

Noah Marschner, Christoph Richter, Janine Patz,  
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# Contested Climate Justice – Challenged Democracy

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# Environmental Racism in Colonial Continuity: Extractivism, Socioecological Crisis and the Mapuche Struggle in Southern Chile

*Anna Landherr, Cristian Alister, Jakob Graf, Dasten Julian, Johanna Sittel*

## Abstract

In recent decades, extractivist industries in Chile have expanded significantly. One of these activities is industrial forestry, which is oriented towards the export of large quantities of pulp and is now one of the country's most important economic sectors. However, its extremely extensive monocultures of pine and eucalyptus plantations in the central south of Chile are associated with widespread social exclusion and ecological destruction. But forestry is not the only source of conflict. In recent decades, Indigenous territory has been revalued for its potential to produce non-conventional renewable energies, which has meant the deployment of numerous hydroelectric, wind and photovoltaic projects that have opened up a new field of conflict. This is especially true in the former territory of the indigenous Mapuche. Their mode of production and living is particularly affected by the destruction of the ecosystems by forest plantations and energy projects. Our contribution shows, first, that especially in the context of progressive climate change, these industrial activities in the central south of Chile lead to considerable ecological destruction and social exclusion. Second, we demonstrate how this primarily affects the indigenous Mapuche and, third, how this can be understood as "environmental racism in colonial continuity". Finally, our contribution will deal with the question of how the situation in Chile is currently being managed politically and how this is to be assessed.

*Keywords: colonialism; environmental racism; extractivism; socio-ecological conflict; Indigeneity*

The geographic expansion of capitalism since the beginning of the twenty-first century has had multiple impacts on Latin American societies. On the one hand, in Latin America the processes of capitalist expansion in the form of extractivist industries have progressed rapidly. On the other hand, global geopolitics has become more dynamic and complex as political institutions and regimes have also strengthened socioecological struggles from below, which are fighting against extractivism, for social rights and for the preservation of ecosystems. In this context, Indigenous and peasant communities' struggles for territorial self-determination have seen a revival (Svampa, 2013). In recent years, these contradictions and conflicts have increased as a result of climate change.

In the case of Chile, its global insertion into renewed value chains, linked to the export of commodities and the import of technology, has deepened its dependence on the dominant countries of the world economy. This has been more notorious since the neoliberal policies introduced in the dictatorship period (1973–1990). In 2022, more than 88 percent of exports were raw materials (CEPAL, 2023, p. 43). Mineral extraction, salmon farming, large-scale agriculture and forestry plantations have fueled and deepened territorial and environmental conflicts (Temper et al., 2018; Schmalz et al., 2023). This new landscape tends to be associated with what is defined in the literature as extractivism, that is, a model of economic growth based on the primarization of exports, which currently includes state participation for partially distributive purposes (Gudynas, 2013).

The extractivist model sets in motion a series of environmental and social consequences for communities, especially Indigenous peoples (Alister et al., 2021), which are associated with the occupation, exploitation and modeling of the territory according to the needs of accumulation. The location of these settlements tends to go hand in hand with the concentration of land ownership, environmental deregulation, state facilities and incentives, as well as a lack of protection for Indigenous peoples, due to the lack of protection procedures and legal guarantees, as well as the impoverishment of these communities.

In this chapter, we are concerned with a series of consequences of extractivism in the Araucanía Region in south central Chile, where several investment projects are specifically affecting the living conditions of Mapuche communities. We offer a definition and problematization of the theory of environmental racism, before we address two examples that present some of the features of typical territorial conflicts, as well as the different actors, mobilizations and protests that have emerged. Finally, we present a reflection on the relevance of environmental racism and the mechanisms of its national and international regulation.

## 1. Environmental Racism Theory

We are living in a time when the negative human impact on ecological cycles, natural habitats and the climate is undisputed. We find ourselves in times of man-made ecological crisis, often called the “Anthropocene”. The discourses around the Anthropocene, especially those from the Global North, present the current crisis as a problem of humanity to which we have all contributed, ignoring both the disparities in responsibility for this crisis and the unequal distribution of its costs. Social scientists such as Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg (2014) and Jason Moore (2022) therefore criticize this view and point out that only a small percentage of the world’s population is actually responsible for and benefits from the conditions that produced the climate crisis. While these critiques foreground the inequalities between rich and poor, as well as between “developed” and “developing” countries, Laura Pulido (2018) has identified a persisting gap in the debate with regards to racialized inequalities, “as if the geography of wealth and power was somehow nonracial” (Pulido, 2018, p. 116). She argues that the Anthropocene and, therefore, climate change must be understood as a racial process. “Certainly it is not solely a racial process—that would be a gross overstatement—but it has played an important role in both producing it and in determining who lives and dies” (p. 117). Disproportionate racialized vulnerability can particularly be seen in Indigenous communities, which are increasingly referred to as “frontline communities”. Since these communities usually live in particular rural territories to which they have a close cultural connection, their livelihoods and ways of living are particularly vulnerable to climate change, including species loss and changes in ecosystems, flooding, and drought (p. 119).

The focus of environmental racism research is, therefore, to trace “the disproportionate exposure of nonwhites to pollution” (Pulido, 1996). The concept of environmental racism emerged hand in hand with that of environmental justice. The use of both terms in the academic field goes back to research by Robert Bullard on communities living near “locally unwanted land uses”, in which he found that “race” is the most significant variable correlating with the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities, even more than socioeconomic class (Bullard, 1990). The study was the first to clearly demonstrate environmental racism in the USA. In his book, he also points to an existing grassroots movement against racialized unequal environmental impact that has gone largely unnoticed by mainstream environmentalism: the environmental justice movement, initiated primarily by Black people to fight back against these injustices. In recent decades, research into the so-called “environmentalism of the poor” (Martinez-Alier, 2002) and the “environmental justice movements” has gained considerable importance. Major research projects such as EnvJustice have, among other things, mapped existing

environmental justice conflicts and identify the central place of Indigenous peoples as both disproportionately impacted by, and disproportionately resisting, environmental destruction around the world (Martinez-Alier et al., 2016, p. 4). In the case of socio-ecological conflicts, there is a high occurrence of cases involving Indigenous and traditional communities, and ethnically discriminated groups, who together represent over one third of all the documented cases (ibid.). The *Ej-Atlas* has detected that in South America, Indigenous communities are affected in 345 of the 626 environmental conflicts registered.<sup>1</sup>

Bullard describes this geographic inequity in terms of the socio-spatial patterns according to which low-income and nonwhite communities are excessively burdened by various forms of pollution and hazards (Bullard, 1994). Researchers from various disciplines in Chile have discovered the same phenomenon for Indigenous groups and, in particular, for the Mapuche in Chile (Meza-Lopehandía, 2007; Castillo, 2018; Millaleo Hernández, 2019). According to these authors, the Mapuche are particularly affected by environmental degradation, and by the presence of extractivist industries and energy projects on their territories. This situation has promoted the question within Mapuche communities if the location policies of these projects must be considered as racially motivated decisions on the part of the state, a strategy of environmental racism in Mapuche territory (Meza-Lopehandia, 2007).

At the same time, the environmental struggles of the Mapuche people have stood out as an example of Indigenous demands for environmental justice in the face of diverse situations of environmental racism (Millaleo Hernández, 2019, p. 275). There are also peculiarities in Mapuche modes of resistance that can be explained by their colonial past. Just like the researchers at *EnvJustice* who describe how “Indigenous peoples will often appeal to their territorial rights, or special protections such as the Right to Free Prior and Informed Consent afforded to them through ILO 169” (Martinez-Alier, 2016, p. 5), they detected peculiarities in the resistance of the Mapuche in Chile. In contrast to the purely environmental movement, the Mapuche movements combine ecological issues with demands for the defense of the territory and the self-determination of peoples (Meza-Lopehandía, 2007), as well as the demand for the decolonization of environmental protection and conservation practices, and a critique of centralized environmental policy, which does not respect and allow ancestral authorities and forms of organization (Millaleo Hernández, 2019, p. 275).

According to Pulido (2018), the historical origins of the capitalist world system, the Anthropocene and today’s racialized environmental injustice all date back to the colonization of the Americas from the fifteenth century onwards.

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1 <https://ejatlas.org/>

She thus builds on Cedric Robinson's notion of "racial capitalism", which posits that racism has been a constituent force of capitalism from the very beginning. Following Pulidos argument, racism informs contemporary capitalism and its antecedents, including primitive accumulation: "Primitive accumulation was essential to creating the initial surplus that subsequently allowed for the development of industrial capitalism. What is important for our purposes is that proto-capitalists, colonists, and Christians all drew on white supremacy as they went about the business of severing indigenous peoples from their land and labor" (p. 126). Primitive accumulation was seen by Karl Marx as an early, violent stage of dispossession that was required in order to move into higher forms of human development. Pulido argues that primitive accumulation helps explain the role of the past in producing the racial map of the Anthropocene, on the one hand, but is also relevant because it cannot be relegated to the annals of history. In referring to David Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession she highlights that primitive accumulation has never ended in the Global South: "These contemporary forms of accumulation are violent forms of taking, as people lose their lands, lives, and livelihoods. Both old and new forms of primitive accumulation require enabling ideologies. And though there have been important changes, racism, especially indifference, remains an important one" (p. 127).

## 2. The "Mapuche Case": Ecological Crisis and Territorial Conflicts

The Wallmapu, the territory of the Mapuche, once extended over the wide valleys, forested hills, large mountains, and long coasts that are now considered part of the Chilean region of La Araucanía (Millamán, 2006). The part of Wallmapu that today belongs to Chile extends for several hundred kilometers along the Pacific coast, nestled by the mountains of the Coastal Cordillera on one side, and on the other side by the high Andes mountains with their impressive snow-capped volcanoes. Before the colonial subjugation by the Spanish crown, beginning in the sixteenth century, around one million Mapuche lived here (Silva, 1995, p. 31). The name "Mapuche" translates as "the people of the earth". They were not only the largest, but also the most defensive among the Indigenous peoples of Chile. United by little more than a common language, Mapuche subgroups were constantly at war with each other (*ibid.*, p. 31).

At the same time, the Mapuche were united by the fight against the external enemy, which for a long time threatened to conquer Wallmapu. The extremely bloody battles against the Spanish, which penetrated far into Mapuche land in the course of the sixteenth century, led to many victims on both sides. In the end, the wars with Spain left dramatic marks on the Mapuche. After these military con-

flicts, their number had fallen to around 25 percent of their original population size (Silva, 1995, p. 76). After a period of ceasefire, military attempts to conquer Wallmapu began again as a result of Chilean independence at the beginning of the nineteenth century. From 1880 to 1883, the Chilean military conducted the “*Campaña por la ocupación de la Cordillera*” (Campaign for the Occupation of the Cordillera) (Ojeda, 2021, p. 277). It was part of the large-scale “*pacificación de la Araucanía*” (the so-called “pacification” of the Araucanía), which ended in a victory for the Chilean military over the Mapuche in 1883.

With the end of the military conflict, a large wave of expropriation of the Mapuche from their lands in the central south began. Thus, long after the Spanish conquest, a process of “internal colonization” started (González, 2006; Pineda, 2014, p. 106–107). The Mapuche were settled in “*reducciones*”, that is, small areas with comparatively low agricultural productivity, in which they were supposed to live and work and to which they were given legal titles—the so-called “*título de la merced*”. This meant reducing the Mapuche to small plots of land on which they produced collectively. In today’s province Arauco, for example, the areas of these *reducciones* only amounted to between 1.4 and 1.7 percent of the region’s total area. The situation was similar in most other regions. Only in Cautín, in southern Araucanía, was the number significantly higher, at around 18 percent (Mariman, 2017, p. 260; Correa, 2021, p. 169).

“Primitive accumulation” in Wallmapu continued to progress in the twentieth century. After the so-called “pacification” of the Araucanía, the construction of a train route and huge mills, and the burning of a large part of the forests, the region developed into the breadbasket of Chilean society (Otero, 2006, p. 89; Garín et al., 2011, p. 75). However, it was not until the military dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990) that a completely new quality of land grabs was imposed on Chile’s Indigenous peoples. The dictatorship introduced policies that allowed the concentration of land, especially by forestry companies (CMPC and Forestal Arauco) and the legal division of communitarian property (Canales, 2020). This impulse was accompanied by a lack of concern for environmental risk and impacts (Román & Barton, 2017). Furthermore, an agrarian counter-reform affected agricultural activities and weakened small peasant and Indigenous production (Almonacid, 2016; Bengoa, 2017). The dictatorship’s policies aimed at actively undermining the Mapuche’s communal mode of production and living (Kaltmeier, 2004, p. 152; Höhl, 2022, pp. 133–134). Laws 2,568 and 2,750, enacted in 1979, involved the dismemberment of the *reducciones* into individual landholdings. By 1990, 2,000 *reducciones* had been divided under these laws, and around 72,000 individual property titles were granted over an estimated 463,000 hectares of land, which has on average resulted in a land size of between only



five and six hectares per family (Kaltmeier, 2004, p. 152; Henríquez, 2013, pp. 151; Höhl, 2022, pp. 48, 130).

However, the privatization and parceling out of the Mapuches' communal land not only led to the forced privatization of land (Millaman, 2017, p. 267), but also once again to major land losses on the part of the Mapuche: firstly, Mapuche belonging to a *comunidad* who were not present at the time of the division of the territory were denied their right to a property title (Henríquez, 2013, p. 152); secondly, because the status of "Indigenous land" was abolished. This meant that land that was previously considered Indigenous and inalienable now often fell into the hands of private profiteers, and illegally appropriated Indigenous land was now given legal status in many cases (Kaltmeier, 2004, p. 152; Henríquez, 2013, p. 151). In addition, Indigenous land was fraudulently appropriated through 99-year leases or debt arrangements (Bengoa, 2004, pp. 428–433). The counter-agrarian reform carried out under Pinochet led to drastic losses of Mapuche land. While land was previously redistributed to the Mapuche under the socialist government of Salvador Allende (1970–1973), the military government now tried to reverse these redistributions.

While in 1973 the Mapuche still owned around 500,000 hectares of land, in 1990 this was only around 300,000 (Kaltmeier, 2004, p. 181). A real wave of migration began. According to José Bengoa (1983, p. 153), in an extrapolated 80 percent of the Mapuche families, at least one household member temporarily migrated to the North in order to take up temporary work there. The Mapuche people were thus further proletarianized and served as an impoverished reserve army for precarious jobs. At the same time, the Mapuches' agricultural practices hardly changed even after their land was fragmented; even in the 1980s, more than 60 percent of them were still focused on subsistence production (Kaltmeier, 2004, p. 152).

Nevertheless, the change in rural modes of production and living has created a "new rurality" (Julián et al., 2022, pp. 117, particularly as a result of the expansion of industrial activities presented below, which can be described according to four main features. First, non-agricultural incomes are playing a bigger role. Second, women are increasingly taking part in monetized employment. Third, there is a growing interconnection between rural and urban zones. Fourth, labor migration is playing an increasingly important role. These processes are also part of a change brought about by the growing importance of new economic areas such as tourism, public employment programs and increasingly better infrastructure and accessibility, even in previously remote places (Julián et al., 2022, p. 118; Ojeda, 2021, pp. 280–281). All in all, these developments situated local communities within a new social context with new problems, but they also led to the formation of new collectivities and organizations that allowed for the forging of new

limits for the capitalist expansion and resistance to environmental impacts and social and racial injustices (Alister et al., 2021).

In 1997, several years after the military dictatorship, a new phase of conflict began between the Mapuche on the one hand and the Chilean state, big landowners, and big business groups of the forestry industry on the other hand (Tricot, 2009; Pairicán & Alvarez, 2011; Pineda, 2014, p. 112). In the municipality of Lumaco, a number of forestry and transport machines were burned on the morning of October 13 1997. Two comunidades subsequently occupied land and, by direct action, attempted to reclaim their territory independently. The public attention that these disputes attracted led to a general radicalization of the Mapuche movement, which in some ways continues to this day (Schmalz et al., 2023).

In order to understand the environmental racism in the traditional Mapuche territory (Wallmapu) the territorial expansion of extractivism is visualized in Graph 1. At present, the Wallmapu on the Chilean side covers four provinces in the south of the country, comprising the provinces of Arauco, Malleco, Cautín and Valdivia. Although the Mapuche people extend beyond these boundaries, this territory has the highest concentration of Mapuche Indigenous communities in the country and, as shown in Graph 1, has been under constant tension in recent decades due to the development of extractive activities, through forestry plantations and energy projects.

## 2.1 Forestry in Wallmapu

The military dictatorship (1973–1990) laid the foundation for today's industrial forestry in La Araucanía. The forestry industry relies on large plantations, it is concentrated in the hands of a few Chilean business families and it is based on the export of pulp (Klubock, 2014). The enormous expansion of forest plantations and their massive subsidies by the state once again increased the impoverishment of the Mapuche (Henríquez, 2013, p. 159). The forestry industry has expanded enormously in the Araucanía since the military dictatorship. This is visible primarily in the industry's expansion in terms of area. Since the late 1970s, a wave of land grabs has rolled across the Araucanía and especially the Coastal Cordillera. Agricultural and common land, native forest and pasture areas became monocultures for the forestry industry. The appropriation of land by the forestry industry continued into the 2000s and only reached its limits in the 2010s. This expansion led to the area of forest plantations in a number of municipalities exceeding 60 percent of the municipality's total area at the end of the 2000s (Garín et al., 2011, pp. 83 Henríquez, 2013, pp. 155). Since then, forestry plantations have expanded even further.

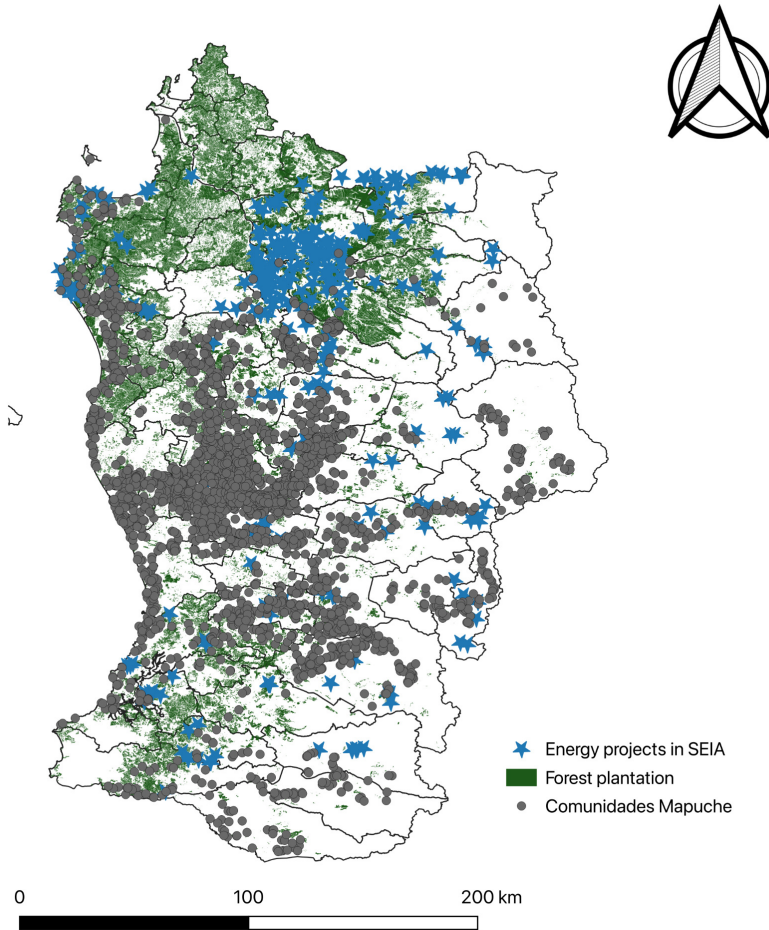


Figure 1: Distribution of Mapuche Communities, Forestry Plantations and Energy Projects in Wallmapu.  
 Source: own elaboration with SAG, 2017; CONADI, 2023; SEIA, 2023

In today's Chile, over 2.3 million hectares are covered with forest plantations, which provide the forestry industry with its raw materials (Infor, 2021, p. 2). Almost half of the total plantation areas are concentrated in just two regions: Biobío and La Araucanía (ibid., p. 6). Because the large-scale plantations do not integrate into the local ecological cycles, but rather leach out the soil, deplete water resources, and aim for mass export without intensive further processing of the raw material, forestry is widely described in political-ecological debates as an ex-

tractivist industry (Pino & Carrasco, 2019). This expansion has been based on the marginalization and dispossession of Mapuche people. The concentration of land in the forestry industry is also particularly pronounced compared to other extractivist sectors. In some Chilean municipalities, more than half of the entire area is covered by forestry plantations that are owned by only a few companies (*ibid.*, pp. 214–216). This economic model has had an impact on communities, especially in their conditions and possibilities of survival, economic activities and cultural well-being.

In recent years the Chilean forestry sector has accounted for around 2 percent of Chile's total economic output and over 8 percent of exports in 2019 (Infor, 2021, p. 2). The industry is essentially dominated by two Chilean companies, Forestal Arauco and CMPC/Mininco, which not only own large parts of the plantations, but also the entire pulp industry (Graf, 2019). Over 70 percent of forestry exports are in the hands of these two companies (Barton & Román, 2012, p. 873). The forestry industry today employs around 111,244 people and therefore around 1.2 percent of the Chilean workforce (Infor, 2021, p. 2). Almost 64 percent are employed in the field of forestry, which means that they work on plantations (CORMA, 2016, p. 28). Almost a third of all activities in this area are carried out by self-employed people and two thirds by dependent employees (Julián & Alister, 2018, p. 183). 27 percent are employed here informally (*ibid.*, p. 185).

In the forestry plantations, where almost 99 percent of the activities are carried out by subcontractors, these are particularly responsible for felling and transport (CORMA, 2016, p. 29). But subcontractors and temporary workers are also often employed in sawmills and factories (*ibid.*, p. 28). In the area of forestry in particular, workers with low qualification levels are hired (*ibid.*, pp. 30–41). Many of the workers employed in the forestry plantations are Mapuche. This employment is often dangerous, physically demanding and extremely precarious. 30 percent of the employees in the forestry plantations in the Araucanía receive wages below the poverty line (Julián & Alister, 2018, p. 183). This means that many people have to live in extreme precarity despite being employed in the forestry sector (*ibid.*, p. 184). Consequently, wage labor relations in the forestry industry, which are routinely temporary, often only serve to generate additional income (*ibid.*, pp. 183–185). Low levels of union organization and insufficient power resources among employees exacerbate this problem (*ibid.*, p. 180). However, the racialized discrimination of the Mapuche is not only and not primarily a problem of labor relations, but primarily one of the expropriations of the Mapuche from their land, the destruction of their ecosystems and, thus, of the basis of their rural production and way of life.

Rodrigo Cerda shows that the economic activities of the large forestry companies leave little wealth in the region when he points out that the GDP per

capita in the Araucanía is only 35 percent of that in the Santiago metropolitan region, and only 15.9 percent of that in the Antofagasta mining region (Cerda, 2017, pp. 409–410). While employment conditions are poor for those who get jobs in the forest plantations, unemployment and poverty are spreading among the local population around the forest plantations too. Initially, some of the local population still had hopes for the emerging forestry industry. But more and more activities in forestry plantations are being carried out by large machines. Therefore, according to scientific studies, communities around forest plantations are strikingly often among the poorest in the entire country (Andersson et al., 2016; Román & Barton, 2017, pp. 249–250; Pastén et al., 2020, p. 62).

The forestry industry not only leads to declining economic diversity and the focus of all economic activities on the forestry industry, but also to the undermining of the local economy and a sharp decline in biodiversity (Pino & Carrasco, 2019, pp. 214 Graf, 2019, pp. 7–8, 23–24). Moreover, it destroys the Mapuche people's way of life and their mode of cultural engagement with their ancestral land. The consequences of the forestry industry's activities include declining ecosystem services, falling water levels and flows, and an increase in forest fires (Latorre & Rojas, 2016, p. 84), especially in times of climate change. The dryness in and around the forest plantations is not least the result of the fact that the fast-growing pine and eucalyptus species have to be large enough to be harvested in twelve to 25 years. This requires between 20 and 40 liters of water per tree every day (Pastén et al., 2020, p. 64). Consequently, the expansion of the forestry plantation economy has enormously reduced the Mapuches' way of production and way of life and continues to undermine it. The result is intense conflicts in the central south of Chile, in which the military police are repeatedly deployed against land occupations carried out by the Mapuche *comunidades*, resulting in injuries, imprisonment and sometimes even deaths.

## 2.2 Hydroelectricity in the Wallmapu

During the last decades, the energy sector in Chile has increased its interest in the exploitation of water resources to generate energy. Although there have been energy projects in Indigenous territories since the second half of the twentieth century, a prominent event in this type of extractivism was the construction process of the Ralco hydroelectric power plant in Alto Biobío. This project represents a turning point in the history of socio-environmental conflicts between Indigenous communities and energy companies, mainly due to its significant impact on the Pehuenche communities where the project was developed. After ten years of legal disputes and mobilizations by the affected communities, the project was

carried out, leaving a deep mark on the relationship between these communities and the state with respect to energy projects (Relmuan, 1998). This situation has contributed greatly to the persistent distrust of Indigenous communities towards new initiatives in the energy sector and large-scale renewable energy projects.

In recent years, initiatives have been proposed for energy generation through run-of-river hydroelectric plants and wind farms in Mapuche territory. These proposals have been processed through the Chilean environmental assessment system, sometimes obtaining approval from the Chilean state, even in the face of persistent opposition from the Indigenous communities involved. Currently, the Pilmaiquén project follows a similar pattern to other energy projects in Indigenous territories. Promoted by the Norwegian company Statkraft, this project aims to be an investment in green energy and has faced fourteen years of resistance from local communities. This opposition is reflected in the words of Machi Millaray Huichalaf, a spiritual authority and environmental leader in the defense of the river: “The Pilmaiken River is the backbone of our territory, through which vital energy flows. It is like our veins, allowing circulation. If they cut off the Pilmaiken, we are immobilized. The Osorno power station is paralyzed because there was a struggle, a struggle of many years. And if the Los Lagos plant is stopped, it will be because we have regained the strength to fight again. Without the river, we are nothing” (Interferencia, 2023). The struggle for Indigenous rights has united all communities in the protection of their culturally significant sites, which are threatened by the project. This mobilization has been violently repressed by the state, demonstrating the absence of effective dialogue within the framework of Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

In Chile, energy projects have been a continuous source of socio-environmental conflict in Indigenous territories. Most of the disputed projects are related to non-conventional renewable energies (NCRE) which receive support and funding from organizations and investors interested in developing sustainable projects. These projects are particularly supported within the framework of global climate policies, as seen recently in the interest of German politicians and companies in importing “green hydrogen” from Chile. To achieve this, such NCRE-projects must be further expanded. Within the country, the production of “renewable energy” primarily serves to supply electricity to the extractive industries. Many of the NCRE projects are directly linked to the energy necessity of extractive sectors like mining, industries that are drivers of climate change and ecological destruction (Valderrama et al., 2019). This situation highlights the contradiction between NCRE, climate change, sustainability-oriented investments and socio-environmental conflicts in Indigenous territories, offering a renewed perspective on extractive initiatives and the “greening” of the economies of the Global

North. In this context, so-called climate policies are challenged by Indigenous movements and environmental activists.

### 3. Conclusion

The history of primitive accumulation, extractivist expansion and environmental degradation in La Araucanía clearly shows that Mapuche communities carry the heavy burden of the socio-ecological consequences of global capitalism. Mapuche are socially excluded from capitalist growth and suffer from water and land loss and the destruction of their ecosystems. It is not only a question of land, but also of ecological damage, such as lack of water and soil erosion, that massively restricts the everyday life—especially important subsistence activities—of the Mapuche. Furthermore, racism against the Mapuche people continues in relevant parts of the Chilean population and institutions (Richards, 2020). At the same time, the two examples of industrial forestry and energy projects stress the high conflictuality of extractivist activities in Mapuche territory. Because of this contradiction between the local economy of needs, on the one hand, and capitalist expansion, on the other hand, we can also speak of an environmentalism of the poor (Graf, 2024). As Graph 1 shows, there are a lot of cases of this conflict, because of the high expansion of forest plantations and hydroelectric projects in Chile.

The Chilean state usually takes a clear side in favor of extractivism based on a supposed socio-technical decision. A regulatory framework which recognizes Mapuche interests does not exist. There is a long debate about the institutional implications of international agreements and consultation procedures for Indigenous peoples (ILO, p. 169). However, the limitations of regulations, oversight capacity, powers and resources available to the entities in charge of these processes lead to a situation of helplessness on the part of the community. The continuity of the constitutional framework after the failure of the constitutional plebiscite in 2022, and the lack of changes in environmental matters, mean that the situation presented remains the same and, in some cases, even worsens, since there is a state of emergency in the Araucanía region that has run from May 2022 until today.

Our article offers a reflection on the emergent and potential social, political and ecological conflicts caused by the threats of extractivism. These conflicts are currently reaching levels of international solidarity and political and social mobilization. In light of this, environmental racism invites us to consider the new colonial modifications in a long continuum of patterns of capitalist accumulation and dispossession. At the same time, it is an invitation to consider the effectiveness

and viability of dialogues between South-North and South-South in the context of climate change and the new offensive of capitalism in the twenty-first century.

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