

# Changing relations among Ceramist workers and Mapuce in Neuquén, Argentina

Case studies of the workers occupation of Zanón Ceramica S.A. and the Mapuce in the Neuquén region

Report from a Minor Field Study in Neuquén, Argentina - Feb-April 2004



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## Abstract

This study focuses on the social and political situation in Neuquén, Argentina, where the workers have occupied a ceramics factory since the autumn of 2001. The workers have been given material support from the Mapuce people in the region, forming cooperation between the workers and the Mapuce. These actions take place in an unstable political climate. Together the Mapuce and the workers maintain examples of alternative ways to organise society, addressing the social injustices with own propositions. The study raises questions on how to approach emancipatory issues both from an insider's and an outsider's perspective. It also discusses the construction of proletarian identity and self esteem, and likewise ethnical ethnification.

**Keywords:** Mapuce, Neuquén, property occupations, workers, Zanón, development, ethnicity, natural resources.

## Preface

“The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.”

Karl Marx<sup>1</sup>

“Another world is possible”

The slogan of the World Social Forum adopted in 2001

This thesis is my report from my Minor Field Study; it has partly been financed by SIDA. The thesis rests on a normative discourse that is commonly known as “a sustainable future”. Being well aware of the various meanings that are associated with this concept, in the following part I will briefly describe what I read into it. Studying Environment, Culture and Development, I became interested in how to combine a perspective of sustainable future with my earlier standpoint, a Marxist perspective of direct democracy. And it was during a class with Professor Alf Hornborg that I was able to ask a crucial question about our capacity to develop a new order. Hornborg (provocatively or not) referred to Immanuel Wallerstein’s<sup>2</sup> conclusion that today’s capitalistic system has only some 25-50 years left, and suggested that we only have to wait for this moment with a better consciousness ready in order to change today’s system. I began to ask myself if not this consciousness would have to develop itself parallel to Capitalisms crisis and ultimately push the implosion the last steps? Wallerstein further emphasized his “firm assessment that the outcome of this transition is inherently uncertain and unpredictable”, an important emphasis considering, for instance, all the arms and nuclear power that is spread around the globe and the terrible impact this could have when (and if) Capitalism comes to an end.

I did not – and still do not – think that it is as easy as waiting for the right moment and have a good environmental ethic ready, leaving people to accept a package of thoughts that could give us a good chance of changing our society’s direction into something more environmentally and socially sustainable. The aim of my study is therefore *to study the way two social groups* (the Mapuce people and the workers of Zanón Cermica en Neuquén, from here on the workers will be called simply the workers) *have chosen to fight against a cornerstone of capitalism - the right to private property*. Both groups have, from two different

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<sup>1</sup> Marx, Karl 1845 *Thesis on Feuerbach* <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/>

<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein 2003 *The Ecology and the Economy: What is Rational?* , paper reachable at <http://www.humecol.lu.se/woshglec/>

positions, come to express, and actively challenge, today's unsustainable economical structures and the norms supporting them. I will study both the environment in which they live (the Neuquén region) as well as the way the two groups have chosen to change their situation.

## **Environment, Culture and Development**

During my studies in Environment, Culture and Development I have been introduced to many interesting academic studies spanning from thermodynamics reaching across other cultures, mostly prehistoric (trying to find inspiration, showing that something else has been possible) but also studying our own history. Through the eyes of John McNeill<sup>3</sup>, we found information tellings us about the prize - environmental disasters, sickness, animal extinction - people have paid and still pay for “development”. Studying the limits of growth we reached the questions I have been asking myself for a long time, how could we do something else? Seeing limits, already far crossed for both the suffering and pain, already far over gone thinking about the Amazons and the great resources being spent everyday in providing a good life for some few percent of the global population. Acknowledging limits, trying to strengthen them again, makes you restless and many times full of despair. Christine von Weizsäcker<sup>4</sup> skilfully describes a trap that you easily can fall in when you direct your attention to global problems, and I think her comparison could serve for an understanding of also the view that easily is acquired in privileged positions of power, she speaks of Atlas, the Greek God who “carries the weight of the world, sustaining it on his shoulders. And as long as he does that he cannot pick the golden apples.” Von Weizsäcker calls the 'Atlas Syndrome' a “frequent modern affliction [that] preferably attacks pleasant, well-trained and conscientious people”. These people, von Weizsäcker continues,

undertake to develop global knowledge and feel a global responsibility. And the more lonely they get, and the more unbearable the weight of the global problem on their shoulders, the more righteous and admirable they feel. They tend to speak for those who cannot speak in person: the future and the environment.

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<sup>3</sup> McNeill, John 2001 *Something new under the sun: An Environmental History of the World in the 20th Century* Penguin Books Ltd

<sup>4</sup> Weizsäcker, Christine 1993:128 *Competing Notions of Biodiversity* Sachs, W. (ed) *Global Ecology* Zed Books, Canada

I think von Weizsäcker's point is important, neither the future nor the environment can speak in person, equally so, we often articulate certainties of both. I do not mean to reach for a complete deconstruction of values but rather the counterpoint that von Weizsäcker emphasises when she speaks of the "Non-Atlases [who] have more versatility, the freedom to walk around, they can find good company and instead of lonely 'global responsibility' they can try to discuss and decide on appropriate responsibility, *which makes responses possible*"<sup>5</sup>. The counterpoint being a process that people enter into in order to *together* work out solutions and since they should stand on the earth (instead of carrying it) they would also find themselves in a local context, rather than trying to overview everything. In this local context relations could be visible and responses not necessarily anonymous, making development a possible joint project.

### **Critique on sustainable development**

Many people choose to refer to the Brundtland report using some of its conclusions as a fundament for a deeper discussion on sustainable development. The report's formulation of a development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"<sup>6</sup> have left me with a feeling that Nicholas Hildyard so wittingly express as we have left the "[f]oxes in charge of the chickens"<sup>7</sup>. Hornborg also point out the paradoxes of the same report and I see it as a problem focusing on statistics in a discussion that involves people wellbeing, since it involves a reduction of people's wellbeing to numbers.<sup>8</sup> Now, the statistical tool could show both a positive and a negative trend of the "poor" people's development which leads to much dispute, lately Bjorn Lomborg<sup>9</sup> presented a large work showing that the world's poor have become richer.

If a person "develops" her economical potential to having 2 USD instead of 1 USD per day, you can say that this person is not among the poorest anymore, but it does not include whether the price on bread has rose 300%, it is possible to have a little more money without being able to consume more. Looking only at figures you do not see the strategies that the same people

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<sup>5</sup> Von Weizsäcker *ibid*.

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.ace.mmu.ac.uk/eae/Sustainability/Older/Brundtland\\_Report.html](http://www.ace.mmu.ac.uk/eae/Sustainability/Older/Brundtland_Report.html) webpage supported by the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

<sup>7</sup> Hildyard, Nicholas 1993 *Foxes in Charge of Chickens* Sachs, W. (ed) *Global Ecology* Zed Books, Canada

<sup>8</sup> Hornborg, Alf 2001 *The Power of the Machine – Global inequalities of economy, technology, and environment* Walnut Creek: Altamira Press

<sup>9</sup> Lomborg, Bjorn 2001 *The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World* 2001 Cambridge: University Press

develop to survive, whether they eat healthy food or not, and the impact this will have on their future. Or as Serge Latouche lets Jean Chesneaux describe the unemployed worker in the slums of Caracas who to his amazement:

discover that he enjoys a standard of living, defined in terms of GDP, which is quite enviable. No less flabbergasted, the fisherman in Samoa who lives quite at ease in relative self-sufficiency, learns that, in terms of GNP, he is one of the poorest inhabitants of the planet.<sup>10</sup>

Speaking of sustainable development seems not necessarily to take into account the individual's, or collective's power to seek a development of their own. What if the South suddenly decides to not pay their "debts"<sup>11</sup>, or stop trading with the North and seek their own solutions without the help from the North? During history we have seen how many attempts of achieving national freedom have been held back by imperialistic countries, in Latin-America first and still Spain followed by the US and Great Britain. For example Cuba with the boycott, the invasion of Granada, the planning and support of the Pinochet coupe in Chile 1973 and in Argentina, how Ford industries tortured workers in their factory cellars in Buenos Aires during the 1970's<sup>12</sup>.

## **Introduction – my view and my fears**

The world is an unjust place. The ecological state of the world seems to be a ticking bomb. But I do not believe in telling other people what to do, I would rather co-operate with others, taking joint-decisions on matters that concern us, and not make decisions for others. I chose to study the Mapuce and the workers for they try to work out new norms of participating in society, new norms for how to solve problems, meaning not to respect today's jurisdictional and constitutional allowances. Living in a state of constructive in-contra, I believe they have much to offer us. I'm convinced that sustainable development is a common need, but someone will have to take the first steps in empowering his/her, their group - in creating new constructive cultures, fighting against a society based on class and gender differences. The practices and consciousnesses that will construct a different future will have to address the problems of identity making in this unjust world, making it relevant to address questions

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<sup>10</sup> Latouche, Serge 1993:199 *In the wake of the affluent society: an exploration of post-development* Zed Books

<sup>11</sup> It has, in my view, been clear for many years that these debts have been more than repaid and today this word continues to have relevance only as long as we – with the western institutions - continue to use it, and hold it for true.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/sep2002/arg-s06.shtml>



of gender; the different roles we play, which ones we would like to play and what consequences this could have for all of our relations. I fear that the disembedding<sup>13</sup> impact of globalisation, that replaces the local autonomy with the market as the denominator of truth, will initiate fascist movements that will endanger the relative democracy we have today.

## How I found out about Zanón

The news of the Zanón workers reached me from Argentinean friends with whom I have been engaged in Lund's local radio broadcast. The only information source available at the time was the workers (not very updated) webpage<sup>14</sup> and Indymedia<sup>15</sup>, an open news site where anybody with an internet connection can publish their articles. It is important to understand from where I gained my knowledge about the factory, since even the workers were surprised of my presence, although they've had many people visiting them. Some of the more well-known people visiting include, Naomi Klein (who in 2003 gathered information for a documentary that today is available called "The Take") and James Petras (whose articles can be reached at the Rebellion webpage<sup>16</sup>). Both these persons are *western* intellectuals on the political left side putting Zanón in a similar light to Nicaragua in the 1980's where Diana Mulinari describe the experience of how different people came with "different expectations and demanded different things from the revolution"<sup>17</sup>.

## Aim

I want to study the changes in made in Zanón Ceramica S.A. after the workers occupation in 2001, specifically the changes in the social relations between this factory and its total environment. In order to study this possible shift I will need to study the social relations before 2001 and have limited the historical empirical work to the year 1996.

In order to understand any possible changes to the environment I want to study the way the relations have changed between the factory and the Mapuce, an aboriginal people that in one community inhabits an area of clay extraction used by the factory.

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<sup>13</sup> For explanation of disembedding see further down on the part about *Forming constructive subjects*.

<sup>14</sup> [www.obrerosdezanon.org](http://www.obrerosdezanon.org)

<sup>15</sup> [www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org)

<sup>16</sup> [www.rebellion.org](http://www.rebellion.org)

<sup>17</sup> Mulinari 1995:40 *Motherwork and Politics in Revolutionary Nicaragua* Lund: Bokbox Publications

The questions I want to answer;

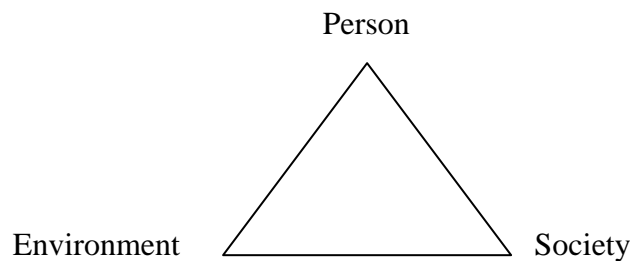
- 1 Why the workers chose to occupy their workplace?
- 2 What impacts have the occupation of Ceramica Zanón S.A. had (1) on the workers (2) to the relations with the Mapuce?
- 3 Have the changes in relations lead to a raised awareness about the production's environmental impacts?

Due to the change in relations and the more profound view that my field work gave me I felt I had to add a question concerning the Mapuce, being:

- 1 What projects have the Mapuce initiated for achieving a development in line with their desires?

### **The human ecology triangle**

Trying to understand social changes through a human ecology perspective is not the easiest thing. Luckily there is a model that can help us; the human ecology triangle. Dieter Steiner<sup>18</sup> has divided the transdisciplinary subject into a fundament of three points of reference that guides the subject.



In my thesis the focus will be much on the individual, though not on isolated individuals but rather on the individual as member of a class or a nation. This view indicates a focus on the sociological approach to human activity, which Steiner, basing his interpretation on Anthony Giddens<sup>19</sup>, calls “the notion of an agency-structure duality” in which “human agents engage in social interactions and practices and by so doing, reproduce (or transform) the social structures which govern these interactions and practices in a constraining but also enabling

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<sup>18</sup> Steiner, Dieter. 1993. Human Ecology as a Transdisciplinary Science, and Science as part of Human Ecology. In D. Steiner & M. Nauser (eds.) *Human Ecology: Fragments of Anti-fragmentary Views of the World*. London: Routledge

<sup>19</sup> See Steiner 1993:57

way”<sup>20</sup>. Since I want to see how the individuals relate to their society and environment I have not focused on the environment itself but on views on how to manage public resources. I use this focus in order to discuss our social practices from both a normative sustainable development perspective for saving the environment as well as a direct democratic perspective for social justice.

The normative sustainable development perspective is not an undisputed and much less a coherent tool ready to use. To my view on this perspective I have included a system critic analysis which tries to put focus on the present structural weaknesses. This has led me to a bottom-up approach to development, trying then to understand what kinds of developments the workers of Zanón and the Mapuce strive for.

The direct democratic perspective that I want to use is inspired by anarchists’ search for tools to create non-hierarchical societies.<sup>21</sup> Many people that today are critical to the contemporary concept of development see social, economical and political hierarchies as one of the important factors for why human activities have reached such an unsustainable ecological impact.<sup>22</sup>

Rather than looking for figures on sustainable development for the Mapuce and the workers, I wanted to understand the way they construct their identity, what questions they relate to and how they look at the concerns about saving the globe from ecological breakdown. My focus lies on local sustainability and forms for decision-making that integrates people rather than reproduce hierarchies between them.

## **The common good**

To understand how society works one is often recommended to take a look on society’s constitution. In modern society the State – supposedly - bases its actions on the constitution, making this document and its implementation a behavioural guidance for its citizens. Whenever there is a dispute over for example property rights, the case should be judged in court, where educated lawmen decide what is right in relation to the law. In both my case

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.57

<sup>21</sup> See for example Guérin, Daniel 1970 *Anarkismen : från lära till handling* Stockholm: PAN/Norstedt

<sup>22</sup> See Richard B. Norgaard 1994:163 *Development Betrayed – the end of progress and a coevolutionary revisioning of the future* London: Routledge

studies (the Mapuce and the workers) law plays an important role in allowing certain actions and limiting others. In respect of this very important factor for both groups possibility to act I want include a comment from Latouche that enables us to see which impact law can have for alternative practices,

[T]he insertion of the good life within a larger framework of the presumed *common good* requires reduction of the manifold personal arts of living and diverse ways of knowing, down to a single collective project. This can easily come to imply, as regards ends and even means, a homogenisation of individual pursuits and purposes.<sup>23</sup>

The (hypothetical) state's single collective project will in today's construction of modern state imply a top-down definition of what should and should not be part of the project, making the project a top-down definition especially since many people feel a large distance between themselves and their representatives.

My study will look closer on the conflicts provoked between the top-down definition of common good and the bottom-up view formulated by the Mapuce and the workers.

### **Forming constructive subjects**

Latouche<sup>24</sup> is one of the thinkers that direct his studies to the forming of subjects, subjects for change. He puts his faith in the people living outside formal society. People who are *outcasts*, forced to find their survival without help from formal authorities, hiding from authorities, people that do not have money but who invent a new currency or starts to barter, exchanging favours and products without registration of taxes. He hopes that this people will develop another culture with an economy based on human needs rather than Capital's need of profit. He makes an important point focusing on the experiences and everyday practices that form people's identity. How can we suddenly start to live in line with new principles when our lives have been formed under other circumstances? How much time will we need to make this internal change of mind and motivation? How will we find the space needed for sustaining another culture, another way of living that could claim to be more in accordance with a socially and ecologically sustainable future?

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<sup>23</sup> Latouche 1993:196 italics in original

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

It was with these questions in my head that I received news of the occupied factories in Argentina. Argentina had in December 2001 experienced an economic collapse; people had seen their bank accounts being frozen and devaluated. Many factory owners had already left the country with their capital, leaving behind the workers and their workplaces. In Neuquén the owner of Zanón Cerámica S.A., Luigi Zanón, had not been able to sell the factory interior and the workers had started to occupy the factory illegally with support of a wide range of local organisations.

The Zanón factory had – with the workers in charge - been given material support from the Mapuche people, a people that have inhabited a zone from Chile to Argentina since long before the Spanish arrived to the continent. The co-operation between a trade union and an aboriginal people seemed interesting especially since the Mapuche were able to help the workers, making them a physically supportive part in the social movement by providing the workers with their much needed raw material - clay.

In my analysis I will try to bring the Mapuche and the workers together as social actors that enrich each other, empower each other. Bearing in mind Hornborg's<sup>25</sup> writings on the need for embeddedness, I want to discuss whether the actors' strategies could be seen as positive examples of this kind of contextualisation. The way I understand Hornborg's<sup>26</sup> use of the term (dis)embeddedness is that he formulates a critical discourse on modernity. Hornborg sees the bearing ideas of modernity as supra-powers that are not created in one place but rather than connected with a locality the structures of society globally lead people into confrontations with these ideas – a confrontation where the modern ideas seem part of a global objectivity. The idea of a global truth which is connected with Capital's need of expansion, constructs a force that disembeds or dissolves local meanings and cultures, or creates a polarity between the two when new areas are challenged by the market. The process of disembedding is about how local practices and meanings are lifted up from their local context into a global context leaving behind the power (literally) to redefine the aims of their new context, which has its epicentre in a structure rather than a place. Hornborg's objective, as I interpret his work – trying to uncover and question underlying assumptions of today's society – in some way coincide with the possibilities that Latouche's puts in the informal society when he claims that it

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<sup>25</sup> Hornborg 2001:176

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p.226

[i]n contrast to industrial civilisation, which is built *in opposition to* the country, subordinating and destroying it, the informal society rediscovers the necessity of being rooted in the local region, and of maintaining a peaceful and amicable relationship with nature.<sup>27</sup>

Even if Latouche is romanticising the possibilities of this informal society I still think that his way of dividing society into two antagonistic parts do help when one wants to understand the protests and the consequences of carrying out the protest against the subordination and destroying of the environment. Or relating back to Hornborg, seeking some other value to exchange today's order with and not only remain questioning it.

Throughout the work I will use the term *consciousness* in an attempt to grasp the individuals and the collectives' ways of understanding themselves and their practices. When I use the term consciousness I use it to point at the process of empowering identity, an empowering that inspires the actors to interpreting constructive views on themselves and the situation they are in. Now, I have not wanted to evaluate the different interpretations, I only want *to make a point out of the* different interpretations that have evolved from people belonging to the same class or nation. Any evaluation of the different forms of consciousness are not in my interest but my selection of aim and subject have clearly been influenced by those formed consciousness that have led to, in my opinion, interesting and encouraging actions. Any individual action has to be understood both from its physical body that expresses it as well as from the socioeconomic and physical surrounding that have made it possible.

## **Sustainable social context**

Focusing only on the individual in the human ecology triangle would not be sufficient because one need to place the individual in his/her context. Now since I want to focus on the practices that individuals develop, one could argue that these practices have developed somewhere, in relation to something. When I approach the concept of environment as a public resource I have already taken a political position, where I do not see the possibility to own private land as something necessarily given. Rather I would like to depart from the focus on the individual with Roy A. Rappaport's conclusion over the human nature "there is nothing in the nature of human thought to prevent it from constructing self-destructive follies, follies

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<sup>27</sup> Latouche 1993:218, authors italics

which, empowered by ever more powerful technologies, have now developed world-destroying capacities”.<sup>28</sup>

Looking at the state of the world through a critical perspective we understand very well how right Rappaport was. I would like to integrate this conclusion with Anna-Lisa Lindén’s sociological approach to environmental problems, focusing on the social relations since “[t]he decisions about how natural resources are used, to what extent, in which purpose and with which consequences on nature are made by people in social contexts”<sup>29</sup>. The big challenge for a sustainable future is in her words “about constructing forms for making decisions where the affected actors participate and jointly make the decisions that shall be followed”<sup>30</sup>, implicitly, this is not the situation today, which she indirectly approaches saying “[i]t can sometimes seem doubtful whether the common citizen has any influence over local politics more than on the day of elections. Perhaps the *real* power is in the hands of others”<sup>31</sup>. Lindén’s words could help us understand the critics of today’s representative democracy, critics that in Argentina find many arguments for why this form easily develop both corruption and environmental disasters. My way of using Lindén’s work is grasping over other fields than Lindén’s explicit Swedish context, but I would like to stress how her implicit points could be used in a context of larger social changes than the constructions of consumer power.

In defining my use of the term *sustainable future*, I try to focus on bottom-up definitions and emphasizing the subject, the people on the spot, their wishes, visions and internal structures of organisation. In relation to Lindén’s word, above, I wanted to study a social context where people try to include rather than exclude others in the process of determining how to use resources for the “common good”. Both the exclusion and the inclusion could be related to what Hornborg<sup>32</sup> calls disembedding and embedding processes. Trying to find the fusion between ecological issues and productional issues, Richard B. Norgaard’s<sup>33</sup> interpretation of coevolutionary processes offers an interesting mapping of the many considerations that should be at hand for any study of development. His cornerstones are; *values, knowledge, organisation, environment* and *technology*. Since these reference points are all connected to

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<sup>28</sup>Rappaport, Roy A. 1994:154 *Humanities Evolution and Anthropology’s Future* in Borofsky, R. (ed). *Assessing Cultural Anthropology* London: McGraw-Hill

<sup>29</sup>Lindén, Anna-Lisa 2001:61 *Allmänhetens miljöpåverkan – energi, mat, resor och ett socialt liv* Stockholm: Carlssons

<sup>30</sup>Lindén 2001: 85

<sup>31</sup>Ibid. p.84

<sup>32</sup>Hornborg 2001

<sup>33</sup>Norgaard 1994

each other, forming what Norgaard calls a “coevolving patchwork quilt”, any study that try to embrace his perspective would soon encounter difficulties in dividing information into different fields of knowledge – which is also one of his strongest aims. Norgaard sacrifices easy models for the benefit of contextualising explanations – making it possible to lift forward the actions with the underlying possible explanations as influents rather than direct generators of action. The individuals are in this way given a space to act on where they can try to influence the social relations by practices and consciousness.

The work of Zulema Semorile<sup>34</sup> has a title worth translating, “Voices and Spaces in conflict”, and she calls the social actors “new subjects of right” and as I understand this, she focuses on how the subjects – in opposition to the constitution – are able to both practice and express a right of their own. The claiming of this other right leads the actors/subjects into a state of conflict with the modern state’s jurisdiction, putting them on the other side of the formal society since they fail to conform to the “allowed handling” by using an illegal method (occupation). Combining Semorile’s study of explicit political actions – made in the context of a supportive public – which could be argued to be part of an embedding process, together with Norgaard’s coevolutionary process I see the two as related to each other in their mutual guidance by the actors they are trying to grasp. Actors that are determined to change the very fundamentals of society. Changing society’s resource management is not an isolated political process and accepting Norgaard’s wide instrument, conclusions of a project aiming to change society are not easily reached. Rather one should try to understand the circumstances that has made it possible for actors to explicitly challenge today’s order and the way these circumstances have influenced the actions that has been carried out.

## **Structure of the thesis**

I have let a preface begin my thesis since I consider it important to understand my point of departure, hoping this will make it easier to see how I have chose to approach human ecology’s ambition to study “the interaction between humans and their total environment”.<sup>35</sup>

In this first chapter I have presented the theoretical approach that I have brought in mind during my field work.

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<sup>34</sup> Zulema Semorile is at the moment working on a Multimedia CD together with Flores, of which I was given a copy titled Voces y Espacios en conflicto and it is this source that I refer to as Semorile 2004.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.humecol.lu.se/index2.php>



In the *second chapter* I present my view on method but already it should be clear that I do not hide in this work, I *position* myself, using a method developed from a critical feminist perspective on epistemology. I will also briefly discuss the material that I have used and the circumstances concerning the selection of this material.

To provide my thesis with an introduction to Argentina and Neuquén I will in the *third chapter* try to draw a general picture of the region's progress. Argentina is a large country, situated in the south of South America. Since the most well-known things about Argentina in Sweden are Evita (Peron), Maradona and the good football, together with ranches, meat and red wine, I think it is useful to present some background information to this north Patagonian region. The Patagonian region has also lately been subject to many conflicts over the distribution and ownership of territory, and giving a short background and update on the matter will help to give a better understanding of two active actors in this process.

In the *fourth chapter* I present my field work with the Mapuce. I will try to draw a picture of their actual processes and their ongoing projects but also give a very brief presentation of their cosmic vision and some questions that came to my mind related to my theoretical approach.

The workers of Zanón, and the factory they today run will be presented in the *fifth chapter*. I will present my results from my field work and give a general orientation of how the factory and workers have progressed since the beginning of the conflict.

Trying to find a common ground for departure for a discussion on how to create this "*other world*"<sup>36</sup> I will in the *sixth chapter* discuss the two "cases" in a philosophical context. Through my study I have been inspired by Hornborg's<sup>37</sup> writings about the need of contextualisation, embeddedness. In my discussion I will argue that both the workers and the Mapuce have developed integrating strategies, trying to create local sense and justice in our decontextualised "globalised" world and by doing so they provide us with much needed insight in the processes of (re-)creating *subjects*.

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<sup>36</sup> I borrow the term from the World Social Forums that has begun to build bridges between social movements all around the world under the visionary "Another world is possible". [www.wsfindia.org](http://www.wsfindia.org)

<sup>37</sup> Hornborg 2001

## Method

The choosing of method is central in academic creation of knowledge. For me, having read much critique against the positivistic and objectifying creation of “knowledge”, it has been an ongoing process of thinking about *how to relate to others*. Arriving as a *young, white, heterosexual male, economically well situated, intellectual with state scholarship*, asking questions in the pursuit for writing a thesis in a distant (from Argentina) country where we speak a not understandable tongue, I really had much thinking to do. And writing the thesis I come back to this process, choosing the right words, in English, I ask myself how the workers/the Mapuce would have liked it to be? My presence in Neuquén was always close to other people. I stayed with the Mapuce; I stayed in the factory and in the home of a historian that I came in contact with through a local radio channel. My work would not have been possible without the help of contacts, without the acceptance – established in Argentina, not from Sweden – of the workers and the Mapuce. The people that helped me could maybe be labelled *key informants* but for me the most appropriate word would be *friends*, and my thesis is a constant balance between me as a scholar with all the above statistic characteristics and what these characteristics let me experience meeting the people in Neuquén. The balance concerns *in which voice* I should present my experience to a third party.

I will in the following pages present my thoughts and the problems I have had to handle, mixed with references to books that have been of help in my struggle to position myself to my own work. The first and obvious obstacle of my study is the *language*.

In Argentina the Spanish that is spoken is, by the Argentineans themselves, distinguished from what they call “el Castellano”, which is Spanish from Castilia in Spain. I had only had brief encounters with this dialect before arriving. So I spent my first weeks in Argentina learning and listening to the way they speak, in order to be able to express myself as clear as possible and to understand as well as possible. Speaking “their” language really helped me gaining confidence from people during my whole stay in Argentina.

Unless I say so, the translations are made by me. Most original material is in Spanish which is natural since the case is new and little has yet been published outside Argentina.

Understanding Spanish has been necessary for completing the study, and this is why I have chosen to use this material.

## Participating observations and semi-structural method

I had set out to do *participating observations*, and I found that my situation matched Russel H. Bernard's suggestions on rapid assessment which meant "going in and getting on with the job of collecting data without spending months developing report. This means going into a field situation armed with a list of questions that you want to answer and perhaps a checklist of data that you need to collect".<sup>38</sup>

Reaching Neuquén this meant to take part in demonstrations and concerts organized by the social movement which both the workers and the Mapuce are part of. When I came to Neuquén I started to live with urban Mapuces, through them I was able to travel and stay one week in a Mapuce community in the national park of Lanin, San Martin de los Andes. After coming back from San Martin de los Andes I returned to the urban Mapuces, where I stayed for totally two weeks. I left the Mapuces to go to stay for two and a half weeks in the Zanón factory. It was during this time I made field interviews and observations. For the interviews I used a *semi-structured method*, where I had different topics to connect to and a couple of questions on each topic that I used in no special order, some questions were also added where I had gained new information that had not been available when I first wrote them.<sup>39</sup> I recorded my interviews with a Mini-disc. The *semi-structured method* seemed to be a good method since I had had very little information about the factory and the Mapuce when I prepared my project in Sweden. To expand the limited view I had had in Sweden I would have to gather basic information first and subsequently ask more precise questions, being open to redefine my questions on the spot as time was short.<sup>40</sup>

The last one and a half week I stayed with Fernando Aizicson and his girlfriend Daniela Miranda in Neuquén. I became friends with them through the local radio station where Fernando heard me present my work. Since Fernando Aizicson<sup>41</sup> worked on his thesis on Zanón (which was how I also got the copy) we had many interesting discussions on the subject. During these weeks I continued my works with daily visits to the plant and the urban Mapuce family where I had stayed earlier.

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<sup>38</sup> Bernard, Russel H. 1995:139f *Research Methods in Anthropology – Qualitative and Quantitative approaches* Walnut Creek: Altamira Press

<sup>39</sup> See appendix 1 for my questions.

<sup>40</sup> Bernard 1995:209 & Rosengren, K. E. & P. Arvidsson 2002:140 *Sociologisk metodik* Malmö: Liber

<sup>41</sup> Aizicson, Fernando 2004 *La experiencia de los obreros de Cerámica Zanón, Neuquén, 1983-2002* Universidad Nacional del Comahue, Facultad de Humanidades, Dep. Historia

The shortness of time and my broad research field have limited the investigation to a time period reaching from 1996<sup>42</sup> until today. I will however make some relating to earlier periods when my material so allow, but my study has been concentrated on the contemporary struggles of both groups. I realize that I only offer parts of the conflicts and hopefully I will in the future have opportunity to deepen my research.

### **Mutual transferring and positioning**

I often felt unsure of whether I was loosing track, whether my questions really generated answers that I could use. But when I read Isabel Hernández<sup>43</sup> I came to embrace a view of the interviewing situation that helped me regain confidence. Hernández speaks of a method called *mutual transferring*, where the investigator puts him/herself in a somewhat equal position with the studied, and so tries to omit as much as possible of the ethnographical goggles that the object/subject relation creates.<sup>44</sup> This method of mutual transferring attracted me because it also recognises me as a creator of information and understandings. It brings the two actors (often otherwise separated into subject/object factors<sup>45</sup>) together as somewhat equals in the production of knowledge. And this is important, I think, in my study since I came without any authority and without wanting to evaluate the actions of the workers or the Mapuce, but rather to understand and be helped in understanding the fundamentals of collective action. It also expands the study to the sharing of everyday life without structuring this event into *unmasked observations*<sup>46</sup>. This would allow all my experiences to be part of the study, not only the ones that were generated through situations where my questionnaire was obvious. I let everybody know that I was there to do my study but our relations came to include many situations of a more relaxed kind, since they invited me, first the Mapuce and then the workers, to stay with them.

Many of the methods I had read about were hard to follow; this I understood later was due to risk of comparing my own work with the work that has been carried out by scientist with years of experience. In relation to inspiring books of Mulinari<sup>47</sup> and Kerstin Sandell<sup>48</sup>, both

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<sup>42</sup> Being the year of the Cutral-Cotazo, see chapter three page 21.

<sup>43</sup> Hernández, Isabel 2003 *Autonomía, Ciudadanía Incompleta – El Pueblo Mapuche en Chile y Argentina* Naciones Unidas Santiago

<sup>44</sup> Hernandez 2003:69f

<sup>45</sup> Or reducing the people to mere objects in need of development aid or reforms, Mulinari 1995:18

<sup>46</sup> Rosengren & Arvidsson 1997:197

<sup>47</sup> Mulinari 1995

<sup>48</sup> Sandell 2001

using concepts like *situated knowledge* and *positioning*<sup>49</sup>, I felt that I did not have the same opportunity or capacity and it was hard to find a good view of my own study until I remembered the words of my instructor telling me that my study was a kind of pilot study. Only after I returned home a translation of Esteban Magnani's work on occupied factories in Argentina was published<sup>50</sup> but it still appears to be little known of outside some leftists and Argentinean circles here. In Argentina I found some articles and documentation of the experiences, material that I will use in my work. Recently (September 2004) Fernando Aizicson's<sup>51</sup> doctoral thesis was presented at the Comahue University of Neuquén. Aizicson tries to structure and contextualise the experiences' from the workers of Zanón. None of the works have tried to analyse the workers' connection with the Mapuce. Research concerning the Mapuce has been easier to find, they are not a new social actor like the workers, since their history goes back to before Columbus arrived in South America. Putting these two actors together might be a construction possible from my distant position and I think it has to do with the interdisciplinary studies that the Human Ecology division at Lunds University promotes.

### **Changing relations**

Initially I had no knowledge of how my contact with either the workers or the Mapuce would be, relying on *key persons* in Buenos Aires and Neuquén whom I had made contact with via my institution and exiled Argentineans in Sweden. And what first had seemed as a close relationship, workers/Mapuce, turned out to be of a more informal and loose kind of interaction.

The workers were not even using clay from the Mapuce when I got there. None of the two groups needed to rely on each other for continued existence and I slowly began to get a better understanding of their situation. The Mapuce who live where the clay is extracted are pastoralists and since I came during the warm season, they were in the Andes with their herds and therefore hard to reach. My questions concerning the spot for extraction then had to be answered by an engineer who had been there and by Mapuces living in the city of Neuquén who had knowledge about the site. Any economical benefit for the actual community could

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<sup>49</sup> Mulinari 1995:32f

<sup>50</sup> Magnani, Esteban 2004 *Ocupera, gör motstånd, producera företag och fabriker i händerna på argentinska arbetare* Stockholm: Federativs förlag

<sup>51</sup> Aizicson 2004. I made friends with Aizicson and he invited me to live in his and his girlfriend's house and I stayed there during my last one and a half week in Neuquén.

not be traced, nor the organisation of work. My discussion of the ecological effects of clay extraction will consequently be based on secondary information from people who have been part of the process in, one way or another. I will discuss the relations between the urban Mapuces and the rural Mapuces in the third chapter, but it will be from the experience of living most of the time with urban Mapuces.

Since the workers and the Mapuce were not as close as I had first imagined I had to rearrange my questions. However, the main structure in my questions remained useful, concentrating on (1) the experience of being worker/Mapuce (2) the informants' views on their relation to the environment, what difference the occupation of the factory had meant (3) knowledge of environmental risks related to the extraction of clay/production of ceramics and the view of one another, worker/Mapuce.

Gaining contact with each group happened through different persons, this gave my study two different inputs, which is another reason why my study did not come to focus only on the factory as much as I first had expected. Studying two actors more independently, using an interdisciplinary openness, trying to reach over environment, culture and development was many times a tough mission but I hope I managed to gather information and find perspectives that the reader will find both interesting and engaging.

Since figures of economical data to me seem to say little about whether people have the ability to form a life of their choosing, I wanted to look for something else. I wanted to take into account the pictures of development that these people have, a picture of how to relate to others. Coming from "outside" I had perspectives that I unconsciously saw them through, I had no idea of how it would be to meet the Mapuce, they were supposed to be suspicious of "winka"<sup>52</sup>, but I was impressed by their way of analysing their own situation. In the case of the workers I had heard that they had an incredible consciousness, a consciousness in development that already had led them to occupy their factory illegally for more than two years.

Trying to *contextualise* information from the fields of environment, culture and development I had to be very open-minded and my results should not be seen as pure products of an

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<sup>52</sup> White or not indigenous, from the verb steal "wingkalf" in Mapundungun, the Mapuce language. Hernandez 2003:49

objectifying method, rather it is the result of the questions I had in common with the workers and the Mapuce; how can *we* create *another world*? A desire I shared with many people that I met and that helped keeping the information together, trying to relate to whatever possibilities people in the region could have out of the experiences created in Neuquén by the workers of a ceramics factory and a people that had survived invasions from both Incas and Conquistadors.

I will try to be as modest as Mulinari, sharing the desire of not wanting “to present to the reader this [thesis] as the end of a journey” but rather “a possible way of thinking about this social phenomenon”.<sup>53</sup>

## Presentation of main sources

It has not been easy to become orientated in the Argentine discussion on the consequences of the crisis in 2001 and the social mobilisations related to people’s experience of the crisis. I have tried to find sources relevant to the contemporary changes, and since much focus was lit on Argentina from 2001 I was able to find much material that discusses the protests in general. In the case of the workers there has not yet been produced much. Since I had the luck to get to know Fernando Aiziczon he provided me with both his own thesis and helped me orient in the little that has been written. One that has written something is Esteban Magnani<sup>54</sup> and I will rely on his work to some extent. He is a student that followed Naomi Klein during her stay in Argentina for the production of a documentary on the recuperations of factories in Argentina<sup>55</sup>. Magnani’s work provides an introduction to the wave of factory recuperations that followed with the crisis. In the chapter about the workers (fifth) I will however be using primarily Aiziczon’s work since this offers a focus on the Neuquén region as important for understanding *why* Zanón came to be occupied in the way it still is. He hence offers a mixture of profound interviews and empirical material relevant for understanding Neuquén as a camp

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<sup>53</sup> Mulinari 1995:43

<sup>54</sup> Magnani, Esteban 2003 *El cambio silencioso – Empresas y fábricas recuperadas por los trabajadores en la Argentina* Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros

<sup>55</sup> The documentary was released in April 2004, under the name “The Take”. There was an interesting reaction from the Movement of recuperated factories – which distanced itself from the position that Klein had given them in the documentary. Showing the distance between western attempts to understand the workers and the workers own interpretation of their struggle. See <http://www.fabricasrecuperadas.org.ar/plan.php3> “LA TOMA’ NO REFLEJA LA REALIDAD DE LAS FÁBRICAS RECUPERADAS EN ARGENTINA – The Take does not reflect the real state of the recuperated factories in Argentina”.

of protest. No work that I could find related to the Mapuce and the workers explicitly, the relation can be traced in Semorile's<sup>56</sup> work but this is yet to be finished.

Semorile's work however proved a useful resource for finding material related to the Mapuce, she is today working on a Multimedia CD as a project concerning new ways of presenting (her own) academic material in a more available form for the public. The CD contains a mixture of work made by her and other contributors and material produced by the Mapuce as well as references to news material available through internet.

Before leaving for Argentina I had a brief encounter with Sergio Cuadra, a sociologist at the moment working in Malmö, who wrote his doctoral thesis on the Mapuce<sup>57</sup>. Even if his work focus on the Mapuce in Chile I have had great use of this work since it offers a good presentation of the culture as well as relates to many of the same questions that arise in my study. He recommended me to read Rodolfo Casamiquelas<sup>58</sup>, and this advice brought much "nosewrinkling" from the Mapuce I got to know since they strongly objected to his work. It is out of my reach to compare the views of all writers but I'm sure that the case of Casamiquelas could bring light to interesting aspects of representational and intercultural relations between the Mapuce and argentine scientists. Anyway, instead the Mapuce would recommend me to read Hernández<sup>59</sup> which I did find very interesting especially for the way she presents her work in her latest book as well as for the methodological approach she uses.

I have made all the translations in my thesis; I hope I have managed to adequately find the right words and meanings.

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<sup>56</sup> Semorile 2004

<sup>57</sup> Cuadra, Sergio 2001 *Mapuchefolket – i gränsernas land – en studie av autonomi, identitet, etniska gränser och social mobilisering* Lund: Sociologiska institutionen

<sup>58</sup> See Cuadra 2001

<sup>59</sup> Hernández 2003



## Argentina

“I learned also [...] that you can not speak in general of ‘the Argentinean society’, or of ‘the argentineans’ since there exists various Argentinas that opposes and fights or that overlap without coinciding completely, and the classes, groups and social sectors differs strongly in its interior when you study them more closely”<sup>60</sup>

The economic crisis that struck Argentina in December 2001 was the result of a process of accumulated minor crises with its beginning some years earlier. Argentina was praised by the IMF for the economical politics carried out during the 1990s and when I started to fill in my application for the MFS-scholarship. Argentina was not considered an underdeveloped country. Argentina had left its state of underdevelopment and in an economical sense, as well as in the minds of the Argentineans, distanced itself from the other Latin-American countries. In Latin-America the Argentineans wants to be seen as more Europeanized than the rest, creating a sence of superiority in being argentine, as being something better than Latin-American. This picture carries an implicit error since the “superior” Argentineans (“with their nose high in the air”) are the ones living in the Rio de la Plata region (or the rich, who could travel when the peso was one-to-one with the dollar), the population and economic centre of Argentina. Tango is a good example since it is perceived as Argentinean, but the people living in the Patagonia do not share the tango as a cultural symbol. I experienced a strong division between the periphery and the centre, between Neuquén and Buenos Aires, and I will try to develop some of these experiences that came to be my fundaments in understanding Argentina, but first some general information.

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<sup>60</sup> Almeyra Guillermo 2004:14 *La Protesta Social en la Argentina (1990-2004) – Fábricas recuperadas – Piquetes – Cacerlazos – Asambleas populares* Buenos Aires: Ediciones Continente

## Statistics<sup>61</sup>

Area	2,780,400 <sup>62</sup>
Population	
Males	17,659,072
Females	18,601,058
Total	36,260,130

Province	Area (Sq km)	Population	Density(Per sq km)	Capital
Buenos Aires				
- Federal District	200	2,776,138	13,880.7	
Buenos Aires				
- Province	307,571	13,827,203	45.0	La Plata
Neuquén	94,078	474,155	5.0	Neuquén

This statistics show the relatively small population that Neuquén holds. Argentina's main concentration of people is in the Rio de la Plata region, where more than half of the population lives.

## The “downside” of IMF adapted behaviour

Argentina's IMF adapted economical politics was based on privatizations made by the president Carlos Menem in the 90ies. Large and prosperous state owned companies were sold as a mean for managing the national foreign debt. These debts had been increased largely during the period of the military junta from mid 70ies until 1982.<sup>63</sup> When democracy returned in the 80ies the Argentine economy suffered from the juntas politics and Kenneth Hermele<sup>64</sup> presents figures showing a cost of 55% of the GDP between the years 1980-1982 for the 70 banks that were closed as a result of the crisis. As I see it, both the memory of the brutal junta

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<sup>61</sup> *The Europe World Year Book 2004*, 2004 London: Europa Publications

<sup>62</sup> Not including the Falklands Islands and Antarctic territory claimed by Argentina.

<sup>63</sup> An independent report on the IMF responsibility for the crisis in Argentina can be reached at <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/2004/080904.pdf>.

<sup>64</sup> Hermele, Kenneth 2001a:44 *Det globala kasinot och dess kritiker från Keynes till Tobin* Stockholm: Ordfront

– during which 30.000 people “disappeared”<sup>65</sup> – and of the economic instability are two important clues for understanding contemporary Argentina. The two phenomena’s are also related since it was during the junta that Argentina’s big loans were approved, showing the World Bank’s acceptance of these illegitimate rulers.

In 2001 the economic crisis that culminates has much to do with the loans taken during the last junta and the remedies that the IMF considered necessary. The banks are again in 2001 threatened and the political and economical defending of the banks is one way of understanding how the situation ran out of control when much money started to flow out of the country as a sign of disbelief in the pesos one to one value with the USD. The independent bulletin Analyskritik describes the economic and political relations in the bank crisis like this,

The remedies for the crisis in Argentina have been dictated by IMF and therefore they haven’t solved the problem. The primary demand from IMF is namely to save the bank system. During the 1990s the financial system was privatized in Latin America. The consequences were that - which also was the intention - the national banks were bought by foreign finance and banks. Especially Spanish and British banks that today control the financial market in Latin America, with Brazil as the only exception where national banks still dominate. In other words: the old colonial powers have again seized financial control over the Latin American continent. In December the Argentine government decided to freeze all savings accounts to stop the outflow of currency and to save the Spanish and British banks from collapsing. A crisis like that would have had immediate consequences in Spanish economy and for the EU. Therefore the EU is pushing the Argentine government to save the banks at whatever cost. And the price for this tightening politics is high for the Argentine population.<sup>66</sup>

During the recent outlet<sup>67</sup>, the Argentineans has lost great amounts of state owned companies to foreign interest. The selling of these resources includes a yet unknown amount of corruption, leaving the people with little faith of the politicians.

This “little faith” was publicly expressed as “*Que se vayan todos! Que no se queda, ni uno solo!*” (They must all go! No one can stay, not any!”), in the streets of Buenos Aires the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> I have no opportunity to focus much on these “black years” but I will relate to this time in the fourth chapter when I also present “las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo”. For further reading see [www.madres.com](http://www.madres.com) and [www.desaparecidos.org](http://www.desaparecidos.org)

<sup>66</sup> Translated from <http://www.analyskritik.press.se/ekonomi/Globalafinanskrisen/Argentina.htm> an independent news analysis bulletin that to my limits of knowledge offer trustworthy articles.

<sup>67</sup> This is a strong word but Menem sold the Boeing airplanes of the state owned aircompany “Aerolineas Argentina” for 1 USD each. The “deal” was sealed with the IMF as a swap, a way of paying the foreign debt. See Hermele 2001b:47 or <http://www.imf.org/External/NP/ieo/2004/arg/eng/pdf/app7.pdf> and see Galeano, Eduardo 2003 “*Bakvända världen : en lektion i illusioner*” Stockholm: Ordfront

and the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 2001. This was the culmination of many years of discontent in the whole of Argentina. The privatization had left a lot of people without jobs. The railway had been sold and today you do not count on railway when you think of transport between cities. A lot of people that had once lived in a town where the trains stopped have had to move, like reversed history, thinking about what the railway meant for the development of cities in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>68</sup>

One important thing to bear in mind about the unemployed workers is that they do not only lose their income, they also lose a part of their identity and their ability to strike. Being kicked out of work also generates great pressure on the family, easily creating domestic conflicts. The knowledge about the consequences of this exclusion is a strong motivator for the social actions that took place in Argentina.<sup>69</sup>

When people found themselves out of work they also found themselves without possibility to strike against employers, instead in Argentina people started using “el piquete” (the blocking of roads). If you can not strike against your old workplace you can block the road, halting traffic as a way of halting transportations for the companies. Sometimes the method is used for spreading information, blocking a road easily creates a public that you can address, even if it is not always a content public. This method, some say, began with the “Cutral-Cótazo”,<sup>70</sup> where people blocked the road demanding that the local authorities enter negotiations.<sup>71</sup> The method is still today used around Argentina and can gather a lot of people. There is even a movement (el movimiento Piquetero) which is divided into smaller groups with different leaders and focus. Visiting a “piquete” can be both frightening and inspiring. Some “piqueteros” (the people blocking the road) cover their faces – in order to save them from registration – and have poles in their hands ready to fight the police<sup>72</sup>. But the roadblock is also an open form of protest where people of all ages come together – showing that the problems are family based rather than individual - sharing what little they have and together

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<sup>68</sup> Almeyra 2004

<sup>69</sup> This is something that I will come back to in chapter four discussing the experience of the ceramic workers of Zanón.

<sup>70</sup> From the city of Cutral-Co in Neuquén, the year as 1996. This method has been used by both the Mapuce and the workers of Zanón, see following chapters three and four.

<sup>71</sup> In <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/3646/desodeb.htm> you find a text by Osvaldo Bayer describing the importance of this action. See also Aiziczon 2004:64 for an extended history on the protests.

<sup>72</sup> Confrontations have occurred and people have been killed by the police. The violence has halted after President Kirchner orders to not act against the social demonstration.

recreating some of their lost dignity. They fight for better social security<sup>73</sup>, real jobs, dignity and social change. Some of these groups<sup>74</sup> protests against the paying of the foreign debt. The piquetero-movement is considered leftist, although the debate within this movement cannot be categorized that easily.

During my time in Argentina many people also felt a need to publicly show their discontent about the raised feelings of being insecure<sup>75</sup>, as a reaction to the increased kidnappings in Argentina. These manifestations gathered some 100,000 people in the centre of Buenos Aires. These mobilisations are something that, as I see it, shows that the Argentineans are ready to go out of their houses in order to express their opinion. One strategy of holding back the people during the junta was to illegalize groups from demonstrating, and the violence which with the military struck have left deep memories in people's minds.<sup>76</sup> Many people experienced an overcoming of these fears during the large demonstrations in late December 2001. These demonstrations began when the government ordered "*Estado de Sitio*" (State of emergency)<sup>77</sup> as a way of reacting to the plundering of supermarkets. The plundering was made by poor desperate people that had few ways of finding food when the banks had stopped withdrawals and urged stores to only accept credit cards as payment.<sup>78</sup>

The ordering of "*Estado de Sitio*" was what made the protests in Buenos Aires increase to the amount that it did. The popular protests were held back by the police, who killed many demonstrators making the streets a huge battle field. In this situation the president Fernando de la Rúa resigned since he no longer had any control over the situation. Four more presidents resigned during the following two weeks and because of the political situation Eduardo Duhalde became interim president until Nestor Kirchner was elected in May 2003.

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<sup>73</sup> Argentina provides organized unemployed people with 150 pesos (almost 50 USD July 2004) a month, a sum that very few people can live off, leaving them struggling to increase this income.

<sup>74</sup> I had no possibility to study every group or their reason for their division, but I think that a general presentation of the actions is fruitful for understanding the political climate in Argentina today.

<sup>75</sup> This mobilisation grew quickly after the Blumberg case, see [www.clarin.com](http://www.clarin.com) for an officialist view and [www.argentina.indymedia.org](http://www.argentina.indymedia.org) for an alternative view.

<sup>76</sup> See Karita Panjabi. 1997. Probing "Morality" and State Violence: Feminist Values and Communicative Interaction in Prison Testimonios in India and Argentina in J. Alexander & T. Mohanty (eds.). *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* London: Routledge

<sup>77</sup> In the sense of overruling the constitution, the same thing happened when the Junta seized power in 76; the action was condemned by the people who then took to the streets to express their resentment.

<sup>78</sup> Almeyra 2004:166. The Argentinean National Bank could no longer withhold the value of the peso. During the last days before the official announcement – that would leave those with savings with a third of what they had had – tons of money left the country, an act that today renders great suspicions of corruption.

## Argentina - food storage of the world.

Hunger and scarcity is not the first thing you are struck by when you read about Argentina.<sup>79</sup> The country had experienced an upswing in its economy after WW2, but even earlier the Argentine pampas had provided meat to the English people for decades. In Sweden we have songs by Evert Taube who sang about the Tango and the ranches. Argentina attracted people from all over the world (who could afford the trip) being a large producer of food.

The influence of modern technology can be traced in Argentina's soy bean production, which had an estimated rise of 50% between the years 2000 and 2002, going from 20,000 metric tons to 30,000 metric tons.<sup>80</sup> You easily find soy products in even the smallest store, often to a cheap price. I see this influence as a sign of Argentina's desire to modernize, a desire which has made them distance themselves from other Latin-American countries, basing their superiority on being more *western*, more *modern* and more *developed*.

Many people have also sought refuge in this large and relatively scarcely populated country. In 1901, Butch Cassidy and Sundance Kid, two famous bank robbers, fled from US law and ended up in the Patagonian part of Argentina. This region came to be a refuge for many German, Spanish and Italian union activists (anarchists) in the following decades.<sup>81</sup> The Italian influence can be traced in traditions as the "ñoquis", a pasta dish that is supposed to be served the 29<sup>th</sup> in every month. The use of the accordion is another trace but the most obvious is perhaps the special Argentinean accent<sup>82</sup>, which sounds more "melodious" or *Italian* compared with other countries. Even if the European feeling is much of a *western* kind people from former Soviet Union, from the Middle East and Asia have also contributed to the country's culture. The flow of people have "exported" the custom of drinking Maté<sup>83</sup> to Lebanon and Swedish settlers can be found in Misiones in a small "Swedish" village. Aiziczon concludes that "[t]his characteristic of mobile society, open, cosmopolite, where it

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<sup>79</sup> For a good résumé on the crisis see

<http://www.analyskritik.press.se/ekonomi/Globalafinanskrisen/Argentina.htm>

<sup>80</sup> Europe 2004:532

<sup>81</sup> Bayer, Osvaldo 2002 *La Patagonia Rebelde*, some parts can be reached at <http://www.temakel.com/ghptragica.htm#Presentación>, where you can read that in 1921 some 1500 workers were shot.

<sup>82</sup> It is a brusque generalisation saying that there is one "Argentinean" accent, people from every region distinguish each others origin of the way they speak, and perhaps what is conceived as Argentinean in this case is again what is really from the Rio Plata region.

<sup>83</sup> This is a kind of tea that is very popular throughout the south of Latin-America.

seems to give a certain ‘pioneering moral’, will endure until our days given the increased population that indicate a notably high of young people, characteristic of this region.”<sup>84</sup>

In Patagonia you also find other people, like the hippies in El Bolson, who have sought “freedom” in this peripheral and beautiful region<sup>85</sup>. The influence of this people and their ideas has come to mix with the historical inhabitants of Patagonia, the Mapuce, in the social actions taking place here. In the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century the regions development came to beset by strikes.<sup>86</sup> These struggles can be seen as a continuation of the Mapuce struggles against the Spanish invaders, showing perfectly well the connection to, and impact of, imperialism in the region.

### **Neuquén, developmental conflicts in an arid region**

Studying a desertification map of Neuquén you are struck by the critical state of large areas. Except for the high parts in western Neuquén the region suffers from medium to serious state of desertification, according to the General Direction of Environment and Sustainable Development.<sup>87</sup> The desertification of the Neuquén region is considered high and having long-term effects, in some cases even irreversible, limiting the areas for animal keeping, which is the main sources of income for some Mapuce communities. The solution of the desertification is considered very complex, which is understandable since the problem is seen as an expression of structural conflicts in the process of progress, showing us another case of progress/environmental conflict.<sup>88</sup>

The dryness of the region is striking when you travel around, the vegetal coverage mostly consists of bushes and the water resources are scarce, which many times lead to shortenings for especially sensible areas, like Zapala.<sup>89</sup> This arid area is very fragile to changes in the vegetation. The Mapuce’ keeping of sheep and goats - animals that easily destroy the vegetation - is of course not the ideal way of surviving on these lands, but this has not been a choice of their own, but rather a consequence of their economic and legal marginalisation. But

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<sup>84</sup> Aiziczon 2004:60

<sup>85</sup> In the South-West part of Neuquén one finds four national Parks, and great environmental resources.

<sup>86</sup> Bayer 2002

<sup>87</sup> See Appendix II

<sup>88</sup> *Diagnostico Expeditivo para la Gestión Ambiental en la Provincia de Neuquén* 1997:13-14

<sup>89</sup> During a short stay in Zapala (third week of March 2004) all public toilets were closed due to water shortage.

the fact that they have to subsist on these animals makes their habitats even more fragile to exploitation of clay for example.

In Zanón they produce ceramics and so they need clay. This is the first environmental impact that the production itself has on the environment. For reaching the clay you remove the top-cover of the ground, which of course destroys all the vegetal covering. In order to reach the quarry you need trucks, and for this you will need a road, and the trucks, which will also destroy the covering around the actual quarry.<sup>90</sup>

Neuquén's rich clay is paradoxical as it seems, located in dry areas. Here the clay has helped to maintain humidity and helped the surroundings to grow a stronger vegetal coverage. These oases have been the goal for the Mapuche during wintertime when they bring their animals down from the mountains, seeking these otherwise too dry regions that then can provide them with the rainwater and so makes a good place for keeping the animal breeds, that otherwise would die from the cold in the mountains.<sup>91</sup>

The structural conflict of progress can clearly be seen in the nation's/region's aim for development, investing in Cerámica Zanón S.A. and the Mapuche use of the clay rich areas for animal breeding. Maintaining and exceeding the factory's production can not be fulfilled without affecting the Mapuche, whose development will be effected in a negative way, unless they are included in the project. But rather than integrating the Mapuche, the province sells the right to exploit the clay to Zanón, treating the federal land as something that the Mapuche have no claim on, and so marginalises and excludes the Mapuche even more from province based welfare. I will come back to this conflict in the next chapter when I present the Mapuche more specific.

The report referred to above also show that the general population's perception of the problems is low concerning soil erosion, the affecting of indigenous communities and irreversible desertification. I did not encounter a strong awareness of environmental problems in Argentina. In developing Neuquén, officials have not focused on limiting environmental impact; rather it seems that the industrial oligopoly has been able to obtain use of land without much concern from the provincial government. Even if the population in general has an

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<sup>90</sup> Interview with Marina Abruzzini, biochemist in Buenos Aires and Roberto Ñancucheo

<sup>91</sup> My own conclusions from interview with Verónica, worker in Neuquén



uninformed perception of the problems conflicts exists. In El Bolson (in the neighbouring Río Negro region) the people started a new political party in order to fight against the provincially decided exploitation of water resources. In Neuquén the Mapuche have carried out various legal processes against companies destroying and polluting the environment.<sup>92</sup>

### **Neuquén, privatizing federal land for development**

These words from the provincial house of Neuquén in Buenos Aires, gives us good information on the “official” view of Neuquén,

The province of Neuquén (94.078 km<sup>2</sup>) is situated in the north east of Patagonia. Its limits are defined mostly by natural borders: the river Barrancas and Colorado separate it from Mendoza, in the north. In the east and south the rivers Neuquén y Limay and the parallel of 68° 09', make the limit with the provinces of Río Negro and La Pampa. This region, considered until recently, the ‘limit of the world’ today, thanks to the advanced technologies, have seized to be it. This allows Neuquén to insert itself in the actual politics economical-cultural, of globalisation and interchange between States. The contacts with Chile allow the outflow of regional products through the mountain to the Chilean Pacific ports, with prospecting commercialisation in the Asian market.<sup>93</sup>

Neuquén is a new state “created” in 1955 as “autonomous and inseparable of the Argentine Nation”.<sup>94</sup> Economic development has been brought to this distant “end of the world” with the help of advanced technology. Today the industry is concentrated on using the rich natural resources, making it clearly an extractive economy<sup>95</sup>, sustained on water, land and energy resources.

The most important economic resource is oil, in 1996 Neuquén stood for 37% of the national oil production. The state is also the nation’s main producer of gas and produce 52% of the hydroelectric power. All this activity has an ecological impact, the water in the ground around the oil fields is now highly inflammable (i.e. making it something else than water). A German study concluded that in some areas around Loma de La Lata, the guidance amounts (for polluting material) are exceeded 700 times. The same study also found exceeded levels of heavy metals in the bodies of the Mapuche living in the area.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Río Negro [www.rionegro.com.ar](http://www.rionegro.com.ar) and search for Mapuche

<sup>93</sup> From the *Folleto del Perfil Provincial* N 1 – año 1998 – Casa de la Provincia del Neuquén – Buenos Aires

<sup>94</sup> Ibid p.1

<sup>95</sup> Using a category from Stephen G. Bunker 1990 *Underdeveloping the Amazon : Extraction, Unequal Exchange, and the Failure of the Modern State* Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press

<sup>96</sup> Río Negro 20011101

Travelling east, reaching the Andean mountains close to San Martín de los Andes, you see another of the state's fundamentals for "development", the forests. These mountains provide the soil with much rain and so it has become a region where the pines stand close, a factor that will have an impact on the region's flora and fauna. As with the case of oil production the state provides areas for exploitation without asking the people that will be affected, using its power to distribute – or limit – land resources, resources for survival versus profit. In this way Mapuche have been forced to move out of their homes and so some of them today are found in very scarce areas in Neuquén's dry zones.<sup>97</sup> Today the privatizations have led as far as to selling federal owned land, often land where the Mapuche live, since they are not recognised as the proprietors of their lands. Recently a big case was highlighted in Neuquén where Benetton had bought federal land. The selling of this land was considered illegal – showing the possibilities of corruption, still existing – but the purchasing was legal. And so the new "owners" of this land – one of the world's most important business families – wanted to kick out the Mapuche from their land. Benetton uses the land for sheep grazing, using the wool in their clothing industry. The Mapuche used the land for their subsistence keeping of sheep and goats; showing how vulnerable the Mapuche are and how they constantly have to defend themselves from these kinds of threats.<sup>98</sup>

### **Industrial promotion, developing the inner regions**

In light of the official view on Neuquén it becomes clear that the region has changed from being the end of the world to an integrated part in both the national as well as the global web of trade. In order to make this transition, much money has been spent on promoting industrial initiatives, which Favaro and Aiziczon show in their article on the workers' resistance,

Remembering that Neuquén [...] developed, more than two decades ago, politics of social welfare, prioritising health, education and living [*made*] possible due to the comparative benefits of the local instance with the central power, in the concept of co-participation, support without need of repayment, and fundamentally since the 80ies, of privileges.<sup>99</sup>

These policies are part of what is generally called ISI-politics (Import Substitution Industry). The ISI-politics where a reaction of the "underdeveloped" countries' dependence towards the

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<sup>97</sup> Compare maps Appendix II

<sup>98</sup> In <http://benetton.linefeed.org/> you can read about this actual case.

<sup>99</sup> Favaro, O. and F. Aiziczon 2003:43f *Al filo de la cornisa – La resistencia obrera en la fábrica Zanón, Neuquén* Realidad Económica, no 197

rest, the theory was based on that the underdeveloped countries should produce what they were importing (substituting the imports) and by doing so the country would develop its own industry and so be less dependent. In the 1970's studies were carried out monitoring the regions possibilities of further economical growth, providing information for those who could exploit these resources, in order to increase profits and taxes, raising the flow of money, the base of economic development.<sup>100</sup>

In the 1980's during Carlos Menem's presidency, the desire to strengthen the nation's industry came to evoke criticism from international finances. This since the public resources was used to promote national industry rather than paying the foreign debts which, as we can see (above), became the fundament for Neuquén's development. Distributing these common goods could have been done as a way of supporting small and middle size companies but according to Aiziczon, it went to firms "that already has a privileged position in their fields", and so rather than providing a good ground for competition it strengthened the oligopoly.<sup>101</sup> This oligopoly ties politicians close to the biggest companies, or the leaders of these interests, making the combination of the two a happy marriage as could be interpreted when Menem in 1993 visited Ceramica Zanón S.A. to open the new porcelain-line.

The reason why Zanón would choose to put the factory in Neuquén is studied by Aiziczon<sup>102</sup>, and he observes that since the technology is imported from abroad it makes it more mobile and facilitate the installation. These factors help to facilitate the choosing of region to where the labour cost is low and least qualified – finding a good place for maximizing profits as smooth as possible. It then appears that the periphery is a preferable place for new investment, expecting little friction from the population, following a logic that can be questioned as we see in the following part.

### **The Church and the theology of liberation**

I was surprised to find a positive connection between the Catholic Church and my study, but in an interview with Raul Godoy, general secretary of the Ceramist Union, he expressed the

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<sup>100</sup> Aiziczon 2004:80

<sup>101</sup> Aiziczon 2004:90f

<sup>102</sup> Aiziczon 2004:83

importance of the bishop Jaime de Nevares.<sup>103</sup> During this time the Catholic Church was divided between the traditional conservative forces and what is called the theology of liberation. This “new” theology focused on the social injustices and worked actively for suppressed people, still today the theology of liberation is important.<sup>104</sup> Amanda Peralta sees the conflict in the Catholic Church in Argentina as being different from other Latin-American countries and she cites Lehmann;

It was in Argentina that the most stunning discoveries about the climate in the Church were made at the time. If the priests elsewhere had resigned in private and individually, they resigned in Argentina, at least one time, en masse. Elsewhere it was not usual that the priests resigned because they could not share their superiors ideas or for the church as a whole. As reason they rather mentioned relations concerning their private life, psychological preference or believe. This was not the case in Argentina. Nowhere else in Latin America priests [...] would make such clear and public statements on the hierarchy’s passive and deformed pose. Nowhere else were the hierarchy so neglecting and stubborn in not accepting dialogue or to question its intimate relation with the holders of the political and economical power.<sup>105</sup>

One reason why the bonds between church and the working class became so strong in Argentina – where in other Latin American countries this did not happen to the same extent – was that the Peronism<sup>106</sup>, which was the main ideology for the argentine working class, was not a traditional Marxism. Rather there did not exist any distance between radical Christian believes and leftist Peronism, so Christians were not excluded nor had many problems in engaging in this movement. Not only did the priests “proletarise” themselves, taking jobs in the factories, the influence was mutual and based on the poor and marginalized, whose participation in the collective projects gave a broad and public support to the - otherwise - very isolating militant practices.<sup>107</sup>

This “new” theology focused on the social injustices and worked actively for suppressed people. Jaime de Nevares has come to be one symbol of the Neuquénian resistance, and the movement that grew from these initiatives came to - in Aiziczon’s words -

configure around the organisations of Human Rights which specific weight served as symbolical generator in the construction of a place – Neuquén – and a discourse

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<sup>103</sup> <http://www.pagina12web.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-29043-2003-12-08.html> see also Aiziczon 2004:110 for Godoy’s schooling alongside the church in Centenario.

<sup>104</sup> See <http://www.ubv.se/bras/fakta/boff.htm> for an up to date interview with a focus on Brazil.

<sup>105</sup> Peralta, Amanda 1995:61 *Teori och Praktik i de fattigas Universum* Göteborg: Daidalos

<sup>106</sup> From the President Juan D. Peron, who together with his first wife Evita, was a very popular president in the years after the second world war.

<sup>107</sup> Peralta 1995:61

– for militant excellence – positive to collective action in the view of the realisation of collective projects, emancipatory horizons, and place of the utopia.<sup>108</sup>

Neuquén became a refuge to many people that had to flee from the junta's persecutions, activists, political people, and unionists, both national and from other countries (Chile was also a dictatorship at the time, a fascist wave struck Latin America during these years as a reaction against the popular uprising that strived for freedom and independence). Neuquén appears a mirror image of the oppression that was led by the junta that with help from the Catholic Church (whose close ties to the junta today are revealed) and Multinationals (Ford had a special torture chamber inside its factory in Buenos Aires).<sup>109</sup> The making of Neuquén as somewhat a hide-out, was possible, I think, by its location in the periphery, where these actions could be more "accepted" than would be the case if Jaime de Nevares had been in Buenos Aires. Many find it incredible that he lived to die from natural cause in 1995. Nevares came to personalize the radicalism that was in opposition with the traditional conservatism of the Catholic Church in Argentina. This division is analysed by Osvaldo Bayer, well-known and much respected Argentinean historian, focusing on the two's different strategies for achieving change,

Well, I think that one of the best tests from which we can unite many bishops that have given all their effort and that always have been with the workers and not with the fat misters that we see here, that only accompany the people to the virgin Lujan, to the grail of the virgin, or those who make large processions towards this saint that gives work, that says that she gives work, instead of encourage that people and take them to Plaza de Mayo, and request from mr. Duhalde that he give them work.<sup>110</sup>

These words also show a Christian perspective that does not fit into the vulgar Marxist perception of religion as something that will only harvest passivity for the people, but rather a social-Christianism, fighting for justice on political rather than religious places. A Christianity that was not afraid to use their position and take active part in the social protest which can be illustrated by Eliot Brat's memory of Jaime de Nevares,

All remember that Jaime de Nevares, in the moment when they had arrested Antonio in El Chocón, he entered the airplane where they had him. And in the same moment [we] the students of the University were preparing the organisation

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<sup>108</sup> Aiziczon 2004:63

<sup>109</sup> Documents have recently been released showing US involvement in the junta's atrocities; see also [www.madres.com](http://www.madres.com) and [www.desaparecidos.org](http://www.desaparecidos.org) for more information.

<sup>110</sup> Osvaldo Bayer in an interview in <http://hem.bolina.hsb.se/o-diessler/radio/10-10-02bayer.htm>, Duhalde was the president of Argentina from January 2002 until May 2003 when Kirchner was elected.

for what would be the great strike for the nationalisation of the University of Comahue. A strike where the unity among workers and students was formed. Where the students united with the workers of the Fruit [Union] of Río Negro and Neuquén and joined in a great assembly in what was the University of Neuquén. They opened in those times of great struggles.<sup>111</sup>

The Mapuce also refers to Jaime de Nevares. He and organisations for Human Rights encouraged the Mapuce to organize and helped them much in the work that would lay the fundament of what today is a strong independent organisation. Still the Assamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos actively engage in the struggles carried out by the Mapuce. Unfortunately this influence was out of reach for my study, but these relations show the broad front of organisations that meet and cooperate in Neuquén today. The University of Comahue is also involved in the mobilisations, and I will use a study made by the University and the Assamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos together with the Mapuce about the “Defence and Recognition of Indigenous lands”. This study show how different actors can cooperate and strengthen themselves, a cooperation that started during the 1970’s and still today plays an active role in making Neuquén a camp of protests.

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<sup>111</sup> <http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=4415> article by Eliot Brat 2004-09-09. Antonio’s last name is Alac and he was one of the most appreciated leaders in the workers actions in the 70ies, inspiring many others to defend what they thought were right. More information on him can be found at: <http://hem.bolina.hsb.se/o-diessler/actualidad/040717alak.htm>

## The Mapuce

The Mapuce Nation was a nation whose territory stretched between much of the area that today constitute Argentina and Chile. Before the defeat of the Mapuce Nation in late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the nation had defended itself from Spanish conquistadors who in the end had to recognize the Mapuche as a nation with territorial limits. It is a people that once again have started to fight, now from within the states that have imposed their constitutions on them, subduing them into almost cultural extinction. Today, in Neuquén the Mapuce identify 50 communities, and count some 300,000 persons as Mapuce<sup>112</sup>. According to the information that the region's own institution produce there exists only 40 communities, the recognition of communities is a central political decision that well shows the struggle between the Mapuce on the one side and formal society on the other side. Recognizing more communities would impede that the Province also provide some kind of help and defence for the affected people, a responsibility that the Province have been much unwilling to undertake, calling the "new" communities "inventions of Mapuce social agitators".<sup>113</sup>

I will in this chapter describe two of the projects that the Mapuce carry out today in Neuquén. The first being the original aim of my study, the cooperation with the workers of Zanón, the second is the co-management (co-manejo) that takes place inside the National Park of Lanin in the Andes. I will use the co-management as an example on how Mapuces struggle to get influence from formal institutions, whereas the example with the workers shows how alliances can strengthen actors within the social movement.

### Mapuche or Mapuce

*"The territory of the words and of the concepts, is part of the spaces to recuperate"*<sup>114</sup>

Usually Mapuce is spelled with ch – Mapuche - but I was told to use theirs own way of spelling, without the h. The reason for the spelling has a story that serves as a good introduction to this people. One should bear in mind the restraints I mentioned in the second chapter, I spoke to the Mapuces in the Newen Mapu community and to the Mapuces in the

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<sup>112</sup> A census of aboriginal people has not been made and is one demand that the Mapuce have on national authorities.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Iris, werken in San Martin de los Andes

<sup>114</sup> Hernandez 2003:208, my italics

Kuruwinka community. I am aware of the little implementation that this way of spelling Mapuce has outside the Newen Mapu community. But both out of respect for their wish and because of the point it makes I will be writing Mapuce without the h.

Does the Mapuce have their own written language? Well, according to my interview with a werken of the Mapuce Confederation, anthropologists have categorized the Mapuce as not having one. But one of the werken pointed out that in the process of revitalize the Mapuce identity, they themselves started to interpret their own symbols and their ceramics art as proving that they have a written language and so started to develop a dictionary, rediscovering their own way of writing their language<sup>115</sup>. In this process they decided to write Mapuce without the h. This shows that some of the Mapuce have started a process of taking the initiative for describing themselves, their limits, their culture and their future.

### **Core – Periphery**

A majority of the Mapuce today live in urban areas. This move (from countryside to the city) is a consequence of modernisation, as a reaction to the Argentinean generals' invasion of the west, the Mapuce had to flee from their areas and found themselves trying to survive on land with scarce resources. With the development of the Argentinean State and the discovery of useful resources on Mapuce land, this movement has been repeated, and the scarce land incite the Mapuce to seek a better future in the cities. Trying to persist in these *poor* areas the people have small opportunities of development, and their consciousness will develop in a different way than it has developed for those who now have organized themselves in the urban area. When I spoke to Iris, a werken of the Mapuce Confederation who has lived in both a poor and marginalised community in the centre of Neuquén and a richer community in the Andes, she saw great differences in the consciousnesses related to the standard of living in the communities. Many communities in the centre have been situated in areas where oil and gas resources are found whereas in the Andes the main source is the wide biodiversity and the great fresh water resources, in her own words,

It is one thing to live here in San Martin de los Andes and another thing to live in my community, for example the government has already given rights to exploit 150 quarries, mines of different minerals and here they know that it is a matter of

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<sup>115</sup> Semorile 2004 presents a text written by the Mapuce about their flag where it is expressed that the black colour in their flag symbolizes their undeveloped written language, a process that was interrupted by the winkas invasion. Cuadra interpret the black and white areas of the flag as symbolizing “art-crafts, science, and writing system”. 2001:107



time before their territory disappears, contaminated by the ones who the government gave the right to exploit. The communities over here is the other side of the coin, so to say, from here comes the water for human consumption, the communities here are very wealthy compared with the communities in central and northern Neuquén.<sup>116</sup>

This dynamic relationship, between central and much marginalised Mapuce communities and the ones that are better off, is important for understanding the relations between Zanón Cerámica S.A. and the Mapuce, since the contact was taken and is still upheld by the Newen Mapu Community. In the Kalfukura community the internal organisation does not explicitly take part in the social movement and, as both the Newen Mapu and the workers perceive it, take no initiatives for a joint project together with the workers.<sup>117</sup>

### **Before 2001 in Kalfukura**

In 1987, Luis Zanón obtained the right to exploit the clay quarry that is located within the Kalfukura community. The Mapuce do not have the right themselves, they live there without legally owning the land, and the State have the right to exploit the resources within the area without consulting the Mapuce. The exploitation was begun without inviting the Mapuce to a discussion on how to exploit without disturbing the activities in the community. The presence of miners and the equipment for extracting the clay have a direct environmental impact as described in chapter two, but this presence is also a constant remainder of the unequal relationship between the Mapuce and the Province, giving the Province the right to limit the activity of the Mapuce whenever decided necessary.<sup>118</sup>

The Kalfukura community survives mostly as “pastoralists, based on goats and to some minor extent sheep. The principal production is of mohair, wool and leathers, in this order. They also produce goat offspring for the commercialisation during Christmas, its commercialisation is made individually, not counting with communitarian structures or organisations for commercialisation.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Interview with Iris

<sup>117</sup> This dynamic as well as the conditions of life for the Mapuce is well documented in Cuadra 2001, see also Hernández 2003:197

<sup>118</sup> Proyecto Especial 256

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

The family income is complemented in some Mapuce families by individuals leaving their family in order to find jobs in mines and quarries in the nearby areas, or in construction or domestic service in towns like Zapala, Cutral-Có and el Alto Valle.

The sum of money that a family has to survive on is, according to the same study, 60% of the “minimal basket” for a typical family with 4 members. This shows very well the tough reality of this community, even if their qualitative wellbeing is not measured, and it also shows the marginalisation of the community.<sup>120</sup> This marginalisation is something they share with many communities in the central and northern area of Neuquén.<sup>121</sup>

The mining activity limited the Mapuce use of their community which generated lost space for the animals, leaving the Mapuce to decrease the number of goats or to increase the pressure on the already fragile land. In either way it would create an internal pressure in the community, a pressure that was aggregated by other consequences; one being the effects on the local fauna that suffered as the vegetal coverage was removed, limiting the reproduction of both the fauna and the animals. Removing the grounds coverage, the earth more easily slides and makes the area even more sensitive to desertification. These effects are not irreversible, but the restoration will be hard, costly and long-term. The presence of other people also increased the indirect exploitation of the area, causing death for some animals, pillage and theft of animals, extraction and appropriation of the little wood existing. All in all this new presence did not develop into something useful for the Mapuce; rather it increased the already limited possibilities of survival.

When Zanón in order to expand the extraction of clay wanted to exploit an area where the Mapuce have a cemetery, a place of much value, for Zanón because of the clay, for the Mapuce because of its religious value, the conflict began to reach its climax. In 2001 when the workers of Zanón Ceramica struggled against the lock-out, the quarry had been blocked by the Mapuce who had also taken the equipment and closed the road that leads to the quarry, making it impossible for Zanón to extract from this quarry.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Iris

<sup>122</sup> Talks with Roberto Ñancucheo, who works in San Martín de los Andes for the Mapuce Confederation 14/3/2004

## Kalfukura today

When the workers seized their factory, they wanted to gain access to the company's quarrying rights (clay). Since Luigi Zanón had urged a boycott against them they had no possibilities to buy any raw material themselves.<sup>123</sup> In order to apply for mining rights they formed a new legal person together with help from MADRES (Madres de la Plaza de Mayo) under the name FASINPAT (Fábrica Sin Patrones / Factories without Employers). Under this new legal person they were given the right by the mining department of Neuquén but the right was withdrawn after a note from a minister of the provincial government. The minister questioned whether the right could be given a Buenos Aires based organisation (MADRES), an argument the workers would have liked to meet but the minister accomplished to halt the process and there had not been any progress made in 2004.<sup>124</sup>

The contacts between the workers and the Mapuce are in the case of the clay extraction carried out by the workers laboratory personal. The reason behind this is that the persons in the laboratory study the clay's quality and carry out the monitoring of the exploitations. When the workers seized the factory they became boycotted and only through the Mapuce Confederation were they able to get clay. Instead of the workers using the right to exploit they were offered clay by the Mapuce. The reason for the Mapuce to offer this help to the workers was, in Veronica's words, "that they too [show] the possibility to generate a new form of democratic participation" and she continues, "that is different from the one that is imposed on us".<sup>125</sup>

The two parts wanted to continue this collaboration and discussions on the conditions took place. Biget recalls that "the price they wanted was low and would have been very beneficent for us" (for the workers), therefore it was part of the plan to "better the price [for the Mapuce] when production started to pay off".<sup>126</sup>

When I spoke to Biget about how they planned to exploit the clay of the quarry in Kalfukura he mentioned that the workers were displeased with MADRES recent decision to support the sitting President Kirchner. This decision had made him question the future cooperation

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<sup>123</sup> Chirico, Roberto (et.al.) 2002 *Caracterización socioeconómica laboral de los trabajadores de la Fábrica de Cerámicos Zanón* Informe de investigación Dep. De Servicio Social Fac. De Derecho y Ciencias Sociales UNC Neuquén

<sup>124</sup> Interview with Biget

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Veronika

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Biget

between them and he rather wanted to give the quarrying right to the Mapuce. He was not sure whether this was possible but he thought it would be the right thing to do, “allowing them [the Mapuce] to decide how they wanted to use their land” and “whether or not they would exploit the clay”. He wanted to let the Mapuce be the “legitimate owners of *their land*”.<sup>127</sup>

Instead of repeating the earlier relations between Zanón Cerámica S.A. and the Mapuce, the workers, in Godoy’s words, “went to the Mapuce and asked; how should we do it?”. This shows the approach that is carried out by the workers in their relations with the Mapuce.<sup>128</sup>

Today the solidarity continues between the two groups, but the primary contact is the discussions, Veronica again, “we have both to show to the rest of society that it is possible with another kind of organisation, of participating mobilisation”. Outside the explicit political field the Mapuce and the workers had planned to play a game of soccer against each other, showing the friendly ties between the Mapuce of Newen Mapu and the workers of Zanón.<sup>129</sup>

One of the reasons why there is no contact between the workers and the Mapuce in Kalfukura is because the Mapuces in Kalfukura are “officialists”, meaning they do not have a critical perspective on the government. Even if collaboration was possible there exists a political split between the Mapuce in Kalfukura and the Mapuce in Newen Mapu which is an important part of the Mapuce’s internal process of organisation. This split has made it hard to understand the level of unity among Mapuce that stands behind the relations with the workers, and have also contributed to the difficulty of separating initiatives being carried out by the Confederation from initiatives carried out by only the Newen Mapu Community. Unfortunately I depended on secondary information about the experience in Kalfukura, a further study could bring more light to the relations in this community.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Interview with Biget, my italics

<sup>128</sup> Godoy in local radio 27/3/2004

<sup>129</sup> Interview with Veronika and personal communication

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Biget, Kiko and Veronika

## Holism

*"Mapuce means 'people of the land' and as such we see our origin and identity. Ixofijmogen is the Mapuce concept of 'biodiversity'. All those lives are forces, are the newen that live together harmonically and interdependently in the world and where the che-person is one newen more, that only has the responsibility to secure the equilibrium of all those lifes."*<sup>131</sup>

*"The land doesn't divide nor is it commercialised, we are the land"*<sup>132</sup>

The Mapuce is a people with a holistic view on life. Cuadra concludes that their logic "stands far from the logic that promotes dual oppositions or dichotomies".<sup>133</sup> The different cultural interpretations create a dynamic in formal attempts to help the Mapuce. For example in the case of the University of Comahue and the organisations of Human Rights that want to help the Mapuce by doing a study on the environmental impact, they are though, not likely to be able to integrate the Mapuce's cultural interpretation of the area. Where we see a quarry full of profitable clay, the Mapuce saw (because the spot has now changed) a Newen, a force, a force that was giving life. Right where the extractions began was the area where the animals reproduced and so it was an area where the Mapuce would meet and perform ceremonies. This area had hence a value that cannot be measured in terms of environmental physical change, neither economical loss due to the transformation since the change concerns the way in which people manifested, celebrated and reproduced life.<sup>134</sup> This made the Province's interventions - in form of Zanón's extractions - a direct aggressive action against the Mapuce, since they were not respected at all. The Mapuce's way of relating to the area was not considered and what today is left is a possible environmental debt and economical debt for the decreased survival possibilities, as we can see in the suggestions from the Proyecto Especial.<sup>135</sup>

## The Mapuces Cosmic vision

I will not try to give a complete coverage of the Mapuce's cosmic vision, for a more profound discussion see Cuadra<sup>136</sup>, rather I will try to give some general guidance that can help the

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<sup>131</sup> C.O.M. Folder *Voz Mapuce para un mundo Intercultural*, my italics

<sup>132</sup> Mapuce interviewed in Hernandez 2003:203, my italics

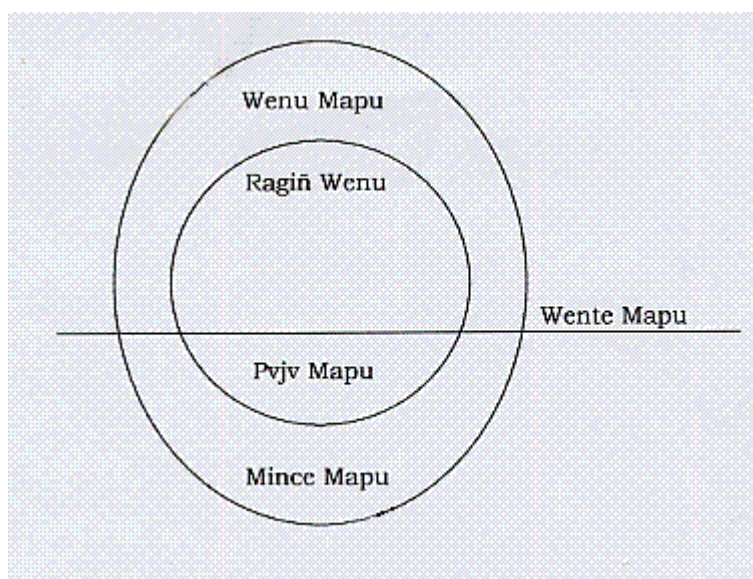
<sup>133</sup> Cuadra 2001:115

<sup>134</sup> Interview with Veronika

<sup>135</sup> Proyecto Especial 260

<sup>136</sup> Cuadra 2001:89

reader to understand the fundamentals of the Mapuce view on life, as I understood it when it was presented to me in Neuquén.<sup>137</sup>



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The Mapuce have divided the cosmos into two spheres, both divided in the middle with a limit called Wente Mapu, what we call “earth”, where life is manifested, where we live, “space of the Mapu [cosmos] where we recreate our culture, our knowledge, our principles and values.”<sup>139</sup>

The space directly above the Wente Mapu is called Ragiñ Wenu Mapu, and here is where the climatic and seasonal changes are coordinated, and “it is here where the communication, petition, demand of each philosophical authority Mapuce reaches, in every act, individual or communitarian.”<sup>140</sup>

In the highest sphere, Wenu Mapu, we find “multiple newens – forces – powers that conform astro-generators of life and energies for the philosophical-cultural Mapuce development.” Pvjv Mapu, the region under the Wente Mapu is where the body will be kept and its forces will return to this part from where it came when the person was born. This is the sphere from

<sup>137</sup> Based on the work made in Newen Mapu (Community in the city of Neuquén) for the presentation of the Mapuce Cosmvision for the co-operate managing of the National Park of Lanin.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. Today the spelling of Mapuce names have gone threw a process of “spanishalisation” where the registrators chose to write the Mapuce names as had they been Spanish. This shows the process of subordinating the Mapuce even in the way that they were not allowed their own names.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

which the forces that goes into a newborn body will be determined. The Mapuce last name's come from where the person was born, which could be the same name as the community.<sup>141</sup>

In the lowest region, Mince mapu, we find the forces of elements like Water, and resources like gold, iron and oil etc. It is in this region that the harmonic interaction of the diversity of forces take place, that speak of the land, this interaction is called IXO FIJ MOGEN meaning biodiversity or environment.<sup>142</sup>

Human beings are only one voice in the world but we have a special role, the role of listener in order to keep the forces in balance. There exist one great evil force and one great good force, both generate forces that flow around and can be identified. Traditionally it is the Maci that can interpret the forces, making this person a central figure in the community, but today it seems that there exists very few Macis in Argentina.<sup>143</sup> Yet the Mapuce identify a great imbalance in the IXO FIJ MOGEN, mankind is overexploiting resources, forces, without considering the role of respecting all living, and what they see as living is also the mountains, water, elements that we tend to simplify into objects. We are filled with the evil forces, making us destroy our surroundings, slowly exterminating the land and the air until we terminate ourselves. And we are too filled up with listening to these bad forces instead of listening to the good forces and to try to correct the imbalance. Respecting life should instead consist of listening to all living creatures, asking permission when using other forces and if possible give something back, positioning us as one of all living with the responsibility of balancing the forces for a fulfilment of IXO FIJ MOGEN, biodiversity.<sup>144</sup>

## A Mapuce collection

*“Through its possibilities as identity shapers symbols ought to be one aspect among others in the steps for a sustainable physical structure in cities development.”<sup>145</sup>*

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> I was told this was due to a strategy of the Argentine liberations army that in their conquest of subjugate the Mapuce deliberately aimed for the Macis.

<sup>144</sup> The Mapuce I talk to appeared uniform in their interpretation of the balance.

<sup>145</sup> Lindén 2001:87, my italics

The help that the workers had from the Mapuce was much appreciated and when the workers found themselves in need of making new collections they turned to the Mapuce, asking them whether it would be possible to make a Mapuce collection. These relations take place in Neuquén, where much of the Mapuce Confederations administration is centred. The decision was taken fast, leaving many questions like the legal rights to the design left to solve, but it was important to get the collection in production. The reason why the workers had to produce a new line was that they wanted to produce something that would be appreciated by the community - to gain support for the mobilisations against the Province's decision to evacuate them from the factory.<sup>146</sup>

The Mapuce collection shows the symbols of the Mapuce cosmic vision. Together with the workers the Mapuce designed the collection so that the symbols would be correct and adjusted only to the ceramic's special qualities. When I spoke to Awkan, one of the Mapuce working in the factory he said that "all Mapuces are very proud of the Mapuce collection"<sup>147</sup>, which shows that the work between the Mapuce and the workers turned out to be successful. Veronica also told me that it is a unique situation where an institution like the ceramists (meaning also the company they today run) take the symbols - "symbols that to us are consciousness"<sup>148</sup> - of an aboriginal people and turn it into something of their appreciation, giving much importance to the Mapuce, showing what a large political impact on peoples' consciousness the Mapuce have in Neuquén.

The collection also turned out to be economically profitable, which was a bonus for the workers. As we shall see in the next chapter the workers have managed to defend themselves from four orders of evacuation, every time with help from the local communities. And in a way to repay the help they decided to employ some people from each sector of the social movement. In this way two Mapuces could start to work in the factory during 2003. The decision of who should have the job was taken in the Ruka<sup>149</sup> after discussing who had the most need of the job.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Interviews with Kiko and Veronika

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Awkan

<sup>148</sup> Interview with Veronika

<sup>149</sup> The Ruka is the main gathering point of a community, and in Neuquén the Mapuce have struggled to get a piece of land where they in the 1980's constructed their first Ruka. They felt a need of having a place to accommodate Mapuces that came to Neuquén for visiting the hospital etc and who often found themselves without money to pay for hostel. In 1987 with the money from an activist that had been detained – disappeared



Some of the Mapuces interpret the Mapuce collection as if the ceramics now come to communicate a respect for the land. Earlier the ceramics ceased to be part of the Mapuce culture when the clay was lifted up from the quarry and its force was lost when it became part of the ceramics production. When the clay left the community it ceased to be within the respect that the Mapuce try to have for the land, ceased to be within the respect because those who made use of the clay showed no respect for the Mapuce or the land where they took it from. Now the product, the ceramic, is loaded with force, a representation of the Mapuce cosmic vision, and bearing the name of their lonkos it also becomes a representation of their culture's struggle and way of organising life. Whether this image is shared by the workers, which I to some extent did find proof of, or the local community could be an interesting study but what I find most important is the possibility of this interpretation that today exist as a result of the solidarity between the two groups.<sup>151</sup>

### **C.O.M. – Coordinadora de Organizaciones Mapuce en Neuquén**

“The COM is the expression of the Original Nation Mapuce of Neuquén that affirms its existence like Original Nation more than limited to the camp or city. Like a concrete support to the construction of a new society that grows and improve confirming the diverse culture it includes.”<sup>152</sup>

With the coordinator of Mapuce organisations in Neuquén (region) the Mapuce today develop their own propositions; they unite over the camp/city borders trying to regain their rights. They have a formalised “generator of norms and laws: Meli Wixan Mapu, Mapuce Parliament.”

The Coordinator consists of three organisations; “Centro de Educación Mapuce” which has the responsibility of carrying out the education in the “Ruka Newen Mapu”, “Confederación Mapuce Neuquina” which represents the 50 Mapuce communities in the province electing their Head Commission every two years, “Organización Mapuce Newen Mapu” the community in Neuquén (city) that promote the defence and respect of the Mapuce Identity and their rights.<sup>153</sup>

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in Cipoletti in 1977 17 year old Leticia Veraldi - whose dream had been to work with the Mapuce in the Andes, they reconstructed the Ruka into a larger building. This is another sign of the good relations between Mapuces and non-Mapuces in the social movement. “This Ruka is a homage to all the disappeared by the dictatorship”. Revista N. 3 de Kona Mapuce de la C.O.M. – Neuquen – Puel Mapu – Año 2003

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Awkan

<sup>151</sup> Interviews with Veronika, Catrupan, Vasco, Awkan

<sup>152</sup> C.O.M. folder

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

The relations between old and new generations are central in the Mapuce culture and they have a couple of myths that foretell the need of maintaining knowledge, reproducing the culture.<sup>154</sup> One of the biggest problems for the Mapuce has been the internalising of their marginalised position; this is shown in many ways but for example by parents who do not encourage their children to speak Mapundungun. It is also shown by parents who give their children Spanish names that do not tell them about their history who do not encourage them to wear traditional clothing, making an effort to erase the traces of otherness. Being other (than Argentinean) was not either a position allowed by the constitution where they came to be seen as equal to everybody else, even if this was not practiced and meant that they could not expect any respect for their own culture. As a reaction to this exclusion it has been important to get schools to integrate the Mapuce culture in its curriculum, making Mapundungun available as well as letting the Mapuce students celebrate their own holidays, a project that is possible since the students themselves desire this freedom and carry out much of the promotional work themselves. In Neuquén I saw students wearing traditional Mapuce clothes whenever they felt like and using their baggy jeans whenever they felt like. Much of the work of strengthening the culture, making it something positive, something to be proud of, something that eventually gives you a personal position, a meaningful context, is carried out in the Ruka. One young Mapuce guy told me that if he would not have been so much in the Ruka he would have played more soccer, indicating that this education is not carried out without any friction, which brings up the problem I think most parents are confronted with – to what extent let the child decide for itself? His conviction also shows the difficult position he feels he is in, between tradition and modernity, where his parents are trying to make something good of what is rejected by modernity. There is no clash however between soccer itself and the Mapuce culture, which could be proved by the wish to play a match against the workers of Zanon, the clash is rather with the dominant culture, modernity, which has a strong attraction on the individuals.<sup>155</sup>

The parents have provided their children with a very strong identity; they spend much time together with their Mapuce friends since many families share responsibility of the Ruka. I was

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<sup>154</sup> Like the myth about Xeg-Xeg and Kay-Kay.

<sup>155</sup> My own observations and reflections

very impressed by the way they behaved, always helping each other out, and their knowledge and pride about their culture.<sup>156</sup>

## Legislature

The Mapuce way of interpreting the area where they live is not defended in the constitution, land is resources not forces. But internationally there exists some declarations that if they were implemented could have positive effects for the Mapuce in their struggles for recognition. I will only shortly present two important declarations that came to be mentioned during my stay. In the work on the UN's universal declaration on human rights there exists a not yet approved part that would definitely strengthen indigenous people.

- 1 Right to existence [...]
- 2 Right to political self-determination [...]
- 3 Right to the environment[...], which means, the right to exploit for themselves their own natural resources
- 4 Right to defend themselves against the plundering of work [...] semi-salaries, source of economic exploitation [...]
- 5 Right to a considerate living, in parity with social security, in respect of their culture, values and beliefs. [...]
- 6 Right to an autonomous education [...] to an autonomous health system [...] and above all, the possibility to freely manifest their culture [...]<sup>157</sup>

These rights are important since the Mapuce have been persecuted because of their difference, for being indigenous. But as long as this declaration is not passed the best legal defence is from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and its C169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 1989, where one for example finds;

### Article 2

1. Governments shall have the responsibility for developing, with the participation of the people concerned, co-ordinated and systematic action to protect the rights of these people and to guarantee respect for their integrity.
2. Such action shall include measures for:
  - (a) ensuring that members of these peoples benefit on an equal footing from the rights and opportunities which national laws and regulations grant to other members of the population;

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<sup>156</sup> My own observations and reflections

<sup>157</sup> Hernandez 2003:199 I have left out the number of the declarations.

(b) promoting the full realisation of the social, economic and cultural rights of these peoples with respect for their social and cultural identity, their customs and traditions and their institutions;

(c) assisting the members of the peoples concerned to eliminate socio-economic gaps that may exist between indigenous and other members of the national community, in a manner compatible with their aspirations and ways of life.<sup>158</sup>

The Mapuce use the ILO convention because it could formally give them the right to the lands where they historically and still live. The right to be in these areas as people, nation, community is the fundamental demand on which other demands rests, which Iris tells us,

in general the strongest demand is the territorial demand – not only for the Mapuce but for all original people here in Argentina, I dare say because I know other original people as well. Ultimately in the last years there has been a certain progress in recognizing the territorial spaces, in beginning to mark and also giving some kind of title in favour of the communities, there's more, there does not exist in the right that norms the Argentine society a communitarian right, the original people have installed it. Well this is our space and from there comes the demand of making use of this territorial space and to have participation in the planning that the government makes – of how to develop the regions, the places – which does not exist, there is no planning where the State have the communities in mind. The government until today has only related to the communities through a social secretary, assistance in coupons, in food, in tin plate, in fuel nothing else. Therefore we demand together with the territorial demand is the participation, we do not want to continue being poor because we continue being poor as long as someone else owns our wealth. We want to participate in order to develop, which is the other demand, since the government's politics have not helped, they've made the communities pastoralists in inhospitable places.”<sup>159</sup>

Iris emphasizes the territorial demand, and from this demand she bases the other demands. She also tells us that the original people have worked for an implementation of a new law that recognizes a communitarian way of owning land. Article 2 from the ILO convention would, if implemented, give the Mapuce another legal standing in conflicts like the Benetton case and Loma de la Lata, since they would be recognised.

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<sup>158</sup> Reachable via the ILO homepage <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/iloquery.htm>

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Iris

## Being Mapuce

Before visiting the Mapuce in Neuquén people in Buenos Aires would tell me things like “that they do not like us, we are winka to them”<sup>160</sup>. The relation between the winka and the Mapuce has not been of the most friendly and peaceful kind. Today when the Mapuce are neglected the right to be recognised as a people they have – through a process of strengthening and deliberate struggle – constructed their own powerful perception of society. Even if I never fully understood the term winka and whether or not I could be included, or if it was only a historical term, I came to be allowed to be part of a ceremony that made a big impression on me:

One of the kona<sup>161</sup> was about to leave for Buenos Aires for studies in Anthropology. She had made her choice of studies thinking about what could be of benefit for the Mapuce struggle. Her way of thinking was not unique, all the kona I spoke to had chosen something that they thought would benefit their struggle, and so they brought with them their own struggle into their studies. The konas had decided to study Anthropology (making them able to present their own culture rather than let it be presented by someone not part of it), Law (in order to defend the Mapuce in the many processes that their struggles generated and to defend the Mapuce in this struggle) or to become a Park Ranger (to be able to work in the National Parks where some Mapuce communities are situated, to take the position of the formal institution but in the benefit for the Mapuce).<sup>162</sup>

The Newen Mapu community organized a farewell party to the kona, she would be the first of this generation of konas that would leave Neuquén for her studies<sup>163</sup>. All her friends had made gifts, home made knitwear, letters expressing her value for them, expressing her role and how she would be fulfilling this. At this party we first ate and then every Mapuce present (as well as some non-Mapuce friends to the kona, I did not have to speak and was instead given the role of photographer) said something to her as the others listened. There were four generations present and they let the elders speak first, most spoke in Castellano but some also used

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<sup>160</sup> This could also have a political dimension based on the acknowledgement of some political parties of a limit for mutual understanding, subordinating the Mapuce, giving another factor for the Mapuce internalized subordination.

<sup>161</sup> Young Mapuce (13-19), older than the pici-kona with some further responsibilities, my own interpretation.

<sup>162</sup> My own observations

<sup>163</sup> She returned after 4 weeks, discontent of the lonesome living in the capital. She is today living in San Martin de los Andes helping out in the Kuruwinka community. Personal communication.

Mapudungun. During the evening the Marici Weu Marici Weu<sup>164</sup> was shouted which to me seemed an identity strengthening act.

I never came to visit a meeting where decisions were taken but with this evening in mind I got a picture of what Veronica told me in an interview, “we try to focus on every individual, that all men and women, young and old, are equally important” a process that is not carried out easily, “it *costs* but that’s the way we’re going”.<sup>165</sup>

The time I shared with the Mapuce in Neuquén left me with pictures of active people. They we’re part of the 24<sup>th</sup> of March demonstrations (the day when the junta seized power in 1976), the Kona began to work with a radio show; they already had a magazine which was sold in some shops in town. They told me about some of the actions they had made earlier, including throwing light bulbs filled with black colours against Repsol, an oil company that has contaminated the land in Pulmari. In the third edition of the Konas magazine one can read about how they express solidarity with the people of Iraq, especially

the Kurds in the north and the Shiits in the south [...] that like ourselves have been put within the limits of a State with their territory reduced to small parcels and in absolute poverty”. Showing how they identify and take position against the imperialist states, that in their own words “are the responsible of the worldwide crisis and which consequences that comes with the politics of creating a hegemonic power and controlling its antonym the cultural diversity.”<sup>166</sup>

Perhaps as a consequence to the big meeting in 1992 the Newen Mapu community started to organize camps with the konas. They saw a need of putting into practice their education, as a way to strengthen their identity. Living in the city makes it hard to practice their knowledge and use their practices since it is a total manifestation of the other. One of the aims with these camps is to develop relations to the specific community they visit and to support the knowledge that each person has, developing their own Mapuce consciousness, a consciousness created in direct relation to the environment and the people in this environment.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Could also have a more contextualised meaning “ten times defending the cultural diversity – ten times the aboriginal peoples resists” see Revista N° 3 de Kona Mapuce de la C.O.M. – Neuquén – Puelmapu – Año 2003.

<sup>165</sup> Interview with Veronika

<sup>166</sup> Revista N° 3 de Kona Mapuce de la C.O.M. – Neuquén – Puelmapu – Año 2003

<sup>167</sup> Revista N° 3 de Kona Mapuce de la C.O.M. – Neuquén – Puelmapu – Año 2003

As a way to decide how this consciousness should develop and determine the processes it should go through they have developed their own way of working with Mapuces who commit a crime. In the C.O.M.'s folder they present their view on how legal processes within their communities should be carried out,

[i]t is inappropriate for a judge to determine what is just in a society like ours. The concepts of justice and rights in the Mapuce society respond to a cosmic vision totally different to the institutional winka, today questioned by the same Argentine society. This was understood by the Superior Tribunal of Justice in Neuquén [...] who in the Article 40 expressed: 'When it concerns crimes that affect own juridical goods of a Mapuce community or personal goods, and both the offender and the victim or in the case of family members, accept the mode that the community has decided [...] it is hereby declared that the penal is extinct.'<sup>168</sup>

In relation to this recognition I was told about a case where one young male had hurt another young male with a knife. The boy was sentenced to spend some weeks in prison but the community decided to have their own investigation and penal. They found out that the fight between the two had started because of a family dispute that goes back generations. Instead of separating the condemned they decided that the two families should be "sentenced" to a joint project, bringing them together to resolve the dispute.<sup>169</sup>

## **The Kuruwinka Community**

"The intercultural model which is based on the recognition of the cultural diversity in a relation of mutual respect, points at the horizontalisation in the taking of decisions where it is fundamental to preserve the cultural identities - ethnic, linguistic, religious and philosophical - of the participators in the process, even if its planted in context of conflict and complex for historical, economical, social and political reasons."<sup>170</sup>

I will shortly describe the co-management that the Mapuce have succeeded to win with the National Park of Lanin.

The Mapuce in the Kuruwinka community have a history that goes back long before the forming of the Argentine State. But as a consequence to the States forming it later decided to

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<sup>168</sup> C.O.M. folder

<sup>169</sup> Observations in the Kuruwinka community

<sup>170</sup> Rio Negro online 010603

protect the area where the Kuruwinka community lives as part of the National Park of Lanin. The creation of the National Park meant that nothing should be taken from the Park without permission from the Park Rangers. This limited the ability of the Mapuce to continue their way of life, making them intruders in the Park since they lived by using these resources. In the Province's and Nation's decision to protect the environment, they forgot the Mapuce, a case similar to the Van Gujjars<sup>171</sup> in the Himalayan region in northern India.<sup>172</sup>

When I came to San Martin de los Andes I could see the co-management that today is the form in which the Mapuce and the Park Rangers carry out the protection of the Park's area. In order to get to this position of equal managing of the area, the Mapuce had occupied the Rangers building in San Martin de los Andes, with the request to begin the co-management, their own answer to the problems.<sup>173</sup>

This strategy of occupying has been used by the Mapuce community in another case when they closed the road that leads up the mountain right through their community during the high-season. During winter the mountain, Chapelco, is a popular ski resort, and there are some hotels at the top. These hotels have let their waste water flow right out into the little river that further down runs through the community, contaminating it to the degree that it can no longer serve as water source for the people. The people found out about this after guessing some relation between the stomach-aches that many suffered from. One day they decided to follow the river and found a pipe that was pouring the waste water right to the river. In order to make opinion against the activities on the top of the Chapelco the community blocked the only road leading to it. They told the people about the situation and many understood, although many were angry about losing a day of skiing, which they came to claim refund for from their organizers.<sup>174</sup> Today it has been decided to study the environmental impact of the ski resort, recognizing the Mapuce as legitimate parts in the co-management of the area. Zulema Semorile has attracted attention to the question of co-management through her work at the University, opening the possibility for more projects of the same kind, focusing on the benefits of the Mapuce cosmic vision, as an alternative to today's use of resources.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Gooch, Pernille 1998 *Community Management Plan: The Van Gujjars and the Rajaji National Park* in State Society and the Environment in South Asia (ed. Stig Toft Madsen). London: Curzon Press.

<sup>172</sup> Interview with Iris

<sup>173</sup> Talks with Roberto Ñancucheo

<sup>174</sup> *Rio Negro* 27/7/2003

<sup>175</sup> Semorile 2004, see also *Rio Negro* online 010603



## Horizontal practice

Even if the Mapuce do have positions that correspond to different roles, I would say that the practices that come from these positions is more important than the actual position. In both my interviews with the *werkens* I was given interesting responses to questions concerning the equality between men and women. The way the Mapuce relate to this subject is by tying it to the invasion of the *winkas*. Today the Mapuce are too “machista” (or have adapted to an unequal view on man and woman), but this, they claim, did not exist before the invasion. The machismo that today exists among the Mapuce, in their eyes it is part of the influence of the Argentine society. And their internalisation of it is a result of their marginalised position that made them dependent on leaving their own community and to try to adapt to the Argentine society. A Mapuce describes this to Hernández like this,

Before the Spanish arrived we had a horizontal type of organisation, where each community defined its own dynamics, its own way of administrating its territory and its own form of interrelationship with other territorial identities [...] that’s what we want to reconstruct.<sup>176</sup>

Scientists like Ricardo Torres continue the emphasis on this historical difference “[t]he Mapuches, in history, respected each other like legitimate others”.<sup>177</sup>

By relating the bad influence to the impact of the invasion they manage to hold their own cultural heritage intact. With focusing on the guidance that their cosmic vision provides, they try to listen to everybody in a pursuit to reconstruct their autonomy. The process of “unlearning” the practices that have come with the modern state and capitalism, and these structures’ ways of representing power - Male/not Indian - is indeed a great task. This difficulty can be shown by the response I got from Veronica in Neuquén “there’s no bigger machista than a Mapuce woman”.<sup>178</sup> To re-learn the practices, which they see as both a cultural heritage and as important for a fair society, is included in the way they approach the demand of influence over territory. They want a space both for practicing their culture but also for administrating the land with respect. This approach however, which to us correspond both to gender issues as well as cultural and power issues, is not in every Mapuce’s consciousness. The dynamic views on Mapuce identity is a big internal struggle that the Mapuce in Neuquén have to deal with. They will have to deal with questions like; how to get

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<sup>176</sup> Hernandez 2003:50

<sup>177</sup> Ricardo Torres 1995 *El Palin – Una cosmovisión Trascendente* Ediciones Universidad de la frontera Temuco, Chile

<sup>178</sup> Interview with Veronika

an effected community to react against the threats from multinational corporations backed by State politics, and how to get them to understand the importance of equality between woman and man, between young and old in order to not reproduce the hierarchical culture of their oppressors.<sup>179</sup>

The Mapuce emancipatory struggle has many similarities to ours, they have to struggle against, in Torres words, “the influence of the grand society, [which] obliged them to value that external culture and not appreciate their own”,<sup>180</sup> but with the big difference that we do not have a culture of our own except that mayor one imposed on us.

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<sup>179</sup> My own analysis, see also Cuadra 2001:210 for a orientation on different standpoints within the Mapuce community.

<sup>180</sup> Torres 1995:13

## From Zanón Ceramica S.A. to Zanón belongs to the People

As Aiziczon and Favaro show (chapter two), Neuquén's regional government has had expansionist developmental politics. In the 1970's the region received help from the UN in form of a mapping of possible resources for development. They found the rich clay and their report came to lay a fundament for the Ceramic factories that one today finds in Neuquén, one being Ceramica Zanón S.A. This factory received much economical help, subsidies and loans for investment and expansion. In 1993 the factory was visited by President Carlos Menem, showing what close relations Luigi Zanón – the former owner of the factory - could count on when it came to his industrial projects. The president came to the opening of a completely new line of production, the porcelain line. This line came to be one of the cornerstones for the factories' exports and made Zanón one of the most productive factories of its kind in Latin America. The porcelain was of European top quality, the factory sent engineers to visits in Europe to study the process in order to be able to copy it in Neuquén.<sup>181</sup>

Today the workers use the Governments aid as an argument for expropriation of the factory. They mean that since the factory received so much help from the province, and since they used the regions resources in their production the factory should be in the hands of the region so that its production could also benefit the region. The workers make their stands from an illegal possession of the factory. Their occupation of the factory is a response to Luigi Zanón's claim that the factory was not profitable in 2001.<sup>182</sup>

By not maintaining the machines, not filling stocks and giving false information on the volumes produced Luigi Zanón tried to paint a picture of crisis. When he ordered a lock-out of the workers the workers had already found themselves acting through their newly won union. They had already had their first successful strike, which made them gain confidence in their own organisation, and through their engagement they had made contact as workers of Zanón with the social movement of Neuquén<sup>183</sup> mobilising support for their situation of false health care and salaries not paid.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Aiziczon 2004:121

<sup>182</sup> The workers appeared uniform in their interpretation of what has happened. See also Magnani 2003:136f

<sup>183</sup> In the case of the workers the social movement has its geographical support in the city of Neuquén as well as in Centenario, a smaller town just as close to the factory as Neuquén where many of the workers live.

<sup>184</sup> See further down, the part on Environment, health and security. See also Magnani 2003:136

## **Instead of lock-out – occupation of the factory**

Instead of accepting the lock-out the workers decided to question it in court. It is hard to understand why they won, Magnani describes it as a unique ruling of its kind<sup>185</sup>, but the court decided that they were allowed to enter the factory and sell what was left in stock. During the three months between the questioning of the lock-out until they started the production again the workers camped outside the factory. They were afraid that Luigi Zanón would take away the machines and try to sell them, which would have made it impossible for them to go back. Throughout the first weeks the workers stayed in the factory and they took turns guarding the factory from any attempts to hinder them. During this time they did not receive any salary, but they manage to survive with help from the local communities. Many people came to the factory to leave a contribution and the workers and their families handed out flyers for food. For each flyer they got something in return to eat. Among the workers who took up the struggle the stories from this time is told with much emotions, it was something completely new to them, both fighting for their rights and having to depend on others for the survival of their families.<sup>186</sup>

Many of the workers had had good salaries before the economic crisis and since the dollar was one to one with the peso; some workers earned more than 1000 USD a month, a privileged salary in Argentina at the time. When the good times changed the workers who earlier did not understand “why people cut the road, why they protested, we had everything, we were such a rich country”,<sup>187</sup> now found themselves on the same streets, sharing the same public demands.

Surviving day to day, depending on other people’s help, not knowing what would happen, not everybody stayed to fight. Some workers had already chosen the side of the “Montes”<sup>188</sup> and would later try to harass the workers when they were inside the factory, making former colleagues stand on each side of the gates. At these confrontations the workers would fire slingshots loaded with stones from the atomizers against each other.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Magnani 2003:138

<sup>186</sup> Interview with Vasco and observed many times during my field work

<sup>187</sup> Interview with Vasco

<sup>188</sup> After the leader of the Union (Jorge Montes) that was loyal to Luigi Zanón.

<sup>189</sup> The atomizers are the machines that work the crude clay so that it will have the right size for its further processing. In the machines stones tear the clay apart and these stones end up white and circled. These stones are today a symbol of the workers struggle with much value among their supporters. I was given two as a gift and Naomi Klein choose to focus on the workers militancy filming a reconstruction of sling shooting for her documentary. See also *Rio Negro* 8/10/2002

Friendships were tested, some held, others did not. For the families the conflict was also a tough test. What in many cases was a family with a male income bringer was of course much affected when one income was lost; some workers went through divorces as a consequence of staying all the time at the factory. The workers received help from psychologists and social workers who could document the workers feelings of stress, fears, pains and anguish.<sup>190</sup> The only female worker I interviewed told me she “had a hard time because women are not supposed to be running on the streets” but her family accepted it “when they understood I had no other choice”. During the whole time she felt much support from her colleagues but her responsibilities where, as she felt, different from the males.<sup>191</sup>

The three months outside the factory changed the workers’ view completely but it was also a time of many difficulties. All in all, the struggle for their workplace came to generate new experiences, new ways of interpreting your life, in Rosas words: “It made you open your eyes, it was not easy”.<sup>192</sup> The conflict put them in new situations where they formed new bonds of support. When the orders for evacuating the factory came (there had been various attempts), many people from Neuquén and Centenario gathered in front of the factory to defend it from any attempts from the police to follow their orders. Forming chains of bodies and people armed with slingshots they managed to create a situation where the governor Jorge Sobisch decided not to have the police threatening the lives of the gathered.<sup>193</sup>

This support has not been forgotten, it is manifested in the workers demand, and in the same time slogan, “Zanón es del Pueblo!” (Zanón belongs to the People, meaning the people of the region).

### **Zanón es del Pueblo!**

The workers have changed the factory’s big sign outside the factory, now it says “Zanón under workers control” and “Zanón belongs to the people!”. Both these “slogans” reflect the political vision that leads the new union. But before I present the union more closely I would

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<sup>190</sup> Magnani 2003:151

<sup>191</sup> Interview with Rosa, one of the 30 women that worked inside Zanón when I was there, of a total of almost 300 workers

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> *Rio Negro* 9/4/2003

like to present the results from my interviews concerning their slogan/demand “Zanón belongs to the people!” in order to give a better understanding of the ideas that today have come to symbolize the example the workers are setting.

I distinguished, together with the workers, three main reasons behind the argumentation that “Zanón belongs to the people!”;

1. Because the people defends it. Without the help from the local communities in Neuquén and Centenario the workers would never had survived nor had they been able to defend the occupation of the factory, so as much as it is the workers’ effort that they today produce it is the people’s effort. Many people know about the occupation which shows that it has spread to a broad public, a supportive public as I many times experienced and as is showed by the manifestations against the closing of the factory.
2. Because the people paid for it. Luigi Zanón managed to receive much financial support from the Province. These investments and subsidies were financed by public resources and peoples tax money and therefore the people are the legitimate owners of the factory. Since the factory still has much loans not repaid the people are the ones who legitimately could claim the factory.
3. Because the workers of Zanón wants it to be for the people. As seen in the second reason, the workers chose to identify the people as the legitimate owners rather than financial institutions or letting Luigi Zanón sell what is left (or now starting it again since the factory is much better known than earlier). This view is based on the political vision that the workers have developed – the factory should be nationalised (provincialised) in order to have the gains of the factory stay in the province. Making the factory a public resource (by making it provincially owned) they also want to keep the public informed about what is happening, how much they are producing; making the factory’s processes something of general concern.<sup>194</sup>

The view that the resources that made the factory possible was public resources - making it also possible to incorporate into public ownership – is, as can be seen in the amounts of loans and subsidies received, not only an ideological construction. Real flows of money, electricity, gas and clay made Zanón into a factory that “[i]n 1998 exported for a value of 10 million USD holding 500 people”.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> The workers appeared uniform in their view on this matter.

<sup>195</sup> Magnani 2003:135

This way of interpreting the situation is not clearly defended in the constitution, and definitely not part of its practice. The view has much to do with the new leadership of the Union that makes a turning point in the workers way of relating to themselves and to the rest of society.

### **Organising a new Union leadership**

The new leadership of the ceramics union consisted of people that have a wide political background but the political party with most influence in this case is PTS (Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo / Workers Party for Socialism). This relation is obvious in the way that the workers often organize actions together with PTS, such as concerts or workshops. Some of the people that work in Zanón did also candidate for PTS in local elections. The workers' lawyer is also affiliated with PTS and PTS is important for understanding why the workers decided to occupy their factory, since it is an idea that rests on the ideology of PTS – Marxism.<sup>196</sup>

Through this new leadership of the union that won the internal elections in 1998, material from PTS started to circulate in the factory and this had an impact on the workers' discourse, which Aiziczon trace in the workers vocabulary, showing how the workers slowly got contact with other political possibilities. Other possibilities because PTS is a small, Trotskyist party in opposition to the Peronism that has been Argentina's main leftist party/ideology, and they interpret worker managed factories as democratic and just. PTS also stands in opposition to what they call bureaucratic organisation, which in the case of the workers of Zanón was the practice of the former union leadership.<sup>197</sup>

How the workers managed to form an oppositional list for the internal elections is in itself an interesting story that could tell us a lot about the ambient in which the first steps were taken. Not only were many workers not accustomed to protesting, they had had very little contact within the factory which was partly due to a strategy in the company's management. I will only briefly present the strategy and some key actions that made a big difference for the workers and one should bear in mind that these actions happened during a long process where the mobilisations in the Neuquén region as well as in the rest of the country influenced the

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<sup>196</sup> Aiziczon 2004:124 see also [www.pts.org.ar](http://www.pts.org.ar)

<sup>197</sup> Aiziczon 2004:110, 124, 148

process. The development of the workers' actions went in small steps and for a more profound analysis and a broader presentation of the process I recommend a reading of Aiziczon's work.

The first electoral success that the new leadership won was the internal commission (in 1998) – in 2000 they would even manage to win the SOECN (the union that organises the four ceramic factories in the Neuquén region). Since it was almost impossible to talk to each other in the factory the people who had the ambition to organize the workers had started to organize barbeques and a soccer tournament where all the sections would play against each other. These spaces were important because here they could meet and talk for the first time to each other.<sup>198</sup>

In the region many had started to mobilize and demonstrations and roadblockings happened more often, and the company was alerted against any signs of movement in the union. The internal commission as well as the SOECN commission was at the time lead by "Montes", considered loyal to the company rather than to the workers. In 1996 when another list was presented for the internal election the people on the list were fired, a clear signal of both the factory's strategy as well as for the unions passivity since they did not try to help them showing what kind of organisational situation the workers were in. The strategy of exclusion was used again in 2000 before the election of the SOECN commission. The electoral meeting had been decided to take place in Zapala at 1pm on a Saturday. This was the "loyalists'" way of hindering others from participating (the workers does not finish work in Saturdays before 2pm but the loyalist had already granted their own participation by negotiating with the employer).<sup>199</sup>

In Zanón you were not allowed to drink Maté. The Maté is one of the most important social habits in Argentina. It can be compared to our own drinking of coffee but the Argentineans (as well as Uruguayans etc) drink Maté during the whole day and for helping to stay awake. Whenever you are invited to someone the Maté will be offered and you will drink from the same straw as everybody else, making you know that you are accepted. Prohibiting the Maté in the factory can be seen as a way of interfering with the workers' social contact. The

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<sup>198</sup> Aiziczon 2004:115

<sup>199</sup> Aiziczon 2004, Magnani 2003



workers had to sneak away to drink Maté, and it was especially needed for those who worked on the night shift.<sup>200</sup>

When the porcelain line had been erected the company had hired mostly young people and offered them unstable contracts, and they also let the new ones know that they should not go to the union but to the administration if they had any problems. A division between this new line and the others was then created. The porcelain line is also situated right under a large window for supervising the production, every section also had a foreman that oversaw the work, these factors add up to a high level of stress that during the years caused many accidents. At the same time, and this is during the later half of the 1990's, the different shifts were encouraged to compete against each other in raising production volumes, making friendships over shift limits hard to develop. In Aiziczon as well as in the interview with Godoy referred to in *the Church*, Godoy speaks about how they passed notes between each other as the only way to communicate.<sup>201</sup>

The football tournament was a success and this brought the workers together and laid the fundament to the victory in the 1998 elections for the internal commission. Those who organized the tournament formed the brown list<sup>202</sup> that went to elections on a completely new way of leading the union. They wanted assemblies where the workers would have one vote each, formulated and decided over the mandate for their representatives. This strategy, they hoped, would differ from the bureaucratic unions since it would not allow negotiations “over the heads” of the workers. Along with these changes they demanded equal pay for equal work and that all the workers with temporary contracts would be given permanent employment.<sup>203</sup>

Around the people who took the initiative a new ambient would spread; they would seek up workers and talk to them about the necessities and possible strategies, trying to encourage their colleagues to take interest in the union. The use of assemblies is a strategy that rests on the active participation of the workers and their expression of their thoughts. The new leadership tried to gain the workers confidence by meeting them and asking them about their opinion, which gave results as Keller – who is one of the eldest in the factory and even if he is

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<sup>200</sup> Interview with Vasco but this is also part of the workers narrative.

<sup>201</sup> Aiziczon 2004:112

<sup>202</sup> Brown is considered the colour of the ceramist workers, from the colour of their shirts.

<sup>203</sup> Aiziczon 2004, Magnani 2003, interview with Biget

not one of the central activists in the process is much respected by the others - describes for Aiziczon:

With these guys it was another thing, because they would come to the canteen, they spoke, made questions and it is like one... at least I, like I gained confidence in them, you know, I mean I liked what they were doing, because I saw that they came face to face, see?, they did not come with lies, and you looked at things, like today, they say to you: 'we think like this: is there another opinion?', well, they look for which is the best, and they accept it like a good opinion, and for me, I see it as something very good, very good because you gain more confidence each time.<sup>204</sup>

Getting used to the assembly was a change that came slowly and still today is an important subject and constant process to be aware of; I will come back to this practice further down.

### **Making demands publicly and the first victory**

The workers had been afraid of being seen in public manifestations; Raul Godoy recalls a newly hired fellow who was recognized by someone from administration and the fellow's contract was not renewed after this. This picture makes a brusque contrast to the marches that the workers started to participate in after the first electoral victory, where they used their working clothes publicly as a way to make sure they were not infiltrated.<sup>205</sup>

Before elections in 2000 there was an accident in the factory. The factory had the same month advertised massive firings that increased the indignation and the stress. In Aiziczon's words:

On the Saturday the 15<sup>th</sup> of July at 6:30 am a young worker of 23 years, Daniel Ferrás, suffers a cardiac attack in the factory. Ferrás is brought to the medical service and dies in the arms of a companion – a delegate – when they transfer him to the hospital.<sup>206</sup>

This tragic death brings to the attention of the workers that the company's medical service lacked both knowledge about cardiac massage and had no oxygen in their tubes, neither were there any ambulances available. Raul Godoy publicly blames the company; the demand for an ambulance goes back 8 years and was connected to the many accidents that occurred and the inadequate state of the medical service was inexcusable. Meanwhile the people inside the factory felt that they had had enough and paralyzed the production. The strike was not ordered

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<sup>204</sup> Aiziczon 2004:117

<sup>205</sup> Aiziczon 2004:111, interview with Rosa

<sup>206</sup> Aiziczon 2004:122

by the internal commission, but they started to organize and articulate the protests, they also informed other unions and organisations for support. In Aiziczon we also see how the workers families got involved and decided to organise themselves:

The wives of some 20 workers that accompany their husbands decide to organize another march; they take responsibility for the strike fund and goes out to seek solidarity in the unions: so the Commission of Women Workers of Zanón is born.<sup>207</sup>

This is the beginning of the 9-days-strike, and it was during these nine days many workers saw themselves for the first time using the road block, talking in radio (today the workers have a radio program of their own in the University's channel) making public announcements.

When the company accepted all of the demands and paid the workers for the nine days (during which they had not worked) the workers could look back on the strike as a complete success. This strike was, as Aiziczon puts it "victorious [...] principally since it was the first strike where a broad spectre of the workers participated and so could evaluate the limits they could reach through their own forces."<sup>208</sup>

## **Workers control**

As part of the occupation the workers directly implemented a management based on open assemblies where every worker would be allowed to speak and where everybody has one vote each. The organisation is still working with the same principle. In order to not recreate hierarchies among the workers they decided that everybody should receive an equal salary – 800 pesos. Another change was that they allowed everybody to drink Maté again. Together with all the changes they have made the amount of accidents have dropped and the security measures were also the area where I found most information on the environmental hazard that the production provoke.

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

## **Environment, security and health**

One day it struck me that I was in an odd place for making environmental studies. The factory is noisy, the industrial dust flows everywhere, the ovens generates much heat and machines are everywhere. But here I was able to study the producers' awareness of their production's impact.

Working in the factory is risky. When I spoke to a biochemist she especially emphasized the micro particles since these get stuck in the lungs and respiratory parts of the body. These micro particles also have an environmental impact on the surroundings of the factory since they travel by air and can get stuck in all living species, trees, animals, flowers etc.<sup>209</sup> These particles are formed in several parts of the factory and the knowledge about where it is formed was good when I spoke to a young student of engineering (Franco) who works in the department of safety in the factory.<sup>210</sup>

Franco also told me about the false tests that the workers had gone through before the occupation. Every year Zanón would hire a van where the workers underwent tests in order to see how they were affected by the micro particles and to which extent lead and cadmium had accumulated in their bodies. These heavy metals accumulate in the body forever and can be the cause of cancer. The workers would some weeks after the tests receive results saying that they were alright. But when the workers took over the factory they found documents showing that many had high levels of lead and cadmium in their bodies, showing that somebody had given them false results, a stunning example of ruthless irresponsibility.<sup>211</sup>

Back then people just continued working on their post, not aware about the state of their health. After the occupation there have been reorganisations of people, so that "today those in the cleaning section are those who suffer from pains in their backs, from irritation in the skin from the particles and the heavy metals or that can not be exposed to much noise". Today there is a different atmosphere in the factory, an atmosphere that has brought down the number of accidents in the factory. According to Franco this change has got to do with a different approach to safety matters, "we tell them that if not for yourself, put the mask on for your family", also as part of the process of occupying the factory they value each other much

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<sup>209</sup> Interview in Buenos Aires

<sup>210</sup> Interview with Franco and Marina Abruzzini

<sup>211</sup> Part of the workers narrative, and one of the doctors working in Zanón verified this.

more knowing that everybody is needed for the production. Earlier in the factory you were just told to use gloves or a respiration filter, “today we tell them why”. This process of creating awareness is not always carried out without friction. Some people are more stubborn than others but the coordinators responsible for the workers’ safety have bought new, full covering masks to help protect the people who are under direct exposure to the micro particles.<sup>212</sup>

The openness to changes is a factor that the workers have to work much with in the internal processes that follows with the occupation since it has changed the routines and organisation of work completely.

### **Workers control and Identity**

“It is fantastic to be able to give back the support in actions.”<sup>213</sup> This is Rosas words; she works in the selection sector where she categorizes the ceramics in different quality classes. She and many of the interviewees speak about how great it feels to be able to give something back to all the people who supported them during their struggles. Vasco told me a story about how an old and poor woman came to them and left oranges and flour. It was hard for him to accept this gift but he made a promise to one day pay her back and with the first salaries he sought up the woman and gave her a large sack of oranges and one sack of flour, he recalls this memory as one of the strongest in his life.<sup>214</sup>

To be able to give back (to someone who has helped you) and to be able to do a good job, are two values that I came to think about as important entities in what could be called a “workers identity”. Vasco describes the easiness with which he today gets up in the morning now knowing that he will be doing something good, how he gets to work wanting to do his best. Not everybody share this view on work and he thinks that some of the younger workers do not see this value in work, which is why he thinks it is important to incorporate the younger ones, and this is also another reason for giving a good example.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Interview with Franco

<sup>213</sup> Interview with Rosa

<sup>214</sup> Interview with Vasco

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

Even though worker controlled factories is part of the Marxist utopia, the fulfilment of a political and theoretical practice is not carried out without friction. When I interviewed Kiko he told me that there will “always be problems in a place with 370 persons”, especially, perhaps, if they are all encouraged to express their opinion, seek common solutions, take active part in decision making as well every other task that needs to be carried out by them now.<sup>216</sup> Disputes and arguments is, implicitly, what the new union wanted when they encouraged the workers to think for themselves, to come with ideas in the assemblies, because this was, as I see it, needed in order to form a strong collective that in the end was able to keep producing without superiors.<sup>217</sup>

The contrast between the old form of viewing the workplace and today’s can be illustrated by a short example. If something breaks down, if the machine on the other side of your own line starts hanging up, it is today your explicit responsibility since everybody depends on the total production. Earlier you could look the other way, or you could even be corrected for leaving your workplace by one of the many “foremen”. To this example one can add that the workers today produce with, as they feel, a responsibility against the community, since the factory, as they claim, belongs to the people.<sup>218</sup>

The workers were all proud to be in Zanón. The result of the long process, seemed to the interviewees, had brought more than any had hoped for. When asked about how they think Zanón would be in ten years they all hoped that they were able to have the factory producing at its total capacity, and through this generating jobs to the province.<sup>219</sup> The threats are in no way over; the governor still proposes plans to evacuate the workers, trying to convince them to leave their workplace by offering them other jobs.<sup>220</sup> But now that they have a factory it is most unlikely they will leave it out of free will. They have control over a production through which they are able to generate more jobs; they have doubled the workforce since they began the occupation, today providing jobs to 480 persons, and as Godoy points out, they “produce without being afraid of bankruptcy”, which is a very privileged situation for workers in Argentina today.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Interview with Kiko who entered the factory in 1996 working in the Porcelain line and today works in the workers own public-relations group.

<sup>217</sup> My own observations

<sup>218</sup> This is part of the workers narrative.

<sup>219</sup> Interviews with Rosa, Catrupan, Quiñidiñil, Awkan, Vasco

<sup>220</sup> *Rio Negro* 21/8/2004

<sup>221</sup> <http://www.pagina12web.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-29043-2003-12-08.html>

Being able to offer work for the unemployed Neuquénian public is another reason for the pride that the interviewees feel. Vasco described how happy he felt when he was able to seek up a friend that had been fired in 1998 and offer him to come back after the occupation. Since the factory now generates jobs rather than close, the workers have a good argument towards the public for defending – legitimise – the occupation.

The workers are at the moment trying to advance in the negotiations with the creditors<sup>222</sup>, together with economy professor Pablo Levin they are working on a plan for the production for the coming years. During an assembly the information about this project was spread and anyone who felt they wanted to participate in working with the plan was able to participate. The plan is supposed to be worked out together with the public, which offers some trouble when the local politicians are not considered “true” representatives, but the workers have formed a large coordination within the region together with the social movement. And through this coordination they have already been offering help in the shantytowns in Neuquén city where many lost their homes due to the combination of heavy rains and the area’s dry soil.

When I asked Kiko about the plan for the future he mentioned that they wanted to inform the public about how the production was going, a way of introducing transparency to the public, so that they would be informed about the amounts of productions and the costs etc.<sup>223</sup> This idea seemed to qualify as part of embedding the factory in the local public. This embeddedness would consist of a workers controlled factory producing and generating direct income for the region. This is the workers official standpoint which has been developed together with the political influence of PTS, with the need to find a public support that can legitimise their illegal action and out of their own desire to defend themselves against unemployment.

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<sup>222</sup> Whose loans the workers do not want to accept as legitimate, but have to continue negotiations even if there standpoint is that the money should be sought in Luiggi Zanón fortune.

<sup>223</sup> Interview with Kiko

## Concluding analysis

With the aim of studying development I chose to study the workers of Zanón who maintain an occupation of their factory since autumn 2001 and the Mapuce, an aboriginal people in Argentina. I have approached development from a Human Ecology perspective, raising questions about the two groups' agency, and how their actions can be understood in light of a critical discourse on sustainable development, based on works by Serge Latouche, Alf Hornborg and Richard B. Norgaard. I have used their theories to form a background for understanding different approaches to social changes. The focus in the thesis is on the report from the field work with the two cases, which took place in Neuquén, Argentina during 7 weeks between February and April in 2004.

My methods during the field work were *participative observations* and *semi-structural interviews*. I used Isabel Hernández work on the mutual transferring method to guide me in the contact with both the Mapuce and the workers of Zanón. This method works well with the study's objective to understand the two groups' development of identities and practices that question top-down definitions of sustainable development.

The two cases I chose to study are connected by their active participation in the Neuquénian social movement. The studying of their actions has been centred on the cooperation that was developed in the beginning of the workers occupation of their factory, when the Mapuces offered them to use the clay that is located in the Kalfukura community. Within the Mapuce community in Neuquén there is an ongoing process of *empowering the Mapuce identity*. With the development of the Neuquén region the Mapuces have been marginalised and the communities are situated in areas with much differing material resources. The different material condition of the communities is part of the reason for the development of different consciousnesses that exist within the Mapuce community in Neuquén. These differences are the main reason for why there is no ongoing cooperation between the Kalfukura community and the workers of Zanón but the case also involves hindering participation from the province government.

The main contact that I had with the Mapuce was through the Newen Mapu community in Neuquén city. This community has engaged in projects to empower their identity as Mapuce and I have integrated a brief orientation on their contemporary projects. Through the Mapuces



in the Newen Mapu community I was able to visit the Kuruwinka community, which is located within the National Park of Lanin. I have included a presentation of their ongoing *co-management of the National Park* since it shows how the Mapuce struggle to gain *active participation in the areas they inhabit*. Both Mapuce communities that I visited engage in internal as well as external projects that aim to strengthen themselves as a people and to secure space and recognition for their culture.

I studied the way the workers of Zanón had occupied their factory and how this had *changed their identities from passive to active participators in the ongoing social protests* in the region. I wanted to see how the relations between the workers and the Mapuce were carried out, but this aim was changed since the workers are no longer in active cooperation with the Kalfukura community. The focus on worker/Mapuce relations was hence changed to the Mapuce of the Newen Mapu community and the Mapuce ceramic collection that the workers produce. In relation to this aim I found out that the workers appreciate the help they were given by the Mapuce and that they are happy to be able to repay this help by the ceramic collection.

The relative autonomy that the groups have achieved is based on an empowering of their claims. The Mapuces in the Kuruwinka community, working against tourism interest were able to get the tourists to support them when they occupied the bridge up to the Chapelco resort. In the case of the workers, they were defended by the local communities of Neuquén and Centenario and a broad spectrum of organisations that made the police back away and ultimately not fulfil the law's order of seizing the factory from the workers. What I see as important in both cases are the possibilities of achieving this support and maintaining it. And it is here that the regions' background play an important role since, as Aiziczon shows, Neuquén has special characteristics that clearly play a large role in determining why the activity has been so massive in Neuquén. Thinking about Cutral-Có, which is a national point of reference for the piquetes (road blockings), the occupation of Zanón which is unique in its way of internal organisation and the Mapuce, that are historically concentrated in the region and that have attracted international attention through their struggles. As an active camp of protest the dramas share the dilemma that Hornborg points out, between using a modernistic approach in efforts of countering modernisation and hence running the risk of internalising a decontextualised language - a language based not on their own concerns but on the discourse

that generate the threats. The way the two groups confront this dilemma is an important clue for why the support is as wide and strong.

Before going into an analysis of the different practices I would like to state that in relation to coming from “outside” – it is easy to paint the actions of the two groups in a romantic way that fits popular meta-stories. Naomi Klein’s way of categorising the Zanón example as violent and the movement of recuperated factories as a continuation of the large public protests that exploded in December 2001 is one way of doing exactly this. Or as other westerners, like Mulinari found in the case of Nicaragua, that comes with different expectations of the struggle. My own expectations of the workers and their relations to the environment was very similar to this kind of romanticism and when confronting this “disappointment” and questioning the hope for a “perfect revolution” I was able to better understand the workers rather than only being able to interpret their actions as part of a meta-narrative.

Throughout my readings I have been struck by the complete silence about the Mapuce’s role in the workers’ process of taking control over their factory. Maybe I am overvaluing the impact of the clay that was passed to the workers when they were boycotted by the market, but perhaps the silence is a sign of the Mapuces’ marginalisation in Argentina and Neuquén. I did not feel that the workers were not thankful for the help they received, and their positive tie to the Mapuces can be seen in the Mapuce ceramic collection they produce. Even if the Mapuce do not earn any money from the collection it is clearly viewed as positive in the Newen Mapu community, as a sign of recognition. So the tie exists even if the direct cooperation today is limited to talks within the Neuquén social movement.

The focus in the Argentine debate seem directed towards the Zanón workers and other organisations that better fit a classical class struggle, like the organised unemployed people in MTD<sup>224</sup>. Perhaps there are local political reasons for why the Mapuce’s role has been set aside in the studies about the workers. One could be the Mapuce’s own critics on the representational politics whereas many workers are organised in PTS and have been running for governing the Province. I have not emphasised the political dimensions that cut through the actions I have studied and this is not due to risking the positive ties between my two

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<sup>224</sup> Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados (Movement of Unemployed Workers)

studied groups, rather it is because it has been hard for me to grasp the total political picture of Neuquén in any of the cases. And as Veronica, a worker in the Newen Mapu community told me, she feels that the Mapuce of Newen Mapu and the workers of Zánón both are important examples since they are able to practically show the public different ways of organising society. This point could seem very political, which is definitely true, but both groups also stress values such as environment, social justice, dignity and autonomy, that involves much more than mere political strategies. Through their occupations they have tried to (re-)empower themselves, decentralise political power and change their relations both internally as well as externally – which is obvious in the case of the workers where they now use direct democratic assemblies and cooperate with a wide range of actors within the social movement.

I wanted to find positive connections between the workers of Zánón and the Mapuces in Neuquén, positive connections of raised environmental awareness among the workers. I did not find such positive connections even if the workers have recognised the Mapuce culture through the making of the Mapuce ceramic collection. The main points that I want to make out of my study are connected with the way the two groups have organised themselves internally and the methods they have used to ensure themselves active participation in the regions development.

Behind the effort of defending the factory there was a period when the workers developed bonds between each other. Godoy's recalling of the notes that were passed between workers as the only way to safely communicate inside the factory shows a communicative situation almost inapprehensible. The process of going from competing workers to a unified force was not done over a night even if it is hard to grasp this large process when you step inside the factory after the occupation. But comparing to the indignation that spreads in Europe whenever there is a factory that threatens to close business, which is the picture that many westerners bear with them, the workers of Zánón have obviously managed to set an example. And their example shows that something else is possible; something else than accepting corrupt union leaders, something else than unemployment as a natural consequence of falling market prices or increased profits elsewhere.

With the occupation the workers' internal organisation changed and they today practice direct democratic assemblies in their management of the factory. Through the assemblies the

workers have initiated changes in the relations between them and between themselves and the local community. The local community plays a large role in maintaining the occupation of the factory and the workers want to incorporate the factory in the public sphere. The workers claim that the factory belongs to the people in the region and I have presented their arguments.

Both the Mapuce and the workers have in my opinion used strategies that aim to incorporate the public in the management of local resources. Their strategies have enabled an initiation of open discussions on the management of resources and have also questioned the limits for the public's resources.

The Newen Mapu community has reached a position where they participate in the social movement where they are open to have discussions with the public about how to treat the environment. The environment in the Mapuce cosmic vision is not separated from the humans. Their attempts to live in respect of all the forces of the community have lead them to search for non-hierarchical practices. These practices are a constant process and maintaining their aim they show the public an alternative way of relating to each other - and to life.

The Mapuce in the Newen Mapu community are very critical towards the Argentinean constitution and the idea of the State as a legitimate frame of order within its limits. They claim to have the right to a "constitution" of their own, and the many projects they run where they develop own propositions for the "management" of resources, show that they are devoted in trying to exchange the state's monopoly as denominator of right. The Newen Mapu community is however a very small community and their ideas are not representative of the whole Mapuce community in Neuquén, which they are aware of and willing to discuss. The way they handle their internal disputes were out of reach for me, but I remember Veronica saying that they do not want to impede values on other communities; it seems they are aware of the process that lies behind their own consciousness. A consciousness they formed out of living in the city where they have had contact with the social movement since at least the days of bishop Jaime de Nevares.

The Mapuces in the Newen Mapu community often referred to their concept of interculturality, a form of organisation they hoped could work as guidance in their relations with non-Mapuce. Since the Mapuce stress their right to practice their culture, and feel that

this has been long neglected in Argentina and Neuquén, they want to secure themselves a space where they can reproduce their culture and try to build a development in line with their own desires. Reaching this position of formulating a development of their own is a long process and an active process that will continue as long as there are Mapuce since it is about formulating and positioning themselves as people. After reaching the position of formulating their own claims they needed to find space and recognition of this right, which in the Kuruwinka community resulted in the occupation of the Park Rangers administrative building in San Martín de los Andes. And what they ultimately achieved was a co-managing of the resources within the Park. They obtained 50% of the seats in the council that manages the National Park – and from these seats they are able to plant their ideas. Mapuce individuals are also educating themselves to be Park Rangers so that they can reach the decision making positions from within the state's organisation to make space for their way of perceiving the environment. The aims of the intercultural project in this case is to be able to participate in the decision making process, in the whole process, from developing propositions into taking the decisions, implementing them and evaluating them. They reached this position of co-managing not directly through talking the same language as the Park Rangers or the administration; the occupation let them impose their claims as legitimate – which resulted in their obtaining a position from where they can try to make sure their view of the lands is respected and implemented. There is of course a lot of politics in this too. The National Parks are a big tourist attraction which the Mapuce also are aware of and are able to draw advantage of blocking the only entrance to the Chapelco resort which runs right through their community. However, scientists like Zulema Semorile are trying to lift this intercultural, co-management to a general policy for the management of all National Parks, which she argues would benefit the biodiversity of the areas – as a way of legitimising the implementation in a popular language. A very important reason for why the Mapuce wants this co-management is not, as I see it, primarily out of a concern for the biodiversity, but rather as a socially just way of participating in the processes that concerns them, and that with their participation could seize their inferior position and improve their possibilities of achieving a constructive Mapuce identity.

With the support of the local community the workers managed to maintain their illegal production – creating a space of autonomy from local authorities. In this space the workers practice direct democratic participation in the management of the production. The workers set an example of managing production without superiors in a modern and large workplace. By

struggling for an incorporation of the factory within the public sphere they wish to enable public participation as part of the factory's development. The workers address the social problems of the region and the nation by proposing different solutions for how their production can help to develop an economy based on public needs. They actively seek public organisations that are willing to participate in the forming of a new social order.

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Biget 1/4/2004

Catrupan 7/4/2004

Franco 6/4/2004

Iris 18/3/2004

Kiko 9/4/2004

Quiñdiñil 6/4/2004

Rosa 12/4/2004

Veronica 16/3/2004 & 15/4/2004

Vasco 13/4/2004

## Resumen

Este estudio focaliza en la situación social y política de Neuquén, Argentina, donde obreros han ocupado una fábrica de cerámica desde el otoño de 2001. Los obreros han recibido materia prima del pueblo Mapuche de la región, formando una cooperativa entre los obreros y los Mapuches. Estas relaciones se mantienen en un clima político coyuntural muy inestable. Juntos, Mapuches y obreros, mantienen ejemplos alternativos de cómo organizar la sociedad, enfrentando las injusticias sociales con propuestas propias. Esta tesis invita a preguntarse sobre cómo acercarse a ideas emancipatorias desde una perspectiva del incluido y del excluido. También discute sobre la construcción de una identidad proletaria desde la autoconfianza, al igual que la construcción de la identidad étnica.

**Palabras claves:** Mapuce, Neuquén, ocupación de propiedad privada, obreros, Zanon, desarrollo, etnicidad, recursos naturales.

## Appendix I

### Questionnaire

#### Mapuce

En que se ocupan?

Existen programas para crear una situación mejor para los Mapuces?

Cómo es su situación?

Son un grupo homogéneo?

Cómo actúan? ¿Cómo un grupo, cómo Mapuces?

Cuales son los mayores fuentes de ingresos?

Cuales recursos demandan y como los consiguen?

Cuestiones actuales para los Mapuces en Neuquén?

Con quienes entran en formas de cooperación?

Quines trabajan con el barro?

Quines poseen tierra, la poseen colectivamente?

Cómo distribuyen los ingresos de el barro? En general?

Cómo ven a Zanon / a las autoridades? Ha habido un cambio de punto de vista?

Porque no entregaron el barro antes? (No quieren entregarlo?)

Ven algunas amenazas contra el medioambiente? Cuales?

Tienen que ver con la extracción del barro?

Cómo manejan estos riesgos?

Cómo se ven a sí mismo en relación con el medioambiente?

#### La Arsilla

Porque suspendieron antes la entrega de la arsilla?

Cuales eran las relaciones antes?

Cómo transportan la arsilla, llega de menos distancia ahora?

Porque no cooperaron con los Mapuces antes?

Cómo se hace la extracción / la producción de cerámica? Riesgos?

Existen otras maneras de hacerlo? Si, si, cuales son las trabas? Recursos económicos/falta de tecnología/de conocimiento?

#### Los obreros de Zanon

Porque ocuparon la fábrica? Cual era la estrategia? Han tenido diferentes?

Existen diferentes grupos en la fábrica? Son un grupo homogéneo? Actúan como colectivo, como? Con quienes entran en formas de cooperación?

Cómo toman decisiones? Cómo se representan a si mismo? Cuales son las discusiones actuales?

Por que quieren que la fabrica sea estatal? Que piensan que el estado debe hacer?

Cómo son las relaciones con el entorno?

Hay diferencias en la producción ahora comparado con antes de la ocupación?

Cuales cambios han hecho? Los resultados?

Cómo consiguen ingresos? ¿Cómo lo distribuyen?

Cómo distribuyen el trabajo?

Perciben algunas amenazas contra el medioambiente que tienen que ver con la producción de cerámica?, Otras?

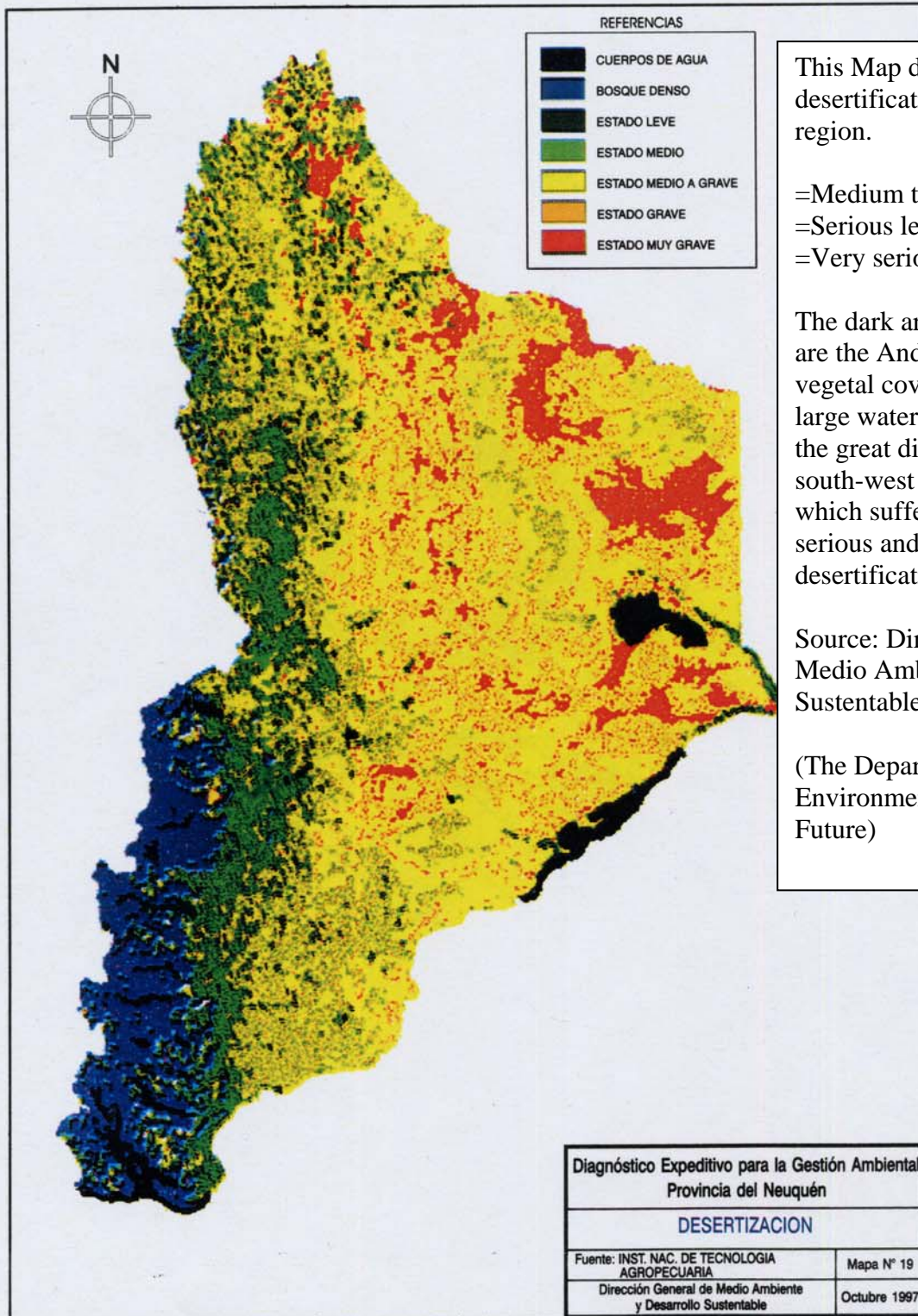
Cómo se ven a sí mismo en relación con el medioambiente?

## Appendix II





## 19- Desertización



This Map displays the state of desertification of the Neuquén region.

=Medium to serious level

=Serious level

=Very serious level

The dark areas in the south-west are the Andes, which has a good vegetal coverage and holds large water resources. Showing the great difference between the south-west and the central part which suffers from medium to serious and very serious level of desertification.

Source: Dirección General de Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo Sustentable

(The Department for Environment and Sustainable Future)

## 20- Registro territorial de conflictos ambientales

Map showing the region's environmental conflicts.

Contamination from mining activity.

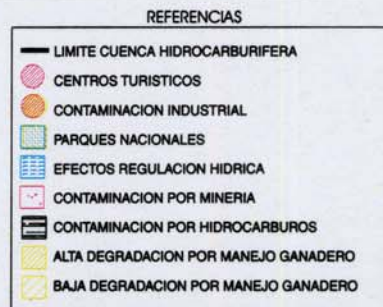
Severe land degradation from cattle keeping.

Tourist centers

National Parks

Industrial contamination

Contamination from hydroelectric power plants.



Source: Dirección General de Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo Sustentable

Diagnóstico Expeditivo para la Gestión Ambiental Provincia del Neuquén	
REGISTRO TERRITORIAL DE CONFLICTOS AMBIENTALES	
Fuente: ELABORACION PROPIA	Mapa N° 20
Dirección General de Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo Sustentable	Octubre 1997



