajectory of the province since the mid-19th century has been mainly shaped by the replacement of agriculture and livestock-rearing with four industries (most of them extractive): oil, aluminium processing, forestry, and mining.[54]

Oil extraction in Chubut dates back to the early 20th century when the first deposit was found in 1907. Extraction intensified, however, from the 1950s onwards with the discovery of Cerro Dragón, motivating the expansion of the then-settlement of Comodoro Rivadavia on the province's coast. Today, the city of Comodoro Rivadavia is one of the most important oil enclaves of the country, with Cerro Dragón yielding approximately 20% of the country's production (Blanco and Mendes, 2006; Bandieri, 2014; Svampa & Viale, 2014).

The economic model that promoted industrialisation, in place since the late 1950s with the decree of Law 10.991, motivated in Chubut in the 1970s the establishment of an aluminium processing plant in the city of Puerto Madryn (still operating to this day).[55] Accompanying the development of this industry was the hydroelectric project of the Futaleufú dam in the province's cordillera (30 km away from the city of Esquel and 650 km away from Puerto Madryn) in order to provide

[53] The imaginary of Patagonia as a region of pristine nature was also key to the consolidation of the region as Argentinian territory during the first half of the 20th century and its subsequent whitening. In these processes the creation of National Parks played a central role (see Rasmussen, 2021; Rasmussen and Figueroa, 2022; Rasmussen and Lund, 2021).

[54] Forestry was not a new form of resource exploitation in the region, as it was already present to some degree throughout the 19th century, expanding during the first half of the 20th century (see Galafassi, 2019).

[55] This was guided by developmentalist economic theory and its concomitant import-substitution strategies. Arturo Frondizi was the main proponent in Argentina (see Romero, 2012). Developmentalism in Chubut also supported the emergence of a textile industry in Chubut, most of which was located in Trelew. However, this industry was short-lived (Mora Castillo & Alvarez Manriquez, 2021).

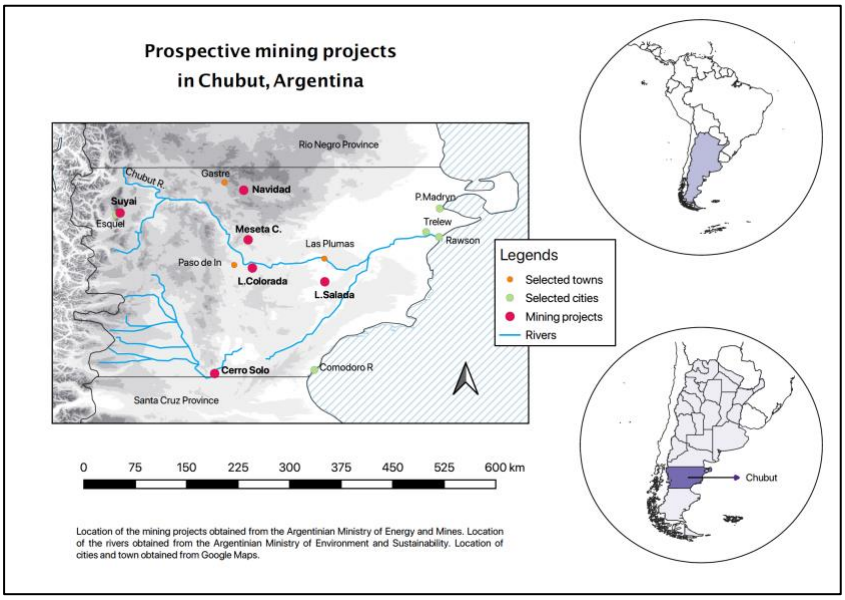
electricity to the company (Blanco & Mendes, 2006; Oriola, 2016). Also in the 1970s, the forestry industry expanded in the cordillera to exploit existing forests of cypresses and lenga beech, and the newly introduced pine, poplar, and eucalyptus trees (Blanco 2005; Blanco & Mendes, 2006).

While mining in Chubut can be traced to the mid 20th century, with the discovery and exploitation of the underground gold mine known as Huemules (see Herrero, 1986), it was in the later 1990s that an interest in mining intensified there (due to the dynamics discussed in the previous section).[56] Here, mirroring the national discourse on extractivism, mining has repeatedly been framed as a way out of economic crisis – first, from the effect of the 2001 crisis on employment and currently, from the provincial economic crisis.[57]

As discussed in the Introduction, the project Cordón Esquel*,* developed from 1997 to 2003, was the first attempt to introduce open pit mining in the province of Chubut. As with ALUAR, the development of this project was coupled with a hydroelectrical dam (known as La Elena) as the project's main source of energy. In 2003, as a result of the movement's actions, Law 5.001/XVII-Nº 68 was passed prohibiting open pit mining with the use of cyanide in Chubut. However, while this law prohibits the exploitation of minerals through cyanidation, it does not prohibit mining exploration works, nor other forms of mining and ore leaching. Moreover, it created the legal notion of 'sacrifice zones' – areas where environmental regulations do not apply. As a result, not only do pressures to install mining in the province remain, but they have expanded beyond gold, to silver and uranium – metals which have taken the interest of the mining sector from the cordillera to Chubut's plateau (see Figure 11). It is here where project Navidad – one of the vastest silver deposits worldwide yet to be exploited – is located and where the government has insisted on creating a 'sacrifice zone'.[58]

[56] In the 1970s, the Angela mining project was also exploited for the extraction of lead and zinc (Patagonia Gold, n.d.).
[57] Due to poor, and potentially corrupt, financial management of provincial governments since that of Mario Das Neves (2003-2011) and especially during the current government of Mariano Arcioni (2017), the province has defaulted on debt of 70 million USD. As a result, for over two years now, the government has been delaying the payment of 60,000 current public employees, as well as of retired state workers. Payments were first delayed in March 2018. Moreover, according to information from the newspaper *El País*, the number of people receiving delayed payments accounts for 10% of Chubut's population. The delay has usually been of two months, reaching three in the period May-November 2020.
[58] The project, located near the vicinity of Gastre, comprises 8 mineral deposits in an area of 20 km^2 and would be expected to process around 15,000 tonnes of rock per day. Controversies have surrounded the project since it was owned by Aquiline Resources, as the company transferred a Mapuche-Tehuelche cemetery out of the area seeking to invalidate the claim of this region as indigenous territory and thus subject to ILO Convention 169 (EJ Atlas, 2020; PanAmerican Silver, 2010). This project has raised concern among Chubut's population because of its potential depletion of underground water sources – namely the Sacanana Basin.

Figure 11. Prospective mining projects in Chubut by October 2022



Source: Made by author.

Shaping the development trajectory of Chubut has been the continuation of the imaginary of Patagonia as a frontier whose natural resources need to be exploited – first agriculture and livestock, oil, and wood, and more recently mining. As in the rest of Patagonia, this imaginary has had dual dimensions: land has been conceived as vast desertic and barren, as well as a landscape of pristine nature and beauty. In Chubut, these dimensions coexist, in part, through their spatial organization.[59] While the imaginary of Patagonia as a barren desert encompasses all of the province in a national imaginary (motivating resource exploitation in the coast, cordillera, and plateau), at a provincial level the imaginary of the desert is assigned more specifically to the plateau and that of a landscape of pristine nature to the cordillera and more recently the coast (in the case of Chubut).

The Patagonian cordillera has historically been a leisure ground for Argentinian elites, which has led to the creation of various National Parks, the aestheticization of the area in resemblance of European mountainous landscapes and more recently to increasing international tourism (Mendoza, 2018; Mendoza et al. 2017; Rasmussen, 2021).[60] While this is a process that has more

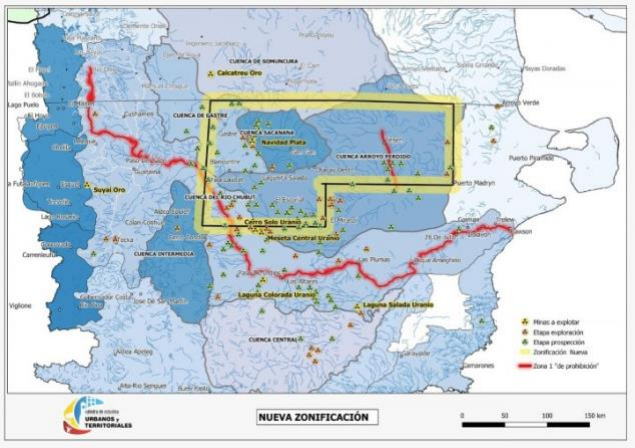
[59] Rasmussen and Lund (2021) have argued that these two imaginaries of Patagonia map onto the cordillera and coast, as the cordillera's nature has been turned into landscape for conservation and tourism, while the coast's has been turned into resources to be exploited for energy production. However, the province of Chubut shows a more complicated geography, as both imaginaries coexist in the cordillera and coast.

[60] This has supported the continuation of processes of Mapuche-Tehuelche displacement (as in the case of the Alerces National Park in Chubut), land privatisation, and foreignization of land ownership (Svampa & Viale, 2014). This process is increasingly referred to, by Mapuche-Tehuelche communities and others, as a Second Conquest of the Desert (Svampa & Viale, 2014; Rasmussen, 2021). In Rio Negro, the creation of the National Park of Nahuel Huapi

notoriously taken place in the provinces of Río Negro and Neuquén, and the towns of San Carlos de Bariloche and Villa La Angostura, it has also shaped Chubut's cordillera – as evident in the creation of the Alerces National Park (Aaegesen, 2000). The imaginary of Patagonia as a region of pristine nature has, moreover, been more recently extended to Chubut's coastal region in light of conservation efforts to preserve land and marine fauna and the transformation of Puerto Madryn and the nearby Puerto Pirámides as a hotspot for national and international tourism for whale and penguin watching.

How the imaginary of Patagonia as a vast barren desert is strongest in the province's plateau (as here it does not coexist alongside that of pristine nature) is evident in the plans in the 1980s to install a nuclear waste deposit in the town of Gastre for the residues produced by the National Commission for Nuclear Energy and imported nuclear waste (Rodríguez Pardo, 2006; see Figure 11) and more recently in the attempts to designate this area as a 'sacrifice zone' for mining (see Introduction, see Figure 12).[61]

Figure 12. Map of the proposed sacrifice zone as per the Zoning Project 2020



Source: Cátedra Libre de Estudios Urbanos y Territoriales (UNP-Trelew).

A frontier imaginary has therefore shaped Chubut's development trajectory at two levels: by being part of what has been construed as the country's interior, and by replicating this same logic at the provincial level, designating the region's plateau as the 'interior within the interior'. This imaginary

also entailed the displacement of Mapuche-Tehuelche communities and is currently under dispute between indigenous groups and the provincial and national government (see Rasmussen, 2021).

[61] This was triggered by the development vision of the dictatorship regime and the central role of nuclear energy therein as the regime envisioned the construction of six facilities throughout the country by the end of the 1990s (Reboratti, 2012).

of the plateau relies on the area's more arid ecosystem and landscape vis-à-vis the cordillera, as well as a series of (racialised) state policies.

The industrialisation pursed by the Argentinian state in the mid 19th century was characterised by a policy that relied on the creation of *polos de 101utogestio* (development poles) under the assumption that concentrating industries in particular locations would prompt development in the surrounding areas (Gatica et al., 2005). Mainly the coast, but also the cordillera, were Chubut's designated development poles (Galafassi, 2012). As a result, the state has actively neglected the province's plateau, framing it as an area that is less densely populated, and subsequently reproducing – through precarity – the imaginary of the region as a frontier (Rasmussen, 2021). The abandonment by the state of the plateau, moreover, has been motivated by the continuation of a racialised idea of the nation-state, as it has actively created a precarious condition for Mapuche-Tehuelche peoples, who represent the majority of the inhabitants of the plateau. This is perhaps best exemplified by the lack of electrical and water infrastructure in the plateau. For example, while the electricity produced at the Futaleufú dam is transported across the province from the cordillera to the coast, it does not supply power any town located in the plateau where all population centres remain dependent on fossil fuel generators (Ordoñez, 2022; Oriola, 2016).

The presence of a frontier imaginary at these two levels (framing the province as part of the interior of the country, and the plateau as the province's own interior) has had important consequences for migration patterns to and within the province. On the national level, especially since the late 20th century, it has motivated migration patterns – mainly from Buenos Aires or other main cities – to Chubut, in response to work opportunities or a desire for a less urban life (Blanco, 2015; Blanco & Mendes, 2006; Galafassi, 2011). This is the case, for example, of various members of Esquel's No a la Mina, who moved from Buenos Aires or elsewhere to the province in response to job openings or a desire to be closer to nature (discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight). On the other hand, the creation of development poles within Chubut motivated increasing migration from the plateau outwards, either towards the cordillera or the coast. It has for the most part pushed Mapuche-Tehuelche people, who since the end of the 19th century have had weak legal claims over their lands, to marginal urban areas (Mora Castillo & Alvarez Manriquez, 2021; Rasmussen & Figueroa, 2022; Rasmussen, 2021).

These frontier imaginaries have also had important socio-political consequences as resistance has sparked across the province (as elsewhere in Patagonia) against the racialised territorial governance and the subsequent development trajectory it has sanctioned.

Mapuche-Tehuelche peoples have a long history of resistance in Patagonia since the Conquest of the Desert and the subsequent consolidation of Argentinian control over these territories. However, their struggles have gained traction since the late 1980s and 1990s in light of an emerging international consensus on the rights of indigenous peoples – crystallised in the creation of ILO Convention 196 in 1989 – and a regional Latin American context of increased indigenous mobilisations (Briones, 2005b).[62] In Chubut – a province that has negated a history of violence against Mapuche-Tehuelche people through its foundation myth of interracial harmony between Welsh settlers and Mapuche-Tehuelche people – these indigenous communities began to organise for the recuperation of their ancestral lands throughout this decade. The most emblematic cases have been that of Huisca Antieco (since 1993), Vuelta del Río (since 1994), Füta Huao (since 1998), Pillán Mahuiza (since 1999) and Curiñanco (since 2002) (Ramos & Delrio, 2005).[63] While for the most part, Mapuche-Tehuelche struggles have been characterised by their rhizomatic character, from 1992 to the early 2000s, the Mapuche organisation led by Mauro and Moira Millán of *11 de Octubre* (involved in the first stage of Esquel's No a la Mina) was an important effort to create a space of coordination between different communities (ibid.). More recently, Moira and Evis Millán, along with other key female indigenous activists, have created the national network of indigenous women named *Movimiento de Mujeres y Diversidades Indígenas por el Buen Vivir*, bringing together Mapuche-Tehuelche women across Chubut (see Mendoza, 2019).

Mapuche-Tehuelche demands in Chubut have in general centred on the restitution of their ancestral land, their right to cultural development, and the recognition of indigenous communities as Nations and thus a demand for some political autonomy within their territories (Galafassi, 2012). Developed vis-à-vis changing legislation that recognised the rights of indigenous peoples in

[62] For example, the 1980 and 1990s saw the creation of various indigenous organisations in Guatemala and the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Rigoberta Menchú a Guatemalan K'iche' indigenous activist; the emergence of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Mexico; the consolidation of two key regional indigenous federations in Ecuador (Ecuador Runacanapac Riccharimui or ECUARUNARI and the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon or CONFENAIE); and the expansion of indigenous organising in Bolivia from the Andean region towards the Bolivian Amazonia and the creation of the regional Indigenous Confederation of the East, Chaco and Amazon or CIDOB (see Colloredo-Mansfeld, 2009; Hayden, 2002; Menchú & Burgos-Debray, 2009; Postero, 2007, 2017; Yashar, 2005) . This is not to say, however, that indigenous mobilisations occurred in all countries of the region. Peru, for example, was not part of this trend (see Yashar, 2005).

[63] The provinces of Neuquén and Río Negro have also seen increased Mapuche-Tehuelche activism, the organisation of a series of land recuperations and resistance against extractive projects (see for example, Narahara, 2021, 2022).

Chubut (such as Provincial Law 3657 and Article 34 of Chubut's Constitution), Mapuche-Tehuelche struggles have thus exposed the systemic lack of implementation and/or enforcement this new legal framework has received, and thus the persistence of the historical neglect and erasure of indigenous peoples in the province and country (Ramos & Delrio, 2005.)

Chubut is also a province with a history of socio-environmental mobilisations since the 1980s – movements that have been composed of both Mapuche-Tehuelche and non-indigenous members according to existing literature. The conflict in Gastre in the 1980s and 1990s is considered the first socio-environmental movement in the province, and thus an important antecedent of Esquel's No a la Mina (Dichdji, 2020; Mora Castillo & Alvarez Manriquez, 2021; Torunczyk, 2015).[64]

In 1986, the project for a nuclear waste deposit in the northeast of the province, for waste both produced in Argentina (by the centrals of Atucha and Río Tercero) as well as imported from France, sparked a movement of resistance. Inhabitants of the city of Gastre, the town which would be in close proximity to the so-called nuclear cemetery, opposed the project in light of its environmental and health hazards. The movement, consolidated under the name of the *Movimiento Antinuclear de Chubut in Spanish* (Antinuclear Movement of Chubut or MACH), reached its height in 1996 when a mass protest occurred in Gastre with the participation of people from across the province who travelled to Gastre to signal their opposition to the project (Blanco & Mendes, 2006). The movement was not only successful in halting the project, but also in prompting the inclusion in the National and Provincial Constitution of a prohibition against importing radioactive residues into Argentina (Dichdji, 2018; Rodríguez Pardo, 2006).

However, this was neither the only nor the first socio-environmental conflict in the province.[65] In 1981, prospective studies for the construction of the hydroelectric project Epuyén-Puelo prompted the mobilisation of the community of Epuyén under the *Comisión de Defensa del Valle de Epuyén* (Commission for the Defence of the Valley of Epuyén). The formation of the Commission was not only motivated by the fact that the project involved the flooding of the area where the town is located, and thus the displacement of around 50 families, but also by the experience in the previous decade with the Futaleufú dam. Similarly, the project also involved the flooding of vast

[64] The framing of Gastre as a direct antecedent of Esquel's No a la Mina is also based on the later participation of key actors in this conflict – such as Javier Rodríguez Pardo – in Esquel's No a la Mina (see Rodríguez Pardo, 2009).
[65] Blanco (2015) argues socio-environmental mobilisation can be traced back to the conflict in Epuyén rather than Gastre. As such, he argues Epuyén is also an important antecedent of Esquel´s No a la Mina. Not only is Epuyén in closer proximity to Esquel (125 km rather than 258), but as in Gastre key actors at Epuyén participated in Esquel's No a la Mina.

areas and displacement of human settlements, and while it promised to boost the region's development, it did not provide electricity for the region (except Aluar as previously discussed) and greatly contributed to the creation of marginal settlements in nearby urban centres. The movement successfully stopped the construction of the dam a few years later and motivated the formation of a new local political party (Blanco 2015; Oriola, 2016).[66]

Moreover, Mapuche-Tehuelche peoples have also been at the centre of other environmental conflicts. This is the case, for example, of the community of Pillán Mahuiza who since 2002 have opposed the hydroelectric dam of La Elena, which would accompany the mining project at Esquel (see Introduction). Likewise, the Mapuche-Tehuelche community of Nahuel Pan, located in close proximity to the city of Esquel, has been contesting since 2009 the presence of a waste dump in the community's surroundings – building on a history of land dispossession and posing health and environmental hazards for the community (see Claro, 2022).

In short, the history of Chubut (like the rest of Patagonia) has been shaped by frontier imaginaries. However, not only has the presence of frontier imaginaries shaped the history of mining in the region, but it has also shaped the opposition to it, as both Mapuche-Tehuelche peoples and non-indigenous communities have organised against the ways in which frontier imaginaries have sanctioned, or are attempting to produce, new land claims and uses of nature.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the history of extractivism in Argentina and the regional history onto which it has mapped in Chubut. In doing so, it has showed: 1. How extractivism at the national level has been a constant, greatly supported through a repeating narrative of economic crisis (a trend that is also reproduced at the provincial level as discussed in Chapter Seven); 2. How in Chubut the current national landscape of extractivism maps onto a history shaped by frontier imaginaries and thus "recursive movements of resource extraction [linked to]… imaginations of bounties awaiting discovery and productive use" (Rasmussen and Lund, 2021; p.80); and 3. How extractivism has

[66] In 1992, a project to develop the area around Lago Puelo and promote the economic integration between Argentina and Chile also sparked resistance. The project, titled *Uso multiple de los recursos naturales de la Cuenca Binacional del Puelo* (Multiple use of natural resources in the binational area of Puelo) encompassed around 900 thousand hectares. The project involved, among other things, the creation of a deep-water port to facilitate maritime trade into the Pacific Ocean directly from Argentina. There are little details, however, of the movement against the project, but it is mentioned in Blanco and Mendes (2006) and Sánchez Reiche & Nebbia (2004).

been crucial to, and relied, on a process of space whitening that has, and continues, to cause injustice against Mapuche-Tehuelche communities.

This is the history into which Esquel's No a la Mina is inserted; a history characterised by settler colonialism, violence, and injustice towards Mapuche-Tehuelche peoples, and, since the end of the 20th century, increasing extractivism and indigenous and socio-environmental struggles. As the following chapters show, the process of commoning created by Esquel's No a la Mina responds to this context – challenging the workings of the state and private sector – and has also had to grapple with tensions that arise from this regional history – namely, Mapuche-Tehuelche struggles for recognition and land.

Chapter Five

Mobilising as *vecinos*: towards a commoning of place and a collective form of citizenship

In February 2020, I joined the women who had volunteered to attend the upcoming meeting of the UACCH in El Maitén as representatives of Esquel's No a la Mina. As the meeting began, as I have briefly recounted in Chapter 3, we were all asked to introduce ourselves and, after my introduction, an intense discussion erupted on whether I could stay in the meeting or not. *Vecinas* from Esquel's No a la Mina argued that I was a *vecina* (neighbour) like them, that I had been residing in Esquel and participating in the assembly for some weeks by then, and that as a result I could stay in the meeting. After a long discussion, it was as a *vecina*, not as a researcher, that I was allowed to stay. This episode was emotionally intense for me since I thought members of the movement had already checked with other assemblies about my presence in the meeting, and the discussion, which felt extremely personal at times, caught me by surprise. The severe discomfort I felt during this discussion – and the embarrassment given that I could not hold the tears this provoked – led me to replay it over and over again in my mind in the days that followed, and it was in doing so that I came to realise the importance that mobilising as a *vecino* has for Esquel's No a la Mina and became interested in what its politics are.

This chapter examines the practice of mobilising as *vecinos* in Esquel's No a la Mina: how the practice has motivated the commoning of place, how this process is supporting and shaping a process of community-making, how it is producing changes in the way members of the movement engage with the state and how it has reproduced exclusions on the basis of social difference.

It argues that mobilising as *vecinos* motivates the commoning of place through the creation of new arrangements of responsibility, supporting and shaping a process of community-making. By building a community where people relate to each other in a horizontal manner, and which offers containment through a sense of proximity, solidarity, and care, participating as *vecinos* has also supported the creation of a strong collective political subjectivity. As a result, to mobilise as a *vecino* is to practice an autonomous collective citizenship that transforms historical practices of collective citizenship in Argentina, as well as contests the individualised model of citizenship that would permit the imposition of extractivism in the province.

However, while this process of commoning place has supported a process of community-making and a collective practice of citizenship, it has also entailed exclusions. As mobilising as *vecinos* has been used as a political identity through which political unity can be built following a politics of conviviality – where place functions as the uniting and equalising factor among *vecinos* and which asks of members to suspend social difference momentarily – it relies on a depoliticised individual sense of self that conditions participation on people's ability to divest themselves of other collective interests. As such, mobilising as *vecinos* runs the risk of creating a homogenous community that reproduces existing patterns of exclusion along axes of social difference within the movement – namely, of Mapuche-Tehuelche people, as well as of women's labour in the movement.

More specifically, in carrying out this analysis, the chapter contributes to the three existing lines of work. First, it adds to the subset of work on political subjectivity within literature on commoning – joining Nightingale's (2019) study, which is the only prior work in this area. Second, it makes a contribution to the literature on conviviality and commoning (Rutt, 2020), exploring how politics of conviviality can both sustain the process and politics of commoning, whilst also causing tensions therein. Third, it extends the literature on conviviality more generally (Alhourani, 2017; Erickson, 2011; Karner & Parker, 2011; Nowicka, 2020; Nowicka & Vertovec, 2014) by showing how it is a form of politics also pursued by social movements for the purpose of building political unity.

To develop this argument, the first section traces the history of political mobilisation under an identity of *vecinos* in Argentina and shows how it is linked to the history of the *asambleas barriales* of 2001. The chapter then discusses the meanings that members of the Assembly attribute to mobilising as a *vecino*, followed by a discussion of how these meanings speak of the commoning of place and community-making, and how this in turn is re-shaping the way members of the movement practice citizenship. The last section builds on the theorization of political subjectivity proposed by Lazar (2008, 2012), as composed by individual and collective senses of self (which acquire specific meaning and configurations at different times and places). This enables an unpacking of the tensions that underlie the process of commoning and of community-making at play.

Participating as *vecinos*: a history in Argentina

The most recent and direct precedent for political participation as a *vecino* can be traced back to the neighbour assemblies – or *asambleas barriales* – that emerged in Buenos Aires and elsewhere in the country during the economic crisis of 2001 (see Chapter Four).[67] The protests of December 2001 motivated people to meet with others in their neighbourhood to discuss the recent political events, as well as to self-organise to attend to people's economic needs (Di Marco et al. 2003; Ouviña, 2002a, 2002b; Sitrin, 2006, 2012).

However, political participation as a *vecino* can be traced further back to two institutions in Argentinian history: the *cabildo abierto* and the *juntas vecinales.* In the 19th century, in a colonial context, *vecinos* (meaning people not in public office) participated in *cabildos abiertos* or deliberative spaces to address matters of general interest. *Vecinos* in the *cabildo abierto*, though, could only be Spanish or criollo, upper class, and male (Tapia, 1969).[68] In the early-mid 20th century, the *Sociedades de Fomento*, which would later develop into *juntas vecinales* or *consejos comunitarios,* formed in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires.[69] Here, *vecinos* – now urban residents of a particular area, mostly male and working class – organised to channel, in the context of urban growth, communal petitions to the state for services and infrastructure, such as electricity, water, paved roads, and public transport (Ouviña, 2002a, 2002b), generating a political practice called *vecinalismo* (see Basconzuelo, 2007; Basconzuelo & Rolfi, 2014; Binotti, 2015).

Thus, when in the early 21st century, people began to participate in the *asambleas barriales* as *vecinos*, it was a form of political participation that built on prior forms of political engagement. As in previous institutions, participating as *vecinos* in the *asambleas barriales* carried the connotation that members were those not in public office but rather 'common' or 'ordinary' people, and (in most cases) urban residents of a particular area. As such, the meaning of *vecino* has remained somewhat constant in Argentinian history as an identity that speaks of one's location in relation to the state,

[67] There is disagreement about which was the first assembly to come together after the events of December, whether this was in the barrio Paternal on the 19th of December or in the barrio of Floresta at the end of December 2001. Moreover, there is record of two neighbourhood organisations prior to the December events, that of barrio Liniers and of San Cristóbal (Di Marco, et al., 2003; Ouviña, 2002a, 2002b; Palomino, 2005).

[68] In the case of Argentina, as in other Latin American countries, the *cabildo abierto* was a key institution for the country's independence. Of special importance is the one that formed on May 22nd 1810 in Buenos Aires to decide the continuity or resignation of the Spanish Viceroy of Rio de la Plata (see Rodriguez, 2006). The *cabildo abierto* should not be confused with the *cabildo* which was a colonial municipal authority.

[69] In the context of Argentina's industrialization, and its impact on rural to urban migration urban growth, the work done by the j*untas vecinales* was known as '*fomentismo'*. The period of military dictatorships saw the decline of the *juntas vecinales*. Their numbers were already constantly decreasing when Videla declared them illegal.

and, since the 20th century, of a form of political participation that is tied to one's belonging to place and, thus, that is spatially demarcated. However, in the case of *asambleas barriales,* participating as 'ordinary' people was uniquely important given the climate of mistrust in state institutions and formal politics that ensued with the crisis of 2001 (see Svampa, 2008; Sitrin, 2012). Moreover, in contrast to the previous two institutions, *vecinos* in *asambleas barriales* were not solely men anymore, but also women – who by the turn of the century had a well-established political role in the country's recent political history (see Introduction). The participation of women in the *asambleas barriales* was, moreover, encouraged and supported by the movement's incorporation and transformation of the mechanism of the *asamblea*. As Di Marco et al. (2003) document, a flat structure and a majority or a consensus decision-making system played an important role in favouring the participation of women in these groups. Not only were they included as *vecinas* but as equals, with the same decision-making power vis-à-vis male members.

The *asamblea* as a decision-making model was developed by the *piquetero* movement – the more militant group of the movement of unemployed workers of the 1990s – and is characterised by its deliberative character (Ouviña, 2002).[70] As the *asambleas barriales* adopted this decision-making mechanism, the *asamblea* was transformed from a hierarchical to a horizontal structure. In other words, in the *piquetero* movement, *asambleas* were used as a space where all members gathered to deliberate about issues to be decided upon, but where there were formal authorities within the movement in charge of making the final decision. By contrast, in the *asambleas barriales, asambleas* were spaces where members could discuss important issues and where decisions were made following either a consensus or a majority system (Sitrin, 2012; Di Marco et al., 2003) and where there was no hierarchal authority – a political principle recognised as *horizontalidad* (horizontality). Hence, *asambleas barriales* shaped the notion of *vecino* as a form of political participation and mobilisation that has a meaning of equality, absent in previous neighbourhood-based institutions.

The principle of *horizontalidad* was also closely related to the principle of *109utogestion* that *asambleas barriales* followed, and whose meaning in Spanish entails a mixture of self-creation, self-organisation and autonomy from formal political structures (Sitrin, 2012). *Asambleas barriales* understood the *barrio* or the neighbourhood as a space for political, social, and economic organisation, which was to be brought into being in the context of autonomy from formal political structures through relationships of solidarity among *vecinos* (Ouviña, 2002). Projects of *109utogestion*

[70] In fact, the *asamblea* model was adopted since the beginning of the movement with the protests in 1996 in Cutral Có – Huincal against the privatisation of the public-owned oil and gas company – *Yacimientos Petroliferos Fiscales* or YPF (Di Marco et al. 2003).

included, *ollas populares* or soup kitchens, delivery of food packages, sponsorships of unemployed workers, free medicine distribution, and new economic proposals such as artisanal fairs, solidarity commerce networks, and barter networks, among others (see Di Marco, et al. 2003; Sitrin, 2012; Ouviña, 2002).

For the *asambleas barriales* of 2001, this mode of working based on the principles of *horizontalidad* and *110utogestion* was particularly appealing due to the then-current political climate of rejection of state institutions and other formal political structures such as political parties, and of a perception of representative democracy as a failed model (Sitrin, 2012; see Introduction). In this sense, the *asambleas barriales* embraced a mode of working that was closer to, and which sought to bring into being, a model of direct democracy. In doing so, the *asambleas barriales* engaged in what has been called 'prefigurative politics' – that is, a form of politics that seeks to enact the desired social, economic, and political relations and organisations (Sitrin, 2012).

The number of *asambleas* in Buenos Aires and its surrounding areas, as well as their number of participants, dramatically dropped by May 2002 (Ouviña, 2002; Di Marco et al., 2003; Sitrin, 2012).[71] Yet, the *asambleas barriales* left a strong legacy as they imbued mobilising as *vecinos* with the principles of horizontality and *110utogestion*.

The identity of *vecinos* is likely to have been present in Esquel already before the emergence of Esquel's No a la Mina, as *juntas vecinales* were created in the town in the previous decades (see Oriola, 2006). However, the movement has greatly shaped its current political connotation in the town. Drawing from the *asambleas barriales*, participating as a *vecino* in Esquel's No a la Mina also means one who participates in his or her capacity as an 'ordinary person' (outside of formal political structures), one who belongs to a particular place (here the whole town of Esquel rather than a particular neighbourhood), one who is equal to all other members, and a group that is self-organised and autonomous, as the next section discusses.

Meanings of mobilising as a *vecino*

Participating as *vecinos* has been at the heart of the movement in Esquel.

[71] However, Sitrin (2012) argues that this trend might have reversed from 2009 to 2012.

To begin with, to participate as *vecinos* has a strong connotation for members of the movement of participation from a position located outside of formal political structures, whether these are state institutions or other political organisations. Thus, participating as *vecinos* in Esquel's assembly shares the meaning given in *asambleas barriales* as speaking about the political participation of 'ordinary people'. As two members expressed, "we are nothing, we are *vecinos*",[i] "this is a movement of *vecinos*, there are no authorities, no government, it is the pure *pueblo*".[ii] This meaning of *vecino* as participating as an 'ordinary person', outside of and in opposition to formal political structures, is particularly clear in the appeal in the latter quote to a notion of *pueblo* ('the people').

Participating as an 'ordinary person' emerges in some members' narratives as necessary when state institutions fail. In the words of one woman in the movement, "if in the corresponding institutions my demands are not heard… I will start gathering with *compañeras* to think about what we can do, we will meet without being supported by any institution, we are self-convened neighbours".[iii] However, in other members' narratives participating as an 'ordinary person' appears not only as necessary but also as desirable. This is precisely because participating as a *vecino* separates them from existing formal political structures – whether state institutions or existing political organisations – heavily criticised and mistrusted in the context of economic crisis in which the movement emerged. The persistence of this feeling can be clearly seen in the movement's rejection of the participation of political groups. As one man in the movement mentioned, "[participating as *vecinos*] is related to the fact that we did not recognise anything but our own self-convening, and this, in a way, meant the rejection of political parties and their appropriation of the power to politically convene people. There was a rejection in that period of political parties, it is related to that".[iv]

As such, participating from a position located outside of formal political structures is seen as desirable by members of the movement as it bestows legitimacy upon their political mobilisation and demands. As one male member of the movement explains by saying, "the *vecino*, *vecina*, has that transparency of the citizen, of not wearing any hat in that moment",[v] this legitimacy is based on the authenticity of the participation of their members whose political interests do not arise from belonging in other political groups but purely from the individual concern of an 'ordinary person'.

In fact, this is the meaning of *vecino* – as a person located outside of formal political structures – which members speak of when they qualify *vecinos* as *autoconvocados* (self-convened). As one member

of the movement explains, being self-convened means that people do not need to be rallied in order to participate, unlike mobilisation under political parties and trade unions. Here, instead, "people convene themselves, because they are *vecinos*, they go and stand there. I am self-convened… there is no need for someone to call upon me".[vi,72] Thus, in this sense, participating as *vecinos* in Esquel's No a la Mina is also similar to that of the *asambleas barriales* and the link therein between *vecinos* and *112utogestion*. As evident in the previous quotes, while participating as a *vecino* is not linked to neighbourhood-based self-organised projects (such as healthcare or education), it is however linked to the self-organisation and autonomy of the movement vis-à-vis other political structures – a principle that can also be found in the movement's decision to not accept support from non-governmental organisations. In the case of Esquel's No a la Mina it is precisely their self-organisation and autonomy as a movement, and thus their location outside of formal political structures, which is for members of the movement at the core of the legitimacy of their struggle. As one man from the movement expressed, "we have nothing to hide, we have never had anything to hide… I show my face, I mention my name and last name, my participation is in the open".[vii]

For members of the movement, participating as *vecinos* also means inclusion. As a member mentioned to me, "it encapsulates the possibility that anyone in Esquel that wants to join is able to do it".[viii] In this sense, the movement's meaning of *vecinos* expands the meaning in *asambleas barriales,* as the basis for inclusion changes from the *barrio* (neighbourhood) to the whole town. As this same member continued explaining, "the *vecino* can be the *vecino* of a neighbourhood, and we expanded it even further to be the neighbour of the city".[ix] As such, for members of Esquel's No a la Mina, participating as *vecinos* speaks of their membership criterion and their concern with it being the widest possible. Participating as *vecino* thus means for them that anyone residing in Esquel can participate, regardless of any other social markers such as place of birth, class, ethnicity, gender, age, education, occupation, political affiliation, and so on. Thus, participating as a *vecino* puts forward a claim for place-based inclusion, as it is precisely residence – being in place – that is considered the most salient criteria for membership, as it is this which has the greatest potential to bring people together.

Precisely because being a *vecino* speaks, for members of the movement, of their being in place, that participating as a *vecino* also speaks of people's experience of their struggle as not entirely voluntary.

[72] Self-convened organisation is also present in other political struggles. For example, teachers in Chubut organise either through the formal teacher trade union – the *Asociación de Trabajadores de la Educación de Chubut* or ATECH – or as Self-Convened Teachers. In fact, almost all the members in the movement who are teachers (see Chapter Six) organise for labour issues as Self-Convened Teachers, not under ATECH.

In other words, as participating as *vecinos* speaks of how mining would affect members' wellbeing as residents of a particular place, it also expresses the lack of choice that members feel about organising against mining. This is evident in how members of Esquel's No a la Mina reject being called activists, who they perceive as people who decide to become involved in a struggle out of an intellectual commitment or solidarity. As one member of the movement expressed:

> "It is just that we are that, *vecinos*, the inhabitants of a place who are defending themselves. We do not even see our participation as something we chose. Obviously, we chose it, but it is not a free choice. It is a choice we made vis-a-vis a threat. If you are threatened, if there is a threat that your region will be burst open, that your society will be burst open, that your community will be broken… it is not about something that is alien to us. It is about defending our own place, our own community… We are the population who is defending itself".[x]

Members of the movement described their anger at the fact that the government had clearly been approaching the mining project as a foregone conclusion. The *audiencia pública* was scheduled to take place in November 2002, and yet even before it had been conducted, the government had already scheduled the starting date for the mining project for December 2002, just one month after the supposedly good-faith consultation about the future of the project. As a member recounted to me, "they already had the dates in mind [to start the project], dates that very same year of 2002".[xi] Numerous members described how this made clear that the government was imposing the project on people of Esquel, and that the *audiencia pública* was being treated as a mere formality. The imposition of mining is also evident in various notes of El Oeste in 2002, one of which reads: "The mine is a fact…The mining project is already in motion and it will have no impediment".[xii] It is this attempt of the government to impose the project which many *vecinos* see as obliging their participation in the movement.

For members of Esquel's No a la Mina, as it was the case in *asambleas barriales*, participating as a *vecino* is also tied to the principle of horizontality – that is, to participating as equals. Thus, participating as *vecino* does not only speak of who can participate but also of how. As a woman I interviewed explained, "We believe we are all *vecinos*, and we all have the right to fight… we always said we were all the same, even if some have been protagonists at different points. We are all *vecinos*".[xiii] As the movement adopted the *asamblea* as its decision-making mechanism, which in the case of the *asamblea* works by majority, the principle of horizontality means everyone has the right to raise issues, speak, and vote, with all votes being equal. Moreover, for members of the movement participating as *vecinos* also means there is no leadership within the movement, a

measure they have taken, in part, as a form of collective care to avoid placing individuals at risk of violent retaliation.[73]

In the accounts of members of the movement, this sense of equality emerges as important on two fronts: education and party politics. The first is evident in the words of a member of the movement who expresses, "the word gives you a sense of closeness, that we are equal, that not because you have more education or not you are different, it unites us".[xiv] This becomes especially relevant in light of the movement's strategy to inform (see Chapter Six). Mobilising as *vecinos* seeks, for members of the movement, to erase differences based on who is perceived as knowledgeable or not – a process of differentiation that tends to develop along class lines. The second is evident in the words of another member of the movement who explained, "it is enough to be oneself, and to be in one's capacity as *vecino*, not in representation of a group, that was not and is not accepted, and that is important because it is what allows us to have an equal system of voices and votes".[xv] The importance of removing one's political affiliation for the sake of equality is further emphasised by the words of another member of the movement who explains, "*vecinas*, *vecinos*, without political machineries, each of us left their beliefs at the door to gather as a community and build the space in a horizontal manner".[xvi] In this sense, participating as equals is understood as bridging social hierarchies based on knowledge, as well as entering the space on an equal footing by participating in an individual capacity.

As mobilising as *vecino* means to participate as located outside formal political structures, on the basis of being-in-place and on an equal footing, it entails, in most accounts, a strong sense of union. This is because participating as *vecino* allows very different people, from different origins, class, ethnicity, gender, age, education, occupation, political affiliation, and so on to come together and to come together as equals. As one member of the movement explained: "if the movement would have not existed, we would not have had contact because we are different, we have a million differences, we have different ages, different occupation… and this united us".[xvii]

Here, the importance of not representing group interests within the movement emerges again as crucial. For members of the movement, this meaning of *vecino* as unifying is intricately related to the meaning of *vecinos* as 'ordinary people' – here not so much as people outside of state institutions but as outside of formal politics. This is because it is precisely 'by not wearing any hats' that unity

[73] This decision comes from advice they received in 2002 from members of a struggle against mining in Tambogrande, Peru not to have leaders, as they had seen leadership heightened risks of violence towards individuals.

is possible. As one member of the movement explains, "the movement does not have a political alignment with parties, and so to speak of *vecino* more than *compañero* [a word associated with *peronismo*] is important to try to unify".[xviii] As such, participating as *vecinos* allows people to find a commonality and bridge not only differences of class, age, occupation, education, and so on, but to particularly bridge political differences – especially those around indigeneity as I discuss later in the chapter. This is also evident in the words of another member who explains,

> "We were not convened by any other reason [but the struggle against mining], and this gave the movement great amplitude. There is room for everyone here as long as we are defending water, defending our place, there can be *peronistas*, *radicales*, *menemistas*, people who are not involved in party politics, people participating in other causes, people from any religion".[xix]

Thus, the principle of self-organisation and autonomy from other political spaces is central to the movement's sense of union.

This sense of unity is usually expressed by likening the movement to a community – and even to a family, for some. As two members of the movement explained to me: "*Vecino*… is a synonym of community, it is about the union of people",[xx] "for me the neighbour is part of a family".[xxi]

It is, moreover, a sense of unity based on bodily proximity, solidarity, and care. As a woman I interviewed explained to me, "what defines a *vecino* is the notion of a corporeal proximity no? And in this struggle, we must participate with our bodies, we have to place our bodies in this".[xxii] Corporeal closeness motivates in turn relationships of solidarity, as two members of the movement explained to me. In their words: "a *vecino* is that who is next to you, accompanying you, marching",[xxiii] "a *vecino* is that who is next to you, and the people in the *asamblea* are next to me, they are the people who will be unconditionally stand shoulder to shoulder next me under these circumstances, that is why we say *vecino*".[xxiv] As evident in these words, the solidarity that participating as a *vecino* involves is also entwined with care. This is also evident in the words of another member who explains that "what it means to be a *vecino*, is to be in solidarity, to take care of the other".[xxv] Therefore, members of the movement stressed to me that the struggle is no herculean task for any person to tackle individually but rather an effort to be done collectively:

> "We are all *vecinos*, it very important for us to remind each other of that, no one should be a martyr, no one should give everything to the cause… I think the Assembly has been right in functioning as a group, being patient, knowing to lay low from time to time, change people, so that other people can assume responsibilities, and to do this from a place of love".[xxvi]

This sense of unity, moreover, is related for most members of the movement to a sense of collective power. As one woman explained to me, "[when speaking about *vecinos*] I think of

something very close to you, besides you, someone who intertwines their arms and forms something very big".[xxvii] This is also evident in the memory another woman shared with me: "I remember, we met when the conflict was at an intense stage, we called an assembly at a school, and we were 10 or 15, and we were so hopeless… we were so few against so many. And then a man said, "we have to look at the person next to us, those at our sides". Of course!... side to side we were so many, so being side by side, shoulder to shoulder gave us hope…. That is a neighbour, the one next to you".[xxviii]

In short then, for members of the movement, participating as *vecinos* connotes participation outside of formal political structures, self-organised and autonomous organisation, being-in-place, and equality among members. This participation as ordinary people, and being self-organised and autonomous, is not only necessary in the context of institutional failure, but also desirable as this is what makes their struggle a legitimate one. Participating as *vecinos* also speaks, for members of the movement, of the making of place into a membership criterion in order to bring people together across social differences. It speaks, moreover, of a concern with equality of participation, expressed in the principle of horizontality. As a result, participating as a *vecino* entails a sense of union – which is supported for members of the movement by their agreement to not represent other group interests within the movement. This sense of unity is related for members of the movement to bodily proximity, solidarity, care and to a sense of collective power.

As the next section shows, because of how members of the movement understand participating as *vecinos* in the movement, doing so entails the commoning of place and a transformation of citizenship towards a collective practice.

The commoning of place and the making of a horizontal community

People's participation as *vecinos* in Esquel's No a la Mina can be understood as entailing the commoning of place through the creation of new arrangements of responsibility over it. Place, a bounded area to which people attach unique meanings (Oberhauser et al., 2018), speaks in this case of Esquel and its surroundings, which members of the movement regard as their home and is thus embedded in feelings of attachment and belonging. As discussed in the previous section, participating as *vecinos* is intricately related to place for members of the movement. By speaking of their being-in-place, participating as a *vecino* speaks of the movement's membership criteria, as well as their concern with inclusion and political unity. Residing in Esquel is what is perceived as the

widest membership criterion, as well as what binds everyone together regardless of social and political difference.

As a membership criterion, participating as v*ecinos* appeals to the 'all-affected principle' (Fraser, 2008) which holds that all those who have suffered an injustice are entitled to participation in a given process.[74] In this case, participating as *vecinos* speaks of how residents of Esquel and its surroundings would suffer an injustice if the mining project was to be installed, and of who in fact had already been suffering one as the result of the state's attempt to impose the mining project on the population without a concern for a democratic process – an issue to which I return later in the chapter. As such, participating as *vecinos* speaks of an understanding of the injustices and harms produced by mining as shared among those living in place – whose democratic rights have been violated by state imposition and who would have their way of life and health affected by the mining project – and opens participation to the movement on that basis. The way in which participating as *vecinos* appeals to the 'all-affected principle' as a membership criterion was evident in my experience of the movement. When I was physically in Esquel – and thus subject to be affected by mining – I could participate in the movement as another *vecina*. However, once I left due to COVID-19, I seized being a *vecina* and became an outsider of the movement – only able to support them by re-sharing news and content produced by them in my network.

This understanding of their participation as responding to the place-based character of the injustices and harms that surround mining shows, in turn, how participating as a *vecino* has motivated new arrangements of responsibility. As a member of the movement explained to me, a *vecino* is someone with whom you organise and share responsibility over place, "the *vecino* is that with whom you should organise to maintain the sidewalk clean, they are the ones that should worry with you that the lights on the street are working".[xxix]

Thus, their participation as *vecinos* speaks of a process of commoning place through shared responsibility over it. This new arrangement of responsibility over place is often expressed by members of the movement, moreover, as one for a common cause or for the pursual of the common good. As a member of the movement explained to me, "It is a matter of closeness, the way I see it, of being committed for a common cause – that is, a problem that affects us all".[xxx] How participating as *vecinos* speaks of, and has prompted, a shared responsibility over place of

[74] This stands in contrast with the 'all-subjected' principle which establishes that those who have claims to justice are those which are subjected to the governing structure responsible for the injustice (see Fraser, 2008).

evident in how participating as a *vecino* implies for members of the movement that their participation is not entirely voluntary but necessary to guarantee their future wellbeing.[75]

The commoning of place through responsibility has, furthermore, supported a process of community-making evident in the way in which participating as *vecinos* entails a sense of unity for members of the movement. As this member continued explaining to me:

> "[speaking of *vecinos*] appeals to a sense of closeness... we are not strangers but rather people who live in a community, and to speak of community already speaks of that which is common, of sharing, that is it: a group of people who considers themselves close to each other and that aims for the good of the community. It is an issue of closeness, of being committed towards a common goal".[xxxi]

Thus, the commoning of place has functioned as an articulating element around which a commoning-community – that is, "a community taking care of and responsibility for a common" (Sato & Soto Alarcón, 2019, p.40) – has emerged. As a member of the movement expressed to me, "it united us, it united us as a *pueblo* to think what we wanted for our future, between everyone".[xxxii] While being a *vecino* speaks in all contexts already of a group of people that live together in a given area, participating as *vecinos* is what has supported the making of a community in Esquel. This distinction between being a *vecino* in any context, and being a *vecino* through the movement, is evident in how members differentiate between being a *vecino* in Buenos Aires and Esquel: "for me the neighbour is part of a family, but you don't have that in Buenos Aires, in Buenos Aires you don't know who is next to you".[xxxiii]

Thus, the emerging community is inextricably linked to the fact that *vecinos* share a common geography. As two members of the movement explained to me, "a *vecino* to me, is the human who lives in a territory, I relate it to who is close to you in a territory".[xxxiv] In fact, it is more specifically contingent on the characteristics of Esquel, as members of the movement often expressed having this community of *vecinos* would not have been possible in larger urban areas such as Buenos Aires but has been possible in Esquel because "in Esquel everything is smaller",[xxxv] which facilitated people knowing each other.

However, sharing a common geography is a necessary rather than a sufficient condition for the commoning of place and the making of a commoning-community. As evident in the words of another member of the movement, it is the new arrangements of responsibility over place and the

[75] Lazar (2012) makes a similar argument, through the analysis of trade unions in El Alto, on how participation in social movements/political groups can be perceived as not entirely voluntary.

resulting relationships of equality, care, solidarity and unity that are central to community-making: "the word *vecino* is related to coexistence in a same geographical space, but more than that to a sense of communion, we are the *vecinos* those who live and inhabit this space, we have to take care of it, defend it, the word *vecino* adds and indicates shared spatial coordinates, ideological coordinates and coordinates of communion".[xxxvi]

As such, the commoning-community is one characterised by the principle of equality among members (expressed through the principle and practice of horizontality), and a strong sense of relationality because of the meanings of bodily proximity, solidarity, and care members of the movement attach to it. Mobilising as a *vecino* does not only entail a collective way of relating to those outside the community (discussed in more detail in the following section), but also entails a relational understanding of the self. Being a *vecino* is, in short, to become in relation to, and next to, others.

Participating as *vecinos,* therefore*,* has not only supported the commoning of place and the making of a community, but by speaking of a process of relational constitution, it also functions as the political subjectivity for the emerging community, providing a language through which it can be articulated. Participating as *vecino* has, furthermore, shaped what the emerging commoning-community looks like – one where people relate to each other in a horizontal manner, and which offers containment through a sense of proximity, solidarity, and care.

The story of my brief participation in the UAACH with which I introduced this chapter speaks furthermore to this point. The fact that *vecinas* from Esquel's No a la Mina decided to intercede on my behalf during the meeting and argue that I was a *vecina* of Esquel and as such had the right to be in that space as anyone else was an example, to me, of the relations of solidarity that have forged between, and that are extended to, members of the movement. Moreover, when the meeting ended 4 or 5 hours later, I felt deeply cared for by these 5 women. Not only did they make a point of laughing about the meeting and the stance of the members that opposed my presence as a way of building and expressing their solidarity towards me, but it was also a way of offering me some emotional contention. This perhaps became clearer when after a few minutes in the car they asked me if I wanted to go for an ice cream, insisting that it would cheer us all up – an offer that I experienced as a profound act of care.

By fostering a community with these characteristics, participating as *vecinos* has supported the creation of a strong collective political subjectivity that has shaped the way members of the movement practice citizenship, as the next section discusses.

Towards an autonomous collective citizenship

As discussed in the Introduction, Argentina has a strong history of collective citizenship which can be traced back to the government of Juan Doming Perón (1946-1952) who sought to build mass popular support through an alliance between the state and the emerging industrial labour force at the time. During his government, the organisation of the working class strengthened through the government's support of trade unionism, and thus increased its social and political weight in Argentinian society (James, 1988; Auyero, 2001). Evident, for example, in the development of a system of collective bargaining for employment conditions, Perón's support of workers' struggles put forward a collective citizenship model where people interacted with the state through collectives (mainly trade and workers' unions), where rights were not granted to individuals but to a group of people, and where the pursual of social justice was central instead of a recognition of individual rights (Dinerstein, 2001; James, 1988).

This collective form of citizenship is also evident in Perón's support of the notion of *pueblo* (or 'the people') which, within an antagonistic relationship between the working-class and the elites, conveyed a "rhetoric of an indivisible community' (James, 1988, p.287) and its links with the Argentinian state. This form of collective citizenship, however, is one that has been for its most part co-opted by the Argentinian state. As Auyero (2001) and Taylor (2004) point out, the collective citizenship associated to workers' struggles and trade unions has historically been linked to a strong relationship between a political figurehead and the collective – a relationship that is hierarchical in nature and where it is the figurehead who informs and gives meaning to the collective's action. As such, collective citizenship in Argentina has been associated to clientelism, entailing the practice of what Taylor (2004) calls 'client-ship' (see Chapter 7 for further discussion on this topic as it also relates also to the movement's practice of appealing to dignity).

However, in the 1990s, as in other parts of Latin America, an individualised model of citizenship was promoted in Argentina alongside the economic reforms promoted by the government of Carlos Menem and the subsequent shrinking of the Argentinian welfare state (a process called '*desbienestarización',* see also Chapter Four). The citizenship model accompanying this process

stressed not only an individual, rather than a collective, way of relating to the state, but also put forward a depoliticised notion of the individual as one that interacts with the state mainly through voting and who can attend to his/her needs mainly through the market (i.e. through consumption) (Dagnino, 2007; Diaz Rosaenz, 2017; Taylor, 2004; see Introduction). In other words, it was a neoliberal notion of citizenship that sought "to shift tasks and power from the realm of the state into the 'private' realm of individual and market" (Taylor, 2004, p.222) and that put forward a notion of agency as individual and as articulated in and through private and/or market spaces. As a result, the 1990s saw the curtailment of social rights associated to the welfare state (see Introduction) and consolidated the 'de-collectivization' of citizenship that had begun under the dictatorship period (Svampa, 2008, 2017). Moreover, it is this individualised model of citizenship that supports the attempts of the state to impose extractivism. By dictating that a person's engagement with the state is mainly through voting (as other citizen rights and duties can be performed in private and market spaces), this form of citizenship more easily permits (compared to a collective form of citizenship) to impose a vertical dynamic between people and the state that forecloses public debates around development (Svampa, 2017).

The strong collective political subjectivity that participating as *vecinos* has nurtured is thus embedded in a history of collective citizenship in Argentina, as well emerging in response to an individualised model of citizenship that set the conditions for the imposition of extractivism.

Participating as *vecinos* entails a form of collective citizenship as it refracts the individual's relationship to the Argentinian state through the collective. In other words, to mobilise as a *vecino* is to engage with the state as part of a collective, rather than on an individual basis. This is evident in how it is through mass street protests that the movement contests any attempt of the provincial government to give green light to the mining industry. The collective political subjectivity created through people's participation in the movement as *vecinos* differs, however, from Argentina's tradition of collective citizenship.

In the first place, mobilising as *vecinos* expands engagement with the state to Argentinian and non-Argentinian people who are not legally recognised as citizens by the state – just as it was extended to me in the meeting of the UACCH recounted in the introduction of this chapter. In the words of two members of Esquel's No a la Mina, "you may not be an Argentinian citizen, but if you live here, you are a *vecina*";[xxxvii] ""we could say 'citizen assembly', but that could exclude someone that might not have citizenship yet".[xxxviii] As such, mobilising as *vecinos* roots political belonging in place.

In the second place, mobilising as *vecinos* changes the locus of collective citizenship. Collective citizenship has historically centred in Argentina around the notion of the worker – with trade and workers' unions functioning as 'prime sites for active citizenship' (Lazar, 2017; see also Perissé 2010; Perelman, 2008). Collective citizenship has thus been mediated by people's inclusion in structures of production and practiced through hierarchical spaces of participation (Perelman, 2008; Di Marco et al., 2003). By contrast, mobilising as *vecinos* establishes place as the locus of citizenship, putting forward a form of collective citizenship that emerges from being-in-place and which is practiced through horizontal relations. As Zibechi (2012) argues the change in locus reflects "the crisis of the old territoriality of the factory and the farm [in Latin America]… and the de-territorialisation of production (p. 15), which has debilitated former political subjectivities and prompted its relocation to 'new territories' (ibidem.) By changing the locus of citizenship to place, the movement has built on the model of the *asambleas barriales* (see Sitrin, 2012), as well as embedded itself in the regional trend of social movements moving away from hierarchical structures and relocating political subjectivities to new terrains (see Zibechi, 2012).

In the third place, by changing the locus of collective citizenship, mobilising as *vecinos* contests the historical tendency for collective citizenship to be co-opted by the Argentinian state as a way to rally mass support for governments (see James, 1988; Svampa, 2017). By stressing that *vecinos* are ordinary people located outside of formal political structures, self-convened and independent from political parties, the movement has emphatically distanced itself from state co-optation. As such, mobilising as *vecinos* builds on the proposal of *asambleas barriales* of an autonomous collective form of citizenship – an antithetical form of collective citizenship to that which has been historically available in Argentina. Yet, this autonomous collective citizenship is practiced differently in Esquel's No a la Mina than in *asambleas barriales*. While in the latter this form of citizenship had the purpose of going beyond the state and build the neighbourhood as a self-organised social, political, and economic space, in Esquel's No a la Mina it has the purpose of keeping the collective separate to the state so that it can remain uninfluenced and legitimate in its demands against extractivism (as discussed in the second section of this chapter). In this sense, while the movement shares the pursual of self-determination with *asambleas barriales* and other social movements in Latin America, the movement is interested more specifically in self-determination as a necessary condition to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the state and in relation to the principle of popular sovereignty.

How the movement contests the tendency of the co-optation of collective citizenship is evident in the movement's refusal to form coalitions and/or alliances with political parties, as well as to have its own political party. While some members of the movement decided to re-invigorate the independent political party of the *Frente Vecinal* in the years that followed the plebiscite (see Introduction), it was collectively decided there would be no formal link between the movement and the party, and like for other parties, no representative of the *Frente Vecinal* would participate as such in the movement. Their rejection of political parties thus indicates a rejection of parties as mediators between people and the state and as the "sole means [and site] of political communication and action" (Taylor, 2004, p.223).

By practicing this form of collective citizenship, mobilising as *vecinos* builds a sense of collective power that contests the vertical logic of the state's imposition of extractivism. As discussed in the previous section, mobilising as *vecinos* enables members of the movement to attain a sense of collective power. This is clearer when considering people's appeal to the notion of *pueblo*. As a member of the movement explained, "it is very satisfying to feel that you are not alone… to feel that we are many… I feel since a long time ago that which is true is the collective, that the only thing that can defend the *pueblo* is the *pueblo* itself"[xxxix]. As the quote captures, this feeling of collective power is imbued with a sense of collective agency over their lives vis-à-vis the state. This is echoed furthermore in a phrase common to the movement, "*solo el pueblo salva al pueblo*" or "only the *pueblo* saves the *pueblo*". Thus, participating as *vecinos* refracts the individual through the collective under an understanding that this is the main (or the only) way in which the state can be contested, and in which people can exercise control over their lives.

Members' appeal to collective agency vis-à-vis the state is inherently related, and appeals to, the notion of popular sovereignty which maintains that it is citizens who hold power in a democratic model where the authority of the state and the government is anchored in the will of the majority of its population. As such, it speaks of – and demands – the collective right people have, in a democratic state, to decide over their lives. The practice of collective citizenship and its embeddedness in the principle of popular sovereignty and a collective right to decide over their lives is evident in how members of the movement liken the community of *vecinos* to that of the *pueblo*.

As previously discussed, the notion of *pueblo* was nurtured by Juan Domingo Perón and speaks of the model of collective citizenship Peronist politics relied on. As such, the figure of the *pueblo* was

the cornerstone of efforts to build mass political support and legitimate his government. As the period of his first government was directly after the military coup of 1930-1945, which removed Hipólito Yrigoyen from power and strengthened the power of Argentinian conservative elites, Perón sought to build support by mobilising the perception of Argentinian institutions and democracy as corrupted by the oligarchy. The notion of *pueblo* emerged, thus, embedded in an antagonistic relationship between the working-class and the oligarchy, and directly linked to a demand for a 'real democracy' (James, 1988, p. 281). While the appeal by members of the movement to the notion of *pueblo* understands it as composed by *vecinos* – ordinary people outside of formal political structures – rather than workers, the notion continues to speak of the principle of popular sovereignty and thus of a collective agency vis-à-vis the state. As members of the movement appeal to the notion of *pueblo* in the context of their perception of extractivism as imposed by the state, the use of the notion continues to be linked to a perception of democratic failure (now because of link between the state and the private sector) and thus to a demand to recuperate democracy. As such, the movement's appeal to the notion of *pueblo* highlights how to mobilise as *vecinos* is to exercise a collective agency to subvert the vertical power relation between people and the state and move away from a relation between the state and people where the former imposes on the latter towards one where the state responds to the wishes of the *pueblo* it represents – that is, a relation where individuals have power vis-à-vis the state through the collective, and where it is the collective rather the state who exercises political power.

Mobilising as *vecinos* also contests the vertical relation between people and the state by engaging, as the *asambleas barriales* did, in prefigurative politics – that is, politics that seek to perform the desired social, economic, and political relations and organisation (Sitrin, 2006, 2012). This is evident in how mobilising as *vecinos* is linked for members of Esquel's No a la Mina to democratic practices. Because of the link between *vecinos* and the principle of horizontality, the assembly model, and the self-convened mode of organisation, mobilising as *vecinos* is often regarded by members as producing a 'laboratory of democracy' where they can put in practice the relation they are seeking to establish with the Argentinian state: one based on the recognition of equality, equal terms of participation, deliberation, autonomy, and collective power. Thus, by performing the relation they are demanding from the state, members of the movement are further contesting the vertical logic followed by the state, as they practice and show alternative ways of building political relations. Moreover, by moblising as *vecinos* and moving away from political parties as sites of citizenship participation, members of the movement are bringing into being the model of direct democracy that would enshrine the principle of popular sovereignty and thus their collective right

to decide over their place and lives. As it is moving away from a model of representative democracy and the barriers set by political parties (Taylor, 2004), Esquel's No a la Mina follows the trend, which began in the 1990s, of social movements moving away from the politics of labour struggles and state-centric forms of organisation. Yet, it maintains, in contrast with that trend, an interest in re-shaping the state and the power distribution between people and the state (Zibechi, 2012).

In sum, participating as *vecinos* entails a form of collective citizenship: to mobilise as a *vecino* is to engage with the state as part of a collective, rather than on an individual basis. This is transforming citizenship in three ways: as belonging, as membership, and as agency. Mobilising as *vecinos* is creating political belonging on the basis of place. In other words, it is creating a sense of political belonging that is rooted in place, moving away the locus of collective citizenship from inclusion in structures of production. It is modifying citizenship as membership as it is strengthening people's collective right to decide over one's place and life in the context of a democratic social contract and its principle of popular sovereignty. Lastly, mobilising as *vecinos* has produced a sense of autonomous collective agency that challenges the workings of the Argentinian state. It contests the individualised model of citizenship that permits the imposition of extractivism, as well as further appeals to the principle of popular sovereignty underlying a democratic model. Mobilising as *vecinos*, thus, seeks to subvert the power relation between people and the state, from one of imposition to one of recognition where people hold authority over the state.

Tensions of mobilising as *vecinos*

Political subjectivity is invariably composed of both a collective and an individual sense of self, which are present in different configurations and with different meanings across citizenship regimes (Lazar, 2008, 2012). Understanding the way in which these are configured in the collective citizenship put forward by Esquel's No a la Mina is key to understanding the tensions that underlie the making of a community through the practice of mobilising as *vecinos*. Collectively, mobilising as *vecinos* has appealed to a politics of conviviality that encompasses all in general terms and seeks to create unity. This produces a strong collective sense of self, as the basis of the movement's strategy and politics. But it has also had paradoxical consequences. A politics of conviviality are contingent on the suspension of difference, and thus sustaining the strong collective sense of self at play is a depoliticised individual sense of self. As a result, the particular conditions of women and Mapuche-Tehuelche people are obscured, and the existing social hierarchies within the collective are tacitly reproduced.

Commoning place has been key for the movement to create political unity. Appealing to the all-affected principle has not only been a way to bridge political differences and differences of class, education and gender, but also to bridge another social distinction that has been salient in Esquel: that between people from Esquel and people who have arrived from other parts of the country.[76] People in Esquel speak of these two groups respectively as 'NYCs', meaning *'nacidos y criados'* ('born and raised') and 'VYQs', meaning *'venidos y quedados'* ('arrived and settled').[77] Historically, the category of NYC has served to erase people's Mapuche-Tehuelche identities, supporting the settler-state narrative that frames indigenous peoples in Argentina as non-existing in present times. It has also given Mapuche-Tehuelche people another language through which their roots to place can be acknowledged without openly identifying as indigenous – an identity which has historically carried a stigma throughout Argentina and only since the 1980s has begun to be reclaimed (see Briones, 2005). It has, simultaneously, allowed the descendants of national and international settlers to transition away from an immigrant identity and further legitimate their claims to land (Trentini, 2009). The category of VYQ, on the contrary, labels first generation migrants and assigns them less legitimate claims to associated rights (ibid.). Mobilising as *vecinos* has bridged this form of social differentiation, transforming it from a differentiating factor to an equalising and inclusive one. As the opening of the movement's radio program "*Voces de la tierra*" explicitly mentions: "We are all *vecinos* who love Chubut. Some of us are born here, some of us have discovered that this beautiful cordillera is our place in the world".[xl]

Holding place as the uniting and equalising factor among *vecinos*, because of its relation to the all-affected principle, has created the terms on which *vecinos* has also functioned as a political identity – that is, as an identity that is strategically mobilised – which has been crucial to the movement's pursuit of political unity. As previously examined, mobilising as a *vecino* means, for members of Esquel's No a la Mina, participating 'without wearing any other hats on' – that is, to only participate in their quality of *vecinos* under an assumption that that the *only* thing all members need to have in common is their opposition against mining. This is perceived as having been of crucial strategic importance to the movement, as it has not only allowed the movement to build unity but also to position their struggle as legitimate. Because they are *vecinos,* people understand they have a right to oppose mining under the all-affected principle and can affirm that it is based on a genuine

[76] The date of the origin of this local social category is not clear.
[77] Tozzini (2004) and Trentini (2008, 2009) document the existence of these categories elsewhere in Patagonia – that of 'born and raised' known as '*nacido y criado* or NYC', 'settled and raised' known as '*venido y criado* or VYC', and 'settled' known as '*venido'*.

concern since they do not belong to any formal political structure nor represent any other group. Likewise, by participating as *vecinos*, leaving behind all other matters, and focusing solely on mining, it is understood *vecinos* can ignore in those moments any form of difference that would bring them apart.

By imbuing participation as *vecinos* with this meaning, and thus asking members to participate in the movement *simply* as *vecinos*, this is an identity that is mobilised within the movement to build unity through the performance of homogeneity – that is, through a politics of conviviality.

Conviviality refers, in political theory, to a particular way of approaching social difference in order to construct togetherness in societies or groups characterised by plurality.[78] Like cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism, conviviality approaches social difference as a potential source of conflict and thus as something to manage in order to live well together (Alhourani, 2017; Erickson, 2011; Karner & Parker, 2011; Laurier & Philo, 2006; Nowicka & Vertovec, 2014). Theorists of conviviality argue for a fluid understanding of difference, as they argue that it is precisely by setting aside (Erickson, 2011) or even momentarily suspending difference (Alhourani, 2017) that conviviality is achieved.[79] Hence, a politics of conviviality requires a performance of homogeneity. In the case of Esquel's No a la Mina, a politics of conviviality is practiced within the space of the movement in order to 'mobilise well together', asking members to suspend difference momentarily while participating in the movement.[80]

As a result, the political subjectivity created through mobilisation as a *vecino* encompasses a depoliticised individual sense of self that stands in tension with the collective sense of self it is simultaneously producing. The *vecino* that forms the basis of a collective citizenship is in fact based on a profoundly individual subjectivity – as the *vecino* is that who does not belong to other group or community and does not represent any other form of collective interest. As a member of the movement expressed to me, "what we try to do in some way with the words *vecinos* is perhaps to depoliticise a bit, many of us use the word *compañero*… but most people when they hear this word, they identify it with the Justicialist Party and with *peronismo"*.[xli]

[78] As Laurier and Philo (2006) note, conviviality can refer to a characteristic of dominant imaginaries of social interaction in general, or a practice in a particular space and group.
[79] Underpinning this approach to difference is an understanding of identity as manifold and multiple which resembles that put forward by intersectional feminist scholars. However, unlike these theorists, in conviviality, identity is understood as non-intersectional, as it possible to neatly separate one's identities from one another, and to locate particular identities as coming into play at specific moments and in specific contexts.
[80] Thus, in contrast to other uses of a politics of conviviality, here difference is not suspended permanently but rather temporarily – only in the space of the movement and the time of participation.

There is a paradox – even a contradiction – then, in the movement's politics of mobilising as *vecinos* – as it replicates the very individual sense of self that is at the core of the neoliberal model of citizenship which it is trying to contest by building a collective practice of citizenship. The movement's politics of conviviality mean, therefore, that the movement has reproduced what Fraser (1990) calls a bourgeois liberal masculinist notion of the public sphere. Following a political of conviviality has made the movement into a space of political participation, composed by a group of *private* individuals who come together to discuss *only* matters of public and common interest and where people can participate/deliberate on equal terms despite social difference, bracketing distinctions of status and hiding the assumption of the white middle-class male as the neutral and default subject through a notion of equal participation (ibid.). Thus, mobilising as *vecino* – which in fact very clearly holds a male subject as the neutral one as the male gender is already implied in the word *vecino* – "makes universal what is in actuality a rather particular form of subjecthood" (Lazar, 2013, p.8).[81] By conditioning participation on people's ability to divest themselves of their other collective interests, leaving unquestioned who has less or more hats to leave at the door (so to speak), mobilising as *vecinos* has created exclusions along existing patterns of social inequality within the movement.

This depoliticised individual sense of self has thus produced a community that "leaves little space for individual variability and internal differentiation" (Lazar, 2013, p.9) as well as obscures the "internal power relations that constrain the ability to define what 'a community' is and what it thinks" (ibid.) – critiques that have been raised more generally of communitarian citizenship and its tendency towards reification (see Pateman & Shanley, 1991; Young, 1990). This depoliticised individual sense of self has been a significant barrier for the recognition and participation of Mapuche-Tehuelche people, as well as for the recognition of women's labour in the movement – which speaks in turn to the way in which commoning place and community-making has been shaped by social difference and entailed exclusions along these lines.

While indigenous people are welcomed in the movement, they have been less welcomed as *indigenous* people. As one member of the movement expressed, "there is no special treatment of 'here comes the indigenous peoples'. No, here come the *vecinos*. We are all *vecinos*… we do not discriminate. We think we are all *vecinos* and we all have a right to fight in this".[xlii] As the words of

[81] As Lazar (2013) also notes, this critique has also been done by feminist and other scholars of contemporary liberal political theory as they see it as promoting the figure of an abstracted individual as a universal model.

this member show, mobilising as *vecinos* has asked of indigenous members to momentarily suspend their indigeneity and to suspend their group interests[82] – in other words to momentarily become depoliticised individuals – a request that runs counter to the strong identity politics and communitarian political traditions of indigenous movements in Argentina, as in other parts of Latin America (see Ramírez, 2017), as well as the intersectional politics of indigenous women in the region (see Barrios de Chungara & Viezzer, 1978; Radcliffe & Westwood, 1993). This is evident in the words of a Mapuche-Tehuelche woman who explained to me: "we cannot stop talking about what is happening in our territories, with stolen lands… [to speak of *vecinos*] is like a closure… it is to close something, to close the demand that we have towards the Argentinian state to stop the genocide in our territories".[xliii] Thus, mobilising as *vecinos* converges, in this sense, with liberal/republic traditions of citizenship in their dismissal of the importance of ethnicity for citizenship as both maintain that "while any individual has the rights to participate in ethnic (or any other) associations, ethnic groups should not be privileged in designing the institutions of interest intermediation" (Yashar, 2005, p.43).

As with political parties, the suspension of ethnic difference has been supported by a concern with fragmentation within the movement. There is a concern that the entrenched racism within Esquel (as in the rest of Argentina) and controversies around Mapuche-Tehuelche land recuperations will inhibit support of the movement from people in Esquel and particularly local landed elites. On the other hand, there is insistence on the part of Mapuche-Tehuelche members and activists for the movement to accept their participation as indigenous *vecinos* and thus to also discuss and position itself regarding their concerns for land and recognition. Thus, while the movement's intent to build unity by suspending difference and other political interests – as many other movements have done when facing gender justice claims[83] – has come at the cost of ethnic recognition for most of the movement's history (I retake this in Chapter 8 and the concluding chapter as this is something that has begun to change in recent years). Most Mapuche-Tehuelche people I spoke to constantly expressed dissatisfaction with the movement because of their insistence on not talking about and not involving themselves in Mapuche-Tehuelche struggles, and thus spoke of it as a space that was not welcoming for indigenous peoples. In the camp I attended in Pillán Mahuiza, for example, organisers constantly highlighted the absence of members of Esquel's No a la Mina from the event as a symbol of their lack of support.

[82] Similar arguments asking indigenous people to drop their indigenous identity in a given space have also been discussed by Smith (2012).
[83] See Campbell (1996), Agarwal (2002, 2007), Deere (2003), and Asher (2007).

Moreover, the placing of this depoliticised individual sense of self at the core of what it means to be a *vecino* has also rendered invisible the gendered composition of the movement. While at the beginning of the movement there were more middle-class white men involved in the assemblies and decision-making processes, now most of these men have stepped back and these spaces are heavily dominated by women.[84] However, despite the current female face of the movement, it has still been assumed to be a movement of *vecinos* rather than *vecinas,* rendering invisible the fact that it is women rather than men who have for the most part stayed in the movement throughout the years, thus rendering invisible the labour that women have done (and that they continue to assume) to sustain the movement. As a result, to my knowledge, this is not a discussion that has occurred within the movement, nor have there been demands for men to participate more and share the workload more evenly.

Lastly, mobilising as *vecinos* has bridged differences of class, as evidenced by the plebiscite's vote in 2003 where 81% of the population voted against mining, which would not have been possible to attain with only the middle class of Esquel. Nonetheless, further analysis is required to understand whether mobilising as *vecinos* obscures issues of class as well. Perhaps indicative of such tensions, some movement members raised a complaint in 2021 about the fact that the movement's protest always took place in the centre of the town – an area that is occupied by richer sectors of the population – and in response to which the movement marched on one occasion through Esquel's poorer neighbourhoods instead.

However, as I return to in the conclusion of the thesis, while mobilising as *vecinos* has created exclusions and misrecognitions within the movement because of the way in which the movement has used a depoliticised individual sense of self to build a collective political subjectivity, the link between mobilising as *vecinos* and horizontality has allowed the movement to remain attentive and responsive to these dynamics, challenging – albeit slowly – the way it has reproduced previous patterns of exclusion.

[84] In fact, many of the women involved in the movement have historically participated with their husbands, especially women now aged 60+. Some of their husbands have stepped back as time has gone by, while other men function in a more secondary or supporting role.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the practice of mobilising as *vecinos* in Esquel's No a la Mina. In analysing what participating as *vecinos* means for members of the movement, the chapter has shown how the practice has motivated the commoning of place through the creation of new arrangements of responsibility over it and how this process is supporting and shaping a process of community-making. It has contributed to making a community where people relate to each other in a horizontal manner, and which offers containment through a sense of proximity, solidarity, and care. In doing so, participating as *vecinos* has also supported the creation of a strong collective political subjectivity that provides a language for the emerging community.

Moreover, this political subjectivity is in turn reshaping the way people engage with the state, since to mobilise as a *vecino* is to practice an autonomous collective citizenship. This builds on the collective practices of citizenship in Argentina set in motion by the *asambleas barriales* of 2001, as well as contests the individualised model of citizenship that facilitates the imposition of extractivism. To mobilise as a *vecino* is thus a form of collective citizenship that is appealing to the collective agency that underlies the democratic principle of popular sovereignty and which seeks to shift the power relation between people and the state from imposition to abidance.

Yet, while this process has supported the making of a community and a collective practice of citizenship, it has also paradoxically entailed exclusions on the basis of social difference. Mobilising as *vecinos* has been used as a political identity to build unity within the movement, following a politics of conviviality, where place functions as the uniting and equalising factor among *vecinos* and which asks of members to suspend social difference momentarily. As such, the political subjectivity of *vecino* encompasses a collective sense of self vis-à-vis a depoliticised individual sense of self that conditions participation on people's ability to divest themselves of other collective interests. As such, mobilising as *vecinos* hides the assumption of a white middle-class male as the neutral and default subject, creating a community that relies on homogenisation and that reproduces, as a result, existing exclusions along axes of social difference. This has been a barrier, in particular, for the recognition and participation of Mapuche-Tehuelche people, as well as for the recognition of women's labour in the movement.

Chapter Six

"*VeciNOs* informing *VeciNOs*": commoning knowledge and building an epistemic agency in citizenship

In my early encounters with *vecinos* in Esquel, they often asked me how was it that I – a Mexican living in the UK – came to learn about their struggle. Serendipity involved, I first learned about the movement through a beautiful leaflet of theirs, entitled *Chubut de Pie,* that had made its way to the pinboard of a lecturer's office at UEA. Depicting the province's river and cordillera in a colour palette composed of sky blue, light yellow, lavender, and emerald, and connoting Chubut's fauna with a whale's tail functioning as Chubut's 't' (see Figure 13), the leaflet caught my eye during a visit I paid to the lecturer and I was compelled to ask if I could I read and photograph it.

Figure 13. Leaflet *Chubut de Pie*

Source: Taken by the author in May 2019

As I shared this story with members of the movement, their response was invariably positive. There was a mixture of joy, pride, and something similar to a sense of vindication. It quickly became clear to me that my learning about the movement was the result of a conscious priority and deliberate strategy of the movement to inform about mining, and that it was, in fact, because of the importance they place on this practice and strategy that they had accepted my presence in the movement. For them, my research with them was a way in which their struggle could be further disseminated (previously discussed in Chapter 3). Thus, both my personal journey to the

movement, and their responses thereto, called my attention to the importance that informing about mining – as a strategy and practice of the movement – has had for Esquel's No a la Mina.

This chapter examines the movement's politics of 'informing'. It examines how the strategy of *información y difusión* has entailed a process of commoning knowledge, community-making, and citizenship transformation, and how this is a process that responds to the ways in which the state and mining sector have relied on the enclosure of expert knowledge, but which can nonetheless result in exclusions within the movement.

The chapter argues that the movement's strategy of 'informing' has encompassed two parallel processes for members of the movement: making oneself an expert (what they call information) and sharing that expertise with others (what they call dissemination). These processes have culminated in a commoning of knowledge, supporting a process of community-making through the creation of epistemic networks, as well as shaping the emerging community as one that is epistemically independent. By functioning as a critical emancipatory component in peoples' relationship with the state, the commoning of knowledge has introduced an epistemic agency to the way people practice citizenship that speaks back to the ways in which mining companies and the state seek to manufacture ignorance. However, as commoning knowledge has mostly referred in this case to expert knowledge, while it has bridged differences of class and created opportunities for the participation of women of diverse backgrounds, it has reinforced the exclusion of Mapuche-Tehuelche members by reproducing colonial attributions of knowledge and ignorance.

In examining the movement's strategy to inform, the chapter contributes to literature on commoning by providing a detailed analysis of a process of (expert) knowledge-commoning – joining Sato & Soto Alarcón's (2019) study, the only one to date examining this process (though in relation to local knowledge). By calling attention to how expert knowledge is embedded in power relations, it also contributes an analysis of how the exclusions present in the process of commoning can be directly supported by the object of commoning in question. The chapter contributes, too, to literature on citizenship and science and technology by showing how social movements are building epistemic agency in different ways to that of citizen science (where analytical focus has thus far been concentrated; see for example Brown, 2007; Hess, 2011, 2016, 2020; McCormick, 2007, 2009). Lastly, in pursuing this analysis, it also contributes to existing literature on science and technology studies and social movements, by showing how extractive industries do not only appeal to the uncertainty of science – that is to, the difficulty of establishing

a causal relation between environmental and health issues (Brown, 2007b; Conde, 2014; Hess, 2016; McCormick, 2009; Renfrew, 2018) – but may in fact attempt to do the opposite: manufacture certainty. Since the chapter shows ignorance-making has been central to these processes, it contributes too to this body of literature by linking it to existing works on agnotology and calling attention to how extractivism relies on, and produces, epistemic injustices.

To develop the argument, the chapter first examines what *información y difusión134* has meant for members of the movement. It then analyses how the epistemic practices encompassed within this strategy can be understood as a process of commoning knowledge, geared towards the making of an epistemically independent community, and how this responds to the practices of the state and the mining company. The following section analyses how, in turn, the commoning of knowledge has impacted upon the way people relate to the state by building an epistemic agency. Lastly, the chapter analyses the tensions and exclusions that surround the commoning of knowledge at play.

'Información y difusión'134: **Self-made expertise and bringing knowledge down to the people**

'Informing' has entailed a two-fold process for members of the movement – as their motto *información y difusión134* implies. It has meant first, a process of gathering information to make themselves experts, and second, a subsequent process of sharing that information with others.

For members of Esquel's No a la Mina, 'informing' commonly refers to a process of informing oneself – that is, to a process of independent learning about a topic – that became necessary in the light of the ways that the mining companies and the state invoked specious expertise to give out misinformation.

Thus, as members recounted to me, this first occurred in the context of the public talks organised by Meridian Gold in 2002 (see Introduction) and initially referred to chemical use to respond to the misinformation on cyanide given by the mining company. "They brought an expert from Dupont – the company that supplied them with cyanide – to explain to us how good cyanide was. The explanation was: if almonds have cyanide and they are edible, how can it not be safe?",[xliv] recounted one of women of the movement to me. "The conference had all sort of errors… that cyanide was as dangerous as *lavandina*[85], that it was a natural product omnipresent in nature… that

[85] *Lavandina* refers to sodium hypochlorite, a chemical used as a household bleach and disinfectant.

it wasn't as dangerous as one could think, that you could even drink it without harming yourself!";[xlv] "They spoke shamelessly… they told us: 'well, you smoke and cigarettes have cyanide",[xlvi] explained other members. Outside of the public talks, members of the movement also witnessed misinformation shared about other issues such as water consumption, acid drainage and employment. As another woman explained to me, "they said… that they wouldn't use any of our surface water, but would use instead underground water, so we didn't have to worry about water becoming scarcer".[xlvii]

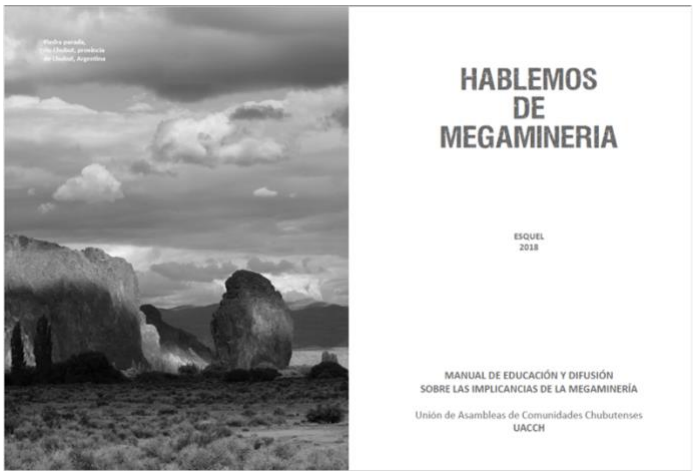
However, in most accounts, informing oneself was a process that required background knowledge in the relevant field or topic, and which began in 2002 with two chemistry professors from the University of Patagonia San Juan Bosco who, given their professional education, were able to spot the misinformation and quickly research about open pit mining to challenge the mining company's claims about cyanide – an event that is seen by many members of the movement as one of the founding moments of their struggle. As one of them explains, "obviously neither of us was an expert on cyanide, but we could study, and we had many more tools to understand".[xlviii] This then motivated bringing in other specialists who were eventually convened to join them in their effort to inform people in Esquel. As one of these other professionals explained to me, "one of them [the chemistry lecturers] called me and asked me if I could give a talk on cyanide. I told her I was not a toxicologist … I told her that I would study up on the topic. And I began to study about mega mining, cyanide, toxic chemicals, arsenic, and all that. I started reading a lot of things".[xlix]

Within the movement, 'informing' also means the process by which this newly acquired expertise is shared with others. As both chemistry professors did back in 2002, this has taken the form of talks in schools, hospitals, *juntas barriales* (neighbourhood associations), streets or other public spaces, as well as of systematically going through Esquel's neighbourhoods door-to-door (like 'Jehova witnesses' according to many members), preparing and printing the leaflets of "*VeciNOs informan a VeciNOs*" (Neighbours informing Neighbours), creating the movement's website (*noalamina.org*), recording diverse radio programmes since 2010, and ultimately creating the guide *Hablemos de Megaminería (*Let's talk about mega-mining; see Figure 14) which aimed to compile and systematise all the information and knowledge members of the movement have gained over the years.

As a result, for laypeople in the movement, 'informing' has meant a process through which they can become experts themselves; in their case, not by teaching themselves, but rather by being

taught by others – those others being experts. As two men of the movement expressed, "we all became sort of experts in mining";[l] "it was a moment that started an enormous learning process".[li] This process has involved not only 'experts' from Esquel but also external experts, such as Robert Moran, Marcelo Giraud, Enrique Viale, and Maristella Svampa, who the movement has invited to give talks.[86] Some members of the movement have complemented this process by independently reading and gathering information about mining to the point of acquiring expertise. As one woman recounted to me, "Sunday, I read all day, and by Monday I was already an expert of 'no to mining"".[lii]

Figure 14. Let's talk about mega-mining: a guide about mining by the UACCH



Source: Taken by the author of the digital version of the manual.

For members, becoming experts is intricately related to the credibility of their stance. Becoming an expert has meant ignorance can no longer be attributed to people in Esquel nor used to undermine their opposition to mining. This is evident in an anecdote I was told by a woman of the movement:

> "And [the public relations officer of the company] said one day, 'the *vecinos* of the *No a la Mina* do not have a bibliography', she said, 'the *vecinos* do not have a bibliography. I was furious… so I put together 80 references, beginning with the Argentinian Constitution… [and including] statements, studies, I am telling you they were 80 studies. And I attached a note saying 'this is the bibliography because of which I say no"".[liii]

[86] Robert Moran is a renowned geologist who has served as a consultant for anti-mining movements by reviewing the environmental impact assessments of the contested projects. Moran visited Esquel in 2003, thanks to the support of Oxfam, and declared that the EIA for the project *Cordillera Esquel* was the worst he had ever seen. Marcelo Giraud, Enrique Viale and Maristella Svampa are key lead academics in the field of socio-environmental movements and extractivism in Argentina. All three are co-authors of the book *15 mitos y realidades de la minería transnacional en Argentina: una guía para desmontar el imaginario minero* (Machado et al., 2011). Enrique Viale, an environmental lawyer, has provided legal support to numerous socio-environmental movements in Argentina.

The importance of backing one's position with claims to expertise also appears in the words of another member, "we also study before speaking. We study and then we see what we can refute … because there are people who just refutes, like that. No, no, no, we study to refute anything, and well of course, we turned them [the mining company] to rubber". As evident in this last quote, claiming expertise is thus the way in which they can contest the claims of the mining company and establish that it is them who are right.

This process of becoming and creating experts is ultimately related in most accounts to 'informing' as a process of 'bringing knowledge down to the people'. As a couple explained to me in an interview: "professionals descended on the town", said the woman, "and they explained",[liv] complemented her husband. This analogy of expert knowledge moving across space is echoed in the words of another member of the movement: "I think knowledge was important, it broke free of the university's cloister and flowed towards the community".[lv] The use of these spatial metaphors shows that, prior to the movement, expert knowledge was perceived as out-of-reach or unattainable for laypeople. As a result, 'informing' has meant for members of Esquel's No a la Mina a process of rendering expert knowledge accessible to the lay members of the community. As one member expresses in one of the movement's radio emissions: "They [the two chemists] brought science close to people".[lvi]

This is all the more evident when considering how 'informing' as 'bringing knowledge down to the people' has also meant an exercise of translation, in making expert knowledge accessible to non-experts. As the couple continued explaining to me, "[They explained] of course, but with a language that was comprehensible for the people … In other words, they descended, they left the academic realm to interact with the people and to explain with simple words what it [mining] meant".[lvii] The importance of adequate 'translation' is also echoed by another member when recalling a talk given by the two chemists: "it was a very simple talk so that everyone could understand".[lviii] Thus, thinking of 'informing' as 'bringing knowledge down to the people' entails, for members of Esquel's No a la Mina, a process of placing expert knowledge within and at the disposal of the community. As one other member of the movement expressed, "it was all a flow of knowledge to all, all, of the town…".[lix]

For this reason, for most members 'informing' speaks of a process of education. As it involves an exercise of translation, it has entailed explaining, teaching. As one member of the movement recalls, "when they [the chemists] started to recount how gold was to be extracted and which one

was the mountain to be brought down… they used a coffee filter machine to explain: 'imagine the coffee is the ground rock, and the water is the water with cyanide, this is poured over the ground rock, the gold is extracted and what is left? The cyanide water".[lx] Thus, for most members, 'informing' entails a process of educating about mega-mining. As two members expressed, "I think the information campaign that was done with the *vecino*, was and is important. It is basically educating";[lxi] "informing had a more educational goal, more about explaining, about convincing".[lxii]

This, in turn, has meant that 'informing' has been made possible by another type of expertise: that of knowing how to communicate information. As one entry in their website reads, "there were members of the assembly with professional knowledge who generate solid information about the effects of cyanide, and others who help to communicate them in simple and efficient ways".[lxiii] This know-how was first and foremost held by teachers – a group that is mentioned as having had a key role in the emergence of Esquel's No a la Mina (see Schiaffini, 2013). As one woman of the movement explained to me, "We are teachers, it is because we are teachers. I am a teacher… so, well you know how to explain, you know how to reach people".[lxiv] In fact, 24 out of the 45 members of the assembly I interviewed were or have been involved in teaching – whether at a school or university level.

For many members of the movement, 'informing' is, moreover, an exercise of educating for consciousness raising. As one member mentioned in one of the movement's radio programmes, "as information and the dissemination of all the facts on the environment and human health advances, many communities have gained consciousness".[lxv] This meaning of 'informing' as raising awareness is also echoed in the words of other members who explained to me: "raising the consciousness of people, that was the labour of those who began to go to meeting spaces, schools, neighbourhoods...";[lxvi] "things started to look different because two lecturers… told the population what was happening".[lxvii] For members of the movement, there is, thus, a linear relationship between becoming aware – 'knowing' – and rejecting mining. As a man of the movement explained to me, "at first, we swallowed the discourse, when they first arrived with the mining project…then, once I started having information, you realise that it is not quite like that, so I became part of the movement".[lxviii] As this member expressed, it is common for members of the movement to locate the triggering moment for their involvement to when they became aware or knowledgeable about mining. Moreover, because of the assumption of this linear relationship between knowing and rejecting mining, 'informing' as consciousness-raising is seen as a one-way process. As one woman

explained to me, "we gave out the leaflet door to door, and as a result people found out. And once they knew how this project was going to be, there was no return".[lxix]

Sustaining this practice of 'informing', and of 'informing' as 'bringing knowledge down to people', is face-to-face communication and a sense of duty and responsibility, respectively.

While the movement has also informed through a variety of written publications, its webpage, and social media, being able to do this process face-to-face especially at the beginning of the movement is seen as crucial for the success of this strategy. In the words of a member, "the contact of being there, face-to-face, receiving the questions and listening to the life stories of people, that too creates a necessary bond for all of us to raise consciousness about the situation".[lxx]

Driving the process is also an ethos of the duties that are attached to expertise, which is evident in the words of various of the professionals that undertook this role. "We left together [from one of the public conferences] and outside we said that this was our responsibility. We were the only chemists who could shed light on the issue";[lxxi] said one of the women to me. As is evident in the words of another of these professionals, this is an ethos that is directly attached to their location within the public education system: "after the public conference we said 'we have an obligation here as members of the university, one of your obligations is to communicate what you know because we are part of a national university, a public university. Who supports you? The people. So it was like a calling, a moral duty".[lxxii]

As the next section discusses, this two-fold process that 'informing' has entailed for members of the movement – first a process of gathering information to make oneself an expert and then a process of sharing that information with others – can be understood as a process of commoning knowledge.

Commoning knowledge: towards an epistemic community

The movement's practice of 'informing' can be understood as a process of commoning knowledge by opening previously enclosed spaces (Sato & Soto Alarcón, 2019) and creating new arrangements of access to knowledge.

'Informing', as discussed above, entails a process through which members of the movement not only become experts themselves – what (Epstein, 1996) refers to as 'expertification' – but seek to make others more knowledgeable too.[87] In the case of the movement, this process of expertification was set in motion by a process of what can be termed '*re*-expertification', as it was people who had previous expertise who took it upon themselves to research and study about open pit mining in order to then share it with other *vecinos*. By starting this process of expertification for others, expert *vecinos* widened people's access to expert knowledge – previously seen as enclosed in the cloisters of the university – establishing it as something that is collectively owned. This is captured in the words of a member who explained to me:

> "In Esquel our scientists gave us information. It is very important that universities, research centres, that those who know about some scientific issues that not everyone sees, because not all of them are visible, for example, arsenic in water is not visible nor does it change its taste, so if someone does not tell us that there is arsenic in the water, we cannot know on our own, and this information is not property of the university, or the scientists, this information is property of the people… the owner of this knowledge is not the scientist, the owner is the community to which these scientists belong".[lxxiii]

Widening access and establishing knowledge as collectively owned did not only entail creating the spaces and means to transmit knowledge, but also engaging in an effort of translation to make its content accessible to people from different educational backgrounds. By motivating a process of expertification, 'informing' also decentralised knowledge transmission beyond the hands of original expert *vecinos*, as members of the movement who had gone through this process began to assume the role of transmitters/educators themselves. As such, by widening access to knowledge previously seen as enclosed within expert circles – namely, those of the university – the movement's practice of 'informing' has built an approach to knowledge as something that is collectively owned.

It is possible to speak of commoning knowledge rather than information – despite the fact this is the term used by the movement – since re-expertification has allowed for information to be transformed into knowledge. As the expert is teaching her or himself, he/she is transforming a collection of facts into justified true beliefs linked to a purpose or use (Gaudet, 2015). Moreover, what is being shared can be conceived as knowledge rather than information as sharing this newly acquired expertise involves a process of teaching so that other members of the community understand the issues at hand in simple ways. Thus, while the process by which experts share their

[87] Epstein (1996) coins this term in his study of the AIDS movement in the United States and the way in which they contested and laid claims to scientific knowledge.

expertise with others is framed by members of the movement as 'informing', that which is being shared is not only information but also knowledge.[88]

This process of commoning, moreover, responds to the ways in which Meridian Gold attempted to rely on the enclosure of expert knowledge to further its agenda. As mentioned in the Introduction, when Meridian Gold was setting up its mining project in Esquel in 2002, the company began the process of conducting and presenting an environmental impact assessment (EIA), as well as organised several public conferences to present the project to town residents. Yet, the EIA was for the most part inaccessible, and when accessible it was fragmented. Coverage in Esquel's newspaper *El Oeste* between September and December 2002 shows that complaints revolved around the accessibility of the contents of the document due to its length of 1500 pages, its use of technical and scientific language, and the short span of 45 days between the presentation of the study and its discussion at an *audiencia pública*. The same newspaper coverage shows how complaints also revolved around the physical inaccessibility of the document. Copies were never handed to the municipal library because of supposedly prohibitive printing costs, meaning that the document could only be accessed through the Municipality of Esquel or the University of San Juan Bosco (which is located a few kilometres outside of Esquel). However, as only one copy of the document was available in each place, town residents were asked to decide on the spot which part they were interested in and to photocopy it at their own expense. Moreover, as discussed in the previous section, the public talks organised by Meridian Gold were plagued with misinformation – misinformation which is also found in articles in *El Oeste* (mostly from September to December 2002). For example, a note of October 1st, 2000, mentions an "expert on cyanide was consulted" who assured cyanide "does not contaminate", that "it vanishes in the tailings dam after 30 or 40 days", and that mining "requires very little water".

The process of the EIA thus signalled to *vecinos* how the use of scientific-technical forms and arguments could be used to withhold information from people, and thus to exclude people from 'knowing'. Moreover, the public conferences and media statements of representatives of Meridian Gold signalled to them an attempt by the company to use the population's general lack of scientific literacy and people's natural unfamiliarity with open pit mining as it was a new activity in the region to foreclose a discussion around mining. This signalled, in turn, how a lack of scientific literacy

[88] Speaking of 'information' also allows the movement to frame the practice as one of telling people what is happening or could happen – that is, of offering a descriptive and explanatory reading of events that appears as 'matter-of-fact' – seeking to galvanise people into action.

could be leveraged to prevent people in Esquel from participating meaningfully in existing mechanisms, such as the *audiencia pública*.

Both the EIA and the declarations of company representatives (either through public conferences or media) can be understood as attempts at manufacturing ignorance – or practices of 'agnogenesis' (Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008). As Proctor (2008) argues, ignorance is not a 'natural state' or a 'lost realm' but an active construct and thus as a 'lack' that can be produced or maintained through various mechanisms such as "neglect, forgetfulness, myopia, extinction, secrecy and suppression" (p.3).

The lack of access to the EIA shows an attempt by the mining company and the state to exploit the barriers that scientization (McCormick, 2006) – the increased role of scientific-technical processes and criteria that increase reliance on expert knowledge – create for popular participation (see also Hess, 2018; McCormick, 2009). As Li (2015) argues, EIAs force political participation through expert knowledge and scientific argumentation. As a result, they not only limit participation and the meaningfulness of that participation, but also limit the language of resistance, as EIAs "…reduce a wide range of political, economic, and social demands and discontents into arguments that will be evaluated based on their scientific validity" (ibid., p.207). The attempts of the company and the state to suppress relevant information through inaccessible language, prohibitive length, and a tight time frame entail an effort to produce ignorance, and thus limit the meaningfulness of people's participation in the *audiencia pública*. As one woman of the movement expressed, "the study had 4 volumes, this thick, you could not read it from one day to another, and they presented it with little time in advance. It was like they were saying don't read it… there were so many issues, you couldn't find it in print, you couldn't easily get it".[lxxiv] As such, the process surrounding the EIA sought to produce what McGoey (2019) calls strategic ignorance – that is, the manufacturing of 'unknowns' with the purpose of attaining support for a given project or initiative. The eventual access to only parts of the EIA can be seen then as an attempt to guard those manufactured unknowns through the fragmentation of relevant information.

Likewise, the public talks were aimed at manufacturing ignorance. However, unlike efforts documented in the literature on agnotology, attempts to create ignorance in this case did not revolve around disputes, manipulation, or neglect of science per se (see McGoey, 2019; Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008) but rather around the creation of disinformation – that is, of false information that aims to mislead the public. The intent of these conferences to manufacture ignorance is even

more evident when noticing how the facts communicated therein were carefully constructed statements that appealed to logical argumentation by syllogism. Most of them relied on the use of two seemingly true premises to arrive – through deductive reasoning – at a seemingly valid conclusion. Almonds contain cyanide, you eat almonds, therefore it is safe to consume cyanide; cigarettes contain cyanide, you smoke cigarettes, therefore cyanide cannot be that toxic; mining will use underground water, Esquel doesn't use underground water, therefore mining won't make water scarcer. In these statements, however, the conclusions are invalid as they does not necessarily follow from the premises. Thus, behind of this disinformation is an attempt to construct something that appears as true, which in some instances was further reinforced with an appeal to expertise, as evident in the example mentioned of the note in *El Oeste* where it is emphasised that it was an expert who assured cyanide was not toxic.

Thus, the state and mining companies have sought to install and legitimise mining through the abuse and manufacturing of ignorance.

But there is no ignorance within the community about that strategy. As two women of the movement expressed, "mining companies use ignorance",[lxxv] "they play with people's ignorance".[lxxvi] Moreover, the suppression of relevant information and the creation of disinformation rather than appeal to the 'uncertainty of science' or the difficulty of establishing causation in, and between, environmental and health issues – a common practice of industry when facing environmental demands (see Brown, 2007; Conde, 2014; Hess, 2016; Li, 2015; Michaels, 2008; Proctor, 2008; Renfrew, 2018) – attempt instead to manufacture certainty. The suppression of information and the disinformation created by Meridian Gold and the state were aimed precisely at presenting mining practices as controllable, predictable, and thus safe. In other words, their attempt to manufacture ignorance was aimed at removing the uncertainty that surrounds mining because of the risks involved, and to frame these issues instead within the certainty of safety. This attempt to manufacture ignorance to generate certainty is not unique to the beginning of the conflict in 2002-2003 but has been constant throughout the years. A recent example is the statement by Chubut's Governor, Mariano Arcioni, in August 2020 when he declared that "without cyanide and managing water carefully, mega mining could be done in a sustainable way",[lxxvii] obscuring all the other socio-environmental risks that surround open pit mining.

The abuse of scientization and the manufacturing of ignorance amount to the creation of epistemic injustice – that is, a wrong to people in their capacity as knowers (Fricker, 2007). The reliance on

scientization and ignorance is aimed precisely at thwarting this capacity, as well as directly attributing ignorance to *vecinos* by assuming people are unable to recognise disinformation. As an entry in the movement's webpage reads: "… we are asking for mining companies to go, for state officials to hear the voice of the people who do not want TO BE POLLUTED, PLUNDERED, NOR TAKEN AS IGNORANT" (capitalised in the original quote).[lxxviii] As this message makes clear, this attribution of ignorance – a historical trend within development (see Hobart, 1983) – is blatant to most members of the movement. As two members recounted to me about their experiences in these public talks, "it was so messy… they were talking as if to an ignorant public, like they could say whatever they wanted, anyone who knows a bare minimum of biology or chemistry, could see that it was false…";[lxxix] "I told him [the presenter] that his statements offended my intelligence and that of the young people present… and that [it offended me that] in a school, a school, they were giving a talk with that level of technical and scientific falseness".[lxxx]

The movement's practice of 'informing' has contested the attempts by the state and mining company to create epistemic injustice as a way to promote the projects through the manufacturing of certainty around mining. By highlighting the risks – and thus, the uncertainties that surround mining – 'informing' has been intended from the outset to open the discussion about mining that already appeared to have already been foreclosed by the state.

Secondly, 'informing' has contested the barriers created by scientization and sought to make relevant knowledge accessible to people. In so doing, 'informing' has been aimed at allowing people to open a discussion around mining and to participate meaningfully therein.

Lastly, 'informing' has sought to break the cycle by which one form of ignorance (lack of knowledge and experience) is used to produce another (disinformation). The commoning of knowledge through the movement's practice of 'informing' has aimed, therefore, at contesting the ways in which – by abusing the lack of expert knowledge and attempting to manufacture ignorance – the state and mining companies have relied on the enclosure of expert knowledge to install mining. This process of commoning aims to undo the enclosure of knowledge which, as one member of the movement explained to me, is central to extractivism: "one of the things that favours extractivism is cloistered knowledge... using science under a belief that it is so difficult that no one will understand".[lxxxi]

The commoning of knowledge, moreover, is also supporting a process of community-making. As mentioned in the accounts of members of the movement, face-to-face contact was central to the movement's strategy in the initial period. As such, 'informing' can be seen as a practice through which people became connected – as members of the movement went door by door giving out leaflets and talking to *vecinos* about mining, visited schools and hospitals to give talks, and attended the movement's *localito*. Moreover, the community-building effect of their strategy to inform is evident in how for members of the movement, the multiplication of expertise has allowed for the creation of a somewhat rhizomatic network working towards the same goal. As a member explained to me, "you see, bringing information, from mouth to mouth, that is what happened at the beginning, information travelled from mouth to mouth, from *vecino* to *vecino*, from family to family".[lxxxii] As other members of the assembly became experts too, they also started disseminating information on mining through talks, door-to-door visits, or informal chats. As various people explained to me, "we were transmitting agents… multipliers of the information we received… each one of us would do their work in their families, workplaces";[lxxxiii] "we were in charge of disseminating, all that we knew or learnt we communicated it";[lxxxiv] "each one of us was a thinking cell, we said in a meeting everyone was free to do as they saw fit, we could do whatever we could think of: talks, leaflets, interviews… we did everything…one went to a school, someone else to another, and again, we were thousands of cells with no schedule".[lxxxv]

People's use of spatial metaphors to speak of how expert knowledge was made accessible to non-experts in Esquel, shows that prior to the movement, experts in Esquel were perceived as members of a gated community and in a somewhat asymmetrical relation to laypeople. Commoning knowledge, therefore, has meant the contestation of the distance between different groups of *vecinos*, between those who are experts and those who are not, and the placing of experts as members of the community rather than as outsiders, supporting a process of community-making. Placing experts as part of the community has allowed, consequently, for building a community with horizontal epistemic ties as portrayed by the leaflets '*VeciNOs informan a VeciNOs*'. In the words of one member of the movement, "it is the same community that warns the rest of the community about what is happening, and that topic is dealt between *vecinos*".[lxxxvi]

The placing of experts within the community points, moreover, to the central role that sharing knowledge as a *vecino* has for community-making, as it is precisely because the people sharing knowledge are not only experts but also *vecinos* that relations of trust can be established. The *vecino* is epistemically trusted because he or she is located outside of formal political structures (see

Chapter Five), and thus has no bias or conflict of interest when it comes to the knowledge he or she is sharing. As two members of the movement explained, "people trusted the *vecino*, they did not trust the official discourse",[lxxxvii] "I believed the neighbour, not those people [the representatives of Meridian Gold]".[lxxxviii]

Figure 15. Leaflets *VeciNOs informan a VeciNOs* (2014 & 2021)

Source: From left to right, photo taken by the author in January 2020 and retrieved from the movement's Facebook page (Noalamina Esquel).

These horizontal flows of knowledge, the placing of experts within the community, and the connection between people through epistemic networks give rise, in turn, to a conceptualisation of how the commoning of knowledge is not only supporting a general process of community-making but shaping it as an epistemic one. Moreover, because the commoning of knowledge responds to the use of scientization and ignorance by mining companies and the state, the emerging community is one that seeks to be epistemically independent. This is evident in the link between 'informing' and *vecinos*. Being outside of formal political structures is seen as key when talking about knowledge, so that knowledge is conceived of and conveyed without the bias of the state and mining companies – that is, from a different standpoint and with a different purpose in mind. Thus, as one member mentioned, it is crucial for *vecinos* to be epistemically engaged, "as we can also circulate information, take it from another viewpoint, and not have to depend on scientists or technicians to come and teach us, to enlighten us, but we can learn amongst ourselves, be autodidacts, and so [to speak of]… *vecinos* informing *vecinos* has become a little bit more important".[lxxxix]

As the next section discusses, to be epistemically independent is seen as an emancipatory component when relating to the state, as knowledge is crucial to people's ability to decide about their future.

Towards an epistemic agency for citizenship

Knowledge is present in accounts of movement members as an emancipatory component that plays out in their relation to the state. The commoning of knowledge, and the making of an epistemically independent community, speaks of a transformation of citizenship as agency through the incorporation of an epistemic dimension thereto. Knowledge acts as an emancipatory component of their ability to choose and to act upon that choice (Kabeer, 1999).

Education has long intertwined with citizenship as the means through which citizens are shaped, and thus as the means through which it is brought about (see Gellner, 1983; García, 2005; Gustaffson, 2009). In Argentina, this can be clearly seen throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. During the 19th century, it can be located in the role that education played in the formation of the nation-state as teachers from Buenos Aires or other major urban centres were sent to the country's so-called interior to civilise (Mandrini, 2006; Oriola, 2014) following Alberdi's political mandate that to populate was to educate and civilise (see Chapter Four). In the next century, this can be found in the educational reform of 1918 which created the *extensión universitaria* (university extension) which mandated public universities to engage in community outreach to link their activity with the community needs in terms of democratic integration and social compromise (Miralles & Cipressi, 2018). The political thought of Leopoldo Lugones was influential at that time, stressing the importance of educating the national population – of teaching "a model of love proper of the soldier towards the nation" (Brienza, 2019, p.172 my translation).

Education, however, acquired an emancipatory counter role in the 1950s under the emergence of popular education – a pedagogical methodology that emerged in this period in Brazil, based on work of Paulo Freire, and to a lesser degree on liberation theology and feminism. Popular education approaches knowledge as a collective enterprise that can emancipate from oppression and exploitation by promoting the revalorisation and self-valorisation of members as knowledgeable (Korol, 2015).[89]

[89] It has been further developed in practice by various social movements/organisations such as the Landless Workers Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* or MST) in Brazil, the Zapatista Movement in Mexico,

The trajectory of popular education in Argentina goes back to the beginning of the 20th century, to emerging critiques of the formal education system for its exclusion of most of the Argentinian population – which in part motivated the abovementioned educational reform in 1918 (Acri, 2016; Pineau, 1994). In the 1910s, *The Popular School* publication was issued aiming to communicate scientific advances and theories in an accessible manner to the general public (Acri, 2016), and through the period between 1900 and 1945 workers' unions and newly emerged citizen associations began to develop alternative education opportunities for people excluded from the formal education system, such as illiterate adults, working women, children, and migrants (Pineau, 1994). From 1955 onwards, popular education groups in Argentina, influenced by the work of Freire, expanded their contestation of the formal education systems not only as a site of exclusion, but as an institution complicit in the oppression and exploitation of the Argentinian population. Under this current of popular education which follows a participatory pedagogy and pursues consciousness-raising, education acquired a distinct emancipatory potential as a tool for the political and social transformation of the popular classes (ibid.; Lazar, 2010).

The movement's practice of 'informing' is related to both traditions of popular education in Argentina – that before and after 1955 – highlighting the links between knowledge and citizenship at play.

As recounted by many of the initial expert *vecinos*, their sense of duty to learn about mining and share that knowledge with people in Esquel was rooted exactly in the university practice of *extensión universitaria* and motivated by its ethos of highlighting the social duty of experts to place their knowledge at the service of the community. This is evident in the words of one of these women, who comments on the increased importance of the *extensión universitaria* in the context of an increasing privatisation of public universities following the 2001 crisis.[90] As this woman recounted to me,

> "We did old-fashioned university extension… There was a new university law that changed 'university extension' to 'third-party services'... In the midst of the crisis, people in university, researchers, complained of what little they earned. So, what did they do? 'Third-party services'. So, if you were a researcher, you could receive external jobs and charge directly for them. You must pay 10% to the university but the rest goes to your pocket…

ALFORJA in Costa Rica, and the Ecumenical Centre of Popular Education (*Centro Ecuménico para la Educación Popular* or CEDEPO) in Argentina (see Ampudia & Elisalde, 2015; Korol, 2015).

[90] Since the 2015 reform of the 24.521 Education Law (*Ley de Educación Superior 24.521* in Spanish) the sale of services by universities is prohibited by article 2bis. Text of the Education Law available at: http://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/25000-29999/25394/texact.htm

> and there were people in the University who worked for mega-mining, whose studies are in the environmental impact assessment…We didn't charge anything. We did as we ought to because we have a degree and that is thanks to the people. We must respond to people, not companies. Because they [other researchers] just lined their pockets… and what is worst, they privatised the university. Sometimes they didn't even show up to give their lectures nor engaged in their research projects, because they were doing research for industry".[xc]

Moreover, for members of the movement 'informing' is linked to a process of education (as discussed in the previous section) and more specifically to a model of emancipatory education. As a member of the movement explained to me, "many say that this was, or continues to be, a work of popular education … there are *compañeros* who define it as such, as we have made knowledge reach all type of people, old, small, young *vecinos*".[xci]

As such, 'informing' is an exercise of popular education. It aims to respond to the failures of traditional education systems to equip people with emancipatory knowledge, approaches knowledge as emancipatory, and engages in collective epistemic horizontal processes. As various members mentioned, "people grew aware, and so people were sharper, they knew what they [the mining company] would do";[xcii] "education sets you free, education wakes you up. Knowledge, knowing what something is about, opens your head";[xciii] "the domination of any people is through the promotion of ignorance… an educated people will not swallow any frog. It is fundamental to think. I think this movement helps people think".[xciv] By practising popular education, Esquel's No a la Mina has functioned as a "pedagogical space-time" (Zibechi, 2012, p.23), resembling other Latin American movements in their making of counter experts and their struggle over knowledge rather than demanding the state fulfils people's right to education (ibid.).[91]As the next section discusses, there is, however, one element in which 'informing' differs from popular education, and this difference produces a narrower version that reinforces one type of knowledge at the expense of others, reproducing exclusions in the movement along the lines of social difference.

The links between the movement's practice of 'informing' and both traditions of popular education illuminate how the commoning of knowledge at play relates to citizenship.

[91] For example, the MST movement in Brazil, the indigenous movement in Ecuador, and the *piquetero* movement in Argentina have sought to form intellectuals of their own. The *piquetero* movement organised philosophy workshops and *rondas de pensamiento autónomos* (autonomous thinking spaces). The indigenous movement in Ecuador founded the Intercultural University of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities in Ecuador and the Landless Movement of Brazil has created around 2,000 independent schools in settlements across the country (Zibechi, 2012).

In the first place, its connection to the *extensión universitaria* shows how commoning knowledge is rooted in what people perceive as a citizenly obligation: the social duty that expert *vecinos* felt to place their knowledge at the service of the community in the context of having been educated and worked in public universities (i.e. to have benefitted from public funds). In this sense, it is people's sense of duty in light of the state's provision of public education what has motivated new arrangements of responsibility over knowledge, and thus its commoning.

More importantly, its connection to popular education shows how 'informing' has been pursued with an emancipatory aim – in this case, to support people's ability to decide about their place. In the words of a member of the movement, "…once people know, they can decide what it is they want".[xcv] This positions knowledge as a critical component in the relation between *vecinos* and the state, and the commoning of knowledge as an "emergent politics of knowledge [which] offers a new space for citizen agency" (Taddei, 2015, p.80), and that results in turn in an agency of "an epistemological sort" (ibidem.).

This is perhaps most evident in how most members attribute the success of the 2003 plebiscite to people being informed. As one member of the movement expressed about their victory in the 2003 referendum: "that was proof of how powerful a collective construction of knowledge was"[xcvi]. As another member expressed: "All *vecinos* had a sufficient level of information to decide – in what was the plebiscite first – and then to continue sustaining, endorsing, and defending not only the result of the plebiscite, but other options for the city, other models. Without doubt it is doing popular education, disseminating, consciousness-raising, informing".[xcvii]

Informing about mining – and commoning knowledge – has thus transformed people's agency in relation to the state. In other words, it has transformed citizenship as agency. By contesting the ways in which the mining company and the state have abused scientization and engaged in agnogenesis, informing about mining has supported people's individual and collective ability to choose, and their capacity to act upon that choice in the context of their relation to the state. Moreover, it has contested the epistemic injustice exercised against people in Esquel. By commoning knowledge, members of the movement are both ensuring that they themselves are knowledgeable, as well as demanding to be recognised as such.

However, by placing expert knowledge at the centre of 'informing' – and thus of the process of commoning knowledge and community-making at play – the movement's politics reinforce the exclusion of Mapuche-Tehuelche members, as the rest of the chapter will show.

Tensions in commoning expert knowledge

As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, 'informing' as a process of expertification – of becoming and creating experts – has been central to how the movement claims credibility and thus to how members legitimate their decision to oppose mining. Members understand it is precisely because they were informed (i.e., knowledgeable about mining) that their decision is valid. As a member of the movement expressed, "here being fundamentalist is useless, saying no because no, or yes because yes; however, we have so many arguments that we even created a manual with them".[xcviii]

Understanding the central role they have given to this process of expertification shows, in turn, how the movement is engaged in a 'credibility struggle' or the contestation of the "believability of claims and claims-makers" (Epstein, 1996, p.3) and hence "of the capacity [between] claim-makers to enrol supporters behind their arguments, legitimate those arguments as authoritative knowledge, and present themselves as the sort of people who can voice the truth" (ibidem.); a struggle that can also be understood as one over truth. As captured in the words of a member: "we always say that our struggle is information and dissemination, meaning that if information reaches someone, there is no turning back. They know now and join the struggle because they know what the truth is, not the truth of mining companies, that mining is sustainable, that it won't pollute… we know that is a lie".[xcix]

Pushing the movement into this credibility struggle is the need people in Esquel have felt to speak in the same language, so to speak, as the mining company and the state to effectively make the case for their opposition. This is evident in the words of one member, "each time we had more information, people who had prepared from their expertise, professionals who could argue concretely with technical and scientific data".[c] Recalling Li (2015), the increasing scientization of socio-environmental conflicts reduces conflicts to a language of scientific validity. In the case of Esquel's No a la Mina, the process of the EIA and the public talks organised by mining company with support of the government forced the movement into the terrain of expert knowledge, to speak in this language in order to be heard and not dismissed 'as fundamentalists' – to recall the

words used by a member of the movement. In other words, it "constricted [the movement] in their politics by being forced to engage in … contestations of expert knowledge through expert knowledge" (Li, 2015, p.11).

As a result, expert knowledge has been at the core of who can inform themselves, what it means to inform oneself, of what is brought down, by who and to whom, and of what type of knowledge is being established as a commons. This, in turn, reinforces a view of expert knowledge as objective and neutral, and of decision-making as a *rational* processes of calculation of benefits and risks – views which, as feminist scholars have pointed out, are embedded in a gendered history as rationality has been equated under a gender binary and where how claims to neutrality and objectivity have been used to portray male standpoints as universal (Merchant, 1989; Plumwood, 1993, 2002; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1986).[92]

Focusing on this type of knowledge has supported women's participation in the movement and has also helped bridge differences of class – something mobilising as *vecinos* has done too (see Chapter Five). As discussed in the previous section, since 'informing' has entailed a process of translation to make expert knowledge accessible to laypeople in Esquel, teachers have been crucial in this task. Teaching is a predominantly feminized occupation in Argentina. According to latest available census (2010), in Chubut there are 15,703 people in the public education sector, out of which 11,712 are women. When considering the private sector, the total figure increases to 21,931, out of which 15,606 are women.[93] Consequently, by requiring teaching skills the practice of 'informing' has implicitly supported the role of women in the movement – particularly of white, middle-class women, though not exclusively. Moreover, the crucial role of the two female academics at one of the foundational moments of the movement may have also supported the participation of women by providing a model of leadership for others. In relation to class, as 'informing' has aimed to bridge the knowledge held by people with different levels of education, it has bridged distinctions of who is perceived as knowledgeable or not – a process of differentiation that tends to develop along class lines.

[92] Yet, as evident in the next chapter, 'informing' does not reproduce the gender baggage around science. It does not conceive science as a tool to exploit and control nature – conceptualised as a female as a result of the divide between body and mind (see Merchant, 1989) – but rather as a tool to care for it.

[93] The 2010 census is quoted because the previous one from 2000 does not disaggregate data according to gender. The 2010 census is available at: https://www.indec.gob.ar/indec/web/Nivel4-CensoProvincia-3-999-26-000-2010

However, the focus on expert knowledge reproduces misrecognitions of other ways of knowing following a historical pattern of attributions of knowledge and ignorance. As discussed in the previous section, 'informing' can be understood as a practice of emancipatory popular education, except in one regard: it does not aim to produce a collective dialectic *production* of knowledge, but rather to enable people to become knowledgeable through the *transmission* of expert knowledge. As a result, 'informing' – unlike popular education – does not rely on an understanding of people as knowledgeable in their own right, but on people's right to knowledge. As a result of this narrower approach and the legitimisation of the movement through expert knowledge, other ways of knowing – such as local knowledge or the knowledge that is obtained through movements and events and thus through historical and relational experience (Escobar, 2012, p.204) – are dismissed as non-knowledge. This dismissal reproduces colonial relationships of knowledge, furthering the historical epistemic misrecognition of the *pueblos originarios*. As mentioned in the previous section, the formation of the Argentinian nation-state was supported by the civilising function given to education, which in turn supported flows of teachers from Buenos Aires to the so-called interior of the country to educate indigenous populations. As a consequence, a practice of 'informing' that focuses on expert knowledge, and the subsequent commoning of expert knowledge, reproduces a historical relationship of who the holders and transmitter of knowledge and who the recipients are – that is, of who is knowledgeable and who is ignorant.

The exclusionary effects on the *pueblos originarios* of placing expert knowledge at the centre of commoning are evident in the dispute that surrounds the origins of the movement. As recounted in the opening of the chapter, most members locate the origin of the movement in the decision of these two chemists to learn about cyanide and share that information, and thus attribute to them (to different degrees) the emergence of the movement. As one member of the movement expressed when telling me about the movement's motto *información y difusión:* "we go back to the origins, how this began… it was two women who in a talk decided to inform, everything was born from that".[ci] However, other members point out (see for example Agüero & Macayo, 2019), that it "was not scientists who raised the alarm about mining but indigenous people",[cii] as the opposition against mining started more than a year before that, in January 2001 rather than October of 2002, when the Mapuche-Tehuelche community of Huisca Antieco found members of Meridian Gold in their territory (see Introduction).

By prioritising expert knowledge, the role and centrality of urban, white, middle-class members has been reinforced – supporting the assumption discussed in Chapter 4 of the neutral subject in

ideas of who is a *vecino* – further marginalising Mapuche-Tehuelche members within the movement. In other words, 'informing' has "set the rules of the game: of who can speak, from what point of view, with what authority and according to what criteria…" (Escobar, 2012, p. 41). As a woman of the movement expressed,

> "science, hard sciences… on those axis we began to sketch the argument to defend our 'no' to mining, this implied that for a really long time the directionality of the defence, of the construction of the assembly in relation to the defence of this no, was made with these paradigms… it would have been very different if the first argument on the table would have been the ancestral knowledge of the *pueblos originarios*. It wasn't like that and so that foundational act generated that everything comes back to using the scientific fundaments of hard sciences. So that gave the assembly a hue, a colour, and we have had to work very hard to start giving it other colours, like the plurinational flag".[ciii]

Focusing on expert knowledge thus attributes political agency to middle-class residents of Esquel (mostly non-indigenous) in particular, and erases that of Mapuche-Tehuelche communities – foregrounding the former in the movement's history and erasing the latter. In doing so, a process of commoning which is mostly concerned with expert knowledge obscures the history of resistance of Mapuche-Tehuelche communities against resource extraction and their political agency, obscuring that "*the pueblos originarios* have always defended the territory, for longer than the last 17 years".[civ,94]

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the movement's politics of 'informing'. It has discussed how the movement's strategy to inform has encompassed two parallel processes for members of the movement: making oneself an expert (what they call information) and sharing that expertise with others (what they call dissemination). These processes have culminated in a commoning of knowledge that responds to the ways in which the state and mining company have relied on the enclosure of expert knowledge to impose mining. In turn, the commoning of knowledge has supported a process of community-making through the creation of epistemic networks, as well as shaped the emerging community as one that aims to be epistemically independent. As the commoning of knowledge is functioning as a critical emancipatory component in people's relationship with the state, it has introduced an epistemic agency to the autonomous collective citizenship being practiced by members of the movement.

[94] This is how old Esquel's No a la Mina was when this interview was conducted.

However, as commoning knowledge has mostly referred to expert knowledge, while it has supported the making of a community by bridging differences of class and supporting women's role in the movement (as mobilising as *vecinos* has done too), it has reinforced the exclusion of Mapuche-Tehuelche members by reproducing colonial attributions of knowledge and ignorance.

Chapter Seven

The day we said 'NO': commoning wellbeing and a moral citizenship

The lockdown due to COVID-19 was made effective in Argentina one week and a half before the celebration of the *Día de la Dignidad del Pueblo de Esquel (*Esquel's Dignity Day) on March 23th in commemoration of the victory of the 'NO' against mining in the 2003 plebiscite. As a result, the celebration could not take its usual form and became a virtual one. From the living room of the house I was staying at in Esquel, I followed the movement's social media that day. They shared numerous photographs of that day back in 2003 – of people voting, of the ballot cards, of the results of the plebiscite, and of the municipal Declaration (*Ordenanza Municipal No. 05/04*) that established the commemorated date in 2004. At 3 PM, I listened to the *cacerolazo* they organised for that day. Witnessing the celebrations first-hand – albeit in a different modality than usual – called my attention to movement's appeal to the notion of dignity. Whether dignity was part of the movement's vocabulary before the municipal declaration, or whether it was adopted because of it, witnessing those celebrations made me aware of how central dignity is to the movement's community-making and way of relating to the state, as well as of the different meanings the notion has in their struggle.

This chapter examines the movement's practice of appealing to dignity, what this means for members of the movement, and the ways in which it supports a process of commoning, and thus of community-making. The chapter argues that appealing to dignity has entailed the commoning of wellbeing, leading to a process of community-making that seeks to bridge differences of class in particular. It has also provided a moral grammar that provides values and affect around which the emerging community can coalesce. By commoning wellbeing, the movement's appeal to dignity contests the ways in which the state and mining companies have exploited people's needs and appealed to the notion of crisis to impose mining in the province. In doing so, the movement's appeal to dignity has shaped the way citizenship is practiced, further shaping a sense of agency and speaking of a right to wellbeing. Lastly, the chapter argues that appeals to dignity present an opportunity to further the recognition of Mapuche-Tehuelche people in the movement but also present potential risks for the creation/reinforcement of exclusions within the movement.

In examining the role of dignity in Esquel's No a la Mina, the chapter aims to contribute to existing literature on dignity, most of which does not empirically explore how the concept is understood and used by social movements (see for example Araya Anabalón, 2010; Diez García & Laraña, 2017; Espinoza, 2008; López, 2012; Poma, 2018). The work of Narotzky (2016) and Nikolayenko (2020) are the only studies – to my knowledge – that undertake this empirical analysis. However, as neither movement is a socio-environmental one, the empirical content of dignity in the context of these struggles remains understudied. In addition, the chapter contributes to existing literature on citizenship and dignity (Roy, 2013, 2019, 2021) by focusing on how social movements, rather than the state, make an appeal to it.

The chapter also seeks to contribute to a better understanding of how commoning is supported by values and affect. As such, it contributes to existing literature on the relationship between affect and commons (Centemeri, 2018; De Angelis, 2017; Majewska, 2021; Nightingale, 2011a, 2019; Singh, 2017), which has mostly focused on food sovereignty movements, predominantly in South Asian contexts, and on relations of care between humans and nature therein. The present chapter expands this scope of analysis, examining the role of values and affect in different processes of commoning, and in commoning and community-making – a relationship that remains theoretically and empirically under-theorised as most of the existing literature has focused on commons rather than commoning.

The chapter is structured as follows. It first briefly discusses a genealogy of the concept of dignity more generally and then traces, more specifically, its emergence in Argentinian social movements. The chapter then moves on to discuss the meanings that dignity has for members of the movement. It then analyses how dignity entails the commoning of wellbeing and a process of community-making that responds to the workings of the state and private sector. Thereafter, it analyses the ways in which the commoning of wellbeing impacts the way people relate to the state and concludes by discussing the promises and perils that appealing to dignity holds for the recognition of difference.

Genealogy of dignity

The emergence of dignity in political vocabularies has a long history. Its meaning, however, has changed significantly through time (from referring to unequal social status and rank to meaning equal moral worth) and remains highly contested. The exact trajectory of the change, from a

meaning of inequality to equality, differs among scholars. However, most scholars agree on the importance of Immanuel Kant's philosophy in locating the origins of the genealogy of the current term (Düwell et al., 2014; Rosen, 2018). One of the founding principles of Kant's ethic is what he calls the categorical imperative: the notion that all human beings are equal in value and should be treated as such, and thus that value cannot be expressed by or translated into any other languages of valuation, for example, monetary. As such, Kant argues people have inherent, unearned, non-fungible *würde* (worth) – a word that has been translated to English as dignity since the 1750s (Debes, 2017). As a result, human equality came to be defined in terms of dignity: all humans are equals since we share the same degree of dignity (see Johnson, 1755). This connection between equality and dignity in the 18th century marked a rupture with previous uses of the word *dignitas*, associated with the idea of status and thus to inequality.

Scholars differ in identifying the philosophical trajectory of the term beyond Kant; but they agree that the association between the ideas of dignity and equality was cemented in the Western public sphere with the Human Rights Declaration of 1948, which affirmed the "fundamental, unearned, equally shared moral status among humans" (Debes, 2017, p.2). With the association between humanity and equal moral status thus affirmed, dignity – as an expression of that association - became a politically salient term. (ibid.).

In the 1990s, the Zapatista movement framed their struggle as the revolt of dignity (see González Aróstegui, 2003; Harvey, 1998; Holloway, 1998) – the first in a series of social movements to use a vocabulary of dignity – appealing to dignity as an alternative language to that associated with a Marxist framework and the traditional political left (Holloway & Peláez, 1998). Dignity, thus, has been central to their struggle, with "creating a world in which people can live with dignity" (Holloway & Peláez, 1998, p.19) being one of their goals. Since then, dignity has been taken up by other indigenous (see Araya Anabalón, 2010; Poma 2018; López, 2012) and non-indigenous struggles in Latin America (see Wolford, 2003), as well as by struggles in response to economic or governmental crises elsewhere (see Diez García & Laraña, 2017; Narotzky, 2016; Nikolayenko, 2020).

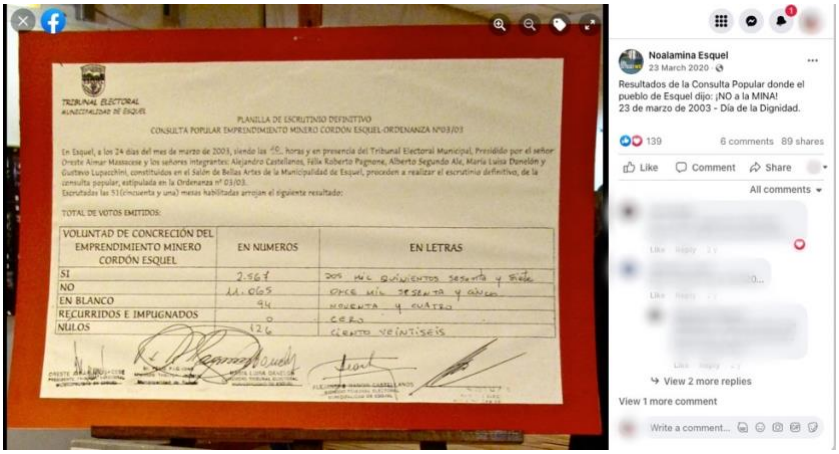
In the case of Argentina, dignity does not have a significant legal trajectory since it does not have the status of a constitutional principle, unlike in other Latin American countries (see Lima Marques & Lixinski, 2014). However, dignity has featured in the vocabulary of Argentinian social movements since the 1990s, and in the movement of unemployed workers (*Movimiento de*

Trabajadores Desocupados in Spanish, or MTD). The more militant group within the MTD, the *piquetero* movement, put forward a demand and practice of 'dignified work' in response to the rapid public sector reforms which were decentralising and privatising health and education, increasing inequality among the Argentinian population (Dinerstein, 2014a; see also Dinerstein 2014b; Chatterton, 2005; Svampa & Pereyra, 2003). By the 2000s, popular economy movements also began to appeal to dignity to denounce growing inequality, to question the government's narratives of development, and to demand visions of "full inclusion in society" (Señorans, 2020, p. 71). Thus, by the beginning of the 2000s, when the movement in Esquel emerged, dignity was already present in languages of social movements in Argentina in relation to a critique of economic inequality and development, and to a demand for wellbeing and an expansion of substantive citizenship.

Acts of dignity: meanings for members of Esquel's No a la Mina

Dignity has been part of the language of Esquel's No la Mina since its inception. For all members I spoke to and in all the publications I saw, the claim to dignity speaks of the act of rejecting mining itself and is tightly linked to accounts of the 2003 plebiscite – which symbolises for most members of the movement the collective decision of people in Esquel to reject mining. The centrality of dignity in these terms is evident in many spheres of the movement's activities. As already mentioned, the plebiscite's anniversary is celebrated as the Day of Esquel's Dignity, as Figure 16 shows in a Facebook post of the movement in 2020, showing the results of the plebiscite along with a message that reads: "Results of the popular plebiscite where the people of Esquel said: NO TO THE MINE! March 23rd, 2003: Day of Dignity".

Figure 16. Post of the movement celebrating the anniversary of the plebiscite



Source: Taken by the author of the movement's Facebook Page (Noalamina Esquel).

There are also numerous publications and declarations from the movement which refer to their protests as exercises of people's dignity, such as the entries in the movement's website titled, "Protests in Esquel: the Dignity of every 4th of the month challenges a model based on plundering" (2008), "Protest VI: the Dignity of the people of Esquel marched against the deception of politicians and mining companies" (2014) and "A plateau of dignity"[cv] – this latter one extending the attribution of dignity to the opposition against mining in the province's plateau (see Introduction).

This close association of the claim to dignity and the act of rejecting mining also evokes a particular context. Dignity is tied for members of the movement to how the victory of the NO in the plebiscite occurred in a context of economic hardship. It refers to peoples' decisions to vote against mining irrespective of their individual economic situation and the ways in which supporting mining could have benefitted them individually. In the context of the aftermath of the 2001 economic crisis, the promises of employment and the money, goods, and food given by Meridian Gold to *vecinos* (especially in poorer neighbourhoods) were of special consequence as many people had urgent economic needs. The 2001 economic crisis had caused a steep increase of unemployment in the province, from around 12% in 1999 to 18% by the beginning of 2003 (Cifuentes Valenzuela, 2015).[95] As one member of the movement explained to me, dignity speaks of their decision to reject mining despite their pressing needs:

> "Dignity, that emerged because in that moment, in 2003, we were coming from the crisis [of 2001] … we were doing badly, there was an unemployment rate in Esquel of almost 20% or even 30%... we had about 5,000 or 6,000 *desocupados*. And the mining company and the government precisely said 'you will work, and not only the unemployed but there will be much more economic activity, all businesses will be able to pay better'. All of that".[cvi]

As a result, for members of the movement, dignity is an act that is more specifically related and attributed to the choice made by people in a situation of economic vulnerability. As one member explained to me,

> "imagine the *desocupados* voted against that which offered them salvation and employment, because that was the argument, 'you are not going to be unemployed anymore'… to do that, one needs to have lots of dignity, only a dignified person, because a person which has no employment, has all the right to say 'I want this, I want whatever' because that [not having employment] is the worst. Even if I tell you 'look you are going to ruin water, the future of your children', but if you don't have what to eat today, it is understandable… and

[95] At a national level, levels of unemployment increase from 13.8% in 1999 to 21.5% by mid 2002 according to data from the National Institute of Statistics in Argentina (see Zeballos, 2003). At the provincial level, there is a discrepancy in the unemployment rate for this period with the Census of 2001 placing it at 13% in 2001 (INDEC, 2001) and others above 15% (INDEC, 2003; Ministerio de Hacienda, 2018). The only available data for Esquel regarding unemployment is that provided by the 2001 Census which places unemployment at 15% in Esquel (INDEC, 2001). This is likely, however, to have increased during 2002 following national and provincial trends.

> those people voted against, look at the dignity that this *pueblo* needs to have to put one little vote against, not everyone would do it in a similar circumstance".[cvii]

Acting with dignity, then, is associated with a commitment to the collective, in being able and willing to reject mining despite one's need – an act that is particularly commendable in relation to marginalised groups.

Their appeal to dignity is also related to how their decision to be in opposition to mining occurs in the context of an 'unequal fight'. Members of the movement appeal to dignity also because of people's capacity and willingness to oppose 'the powerful'. As two members expressed, "it was very dignified to stand in front of everyone: economic power, media, government… because the fight was very unequal… It was David against Goliath really, because it was the *vecino* telling the *vecino* why not, that is it, against all the other power. That is why the struggle is very dignified";[cviii]

> "to have economic and political power in front of you, I mean, one has to have an attitude to say no. And I think the only way of sustaining that, besides bravery, is like Esquel's community has done so, by having a degree of dignity, not letting ourselves be bought for 2 pesos, because that was the easiest, more comfortable position we could have had, to relax and wait for the project to be developed… we could have had that position and yet the *vecinos* didn't".[cix]

Thus, dignity is seen by members of the movement as the act of opposing mining in the context of an uneven playing field, and evokes the courage, strength, and moral elevation that this opposition entails.

Supporting this act of dignity – of refusing mining despite one's needs – is in turn an understanding of dignity as the refusal to sell oneself and be used by exchanging one's vote or support for material benefits. This is best exemplified in a publication of the movement which reads "the dignity of those that do not sell themselves for two pesos",[cx] and in the words of a member who explained to me, "[dignity] is because of the plebiscite, of all the gifts people received, all the promises… and in exchange of what did people vote NO? Because they had dignity, I mean because they knew they were being used, knew they were being tricked, knew they were trying to be bought against their will".[cxi] Dignity as the refusal to exchange one's support for material benefits, regardless of one's convictions, is further exemplified in a common expression of the movement, "we don't exchange salaries for mega mining",[cxii] and in the words of a member who mentioned to me that "it is a matter of dignity, saying 'no, we do not sell ourselves"'.[cxiii]

This understanding of dignity as the refusal to compromise one's convictions in exchange for material benefits relates to how members of the movement speak of dignity in the context of the plebiscite. The movement appealed to people in Esquel to not treat taking the so-called gifts given by Meridian Gold as equivalent to support for the mining project. As one woman from the movement recounted,

> "'*vecino*, take the food, take the chorizos, take all the gifts they are giving you' because that is what the mining company did, they gave them food, gave them meat. 'Take everything, but the day you go and vote, say no'. And so that is why we say it was dignity, but not mine, or of so many others who are better-off economically, but that of humble people".[cxiv]

Members of the movement understand, therefore, that their dignity lies in their recognition of that distinction. As one member explained to me, "here, it was proved, people of the mining company went, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, giving away school supplies, backpacks, jackets, and people voted against it, that is the dignity of the people".[cxv]

As members explained to me, this involves looking beyond immediate benefits and prioritising the long over the short-term. This is evident in the words of two members of the movement, who explained to me, "I think that is why we speak of dignity, being able to stand and say no, I respect myself, I take care of my place, I can see beyond this moment, I can realise that work would only last a few years and then we would be left with nothing again";[cxvi]

> "the dignity of those who said no, of those who weren't 'short-termists', that did not stay with the promise of employment then… I think people who aren't having a good time economically and say no to mining companies, I think they are so dignified because when you are offered something in the short-term, and you are concerned about hunger, or the hunger of your children, it must be so difficult, so all of that is dignity".[cxvii]

Members' account of dignity in this sense of refusing to sell oneself extends, moreover, to a refusal to compromise not only themselves but that which is shared. This is evident in the words of a member of the movement who explained to me,

> "I profoundly believe that it is a matter of dignity to say 'no, we don't sell ourselves, there is no price that can pay our place, our environment, water, life'…there was a very profound crisis after 2000-2001 in all of Argentina, and there was lots of unemployment, and people from the *barrios* could have sold themselves to that idea of development, of work, and they didn't buy it… defending their place was worth more".[cxviii]

Dignity, for members of the movement, also derives not only from their opposition but from the means through which they have chosen to carry it out: their strategy of 'informing' and their use of the democratic tools at hand (i.e., the plebiscite and the Popular Initiatives). This is evident in the words of two members who explained to me:

> "in the campaign of the plebiscite there was lots of corruption… and our campaign was based on informing the *vecino*. Everything we did was information, house by house, in schools… and the mining company with the government did as political parties do, buy wills, play with people's needs";[cxix]

> "I think it is also the way, besides achieving something, it is the way in which it is achieved that speaks of dignity, because we didn't achieve it bribing people, or giving money or by betraying someone. No, on the contrary, we used the mechanisms given by democracy, it is the same with the Popular Initiative, if it wasn't honoured after, then it was someone else's betrayal, but the people who achieved it and succeeded have dignity".[cxx]

Lastly, dignity, for members of Esquel's No a la Mina, also results from their decision to put their bodies on the line (what they call '*poner el cuerpo*'). As one member already cited expressed "that is why we speak of dignity, being able to stand and say no". This emphasis on the body is repeated throughout accounts of other members: "dignity is an act of presence";[cxxi] "dignity is maybe, raising one's voice, speaking, deciding to go and stand, and stand in front of this system".[cxxii] Dignity speaks of the corporeal politics of their rejection to mining – to be present, to stand up, and to stand in front of.

The movement's appeal to dignity speaks, in sum, of the act of rejecting mining in its entirety, and the choice to do so in a context of economic hardship and power asymmetries. It also speaks of an individual choice to refuse to compromise one's convictions in exchange for material benefits, to prioritise the long over the short-term, and to refuse to compromise that which is shared. Moreover, dignity is a corporeal expression, a stance taken with their bodies as much as their words.

Dignity: the commoning of wellbeing and a moral grammar for the community

Dignity, as defined above, is recognisable as a 'multivocal concept' (LaVaque-Manty, 2017) – that is, as a concept that can "denote different, even opposite, but nevertheless related things" (ibid., p.308). In its multivocality – as an act, the individual capacity that sustains it, and its result – the movement's appeal to dignity functions as an idiom that prompts the commoning of wellbeing, as well as puts forward a moral grammar for the emerging commoning-community. By doing so, it contests the workings of the state and mining companies.

In looking at how members of the movement appeal to dignity, it is possible to see how it speaks not only of the act of rejecting mining under conditions of economic hardship and power asymmetries, but also of the individual capacity and choice that sustains that act. It speaks of a

choice to prioritise the long term over the short term, and to refuse to compromise one's convictions and that which is shared in exchange for individual material benefits. As a result, the movement's appeal to dignity speaks of the individual ability and choice to place communal over individual wellbeing. Considering the long-term entails looking beyond oneself and considering young and future generations; and similarly, refusing to compromise that which is shared implies recognising that place is shared and is depended on by other people – albeit in different ways. Thus, by speaking of the prioritisation of communal over individual wellbeing, the movement's appeal to dignity can be understood in turn as commoning wellbeing – or building an understanding of wellbeing as intrinsically shared and collective.

Understanding wellbeing as collective rejects the main premises of our economic systems – short-term self-interest, the primacy of market value over other forms of valuation, and of the fungibility of value through the market – which have been intricately related to an individualistic conception of wellbeing (Dinerstein, 2001). Commoning wellbeing speaks of a transformation of short-term self-interest and market value as the dominant criteria for what is desirable. The next section discusses how this reconceptualization of wellbeing translates to a demand for other forms of development.

Motivating an idiom of dignity, and thus of the commoning of wellbeing, has been the way in which members of the movement have come to understand how to oppose the actions of the state and mining companies, which preyed on people's economic situations and tried to force people to accept mining out of need. The people I interviewed constantly referred to dignity as something that emerged in response to the attempt of the mining company to 'play with people's needs'[cxxiii] through promises of employment and attempts to build clientelist networks. As one member expressed to me, "we had a huge crisis at a national level, with soaring unemployment rates and all the mining discourse is generally around generating employment… around the needs for employment and using, speaking for unemployed people".[cxxiv] Recall, too, that members attribute dignity first and foremost to the unemployed because of their heightened vulnerability to the attempt by the mining company to use their needs to persuade, or force, them to accept mining, and that dignity was reflected in separating the acceptance of the items or money given by Meridian Gold from people's votes in relation to the project in the 2003 plebiscite.

Moreover, as the quote above illustrates, members of the movement relate this attempt to 'play with peoples' needs' to constant appeals to notions of crisis. As Meridian Gold arrived in Esquel

in the aftermath of the 2001 economic crisis, the company framed the industry as a source of wealth and thus as way out of the economic crisis. Coverage in the local newspaper *El Oeste*, particularly in October and November 2002, shows how promises of direct and indirect employment were at the centre of the discourse of the mining company. For example, in an article of the 13th of November 2002, the Director of *Minera El Desquite* (the subsidiary company working with Meridian Gold) declared that local employment would be used during the construction operation but more importantly during the operation phase, assuring direct employment of 340 people from Esquel for 8 to 10 years, representing 9.6 million USD per year or 800.000 USD per month, and spurring the creation of indirect jobs in sectors such as cleaning, security, and transport. Moreover, the company also engaged in a performance of wealth. It sent luxurious golden cards to *vecinos* announcing the arrival of the mining company and its benefits for people in Esquel. The employees of the company also used new and luxurious vehicles and rented out some of the biggest properties in town. In a context of economic hardship, as members recounted to me, the display of the company's acquisitive power was a demonstration of its power to transform the economic landscape of Esquel and to offer promises of employment, seeking to make people believe in their promises of local prosperity.

The same discourse of mining as the only way out of the crisis has been at play again since 2018, appealing this time to the provincial economic crisis and since 2020 to the effects of COVID-19. In response, the movement has begun to use the term of *'crisis de diseño'* ('designed crisis' or 'crisis by design'), following the work of Naomi Klein (2007) on disaster capitalism, to speak of how the provincial crisis has been either deliberately created to try to strangle people economically and force them to accept mining, or at least has been deliberately used to frame mining as the only path to economic recovery. Klein's argument is that moments of crisis and/or shock are especially useful to introduce unwanted political or economic changes. She argues crises reduce people's capacity to react, immobilising resistance, and creating a situation in which changes that promise improvement are welcomed rather than opposed.

The attempt by the state and mining company to 'play with people's needs' represents an attempt to instrumentalise and commodify popular support in Esquel: instrumentalising people's needs and commodifying the value of their choices. The appeal to dignity subverts these attempts through a refusal to compromise one's convictions in exchange for material benefits. As such, dignity entails rejecting being used as a means to an end (for the mining to use people's needs as a way of securing support) as well as rejecting the assignment of a monetary value to one's choice.

This refusal to be instrumentalised and/or commodified is anchored, in turn, in an appeal to the Kantian definition of dignity as referring to people's intrinsic moral worth, which also prevails in human rights discourse. In other words, it is because people have inherent human worth that they cannot be treated as means to an end (that is, instrumentalised), nor objectified (that is, commodified). This is evident in the following words of a member of the movement:

> "I think dignity is what we have as a pueblo, dignity to live as we deserve because we are human and we need to live in a world where humanity, in all its meanings, is respected".[cxxv]

Discourses of crisis, in turn, represent an attempt to narrow down the sense of what is possible. This is also evident in how the company and the state appealed to people's economic needs to create support for the project back in 2002 under the assumption that because people needed employment, they would take whatever it was made available. Such discourses of crisis serve to reduce people to their needs, forgoing their wants and desires. To talk about dignity in the context of discourses of crisis seeks thus to counteract and refuse the closure or narrowing down of possibilities. Appealing to dignity, then, calls for the imagination of alternatives, to imagine things could be *otherwise*. This is captured in the words of a man from the movement,

> "the results of the plebiscite indicated that there were less votes for the 'yes' [to mining] than there were *desocupados* and that showed that the *pueblo*, even if it had huge needs, it sustained its dignity, the space to look for other ways to exit the crisis… today the same conversation is present again with the issue of the plateau and I think, dignity, a bit, is not accepting what is proposed as the only way, the only way out, but of, if one is against something and think it is going to hurt one's territory, [to place] territory over those promises and to demand for the way out to be different that the one proposed… I think dignity is not accepting things as they want to impose them on you, but of defending oneself and to demand things to be done otherwise".[cxxvi]

As discussed in the next section, dignity, by reconceptualising wellbeing as collective and seeking to counteract the closure of possibilities brought about through the notion of crisis, is putting forward a demand to expand the meaning of development.

The commoning of wellbeing, moreover, has prompted a process of community-making in Esquel and provided a moral grammar for the emerging commoning-community.

The ways in which dignity has prompted a process of community-making goes hand in hand with the ways in which dignity is simultaneously understood as an inherent and agentic quality (LaVaque-Manty, 2017). As already mentioned, it is possible to see a Kantian notion of dignity as human intrinsic moral worth in the way in which members understand dignity. Dignity therefore speaks of a common quality among all *vecinos* – one that particularly speaks across class. As a

message of support from the plateau for the Popular Initiative in 2020 reads, "in the plateau we are abandoned and lacking in everything, except dignity".[cxxvii] As such, to speak of dignity is to appeal to a sentiment and quality all people can relate to, and share, despite socio-economic differences. The support lent by an idiom of dignity to a process of community-making across class differences is also evident in how in 2002-2003 it enabled the subversion of the clientelist politics of the mining company without alienating the poorer sectors in Esquel. By highlighting clientelism as an economic choice that could be decoupled from its political character, it allowed the movement to not force poorer *vecinos* to choose between the movement and the gifts given by the mining company.

Linked to this understanding of dignity as inherent is also an understanding of dignity as 'agentic' (LaVaque-Manty, 2017). This is evident in how dignity is understood as the act of rejecting mining in itself, as well as something that is produced by carrying out their struggles through democratic and bodily means. Dignity is thus also produced through people's actions.

The attempt of the mining company and the state 'to play with people needs' is a form of misrecognition. Honneth (1995) argues misrecognition comes through humiliation, denigration and/or the denial of rights. Trying to use people's economic needs to secure support for mining thus involves an act of misrecognition – in this case through humiliation by attempting to instrumentalise and commodify people's choices and foreclosing future possibilities on the basis of their immediate needs. As the movement's appeal to dignity aims to contest these acts, it is possible to understand "the starting point of dignity [as]… the negation of humiliation" (Holloway & Peláez, 1998, p. 223) and thus to understand how dignity entails a relational dynamic: "a relation of struggle" (ibidem.) or insubordination.

This is best exemplified in the movement's appeal to Bayer's book *Patagonia Rebelde* (1974), whose title has been taken by the movement and placed on posters, placards, and t-shirts (see Figure 17) – alluding to, and placing their struggle in, a history of regional resistance, as well as speaking of a shared relation of rebellion against 'the powerful'.[96] In this sense, the movement's appeal to dignity and the concomitant commoning of wellbeing can be understood as entailing a process of community-making through the making of a 'community of struggle'.

[96] *Patagonia Rebelde* (Rebel Patagonia) refers to a period of workers' strikes in what is now the province of Santa Cruz, between 1919 and 1922. This event is also known as *Patagonia Trágica* (Tragic Patagonia) as the protests were violently repressed by the government with 1,500 workers killed and 600 imprisoned (Bandieri, 2021). Bayer's book is the most detailed account of these strikes.

Figure 17. Poster No a la Mina Patagonia Rebelde

Source: Taken by the author in March 2020.

Lastly, dignity can be understood as functioning as a moral grammar, providing a value and affect around which the emerging commoning-community can coalesce. Here I understand a moral grammar not only in Honneth's (1995) sense of "the moral logics of social conflicts" (p.2), but as the principles that organise the logics of morality for the emerging community.

By appealing to people's intrinsic moral worth, and thus aiming to negate acts of humiliation as its starting point, dignity is functioning as a moral grammar in Honneth's definition – that is, as an idiom that expresses and structures the movement's moral logics. This becomes clearer when recalling the movement's appeal to dignity is commonly juxtaposed to the practices of the state and mining company. Dignity represents the movement's claim to a moral stance that is defined in opposition to the workings of the state and private sector.

The movement's appeal to dignity, however, does not only speak of the moral logics of the conflict but is also functioning as a principle that organises the logics of the moral for the emerging community. Dignity, as understood by members of Esquel's No a la Mina, encompasses values such as integrity, honesty, courage, and autonomy. For example, when members speak of being willing to oppose powerful actors despite their unequal positions and of being willing to put their bodies on the line, dignity alludes to courage. Likewise, when they speak of the legitimacy of the ways in which they organise their struggle as related to dignity, it alludes to honesty and integrity, and when speaking of dignity as the ability to separate clientelist practices from one's choices, dignity speaks of autonomy. By encompassing these values, dignity holds a moral connotation – that is, a connotation of rightfulness as dignity entails 'doing the right thing'. The movement's appeal to dignity further builds this meaning of rightfulness by speaking of the prioritization of the long over the short-term, the refusal to commodify that which is shared and thus the ability and choice to place communal interest over individual benefits. In other words, the movement's

appeal to dignity provides a moral grammar for the emerging commoning community by encompassing a set of values and principles that informs what is right.

By functioning as a moral grammar, the appeal to dignity thus supports a process of community-making by functioning as a value and affect around which this process can take place. As Centemeri (2018) reminds us, commons need to be guided by values in order to respond to social justice. Moreover, as argued by Majewska (2021), Nightingale (2019) and Singh (2017), affect is key for the commons and thus commoning needs to be understood as organised by affective structures. As Honneth (1995) points out, experiences of indignation necessarily mobilise moral feelings of indignation and thus their contestation produces feelings of self-esteem and self-worth in members, redressing the impact of instances of misrecognition on the individual. Contesting these experiences of indignation, the movement's appeal to dignity speaks to, and produces, feelings of self-esteem and self-worth. The affective significance that dignity has for members of the movement is evident in the feelings of pride, strength, awe, and gratitude that I witnessed when talking with them about the plebiscite, which in many of the conversations manifested through broken voices and tears. As such, the movement's appeal to dignity is imbuing the emerging commoning-community with a moral framework, creating an affective tissue that supports its making, and that further reinforces the capacity of the community to resist the ways in which the state and mining companies 'play with people's needs' to impose extractivism.

Dignity: towards a citizenship with a moral agency and a right to wellbeing

Appealing to dignity, in the way done by the movement, impacts citizenship both as membership and as agency.

Virtue has long been central to citizenship. As Lazar (2013a) discusses, an Aristotelian notion of citizenship highlight how citizenship does not just refer to a status of membership within a political community, but to how it is imbued with ideal notions of how to live within that collective and thus with a set of associated virtues (which for Aristotle, for example, referred to a respect for law and a passion for public deliberation) which are to be individually cultivated and practiced. As discussed in the previous section, the movement's appeal to dignity functions as a moral grammar that sets out a group of values (e.g., autonomy) and principles (e.g., human intrinsic moral worth, long-term vision, the prioritisation of communal over individual wellbeing, and the importance of non-market value) that aim to orient the commoning-community. In doing so, the movement's

appeal to dignity informs citizenship as membership as it proposes a moral grammar (a set of values and principles) that informs people's and the collective's relationship to the state.

By commoning wellbeing – reconceptualising it as collective – the assertion of dignity is also expanding the meaning of development, and thus acting on, and anchoring the movement in, a right to wellbeing based on the tenets of dignity as understood and enacted by the movement: intrinsic human worth, long-term vision, and non-market value. By appealing to dignity, the movement has embedded its claim against mining in an expanded right to wellbeing, impacting citizenship as membership.

Firstly, by anchoring an appeal to collective wellbeing on people's intrinsic moral worth, dignity resists the narrowing down of development due to one's immediate needs and through a notion of crisis. It is because people have dignity that they deserve better alternatives than mining, a future in which it is possible to achieve wellbeing or a good life. As a member previously quoted continued explaining to me:

> "…dignity to live as we deserve because we are human and we need to live in a world where humanity, in all its meanings, is respected. From food, clothing, being worthy, being worthy of traversing this life… do it the best way we can, as we deserve, we cannot be hungry, we cannot work 20 hours and earn little, the everyday injustices we experience cannot happen".[cxxviii]

Dignity, thus, calls for the imagination of alternatives – that is, to imagine things could be *otherwise* – rather than lower their expectations and desires to what is offered by the state and private sector.

Secondly, by appealing to people's intrinsic moral worth, dignity also informs the content of what a robust notion of wellbeing entails. As a member of the movement explained to me,

> "I would understand it in the frame of human rights, when one demands for the fulfilment, for example, of the right to dignified housing, or dignified education, because it is not just that… in the case of a house, it is not just 4 metal sheets and 2 cloths but dignified housing, where I can heat up food, manage waste, be sheltered, protected from cold and warm. It is the same in Esquel, people did not just gather to protest against mining, no, we want a dignified life".[cxxix]

Thus, dignity entails refusing a notion of wellbeing where only the basic economic needs of some people are met and where people are pushed to socio-economic marginality and to depend on the assistance programmes of mining companies and/or of the state in order to satisfy their basic needs. As two members of the movement explained to me: "we defend… the dignity of not depending, extractive activities mean to later depend on the state, of the assistance of companies, that they give you water, that *they* give *you*, because you end not having everything you need";[cxxx]

"dignity of being able to wake up and knowing that your effort counts, that you will be able to give a future to your family, to enjoy life as we deserve and not live like we do, full of anguish, of worry that we won't make it to the end of the month, that we won't have a future".[cxxxi] It calls on, instead, an understanding of wellbeing as being able to live 'as well as possible' (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), one that also maintains their autonomy to decide what wellbeing means. In this sense, as Roy (2021) argues, appeals to dignity speak of a normative vision of development along the lines of Sen's (1999) proposal of 'development as freedom' – that is, of development as process that should be geared towards allowing people to reach their full potential and which speaks about more than economic indicators.

Moreover, by commoning wellbeing, dignity calls for an imaginary of wellbeing where what is desirable is decided on the basis of long-term communal interest and non-market values. Dignity thus calls for replacing the primacy of individual short-term interest and economic market value in notions of development – that is, in understandings of how a good life is achieved and what it entails. In the words of another member, "people chose not the economic side, but general wellbeing, of the population, of their children, of their family, the environment and else. So, there dignity was more important than the economic, the personal. I think [dignity] is because of that".[cxxxii] Dignity, thus, calls for "not subjecting life to the market" (Holloway & Peláez, 1998, p.17) and to the logic of monetary value (Dinerstein, 2014a). This explains why dignity was constantly juxtaposed to market value in the accounts of members of the movement. As one member expressed to me: "dignity and money is an important axis".[cxxxiii]

The way in which the movement's appeal to dignity calls for the state to act on the basis of a reconceptualization of wellbeing echoes the proposal of Anderson (2014) where dignity is placed as an alternative value for the economy and wellbeing. It also echoes the work of a variety of scholars such as Raworth (2017) whose call for placing social justice and environmental limits at the core of the economy; Gibson-Graham, Cameron, & Healy (2013) who call for rethinking the economy as a place of ethical action; and Princen (2005) and Schor (2010) who call for sufficiency and plenitude as guiding values for the economy. As the next section discusses, it also converges with the indigenous paradigm of *Buen Vivir*.

By understanding the rejection of mining as an act of dignity and understanding the democratic and corporeal means of their resistance as acts that produce dignity, the movement's appeal to dignity also impacts citizenship as agency.

Citizenship in a democratic state is linked to a social contract that promises equality between people in the eyes of the state (Taylor, 2004). Yet, this promise remains elusive in Argentina, as across Latin America, as elites continue to have privileged access to, and benefits from, the state (Svampa, 2019; López, 2018). Neoliberal citizenship, moreover, has placed its agency in the private and market realm, 'privatising' responsibility over inequality and placing it as a private and individual concern (Taylor, 2004, p.223). The privatisation of responsibility over inequality has led, as Taylor (2004) explains, to the practice of clientelism and of 'clientship' as a form of agency.[97] While citizenship is about equality, rights, formal relationships, and long-term wellbeing, client-ship is about inequality, favours, personal ties, and short-term needs and is supported and maintained by charisma and 'goods-for-power' transactions (ibid.).

Appeals to dignity are a refusal to find agency in 'client-ship' and to enter into relations of inequality. It affirms, instead, citizenship (and its associated condition of equality) as a site of agency vis-à-vis other people and the state. In this sense, the movement's appeal to dignity calls on, and enacts, democracy's promise of equality between people and it positions that relationship of equality as the basis on which people can interact with the state to demand its rejection of mining.

How dignity entails refusing to substitute citizenship with clientship is emphasised in how members' use appeals to a sense of autonomy. As one member of the movement explained to me, "all the gifts that people received… when those people went to vote they had dignity… they knew [the company] was trying to buy wills and you know what? They said: "when I am in front of my ballot, I choose".[cxxxiv] As dignity speaks of people's right to be autonomous – understood as being able to choose (with freedom from coercion) and to act upon that choice (Kabeer, 1999; Mies, 2014b) – it calls for a relation of equality.

Moreover, by functioning as a moral grammar, appealing to dignity frames the willingness to engage in a relation of struggle (discussed previously) and to pursue this relation with the state as a virtue of citizenship. The movement's appeal to dignity frames a relation of democratic and corporeal struggle against the state as a virtuous practice that stands as an antipode to the grammar of the state and private sector. Therefore, by functioning as a moral grammar, dignity emboldens

[97] As Auyero (2001) notes in his study of contemporary Peronism in Argentina, clientelism has been historically associated to this political tradition.

citizenship as agency through a positive moral connotation and its associated affective tissue (pride, contentment, self-esteem, self-respect, etc.).

The plurality of dignity and the perils of morality

As briefly discussed in the first section of this chapter, dignity entered the terrain of social movements with an indigenous struggle – that of the Zapatistas (see González Aróstegui, 2003; Harvey, 1998; Holloway, 1998). Appeals to dignity have also been present in the case of Mapuche-Tehuelche struggles for land and indigenous recognition. While dignity may have its own trajectory of meaning within indigenous struggles (see for example Pharo, 2014) it is possible to observe various similarities with how it is used by Esquel's No a la Mina. Dignity, in the instances I have seen it being used by Mapuche-Tehuelche *weychafes* (warriors/leaders), also refers to dignity as something that results from being in a 'relation of struggle', of rebellion or insubordination so-to-speak.[98] In the case of Mapuche-Tehuelche people this relation of struggle is a historical one linked to centuries of resistance against the settler colonialism of the Argentinian state and the subsequent marginalisation of indigenous peoples (see Chapter Four) and linked thus to a shared sense of becoming through identification with a history of injustice, violence and dispossession (Briones, 2007).

Moreover, the movement's appeals to dignity echo the paradigm of *Buen Vivir* particularly present in indigenous communities in the Andean region of Latin America. While the notion of *Buen Vivir* changes across different contexts, in general it entails a critique of development for its narrow notion of wellbeing (centred on economic growth, consumerism, and nature's exploitation) as well as for its separation of human from other forms of life (Chuji, Grimaldo, & Gudynas, 2019; León T., 2010) – an issue I retake in Chapter Eight.

The notion of *Buen Vivir* is present in Mapuche-Tehuelche worldviews as *kume morgen* or *kume felen,* which conceptualises wellbeing as based on three elements – territory, people, and autonomy – as well as on an equilibrium between people and nature. As the *Proposal for a Mapuche Kvme Felen* (2010), elaborated by the Mapuche Confederation of Neuquen (*Confederación Mapuche de Neuquén*) reads:

> "Kume felen … means to be in balance with oneself and with the other newen (forces of nature) in virtue of being part of the waj mapu (territory). Kvme felen is to live in harmony from the ixofij mogen (biodiversity), reclaiming the az mapu (traditional legal system), Mapuche ancestral principles of circular ordering, [which are] holistic and natural. Also by

[98] The term activist is not used in Mapuche-Tehuelche struggles and movements.

> being conscious that a person is one more newen in the ixofij mogen, never superior to any other, only with a different role. There resides the importance and centrality of territory for our identity and worldview. In it, we find our origin, our being, and from it we exercise our government through the az mapu as an ordered whole. We want to live well, from what we were ancestrally and from what we consider necessary for our peoples today. This means that our kvme felen is about recuperating and strengthening our kimvn (knowledge), rakizuam (thought), piam, wewpin, vlkantun, Mapuzugun (the language of the land), and our ixofij mogen" (CMN, 2010, p. 12, cited in Savino, 2016).

The pursuit of *kume felen* is evident in the territorial recuperations carried out by Mapuche-Tehuelche communities across Chubut. It is also more explicitly present in more recent struggles such as that of the *Movimiento de Mujeres Indigenas y Disidencias por el Buen Vivir* who sought in 2015 to install Buen Vivir as a right in Argentinian national law (Álvarez Ávila, 2019). Thus, appeals to dignity in Esquel's No a la Mina (as a demand to reconceptualise wellbeing) converges on a similar conversation and aim to that of Mapuche-Tehuelche struggles in Chubut.

Dignity, thus, may be a notion within the movement that allows not only for political coalitions among different sectors (especially across class) – as dignity precisely appeals to that which is shared by all people regardless of social difference – but, more particularly for indigenous recognition within the movement. Firstly, as dignity is a multivocal concept, as well as both a universal and local language (Düwell et al., 2014; Rosen, 2018), it may be able to sustain coalitional politics without calling for homogenisation or the erasure of difference (like mobilising as *vecinos* has done). Secondly, as appeals to dignity converge with the way in which Mapuche-Tehuelche struggles are also reconceptualising wellbeing, it can create opportunities for the epistemic recognition of the *pueblos originarios*.

This is echoed by Taylor (2003) who argues dignity provides an alternative basis on which citizenship's claim to equality can be founded – one that provides more ample room for the recognition of indigenous peoples. She argues, dignity, precisely because of its multivocal character, its definition as an inherent quality of people (unlike rights, which are located in people's relation to the state), and its strong connotation of sense of self-worth and mutual respect, it is better suited to "respond to different cultural and epistemological frameworks" (p.X) and further the recognition of the 'Other'.

Moreover, like any non-relativist moral framework, the movement's appeal to dignity is not exempt from the risk of being leveraged to create exclusions and injustices. By functioning as a moral grammar, providing a logic of what is right and wrong, an appeal to dignity necessarily

excludes those that do not abide by its moral grammar or that do not fit definitions of what a dignified *vecino* is. The ethical implications of this going forward will depend on if and how the content of this moral grammar transforms and is used over time.

Conclusion

The chapter examined the movement's practice of appealing to dignity. It argued that underlying it is an understanding of dignity as multivocal. As such, members of the movement understand dignity as: 1. the act of rejecting mining, the choice to do so under a context of economic hardship and power asymmetries; 2. an individual choice to refuse to compromise one's convictions in exchange for material benefits, to prioritise the long over the short-term, and to refuse to compromise that which is shared; and 3. a product of the democratic and corporeal means used in their collective opposition to mining.

As this converges in the prioritisation of collective wellbeing over individual benefits, the movement's appeal to dignity can be understood as supporting the commoning of wellbeing and a process of community-making that aims to bridge particularly differences across class. Moreover, an appeal to dignity can also be understood as a moral grammar – providing values and affect around which the emerging community can coalesce.

In commoning wellbeing, the movement's appeal to dignity seeks to contests the ways in which the state and mining companies have exploited people's needs and appealed to notions of crisis to impose mining in the province. In doing so, dignity is also reshaping citizenship by infusing its associated agency with a moral dimension, as well as by articulating a right to wellbeing that transforms citizenship as membership. Lastly, while appealing to dignity presents an opportunity to further the recognition of Mapuche-Tehuelche people in the movement, if abused it holds potential risks for the creation and/or reinforcement of exclusions within the movement.

Chapter Eight

The mountain still stands thanks to its people: towards the commoning of nature and a citizenship based on care

Nature is commonly present in the movement's oral, written, and visual expressions. Inside the *localito* – the small kiosk they occupy in the centre of the town and which they use as an information point – one is surrounded by phrases like "*el agua vale mas que el oro*" (water is worth more than gold), "*el agua no se vende, se defiende*" (Water is not to be sold, it is to be defended and "*la meseta no es zona de sacrificio*" (the plateau is not a sacrifice zone). These phrases, which are commonly heard too during the movement's street protests and interventions, abound in the localito in the form of stickers, t-shirts, stencils, and leaflets. On the exterior, one of its walls displays the phrase, "*la Montaña SIGUE en pie gracias a su gente"* (the Mountain STILL stands thanks to its people) in blue and red letters, referring to the mountain which the mining project near Esquel has threatened since 2002.

Figure 18. *El agua vale más que el oro* & *la montaña sigue de pie* embroideries

Source: taken by author in April 2020

I began to reflect on the meaning of these expressions as I took up embroidery during my time under lockdown in Argentina. Forced to spend most of my time at home and inspired by the woman I lived with and her amazing knitting, crocheting, and sewing skills, I found myself crafting designs using these phrases (see Figure 18). It was with needle in hand, as I embroidered each letter of these phrases (often multiple times as I made, undid, and corrected mistakes), that I began to reflect on and understand how these phrases spoke of the movement's effort to rethink people's

relationship with nature and how this impacts the process of community-making and citizenship transformation at play.

This chapter turns to this practice of the movement. It argues that the movement is re-imagining nature as shared, cared for, and entangled with human wellbeing, commoning nature as a result. This process of commoning challenges the ontological underpinnings of extractivism – that is, the worldview that sanctions it – contesting the ways in which the state and private sector relate to nature. As with the other practices of commoning analysed in previous chapters, the commoning of nature is motivating the making of a community: in this case, one that is structured around care and one that goes beyond anthropocentric understandings – what I have called a 'kin community' following Haraway (2015, 2016). This in turn furthers the transformation of citizenship at play, by speaking to its associated sense of agency and their demanded to a different paradigm of wellbeing. However, while this form of commoning creates opportunities for the epistemic recognition of Mapuche-Tehuelche people, and for the convergence of struggles, it has two underlying tensions around the appropriation of indigenous worldviews and the valuation of nature as landscape.

The argument sketched above, and developed throughout this chapter, contributes to literature that already provides a more complex understanding specifically of the commoning of nature (Nightingale, 2019; Centemeri, 2018; Sato & Soto Alarcón, 2019). It shows how ontological change can drive commoning and what factors support it. The chapter also contributes to literature on socio-environmental movements in Argentina, in which the notion of *bienes comunes* (common goods) present in these spaces has been solely understood as a 'mobilisational language' (Svampa, 2017, 2019) rather than as embedded in – and symbolic of – ontological change and commoning. Lastly, the chapter contributes to theories of care ethics (MacGregor, 2004; Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Tronto, 1993, 2005), showing how these do not need to be confined to citizens, but can be extended to the logic of the state.

To develop this argument, this chapter is structured as follows. It first examines the ways in which members of the movement are rethinking and making sense of the way in which they relate to nature. It then discusses how these ways of relating to nature can be understood as creating a process of commoning that contests the ontological underpinnings of extractivism. The following section examines how commoning nature is tied to a process of community-making. The last two sections examine, in turn, how commoning nature prompts a change in the way citizenship is practiced by members of the movement, and how it creates convergences (not without

contradictions) between non-indigenous members of the movement and Mapuche-Tehuelche people.

El agua vale más que el oro: rethinking human-nature relations

The way in which the movement is re-imagining human-nature relations is encapsulated in the introduction of the movement's radio programme, *Voces por la Tierra* during 2020-2022, which opened as follows:

> "We are *vecinos* who love Chubut. Some of us have been born here, others of us have discovered in this beautiful mountain range our place in the world. And as with everything one chooses and loves, we feel the need to protect this, our common home. Most of us grew up in a world where the riches of the planet seemed endless and where it seemed possible to easily satisfy the ambition of its inhabitants. However, little by little we started seeing polluted rivers, vanishing lakes, the deforestation of extensive areas of forests, droughts, and floods – all products of irrational human action. Then, we started to listen to other voices, those of the Mapuche-Tehuelche peoples which prompted us to understand that we are part of the world, not masters of the world and that life is preserved if we are in harmony with nature".[cxxxv]

As this message captures, the movement speaks of nature as something communal, to be cared for, and entangled with human wellbeing – a new form of relating that they see as supported in Mapuche-Tehuelche worldviews.

To begin with, the movement is rethinking human-nature relations by speaking of '*bienes comunes'* in relation to water (underground water deposits and Chubut River), the mountains, and the plateau. Members of the movement stressed to me that they do not think of nature as resources ('*recursos naturales'*) but as '*bienes comunes*' (common goods) – a position that is also clear in key documents of the movement such as the manual *Hablemos de Megaminería* and the three Popular Initiatives. Most members I interviewed spoke of changing to speak of nature as *bienes comunes* since they learned from other *vecinos* the importance of doing so. As one woman explained to me,

> "They are not resources, they are common goods, they are not material resources. That simple conceptualisation changes one's understanding of the issue and changes one's worldview. It is not the same for me to speak, feel and live with the belief that we have common goods to take care of, maintain and preserve, as it would be to say that those are material resources available to those with most power. It is not the same… They are common goods. The stream is not mine, even if I live next to it".[cxxxvi]

As this woman of the movement explained, thinking of *bienes comunes* is central to re-imagining ways of relating to nature and to do so through different principles.

Rethinking nature as *bienes comunes* rather than *recursos naturales* is rooted for members of the movement in how important nature is for present and future human wellbeing. This is most evident members of the movement discussed water with me. As two members explained to me, "there is no life without water";[cxxxvii] "water, we gave water so much, so much, value. What is more important than water?... Gold is taken to other countries and put in vaults, and it is not edible. While water would be polluted…we were worried about common wellbeing, about general wellbeing".[cxxxviii] This is why a frequent message and image in the movement is "*el agua vale más que el oro*" (Water is worth more than gold; see Figure 19).

Figure 19. *El agua vale más que el oro*, message in a protest and happening

Source: Photos taken by Esquel's No a la Mina,
available on their Facebook page (Noalamina Esquel).

It is also evident in an entry on their website that reads, "We are asked to sacrifice water, land and air to extract a metal that WE DO NOT NEED TO LIVE"[cxxxix] (capitals in the original). The movement's rethinking of nature as *bienes comunes* is motivated by an understanding of the dependence of human wellbeing on a life-supporting environment. For some members, the link between environment and wellbeing goes even further, as they understand that a life-supporting environment is not only crucial for human survival, but that access to nature is also central to people's mental and physical wellbeing. As another member told me, "I believe we should all have access to the mountain… to the movement of water, to think, to meditate".[cxl]

For members of the movement, to re-imagine human-nature relations is also to centre a notion of care. In fact, most members regard their struggle against mining as about defending water, the mountain, and the plateau from harm, and defending as a form of care. As one member explained to me, "we have been called crazy defenders of the planet. What could be more beautiful than to be dedicated to take care of *bienes comunes*?... Our only goal is fundamentally to take care of water".[cxli]

In fact, for some members, a sense of care is what motivates them to be in the movement – an action which in turn builds/expands on this relation of care. As two members shared with me, "…many of us coincided in that we wanted to care for our place, we wanted to prevent its contamination",[cxlii] "that is what motivates me, caring for the environment in which I want to spend the rest of my life, and I think many others are also motivated by that, by the defence of our place".[cxliii] Moreover, members understand this caring relationship as one for life, as they do not anticipate pressure to exploit mineral resources will subside. In the words of a member, "our province is rich in minerals, and our struggle is not just now, it will not end. It is for life".[cxliv]

Caring, for most members of the movement, stands in stark opposition to the violence they see in extractivism. This is best captured in an excerpt of an episode of *Voces por la Tierra* in which a member of the movement speaks of how extractivism *'sucks dry'* territories.[cxlv] In Spanish, he uses the verb *chupar,* which was and is used to refer to the political disappearances that were perpetrated by Argentina's military dictatorship (1976-1983). Using this verb to talk about extractivism's use of nature highlights its violent character and speaks of a process of annihilation rather than depletion. How defending the region from mining stands in stark opposition to the violence of extractivism is clear in the words of another member: "taking care of the Earth, caring for territory, has to do with this, with keeping out those who want to ruin the territory, mining companies or wealthy individuals who want to buy land for their own enjoyment".[cxlvi]

For members of the movement, caring for nature is also linked to a revaluation of what we need to be well – which, as Chapter Seven, analysed is also ongoing through the movement's appeals to dignity. Caring, for most members, entails taking from nature just what is necessary, and thus to use *bienes comunes* in a measured way. As a member of the movement explained to me, not caring for nature results in environmental and social collapse (of which COVID-19 is taken as an example):

> "This world is collapsing in many fronts, all related with the way in which we live in this system… the pandemic is another expression. It has to do with our running over nature… all that is destroying or unsettling, polluting the soil, water, air… We have to live otherwise… There are things from this way of life that will be easier to immediately forgo, like gold, others will be harder and will take longer, but we must change all of that; if not, air won't be breathable, and we won't be able to drink water… Of course, we will have to live more modestly, there are many that already live in that way".[cxlvii]

Re-imagining human-nature relations on the basis of a principle of need rather than accumulation, is also echoed in discussions about uranium mining in the province and the hydroelectric project of La Elena (see Introduction). In one of the broadcasts of *Voces por la Tierra*, a member of the

movement comments on a uranium mining project in Chubut's east: "What we think from a place of preserving the planet... is that if uranium is not used for war, what is needed by other industries, by medicine, can be sufficed by what has already been extracted… in other words, there would be no need to extract more".[cxlviii] Likewise, criticising the project of La Elena in the context of the maldistribution of the electricity produced by the Futaleufú dam (see Chapter Four), one man in the movement expressed to me:

> "It is non-sensical to build a new dam, if you already have one that produces an excess of electricity. The thing to do is to distribute that electricity as much as possible, to not waste it. Is it clear what I am trying to say? We always kill a cow, eat half and want to kill the next one… we live in nature and we can relate to it respectfully".[cxlix]

In speaking of territory, members of the movement are also rethinking nature as entangled existence. This does not only entail understanding the intricate links between humans and nature, but also to understand humans as part of, rather than separate from, nature. In the words of one member, to speak of territory is to make visible the web of interdependent human and nonhuman relations that occur in a particular place and to value both of them as a whole:

> "…an area of the world where one experiences a universe of relations, between nature and human beings as part of that nature, with their culture… it is a concrete place that is visible and habitable… it is not only a geographical, it has a different depth than the Western concept as a place in a map… It is the integrity of a place, of which human beings are part of, but an animal or a plant or a stone is not less part. They are not inferior either. Everything is a whole. Think of your body, your foot is not inferior to your nose, or hands to your chest. They are part all part of one body".[cl]

By speaking of territory, members of the movement are rethinking nature not only as a *bien común* for/of humans but also for/of other forms of life – recognising that human wellbeing is not the only one to depend on a life-sustaining environment. In other words, to re-imagine nature as territory has meant not only considering human wellbeing but also the wellbeing of other present and future forms of life. In the words of a member when referring to the Chubut River – "this narrow and slow-flowing river is the one that gives life to all of us".[cli] This is further exemplified by the words of a member of the movement in a 2013 broadcast of the *No a la Mina* radio programme when discussing water as a *bien común*, "… it is property of all the inhabitants, and not only human ones, but also animals and plants, of all the living beings who live next to these mountains. This is very important. If we don't have water, we cannot survive".[clii] In this sense, territory speaks of what the movement calls in the introductory message of *Voces por la Tierra,* a 'common home'. Thus, by speaking of territory and rethinking nature as the whole to which humans belongs means, as a member expressed in one of the episodes of *Voces por la tierra,* "being

in syntony with the inhabited territory"[cliii] – that is, recognising and knowing about the web of relations that occur within that space.

This understanding of nature as territory has been greatly motivated by Mapuche-Tehuelche ontology. The concept of *mapu* is at the centre of Mapuche-Tehuelche culture. It refers to the Earth and to nature in all its complexity and can also be referred to as *ñuke mapu* (or Mother Earth).[99] The *mapu* is the giver of life and is alive itself. Water, forest, rocks and so on, have both a spirit (*ngen*) and a force (*newen*). As a Mapuche member of the movement explained to me, "ours is a deeply spiritual culture where it is very important to understand that we are part of the earth".[cliv] In the words of a Mapuche *longko*, "the philosophical principle of the Mapuche world is that nature is the central axis of our lives. It is nature who generated the norms of coexistence for human beings, the *az mogen* and *nor mogen* – all the norms that nature dictated so that we can function in harmony with every element".[clv] Thus, the concept of *mapu* implies relationships of care between human and other forms of life. How care is motivated by this ontology of nature is captured in one of the movement's activities, a storytelling session which was organised by a young Mapuche woman and which I first misunderstood as entailing telling stories *about* water rather than *to* the water. As she explained to me,

> "I searched for a connection, thinking of the territory… I think that sometimes we need to tell stories to the water too, to the spirits that protect the water, because we use it for our wellbeing, our comfort, but we do not give it anything in return… The point was to make a little gesture of affection to the *ngen ko*, which in Mapuzugun is the guardian spirit of the water. *Ko* is water and *ngen* is a spirit or protecting force".[clvi]

Many members of the movement emphasised to me how important Mapuche-Tehuelche ontology has been to their practice of rethinking of nature.[100] As one member explained to me, "territory or *mapu*, as Mapuche people call it. The *mapu* is everything. It is the wholeness of a place… This is what indigenous peoples have taught us what territory means… encountering Mapuche culture… allows oneself to learn something different".[clvii] This is echoed in the words of two other members, "… for me to say, think and live accordingly to the idea of *bienes comunes* which we have to take

[99] However, according to Mapuche-Tehuelche people with whom I spoke, unlike other concepts such as that of the Pachamama, the *mapu* is not a deity but the world/cosmos itself or herself (as the *mapu* is commonly conceived as female, as the term *ñuke*, meaning mother, shows).

[100] This also seems to be present in other assemblies of No a la Mina in the province such as Puerto Madryn's and the Comarca, where members I spoke with also recognise the importance of Mapuche-Tehuelche ontology. For example, the assembly in Puerto Madryn is called "*Asamblea por la Defensa del Territorio*" (or Assembly for the Defence of Territory). As a member of this group explained to me, they chose to name it as such because "what we wanted was to return to the idea of indigenous peoples, that there is no ownership of land… that we are part of the Earth and no one is the owner of the land. Earth is our common home and so we must take care of it collectively… that is why we speak of defence of territory". Likewise, the *Asamblea de la Comarca* mentions in a programme of *Voces por la Tierra* learning this too from Mapuche-Tehuelche people too (see Episode 26/2021).

care of, maintain and preserve, to say that they are material resources … is completely different, and all of that belongs to the humility and wisdom of indigenous peoples";[clviii] "the worldview that indigenous peoples have of considering earth, nature… as something important, as our home, that it is not a resource that we can exploit, but that is our home and we need to take care of it".[clix]

Thus, to return to the opening of *Voces por la Tierra*, the movement is re-imagining a different way of relating to nature, as something that is shared, cared for, and entangled: as a common home that needs to be protected. In making sense of this relation, the movement is commoning nature, and contesting the view of nature on which extractivism relies.

Commoning nature and its contestation of extractivism

The way in which the movement is rethinking nature – as something communal, to be cared for, and entangled – entails a process of commoning, self-evident in the reconceptualization of natural resources as *bienes comunes* (common goods). It is a process of commoning, more substantively, by the ways in which the movement's re-imagination of human-nature relations contests the enclosure and depletion of nature by extractivism, and furthermore places care as the guiding principle for creating new arrangements of access, use and responsibility. In doing so, commoning nature responds to, and contests, the ontological underpinnings of extractivism – that is, the understanding of, and relation to, nature that sanctions it.

As discussed in Chapter Four, extractivism is a particular mode of appropriating nature. It is characterised by a teleology of exploitation, a high impact on the surrounding environment, a large-scale dimension, and an export drive (Gudynas, 2015). As members of the movement also point out, this mode of appropriation relies on a reading of nature as *resources*, as means to an end and thus as something that acquires value through use and transformation (ibid.).

As Merchant (1989) has argued, this understanding of nature is tied to the emergence of science and technology within an emerging capitalist economy in the Global North in 17th century, as scientific and technological development was based on, and promoted, a worldview that reconceptualised nature from a living organism into a mechanical object. As such, the development of science and technology contributed to entrenching a Western worldview under which nature is to be manipulated and controlled through these two means. This ontology of nature, moreover, has been one that is deeply patriarchal as it results from the gendered and hierarchical dualism of

the body and the mind, and the subsequent association of nature with the bodily and female on one hand, and of culture with the rational and male on the other (Merchant, 1989; Plumwood, 1993, 2002; Shiva, 1989). Thus, as reason was framed as aiming to subject nature to human mastery, this entailed an underlying gendered logic by which the masculine was to subject the female.

This ontological transformation of nature and its gendered undertone have thus sanctioned an exploitative relation towards nature based on 'a paradigm of productionism' (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2015). Approaching nature as *resources* has placed exchange value at their centre, assigning fungibility to nature, subjecting it to market equivalences and transforming it into commodities for exchange (Haraway, 2008). This in turn has supported a relation of exploitation as this form of value reinforces nature's instrumental significance.

Extractivism as a mode of appropriation has also relied on the simplification of nature (Tsing, 2015), creating what Wright (2022) has termed 'ecologies of erasure'.[101] Understanding nature as resources simplifies nature since commodities are goods that are considered homogenous and thus fungible (Gudynas, 2015). Moreover, placing as its *raison d'être* the human use of nature has resulted in a 'negative' approach to nature – that is, the conceptualisation of nature as an absence rather than a presence. In other words, it has resulted in the conceptualisation of nature as the backdrop to human existence, and thus as empty in the absence of humans or where a given ecosystem is seen as having no value for human activities – where 'human' is usually narrowed down to particular groups along racial, gendered, and class axes (Plumwood, 2001). As a result, the complex web of relations that are present in nature tend be disregarded or erased, and nature tends to be fragmented, overlooking the ways in which natural systems connect beyond a given geography.

This simplification of nature is most evident in the portrayal of regions as empty, idle, or *terra nullis* (Gudynas, 2015; Poirier & Dussart, 2017) – as empty spaces that must be occupied and used (Galafassi, 2011). As discussed in Chapter 4, the notion of emptiness has been key, historically, for the installation of resource extraction in Patagonia – cattle ranching, oil extraction, and more recently mining. It has been central to the attempts of Chubut's government to designate the province's plateau as a 'sacrifice zone', as the Zoning Project (see Introduction) is based on a discursive representation of the plateau as a desertic, empty, unproductive zone which has no intrinsic value, other than through its destruction for the sake of the development of the rest of

[101] Wright develops this term based on the work of Rose (2004, 2012) in the field of environmental humanities.

the province. It is also based on an illusory fragmentation of the province by which the environmental impacts of mining would remain contained within this area, ignoring the way in which water, air, and animals travel.[102]

As a result of the reduction and simplification of nature, extractivism entails an exploitative relation towards nature. Firstly, this creates the very possibility of appropriating it. By conceiving nature as a set of resources and commodities, private ownership of nature becomes possible – ignoring the ways in which nature sustains collective wellbeing and re-purposing it for individual profit. Secondly, sustaining this mode of relating and using nature is the 'hyper-separation' (Plumwood, 2001) of humans from other forms of life through the myth of 'human exceptionalism' (Haraway, 2008). As both these authors elaborate, exploiting nature has been based on the "premise that humanity alone is not a spatial and temporal web of interspecies dependencies" (Haraway, 2008, p.13) or on 'imaginaries of autonomy' (Plumwood, 2001). The notion of a self-made autonomous individual underlies an imaginary in which humans are thought of as separate and independent from, rather than interdependent with nature, conceiving culture as the realm of human activity and "as a self-enclosed space hyper-separate from an inessential nature" (Plumwood, 2001, p.28). This is an 'imaginary of human mastery' (Plumwood, 2001) as it sanctions an absence of restraint when manipulating and controlling nature, since human wellbeing is seen as independent from nature.

The movement's practice of rethinking human-nature relations contests extractivism's enclosure and exploitation of nature by challenging its ontological underpinnings.

To reconceptualise nature as *bienes comunes* challenges, most evidently, the privatisation of nature that underlies and supports extractivism. As echoed in the words of a member already quoted, thinking of nature as *bienes comunes* entails recognising "the stream is not mine, even if I live next to it". Commoning, thus, acts upon a different principle: nature which is central to collective wellbeing cannot belong to individuals, but should be shared and managed collectively. This challenges not only legal private property but *de facto* privatisation by using commons in such a way that one form of use precludes others.

[102] This conceptualisation does not rely on arid biomes. In other words, the conceptualisation of a territory as a desert does not require its geographical and biological characteristics to match those of a desert. The clearest example is the Amazonian and its framing as a 'green desert' (Gudynas, 2015).

In the case of the movement, the process of commoning has focused on the latter – that is, on challenging *de facto* privatisation rather than legal ownership. In fact, when I asked various members of the movement who owned the land on which Cordón Esquel was located, no one seemed to know. The lack of interest in legal property rights is potentially related to the fact that the land is most likely public land, given in concession to mining companies, and so the primary issue comes down to *de facto* control. The focus on contesting nature's de facto privatisation is clear in the case of water and their common assertion that 'water is not to be sold, it is to be defended' (*'el agua no se vende, se defiende'*). While water is not being sold per se to mining companies, mining projects would use water in such quantities and with such a negative impact on its quality that water would be effectively privatised as their use of water will necessarily mean restricted access for Esquel's population. Thus, the ways in which the movement is rethinking human-nature relations contests the enclosure of nature through privatisation. As Wichterich (2015) argues, to speak of commons in this case is to "break with the logic of private property" (p.90).

Approaching nature as *bienes comunes* further challenges the commodification of nature by asserting nature's inherent value. While a 'good' is usually a long-term asset and thus something that is valuable in itself, a resource is something to be used and transformed "from a less valued to a more valued state" (Thompson, 1995, p.11). Understanding nature as having inherent value challenges unrestrained thereof because it contests the assumption that it is through human use that nature acquires value. As a member explained to me: "we have learned… that it is important to move away from the notion of 'resource' because a resource is to be taken without scruples".[clx]

This approach contests the principle of accumulation that underlies extractivism. As discussed in the previous section, members of the movement's propose relating to nature on the basis of need – which Wichterich (2015) has termed a principle of 'sufficiency' and a 'culture of enough' – challenging the principles of overproduction and overconsumption that underpins our current economic system.[103] This is most evident in the accounts of members of the movement when they speak of the superfluous character of gold in comparison to water and of gold extraction as a nonsensical decision of choosing to contaminate water and land to accumulate gold (see the previous section). As such, to understand nature as a *bien común* contests the enclosure of nature in the market and its subjection to market logic.

[103] This resembles proposals of degrowth (D'Alisa, Demaria, & Kallis, 2015; Demaria & Latouche, 2019; Latouche, 2010; Muraca, 2012).

Moreover, re-thinking human-nature relations through care clearly contests the principle of exploitation that drives extractivism. As Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) argues, care transforms hierarchies of value. This is evident in how the movement is proposing to relate to nature based on restrained use. This is clearly illustrated in the second and third Popular Initiative, as both documents introduce the term *bienes comunes*, rather than natural resources, when appealing to the principle established in Argentina's *Ley General del Ambiente* (Law 25.675 on the Environment) on cooperative management, and equitable and sensible use. As the law states:

> "Law 25.675 on the Environment establishes the principles of environmental policy to be respected, among them …. The principle of cooperation, that establishes natural resources (better understood as 'common goods')…will be used in an equitable and sensible manner"[clxi] (p. 3 in both documents).

It also evident in the ways in which the movement's rethinking of human-nature relations is tied to a reconceptualization of what is necessary in order to be well, replacing the ethos of accumulation that underlies extractivism. While relating to nature unrestrainedly, and through a principle of accumulation, leads to its depletion – as expressed in the opening message of *Voces por la Tierra*[104] - thinking of nature as *bienes comunes* calls for a more harmonious relationship with nature. In fact, as members of the movement understand their struggle as a form of caring, their struggle in itself contests relating to nature on the basis of exploitation, showing it is possible to relate to nature otherwise.

Likewise, rethinking human-nature relations on the basis of care and as entangled existence challenges extractivism's exploitation of nature by challenging its imaginary of human autonomy and human mastery (see Plumwood, 1993, 2001). As discussed in the previous section, to rethink human-nature relations as entangled existence is to understand human interdependence with nature. Care, as Puig de la Bellacasa (2015) argues, also highlights a relationship of interdependence, as care draws attention to the dependency of the carer on the cared for – challenging a unidirectional way of relating to nature. Thus, to relate to nature based on care, and understand it as entangled with human wellbeing, is to recognise water, the mountain, the plateau as "valued participants in a world of ecological wellbeing" (Tsing, 2010, p.198).

This recognition challenges the 'hyperseparation of nature' (Plumwood, 2001) that sanctions extractivism. In the words of another member when discussing extractivism: "we need to realise

[104] The excerpt reads: "most of us grew up in a world where the riches of the planet seemed endless and where it seemed possible to easily satisfy the ambition of its inhabitants. However, little by little we started seeing polluted rivers, vanishing lakes, the deforestation of extensive areas of forests…".

that we are part of nature and that we are destroying ourselves".[clxii] In this way, rethinking human-nature relations on the basis of care and interdependence, "short-circuits [the] distance" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p.112) that allows for a relation of exploitation.

Care, however, is not inherently benevolent nor harmless (Ticktin, 2011), and thus it is important to highlight that care is not embedded, in the way members of the movement are rethinking human-nature relations, in a belief of human mastery over nature. Rather, it is the result of what Deborah Rose calls 'responsive attentiveness' – that is learning how to care through time and place (cited in Haraway, 2011). This is evident in the words of a member when she discusses how defending nature should not be necessary, "I think it is madness that people have to defend it [nature]. There is a phrase often said in street marches 'water is not to be sold, but to be defended'… water should not be sold, or defended, it should just be, that is it…we should not be having to defend water".[clxiii] Thus, caring for nature is not understood as embedded in a power relation between humans and nature, in which the asymmetry of power is not recoded under the language of stewardship, but rather as responding to a necessity.

Next, rethinking nature as entangled existence – which as previously discussed is expressed in the notion of territory – contests the simplification of nature on which extractivism's enclosure and exploitation of nature relies. To speak of territory is to understand and emphasise how complex nature is. A territory is a social construct that occupies and organises a given space (Gudynas, 2015) and that emphasises how space is never empty (Halvorsen, 2019). It speaks of a space where different forms of life coincide and thus of a space that is occupied, and of a space that is constituted through the complex web of relations therein. More precisely, it speaks of a space that is defined through the interdependency of human and non-human forms of life and speaks in this way of what Haraway (1997, 2008) has called 'naturecultures' to refer to the intricate relations of dependency that tie human and other forms of life together and through which they come into being. It speaks, more precisely, of what Haraway has called 'situated naturecultures' (2008) – that is a natureculture that exists in place and which comes to being through that relating-in-place. The notion of territory contests, thus, the separation of humans from nature that underlies extractivism (Halvorsen, 2019), as well as the notion of emptiness and idleness that sanctions it.

To think of nature as entangled contests, lastly, the fragmentation of nature that results from its simplification, by which elements or zones can be isolated and/or separated from the whole. Understanding human-nature relations as entangled existence, and appealing to the notion of

territory, directly challenges the notion of sacrifice zones under which the government of Chubut has sought to introduce mining in more recent years. It challenges the attribution of emptiness to the plateau which sanctions allocating the environmental costs of the mining industry to the designated area, as well as the principle that contamination and environmental degradation can be contained within delimited areas. As such, to rethink human-nature relations as entangled through territory contests an 'ecology of erasure' (K. Wright, 2022) with an ecology of permanence. Moreover, it entails recuperating to some degree an understanding of nature as a living organism, rather than as dead matter, which Merchant (1989) argues calls for restraining exploitative relations towards nature.

Thus, the ways in which the movement is rethinking nature – as *bienes comunes,* something to be cared for, and as entangled with human wellbeing – contests the enclosure and depletion of nature by extractivism by contesting its ontological underpinnings: privatisation, commodification, exploitation, and simplification.

Moreover, as Puig de la Bellacasa emphasises, commoning is deeply intertwined with relations of care, as commons are to be taken care of, maintained, preserved, and repaired (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2015, 2017) – and, in the case of the movement, defended. Thus, the ways in which the movement is rethinking human-nature relations on the basis of care is also indicative of a process of commoning. In turn, care is acting as the guiding principle for the creation of new arrangements of access, use, and responsibility.

As already discussed, care entails an emphasis on relations of interdependence. By stressing the movement's understanding of human-nature relations as entangled existence, care supports the creation of new arrangements of access. In other words, placing care at the centre of human-nature relations stresses the intricate relation between ecological and human wellbeing, as such it stresses how nature cannot be *de facto* privatised or depleted as that on which wellbeing depends needs to be equally accessible to people in Esquel. Likewise, by stressing interdependence between ecological and human wellbeing, making care central also prompts the creation of new arrangements of use, challenging the ethos of accumulation that underpins extractivism and calling instead for using nature measuredly through principles of sufficiency or a culture of enough.

Lastly, as Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) argues, recognising interdependency between humans and nature brings to the forefront questions of individual and collective responsibility towards others

and oneself, highlighting "a thick mesh of relational obligation" (p.20). As such, making care central to human-nature relations entails the negotiation of new arrangements of responsibility. This is evident in the words of a member who expressed to me, "everyone is responsible for caring for water, territory and life, wherever you are";[clxiv] in the pledges to the mountain organised by a member of the movement previously discussed; and in the common phrase of "water is not to be sold, it is to be defended" (see Figure 20). As the members of the movement see their struggle as defending nature, and defending as a form of care (a practice that will have to be continued for the foreseeable future given the permanent location of gold in the mountain), these are life-long and multigenerational arrangements of responsibility, emphasising how, as Puig de la Bellacasa (2015, 2017) has argued, care is a form of labour characterised by regularity and reiteration, involving everyday repetitive maintenance, and a relationship that adjusts "to the temporal exigencies of the cared for" (2015, p.19).

Figure 20. Water is not to be sold, (it is to be loved) and it is to be defended – banners in marches of Esquel's No a la Mina in February 2020 & January 2021

Source: From left to right, photo taken by the author in February 2020 and photo retrieved from the movement's Facebook page (Noalamina Esquel).

The movement's practice of rethinking human-nature relations thus shows how commoning is a process that is rooted in different understandings of nature, which support in turn the creation of new arrangements of access, use and responsibility, as opposed to being a process that is just about the development of these new arrangements without an ontological shift. In other words, it emphasises how commoning is a process rooted in ontological changes or in the ways we understand the world around us and our place therein. How commoning is a process that goes beyond claiming shared ownership, as it is commonly narrowly understood, is evident in how it is water not gold which is being framed as a *bien común*. In this sense, the commoning of nature at play in Esquel's No a la Mina supports an argument long made by feminist scholars about the intricate link between our understanding of nature and the way in which we relate to it (see

Merchant, 1989; Plumwood 1993, 2002; Shiva, 2016). I return to this discussion of ontology in the following section as it also relates to the movement's community-making.

Before moving on to an analysis of how the commoning of nature is supporting a process of community-making, it is important to highlight that in addition to being supported by the worldview of Mapuche-Tehuelche communities (discussed previously and to which I return in the last section of this chapter), this is a process that is supported by proximity to nature, knowledge, and attachment to place.

In many of the conversations I had with members of the movement, *vecinos* emphasised how they could see Mountain Willimanco (to which the mining project pertains) from their homes and/or workplaces. On various occasions, people even switched from the front to the back camera of their phones during our video calls to show me the view they were referring to. In the words of one woman who has sharing with me her experience of finding out back in 2002 what the impact of the mining project would be: "to top it all, I have the window of my kitchen facing, front facing, the mountain. To think that mountain would be blown off was unthinkable".[clxv] How being close to the mountain has motivated people's opposition to mining (and thus defending nature as a form of care) is also well represented in the words of another woman: "what afflicts me, what calls me to participate… in reality, is that I can see the mountain from a window in my house, and, really, it makes me very upset and sad".[clxvi] For another woman, it was precisely the proximity to the mountain that inspired organising a daily pledge to the mountain in 2002:

> "I could see the mountain from the window in my office. One day, I saw it and I thought 'let's make a pledge to the mountain'. Three or four people joined… 'Mountain', I said, 'we are going to defend you, we are going to care for you, we are not going to let them destroy you, we are going to defend you and water, they will not pass'. 'Does anyone else want to add anything', I said. And you have no idea, everyone gave their own testimony… Well, we did that every morning…And you know what happened?... People left stronger".[clxvii]

This proximity to nature was expressed by members not only as being able to see, but also as being able to feel it and interact with it, and as being aware of one's coexistence with it. As one woman shared with me, "Always when I go out cycling or just when I go around, it makes me think that this is what I love the most, the mountains, that wherever you go there is water flowing. The rivers flow with so much strength, with so much vitality, that you can't say yes to mining"[clxviii]. This is also echoed in the words of another member when speaking about how she moved to Chubut from another part of the country,

> "Here everything is very intense…. The geography in itself is shocking, these mighty mountains, so many lakes… One day you wake up and a volcano has exploded (like it happened to me years ago). Another day you wake up and there are two meters of snow. Nature is always very strong, very strong… The *Pachita*[105], like we call it, is always very present and when I arrived here that started to move something in me".[clxix]

Thus, being physically close to nature was crucial for *vecinos* to grasp the interdependency between human and ecological wellbeing. This in turn allowed for the emergence of what Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) calls 'haptic-touch' or 'tactile looks', Barad (2007) calls 'seeing-touching', and Hayward (2010) calls 'fingery-eyes" (2010), to refer to a feminist epistemology that emphasises embodiment and embeddedness – that is, 'being in touch with'. As Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) argues, touch is always relational (unlike vision) and results in increased accountability and care: "we can see without being seen, but we cannot touch without being touched" (ibid., p.97). In this sense, haptic-touch contests "the abstract and disengaged distances more easily associated with knowledge-as-vision" (ibidem.) and supports the formation of caring relationships. In other words, physical proximity contests the hyperseparation of humans from nature, as well as mobilises relations of care through affect. Being able to palpably coexist and interact with nature has supported a distance more susceptible to accountability (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), and the development of affective ties to nature and of 'responsive attentiveness' (Rose cited in Haraway, 2011) – or the ability to observe (and in this case, imagine) changes and act accordingly.

Moreover, for some members, knowledge has also shortened the distance between them and nature, and thus motivated relations of care. For some members of the movement, the movement's practice of 'information and dissemination' (discussed in Chapter Six) has supported a process of environmental consciousness-raising. As a member of the movement explained to me, "here in Chubut we have an important environmental awareness that we owe to the *vecinos* and *vecinas* of 2003, who wrote the manual, who went to schools, taught and raised awareness".[clxx] This is also echoed in the words of another member, when he associated one's capacity to relate to nature differently with knowing more about it: "it is vital to raise awareness… we had access to information, and people that are closer to the land, such as indigenous people, also respect nature".[clxxi] Hence, knowledge can also act as "knowledge that cares" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p.118.) helping to restore, for some members, a sense of connectedness with nature, as this counteracts the lack of knowledge about our natural environment that commonly results from hyperseparation.

[105] This refers to the Andean concept of Pachamama, which is usually translated as Mother Earth. In Andean mythology, the Pachamama – nature – is a female deity who is the source of all life (Gualinga, 2019).

Attachment to place is another element motivating the commoning of nature by mobilising relationships of care. Most, if not all, members of the movement who have migrated to Esquel from other parts of the country (referred to as VYQ in the region, see Chapter Five) have moved, in part, searching for contact with nature. Having migrated to Esquel precisely because of the natural environment and one's proximity to it, many members of the movement express a strong attachment to nature. As a man expressed to me during an interview,

> "At 6 pm I was finished getting ready to talk to you and if you could have seen the landscape I saw… It was moving. I am lucky that my window looks to the mountain, and today the view was touching. There was a fog that covered half the mountain, and because yesterday rained, some of the snow had been washed off. You could see a combination of rock and snow… that image from 6 pm is unforgettable. So, evidently, I always wanted to be here… and I am lucky to have spent here a third of my life in this place where I feel so good".[clxxii]

Thus, for many members, it is their attachment to Esquel which has motivated an affective tie to nature and thus a caring relationship towards it, as echoed in the words of another member: "I think it was provoked by Esquel… nature, the mountain, the unpolluted… it made me love nature very much, be aware and care. It is not that before I went around lighting fires or polluting but I didn't pay much attention".[clxxiii] As emphasised by this *vecino*, this attachment to place and caring for is partly rooted in an appreciation of Esquel and its surroundings as somewhat pristine, as a place where "they can still drink spring water …and [thus] where the objective is to fundamentally take care of the water".[clxxiv] It is also rooted in having chosen it as the place they wanted to live in. In the words of another *vecino*, "that is what motivates me, caring for the environment in which I want to spend the rest of my life. I think that motivates many of us, defending our place".[clxxv]

For members who are from the Esquel or the province (referred to as NYC, see Chapter Five) attachment to place is rooted in their history. This can be seen in the words of two young Mapuche members. One of them emphasises how her Mapuche ancestry entails a duty to defend the territory, "I have Mapuche blood, I feel it. I have to defend the territory, I have to do something for future generations…".[clxxvi] The other highlights that attachment to place can also be rooted in feelings of solidarity. As they expressed to me,

> "I selfishly thought that because I didn't have a house here. I didn't have a house or a job, only my kid. If they [the mining company] arrives and this goes to shit, I'll leave. I'll grab my things and leave. I remember I went to my parent's place, told them and they replied 'Alright, daughter'. Of course. They couldn't leave. And then I realised there are so many people that cannot leave and do not want to leave because their home is here".[clxxvii]

Proximity and attachment to place thus speak of the role of affect in fostering care. Care, as Tronto (1993) argues, requires an affective disposition to responsibility and worry. In fact, a touching vision implies "being touched by what we 'observe'" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p.116) – that is, to engage affectively. As a member explained to me, to rethink nature as *bienes comunes,* also entails an affective change: "It is to think it, to feel it and to act upon it, that these are *bienes comunes*".[clxxviii] Attachment to place speaks precisely of the development of affective ties with nature (as part of place) through a personal history – whether of ancestry or migration. How attachment to place entails affect is clear in the feelings of concern, duty, sorrow, angst, and empathy members of the movement experience in relation to nature. Thus, nurturing affective ties between humans and nature appears as crucial to the commoning of nature and thus the contestation of extractivism. However, as the attachment to place for people who have migrated to Esquel is articulated through an attachment to a pristine landscape, there are some tensions underlying the process of commoning at play, which I take up in the last section of this chapter.

In sum, the way in which the movement is rethinking nature as a process of commoning – as something communal, to be cared for, and entangled with human wellbeing – contests the ontological underpinnings of extractivism, by contesting its enclosure through privatisation and commodification, as well as contesting its exploitation through relations of care. Care, thus, is being placed as the basis for creating new arrangements of access, use, and responsibility. Moreover, as the movement's commoning of nature has been supported by Mapuche-Tehuelche worldviews, proximity, knowledge, and attachment to place, it highlights the crucial role these factors can have in the disruption of the ontological underpinnings of extractivism. Indigenous worldviews can disrupt dominant imaginaries of nature by showing alternative forms of human-nature relations, proximity and knowledge can contest the hyperseparation of the human from the natural, and proximity and attachment to place can motivate the affect that supports practices of care.

However, as it is on ongoing process, the movement is confronting questions of what aspects of nature should become a commons and what should not. For example, while members of the movement refer to the importance of thinking of nature in general as *bienes comunes* rather than resources, this notion has been mostly applied to water. Deciding on the boundaries of commoning also entails questions about how to care. For example, as they see defence as care, this entails questions around what of nature needs to cared for, protected, in relation to what – in

other words, deciding on when and how one should care for nature. These are conversations that are still developing.

Towards the making of a kin community and a citizenship based on care

The process of commoning discussed above is motivating the making of a community by elaborating a relational ontology of care, as well as expanding this process beyond an anthropocentric notion.

The commoning of nature entails recognising the intricate interdependency between ecological and human wellbeing – a relation that members of the movement have explicitly articulated (as previously discussed). As Velicu & García Lopez (2019) argue building on the work of Butler and her conceptualisation of mutual vulnerability as 'common physicality and risk', interdependence entails a "relational politics that engages with human boundedness and mutual vulnerability… an inevitable exposure to others" (p.65). Mutual vulnerability is "a condition that makes more possible a 'response-ability'" (ibid., p.66) – which according to Haraway (2016) speaks of one's ability and responsibility to respond to the needs of others.[106] 'Response-ability' speaks, in turn, to what Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) calls a caring politics based on hapticity – that is, an ethical commitment, "an engagement to respond to what a problem requires" (p.110). In other words, an understanding of the human and the natural as intricately related emphasises relations of exposure and vulnerability and it is based on these relations that the process of commoning at play is creating new arrangements of responsibility.

Figure 21. North-west façade of the movement's *localito*

Source: Photo taken by the author in February 2020.

[106] Although Velicu & García Lopez (2019) define response-ability as the "ability (of all) to counteract violence because it 'already establishes a principle of equality' (citing Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p.107).

These relations of responsibility entail, in turn, the emergence of a caring politics that contributes to a process of community-making. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, the ways in which the movement is rethinking human-nature relations is motivated by an interest in collective human wellbeing, present and future, as well as by a concern for the wellbeing of other forms of life and the protection of a life-sustaining environment. Thus, it is possible to see how relations of care – caring and being cared for – indeed function as the binding force for the production and/or reproduction of community (Sato & Soto Alarcón, 2019). Care in this sense speaks of collective acts that occur through "a collective web of obligations, rather than individual commitments" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p.120), and thus of as a relation that is embedded in the collective as an "ethico-political issue" (ibid., p.160).

The centrality of a politics of care in Esquel's No a la Mina is reflected in the phrase that decorates one of the exterior walls of the *localito* and which many members express as their favourite: "*la montaña sigue en pie gracias a su gente*", the mountain still stands thanks to its people (see Figure 22). As one of the entries in the movement's website reads: "In Esquel, us, *vecinos* know and celebrate that 'the mountain stands thanks to its people"'.[clxxix] This phrase is indicative of the link between care and community-making in two ways. First, the phrase speaks already of a collective formed around an act of care. Second, the phrase represents an effort to render visible the everyday care work assumed and performed over the last 20 years by members of the movement. As a member of the movement explained to me: "that is why I say it, because it is thanks to the struggle that started 18 years ago [at the time of the interview] that we still have pure water, pure air, and the mountain".[clxxx] As such, the permanence of the mountain attests to the care work done by the movement and thus to how care has tied together people in Esquel, as well as people and nature.

As this phrase indicates, the process of commoning at play does not only tie people together but also ties people and nature together through relations of care, expanding a process of community-making beyond anthropocentric boundaries. As previously discussed, in the way the movement is rethinking nature, commoning is not only for human wellbeing but also for the wellbeing of other forms of life – that is, for the creation of 'life sustaining interdependencies' (Haraway, 2008). This is made clear by members of the movement when they emphasise their struggle is 'defending life', as Figure 21 shows. As two members expressed to me: "we are aware that what we are defending is life";[clxxxi] "we think every place in the province should have [like we do] an assembly for the defence of water and life".[clxxxii] How their appeal to 'life' refers to all forms of life, rather than just

human lives, is symbolised in the leaflets shown in Figure 23, where the message of "*la minería amenaza la vida*" (mining threatens life) clearly refers to non-human animal life.

Figure 22. South-west façade of the movement's *localito* and a digital publication celebrating the movement's 17th anniversary

Source: Left to right, photo taken by the author in February 2020 and digital publication retrieved from the movement's Facebook page (Noalamina Esquel).

Figure 23. Digital publications made by the movement in 2021

Source: Retrieved from the movement's Facebook page (Noalamina Esquel).

Moreover, emphasising human boundedness, mutual vulnerability, and response-ability, supports a worldview where engagement "… with the material world [occurs] less from the perspective of defined 'objects' and 'subjects' but as composed of knots of relations involving humans, nonhumans, and physical entanglements of matter and meaning" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, p.141 citing Barad, 2007). This entails a recognition of how one 'becomes-with' not only vis-à-vis other people but while responding to these knots of relations and thus vis-à-vis the nonhuman. Hence, commoning nature is not only prompting the making of a community composed of those who are doing the caring, but one that also includes the cared for. This is most evident in the phrase of 'the mountain still stands thanks to its people'. By speaking of 'its people', as in the mountain's people, this phrase speaks of a community whose defining element is its shared nature or the cared for.

Moreover, to speak of *its people*, is to incorporate nature – in this case the mountain – as part of the community.

The movement's commoning of nature is thus supporting a process of 'making-kin' (Haraway, 2015, 2016) – that is, 'to make-with and become-with', to expand our ties of response-ability beyond the human towards non-human life or presence. As Van Dooren & Chrulew (2022) argue, care produces situated ties of kinship with that which surrounds us, a "connectivity that both sustains and obligates" (ibid., p.2) that can go beyond the human. As a result, following Haraway's term, the commoning of nature is motivating the emergence of a 'kin community' – what elsewhere has been called 'a multispecies community' (Sato & Soto Alarcón, 2019; Centemeri, 2018) or 'more-than-human kinship' (Van Dooren & Chrulew, 2022).[107]

The emergence of a kin community is palpable in the increasing use of the notion of territory by members of the movement to refer to a set of human-nature relationships within a given space. By speaking of territory, members of the movement call attention to how a kin-community is one that is territorially rooted and how the relations of care that are supporting this process are being forged within, and on the basis of, a given geographic space that is being appropriated and re-signified. As other urban/rural land, indigenous, feminist, and/or socio-environmental movements (see Zibechi, 2012; Ng'weno, 2007; Escobar, 2008; Halvorsen, 2019; Gargallo, 2013; Ulloa, 2016; Narahara, 2022), Esquel's No a la Mina is appealing to a notion of territory, and this speaks to a process of re-signification of space (Porto Gonçalves, 2001). While other movements physically occupy (or aim to recuperate) a given space (see for example, Valverde, 2010), Esquel's No a la Mina does not seek. This is because the legitimacy of the residence of *vecinos* is not what is in question. Instead, they are appropriating space precisely by assuming and creating new arrangements of responsibility over it – towards nature and between *vecinos* (see also Chapter 5). They also share, with other movements appealing to the notion of territory, a feeling of territorial rootedness that is expressed through the pursual of a 'long-term project… [that] reproduces life' (Zibechi, 2012). This is evident in their claim that they reject mining because they are defending life.[108]

[107] Puig de la Bellacasa (2015) argues a similar dynamic occurred in a permaculture collective were the "collective, does not only include humans but the plants we cultivate, the animals we raise and eat (or rather not), and Earth's energetic resources: air, water".

[108] Their pursual is not related to creating something new – as in other social movements, but rather in keeping things as they – that is, on the absence of mining. This is because it is this absence that is necessary for life and its reproduction in this territory.

In sum, the process of commoning at play is supporting the making of a kin community by mobilising relations of care that aim to sustaining the multiple webs of dependency that exist within naturecultures. Challenging anthropocentric boundaries of community-making is opening discussions within the movement about nature as a subject of rights – an issue to which return later in this section.

As a result, the movement is proposing and practising citizenship as a relationship of caring and being cared for – transforming citizenship as belonging, agency and membership. As discussed in previous sections of this chapter, care is central to the process of commoning and community-making at play: it is the guiding principle for the creation of new arrangements of access, use, and responsibility in relation to nature, as well as the driving force binding people together and to nature, through ties of response-ability for the creation and/or maintenance of life-sustaining interdependencies. In doing so, the movement has politicised care, made it 'public and political' (MacGregor, 2004). They have framed care as a collective act rather than an individual commitment, as evident in their understanding of their struggle as a form of care which, recalling Chapter Five, they emphasise is not anyone's individual responsibility but a shared one. It is, for them, a guiding principle – and thus an ethical imperative and political ideal – for life in community.

Feminist scholars have explicitly argued for the need to centre care in practices of citizenship for the sake of gender justice (Lister, 1997a; Sevenhuijsen, 1998) and/or ecological justice (Curtin, 1991; MacGregor, 2004, 2006, 2010). Unlike scholars who frame care as gendered and advocate for an expansion of a caring ethos and practice through a gendered language (e.g. the need for everyone to 'mother') (Gilligan, 2016; Puleo, 2013; Ruddick, 1995), authors like MacGregor (2004, 2006, 2010) argue for the expansion of a de-gendered notion of care. As Tronto (1993) argues, a de-gendered notion of care is necessary because care is not only central to our private lives, but to our life in political community. Thus, as Tronto (1993) and MacGregor (2004, 2006, 2010) argue, an ethic of care cannot be articulated through a gendered language – what has been called 'maternal politics' (see, for example Ruddick, 1995) – since this runs the risk of maintaining care as a depoliticised practice to be carried out as an individual private responsibility. Moreover, as advocating for the expansion of care through a gendered language exults a connection between women and care, it also runs the risk of entrenching care as women's responsibility (MacGregor, 2006). In contrast, they argue that an ethic of care developed on the basis of a degendered notion of care allows instead for its politicization as a guiding principle for life in political community, to

contest its exclusive placement in the private realm, and thus to inform understandings of justice and democracy.

The way in which Esquel's No a la Mina has politicised care resembles the degendered ethics of care proposed by Tronto (1993, 1995) and MacGregor (2004). There is no use of gendered language or associations in the movement, and as a result members of the movement has positioned care in the public political arena as a guiding principle for life in political community, for all *vecinos* and the state. As such, the movement has infused citizenship with a notion of care, where caring has been built into a form of agency that simultaneously motivates and informs citizenship, as well as demands of the state that it concerns itself with ecological wellbeing.[109]

Firstly, as discussed in Chapter Five, mobilising as *vecinos* is transforming citizenship as belonging by rooting it in place. Politicising care, as it is inherently linked to a notion of territory (as previously discussed), further supports this transformation of citizenship. By emphasising territorial rootedness, caring strengthens the movement's demands to have a degree of self-definition within a democratic contract – that is, to renegotiate authority between people and the state on the basis of the principle of popular sovereignty. This is because, as Ng'weno (2007) argues, to speak of territory within the context of the state is to dispute claims to authority and sovereignty as these have historical been the bedrocks of the nation state. Thus, territorial claims are often "the setting through which the goals of citizenship in terms of … self-definition… are produced withing the contemporary state" (p.25).

Secondly, politicising care mobilises it as a form of agency. By understanding their struggle as a form of care, caring is both a principle and a set of practices that make citizenship possible in the first place (MacGregor, 2004), as well as a means of exercising agency in relation to the state. In other words, it is the motivation to engage with, and contest practices of, the state, as well as a way of engaging with it.

Furthermore, politicising care supports the ways in which citizenship is being transformed by the other movement's practices. By politicising care, it is further embedding a moral dimension into citizenly agency – something which is also nurtured through the movement's appeal to dignity, as discussed in Chapter Seven. It is also bolstering *vecinos'* sense of collective power – discussed in Chapter Five –through a notion of territory. As discussed in Chapter 5, the movement's appeal to

[109] It is also expressed by members of different gender alike.

the notion of *pueblo* highlights how to mobilise as *vecinos* is to exercise a collective agency to subvert the vertical power relation between people and the state. By understanding care as territorially rooted, and politicising it, the movement is further legitimising its claim, and practice of, collective agency. This is because, as already discussed, speaking of territory bolster claims over authority and sovereignty (Ng'weno, 2007) – which in this case manifests through their claim to being able to choose about their present and future and to act upon that choice.

Thirdly, the movement's politicisation of care clearly establishes it as a political ideal that transforms citizenship as membership. However, the movement's politicisation of care goes one step further than current theories of care ethics, as it does not confine an ethic of care to citizens – whether individually or collectively – but extends it to the logic of the state. Care is not just one of "the qualities necessary for democratic citizens to live together well in a pluralistic society" (MacGregor, 2006, citing Bowden 1997), but also a necessary quality and obligation of the state. This demands that the state incorporate and act according to a different understanding of human-nature relations and according to a principle of response-ability. Thus, demanding a caring relationship from the state towards people revises the notion of citizenship by putting forward an understanding of citizenship as being, in part, cared for – transforming the duty of the state towards its citizens.

Reshaping citizenship as caring and being cared for, has ultimately led to the 'calling of earth-beings [nature] into politics' (De la Cadena, 2010). As a result, like the movement's appeal to dignity (see Chapter Seven), its making of a kin community also contests the narrow definition of wellbeing held by the state and demands it acts upon an expanded definition. In this case, it contests the exclusion of nature which is affected through its neglect of the dependence of human wellbeing thereon, and its disregard for ecological wellbeing. In this sense, the movement's contestation of the state's paradigm of wellbeing is more similar to, and echoes, the paradigm of *Buen Vivir* – and more specifically that of *kume morgen* or *kume felen* – which proposes the reconceptualization of wellbeing based on a different understanding of human-nature relations.
By calling nature into politics, reshaping citizenship as caring and being cared further transforms citizenship as membership. This is because it has also led to incipient discussions of nature as a subject of rights, and thus to a discussion of the boundaries of the political community. In time, these may develop into a demand for the expansion of state-afforded and protected rights to nature. As a member of the movement expressed, "to consider nature as a subject of rights is also crucial".[clxxxiii]

Opportunities for convergence and their limits

The ways in which members of the movement are rethinking human-nature relations is creating a convergence between Mapuche-Tehuelche people and the movement, as well as prompting their recognition. However, the way in which members of the movement are attached to place through landscape means that despite this convergence, important differences remain in the way indigenous and non-indigenous members value nature, which could limit the transformative potential of this convergence.

As previously discussed, one of the factors influencing how members of the movement are rethinking human-nature relations is Mapuche-Tehuelche worldview. As many members of the movement have learnt from Mapuche-Tehuelche people how it is possible to relate to nature differently, this process is opening opportunities to contest the historical attribution of ignorance to indigenous peoples that has long supported (settler) colonial processes. It is creating opportunities for Mapuche-Tehuelche people to be recognised as knowledgeable – that is, to be epistemically recognised – reversing the direction in which knowledge has been assumed to travel since the formation of the Argentinian nation-state. Their epistemic recognition can in turn start paving the way for their political recognition and contest the ways in which "some *vecinos* continue to deny Mapuche-Tehuelche people recognition as rights-bearing subjects".[clxxxiv]

Moreover, this process of learning has motivated and supported a much more complex political reading of mining by most members of the movement under which "*la lucha es una sola*" – the struggles [mining and Mapuche-Tehuelche struggles] are the same. Learning from Mapuche-Tehuelche people has been gradually allowing the movement to move beyond an agenda solely focused on the regional prohibition of mining towards one that recognises the transversality of extractivism. As a result, this process of learning has increasingly created common political terrain between the movement and Mapuche-Tehuelche people, as members of the movement are coming to acknowledge how extractivism relies too on the dispossession of the *pueblos originarios* of their lands. As a result, this has created a feeling of trust and understanding for some Mapuche-Tehuelche people that supports political convergence. As a Mapuche-Tehuelche man expressed to me,

> "There are many people who came to live here, searching for nature, tranquillity, rivers, lakes. They came from cities like Buenos Aires where it is already polluted, having already seen what can happen in a territory. Then, they come with another mentality, willing to defend, because if we don't there won't be anything left in a few years".[clxxxv]

In fact, the notion of territory is playing a crucial role in the creation of this political convergence of struggles. As Halvorsen (2019) argues, the notion of territory is being reclaimed and re-signified by social movements, allowing them to move away from a dominant Western conceptualisation towards a more pluralistic term (Plumwood, 2001). In this case, the notion of territory is acting as what De la Cadena (2010) calls an 'equivocation' – that is, a notion that "enable circuits between partially connected worlds without creating a unified system of activism" (p.351), allowing people to "both understand and not understand the same thing by the same words" (ibidem.). In other words, the notion of territory allows for both struggles to converge while maintaining their differences. For example, for Mapuche-Tehuelche people, to speak of territory is to speak of an ancestral tie to the land, a spiritual worldview, and reciprocal care ties between humans and the *mapu*. On the contrary, territory for non-indigenous members of the movement speaks of personal attachment to place through a personal history, unidirectional relations of care as nature is not conceptualised as agentic, and not necessarily embedded in a wider spiritual worldview. Yet, for both indigenous and non-indigenous people, to speak of territory is to speak of 'situated naturecultures' where human and ecological wellbeing are deeply interrelated, and to speak of a space where its inhabitants demand some degree of autonomy. As one member explained to me, "cosmology is something much wider. We coincide in this notion of territory or *mapu*"[clxxxvi] – albeit with difference in what this entails.

However, there are two tensions at play in this process. Firstly, as learning from Mapuche-Tehuelche people pertains to only part of their cosmology, a question remains of whether this process is more one of appropriation than transformation. In other words, questions remain of the transformative potential of this process in terms of the recognition of Mapuche-Tehuelche communities and their struggles, or whether it speaks (or can develop) as a process of appropriation – accepting parts of Mapuche-Tehuelche cosmology, while rejecting their political claims. Secondly, as *vecinos* who have migrated to Esquel from other parts of Argentina in search of closeness to nature replicate imaginaries of Patagonia as pristine nature (see Chapter Four), their attachment to place is one based on the value of nature as landscape. As Galafassi argues (2019), valuing nature as landscape does not necessarily entail attributing to it inherent value for socio-ecological reasons but can be a different way of attributing it market value (in this case for tourism). While members of the movement speak of nature as having inherent value, they also speak of tourism as an economic alternative for the region – as this would allow for the conservation of nature-as-landscape. In doing so, the movement faces a contradiction between the active ways it

is rethinking human-nature relations, and the ways in which it puts forward practical alternatives to mining.

This creates an internal contradiction in the commoning of nature around who would own these activities, who would (and would not) benefit, and whether a process of commoning can still exist in the presence of market logic. Moreover, supporting tourism can be at odds with Mapuche-Tehuelche land struggles, as valuing nature-as-landscape has motivated much of the dispossession of Mapuche-Tehuelche communities from their lands throughout the region of the cordillera, and could compete in present times with the territories communities are seeking to recuperate, as is the case in the dispute between the National Park of Nahuel Huapi and the Mapuche-Tehuelche community Lof Inkalai WalMapu Meu in Rio Negro (see Galafassi, 2012; Rasmussen, 2021; Trentini, 2011). Thus, the embrace of tourism could signal an important ideological difference, and thus divergence, between Mapuche-Tehuelche struggles and Esquel's No a la Mina.

Conclusion

This chapter argued that the movement is re-imagining a different way of relating to nature, as something that is shared, cared for, and entangled, commoning nature as a result. Their commoning of nature challenges the ontological underpinnings of extractivism, contesting the enclosure and depletion of nature by extractivism. Supported by the worldview of Mapuche-Tehuelche communities, proximity to nature, knowledge, and attachment to place, this process of commoning nature also places care as the guiding principle for the creation of new arrangements of access, use, and responsibility. This shows how commoning is not only a process of negotiating new arrangements, but how it is also sustained by ontological shifts regarding human-nature relations.

The commoning of nature, therefore, is motivating the making of a community by elaborating a relational ontology of care and expanding this process beyond an anthropocentric notion – building a 'kin community'. By commoning nature, and making community, the movement's re-imagining of human-nature relations is, ultimately, putting forward an understanding of citizenship as caring and being cared for that transforms citizenship as belonging, agency and membership. Politicising care further roots citizenship in place, it motivates engaging with and contesting practices of the state, reframes the duty of the Argentinian state towards its citizens, and calls nature into politics.

However, this form of commoning is not without its tensions. As I have discussed, while it creates opportunities for the epistemic recognition of Mapuche-Tehuelche people, and for the convergence of struggles, it is important to question to what degree there is an appropriation of Mapuche-Tehuelche worldviews, as well as to be attentive to the ways in which valuing nature as landscape creates internal contradictions for the commoning of nature.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the processes of commoning, community-making, and citizenship transformation that underpin the success and continuity of Esquel's No a la Mina over the course of two decades. It draws on both onsite and remote research methods (conducted in 2020 and 2020-2021, respectively). Based on a theoretical framework that brings together a feminist political ecology lens and an anthropological perspective on citizenship, the study has argued that it is four practices – everyday discourses and actions of the movement – that have supported this process through their performative potential. Each of these four practices – mobilising as *vecinos*, 'informing' about mining, appealing to dignity, and rethinking human-nature relations – have entailed processes of commoning which have both supported and actively shaped community-making. This, in turn, has impacted the ways in which members of the movement engage with the state, reshaping their understandings and practices of citizenship. As part of this analysis, the study has also examined the ways in which these practices are embedded in relations of power, not only vis-à-vis the state and the private sector, but also those present within the movement on the basis of social difference, affecting the participation of indigenous peoples in particular.

Summary of argument and contributions

Commoning

Mobilising as *vecinos*, 'informing' about mining, appealing to dignity, and rethinking human-nature relations have entailed processes of commoning: of place, knowledge, wellbeing, and nature, respectively.

Mobilising as *vecinos* has supported the commoning of place through the creation of new arrangements of responsibility. As discussed in Chapter Five, participating as *vecinos* responds to the place-based character of the injustices and harms that surround mining by invoking place as the unifying factor among people in Esquel, and by capturing how mobilising against mining is understood by members of the movement as more of a responsibility to assure the common good for people in Esquel, than a choice. As such, participating as *vecinos* speaks of a process of assuming shared ownership over place and of establishing arrangements of shared responsibility over it – thus, commoning place.

'Informing' about mining has encompassed two parallel processes: making oneself an expert and sharing that expertise with others. As discussed in Chapter Six, 'informing' is a process through which members of the movement not only become experts themselves but seek to make others more knowledgeable too, widening people's access to expert knowledge and establishing it as something that is collectively owned and should not be enclosed in expert spaces. Hence, 'informing' seeks to establish new arrangements of access to knowledge, framing knowledge as belonging to everyone not only a few – commoning knowledge as a result.

As discussed in Chapter Seven, the various meanings dignity has for members of the movement – and which underlie the way in which the movement appeals to this notion to celebrate their struggle – coalesces around the prioritisation of collective over individual wellbeing. Dignity – as enacted through the rejection of mining under conditions of economic hardship and power asymmetries – is, for members of the movement, rooted in an individual capacity and choice to prioritise the long-term over the short-term and to refuse to compromise one's convictions and place in exchange for individual material benefits. Hence, by applauding the prioritisation of communal over individual wellbeing, the movement's appeal to dignity builds an understanding of wellbeing as collective – commoning wellbeing.

The movement's rethinking of nature as something entangled with human existence, and thus as something that should be shared and cared for, speaks of a process of commoning nature that calls for new arrangements of access, use, and responsibility. In other words, by understanding the interdependence of human and ecological wellbeing, members of the movement have begun to place care at the centre of human-nature relations, which motivates the creation of new arrangements: new arrangements of access as nature cannot be used in exclusionary ways; new arrangements of use based on a culture of enough rather than a principle of accumulation; and new arrangements of responsibility that adapt to the needs of those cared for (both human and non-human).

In doing this analysis, this thesis shows how social movements can be sites of commoning. It establishes how commoning does not need to emerge from an explicit agreement to establish something as shared or an explicit negotiation of new arrangements of use, access, and responsibility, but can also come into being through the continuous repetition of seemingly unrelated practices. It also shows how commoning is a process that extends beyond nature, not only to include knowledge but also place and wellbeing. In discussing the commoning of nature,

moreover, the thesis shows how commoning is not only a process of creating new arrangements, but how, to be transformative, it needs to be sustained by an ontological shift in the way we understand that which is being established as a commons.

Making a commoning-community

Locating how these four practices of the movement have entailed processes of commoning, has shown, in turn, how they support allied processes of community-making.

First, three of these practices – mobilising as *vecinos*, 'informing' about mining, and appealing to dignity – have explicitly sought to bridge differences across *vecinos* in Esquel and call people from different backgrounds into the movement. To mobilise under the identity of *vecino* speaks to the movement's effort to find the widest membership criterion possible for people in Esquel, and to bridge differences of gender, ethnicity, class, and origin (as discussed in Chapter Five). Likewise, 'informing' about mining and appealing to dignity speaks of the effort to bridge differences between members on the basis of education and class. Clearly then, these three practices facilitate and create a sense of unity among people from different backgrounds in Esquel, one of the bases upon which their community is made.

Secondly, all the four practices also nurtured a sense of community through the processes of commoning they have generated. Commoning place by mobilising as *vecinos* has contributed to the emergence of a strong sense of relationality within the movement and a collective political subjectivity, which has motivated in turn the making of a community structured around the principle of horizontality, and which offers containment through a sense of proximity, solidarity, and care. Moreover, mobilising as *vecinos* creates a collective political subjectivity in terms of which a sense of community can be articulated. 'Informing', and thus the commoning of knowledge, has created community epistemically, through epistemic networks that express shared understandings and goals, including the aspiration to collective epistemic autonomy. Appealing to dignity, and thus the commoning of wellbeing, has fostered a sense of community by speaking of a shared relational opposition to the state, and imbuing this shared relation of struggle with a moral and affective tissue which binds people together. As such, dignity is functioning as a moral grammar that ties together and strengthens the community through a set of values and affect. Lastly, rethinking human nature-relations, and the commoning of nature, has motivated the making of a

community by centring a notion of care that weaves people, and people and nature, together – forming a 'kin community'.

By providing a detailed account of how commoning supports a process of community-making, the thesis empirically illuminated a relationship between commoning and community that had only been established theoretically before now. In doing so, it showed how the emergence of a commoning-community is not only related to new political subjectivities and affective relations (discussed in Chapter 2), but also to elements absent in the literature until now: an articulating language of political belonging, epistemic goals and relations, a moral grammar, and ontological shifts of human-nature relations. Moreover, the thesis has shown how commoning not only motivates a process of community-making, but how the particularities of what is being established as a commons shapes the very content of the emerging commoning-community.

In other words, it shows how each process of commoning will lead invariably to different community formations, reflecting the history and dynamics of a given time and space. In pursuing this analysis, the thesis has thus contributed too to existing literature on social movements and community-making by showing how social movements can be sites of community-making through commoning.

Citizenship

The processes of commoning and community-making at play, are, moreover, reshaping citizenship as belonging, membership, and agency. As a result, they are reshaping the political subjectivity, rights and duties, and political agency associated to citizenship, transforming the way members of the movement relate to the Argentinian state.

The collective political subjectivity produced by mobilising as *vecinos* overcomes the more conventional individualist motivation for citizenship. Members mobilise as part of a perceived collective; their individual participation is refracted through a collective body. This collective practice of citizenship builds on a history of collective citizenship in Argentina, as well as transforms its practice. It reshapes it – following the *asambleas barriales* of 2001 – from one based on inclusion in structures of production, practiced through hierarchical spaces of participation and easily co-opted by the state, to one based on place, practiced through horizontal relations and political autonomy. As such, mobilising as *vecinos* puts forward a different form of collective

citizenship to that which has been historically available in Argentina at large, and which contests the de-collectivisation of citizenship supported by the Argentinian state since the 1980s, instrumental to the foreclosure of public debates around development and the imposition of mining. Moreover, the practices of the movement of mobilising as *vecinos* and rethinking human-nature relations are nurturing a political subjectivity that is firmly rooted in place.

The movement's commoning of place, wellbeing and nature puts forward a demand to expand the rights and duties associated with citizenship, thus transforming citizenship as membership. Commoning place emphasises and demands people's collective right to decide over their lives – a right that is anchored in a democratic social contract between people and the state. The commoning of wellbeing and nature qualify this right further.

Commoning wellbeing is a call to imagine development alternatives – to imagine things could be *otherwise* – and to do so based on a wider notion of wellbeing than that which underlies the state's current imaginary of development. It articulates people's right to define wellbeing on their own terms, expressing a demand to transform the teleology of development. They are demanding it is not only a process on which people have a collective right to decide, but one on which people can decide on the basis of different criteria – such as communal interest and non-market values – and one which supports this vision.

By proposing care as a political ideal for human-nature relations, the commoning of nature contests the disregard for ecological wellbeing — both in its own right and its importance to human wellbeing — that characterises the state's development imaginary. As a result, the commoning of nature has prompted an understanding of citizenship not only as caring, but also as being cared for. This stresses and informs further a demand for people's collective right to decide over place, the different values steering their decisions, and their right to define wellbeing on their own terms. It also reframes the duty of the state towards its citizens in the language of care. This, as briefly discussed in Chapter Eight, may develop into a demand for the recognition of nature as a subject of rights in coming years.

All four practices of the movement converge, lastly, in the transformation of citizenship as agency– that is, of people's sense of their ability to choose and to act upon that choice (Kabeer, 1999). Mobilising as *vecinos,* by producing a form of collective citizenship, appeals to a collective notion of agency. Based on the principle of popular sovereignty underlying democracy, this form of

citizenship claims collective authority vis-à-vis the state. By placing knowledge as a critical emancipatory component of people's ability to choose and act accordingly, 'informing' shapes this sense of collective agency further as one that is also epistemic. The moral grammar created by appeals to dignity frames the willingness to engage in a relation of struggle with the state, and the act of doing so through democratic and corporeal means, as virtues of citizenship. As such, the movement's appeal to dignity emboldens a claim to agency through a moral connotation and its associated affective tissue (pride, contentment, self-esteem, self-respect, etc.). Moreover, the movement's commoning of nature and the subsequent politicisation of care, roots this collective epistemic and moral agency in an ethics of care. This incorporates caring as a practice of citizenship, as well as boosts the moral dimension of the sense of agency they are building.

Ultimately, these transformations speak of, and converge in, a transformation of the social contract that underpins the relationship between *vecinos* in Esquel and the Argentinian state. This new social contract, which is being brought about as well as demanded, is one in which people engage with the state through an autonomous collective political subjectivity rooted in place, an epistemic and moral agency, and rights to wider notions of human and ecological wellbeing, and by which the state is required to reshape, in turn, its understanding and relation to extractivism. In sum, they speak of a renegotiation of power between *vecinos* in Esquel and the state, and thus of a demand and creation of a new social contract with a new form of public authority vis-à-vis the state: the community. It is the community, rooted in place, that has the right to decide, the means to do so, and different criteria informing their decisions, and it is the state who under a democratic model and following the principle of popular sovereignty should abide by this decision. How the processes of commoning at play, and their impact on citizenship, are ultimately resulting in the creation of a new public authority vis-à-vis the state is perhaps most evident in the notion of *licencia social* (social license) that the movement uses (as other socio-environmental assemblies do throughout Argentina) to emphasise extractivism does not have support from the majority of the population.

As such, this process of commoning and its impact on citizenship can be understood as aiming to re-construct the Argentinian state – an argument that Ramos & Delrio (2005) made in relation to the protests of 2001 and the struggles of *pueblos originarios*. As I return to later, it is this aim that also holds potential for the redressal of exclusions within Esquel's No a la Mina.

In examining the connections between commoning, community-making, and citizenship, the thesis has shown how a socio-environmental movement, and thus how socio-environmental processes, can shape citizenship, and how socio-environmental movements can be productive sites for the transformation not only of the micro-political but of the very way in which people relate to the state. In doing so, it has stressed the importance of analysing the transformative potential of socio-environmental movements in relation to the wider political context. It has also shown how the politics of autonomy associated with particularly urban and indigenous movements in Latin America since the 1960s do not necessarily aim to transcend the state. The analysis of Esquel's No a la Mina shows how a movement's politics of self-determination do not have to be directed at building autonomous spaces, independent of the state, but can be expressed instead within and concerning people's relation to the state.

Power: outside and inside the movements

As discussed throughout the empirical chapters of the thesis, the processes of commoning, community-making, and citizenship transformation at play are embedded in power relations.

Firstly, as the connection between commoning and citizenship highlights, these are processes that respond to and contest the ways in which the state and mining sector have sought to install mining in the province. In other words, they contest the discourses and practices through which the state and mining sector attempt to (re)produce the power to impose mining. Commoning place through people's mobilisation as *vecinos* contests the imposition of extractivism. By building an autonomous collective practice of citizenship, it contests the individualised model of citizenship that forecloses debates about development, as well as appeals to the principle of popular sovereignty that underlies democracy, seeking to shift the relation of imposition between people and the state to one of abidance. Moreover, as mobilising as *vecinos* is a form of prefigurative politics that seeks to perform the desired democratic model, it contests state imposition by showing alternative ways of building political relations. Commoning knowledge, and building an epistemic citizenship, responds to the ways in which the state and mining company have relied on the enclosure of expert knowledge to impose mining. It contests their abuse of scientization and attempts at agnogenesis to restrict people's capacity to decide. Appealing to dignity, and commoning wellbeing contests the ways in which the state and mining companies have exploited people's marginalisation to force them to accept extractivism as development, as well as appealed to notions of crisis to foreclose development possibilities. Lastly, re-imagining different forms of human-nature relations, and thus

commoning nature, challenges the ontological underpinnings of extractivism which normalise the enclosure and depletion of nature, as well as the state's endorsement thereof as a form of development.

In the course of this analysis, the thesis sheds lights – empirically – on the multiple factors that support an extractive development agenda in Argentina, and also develops a conceptual understanding of how processes of commoning are embedded in power relations, not only within the commoning-community, but between people, the state, and private sector. This analysis, in turn, emphasises the crucial role of socio-environmental movements in contesting environmental injustice and prompting transformations that contribute towards futures of environmental justice (see Scoones, 2007; Temper et al., 2018).

Secondly, a closer examination of the process of commoning and community-making at play showed how both processes are invariably shaped by power relations organised around social difference. This emphasises how commoning necessarily entails constant renegotiations of who and what belongs to the community, and what shape it takes.

As mobilising as *vecinos* encompasses a collective sense of self vis-à-vis a depoliticised individual one that conditions participation in the movement on people's ability to divest themselves of other collective interests, it homogenises the emerging commoning-community. As a result, it has tended to reproduce privilege and exclusion along axes of social difference – namely, the privilege of those that are closer to that which is assumed as the default *vecino* (male, white, and middle-class) and the exclusions of those that are further away from it (namely, Mapuche-Tehuelche people and women). Likewise, as the commoning of knowledge has mostly referred to expert knowledge, it has reinforced the exclusion of Mapuche-Tehuelche members by reproducing colonial attributions of knowledge and ignorance.

The commoning of wellbeing and the commoning of nature also hold potential risks for the creation and/or reinforcement of exclusions within the movement. By producing a moral grammar for the coalescence of the community, an appeal to dignity could serve as a disciplinary and exclusionary mechanism of those that do not abide by, or fit, ideas of who is a dignified *vecino*. Finally, as the commoning of nature has been motivated by parts of Mapuche-Tehuelche worldview vis-à-vis a valuation of nature as landscape, a question remains of whether this

represents a transformative opportunity or an appropriation of Mapuche-Tehuelche culture and knowledge.

By pursuing this closer examination of the process of community-making at play, this analysis illuminates, empirically, how commoning is not a process without tensions and how these tensions respond to the ways in which social difference organises local power relations and permeates, as a result, the emerging commoning-community. This emphasises commoning as a process where, as Nightingale (2019) argues, "any moment of coming together can be succeeded by new challenges and relations that un-common" (p.30) and emphasises the commoning-community as a collective that is never homogeneous nor necessarily just, but where power relations need to be actively addressed, "respecting and negotiating different interests and identities" (Wichterich, 2015, p.90).

This analysis thus challenges existing literature on Esquel's No a la Mina which asserts the success of the movement in bringing people together across gender, class, and ethnicity, without critical inspection. It challenges their portrayal of political convergence as natural, their romanticization of this characteristic of the movement, and thus their inattention to the complexities of bringing diverse groups of people together. Instead, this analysis showed how this process has been fraught with tensions – especially in relation to Mapuche-Tehuelche people – and how unity has been pursued at times at the expense of their recognition. It also shows how the convergence of diverse groups of people in the movement was neither a natural response to mining nor secured at the beginning of the struggle, but how it has entailed an immense amount of – often challenging – work. Thus, this analysis also calls attention to how building political convergence is never a finished product, but an ongoing one, that requires actively addressing power relations around social difference. Lastly, in neglecting the tensions that underlie the movement, analysis of Esquel's No a la Mina have also ignored the crucial role that conflict can have in advancing recognition and social justice (Rodríguez, 2015; Rodríguez & Inturias, 2018) – it is to this potential that the next section turns.

Productive tensions: staying with the trouble

While the tensions present in the movement have reproduced misrecognitions, most notably of Mapuche-Tehuelche people, the principles underlying the community in the making have allowed the movement to remain attentive and responsive to these dynamics, challenging – albeit slowly – the way it has reproduced patterns of exclusion. This is also evident in the discussion of the

movement's banner with which this thesis began. As the movement's banner changes show, while there have been misrecognitions of Mapuche-Tehuelche people, there has also been an interest and will in the movement to address them. This prompted, first, the integration of the Mapuche-Tehuelche and Wiphala flags, and later the change of banner altogether. It is also evident in the movement discussion around inclusive language – a linguistic proposal that emerged from feminist movements to make languages non-binary and gender inclusive and which proposes in Spanish to displace the use of the male gender as the neutral gender, changing words ending in -o/os to -x/xs or -e/es.[110] As a member of the movement explains, this means "a *vecino* would be written instead with an x, *vecinx* or *vecine* in order to include everyone".[clxxxvii] Though the use of inclusive language has been left up to personal preference rather than assumed as a formal collective position, its discussion has brought into the movement a conversation about gender and recognition, of the importance of rendering visible who is participating in the movement.

Multiple practices and processes analysed in this thesis have been crucial in creating this self-critical and corrective capacity. Mobilising as *vecinos* infuses the emerging community with a principle of horizontality and a practice of prefigurative politics. Appeals to dignity infuse the community with a moral grammar that is antithetical to that of the state, motivating the building of the community as a just space unlike the state. In addition, processes of commoning nature have allowed for a wider reading of extractivism in which achieving environmental justice entails more than just saying no to mining.

Thus, while commoning is invariably shaped by power dynamics organised around social difference, it can also create an ethos and worldview that have transformative potential. This is more clearly seen in relation to indigenous movements, as in Esquel the movement has clearly created the space where the marginalisation of indigenous people – that is pervasive across Argentina – has begun to be recognised, discussed, and contested.

This capacity and will of the movement to learn and re-orient itself is all the more evident in the way in which the notion of the community has recently begun to be used in lieu of a language of

[110] Spanish is a gendered language. Words that end in -a tend to be feminine (e.g. *niña*, female child), and words that end in -o tend to be masculine (e.g. *niño*, masculine child). It therefore builds a gender binary into language. Moreover, standard rules of Spanish maintain plurals are to be masculine if at least one male member is present in the group. For example, if there is a group of children that is made up solely of girls, they would be referred to as '*niñas*'; however, if a boy is added to the group, the group would be referred to as '*niños*'. Feminist proposals of inclusive language maintain that using -a and -o codes the world into a gender binary that renders invisible people who identify outside the gender binary, and that using the standard plural form *-os* renders women invisible in groups.

citizenship, to which the change in the name of the UACCH attests – from Union of Citizen Assemblies of Chubut to Union of Assemblies of Communities from Chubut. Motivating this change is the recognition that while citizenship was previously regarded and appealed to as an 'articulating principle' (Mouffe, 1993) "…at once pluralistic and yet unifying enough" (MacGregor, 2010, p.28), this is not the case when considering indigenous peoples and their politics. Rather, because of the settler colonial history of Argentina – like that of other nation-states – citizenship can be perceived as an exclusionary language that negates the recognition of indigenous peoples and their claims for the construction of a plurinational state where the autonomy of the *pueblos originarios* is recognised, as discussed in the Introduction of this thesis.

Hence, the notion of the community is being used in/by the movement as an alternative language of political belonging to that of citizenship precisely in response to Mapuche-Tehuelche claims for plurinationality. This adoption of community as an alternative language of political belonging is supported by how the notion acts (as I have argued of the notion of territory in Chapter Eight) as an 'equivocation' (De la Cadena, 2010) – that is, as a notion that "enable circuits between partially connected worlds without creating a unified system of activism" (p.351). Community, as the assemblage of *vecinos*, speaks for non-indigenous members to the notion of *pueblo* and thus to a principle of popular sovereignty (discussed in Chapter Five); while for indigenous members, it speaks to their history of collective political organisation and their claim to some degree of political autonomy vis-à-vis the Argentinian state.

In this way, the processes of commoning at play, and their making of a community, are creating the space to advance the recognition of Mapuche-Tehuelche people. They are ultimately supporting the reshaping of people's relation to the Argentinian state around a new language of political belonging, away from homogenising notions of citizenship towards a decolonial one where diversity and difference is acknowledged, where there is 'an openness to unassimilated others' (Lazar, 2013, p.9), and where it is possible to foster a politics of 'solidarity in difference' (Mouffe, 1992; Yuval Davis, 1997; Young, 1990; Taylor, 2013). In this way, positioning community as an alternative language of political belonging captures the claims of both indigenous and non-indigenous members for the making of a new social contract and opens the possibility for their convergence.

Thus, while it remains essential to criticise the 'urge to unity' (Young, 1990; see also Butler, 1990; Simpson, 2017; Lugones, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 1997) in social movements, Esquel's No a la Mina

shows that political spaces that aim to bridge across difference and follow a politics of coalition (Butler, 1990) can be key for advancing social justice – and more specifically for the creation of just commoning-communities. While it is not necessary for everyone to participate under a single movement – in fact, Mapuche-Tehuelche people may prefer to be politically active from indigenous organisations rather than assemblies against mining – it may be important not to give up the construction of inclusive and just spaces. The movement shows that while bringing people together invariably creates 'trouble', it is when people come together that tensions can be approached in a constructive way. To 'stay with the trouble' – to use Haraway's (2016) terminology – as Esquel's No a la Mina has done, may thus be crucial to support the making of just commoning-communities.

Future research opportunities

This research opens a number of future avenues for investigation. Firstly, it calls for an analysis of the movement of No a la Mina at a provincial level to examine whether the processes theorised in this thesis are also at play in other assemblies against mining in Chubut and of their specificities. Secondly, it calls for a sustained examination of these processes of commoning, community-making, and citizenship transformation in Esquel through time, as these are changes that are always becoming, on-going, rather than fully finished. It also calls for further research on the tensions of class, gender, and especially ethnicity in the movement and the process of commoning at play in order to increase our understanding of the transformative potential of tensions to create *just* commoning-communities. Lastly, it calls for future research on how the notion of the community is being positioned as an alternative language of political belonging and the way in which this continues reshaping the way people understand and practice citizenship in Chubut.

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Annexes

Annex 1. Interview guide for members of the movement

1. ¿Me podría platicar un poco de vos? / Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. ¿Cómo comenzó el movimiento? ¿Cómo? ¿Porqué? / How did the movement start? Why?
3. ¿Cómo fue que se involucró en el movimiento? / How did you become involved in the movement?
4. ¿Cómo surge el nombre de Asamblea de Vecinos Autoconvocados? / How does the name of Assembly of Self-Convened Neighbours come up?
5. Si hiciéramos una línea de tiempo sobre el movimiento, ¿cuáles son los momentos claves que enfatizaría? / If we were to do a time line of the movement, which events would you place as key moments?
6. ¿Qué le motiva/ha motivado a participar? / What motivates you to participate in the movement?
7. ¿Participa alguien más de su familia en el movimiento? / Does someone else in your family participate too?
8. ¿De qué forma ha participado en la asamblea? / How have you partcipated in the movement?
9. ¿Cuál ha sido su experiencia participando en la asamblea? / What has been your experience while participating in the movement?
10. ¿Cómo eligieron la bandera con la marchan? / How did you choose the banner of the movement?
11. ¿Porqué se habla del día del plesbiscito como el Día de la Dignidad del Pueblo de Esquel? / Why speak of the day of the plebiscite as the Day of Esquel's Dignity?
12. ¿Qué actividades ha realizado o realiza la asamblea para "luchar" en contra de la megaminería? ¿Qué medidas o eventos cree que han sido de las mas útiles y porqué? / What are the activities/strategies of the movement? Which ones do you think have been the most important and why?
13. ¿Cuál es el vínculo entre la asamblea y movimientos de pueblos indígenas? / What is the relationship of the movement with Mapuche-Tehuelche groups/ struggles?
14. ¿Ha cambiado la asamblea a través de los años? ¿Cómo? / Have you seen changes in the movement throughout the years? How?
15. ¿Han pensado en alternativas a la minería? /Have you thought about alternatives that you would like to see in place, instead of mining?
16. ¿Cuál es el vínculo entre el Frente Vecinal y la asamblea? / What are the links between the Frente Vecinal and the movement?
17. ¿Qué le gustaría que se lograra? / What would you like the movement to achieve?
18. ¿En algún momento ha sentido una ventaja/desventaja por ser mujer/hombre dentro o fuera de la asamblea? / Have you ever felt advantaged/disadvantaged because of your gender when participating in the movement?
19. ¿Cree que su participación en la asamblea haya tenido un impacto sobre su vida en alguna forma? ¿Cuál o de qué forma? / Do you feel your participation impacted you in a personal manner?
20. ¿Participa en otros espacios políticos? / Do you participate in other political spaces?

Annex 2. Interview list

Interview	Date	Type	Gender	Ethinicity	Gave consent
Interview 1	29-Jan & 21-Feb 2020	In person	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 2	18-Feb & 27-Feb 2020	In person	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 3	20-Feb 2020	In person	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 4	05-Mar 2020	In person	W	Mapuche-Tehuelche	Yes
Interview 5	04-Mar 2020	In person	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 6	11-May 2020	In person	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 7	18-Jun 2020	Online	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 8	18-Jun & 25-Jun 2020	Online	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 9	25-Feb 2020	In person	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 10	25-Jun 2020	Online	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 11	23-Jun 2020	Online	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 12	22-Jun 2020	Online	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 13	24-Jun 2020	Online	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 14	27-Jun 2020	Online	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 15	27-Jun 2020	Online	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 16	24-Jan, 02-Feb & 07-Sept 2020	In person	W	Mapuche-Tehuelche	Yes
Interview 17	15-Jul 2020 & 22-Jul 2020	Online	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 18	16-Jul 2020	Online	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 19	17-Jul 2020	Online	M & W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 20	25-Jul 2020	Online	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 21	27-Jul 2020	Online	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 22	28-Jul 2020	Online	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 23	29-Jul 2020	Online	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 24	03-Aug 2020	Online	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 25	07-Oct 2020	Online	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 26	07-Oct 2020	Online	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 27	11-Oct 2020	Online	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 28	14-Oct 2020	Online	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 29	16-Oct 2020	Online	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 30	18-Oct 2020	Online	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 31	22-Oct 2020	Online	M & W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 32	01-Nov 2020	Online	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 33	02-Nov 2020	Online	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 34	10-Nov 2020	Online	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 35	25-Feb 2020	In person	W	Non-indigenous	Yes

Interview 36	11-Nov 2020	Online	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 37	12-Nov 2020	Online	W	Mapuche-Tehuelche	Yes
Interview 38	12-Nov 2020	Online	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 39	13-Nov 2020	Online	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 40	18-Ene 2021	Online	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 41	14-Mar 2021	Online	W	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 42	15-Mar 2021	Online	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 43	23-May 2021	Online	W	Mapuche-Tehuelche	Yes
Interview 44	8-Jun 2021	Online	M	Mapuche-Tehuelche	Yes
Interview 45	12-Jun 2021	Online	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 46	14-Jun & 24-Aug 2021	Online	M	Non-indigenous	Yes
Interview 47	16 Sept 2021	Online	W	Mapuche-Tehuelche	Yes
Interview 48	21-Jan 2021	Online	W	Non-indigenous	Yes

Annex 3. Original interview quotations in Spanish

[i] "Nosotros no somos nada, somos vecinos" (Interview 45).

[ii] "Es muy de los vecinos, no hay autoridades, no hay gobierno, es el pueblo puro" (Interview 41).

[iii] "Si en las instituciones que corresponden, no me escuchan por mi reclamo … empiezo a juntarme con mis compañeras y ver que hacemos y nos reunimos y ya no estamos con ninguna institución que nos avale, nosotros somos vecinos autoconvocados" (Interview 10).

[iv] "…tiene que ver con que no reconocíamos más que nuestra propia auto-convocatoria, y de alguna forma significaba el rechazo de los partidos políticos de apropiarse de esa convocatoria. En ese tiempo, había un rechazo a los partidos politicos y tiene que ver con eso principalmente" (Interview 8).

[v] "El vecino, vecina tiene esa transparencia de ciudadanos, que no tiene ninguna camiseta puesta en ese momento" (Interview 39).

[vi] "… la gente se autoconvoca. Por ser vecino, va y se planta en ese lugar. Yo estoy autoconvocado… No hace falta que me llame nadie" (Interview 6).

[vii] "Es que no tenemos nada de que ocultar, no tenemos nada de que ocultar. … damos la cara. Yo tengo nombre y apellido, entonces me presento cómo quien soy" (Interview 31).

[viii] "Y también me parece que abarca o da la posibilidad de que aquel, de que cualquiera que quiera sumarse lo pueda hacer, ¿si? Los que estamos en Esquel" (Interview 42).

[ix] "El vecino, pero bueno puede ser vecino de barrio y lo expandimos todavía un poco más al vecino de la ciudad" (Interview 42).

[x] "Es que somos eso, los vecinos, los habitantes de un lugar que nos estamos defiendo, ni siquiera es que tomamos esta participación como algo que hemos podido elegir libremente. Obviamente de alguna manera elegimos participar, pero no es una elección libre. Es una elección que se da en función de una amenaza. Si estás amenazado de que revienten la zona, que nos revienten nuestra

sociedad, nuestra comunidad… aquí no hay algo ajeno. Se trata de defender nuestro propio lugar, nuestra propia comunidad … Somos la población que nos estamos defendiendo" (Interview 8).

[xi] "Si, porque además ya se estaba planteando fechas, ya estaban planteando fechas, en el propio año 2002" (Interview 20).

[xii] "La mina es un hecho…el proyecto está en marcha y no tendrá impedimento alguno" (El Oeste, 2 November 2002).

[xiii] "Creemos que todos somos vecinos y todos tenemos derecho a luchar y demás…nosotros siempre dijimos que todos somos iguales, por más que alguno haya sido más protagónico que otro. Somos todos vecinos" (Interview 2).

[xiv] "Pero esa palabra te da sensación de cercanía, de que somos iguales, que no porque tengas un estudio o seas diferente, sino como que nos une y nos hermana" (Interview 30).

[xv] "Basta con ser siempre uno mismo y ser siempre calidad de vecino, nadie que fuera representante de un grupo, eso no se aceptaba ni se acepta. Y eso es importante porque lo que permite es tener un sistema equitativo de voces y de votación" (Interview 8).

[xvi] "Vecinas y vecinos sin aparataje políticos, cada uno sus creencias las dejaba en la puerta para juntarnos como comunidad y construyendo de manera horizontal" (Interview 22).

[xvii] "… Y si no hubiera existido esto … no hubiéramos tenido contacto porque somos distintos, tenemos miles de cosas distintas, tenemos edades diferentes, bueno actividad diferente. …nos unió" (Interview 45).

[xviii] "La asamblea no tiene una particularidad político-partidaria, y… se fue yendo hacia utilizar más esa palabra, más vecino que compañero para tratar de unificar" (Interview 42).

[xix] "No íbamos convocados por ninguna otra cuestión, lo cual le daba una gran amplitud... Aquí hay lugar para todos, siempre y cuando estemos defiendo el agua, estemos defiendo nuestro lugar, puede haber peronistas, puede haber radicales, menemistas, gente que no quiera la política, gente que este militando, gente de cualquier religión" (Interview 8).

[xx] "Es un sinónimo de comunidad, también tiene que ver la unión de personas" (Interview 39).

[xxi] "Para mí el vecino era parte de una familia" (Interview 11).

[xxii] "Eso es un vecino, una vecina…lo que te marca el vecino es la idea de una proximidad corporal, ¿no? Y en esto hay que ponerle el cuerpo, esto se le pone el cuerpo" (Interview 23).

[xxiii] "…el vecino, quien está al lado, acompañándote, marchando y ese tipo de cosas" (Interview 36).

[xxiv] "Un vecino es algo que está al lado tuyo y la gente que está en la asamblea está al lado mío, es la gente que incondicionalmente va a estar incondicionalmente hombro con hombro al lado mío en estas circunstancias, por eso se dice vecino" (Interview 23).

[xxv] "…lo que significa ser vecino…solidaridad… cuidar al otro" (Interview 41).

[xxvi] "Somos vecinos todos, entre nosotros es importante recordárnoslo… nadie debería de convertirse en mártir, entregar todo, porque tiene riesgos eso. Primero para la persona que lo sufre, pero … hay países donde las cosas han sido mucho más brutales de parte de las mineras y es muy acertada la asamblea de Esquel de funcionar siempre en grupo, teniendo paciencia, saber retirarnos cada tanto, para que otras personas puedan tomar la posta y hacerlo siempre como un acto de cariño" (Interview 8).

[xxvii] "Se me viene la imagen de alguien muy próximo, muy junto a uno, que hasta entrelaza los brazos y que forma algo muy grande" (Interview 23).

[xxviii] "Me acuerdo … Estaba la minera a full. Nos reunimos, llamamos a reunión, a asamblea en una escuela y seriamos 10-15. Mira, estábamos tan decaídos…teníamos un montón enfrente. Así que

nosotros, poquitos. … Y había un señor 'hay que mirar al que está al lado, al lado'… ¡Claro!... Así que así uno al lado del otro, codo con codo, y bueno eso nos dio más ánimos... el que está al lado. Y ese es un vecino" (Interview 17).

[xxix] "El vecino es con quien deberías acordar de mantener la vereda limpia, es el que se tendría que preocupar contigo de que la luminaria de la cuadra esté funcionando" (Interview 18).

[xxx] "Eso es como una cuestión de cercanía lo veo yo, de que se comprometen por una causa común que sería un problema que nos afecta a todos, entonces por ese lado" (Interview 14).

[xxxi] "… apela a una cercanía, decir…somos algo, no es que somos extraños si no que somos personas que vivimos en una comunidad, ya la palabra comunidad te habla de lo común, de compartir y nada… eso, un grupo de gente que se considera cercana y que apunta al bien de la comunidad y eso es como una cuestión de cercanía lo veo yo, de que se comprometen por una causa común" (Interview 14).

[xxxii] "Nos unió, nos unió como pueblo lo que pasó y pensar que todo, el proyecto que queremos para el futuro, entre todos… el vecino va a ser como tu familia, porque todo esto lo vamos debatiendo entre todos los vecinos" (45).

[xxxiii] "Para mí el vecino era parte de una familia, pero no se da eso en Buenos Aires, en Buenos aires a veces no conoces a quien tenés al lado y demás…. porque todo Esquel era más chico, un poquito más chico que es ahora y entonces era increíble como nos conocíamos, como la gente te reconocía a vos" (Interview 11).

[xxxiv] "Vecino para mí es como, es el humano que vive en un territorio, osea, lo relaciono con quien está cerca de ti en un territorio" (Interview 46).

[xxxv] "…porque todo Esquel era más chico, un poquito más chico que es ahora y entonces era increíble como nos conocíamos, como la gente te reconocía a vos" (Interview 11).

[xxxvi] "La palabra vecino tiene que ver con la convivencia en un mismo espacio geográfico, pero más allá de esa convivencia hay como un sentido de comunión … de comunión, de compañía, de bueno somos los vecinos, somos los que vivimos, los que habitamos este lugar, tenemos que de algún modo cuidarlo, defenderlo, aúna, la palabra vecino aúna, pero si indica aparte de compartir coordenadas espaciales, coordenadas ideológicas y coordenadas de comunión" (Interview 26).

[xxxvii] "Porque ahí hay una situación, vos sos un ciudadano, ¿no es cierto? Pero además de ser ciudadano, sos vecino de otros ciudadanos, que también es vecino tuyo… Entonces, el hecho de ser ciudadano no quita que además seamos vecinos, porque vos podés ser ni siquiera ciudadana argentina, pero si vivís aquí sos vecina" (Interview 6).

[xxxviii] "Se podría decir Asamblea Ciudadana, pero también podía eso dejar afuera a alguien que no tuviera aun la ciudadanía…" (Interview 8).

[xxxix] "… eso es muy gratificante, sentir que no estás solo … Sentir que somos un montón… yo siento desde hace mucho tiempo que lo verdadero es lo colectivo, que los únicos que defienden al pueblo es el pueblo mismo" (Interview 21).

[xl] "Somos vecinos que amamos a Chubut. Algunos hemos nacido acá y otros descubrimos en esta bellísima cordillera nuestro lugar en el mundo. Y como todo lo que se elige y se ama, sentimos la necesidad de proteger esta, nuestra casa común" (Voces por la Tierra, 2020-2021, 2021-22 cycles).

[xli] "lo que se intenta de alguna manera, quizá con la palabra vecino es despolitizar un poco, muchos utilizamos a veces la palabra compañero … pero la gran mayoría de las personas cuando escucha compañero identifica con el partido justicialista y con el peronismo" (Interview 42).

[xlii] "Quieren trato especial como "acá viene el pueblo originario". Vienen los vecinos. Somos todos iguales. ¿Me entendés? Nosotros no discriminamos. Creemos que todos somos vecinos y todos tenemos derecho a luchar y demás…" (Interview 2).

[xliii] "Nosotros no podemos dejar de hablar de lo que pasa en nuestros territorios, con las tierras usurpadas…[hablar de vecinos] es como cerrar… es cerrar algo, una demanda que estamos haciendo a este Estado para que no se cometa este genocidio en nuestros territorios" (Interview 37).

[xliv] "'Trajeron un especialista de la firma de Dupont que era una firma que les vendía el cianuro a ellos para que nos explique lo bueno que era el cianuro. 'Si la almendra tiene cianuro y la comen, ¿cómo no va a ser seguro?' Esa era la explicación" (Interview 31).

[xlv] "…que el cianuro era tan peligroso como la lavandina o que era un producto natural omnipresente en la naturaleza … y que no era tan tóxico como se podría suponer, ¡que hasta se podía beber sus soluciones sin sufrir daño!" (Interview 48).

[xlvi] "…hablaban con mucho desparpajo, 'bueno, pero usted fuma y en el cigarrillo hay cianuro', nos decían" (Interview 21).

[xlvii] "…que el agua, por ejemplo, otra cosa que decían, que el agua no iba a ser agua de red, que no nos iban a quitar agua a la ciudad. Porque la iban a usar de pozo" (Interview 2).

[xlviii] "Obviamente no éramos ninguna de las dos expertas en cianuro, pero podíamos estudiar y teníamos muchas más bases para comprender" (Interview 2).

[xlix] "Me habló y me pidió si podía hablar sobre cianuro… Le digo, mira, yo no soy toxicólogo… le digo bueno, que voy a estudiar el tema. Y me pongo a estudiar sobre megaminería, cianuro, tóxicos, arsénico y todo eso. Y empiezo a leer, a leer muchas cosas" (Interview 46).

[l] "Ahí todos nos hicimos un poco expertos en minería, porque yo no tenía idea. Entonces empezamos a buscar como era el tema, como se extraía" (Interview 40).

[li] "Fue un momento de iniciar un aprendizaje enorme" (Interview 20).

[lii] "El domingo leí todo el día, y el lunes era una especialista del No a la Mina" (Interview 17).

[liii] "Y un día dijo [la representante de Relaciones Públicas de la empresa], 'los vecinos del No a la Mina, no tienen bibliografía'. Dice, 'los vecinos no tienen bibliografía'. Ah, me llovió un calor, así que me puse... Eran 80 citas, empezando por la Constitución Argentina… declaraciones, estudios, ya te digo, eran 80 estudios. Entonces le puse, 'acá adjunto la bibliografía por la cual yo digo NO'" (Interview 17).

[liv] "Los profesionales se bajaron al pueblo. Y explicaron…" (Interview 19).

[lv] "'También fue el conocimiento, rompió el claustro universitario y se volcó a la comunidad" (Interview 23).

[lvi] "Ellas le acercaron la ciencia a la gente"(Voces por la tierra, Episode 06, 2020).

[lvii] "Claro, pero con idioma entendible para el pueblo. Eso es una cosa muy loable. Digamos, se bajaron, salieron de la universidad, salieron del ámbito académico a relacionarse con el pueblo y explicarle con palabras sencillas que es lo que significaba [la minería]" (Interview 19).

[lviii] "Era una charla sencilla, muy, para que pudiera entender cualquier" (Interview 3).

[lix] "Era todo un fluir de conocimientos a todo, todo el pueblo, todos los vecinos…" (Interview 31).

[lx] "Cuando empezaron a contar cómo iban a sacar el oro y cuál era la montaña que iban a derribar… contaron con una cafetera de esas que se ponen filtro: 'bueno, entonces imagínense que el café es la roca molida, el agua es el agua con cianuro, entonces se le echa sobre la roca molida y ahí va a quedar el oro y abajo ¿qué va a quedar? El agua cianurada' " (Interview 1).

[lxi] "Yo creo que la campaña de información que se hizo a los vecinos ha sido y es importante, esto es básicamente educar. Y se llegó a los vecinos, se pudo llegar educándolos, a los vecinos que no estaban informados se le informó, se les acercaba material, eso fue un aspecto" (Interview 41).
[lxii] "[informar tuvo]…un fin más educativo, más de explicar, de convencer a la población, si se quiere, diciéndolo simplemente, de educar sobre la megaminería (Interview 40).
[lxiii] "…hubo asambleístas con conocimientos profesionales que generaron información sólida en relación con los efectos del cianuro y otros que ayudaron a comunicarlos de modos simples y eficientes" (in entry titled, A diez años de un plebiscito histórico).
[lxiv] "Es que somos docentes. Es que somos docentes. Yo soy docente … así que bueno, vos sabes como explicar… sabes como llegar a la gente" (Interview 17).
[lxv] "A medida que avanza la información y la difusión de todos los datos sobre el medio ambiente y la salud humana, se han ido concientizando muchas más comunidades" (No a la Mina Kalewche, Episode 22.06.2013).
[lxvi] "La concientización de la gente, eso fue un trabajo de la gente que empezó a recorrer lugares de encuentro, ya en escuelas, en barrios" (Interview 19).
[lxvii] "Las cosas empezaron a verse de forma diferente porque dos profesoras fueron al canal y le contaron a la población lo que estaba pasando" (Interview 1).
[lxviii] "Al principio nos comimos el discurso cuando recién llegaron con el proyecto… entonces, una vez que empecé a tener información te das cuenta de que no es tan así. Entonces empecé a formar parte" (Interview 27).
[lxix] "… casa por casa entregábamos el tríptico. Entonces la gente se enteró. Y una vez que supo cómo iban a ser ese emprendimiento ya no hubo vuelta atrás" (Interview 1).
[lxx] "Pero el contacto de estar ahí, charlando cara a cara y recibiendo las preguntas y escuchando historias de vida de la gente, eso también crea ese vínculo necesario para que todos tomemos conciencia de cuál es la situación actual…" (Interview 3).
[lxxi] "Salimos las dos juntas y afuera dijimos 'es responsabilidad nuestra'. Somos las únicas dos químicas en todo Esquel que pueden dar luz sobre todo esto" (Interview 2).
[lxxii] "Después la charla fue un horror. Dijimos acá hay una obligación como universitarios, una de tus obligaciones es comunicar lo que vos sabes porque somos parte de una universidad nacional, de una universidad pública. ¿Quién te sostiene? La gente. ¿A quién te debes? Entonces fue como un llamado, viste, un deber moral" (Interview 48).
[lxxiii] "Es muy importante que las universidades, los centros de estudio, los investigadores, quienes saben sobre algunas cuestiones científicas que no todo el mundo ve, porque no todo es visible, el arsénico por ejemplo en el agua no se ve, ni le cambia el gusto. Si alguien no nos dice que hay arsénico en el agua, nosotros no nos damos cuenta por nosotros mismos. Esta información no es propiedad de la universidad, ni del científico, esta información es propiedad del pueblo, la tiene que conocer la gente…. el dueño de los conocimientos no es el científico, quien es dueño de los conocimientos es la comunidad de donde esos científicos salen..." (Voces por la tierra, Episode 02, 2020).
[lxxiv] El estudio de impacto ambiental que eran 4 tomos, así de grueso, no era para leerlo de un día para otro y lo presentaron con poca anticipación, cosa como que no lo lean. Había un montón de cosas, que no lo conseguía impreso, que no lo conseguían fácil …" (Interview 31).
[lxxv] "…porque ellos usan eso, usan la ignorancia" (Interview 7).
[lxxvi] "…jugaban con la ignorancia de la gente" (Interview 48).

[lxxvii] "que sin cianuro y cuidando el agua la megaminería se puede llevar a cabo de forma sustentable" (Voces por la tierra, Episode 06, 2020).

[lxxviii] "Estamos… pidiendo que las mineras se vayan, que los gobernantes escuchen la voz de este pueblo que no quiere que lo CONTAMINEN, NI LO SAQUEEN, NI LO TOMEN POR IGNORANTE (in entry titled 'Abrumador 4.500 marcharon contra la megaminería', noalamina.org).

[lxxix] "Y fue tan desprolijo… como hablando a un público ignorante, así como que todo lo que decía el tipo era cualquier cosa, alguien que sabe mínimo de biología o de química sabía que no era correcto. Entonces, viste, ahí también te toca el tema del orgullo" (Interview 48).

[lxxx] "La charla terminó mal… le dije al final que la verdad me ofendía la inteligencia mía y de todos los chicos que estaban ahí, el nivel de la charla que estaba dando, y que en una escuela, en una escuela, no podía dar una charla con semejante nivel de falsedad técnica y científica" (Interview 46).

[lxxxi] "Una de las cosas que favorece el extractivismo son los conocimientos enclaustrados … como que la ciencia, nadie va a entender esto que es tan difícil" (Interview 3).

[lxxxii] "Y era eso, viste, llevar la información, de boca en boca, que es lo que se produjo al principio... la información se fue dando de boca en boca, de vecino en vecino y de familia en familia" (Interview 10).

[lxxxiii] "Éramos como agentes transmisores…multiplicadores de la información que recibíamos, los que íbamos a las reuniones. Cada uno hacia su trabajo en su familia... sus lugares de trabajo" (Interview 10).

[lxxxiv] "Nosotros nos encargamos de difundir. Todo lo que sabíamos o aprendimos, lo fuimos diciendo" (Interview 31).

[lxxxv] "Cada uno de nosotros era una célula pensante. En una reunión se dijo que quedábamos todos en libertad de acción. Podíamos hacer todo lo que se nos ocurriera, charlas, folletos, entrevistas… Uno iba a una escuela, el otro a otra, el otro así. Éramos, ya te digo, miles de células, sin horario" (Interview 17).

[lxxxvi] "La misma comunidad es la que le advierte al resto de la comunidad de lo que está pasando y se trata en ese ámbito entre vecinos" (Interview 15).

[lxxxvii] "La gente confió en el vecino, no confió en el discurso oficial" (Interview 18).

[lxxxviii] Y yo le creí al vecino, no le creía a la gente esta. Ese fue un golpe fuerte y bajo para la gente" (Interview 31).

[lxxxix] "Como nosotros también podemos hacer circular la información, y la podemos tomar desde otra mirada. Y no estar dependiendo de que vengan los científicos o técnicos a enseñarnos, a iluminarnos, sino que podemos aprender entre nosotros, ser autodidactas y entonces… [hablar de] vecino informa a vecino ha cobrado un poquito más de importancia" (Interview 30).

[xc] "Extensión universitaria a la antigua. Había habido una nueva ley universitaria que cambió la extensión universitaria a servicios a terceros… En la crisis, los universitarios, los investigadores y demás se quejaban de lo poco que se cobraba y todo eso. ¿Entonces qué hicieron? Servicios a terceros… Vos sos un investigador de la universidad. Entonces, te pueden llegar trabajos de afuera que te lo pagan a vos. Tenés que pagar un 10% a la universidad, pero el resto va para tu bolsillo… Y hubo gente en la universidad que trabajó para la megaminería que está incluso en el reporte de impacto ambiental… [Nosotras] No cobramos nada. Lo hacemos como debemos hacer porque nosotros tenemos un título y además que es gracias a la gente. Tenemos que responder a la gente, no a las empresas. Porque además se forraron los bolsillos, pero además de forrarse los bolsillos,

que sería lo de menos, privatizaron la universidad. A veces ni iban a dar a clases, ni hacían las investigaciones que hacían antes, porque estaban haciendo las investigaciones para la industria…" (Interview 2).

[xci] "Algunos hablan de que fue un trabajo de educación popular, o sigue siendo un trabajo de educación popular. Hay compañeros que lo definen de esa manera porque puedes llegar con conocimientos ampliamente a todo público, a todos los vecinos grandes, pequeños, jóvenes…" (Interview 20).

[xcii] "La gente se enteró... Entonces, la gente ya estaba avivada, sabía que era lo que iban a hacer" (Interview 1).

[xciii] "Como que la educación te libera, la educación te despierta. El conocimiento, el saber de qué se trata, te abre la cabeza (Interview 2).

[xciv] "La dominación de cualquier pueblo es a través de fomentar la ignorancia... un pueblo educado no se va a tragar cualquier sapo. Es fundamental para poder pensar. Me parece que este movimiento ayuda a la gente a pensar" (Interview 3).

[xcv] "…la gente sabiendo decide que es lo que quiere" (Interview 25).

[xcvi] "Eso fue una muestra de lo poderoso que fue la construcción colectiva de conocimiento" (Interview 22).

[xcvii] "… todos los vecinos tuvieron un grado de información suficiente para poder decidir lo que fue la consulta popular primero y luego seguir sosteniendo y avalando y defendiendo, no solamente el resultado sino, ya pensando en otras posibilidades para la ciudad, en otro modelo. Indudablemente fue el trabajo de llamarle educación popular, de difusión y concientización, de información" (Interview 20).

[xcviii] "Acá ser fundamentalista no sirve, decir no porque no, o si porque si; sin embargo, tenemos tantos argumentos que logramos plasmar hasta en un manual" (Voces por la Tierra, Episode 10, 2020).

[xcix] "Nosotros siempre decidimos que nuestra lucha es la información y la difusión. Ósea que si le llega la información a alguien ya no puede tener vuelta atrás…Ya lo sabe y entonces se suma a la lucha porque sabe que es la verdad. No es la verdad de las mineras, que ellos siempre dicen que es sustentable, que no van a contaminar... Y nosotros sabemos que eso es mentira" (Interview 1).

[c] "Entonces cada vez teníamos mas información, gente que se formaba desde su saber, profesionales que podían argumentar concretamente, con datos técnicos y científicos" (Interview 29).

[ci] "Volvemos a los comienzos, y como empieza esto …eran 2 mujeres que en una charla se propusieron salir a informar. Y de ahí nace todo…" (Interview 39).

[cii] "… no fueron profesionales los que levantaron la alarma acerca de la minería, sino los pueblos originarios" (Interview 16).

[ciii] "…ciencias, con las ciencias duras…sobre esos ejes se empiezan a trazar los argumentos para empezar a hacer la defensa del no a la mina, esto implico que durante mucho tiempo la direccionalidad de la defensa digamos, de la construcción de la asamblea en relación de la defensa del no, se hiciera con estos paradigmas. Te hago un contra ejemplo, hubiese sido muy distinto si el primer argumento que se pone sobre la mesa hubiese sido la sabiduría ancestral de los pueblos originarios. No fue así, no fue así. Y entonces ese acto fundacional generó que a partir de eso mucho de lo que empezaba a ocurrir siempre volviera a imbricarse sobre las cuestiones de fundamentación científica de las ciencias duras. Eso le da un matiz, un color a la asamblea que

hubo que laburar mucho para que empezará a tener otros colores, como por ejemplo la bandera pluri[nacional]" (Interview 21).

[civ]"Los pueblos originarios han defendido la territorialidad siempre, no desde hace 17 años" (Interview 21).

[cv] "La meseta de la dignidad"(entry in noalamina.org).

[cvi] "Dignidad, eso surgió porque en el momento, en el año 2003 venimos de la crisis… estábamos muy mal, había una desocupación en Esquel superior al 20, casi rondando el 30%...Estábamos en 5 mil, 6 mil desocupados. La empresa minera y el gobierno justamente 'decían bueno van a trabajar, no solamente van a trabajar los desocupados, pero va a haber mucha mas actividad, los comercios, los comercios van a poder pagarles mejor'. Toda esa cuestión" (Interview 38).

[cvii] "Imagínate que eso desocupados votaron en contra de lo que le prometía la salvación y el empleo, porque ese era el argumento, 'ustedes no van a ser más desempleados'… Entonces para eso hay que tener mucha dignidad, solo una persona muy digna porque una persona que no tiene empleo tiene todo el derecho de decir 'quiero esto, quiero lo que sea' porque eso es peor que el fin del mundo para que no tiene trabajo. Por más que yo te diga 'mira te vas a arruinar el agua, el futuro de tus hijos', pero si no tienes para comer en el día de hoy es entendible … Esa gente le voto en contra, fíjate vos la dignidad que tiene que tener este pueblo, para poner un votito en contra. No cualquiera lo hace en una circunstancia así" (Interview 22).

[cviii] "Porque la lucha fue muy desigual, la lucha fue de los vecinos explicándole a vecinos por qué no. Entonces fue David contra Goliat realmente, fue el vecino contándole al vecino porque no, nada más, contra todo el otro poder. Por eso es muy digna la lucha" (Interview 27).

[cix] "Entonces tener el poder económico y el poder político enfrente, digo hay que tener una actitud para decir que no y me parece que la única forma de sostenerlo, además de valentía, como lo ha tenido la comunidad de Esquel es tener un grado de dignidad, no dejarse comprar por 2 pesos. Porque la actitud más fácil, más cómoda que podríamos haber tenido muchos es habernos relajado, esperar que se desarrolle ese emprendimiento … Entonces podríamos haber tenido esa actitud y sin embargo, no la tuvieron los vecinos" (Interview 37).

[cx] "La dignidad de quienes no se venden por dos pesos" (in entry titled La Meseta de la Dignidad, noalamina.org).

[cxi] "En realidad es porque todo lo que se hizo con respecto al plebiscito, todos los regalos que la gente recibió, las promesas que la gente recibió… Y ¿a cambio de qué, la gente votó que no? Porque se sintieron dignos, se sabía que nos estaban usando, sabían que nos estaban engañando, sabían que nos estaban intentando comprar contra nuestra voluntad" (Interview 18).

[cxii] "No cambiamos salarios por megaminería" (Voces por la Tierra, 2020-2021, 2021-22 cycles).

[cxiii] "Es una cuestión de dignidad decir 'no, nosotros no nos vendemos'" (Interview 32).

[cxiv] "Entonces lo que le decíamos nosotros a los vecinos era 'vecino agarre la comida, agarre los chorizos, agarre todos los regalos que le dan' porque eso hacía la minera, les daba comida, les daba carne. 'Agarren todo, pero el día que se va a votar, ponga no'. Y entonces por eso dijimos que fue la dignidad, no de mí ni de tantos otros que económicamente estamos mejor, sino de la gente humilde" (Interview 41).

[cxv] "…Acá estuvo probado, gente de los mineros iban barrio, por barrio, entregando útiles escolares, mochilas, camperas, la gente le hizo así y votó en contra. Entonces esa es la dignidad del pueblo" (Interview 19).

[cxvi] "Yo creo que ahí quedó lo de la dignidad, porque poder plantarse y decir no, me respeto, cuido mi lugar, puedo ver más allá de este momento, darme cuenta que el trabajo va a ser para unos cuantos años y después me voy a quedar otra vez sin nada" (Interview 41).

[cxvii] "Es una cuestión de dignidad de decir 'no, nosotros no, nos vendemos'" (Interview 32).

[cxviii] "Creo profundamente que es una cuestión de dignidad de decir 'no, nosotros no nos vendemos, no hay precio que pueda pagar nuestro lugar, nuestro ambiente, el agua, la vida'… Había una crisis también muy profunda después del 2000-2001 en toda la Argentina y había mucha desocupación y gente de los barrios que podía haberse vendido digamos a esa idea de desarrollo, de trabajo, … no compro eso… valió más el defender su lugar" (Interview 32).

[cxix] "Y después en la campaña del plebiscito, hubo mucha corrupción… nuestra campaña se basaba en la información al vecino. Todo lo que se hizo fue información, casa por casa, en las escuelas … Y la minera junto con el gobierno … hicieron la campaña como hacen generalmente los partidos políticos, comprando voluntades, jugando con la necesidad de la gente" (Interview 31).

[cxx] "Yo creo que es el modo, además de lo que se logra, es el modo en que se logra que es digno, porque no se logró coimando a nadie, haciéndole una entrega de dinero a nadie, ni traicionando a nadie. No, al contrario, se utilizaron los mecanismos que nos da la democracia para poder conseguirlo. Lo mismo que la iniciativa popular, después si no se hace y no se cumple el que traiciona es otro, pero el grupo de gente que lo consiguió y lo logró tiene dignidad" (Interview 33).

[cxxi] "Para mí la dignidad es un acto de presencia" (Interview 29).

[cxxii] "…dignidad es como si quizás, desde alzar la voz, desde decir, decidir ir a pararse y hacerle frente a este sistema" (Interview 37).

[cxxiii] "…jugando con la necesidad de la gente" (Interview 31).

[cxxiv] "…teníamos una crisis muy grande a nivel país con índices de desocupación muy altos y todo el discurso minero generalmente gira en torno a la generación de puestos de trabajo. Y todo el discurso de las empresas, de los políticos un poco iba relacionado a eso, a necesidades de trabajo, y a utilizar, a hablar en nombre de las personas desocupadas" (Interview 40).

[cxxv] "Yo creo que la dignidad es lo que nos queda como pueblo, dignidad de vivir como nos merecemos porque son personas humanas, donde necesitamos vivir en un mundo donde se respete a la humanidad en todos sus sentidos" (Interview 43).

[cxxvi] "… los resultados del plebiscito indicaban que había menos votos por el sí, que la cantidad de desocupados. Y eso un poco daba a entender que el pueblo por más de que tuviera una necesidad muy grande, había sostenido la dignidad el espacio de buscar otras formas de salir de la crisis… hoy vuelve a estar la misma discusión con todo el tema de la meseta y un poco, la dignidad me parece que es no aceptar lo que se propone como la única forma, la única salida, sino, si uno está en contra de algo y creo que le va a hacer mal a su territorio, el territorio por sobre esas promesas y exigir que la salida sea distinta y no sea la única que se ofrece… Y me parece que un poco la dignidad es no aceptar las cosas como te las quieren imponer, sino defenderse y exigir que se pueda hacer de otra manera" (Interview 40).

[cxxvii] "En la meseta estamos abandonados y carentes de todo, pero NO de dignidad" (in entry titled El Pueblo no siente la Megaminería como Solución, noalamina.org).

[cxxviii] "Dignidad de vivir como nos merecemos porque son personas humanas donde necesitamos vivir en un mundo donde se respete a la humanidad en todos sus sentidos. Desde la alimentación, la vestimenta, ser dignos, ser dignos de poder atravesar esta vida… Hacerlo de la mejor manera, como nos merecemos, no podemos tener hambre, no podemos laburar 20 horas y ganar poco, las injusticias que se viven a diario no pueden estar sucediendo" (Interview 43).

[cxxix] "Yo le daría el sentido de cuando, en un derecho humano, uno pide que se cumpla, por ejemplo, el derecho a la vivienda digna o a la educación digna… En el caso de una vivienda, no son 4 chapas y 2 lonas, no, una vivienda digna, donde tenga algo para calentarme la comida, algo para que mis desechos tengan donde ir, y que cobije y que me proteja del frío y del calor. Bueno lo mismo en el pueblo de Esquel, no es nada más que se juntó la gente para protestar por que no quieren la mina, no, queremos una vida digna" (Interview 33).

[cxxx] "defendemos … la dignidad de no depender porque bueno las actividades extractivas después es depender del estado, de asistencia las empresas que den el agua, que te den porque dejas de tener todo lo que necesitas" (Interview 32).

[cxxxi] "Con eso me refiero con la dignidad, la dignidad de poder levantarte y saber que tu esfuerzo vale, que vas a poder darle un futuro a tu familia, poder disfrutar de la vida como nos merecemos y no así como estamos viviendo de la angustia, de la preocupación, de que no vamos a llegar a fin de mes, de que no tenemos un futuro, no se puede vivir así" (Interview 43).

[cxxxii] "…eligieron no por lo económico sino por el bienestar general, de la población de sus hijos, de su familia, en cuanto a lo ambiental y demás. Entonces ahí primó la dignidad antes que lo económico personal. Me parece que es por eso" (Interview 42).

[cxxxiii] "Dignidad y dinero es un eje importante" (Interview 34).

[cxxxiv] "…todos los regalos que la gente recibió … cuando fue esa gente al cuarto obscuro contó con dignidad …sabían que nos estaban intentando comprar contra nuestra voluntad. Y ¿sabes qué? Dijeron 'no, cuando estoy en el cuarto obscuro yo elijo'" (Interview 18).

[cxxxv] "Somos vecinos que amamos a Chubut. Algunos hemos nacido acá y otros descubrimos en esta bellísima cordillera nuestro lugar en el mundo. Y como todo lo que se elige y se ama, sentimos la necesidad de proteger esta, nuestra casa común. La mayoría de nosotros creció en un mundo en el que las riquezas del planeta parecían infinitas y que se lograría satisfacer la ambición de sus habitantes sin ningún inconveniente, pero poco a poco vimos ríos contaminados, lagos que desaparecían, la tala de enormes extensiones de bosques, sequías e inundaciones, todo producto de la acción irracional de los seres humanos. Entonces, empezamos a escuchar otras voces, las del pueblo Mapuche-Tehuelche que nos hacía entender que somos parte del mundo y no amos del mundo y que la vida se conserva si estamos en armonía con la naturaleza".

[cxxxvi] "No son recursos son bienes comunes, no son recursos materiales, esa simple conceptualización cambia la cosmovisión del planteo y cambia la cosmovisión de la vida misma. No es lo mismo que yo diga, sienta y viva en consonancia de que tenemos bienes comunes a los cuales cuidar, mantener y preservar, a que yo diga que son recursos materiales a disposición de el que tenga mayor poderío poder … No es lo mismo. …. Son bienes comunes. No es mío por más que yo viva al lado del arroyo" (Interview 21).

[cxxxvii] "Sin agua no hay vida" (Voces de la Tierra, programme 01 2020).

[cxxxviii] "El agua, le dimos muchísimo, muchísimo valor al agua. ¿Qué cosa más importante que el agua? … El oro se lo llevan a los países, y lo ponen en las bóvedas y no se come …. En cambio, si va a contaminar el agua… nos preocupaba el bienestar común, el bienestar general" (Interview 17).

[cxxxix] "Nosotros debemos sacrificar agua, suelo y aire para extraer un metal que NO NECESITAMOS PARA VIVIR" (in entry titled Abrumador 4.500 marcharon contra la megaminería, noalamina.org,).

[cxl] "Todos deberíamos tener derecho a la montaña… también necesitas el movimiento del agua…para pensar, para meditar…" (Interview 4).

[cxli] "Nos han adjetivado hasta … locos defensores del planeta. ¿Qué cosa más linda que dedicarse a cuidar los bienes naturales?... Nuestro único objetivo cuidar fundamentalmente el agua" (Interview 18).

[cxlii] "Queríamos esto, queríamos cuidar el lugar, queríamos que no se contaminara" (Interview 17).

[cxliii] "Eso es lo que me motiva, el cuidado del ambiente en el que yo quiero pasar el resto de mi vida… y yo creo que a muchos motiva eso, la defensa de nuestro lugar" (Interview 10).

[cxliv] "Nuestra provincia es rica de minerales y no va a ser esta lucha ahora, ni se va a terminar, sino que va a ser de por vida…" (Interview 43).

[cxlv] "El extractivismo chupa los territorios" (Voces por la Tierra, Epidose 03 2021).

[cxlvi] "… cuidar la tierra, cuidar el territorio, tiene que ver con esto de que no entren aquellos que quieran arruinar el territorio, empresas mineras o personajes que quieran comprar tierra para su provecho" (Interview 25).

[cxlvii] "Este mundo está colapsando en muchos frentes, todo relacionado con la forma en la que vivimos en nuestro sistema. … la pandemia es otra expresión más, tiene que ver con nuestro atropellar la naturaleza. … todo lo que sea destruir o alterar y contaminar el suelo, el agua, el aire … tenemos que vivir de otra manera… Hay cosas que son más fáciles de prescindir así inmediatas, como el oro, hay cosas que van a ser más difíciles y que llevaría más tiempo … pero todo eso tenemos que cambiar porque si no el aire ya a va a ser irrespirable, porque no se va a poder tomar agua… Por supuesto que vamos a tener que vivir de una manera más modesta que como vivimos, ya hay otros que viven muy modestamente" (Interview 48).

[cxlviii] "Lo que pensamos desde un lugar de preservar el planeta… [es que si] el uranio no se utiliza más para la guerra, lo que se necesita para el resto de las industrias y la medicina, alcanza con lo que ya está fuera de la superficie… es decir, no habría necesidad de sacar más" (Voces por la Tierra, Episode 19, 2021).

[cxlix] "No tiene sentido hacer una represa nueva si ya tenés una hecha que produce un exceso de electricidad. Lo que hay que hacer es distribuir esa electricidad a todo lo que se pueda, no desperdiciarla. ¿Se entiende a lo que voy? Yo decía siempre, 'hemos matado una vaca, comimos solamente la mitad, y queremos matar otra vaca más'… vivimos en la naturaleza y podemos relacionarnos con ella, pero respetuosamente…" (Interview 46).

[cl] "Es un área determinada del mundo donde se vive una integridad de relaciones, entre la naturaleza y el ser humano como parte de esa naturaleza, con su cultura… un lugar real, concreto, que es visible que es vivible. No es sólo geográfico, ¿sí? Tiene una profundidad distinta a la que en Occidente se la da a la palabra territorio sólo como un lugar en el mapa… Es la integridad de un lugar, en donde el ser humano es parte, pero un animal o una planta o una piedra no es menos parte. No son partes inferiores, sino que es un todo. Es como tu cuerpo, el pie no es inferior a tu nariz, o tus manos a tu pecho, es parte de tu cuerpo" (Interview 46).

[cli] "Este río que es muy poco caudaloso, digamos… nos da vida a todos" (Interview 22).

[clii] "… es propiedad de todos los habitantes, y no solamente los humanos, sino también todos los animales y las plantas, todos los seres vivos que vivimos abajo de esas montañas. Muy importante. Si no tenemos agua, no podemos sobrevivir" (NO a la Mina, Episode 01.06.2013).

[cliii] "…están en sintonía con el territorio que habitan" (Voces por la Tierra, Episode 21, 2021).

[cliv] "Es una cultura sumamente espiritual donde tiene importancia que nosotros somos parte de la tierra" (Interview 43).

[clv] "…El principio filosófico del mundo Mapuche es la naturaleza como eje central de nuestras vidas. Es inclusive la que ha generado las propias normativas de coexistencia y convivencia del ser

humano, el az mogen, el nor mogen, decimos todas las normas que dictó la naturaleza para que podamos funcionar en armonía con cada elemento de la naturaleza" (Interview 44).

[clvi] "Si, busqué un vínculo también por esa parte del territorio… Y me parece que a veces hay que contarle al agua también, a los espíritus que protegen al agua, porque vamos de nuevo, la usamos para nuestro bienestar y nuestro confort, pero no le damos nada… Igual el objetivo era hacerle un mimo al ngen ko que en mapuzugun es como el espíritu guardián del agua. Ko es agua y ngen es como el espíritu o la fuerza protectora del agua" (Interview 4).

[clvii] "Territorio, o mapu, como le llaman los mapuches. La mapu es todo. Es la integridad de un lugar… esto que nos han enseñado los pueblos originarios lo que significa el territorio, …. encontrarme con esta cultura mapuche… permite que uno aprenda otra cosa" (Interview 46).

[clviii] "…que yo diga, sienta y viva en consonancia de que tenemos bienes comunes a los cuales cuidar, mantener y preservar, a que yo digo que son recursos materiales… es completamente distinto y todo eso pertenece a la sencillez y sabiduría de los pueblos originarios" (Interview 21).

[clix] "La cosmovisión que tienen los pueblos originarios es la de considerar a la tierra, a la naturaleza…como algo importante, que es nuestra casa, que no es recurso que podemos explotarlo, sino que es nuestra casa y hay que cuidarla como tal" (Interview 15).

[clx] "Hemos aprendido que algún día escuchamos que no teníamos que decir 'recurso', porque recurso es para ser tomado escrupulosamente" (Interview 18).

[clxi] "La Ley N° 25.675 (Ley General del Ambiente) establece principios de política ambiental que deben ser respetados, entre ellos… El principio de cooperación, que plantea que los recursos naturales (mejor denominados 'bienes comunes') … serán utilizados en forma equitativa y racional" (Proyecto de Ley Iniciativa Popular, 2020, 2022, p.3)

[clxii] "… darnos cuenta de que somos parte de la naturaleza y que nos estamos destruyendo" (Interview 48).

[clxiii] "Me parece una locura que la gente tenga que defender eso. Hay una frase que se dice mucho en las marchas, 'el agua no se vende no se defiende' … el agua no se vende, el agua ni se vende ni se defiende, hay que dejarla ahí, ya está"... No habría tener que estarla defendiendo" (Interview 5).

[clxiv] "Todos somos responsables del cuidado del agua y del territorio y de la vida, desde el lugar que estemos" (Interview 43).

[clxv] "Para colmo yo tengo la ventana de mi cocina que daba así, de frente tenía la montaña, ¿viste? pensar que esa montaña iba a volar era impensado" (Interview 10).

[clxvi] "…lo que me aprieta en este sentido, lo que me llama a decir bueno tengo que estar… realmente, yo de la ventana de mi casa veo la montaña y me da realmente mucha cosa" (Interview 23).

[clxvii] "Yo de mi ventana del consultorio se veía la montaña. Y un día miro la montaña y se me ocurre… 'vamos a hacer la oración de la montaña'. Entraron 3 o 4 personas … 'Montaña, te vamos a defender, te vamos a cuidar, nos vamos a dejar que te destruyan, vamos a unirnos, vamos a defenderte, a vos y al agua, no pasarán'. Y entonces dije, '¿alguien quiere agregar algo?' No sabes. Cada uno daba un testimonio… Bueno, todas las mañanas lo hacíamos. Y ¿sabes que pasó, Diana?… ¡Salían con una fuerza!" (Interview 17).

[clxviii] "Yo siempre como que hasta el día de hoy salgo a andar en bici o recorro algunos lugares y me pongo a pensar ese poquitito, es lo que más quiero, las montañas, donde vayas ahora, el agua que corre, los ríos corren con tanta fuerza con tanta vitalidad que vos no podés decir si a la mina" (Interview 12).

[clxix] "…acá todo es muy intenso … la propia geografía te impacta, semejante montaña, tantos lagos, que se yo, un día te levantas y explotó un volcán como me pasó ya hace unos años, otro día te levantas y te nevó 2 metros. Siempre está la naturaleza muy fuerte, muy fuerte... Siempre está muy presente la Pachita como decimos nosotros. Y cuando llegue acá, como que esto empezó a movilizarme acá dentro mío" (Interview 41).

[clxx] "Acá en Chubut tenemos una conciencia ambiental importante, … [que] debemos a los vecinos y vecinas del 2003 que se encargaron del manual, que se encargaron de ir a las escuelas, de concientizar y de enseñar" (Interview 43).

[clxxi] "Es importante crear conciencia.... Nosotros porque tenemos acceso a cierta información…y la gente más apegada a la tierra, que viven de forma más tribal, también respetan a la naturaleza…" (Interview 48).

[clxxii] "A las 6 de la tarde que estaba listo para poder charlar contigo, si vos hubieras visto el paisaje que yo vi cuando eran las 6 de la tarde. Te conmueve. Tengo la suerte que una ventana me da a la montaña. Y hoy era conmovedor porque hay como una niebla que cortaba la montaña por la mitad, y la montaña como ayer llovió, se había lavado un poco la nieve, y había floraciones de roca y nieve. Esa imagen a las 6 de la tarde es imborrable …. Evidentemente siempre quise estar aquí … con suerte habré vivido la tercera parte de mi vida en este lugar, donde me siento tan bien…" (Interview 18).

[clxxiii] "Creo que me lo hizo nacer Esquel…la naturaleza, la montaña, lo puro, me hizo querer mucho y la conciencia ambiental y el cuidado. Si bien, no es que antes andaba prendiendo fuego, o ensuciando… pero no le daba mucha bolilla" (Interview 5).

[clxxiv] "Nosotros todavía tomamos agua de los manantiales ¿viste? Osea que brotan de las rocas, viste, y eso es mucho. Y bueno esa es nuestra mayor, nuestro único objetivo cuidar fundamentalmente el agua (Interview 18).

[clxxv] "No hay que permitirlo porque si llegara a suceder, estamos fritos y eso es lo que me motiva. Es el cuidado del ambiente en el que yo quiero pasar el resto de mi vida y así. Es eso, y yo creo que a muchos motiva eso, defender nuestro, la defensa de nuestro lugar" (Interview 10).

[clxxvi] "Tengo la sangre mapuche, la siento. Tengo que defender el territorio, tengo que hacer algo por las futuras generaciones…" (Interview 43).

[clxxvii] "Yo pensaba, egoístamente, como no tenía casa aquí. No tenía casa, trabajo, sólo tenía a mi hijo: 'si llegan y esto se va a la mierda, yo me voy. Yo agarro mis cosas y me voy'. Me acuerdo que fui a casa de mis padres y les dije. Y me dijeron, 'está bueno hija'… Claro, ellos no se podían ir… y ahora me doy cuenta de que hay muchas personas que no pueden y que no quieren irse porque aquí está su casa" (Interview 16).

[clxxviii] "Es pensar eso, sentir eso y hacer eso, son bienes comunes" (Interview 21).

[clxxix] "En Esquel, los vecinos sabemos y celebramos que 'la montaña está de pie gracias a su gente'". (in entry titled Adhesión de la Asamblea de Vecinos de Esquel al Día Mundial contra la Megaminería, noalamina.org).

[clxxx] "Eso digo yo porque gracias a la lucha de hace 18 años seguimos teniendo las aguas puras, el aire puro, la montaña" (Interview 7).

[clxxxi] "En definitiva, nosotros somos conscientes que defendemos la vida" (Interview 32).

[clxxxii] "Creemos que en cada lugar de la provincia tiene que haber una asamblea en defensa del agua y la vida" (Interview 43).

[clxxxiii] "Considerar a la naturaleza como sujetos de derecho creo que también es importante" (Interview 15).

[clxxxiv] "Hay sectores… que no los consideran sujetos de derecho" (Interview 20).

[clxxxv] "Hay mucha gente que viene a vivir acá, buscando … la naturaleza, la tranquilidad, los ríos, los lagos. Entonces es como que vienen ya de ciudades como Buenos Aires donde ya está la contaminación, donde ya ven lo que hacen con los territorios. Entonces, vienen con otra cabeza de defender esto, porque si no lo defendemos en unos años no vamos a tener nada" (Interview 43).

[clxxxvi] "…la cosmovisión es una cosa mucho más amplia. Nosotros coincidimos al menos en esta cuestión del territorio o la mapu…" (Interview 20).

[clxxxvii] "Un vecino se escribiría con la x o vecine … ¡como para incluir a todos!" (Interview 39).