

Research Report:
Women's Participation in the Coordinación de Organizaciones Mapuche

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Research Objectives

Approximately twenty years ago, a group of Mapuches living in the provincial capital of Neuquén, in the province of the same name, began meeting weekly to discuss their identity as indigenous people in a country that does not recognize them as such. Today that organization has grown and evolved into multiple organizations, all of which are subsumed under the banner of an organization called the Coordinación de Organizaciones Mapuche (COM). My initial research objectives were to look at the way in which Mapuche women participate in the current organization. I especially wanted to investigate the coincidence of their identity as Mapuche and as women. As I began to talk with the women at the COM, I also became interested in generational differences among the women and the way that these differences intertwine with their identity.

While the Mapuche population in Neuquén is estimated to be 70,000¹, the number of women who participate in this particular urban indigenous organization is relatively small. Part of my research objectives, then, were also to determine when and why the women who participate in the COM do so. What distinguishes them from the many other Mapuche women who either do not recognize themselves as such or do not see their Mapuche identity as a driving force in their daily lives? In determining the reasons for their high levels of participation, I became interested in the history of the organization itself and the way in which women's participation in it has shaped it over the past two decades. I became interested in the way in which women's stories of their lives

intertwined with the history of the COM. A further research objective was to look at the COM in a regional context in order to determine its relationship with the provincial state and the way that this relationship impacts social policy towards the Mapuche people. The relative antagonism of the state towards the COM and the lack of public recognition of the existence of Mapuches within the province of Neuquén led to interesting observations regarding the struggle for the implementation of social policy. This was especially clear to me in the area of education and the measures taken by the COM to implement intercultural education in public schools.

Research Methodology

My research methodology consisted mostly of participant observation. I initially spoke with Raúl Díaz about an appropriate way in which to go about my research and an appropriate focus of my topic. The confidence and trust he shares with the COM, and especially with the Center of Education within the COM, served as an initial entrée into the organization. Because of the sensitivity of my role as an outsider, Professor Díaz felt that the timing of my first meeting with the COM was extremely important. After being in Neuquén for a little over a week and getting to know him better, we went to the COM one morning together. Four of the women were leaving to take part in a solidarity event with the workers of a taken over factory, and they invited me to go with them and observe their way in which they participate in community events. The following day I returned with Professor Díaz to observe a meeting with a prominent American intellectual, who had come to speak with the Mapuche about their plight against the Argentine state and within the Neuquén community. On this day one of the women told me that I was welcome to come by the COM any and every day that I wanted, and that I

should not be afraid to ask them any questions. They would try to answer all of the questions I asked. She went so far as to tell me that I could even stay the night at the COM one night if I so desired, in order to see the workings of the organization around the clock.

The same day that I received an overall welcome into the organization, I also faced my first research challenge. The intellectual from the U.S., upon discovering that the COM had ties to researchers at the University of Texas, began to lecture about the untrustworthiness of the state of Texas in general. He stated that American researchers, especially those in such close proximity to the homeland of President Bush, should not be trusted, even if they seem nice enough. He cautioned that information shared with American researchers had a way of leaking to those with power, and that this was especially relevant to the Mapuche, who are fighting petroleum companies in Argentina. Those same petroleum companies have power in Texas, and would love to have access to information about struggles around the world, he ultimately warned. I immediately felt that these comments had created a distance between the Mapuches and me that might be hard to gap. I tried to be wary of his warning, understanding the general fear of research that later become appropriated by those with power. More importantly, I tried to overcome his stereotype and instill trust in people so that our relationship would be one based on trust than on a mistrust stemming solely from my country of origin. I did find in general, though, that people were less willing to talk to and be open with a researcher from the United States.

I accepted the women's invitation to visit the COM as frequently as I wanted and went there nearly every day. I talked with whomever was around, sometimes about issues

pertaining to my research objectives and other times about them and the intricacies of the organization. I often sat by the computer while some of the women wrote grant proposals and summaries about their work in the Center of Education. I helped translate documents that had been written in English for one woman who is an active participant in many international conferences. Many days non-Mapuche people, especially teachers and students, came to the COM to discuss the ways in which they could change their teaching and thinking about Mapuches in the classroom. I often sat in on these discussions, listening to what the representatives of the Center of Education informed and advised non-Mapuche Argentines. Toward the end of my stay, the members of the COM invited me to take part in their New Year's ceremony, *Wiñoy Xipantv*, and I attended it with them in Puente Blanco. This gave my research greater depth as I spent four days and nights with them. I was able to have more in-depth conversations and began to understand the structure of the organization better. As I got to know people better, I also started sharing meals with them, which led to a greater understanding of them and their roles within the organization and community. At the end of my stay I conducted four formal taped interviews and had an un-taped in-depth conversation with an older member of the community.

In addition to the obstacle of being an outsider and especially an American outsider, another obstacle I faced was the difficulty of being able to find people on a regular basis. I scheduled various interviews that never came to fruition because the interviewees were busy with their lives and commitments. In this sense, it was difficult to have consistency in my conversations and informal interviews. I tried to respect my subjects' personal lives and priorities while still conducting my own research.

Another difficult issue was that of my placing importance on women over men. When I first told the women at the COM that my research would focus on the role of women within the organization, they quickly responded that in their belief system, there was no difference between men and women, and that they did not intend to follow Western belief systems and create one. They also were hesitant to speak of themselves as individuals with individual stories because of their belief system, which sees the organization as a community whose characteristics are communal rather than individual. In following with the Mapuche world-vision, the organization has as its focus the community and does not believe in exalting the individual. In this sense they were hesitant to offer me their stories as individuals and as women. These two strong beliefs regarding the role of women and of individuals dictated the questions I felt were appropriate to ask and challenged the basis of my research, individual women, forcing me to go about my research in a manner different than I had planned. I became aware that I could use the stories of individual women to create a richer history and understanding of the community and that my goal was not to separate the women from men but rather to determine the ways in which their roles differ within the whole. This is the direction my research took, as I became especially interested in the way in which different generations of women made up the network of relationships within the community.

National Context

The late 1800's saw a series of military expeditions into the pampas and hinterlands with the double goal of eliminating the indigenous population and expanding national borders. These expeditions culminated in the Conquest of the Desert of 1878, carried out by then-President General Rosas. After this multi-phased military expedition,

intended to wipe out the Mapuche population, other more subtle, but no less consequential state-sponsored actions have been implemented with the same general goal of extermination and assimilation. Despite these continued attempts, there still exists a strong Mapuche population in Argentina, concentrated in Patagonia, and with large numbers in urban areas in Neuquén. Regardless of the number of self-recognizing Mapuches in Argentina generally and within the capital city of Neuquén specifically, both the provincial and national governments continue to maintain an antagonistic stance towards Mapuches. The general populace upholds an attitude of intolerance, indifference or disbelief that Mapuches still exist. In talking with non-Mapuches in the province of Neuquén, most told me that they had lived in the province their entire lives and had never seen a real Mapuche, possibly suspecting that Mapuche people do not actually exist. Other non-Mapuches in provinces farther away, such as Buenos Aires, seemed to regard Mapuches as an exotic relic of the past – again something that they had heard of but certainly never experienced. The idea that real Mapuches no longer exist in Argentina is fostered by the educational system, which teaches from a Euro-centric point of view. It does not include discussion of current Mapuches, their lives, beliefs and culture, but rather speaks of them as an historic aspect of the country. It teaches that they were a people who were long ago conquered and who have no current bearing on the Argentine state. Because of this, a main point of interest for Mapuche organizations is the conversion of the ideologically Western education system to a system of intercultural education. This system would be more fair in its treatment of and teachings about all kinds of people and emphasize their modern role.

In the province of Neuquén, specifically, the same political party has been in power for twenty years, giving the impression of clientelistic ties to the general populace. In the eyes of many citizens of the province, both Mapuche and non-Mapuche, the current provincial government, headed by Jorge Sobich, has a history of corruption and power abuse through its authoritarian force. While the provincial government has been slow in recognizing Mapuche communities and their rights as such, in some cases there has been greater reception to Mapuche demands by the national government, furthering the antagonism between Neuquén's government and the Mapuche organizations and communities.

To add to the problem of obtaining state recognition, the larger national economic crisis plays a role in the current situation. In December 2001 Argentina faced a disastrous economic crisis that heavily devalued its currency and left many people without savings, retirement protection and jobs. The national government, in trying to offset costs, began a decentralization process, giving provinces more financial responsibility. Provinces, unable to shoulder this burden have left many public employees with a portion of their previous salaries, or worse, with no salary at all. The result of this has been a huge increase in unemployment in the past few years and the parallel effect of increased poverty. Interestingly, the backlash of the lack of state involvement and ability to change the situation has been an increase in support for groups who are confronting the state. There seems to be a heightened sense of solidarity among different organizations around the country who are trying to join forces to confront the state and change the social, economic and political situation. For example, Mapuche representatives attend factory take-over rallies as well as university demonstrations as an act of solidarity with these

other groups. Their specific causes differ, but they share the goal of trying to act in the face of poverty and government corruption. Thus, while the majority of the population in Argentina is suffering economically, there is a sense of hope through shared participation in social movements and activities. Organizations representing many different kinds of people from across the country are fairly tightly connected in their attempts to change aspects of Argentine politics and society. In turn, these groups seem to have the support of a large portion of the population.

During my time in Neuquén, I experienced one particularly powerful example of the antagonism the provincial government of Neuquén feels for the COM. This example took the form of an expertly planned and executed break-in of the COM's community center. Despite the fact that a woman sleeps at the center in order to keep watch over it and that the center is well equipped with a high-tech security system, the robbers effortlessly carried off one computer and another CPU. When I arrived at the center the following morning, the members of the COM were certain that the professional job signified a higher level of planning than a neighborhood kid could have carried out. The alarms had been disabled so as not to go off and the robbers were very specific in what they took and what they left behind. A week previous to the robbery, the local police had unexpectedly and violently arrived at the center in full force looking for documents regarding the Mapuche Confederation. The members of the COM were sure that this second attack, in the form of the taking of all information pertaining to the COM over the last twenty years, which had been stored on the two computers, was related. They were sure, as well, that it had been sponsored by Sobich's government. It was a desperate attempt to demoralize the COM and quiet its constant confrontations of the state

authorities. The COM members expressed their conviction on the news and in their daily discussions, sure that every-day robbers would have taken the more valuable items of scanners and fax machines.

Communities Visited

In the environment of hostility between the provincial government and the Mapuche organizations, I felt that my time was best spent exploring the details of this relationship and the relationship the members of the COM had among themselves. Because of this, the community in which I spent most of my time was the urban Mapuche community in the capital city of Neuquén. While many Mapuches live in Neuquén, the number who take part in the COM and other Mapuche organizations is considerably smaller. However, those who are part of the COM consider themselves an urban community with the same interests, needs and rights as a rural community. In other words, for them, being Mapuche does not depend exclusively on living in a rural area. At the same time, most of the urban Mapuches who make up the COM maintain strong connections to rural communities. Some maintain ties to their community of origin while others have developed relationships with different rural communities.

The fact that the community in Neuquén is urban did not seem to detract from its communal or community-based characteristics. Similarly to the make-up of a rural area, many of the members of the community were related. Some of the older members are siblings, making the younger generation cousins. Others of the older members are themselves cousins. However, whether related or not, most of the people with whom I spoke professed a strong sense of belonging which they equated with feeling like family members. Most members live in the neighborhood in which the center is located. More

specifically, many live within a few blocks of each other; one woman lives in the COM's building itself while another lives across the street.

Regardless of where the members live, most spend a considerable amount of time at the center. This is especially true of the women who make up the education center. They spend the majority of the day at the COM. While they are there they host visitors, perform necessary work and discuss pertinent news with other members who continually come in and out. In addition, the kids of most of the members, from a nine-month old baby to a group of adolescent boys, spend large chunks of the day at the center. Some attend morning classes and show up at the COM in the evening, whereas others are at the COM in morning preparing for their evening classes. Most days in the middle of the day some of the kids arrive from school for lunch. Someone, usually one of the women, then either makes or buys food for everybody to eat. The kids then play, talk, help out with tasks around the center, do their homework or work on the magazine that they publish throughout the year.

The constant daily activity gives the center a liveliness in which it feels like members of the community of all ages are welcome and are involved. There are constant discussions of the newest progress in any one of the many areas in which the COM plays a role. Some days there is progress with the Universidad del Comahue in promoting a Mapuche studies program. Other days people discuss a community that is fighting with a petroleum company over land rights, and debate the best line of action when dealing with the state in the matter. No matter the day or the issue, people keep up a constant analysis of the events affecting both their urban community and the rural communities about which they deeply care. In addition, they are always strategizing about the best way

to approach these issues or deal with problems, such as the robbery of the computers. Also, the community leaders participate in regular meetings that are closed to everyone else. Some members of the community, especially those involved with the education center also participate in solidarity events, as previously mentioned, and frequently leave for interviews with local television and radio programs. For them, speaking on television or the radio is a role that they must fulfill. It is a form of education that reaches a large percentage of the population and hopefully has the desired effect of making their presence and their identity known.

Although I spent nearly all of my time in Neuquén, the members of the COM invited me to join them in a community outside of San Martín de los Andes for their New Year's celebration called Wiñoy Xipantv. This is the community of Curruhuinca, in the specific locale of Puente Blanco. My time in this community was limited to the time I spent there for the ceremony. My knowledge of the community was also limited by the constraints of being in a ceremonial site as well as by the people with whom I spoke. However, I stayed in the local school in Puente Blanco with many other Mapuche from Neuquén and other neighboring communities. During these few days, I helped out in the kitchen of the school, helping cook dinner for the many Mapuches there for the ceremony. This gave me an opportunity to talk with some members of Curruhuinca.

The most striking feature of Puente Blanco is the centrality of the school to the community. I had heard about the school and its implementation of intercultural education before visiting the community, and from these conversations I gathered the importance of the school to both its particular community and also to the larger Mapuche population. The school and community represent a way of teaching youth that is not

based on the traditionally discriminatory Argentine system, but is rather an incorporation of Western education into a Mapuche vision of education and beliefs. It represents a small victory against the Argentine state and, moreover, a place that the Mapuche community can call its own. Upon entering the school, it is obvious that this school is different than other schools in the province of Neuquén. The school consists of one main room with various small rooms along both sides. The main room proudly displays posters of modern Mapuches. The blackboards in the individual rooms are covered with the remnants of the previous day's lesson: a cluster diagram of the negative consequences of the Conquest of the Desert. And the kids of the school, like the kids from the COM in Neuquén, are eager to participate in the ceremony. They know about the importance of the ceremony to their beliefs and strongly desire to uphold those learned beliefs. This is obviously a place of learning different than most and a point of pride for the community.

Policy Implications

There are a number of issues that must be addressed when looking at national social policy regarding the Mapuche. On a general level, it is important to address the necessity of a policy dealing with poverty and lack of employment, which affects everyone, but has a more focused effect on rural areas and on indigenous people. Because many Mapuche fall into these categories, they are adversely affected by poverty. Social policy dealing with poverty could be a range of possibilities. First of all, the federal government needs to better implement its project of decentralization, either by improving funding to provinces or by providing direct financial support to state employees and poor communities. At the same time, the state needs to devise a method of redistribution of wealth. A couple of the Mapuche women I knew received funds from the national

program Jefes/Jefas de Hogar, but this meager sum was hardly enough for food for one for the month. In addition, there were bureaucratic problems that often kept the money from arriving.

More important to the members of the COM than their level of wealth are the issues of recognition, land rights, education and management of national parks. These topics all require a certain strong social policy and one that the state, on both the national and provincial levels, will only reticently, if at all, apply. For example, when calling for recognition, the COM is also calling for legal rights of self-government and self-punishment. It advocates the right to a Mapuche justice system that will regulate and punish as the communities see fit, rather than depend on the federal and provincial justice systems. According to the COM, a judicial organ within Mapuche society already exists. This system should be allowed the responsibility and authority to make a decision in minor cases and to make the first jurisdictional decision in more serious cases. In this case, the political authority would come from Mapuche communal policy with the COM being the final authority and last resort. For this type of judicial system to come into play, the Argentine national and provincial governments would have to give up a large amount of power to Mapuche communities. In a country in which Mapuches are not generally recognized, this would be a seemingly huge step for the state. At the same time, it would be a true recognition of Mapuches as an indigenous (and perhaps autonomous) group, rather than the current recognition that carries little political meaning. While this is not an area that I studied as intimately as other areas, I believe that the actual implementation of a judicial system run completely by Mapuches and for Mapuches would require an

atmosphere of trust by the Argentine state. It would also require a clear legal definition of minor vs. major cases and a large degree of organization by Mapuche communities.

A second area of policy regarding the Mapuches is that of the co-management of National Parks. Much of the land that today makes up National Parks in Patagonia was previously land pertaining to the Mapuche people. When the Argentine state became interested in expanding its border and assuring that Chile would not claim land that Argentina wanted, it designated much of the land along the border as National Park. This gave, and still gives, the Park Service access to and control over the resources the land has to offer and the way in which the land is used. It is now the Argentine state, under the auspices of the Park Service, that mandates land usage. This takes place despite the fact that there have been Mapuches living on this very land since long before the construction of the Argentine state. Today there are Mapuche communities within National Parks, yet they have no say in the way the land is used. This is especially problematic in cases such as the Cerro Chapelco, in which the National Parks system decided to create a ski resort on Mapuche territory within the park. In an attempt to remedy this situation and begin to treat Mapuche communities within the parks more fairly, a new system of co-management has been adopted. The new structure of management implies an entirely new set of policies surrounding the protection and usage of National Parks. Mapuche representatives now have a greater say in the way that the land should be preserved according to the Mapuche world-vision and the way that it should be used by both Mapuches and non-Mapuches.

A third facet, and area with which I became strongly acquainted during my time in Neuquén, is that concerning education. Currently in Argentina, the treatment of

Mapuches in the public education system is poor, both in terms of treating Mapuche children and in terms of teaching the situation of current Mapuches. Within the Mapuche communities, there is constant dialogue concerning the state of education. This dialogue is almost always a critique of the educational system and the way in which it avoids the subject of modern Mapuches. What struck me as interesting is the way in which people of all generations talk about the educational system. Thus, while Mapuche children are attending public schools, at home and in the community they also participate in a critique of these very places. In talking to both parents and students, it appears that this creates a dilemma for the Mapuche student. On the one hand, the communities want their children to continue their education. With this desire there is a deep understanding that a continued education bears the responsibility of returning and providing the community with resources previously unknown or taken from non-Mapuche society. This will help Mapuche communities become more self-sustainable and less dependent on the intellectual and scholarly resources of outsiders. On the other hand, the constant criticism of public education makes students wary of continuing and of devoting a large part of their life to studying, especially when the system is so wrought with problems. At the same time, there are many other ways in which the children are needed in the communities and these are often more important than continuing with school. One clear example of the way in which this dilemma is played out on a daily basis involves a high school student who has inclinations to be a leader. His election as student body president stirred up great debate within the community. Members of the community were proud of his leadership achievement, yet concerned about his intimate involvement in a system that has long been detrimental to all Mapuches.

In light of these types of debates, social policy concerning education becomes especially important. Throughout my time with Mapuche communities, the reasons that I most frequently heard concerning the fight for recognition and revival of identity focused on Mapuche children. There is a high level of awareness about the current struggle and its importance to the younger generations and those to come. With this in mind, a large section of the COM is devoted to its Center for Education, or Norgybamtuleayin. This center is devoted to collecting and strengthening Mapuche knowledge and promoting intercultural education in Argentine society at large. Because education is a crucial topic when considering the future of any group, and especially one that has suffered continuous oppression under the hands of the provincial and national governments, social policy regarding its implementation is especially important.

I observed many proceedings related to the promotion and implementation of intercultural education. Certain of these events are especially important to consider for a new social policy. First, the training of teachers is an essential area that an educational policy must take into consideration. It is important that teachers who both are and are not planning on teaching in Mapuche communities receive training regarding Mapuches. Their training is a critical aspect of the process of implementation because they are one of the largest influences on children in a school setting. In this sense, their training must include a history of the Mapuche people from the Mapuche point of view. At the same time, they must receive training about the Mapuche belief system, values and practices. From this beginning, a policy on education would then need to address the best way to include these ideas in a curriculum and give them equal weight and validity as Western

ideas in the classroom. This should hold for schools both within and outside of Mapuche communities.

One question that I heard constantly being discussed by members of the COM and other Mapuches was that of language. Some Mapuche organizations focus on the importance of re-learning and re-teaching their language, Mapuzugun, and in this direction are committed to the necessity of bilingual education. For others, especially the members of the COM, bilingual education is important, but not nearly as much as intercultural education. As one Mapuche woman put it, “Knowledge of Mapuzugun is an important tool. But it is just that – a tool.” The reasoning behind this line of thought is that teaching the same curriculum in a different language does not change the ideas, only the words. The more important thing to change is the meaning behind the language and the ideas themselves. When this is done, then the inclusion of Mapuzugun takes on greater significance.

A further aspect of educational policy that was taking shape while I was in Neuquén was a partnership between the COM and the Universidad del Comahue, the provincial public university. The goal of the partnership is to promote a Mapuche studies program within the university. Recognition by the university of the importance of studying Mapuche culture, language, and belief system will add to the legitimacy Mapuche communities are vying for within the state. Given the impact of education on both Mapuche and non-Mapuche children and its implications for future dealings between the two, a shift in educational policy is essential. The state must take a strong stand on the education of educators and the implementation of intercultural education.

This policy must not focus only on a change to bilingual education but must change completely the way history, current events, ideas and beliefs are taught.

Further Research Areas

Further research in Neuquén could go a variety of directions. In the first place, tracking of the progress of the intercultural education program implemented in the community of Puente Blanco is important. It will serve as an example of the way an intercultural education program can be developed in a rural school with a mostly Mapuche student population. As the program matures and progresses, research regarding its successes and struggles will be important indicators for other communities wanting to implement a similar program. Another interesting point of investigation would be the notion of multiculturalism and its use and appropriation by the state. This research would address the intentional use of multiculturalism by the state and the way the state manages groups according to this notion. It would look at the way in which the state recognizes Mapuche communities and what state recognition means. In other words, how much autonomy does a community gain with state recognition, or conversely, how much does its status become managed by the state and its politics subject to heavier control? A third point of research would be the relationship between rural and urban Mapuche communities and organizations and the places of both convergence and divergence in these relationships. Because indigenous people are generally assumed to be rural, the recognition of urban dwellers as Mapuche and their different role as such presents an interesting contrast to the rural assumption. I often thought that it would be interesting to explore this assumption and the problems that it presents within the Mapuche communities and in dealings with the state. A further research topic that I looked at but

that could be developed further is the role of youth in the Mapuche organizations. It would be interesting to compare levels of youth involvement in the COM with levels of youth involvement in indigenous organizations in other regions or with youth involvement in rural Mapuche communities. This research would also look at youth identity and how it shapes community participation.

Contact Information

I conducted many informal conversations with various members of Mapuche communities, most of whom live in Neuquén and are connected to the COM. I also conducted formal taped interviews with four Mapuche women who are active participants in the COM. In addition to Mapuche contacts, I talked a lot with Raúl Díaz about his work, and his guidance was extremely helpful. He shared literature with me on many relevant topics. He introduced to me other professors at the Universidad del Comahue, who were also of help to me. In particular, I spent time talking with Alejandra and Jorgelina, two of Raúl's assistants and with a professor of feminist theory, Graciela Alonso. In addition, the investigation team set up by Raúl Díaz on the subject of intercultural education made a good set of contacts for me. I attended classes at the university that were of interest and that dealt with issues of investigation and cultural anthropology. Talking with Argentine students in these classes was also beneficial.

Community Research Needs

After talking with various members of the COM, one of the most frequently mentioned and important research needs of the Mapuche community in Neuquén is that of documenting and cataloguing Mapuche knowledge from older members. The documentation center is just getting off its feet and starting to investigate this topic, but

the process itself will be a lengthy one and will require plenty of researchers. Along these lines, it would be of use to take an accurate census count of the number of Mapuches in the capital city of Neuquén as well as in the region of Patagonia. Having this information would be useful to the COM and to other researchers. Another area of importance is that of the successful implementation of intercultural education. There is certainly more research to be done in this area, and people feel that it is an important research area. A comparative study of the Mapuches with another indigenous group that has experienced successes and failures in trying to gain recognition and rights from the state is also an important research topic. This would be especially true of an investigation of an indigenous group that is also working on the best way to gain land rights from the state, especially when the land contains valuable resources, such as petroleum. A comparative study assessing these two different groups would be valuable to the present Mapuche struggles for access to land rights.

Collaboration with CLASPO Members

For my research purposes, the collaboration with CLASPO's members in Neuquén could not have been any better. I worked closely with Raúl Díaz, attending his relevant courses and discussing with him my research topic and progress. He was my initial liaison to the COM, and his excellent working relationship with the members of the COM gave me an entrée into the organization. At the same time, he was extremely helpful in personal matters, such as finding housing and inviting me to his house on a regular basis. The members of the COM were open to me from the beginning of my time there, a result of the strong commitment they feel towards CLASPO and researchers from the University of Texas. Their affinity for CLASPO allowed them to feel comfortable

enough with me from the beginning to welcome me to the COM, telling me that I would be welcome all day every day and that I should feel free to ask any question that I wanted. Their warmth extended throughout my time there, culminating in an invitation to participate with them in Wiñoy Xipantv, their New Year's celebration, in Puente Blanco. I am incredibly grateful for their hospitality and acceptance of me as well as for the kindness and helpfulness extended me by all members of CLASPO's project in Neuquén.

¹ CNPV, 2001: www.indec.ar/neuquen