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Overcoming Environmental Injustices: An analysis of citizen assemblies' fight against open-pit mining in Bariloche and Esquel

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Overcoming Environmental Injustices

An analysis of citizen assemblies' fight against open-pit mining in Bariloche and Esquel

La superación de la injusticia ambiental:
un análisis de la lucha de las asambleas comunitarias contra la minería a cielo abierto en Bariloche y Esquel

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ABSTRACT

Worldwide, environmentalism and environmental concern is growing. Additionally, environmental issues like pollution and contamination are no longer considered simply environmental problems; environmental issues are now frequently analyzed from a sociological perspective. Beginning in the 1980s in the United States, the investigation of the relationship between environmental and social issues developed into the theory of environmental justice. This theory postulates that the unequal distribution of environmental harm occurs in correlation with (or is a direct result of) a lack of political recognition and participation.

In this investigation, I utilize the theory of environmental justice to analyze the development of open-pit mining in Patagonia, and the subsequent responses to this development by local citizens in the communities of Bariloche and Esquel, Argentina. I analyze how and why citizen assemblies have been used to overcome the environmental injustice of open-pit mining. In particular, I question a) if these communities have a history that lacks political recognition and participation, b) how these assemblies use or avoid external support, and c) what the motivations and desires of these assemblies are.

For ten days, I traveled to Bariloche to interview five neighbors of the Esquel and Bariloche assemblies. From these semi-structured interviews and other background research, it became clear that the development of open-pit mining in Patagonia is a case of environmental injustice. Furthermore, the goals, desires, actions, and organization of these assemblies are a direct result of (and response to overcome) the conditions of injustice that these community faced. The organization of the assembly, the search for autonomy, and the desire for structural change are the assemblies' response to and means to overcome the environmental injustices associated with open-pit mining.

In this paper, I will discuss: the history of mining in Argentina, the development of the assemblies of Esquel and Bariloche, the theoretical framework of environmental justice, how open-pit mining is an example of an environmental injustice, and how the organization, desires, and actions of these assemblies are a direct result of and response to overcome the conditions of environmental injustice they faced.

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INTRODUCTION

Around the world, environmental concern is growing. Environmentalism influences international conferences, academic writings, marketing schemes, and local protests. People are increasingly concerned with global warming, water shortages, pollution, and genetically modified foods. Not only has the level of environmental thought increased, the way in which people think about and analyze environmental problems has also changed. Instead of analyzing environmental issues in isolation, an increasingly large sector of both the academic and public spheres are beginning to question and discuss the connections between environmental and social issues. From the analysis of this relationship, the theory of environmental justice developed. This theory explains the connections between the environment and society by citing that unequal distribution of environmental harms occurs in correlation with (or as a result of) the lack of political participation and recognition of particular groups.

Examining the relationship between social and environmental issues (and the presence of environmental injustices) is particularly relevant to the study of the development of open-pit mining in Argentina. Since the introduction of neoliberal policies in Argentina in the 1990s, the development of open-pit mining increased significantly, especially in southern provinces including Chubut and Río Negro. However, the development of open-pit mining in these regions has been met with significant resistance by local communities. Numerous communities, like Esquel and Bariloche, have responded to the threat of open-pit mining by creating citizen assemblies to protest against mining activities.

In this investigation, I will analyze the development of open-pit mining in Patagonia and the subsequent responses to this development by local community members of Bariloche and Esquel using a framework of environmental justice. I will analyze how and why citizen

assemblies have been used to overcome the environmental injustice of open-pit mining. In particular, I will focus on a) if these communities have a history that lacks political recognition and participation, b) how these assemblies use or avoid external support, and c) what the motivations and desires of these assemblies are.

In this paper, I will discuss: the history of mining in Argentina, the development of the assemblies of Esquel and Bariloche, the theoretical framework of environmental justice, why open-pit mining is an example of an environmental injustice, and how the organization, desires, and actions of these assemblies are a direct result of and the means to overcome the conditions of environmental injustice they face.

METHODOLOGY

In order to research and analyze community assemblies in Patagonia, I utilized a qualitative research design in which I analyzed primary resources (press releases, scholarly journals, documentaries, and papers) and conducted interviews. I began my research by conducting background research on the history of mining in Argentina and responses by the affected communities. I specifically focused on Esquel and Bariloche in the region of Patagonia.

The majority of the data informing my analysis of community assemblies came from the interviews I conducted. I interviewed five individuals who were all members of local assemblies (four in Bariloche and one in Esquel). These neighbors were of a variety of ages and included both men and women. To gain entrance to these assemblies, my academic advisors in Buenos Aires, Ana Laura Lobo and Darío Duch, gave me contact information of two members of the assembly in Bariloche. These were my first two interviews. During my first interview, I was given the contact information for three additional neighbors to interview.

I conducted the four interviews of the Bariloche neighbors in person. These interviews took place at the houses of the individuals I interviewed. I also interviewed the neighbor from Esquel over Skype. I conducted this interview over Skype due to my time and budget constraints. It was not feasible for me to travel to Esquel to conduct just one interview. I spent 10 days in Bariloche collecting this data. These interviews all took place between May 10th and 21st 2013.

The interviews I conducted were semi-structured and structured and were all in Spanish. Although a less structured interview minimizes the division between myself, as the researcher, and the individuals I interviewed, I chose to conduct semi-structured and structured interviews due to the language barrier that existed between myself and these individuals. To ensure my questions were clear and concise, I arrived at each interview with prewritten questions. Having structured questions also insured that I collected information on similar topics from each interview I conducted. This insured that my limited number of interviews were all pertinent and helpful in informing my analysis of community assemblies.

At the beginning, I encountered some difficulty gaining contacts from the community assemblies. I made initial contact with the first neighbor and ensured he would be available to meet with me during my time in Bariloche. However, after our initial contact, I had difficulty contacting him again. I didn't hear back from him about a time or place to meet until the night before our meeting. While it was stressful to not have a set schedule, it ultimately was not a problem. He set up the times and meeting locations of three other interviews, so I had no problem accessing this information either.

Although as a researcher I attempted to minimize my influence on the study, I could not eliminate all biases entirely. In this study, my personal characteristics, point of entrance, and presence may have influenced the data I received during the interview process.

For example, my point of entrance into the assemblies was fairly limited. Because of my lack of contacts and knowledge about the assemblies, I relied on a snowball sampling process. I found one contact individually, but the first neighbor I interviewed, gave me the contact information of the other three neighbors of the assembly. I noticed that these four neighbors had very similar outlooks on the functioning and role of the assembly, while the single woman I contacted separately had slightly differing opinions. I am not confident whether this difference in opinions was a result of my sampling bias, whether it actually represents the distribution of differing voices in the assembly (the majority think one way, but there are a few other opinions) or whether the one female neighbor was a random selection and her opinions are unique to herself. However, given the time and lack of access I had to the assemblies, there was really no way to avoid this bias. If I were to extend the study, however, I would try to create a more representative sample (preferably through a random sampling method). Additionally, interviewing a larger number of people would allow me to create a more representative sample.

Another bias that may have affected the research I gathered during interviews was my being from the United States. I was particularly attuned to this bias during my first interview when we discussed the environmental justice implications of mining. Environmental justice is typically analyzed at a local or national scale. Using this scale, mining in Argentina is not a case of distributive environmental injustice. However, this neighbor was hesitant to continue. With a bit of urging, he went on to discuss environmental justice at an international scale. Mining is a clear example of this and the United States is particularly implicated in this system as a vast

majority of international mining corporations are based in the United States. I think this neighbor was worried about offending me and my country because he kept qualifying that this was just his opinion about environmental justice. Once I agreed with him and he realized I was not offended by his claims, he was more open to discussing the political stance behind his opinions and assembly decisions. Unfortunately, this bias is hard to avoid, particularly when I have to introduce myself and my project during each interview. However, if I were to further this study, I could reduce this bias by working with another researcher from Argentina. We could compare and share results to reduce the bias created by our personal characteristics.

BACKGROUND OF MINING

Typically, when someone thinks of mining, they picture underground miners accessing precious metals or minerals with axes or other hand tools. This was the traditional means of mining as it was cheaper and the minerals and metals were easier to access. However, as these types of mines were exploited, new technology developed that allowed mining of harder to access minerals to be more feasible and profitable. Minerals are harder to access in non-traditional mining as these minerals, "are found in a state of dissemination in nature and in tiny particles dispersed in mountainous rocks… which is why it is impossible to extract [these minerals] with the methods and technologies of traditional mining"[1] (Svampa, Bottaro, and Álvarez 2009: 30). To access the dispersed minerals, one type of mining that increased significantly was open-pit mining. Though technology made open-pit mining possible and profitable, this type of mining also presented significantly greater environmental consequences as the metals are much harder to access and extract.

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[1] "Los minerales remanentes se encuentran en estado de diseminación en la naturaleza y en partículas ínfimas dispersas en las rocas montañosas, razón por la cual es imposible extraerlos por los métodos y tecnologías de la minería tradicional." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

Gold is one common metal extracted using an open-pit mining process. The gold extracted in these types of mines doesn't appear in large veins, as it does in traditional mines. So, simple pick axes will not remove the gold. Instead, "During the extraction, to appropriate the mineral and concentrate them, the mine must first produce a blast of extraordinary amounts of soil, entire mountains are converted into rocks and then crushed into tiny particles, later a chemical soup with huge amounts of water are applied to them, which succeed in separating and capturing the metals from the rest of the rock"[2] (Svampa, Bottaro and Álvarez 2009: 30). The common chemicals used in the extraction process are: cyanide, mercury, and sulfuric acid (Svampa, Bottaro and Álvarez 2009: 30). The chemicals, the chemical solution, and remaining rock particles are all waste products of this process. This waste contaminates the soil, air, and water of the surrounding areas.

One of the main environmental concerns associated with mining, is the effect it will have on water sources. Cyanide and other toxic chemicals used to extract the minerals leach from the pools and can easily contaminate underground water sources or nearby surface water such as lakes and streams (Svampa, Bottaro and Álvarez 2009: 30). Once the water is contaminated, all water sources downstream of the mine can also easily become contaminated. In addition to the contamination caused by mining, the amount of fresh water consumed during the mining process is also a great concern. For example, the Alumbrera Mine in Argentina "extracts 1200 liters of water per second (around 100 million liters per day)"[3] (Svampa, Bottaro and Álvarez 2009: 30).

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[2] "Durante la explotación, para apropiarse de los minerales y concentrarlos, la minera debe primero producir la voladura de extraordinarias cantidades de suelo, montañas enteras que son convertidas en rocas y luego trituradas hasta alcanzar medidas ínfimas, para posteriormente aplicárseles una sopa de sustancias químicas licuadas con gigantescas cantidades de agua, que logran separar y capturar los metales del resto de la roca." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

[3] "…extracción de 1.200 litros de agua por segundo (alrededor de 100 millones de litros por día)." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

So, not only does open-pit mining cause a water shortage, it contaminates the little water that remains.

Development of Mining in Argentina

In the past, mining has never been an essential part of Argentina's economy[4]; it has traditionally remained as a secondary activity (Svampa, Bottaro and Álvarez 2009: 31). During the last two decades, however, mining activity has increased significantly, especially in the southern regions of Argentina and Chile. With the political change to neoliberal policies in the 1990s, Argentina opened its economy to privatization and foreign investment. This period, "was marked by economic deregulation, fiscal adjustment, [and] politics of privatization (of public utilities and hydrocarbons)"[5] (Svampa, Bottaro and Álvarez 2009: 31). These policies "favored not only the introduction of foreign capital, but ensured the institutionalization of the rights of large corporations"[6] (Svampa, Bottaro and Álvarez 2009: 31). The second phase of neoliberal policies in Argentina was, "characterized by spread of the extractive-export model, based on the exploitation of non-renewable natural resources"[7] (Svampa, Bottaro and Álvarez 2009: 31). This is evident in the increase in mining activity in Patagonia, driven by powerful multi-national

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[4] It is interesting to compare mining to oil, particularly somewhere like Mosconi and YPF. Because the town built itself around the oil company, oil was an intrinsic part of the community. It is significantly harder to question the negative impacts of this company (like pollution, water contamination, spread of diseases like diabetes) when the company essentially is the community. Movements like assemblies against oil are much less likely to develop. However, in cases like mining, that are only secondary activities, I believe resistance may be more likely because the community identity is not formulated around the extractive company. Because they knew a way of life before the mining started, they are more likely to question the true costs and benefits of this industry.

[5] "…estuvo marcado por la desregulación económica, el ajuste fiscal, la política de privatizaciones (de los servicios públicos y de los hidrocarburos)" Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

[6] "favorecieron no sólo la implantación de capitales extranjeros sino que garantizaron la institucionalización de los derechos de las grandes corporaciones" Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

[7] "caracterizada por la generalización del modelo extractivo-exportador, basado en la explotación de recursos naturales no renovables" Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

corporations. However, the introduction of extractive industries, like mining, in the region was met with great resistance on behalf of local communities.

The Assembly of Self-Organized Neighbors of Esquel

The key example in the study of the development of citizen assemblies against open-pit mining is the case of The Assembly of Self-Organized Neighbors of Esquel (la Asamblea de Vecinos Autoconvocados de Esquel). Esquel is a small town located in the province of Chubut, Argentina. After the economic crisis of 2001, Esquel's economy suffered significantly. At the time of the initial development of the mine in 2002, "25% of the population was unemployed and 20% was under the poverty line" (Urkidi and Walter 2011: 690). Given this context, mining promised to be an economic benefit for the community. In 2002, the American corporation, Meridian Gold, began exploration and development of a gold and silver mine. Located six miles outside Esquel, this $720 million mine promised to bring economic prosperity to the community (Urkidi and Walter 2011: 690). However, the development of the mine quickly became a controversial issue; Esquel divided along pro-mine and anti-mine lines. While pro-mine groups emphasized the economic prosperity the mine promised, anti-mine groups warned against the environmental contamination the mine would cause. In November of 2002, nearly 600 citizens joined together against mining development and formed the Assembly of Self-Organized Neighbors (Asamblea de Vecinos Autoconvocados) (Urkidi and Walter 2011: 691). On November 24, 2002 the assembly marched against the government and Meridian Gold for the first time. They next marched on December 4th in reaction to the publishing of an environmental impact statement of the proposed mine (Marín 2009:184). In this march, they "denounce[d] the political accomplices of mining, repudiate[d] the existing mining laws, warn[ed] that [mining] is

looting as [the company] 'comes for the gold and comes for it all'"[8] (Marín 2009:184). Since

then, the assembly marches on the 4th of every month in commemoration of this date (Marín

2009:184). After months of marches, reunions, and meetings, the Assembly forced the

provincial government to create a community wide vote for a non-binding plebiscite that would

determine the future of the mine. On March 23, 2003, the plebiscite was held. Nearly 75% of

eligible voters of Esquel participated. With 81% voting 'No to the mine', mining activities were

temporarily terminated and a provincial ban on open-pit mining was initially passed (Urkidi and

Walter 2011: 692).

The success of the assembly's work in Esquel is not only important for what it achieved

for its own community, but also for what it signified for other communities in Argentina.

Because Esquel was the first municipality that successfully stopped the advance of the mining

industry in Argentina (Marín 2009: 181), it provided hope that something like this could actually

be achieved, and gave others a model to follow in their own communities. Since Esquel, many

other community assemblies have formed throughout Argentina, all fighting similar battles

against mining in their respective communities and provinces.

Assembly of Self-Organized Neighbors of Bariloche

One example of an assembly that formed after the success in Esquel was the Assembly of

Self-Organized Neighbors of Bariloche. San Carlos de Bariloche is located in the Province of

Río Negro. Currently, Bariloche itself does not have any mines, or plans for mining

development. If there is neither development nor exploration of mines, what motivated the

citizens of Bariloche to form the assembly mining? To understand this, one must first

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[8] "se denuncia a los cómplices políticos de la minera, se repudian las leyes mineras vigentes y se advierte que se trata de un saqueo porque 'vienen por el oro y vienen por todo'" Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

understand the difference between a threatened and effected community. In the case of mining, an effected community is one where mining is taking place and the town suffers the consequences of contamination. In contrast, a threatened community does not have mining operations located in or near the town, but is fighting to keep mining out (Interview 1). Thus, Bariloche is considered a 'threatened community' rather than an 'effected community'.

However, just because there are no mines in the community itself, does not mean that there is no work to be done. In 2011, the law 3981 that prohibited the use of cyanide in mining, was repealed by the Provincial Government of Río Negro (Kosich: 2012). While this law was in effect, open-pit mining itself was not explicitly prohibited, but the ban on cyanide essentially ensured that open-pit mining could never develop in the region. Since the repeal of this law, mining development and exploration has increased significantly in the province of Río Negro. Thus, the principal goals of the citizen assembly of Bariloche are to reinstate this law and insure that no mines develop in the Bariloche region in the future.

This assembly was formed in 2011 in response to the repealing of law 3981. At the beginning, participation was very high, and marches could include up to 3,000 people (Interview 5). However, participation levels constantly changed. During periods of intense conflict, the assembly is much larger and more visible. During times of relative dormancy, the assembly can consist of no more than twenty neighbors (Interview 1). The assembly is currently in a period of relative dormancy (close to 20 neighbors) as there are no large conflicts, it is winter, and it is an election year so the focus of many neighbors is drawn away from the assembly (Interview 5). However, just because the numbers are smaller, does not mean the assembly is not active. To the contrary, the neighbors still meet weekly and within the last year, they have marched 37 times against provincial governments and mining corporations throughout the region (Interview 4).

FRAMEWORK OF EVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Throughout the past several decades, connections between environmental and social issues have entered into discussion with increasing frequency. The analysis of the correlation between environmental contamination and social issues lead to the development of the theory of environmental justice. This theoretical framework is a relatively novel approach to the study of environmental contamination and has had a particularly strong influence on the studies and social movements in the United States. One of the first scholars to define this new theoretical framework was David Schlosberg. Unlike the traditional environmental movement that solely focused on the environmental contaminant or problem, Schlosberg emphasized the interconnectedness between social issues of justice with the distribution of environmental contaminants. According to Schlosberg, environmental justice consists of three components: distribution, participation, and recognition (Schlosberg 2003: 88). In other words, the theory of environmental justice advocates that there is a) inequality of the distribution of environmental harms and benefits, b) unequal levels of participation in the decision making process of these environmental harms and benefits, and c) a lack of recognition of people's rights and cultural or traditional lifestyles (Schlosberg 2003). The vulnerable populations are generally lower classes, minorities, and women.

Modifications to Environmental Justice in Argentina

Because environmental justice examines the underlying social and political causes of environmental issues, this framework is highly dependent on the political and social context in which it is utilized. Thus, environmental justice theory developed in the United States, will not

apply seamlessly to all cases of environmental injustice around the world. When analyzing a specific case of environmental justice, the framework must be slightly modified to fit the social and political context of that location. Thus, Schlosberg's framework and definition must be slightly altered to analyze cases of injustice in Argentina.

Specifically, environmental justice frameworks are modified in Latin America in three ways: "first, the novelty of the formation of these movements; second, the redefinition of environmental justice and its incorporation of new concerns and actors; and third, their articulation with a long tradition of human rights and social justice activism in the region" (Urkidi and Walter 2011: 685). These three innovations are obviously quite broad. To begin, the theory of environmental justice does not exist in Argentina as explicitly as it does in the United States. "In Argentina, there is still no network explicitly defining itself as an EJ [Environmental Justice] network. However, EJ concerns are deeply-rooted in environmental organization and network claims" (Urkidi and Walter 2011: 686). While the term isn't widely used, the knowledge of the connection between environmental and social issues is increasingly known. In Argentina, activists and scholars often refer to this relationship in the context of "socio-environmental conflicts" that emphasize the connection "between environmental problems, social equity and human rights" (Urkidi and Walter 2011: 686). I will incorporate a discussion about the second and third modifications to environmental justice in more depth throughout the follow sections on justice as recognition and participation as it is easier to explain these changes within the specific context of the assemblies of Esquel and Bariloche.

Environmental Justice as Distribution

The unequal distribution of environmental harms and benefits is the first conception of justice in the framework of environmental justice. This conception of justice is the easiest and, in general, is the first to be identified. Typically, the distribution of environmental harms and benefits is examined from a local or national scale. As my first interviewee noted, mining in Argentina is not a case of local environmental injustice as mining contamination is a problem that doesn't discriminate (Interview 1). Contamination from mining affects the commons (including the air, water, and land) so both rich and poor are affected. Thus, if mining was analyzed only on a local level, one could conclude that there is not an unjust distribution of environmental harms.

However, in the case of open-pit mining in Argentina, the injustice of distribution occurs not at a local scale, but rather at a global scale. In fact, the unequal distribution of many environmental harms follows a global pattern. This pattern is a key component of the 'Core and Periphery Model'. This model postulates that as global wealth increases, the majority of the wealth is concentrated in 'core' countries (typically located in the global north). Because of this, to some degree, wealthier core nations enjoy the luxury of controlling the economic market (Jorgenson: 2003). Thus, core countries develop tertiary industries within their own country (which have high economic benefits and low environmental consequences) while exporting extractive industries (with lower economic benefits and higher environmental consequences) to the periphery countries.

From an environmental standpoint, core nations are essentially exporting their pollution to periphery nations. The consumption of core nations (and their need for raw materials) drives the growth of extractive industries in less developed periphery countries. As the first neighbor I

interviewed noted, "The cause [of contamination in Argentina] is the overconsumption of the first world and the contamination of the poorer countries"[9] (Interview 1). Though he did not refer to this cause of injustice as the 'core-periphery model' his belief expresses the same global pattern of unequal distribution of environmental harms. Following the beliefs of this neighbor, and the 'core and periphery' model, environmentally unfriendly industries are more likely to locate in periphery nations.

This unequal worldwide distribution of environmental harms is evident in the distribution of open-pit mining throughout the world. In fact, "Latin America is the region where most gold prospecting took place in the world in the 1990s and 2000s" (Urkidi and Walter 2011: 683). The distribution of open-pit mining, "underlines that there is a global displacement of investments from the Global North towards the Global South" (Urkidi and Walter 2011: 684). The majority of mining companies in Argentina are American or Canadian corporations (Meridian Gold, Barrack Gold, etc). While countries like the US and Canada want the resources and investments associated with a gold mine, these countries do not want the contamination from the same mine to be in their own country. They essentially keep the good and export the bad.

One of the driving factors behind the unequal distribution of environmentally harmful extractive industries is economic vulnerability. Poor or economically unstable communities are especially at risk of having an extractive industry locate in their community. Corporations and governments often leverage the promise of jobs and economic prosperity with agreeing to possible environmental contamination. Communities that are in desperate need of work are often forced to accept environmentally harmful extractive industries as the need for immediate economic relief is more important in the short term than possible long term environmental

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[9] "la cause es el sobreconsumo del primer mundo y la contaminación de los países pobres." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

contamination. Esquel is a perfect example of this. With a depressed economy, many citizens felt the only reasonable way to improve their economic situation was to allow the mine to locate in their community (Interview 3).

Identifying the unequal distribution of environmental harms is the first step in overcoming environmental injustices. However, simply evaluating the distribution of environmental harms does not solve the problem. Once the issue of unequal distribution is identified, the next step in the environmental justice framework is to determine the causes behind the injustice. This cause is the lack of representation and participation. In the following sections, the analysis of the work, goals, and motivation of the assemblies is particularly important.

Justice as Recognition and Participation

If the assemblies of Esquel and Bariloche were fighting solely against the distribution of open-pit mining in Argentina, this would be a purely environmental movement. However, because this problem has social and political causes and consequences, the assemblies are fighting against a larger social-environmental conflict, or an environmental injustice. In the case of an environmental injustice, simply addressing the unequal distribution is not enough to overcome the injustice. According to Schlosberg, "justice today requires *both* redistribution and recognition… justice requires both, as neither is sufficient" (85). Thus to achieve justice in distribution, both injustices in recognition and participation must be addressed.

The traditional definition of justice of participation emphasizes the procedural process of inclusion or participation in decision making (Schlosberg 2003:84). Essentially, "For a norm to be just, everyone who follows it must, in principle, have an effective voice in its consideration"

(Schlosberg 2003:84). Because political inclusion in decision making is different in every society, this aspect of justice is particularly dependent on the political context of the society in question. It is in this conception of justice that the most modifications to the traditional framework of environmental justice are seen.

Justice as recognition is a more complex to define. However, in the traditional definition of environmental justice, justice as recognition is defined as, the individual right to self-recognition but most importantly [as] the recognition of collective identities and their particular needs, concerns and livelihoods" (Urkidi and Walter 2011: 684). There are three types of injustice of recognition: "the violation of the body…, the denial of rights, and the denigration of ways of life" (Schlosberg 2003:82). Thus to achieve justice of recognition, "individuals must be fully free of physical threats, offered complete and equal political rights, and have their distinguishing cultural traditions free from various forms of disparagement" (Schlosberg 2003: 82).

In environmental justice theory in the US, or in particular cases where indigenous rights are clearly being violated, it is easier to separate justice as participation from recognition and discuss the two separately. However, in the case of the assembly's fight for justice, it is easier to discuss the two in unison as both are intrinsically connected. Thus, in the following sections I will analyze how both justice of recognition and participation are key factors in the assembly's fight against open-pit mining.

Lack of access to the truth.

The ways in which justice of recognition and participation manifested themselves in the beliefs of neighbors of the assemblies of Esquel and Bariloche was divided into two main

categories: 1) the lack true information and trust and 2) the lack of representation. In this section, I will discuss the lack of access to the truth and trust as a manifestation of procedural and representative injustice. The lack true information is obviously a very broad category. However, it can be broken down into: the lack of access to information and the lack of trust in the government and/or mining corporations.

According to a survey conducted by the transnational consulting corporation BSR (hired by Meridian Gold), the six primary reasons that Esquel citizens voted against the mine were: the incapacity to share information adequately, the failure of communications, unresolved questions about the environment, preoccupations about the economic benefits for Esquel, the lack of confidence in political figures and government, and the unfavorable attitude of the company (Marín 2009: 92). All of these reasons relate directly to the lack of information and the lack of access to information.

The lack of access to information includes both the lack of access to true information and also the lack of access to information in general. In the study of Marcela Marín, she contends that the Esquel citizens believed that both the municipal and provincial governments were not providing enough information about the mining development. The information that these governments did provide, "minimized harmful aspects [of mining] and overemphasized the favorable aspects"[10] (Marín 2009:183). This sentiment of overemphasizing some information, while minimizing others was also evident in the beliefs of the neighbors of Bariloche and Esquel whom I interviewed. These neighbors all expressed that the government and mining corporations overemphasized (or lied) about possible economic benefits, while hiding the true environmental consequences of mining. The neighbor of Esquel noted that the government and

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[10] "…minimizaba aspectos perjudiciales y resaltaba otros supuestamente favorables en forma exagerada." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

mining corporations overemphasize the economic benefits of mining, "because it is the delusion that they use, that they give jobs…but it's a lie, there are few jobs and they are highly dangerous and damaging" (Interview 3). Another female neighbor insisted that, "the work of the assemblies to create consciousness [about the negative impacts of mining] is quite strenuous because there are these lies [of the government and corporations]…The assembly has to work hard to clarify what is the truth and what is the lie"[11] (Interview 2).

This lack of access to the truth ultimately manifests itself in a lack of trust in the government and mining corporations. Citizens constantly must question what is true and what is a lie. Compounding the lack of trust in the government and mining corporations resulting from the lack of true information given by these actors is the financial relationship between the government and mining corporations. According to an Esquel neighbor, the mining corporations, "have lots of money and invest it in corruption, buying journalists, politicians, newspapers, radios… They buy the media and the government"[12] (Interview 3). Thus, the lack of information and financial relationship creates a lack of trust of the government and mining corporations.

The lack of access to information and the lack of trust of government officials and mining corporations is evidence of the presence of injustice of participation and recognition. In order to make an informed decision about the true costs and benefits of mining, citizens must be given an adequate amount of true information. Citizens must be insured that this information was not corrupted or manipulated by either corporate or government interests. However, in Esquel and Bariloche, this is not always an option. Thus, the inability to trust the government and mining

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[11] "Son trabajos bastante arduos de las asambleas, para crear consciencia…porque están estas mentiras…Entonces la asamblea tiene que trabajar mucho para aclarar dónde está la verdad y dónde está la mentira." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.
[12] "tienen mucha plata, mucho dinero y que lo invierten en corromper, comprar periodistas, políticos, diarios, radios…Compran los medio y compran a los gobernantes" Original text tranlsated by Sara Kleinkopf.

corporations and the information they provide inhibits the ability of citizens to participate fully, actively and in an informed matter in the decision making process. Because citizens cannot trust that the information they are provided is accurate, they are either forced into following the lies of the government and corporations, or fighting to gain access to the truth.

Lack of representation.

The second way in which justice of recognition and participation manifested themselves in the beliefs of neighbors of the assemblies of both Esquel and Bariloche was in the overwhelming belief that the community members were not adequately represented by their representatives in government. This sentiment was most strongly voiced by the first neighbor I interviewed.

> …the world is worn out with the system of representation as seen in Spain, Greece, [and] Portugal. The representatives represent corporate interests and not interests of the people ...[They represent] interests of capital, not the people… In history there has been good or bad representation, good or bad ... but right now they have all the same feature, which is representing the capital interests. [The representatives] are all representing corporations related to economic capital. They all are. So it's not a question of good or bad representation, but that they do not represent [us], they represent others[13] (Interview 1).

This connection between the government and mining corporations was also expressed in my second interview. This neighbor referred to the government and mining corporations as one in the same. In her opinion, "the government and the mines are the same"[14] because the government is only concerned with the wellbeing of corporate interests (Interview 2).

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[13] "…el mundo se está agotando el sistema de representación y date una idea que en España, Grecia, Portugal los representantes representan a intereses de corporaciones y no intereses de los pueblos… en la historia pudieron haber habido buenas o malas representaciones, buenas o malas…pero ahora directamente tienen todas una misma característica, que es la…Todas representando a corporaciones relacionadas con el capital, todas…Entonces, no es una cuestión de que representan bien o representan mal sino que no representan, representan a otras." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

[14] "El Gobierno y la mineras que son lo mismo." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

The deeply connected relationship between the government and mining corporations is a direct result of changing economic and political policies in Argentina. With the introduction of neoliberal policies, there is, "a new model of the state: [the state of] corporate or enterprise security"[15] (Marín 2009:189). This new state insures the legal and financial security of "private firms and multinationals such as Meridian Gold Inc., even at the expense of the safety and preservation of citizens' integrity"[16] (Marín 2009:189).

This crisis of representation is clear evidence of the lack of participation and recognition. While in principle all citizens are 'represented' by their governing officials, it is not true participation if the representatives don't represent their contingencies. Instead of the government and representatives working on behalf of the people, they now work on behalf of the corporate interests.

OVERCOMING ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICES

Development of open-pit mining in Argentina is clearly an example of an environmental injustice. There is an unequal distribution of mining in periphery countries like Argentina, and injustice in representation and participation are present in the lack of information, lack of trust in the government and/or mining corporations, and a lack of representation.

Overall, the conditions of environmental injustice directly affected the way in which the communities of Esquel and Bariloche responded to the threat of open-pit mining in their communities. The conditions of environmental injustice (especially the lack of trust and representation) affected the communities' responses in three primary ways. In the following

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[15] " un nuevo modelo de Estado: el Estado de seguridad corporativa o empresarial." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

[16] "…las firmas privadas y transnacionales como Meridian Gold Inc., aun a expensas de la seguridad y preservación de la integridad de los ciudadanos." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

sections I will discuss how the conditions of environmental injustice drove the communities to: organize in the form of an assembly, search for autonomy, and seek structural change.

The Assembly: As a Form

Conditions of environmental injustice affected the reaction by community members against open-pit mining through the manner in which these citizens decided to organize themselves. As explained previously, communities suffering from conditions of environmental injustice often experience a lack of representation and recognition. They are denied equal opportunities to voice their opinions and influence the decision making process. In order to overcome this injustice, the manner in which decisions are made must be changed. According to the neighbors I interviewed, many neighbors of Bariloche and Esquel want to replace the current inadequate system of representation with a system of direct democracy and participation. While community members cannot demand that the government must immediately make all decisions through a system of participatory democracy, citizens can change the way decisions are made at a local level. Thus, to insure that all citizens had an equal voice in the decision making processes on a local level, neighbors organized themselves into an assembly (Interview 5).

Mobilizing in an assembly is not an action unique to the anti-mining movement in Argentina. Thus, to understand why these neighbors chose to mobilize in an assembly, a brief explanation of the development of community assemblies is necessary[17]. This development of community assemblies in Argentina dates back to the economic crisis of 2001. During this crisis, thousands protested and marched through the streets of Argentina shouting "Out with everyone!" (Blanco: 2010). Though there were many causes for this rallying cry, one of the

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[17] Although the development of the form of an assembly is extremely important, I do not spend a significant amount of time developing this analysis within this project given my time constraints. However, if I choose to develop my analysis of the assemblies further, this is one area in which I could significantly expand my analysis.

driving factors was the crisis in representation and the lack of transparency of the government. According to one neighbor, "The assemblies were born in the crisis of 2001, in reaction to the political parties and the mode of representation"[18] (Interview 1). Immediately after this crisis, the number of assemblies grew rapidly as organizing in an assembly gave all members equal access and influence within small scale decision making processes. However, over time the number of assemblies decreased. One of the reasons the number of assemblies decreased was due to the presidency of Nestor Kirchner, whose policies helped institutionalize many social movements (Zibechi: 2003). However, the birth of the form of the assembly created the repertoire of action for other social movements, like the anti-mining movement, to draw from in the future.

One defining characteristic of these citizen assemblies is their horizontal structure. One neighbor of Esquel emphasized the importance of organizing in a horizontal manner. She explained, "If we want to change something, we have to change the form of how we gather and how we make decisions. And [the assembly is] one of the ways, or at least the most horizontal or the one of most consensus where we can all express our opinions"[19] (Interview 4). In addition to this neighbor, all neighbors interviewed expressed similar beliefs that an important aspect of organizing as an assembly was the horizontal nature that insured equality. One neighbor emphasized, "In an assembly we are all equals"[20] (Interview 2) while another elaborated that, "There is no one that stands out above the others, the work is of everyone equally"[21] (Interview

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[18] "Las asambleas nacieron en la crisis del 2001, en reacción a los partidos políticos y a la manera de cómo era la participación." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.
[19] "Si queremos cambiar algo tenemos que cambiar la forma de cómo nos juntamos o como tomamos las decisiones. Y esa es una de las maneras o por lo menos la más s horizontal o de consenso, donde todos podemos opinar…" Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.
[20] "En una asamblea somos todos iguales." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.
[21] "No hay nadie que destaque por sobre los otros, el trabajos es de todos igual." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

4). To maintain the horizontal structure and internal equality, the formation of a collective identity is essential.

Collective identity: 'the neighbor'.

New Social Movement Theory of European sociological schools analyzes the subjective elements that influence participation and organization of social movements. According to this framework, one of the principal ways in which a movement sustains its members is through the creation of collective identities. Because "collective identity is strongly associated with recognition and the creation of connectedness," (Della Porta and Diani 2006: 21) the formation of a collective identity gives individuals a shared identity and a common cause. Instead of being a group of individuals, a collective identity allows the group to feel connected to the movement and to one another. In the assemblies of Bariloche and Esquel, the participants actively work to create a collective identity to insure equality and recognition among all members.

According to Della Porta and Diani, "Identity emerges from the process of self-identification and external recognition" (2006: 105). Thus, in the case of the assemblies fight against open-pit mining, there are two aspects of collective identity for these assemblies: an internal identity of the 'neighbor' and an external identity of the 'assembly'.

The primary way in which the internal identity is formed is through assuming of role of the 'neighbor'. According to one neighbor, "We always manage a scheme in which we are all neighbors; amongst ourselves we call ourselves neighbors. We use that word to designate ourselves, because we are equal. And that in itself is very important"[22] (Interview 5). Thus the collective identity of the neighbor is used to insure that all members of the assembly are equal and share something in common.

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[22] "siempre nos manejamos en un esquema en el que todos somos vecinos, a nosotros mismos nos llamamos vecinos…Usamos esa palabra para designarnos, porque somos iguales. Y eso sí es muy importante." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

Within the assembly, there is no set type of person that is more predisposed to join. There are all type of people including, "kids from 12 to 14 years old, elderly gentlemen, lawyers, business owners, teachers, unemployed individuals and housewives"[23] (Interview 3). Without class to unite them (like traditional social movements had) new social movements must form a collective identity so that members feel connected to and part of the group. The internal identity of a neighbor has this affect for the assemblies of Esquel and Bariloche. "All the people work through the assembly as neighbors, not as organizations. A lawyer can do a job for the assembly as a neighbor, and there is no one that does work not as a neighbor"[24] (Interview 1). In addition to all individuals working as a neighbor rather than as their title, individuals must not come to the assembly as a representative or advocate of any political party. For example, one neighbor reinforced that, "If someone belongs to a political party they can come, but they must come as a neighbor, not as a representative of a political party"[25] (Interview 1).

Additionally, the neighbors of Esquel and Bariloche actively work to create and maintain the external identity of the 'assembly'. From outside observers (the government, organizations, universities, etc) these neighbors want to be recognized as an assembly, not as a collection of random individuals (Interview 2). They want the voice and opinions of the assembly to be heard and taken as the opinion of the assembly itself. One neighbor believed that a major successes of the assembly of Bariloche, was that their identity was beginning to be recognized externally. "The assembly has succeeded in becoming a valid voice on the issue [of mining] in the region. The media come to us when they are going to talk about the issue…. And on occasions the

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[23] "Chicos de 12 o 14 años hasta señores ancianos, desde abogados, dueños de negocios hasta desempleados o docentes o amas de casa…" Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.
[24] "Todas las personas funcionan adentro de la asamblea como vecinos, no como organizaciones…El abogado puede hacer un trabajo para la asamblea como un vecino y nadie hace trabajos que no sea como vecino." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.
[25] "Si alguien pertenece a un partido político puede venir, pero viene como vecino, no viene en calidad de represéntate del partido político." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

government has responded to [the assembly] as an assembly"[26] (Interview 5). This external

recognition is a key component of creating and maintaining an exterior collective identity.

Belief in the assembly as a form.

The assembly as a form allows the neighbors to create a horizontal structure that

facilitates the creation of collective identity, maintains the equality of all neighbors, and allows

all neighbors to make decisions collectively. Because of this change in participation and

organization, many neighbors I interviewed expressed their belief in the organizational form of

the assembly. This theme was particularly evident in my interview with a female neighbor of the

Bariloche assembly. "Personally, I think that the assembly is the only way to do something

…Lets say, I believe in the assembly as a form"[27] (Interview 5).

Another neighbor expressed that there is something particularly liberating about being an

assembly. "I think it gives us more freedom of action in the sense that we know where we're

going… we will not form a political party… we will not turn into something else… We will

continue to be an assembly of neighbors, of equals"[28] (Interview 5).

Both these sentiments express that these neighbors truly believe in the change they are

working for. Because they suffered in a system characterized by the lack of trust, lack of

information, and lack of representation, they sought a change. Organizing as an assembly was

their solution to replace the non-functioning system of representation with one of local direct

democracy and participation.   In order to overcome the environmental injustice of open-pit

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[26] "La asamblea ha logrado convertirse en una voz válida sobre el tema en la región. Los medios de comunicación recurren a nosotros cuando van a hablar del tema… y en ocasiones el Gobierno nos ha respondido como asamblea." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

[27] "Personalmente a mí me parece que lo asambleario es la manera, la manera posible de hacer algo que no sea…Digamos, yo creo en lo asambleario como forma" Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

[28] "Yo creo que nos da más libertad de acción en el sentido de que sabemos hacia dónde vamos…no vamos a formar un partido político, no nos vamos a convertir en otra cosa…Vamos a seguir siendo una asamblea de vecinos, iguales." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

mining, "demands for a broader and more authentic public participation, is often seen as the tool to achieve both distributional equity and political recognition" (Schlosberg 2003: 84). Organizing as an assembly is this tool for the neighbors of Esquel and Bariloche.

Seeking Autonomy

An additional consequence of the crisis of representation in Argentina, is citizens believe they do not have any voice or influence in the decision making process. In a system of representation where the representatives represent corporate interests rather than the interests of the common citizen, how are citizens supposed to effectively participate in the political process? This lack of participation directly affected the desires of the assembly against the mine in Bariloche and Esquel. Not only are these neighbors fighting to remove the mines (or keep mining out in the case of Bariloche), but they are also fighting for autonomy.

Although these neighbors continuously emphasized the importance of being autonomous, it is first important to ask who or what they want to be autonomous from. These assemblies do not reject all support, they just reject the support that is connected to the system they are trying to overcome or replace. In the case of the assemblies of Bariloche and Esquel, the assemblies are searching for autonomy from the current political system and the influence of capital interests. Thus, they are primarily seeking autonomy from the government, mining corporations, and any organizations that are tied to these interests (Interview 5). These assemblies are willing to support and receive support from anyone who identifies with the identity of the neighbor or the assembly. For example, one exception to the avoidance of exterior support is the Union of Patagonian Assemblies and the Union of Citizen Assemblies. Both the assemblies of Esquel and

Bariloche are members of these networks as these are networks of neighbors all fighting for a common cause (Interview 2).

In establishing autonomy from the government and capital interests, the identity of the 'neighbor' is especially important. All individuals work as neighbors, not as representatives of their own organizations or political parties. As a female neighbor explained, "If a lawyer does work, for now he does it out of good faith, as we say"[29] (Interview 4). The neighbors I interviewed expressed the importance of doing work only as a neighbor in order to maintain their autonomy. When asked why assemblies don't receive outside support, a male neighbor of Bariloche was quick to answer. He explained, "I think it is important to maintain this, to be autonomous, in principal from the State… from the State, from the organizations, from the political parties, from the organizations that are fighting the government" (Interview 5). All neighbors expressed similar responses to avoiding outside support. These neighbors expressed that their successes are due to the work of themselves as neighbors, not others; "What there is, is work of the community" (Interview 3).

Another facet of maintaining autonomy is the avoidance of exterior funding of any kind. According to one neighbor, "The assemblies don't receive finances… [Because] finances always condition you. So what we proposed is a path of autonomy"[30] (Interview 1). All neighbors I interviewed emphasized similar beliefs that the assembly couldn't remain autonomous if they received external financial support.

Finally, the neighbors I interviewed expressed that external support is avoided because a key element of autonomy is the ability for the assembly to determine its path and actions at all

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[29] "Si la abogada lo hace, por ahora lo está haciendo de buena onda, como decimos nosotros." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.
[30] "Las asambleas no reciben financiamiento…el financiamiento siempre te condiciona. Y entonces lo que nosotros propusimos es un camino de autonomía." Origional text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

times. Often, large NGOs or other formal organizations, have agendas of their own. While these

organizations do want to help communities like Esquel and Bariloche remove the threat of open-

pit mining, they also have other motivations or restrictions on their ability to support community

assemblies. For example, one neighbor of Bariloche explained why the assembly avoids support

from NGOs like Green Peace. According to this neighbor,

> Avoided also is the support of NGOs, of organizations like Green Peace, international
> [organizations], because in general the assemblies think that there is a model, that the
> cause…is the overconsumption of the first world and the contamination of the poor
> countries. But organizations like Green Peace and others, who are friends of ours,…do
> not consider the political problem, and for us the cause is political… So, the support of
> these organizations that only consider the problem in isolation from the political causes,
> do not serve us[31]. (Interview 1)

If the assemblies of Bariloche and Esquel were concerned only with removing open-pit mining

from their communities, the support of NGOs like Green Peace could be useful. However,

because the assemblies are also looking to fix the political causes of an environmental injustice,

alliances with Green Peace are not useful. The work of the assemblies is just as much about

gaining autonomy and a voice in the decision making process as it is about removing the threat

of open-pit mining.

Desire for Structural Change

In addition to seeking autonomy, the assemblies of Bariloche and Esquel also advocate

and search for structural changes to the State and political system as a means of overcoming the

environmental injustices they face. In the traditional theory of environmental justice,

communities who lack political participation will search for means of correcting this lack of

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[31] "Evitado también es la ayuda de ONG, de organizaciones como Green Peace, internacionales, porque en general
las asambleas creen que hay un modelo de que la causa es…el sobreconsumo del primer mundo y la contaminación
de los países pobres. Pero organizaciones como Green Peace u otras, que son amigas nuestras…no consideran el
problema político y para nosotros la causa es política…Entonces, es como que no sirve la ayuda de organizaciones
que consideran el problema aislado de sus causas políticas." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

participation. Individuals can demand that their rights must be respected and they can demand increased participation and better representation. However, in the case of the assemblies, the individuals I interviewed all expressed their discontent with the current political situation. Because of this, no neighbor wanted increased participation within the current system. "The assemblies do not want political recognition. Those who want political recognition are those who form a political party and seek traditional paths, those are [people] who want political recognition. The assemblies do not want political recognition. We want to stop the plunder and pollution"[32] (Interview 1).   In other words, these neighbors are not looking for increased or better representation. Because the system does not serve them anymore, the assemblies look for something more. In order to stop the development of open-pit mining, the neighbors I interviewed wanted to change the system entirely. A neighbor from Bariloche argued, "The big changes come when the people mobilize… And if we want to change something, we have to change the form in which we gather and how we make decisions"[33] (Interview 4). The question that looms above the assembly is how exactly to change the system. This question is still in discussion among the neighbors, but is best understood through the development and influence of the word 'No'.

The meaning of 'no'.

At all marches, meetings, or conversations with a neighbor about mining, the word 'no' undoubtedly appears numerous times. "No to the Mine" (No a la Mina) is the rally cry of these

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[32] "Reconocimiento político no quieren las asambleas, los que quieren reconocimiento político son los que arman un partido político y buscan los caminos tradicionales, quieren reconocimiento político. Las asambleas no queremos reconocimiento político, queremos que se corte el saqueo y la contaminación." Orininal text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

[33] "Los grandes cambios vienen cuando la gente se mueve… Y si queremos cambiar algo tenemos que cambiar la forma de cómo nos juntamos o como tomamos las decisiones." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf

assemblies and appears on flags, flyers, websites, and newspapers. In these assemblies, the word

'no' has a significance and story of its own. For the neighbors I interviewed, saying 'no' is the

first step in the process of changing the system.

Because the assemblies do not believe in the current political system, they wanted to

propose something better. But such a difficult task can be daunting. One neighbor claimed the

daunting task of proposing changes of this magnitude often seems impossible.

> When the system does not serve us any longer, many people ask if anyone knows how to
> propose something better. And many people do not say anything because they do not
> know how to propose something better. So, many times they remain marginalized under
> the system because the people do not know how to propose something better, until the
> day that the communities say "I do not know if I can propose something better, but I
> know that I do not want this." And the people gather around the word 'no'[34]. (Interview
> 1).

Thus, the word no was developed as the first step of changing the system. To this day, the

neighbors do not have a solution, or know what the future holds. But they continue to mobilize

around the word 'no' because they all agree that they do not want the current system.

Frequently, the assemblies are accused of overusing the word 'no' and remaining over-

negative. However, the word 'no' is not simply a negative; it is more complex than that. The

neighbor from Esquel explained,

> The 'no' means this…to say stop, that's enough, we do not want it, this we do not want.
> But the 'no' also means 'yes' to life, to maintain a quality of water, to access to water for
> everyone, and especially to sustainable work for all of our life. It is to say that, to say
> 'no' does not mean that we are negative and we do not want anything, but that it is a 'no'
> that is alternatively positive. Because it means that we do not want this type of work.
> Because of this, as I told you, the "no" converts into a "yes". Not this, but yes to the
> rest.[35] (Interview 3).

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[34] "Cuando el sistema este no sirve más, mucha gente se pregunta si sabe proponer algo mejor. Y mucha gente no
decía nada porque no sabía proponer algo mejor. Entonces, mucho tiempo se estuvo alimentado a un modelo
equivocado porque la gente no sabía proponer algo mejor, hasta que un día las comunidades dijeron 'yo no sé si sé
proponer algo mejor, pero yo sé que esto no lo quiero'. Y la gente se juntó alrededor del no." Original text
translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

[35] "Entonces, el "no" significa eso…decir stop, hasta aquí, no queremos, esto no lo queremos. Pero el "no" también
significa un "sí" grande a la vida, a mantener la calidad del agua, al acceso al agua para todo el mundo y sobre todo
al trabajo genuino y trabajo sustentable para toda la vida. Es decir, el decir "no" no significa que somos negativos y
no queremos nada, sino que es un "no" altamente positivo. Porque significa que no queremos este tipo de trabajo…

As expressed by this neighbor, the word no is very complex. But the change these assemblies are fighting for is also complex. Because the neighbors know they want to change the system, but do not yet know how, they have mobilized around the 'no'. No to the mine, no to the State, and no to false representation is the first step for these assemblies to overcome the environmental injustices they face.

CONCLUSIONS

From my interviews with the neighbors of Bariloche and Esquel it became very clear that the development of open-pit mining was a glaringly obvious example of environmental injustice. The distribution of open-pit mining is unequal as worldwide mining developments are more likely to be located in periphery countries. This unequal distribution of mining is accompanied by a lack of political recognition and participation in communities like Bariloche and Esquel as shown by in the manipulation of information provided by the government and mining corporations, a lack of trust in the government and mining corporations, and a crisis in representation of local citizens. The conditions of environmental injustice (especially the lack of true information/trust and the crisis in representation) directly impacted the manner in which the community responded to the development of open-pit mining. Community organization into an assembly, the search for autonomy, and the desire for structural change are the assemblies' responses to but also their means to overcome the environmental injustice of open-pit mining.

Por eso, como te digo, el "no" se convierte en un "sí". No esto, sí a todo lo demás." Original text translated by Sara Kleinkopf.

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INTERVIEWS

Interview 1:

> **Name:** Alejandro
> **Position:** neighbor in Bariloche assembly (also Works for an environmental organization
> Piuké).
> **Age:** 50+
> **Sex:** male

Interview 2:

> **Name:** Ana
> **Position:** neighbor in Bariloche assembly (also works for environmental organization
> Árbol en Pie)
> **Age:** 60+
> **Sex:** female

Interview 3:

> **Name:** Juan
> **Position:** neighbor in Esquel assembly
> **Age:** 40+
> **Sex:** male

Interview 4:

> **Name:** Paula
> **Position:** neighbor of Bariloche assembly (also a history professor)
> **Age:** 35+
> **Sex:** female

Interview 5:

> **Name:** Darín
> **Position:** neighbor of Bariloche assembly (also works in the pandería of Piuké)
> **Age:** 25+
> **Sex:** male

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