

PH.D. THESIS

Cracks in the Desert

Hegemonic Space and Indigenous Resistance
in the Borderlands of Northern Patagonia

Philip Wade

SCHOOL OF GLOBAL STUDIES



UNIVERSITY OF
GOTHENBURG

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*For Mam and Dad
And Andrew too
Thank you for everything
This is for you*

Abstract

The 1878 arrival of the Argentine settler state as conqueror in northern Patagonia produced a singular problem for the state: the desert. A colonial imaginary of the absolute outside was now incorporated into Argentina, sparking a long-running territorial conflict that endures to this day.

This thesis examines how enduring settler colonial processes shape territorial relations in northern Patagonia and how Indigenous Mapuche and allied actors enact diverse practices of resistance. Bringing settler colonial studies into conversation with political ontology, theories of space and relational approaches to resistance, it conceptualises contemporary territorial conflicts as part of the *longue durée* of settler colonialism. The research employs a qualitative, ethnographically oriented methodology, drawing on participant observation and partial life-history interviews, as well as documentary sources and urban artistic interventions.

It is argued that settler colonialism operates through the application of a hegemonic spatial regime that has rendered Indigenous territory available for transformation into extractive and conservation frontiers. These spatial relations are continually reproduced through processes of bordering, extractivism and exclusive conservation which are presented by hegemonic power as natural and inevitable, while practices of partial recognition and de-recognition attempt to absense Indigenous peoples, both in time and in space.

Hegemony, however, remains incomplete. Insistent Mapuche presence and resistance expose persistent cracks within settler colonial spatialities and temporalities. Through these cracks emerge diverse practices of resistance. These practices contest narratives of Indigenous absence, build alliances and articulate alternative relationships to territory. The thesis therefore conceptualises resistance not solely as opposition to particular territorial projects, but as productive and ontological. This resistance is world-making, challenging the spatial and temporal assumptions through which hegemonic settler colonial power is continually reproduced.

Keywords: Settler colonialism; Indigenous resistance; Political ontology; Frontier-making; Mapuche; Northern Patagonia; Borderlands

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Gracias, tack så mycket, tusind tak, thank you

Mañumün

Prologue

I remember the dinosaurs.

At around 10am we saw the dust cloud approaching. It was coming along the dirt road that runs past the solar park, going west from the highway towards the white-capped mountains. The road was in poor condition, trucks carrying heavy machinery to the site ran up and down it. Their tyres carving deep ruts into the surface, churning any loose sand into a fine windborne debris.

An area of lush pampa had been cleared for the construction of the solar park. An adjacent plot, roughly the same size, was bulldozed for a space to dump the topsoil and bracken. We saw great mounds of the stuff piled up. The unsecured earth drifted towards us on the wind, layering itself across the road. Grading machines flattened the desertified land, making it pristine and empty. In one corner the first stanchions for the solar panels were being driven into the ground, ordered metal facsimiles of the bushes they replaced.

As the dust cloud got nearer the great head of a Diplodocus became visible. It rose majestically before us, bathed in the winter sun. As it came closer, we saw a smaller dinosaur behind it. Some accident had cracked its skull, and it was now patched up with a great ream of sellotape around its jaws. They carried on beyond the solar park and disappeared down the road. We were silent as they passed by. There is little to be said when such things pass by. We would see them later.

There were 13 of us, our guide, three European researchers, one from a US institution and eight from CONICET, the Argentine national science council. Our guide, a Mapuche spokesperson, or *Werken*, had brought us to see the solar project which has been built on Mapuche land without prior consultation. We had parked our vehicles along the road next to the solar park and were discussing the site when another pickup truck came hurtling along towards us. It was travelling far faster than is safe on such a surface. Inside was the chief engineer and project leader of the site. Our guide had been trying to contact him for months, yet by some

PROLOGUE

happenstance, perhaps encouraged by the arrival of so many brand-new pickup trucks emblazoned with CONICET, he had been brought to us.

The Werken and the engineer represent a meeting of two worlds, an ontological fracture. Their conversation was tense, though without raised voices. The Werken attempted to articulate the needs of the local people who have to live with the destruction happening on their doorstep. The engineer wanted to know who we were.

After introductions he claimed that his predecessor was responsible for the state of the road and damage to the water infrastructure. He promised that the company intended to replace the topsoil and lead an ecological renewal of the site after its exhaustion, in around 30 years. An impressive promise for a company that has existed for less than half of that time. There is no reference to such a regeneration project on their website. The engineer asked repeatedly that he and the Werken talk privately on WhatsApp, however our guide explained that his role as a representative requires public discussions.

Without any agreement beyond future contact, the engineer got back into his pickup and sped off down the road. Despite lofty and unlikely promises of regeneration, the reality of a future exhaustion was made clear. An example of how hegemonic notions of a 'great transition' to 'clean' energy are predicated on a price being paid by someone, somewhere. Usually, it is the same places that pay such prices over time. A few hundred metres along the road was a silent and rusted nodding-donkey pumpjack oil drill. Our guide told us that it still worked sometimes, eking out the last drops of an exhausted oil field.

We saw the dinosaurs again a few hours later. *El parque de huellas* (Footprint Park) is a passion project led by the local mayor who was at the site when we visited. The dinosaurs had been unloaded from the truck that carried them near to the entrance. They were to provide the opening attraction of the park. Surveyors for a mining company had uncovered remarkably preserved fossilised footprints here, and their special scientific importance had led to their preservation. The mayor showed us the burgeoning tourist site being built around the fossils, demonstrating great pride in the place. We were being given an exclusive tour as the park wouldn't open to the public for another month.

In studying the fossils, our guide commented that the Mapuche had looked after this land and thus had looked after these fossils. For the Werken, caring for

the fossils is a continuation of the Mapuche's historic inscription in the land. Their preservation is not predicated on their discovery as something valuable, rather the footprints express a continuity of connection that long predates the demands of modern resource extraction and tourism. This is a relationship to land that transcends Western notions of territory as bordered and divisible property, based on logics of productive value. Instead, it reveals territory as a complex and temporal process, projected through time as past, present and future. Encompassing even the 80 million years of continental drift and isostatic uplift since a *Teratopodus Malargüensis* walked on this surface and left their impression in the sand.

It's about territory.

1

Introduction

Two conflicts

In 2011, after mapping the vast Vaca Muerta oil and gas shale play in the northern Patagonian Desert, Argentina discovered it that it held the second-largest shale gas resources and the fourth-largest reserve of shale oil globally (Raftopoulos and Specht, 2022). In June 2013, As YPF, the newly renationalised (in 2010) state oil company, was about to sign a concession for the US oil company Chevron to begin fracking in Vaca Muerta, a delegation of Kofan and Siona peoples from Ecuador visited the *Confederación Mapuche de Neuquén* (Mapuche Confederation of Neuquén). They warned of the destruction that Chevron's activities in the Amazon had caused to their territories (Fumambulist, 2020).

The Confederation declared that they would resist Chevron, rejecting as illegitimate the agreement signed in July 2013, worth US\$1.24 billion (Reuters, 2013). In protest against the agreement, 120 Mapuche activists from the Campo Maripe *lof*¹, together with other members of the aforementioned Mapuche Confederation of Neuquén, occupied two fracking wells (Mapuche-Nation, 2013). A Mapuche leader, or *Lonko*, Albino Campus, explained their protest as a rejection of sacrifice for development, stating:

We no longer want to pay the price of this development, which promotes unlimited growth, without regard for the nature and culture [...] (in Rio Negro Diario, 2013; in Mapuche-Nation, 2013).

¹ A *Lof* is traditionally translated as an extended Mapuche family unit. It is the first emic unit of Mapuche society, a construction that relates to territory and complex interpersonal linkages (Pehuén, Quiñones and Letelier, 2019). *Lof* refers to both a 'tangible and intangible space of the land [*Lofmapu*]', and the *Lof* as a community of people who inhabit or transit that space [*Lofche*]' (Cañumil and Ramos, 2016: 5).

The occupation lasted 48 days, with a group of Mapuche women climbing onto the fracking rigs and chaining themselves to the top (Funambalist, 2020).

Returning to 2011, the organisation *Resistencia Mapuche Ancestral* (Ancestral Mapuche Resistance) claimed responsibility for setting fire to a trailer and construction and heavy plant equipment in the Nahuel Huapi National Park. Ancestral Mapuche Resistance operates throughout historical Mapuche territory, across the modern states of Chile and Argentina, and is designated a terrorist organisation in Chile. In its press release, the organisation explained its reasons for the arson attack:

These actions are part of the territorial struggles that we as a people are developing for our reconstruction throughout our ancestral territory and this area is a strategic point in the consolidation of the oppression of Western capitalism (Cric-Colombia, 2011).

The conflict over land rights and the park dates back to the designation of the land as a national park in 1922 (Wakild, 2015). Over the many decades since, successive rounds of dispossession have occurred, with Mapuche families being evicted in favour of European settlers, extractive industries or exclusive notions of conservation (Rasmussen and Pouliot, 2025). Particularly in the wake of the 2001 Argentine crises, the region experienced a massive influx of foreign investment in tourism (Rasmussen, 2021). This has led to Mapuche land being parcelled out to private interests, as ancestral territory has been transformed into plots of private property (Miniconi and Guyot, 2023).

Cracks in the desert

The conflicts in Vaca Muerta and Nahuel Huapi National Park in Neuquén are over very different uses of land. However, in the context of the conflict between a settler colonial state and Indigenous² peoples, they represent two sides of the same coin: the colonial territorialisation of Indigenous land. Even as hegemonic structures of power increasingly impose themselves through this territorialisation, the contradictions of the capitalist and colonial logics that underpin them are exposed. This thesis conceptualises these contradictions as *cracks* in hegemonic space (Burman, 2017; Lilja, 2021), moments where dominant spatial ontologies fail to fully contain insistent Indigenous presence, resistance and imaginaries of alternative futures.

² In alignment with Christine Weeber's (2020) essay in *Sapiens*, Indigenous is capitalised throughout this thesis when it refers to Indigenous peoples and their worlds

These cracks are often formed as subtle and slow yet emerge under conditions of extreme pressure, like the earth in desert landscapes that fractures and cracks after prolonged dry spells. In such arid places, these cracks retain the possibility of renewal. When the rains come, the drops leach into the crevices. Water can be retained and filtered through the parched earth, and slowly, over time, the plants can return. Colonial spatial orders, no matter their dominance, are never fully hegemonic, and they contain the seeds of their own obsolescence.

Problem, Aims and Research Questions

Peace and Development studies is a large multi-disciplinary field of research that recognises the holistic and heterogenous nature of conflicts, through the disparate but interconnected studies of peace, power, political economy and development (Hettne, 1983; 2001). As an in-depth, ethnographically oriented study of territorial conflict in northern Patagonia, this thesis particularly engages with debates concerning territory, power and resistance, while drawing on an interdisciplinary framework encompassing settler colonial studies, political ontology and studies of resistance.

As will be discussed in the following chapter, settler colonial studies provides an account of enduring and asymmetrical structures of power but has been criticised for potentially reducing Indigenous agency to settler defined binaries of incorporation and resistance (Macoun and Strakosch, 2013; Snelgrove, Dhamoon and Cornthassel, 2014). Political ontology enables Indigenous world-making and ontological difference to be taken seriously, while risking the converse problem of treating these different worlds as bounded or mutually exclusive (Burman, 2022; Martin, 2020; Chandler and Reid, 2020; Espinosa Arango, 2021). Relational and productive approaches to resistance have moved beyond understandings of resistance as direct opposition (Katz, 2004), adding notions of resistance as constructive and intertwined with spatial and temporal practices (Lilja, 2021; Baaz et al., 2016). This thesis builds on these literatures by bringing them into conversation to examine complex forms of resistance under the historical and continuing conditions of settler colonialism. As such, the overall aim of this thesis is to examine how settler colonial processes shape territorial conditions in northern Patagonia and how Indigenous and allied actors enact resistance within and against these conditions.

The research problem emerges from the empirics of the territorial conflict and the aforementioned theoretical debates. Hegemonic spatial regimes, such

as the Western spatial ontology, create conditions that constrain the articulation and enactment of alternatives, presenting temporal and spatial relations of power as *natural* and *inevitable*. The problem, therefore, is how relational and productive forms of resistance operate under the spatial, temporal and ontological conditions encountered in northern Patagonia. Of particular interest is how such resistance may both negotiate with and operate through the institutions and spaces in which hegemonic spatial orders are produced, while simultaneously enacting alternative relationships to territory. In addressing this problem, the thesis contributes to existing debates by developing spatial, temporal and ontological conceptualisations of resistance under settler colonial conditions, including strategies of *perpendicular resistance* and *slow resistance*, and practices of *re-knowledge* and *present-making*. *TINA-spaces* further conceptualise the spatial and temporal conditions through which alternative futures are constrained.

The two overall research questions (RQs) addressed by this thesis are:

RQ1: *How do structures and processes of settler colonialism shape relations to territory in northern Patagonia?*

RQ2: *How do Indigenous and allied actors enact resistance to settler colonial territorialisation in northern Patagonia?*

In order to answer these two research questions, each of the four articles addresses a specific sub-question (SQ). The SQs are presented in the order of the articles, with each followed by a brief explanation mapping it onto the research questions, demonstrating how, taken together, the sub-questions enable the thesis to answer the RQs. A fuller account of how the articles contribute to this thesis is provided in Chapter Five of this Kappa.

SQ 1: *How has the imposition of settler colonial administrative and international borders in northern Patagonia affected Mapuche territorial understandings and practices of resistance?*

Article One does not formulate a conventionally explicit research question but poses the broader question of what a border is through alternative ontological perspectives. The article develops the concept of *perpendicular resistance* to demonstrate how actors may strategically engage with and cross-cut settler colonial spatial orders without necessarily accepting the spatial assumptions of hegemonic power on which such spatial orders depend. Answering SQ1

therefore contributes to RQ1 by examining how settler colonial bordering imposes particular understandings of territory and space, and to RQ2 by identifying a form of resistance enacted in relation to that process.

SQ 2: In which ways are different resistance-signs articulated by Indigenous movements in a context of de-recognition? How does present-making function as a practice of (re)signification in the context of alliance-making? What can this tell us about the concept of 'slow resistance'?

SQ2 comprises three interconnected questions that together make up the research questions of article two. It principally operationalises RQ2 by examining how present-making and slow resistance operate through (re)signification and alliance-making. This also includes the concept of *re-knowledge*, which is understood as a radical politics that links land and identity through emic narratives. SQ2 also further contributes to RQ1 by situating these practices within notions of recognition and de-recognition, which are understood as settler colonial strategies aimed at governing indigeneity and territorial relations.

SQ3: How does the spatial enactment of neoliberal inevitability renew the extractive frontier in Vaca Muerta through the spatial and material ideology of extractivism, and how does this, conversely shape resistance to extractivism?

As with article one, article three does not articulate a conventional research question. Corresponding to the focus of the article, SQ3 contributes to answering RQ1 by examining how the extractive frontier is repeatedly renewed through the spatial and material production of extractivism as inevitable. The concept of *TINA-spaces* identifies mechanisms through which alternatives are foreclosed, including economic dependency, the production of consent and the temporal-lock that attempts to foreclose both pre-extractivist pasts and alternative post-extractivist futures. SQ3 contributes to answering RQ2 by examining how these conditions shape resistance, including both non-cooperative opposition to extraction and constructive resistance (Lilja, 2021), which often involve complex strategies of negotiation while attempting to maintain alternative future imaginaries.

SQ4: How do local Indigenous and allied actors make their presence and resistance visible in public spaces, and in what ways do these practices build alliances, consensus and alternative imaginaries?

SQ4 addresses RQ2 by investigating how urban artistic interventions make resistance materially and discursively present in public space. The article conceptualises these interventions as forms of *slow resistance* and practices of *present-making*, through which Indigenous and allied actors contest narratives of Indigenous absence, and make visible alliances and solidarities between movements. Their resistance is both spatial and temporal, as interventions are often shaped by where they are placed, while processes of memory, memorialisation and the repeated assertion of presence connect historical and contemporary struggles. SQ4 therefore contributes to RQ2 by demonstrating how resistance can operate through the material presence and the collective framing of counter-hegemonic narratives in public space. It also contributes to answering RQ1 by showing how the urban spatial relations within which this resistance occurs remain structured by settler colonial narratives of Indigenous absence and hegemonic representations of extractive progress.

Outline of the thesis

This thesis is organised as follows. Chapter 2 provides the historical background of northern Patagonia and introduces the colonial imaginary of the desert. Chapter 3 sets out the theoretical framework of the thesis. It begins by outlining the debates in which this thesis is set, before turning to two further sections. Part two engages with theories of space and spatiality, while part three develops the thesis' approach to recognition and resistance. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology and method of the research and is in two parts. Part one discusses the data collection and analytical method of the thesis and part two discusses the ethical considerations. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the four articles and chapter 6 presents the overall conclusions and contributions of the thesis. The four articles are then presented in full.

2

Background

The Conquest of the Desert

Contemporary land conflicts in northern Patagonia are placed by this thesis within a longer history of settler colonial violence. Rather than treating the Mapuche conflict as a recent or isolated phenomenon, it is understood as part of enduring processes of dispossession, territorialisation, and genocide. This reflects the *longue durée* of settler colonialism and aligns with Patrick Wolfe's assertion that 'invasion is a structure, not an event' (2006: 388). Central to this history is the *conquista del desierto* (conquest of the desert), a series of late nineteenth-century military campaigns that consolidated Argentine state power through the systematic invasion, occupation and destruction of Indigenous people and their worlds (Delrio, 2010). While cycles of violence between settlers and 'El Malón' (the Spanish name for Mapuche war bands), had occurred since Spanish Imperial times, the gradual expansion of the colonial and then post-colonial state of Argentina in the 19th century led to a series of wars and increasing militarism. These wars should be understood as part of broader regional processes of racialised state formation (Delrio, 2015).

The War of the Triple Alliance (1864–1870), fought between the three allies of Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil against Paraguay, resulted in the deaths of up to 60% of Paraguay's mainly Indigenous Guaraní population (Alix-García et al., 2022). This has itself been considered by some authors to be a genocide (Lenton, 2010). For Argentina, the war served multiple purposes. The spoils of victory gave Argentina the provinces of Formosa and Misiones in the north and provided a new generation of army officers with experience of killing Indigenous peoples. Subsequently, this military expertise would be re-deployed in Patagonia as the Argentine state expanded southwards into Mapuche territory, or *Wallmapu*.

A global economic downturn in the 1850s, affecting the settler colonial export economies of Argentina and Chile, led to calls for state expansion into the fertile territory of Wallmapu on both sides of the Andes (Hernandez, 2003: 140). By opening new land and production capacities, territorial expansion can be understood as a ‘spatial fix’ (Harvey, 2004). The Mapuche, as the ‘savage other’ (Gordillo, 2016), were already considered the ‘common enemy’ of Argentinians and Chileans (Hernandez, 2003: 135). This shared racial framing, inherent to settler colonial logics, mutually reinforced the coming campaigns of violence against the Mapuche, despite the competing and overlapping territorial claims of both states (Mariman Quemenado, 2023). Previously, the Mapuche had engaged in complex diplomacy with both states, often playing them off against each other (Zarley, 2019). In 1869, Chilean forces attacked and invaded Wallmapu on the western side of the Andes as part of the Chilean *Pacificación de la Araucanía* (Pacification of Araucanía³). In 1878, on the eastern side of the Andes, General Julio Argentino Roca, himself a veteran of the war against Paraguay, and numerous civil wars and rebellions of the 1870s, set out with his column from Mendoza to begin the Conquest of the Desert (Delrio, 2015; McNeish, 2021). Starting in Mendoza was also symbolic, as it was from this city that General José de San Martín had set out with the Army of the Andes in 1817 to cross into Chile. This was a key event in the Argentine and Chilean wars of liberation (Cersósimo and Barbosa Lopes, 2019).

Financed in significant part by British capital (Nagy, 2022), the campaigns of conquest were undertaken with the explicit aim of killing and displacing Indigenous peoples and populating the valuable agricultural land with European settlers (Delrio, 2010). The aim of the conquest was not to engage with Mapuche war bands or warriors but to head straight to Mapuche residential sites, with the express purpose of killing as many Mapuche as possible (Maybury-Lewis, 2002). An inherent logic of settler colonialism is the ‘elimination of the native’ (Wolfe, 2006), by one means or another, and underpins the genocidal logic of settler colonialism.

The campaigns envisioned a ‘new society’ based on European Whiteness, with Indigenous peoples cast as the ‘internal other’ and confined to the past (Pérez, 2011: 6). Roca himself articulated the ideological underpinnings of the campaigns:

³ Araucanía is the Chilean name for the region.

Our self respect as a virile people obliges us to put down as soon as possible, by reason or by force, this handful of savages who destroy our wealth and prevent us from definitively occupying in the name of law, progress, and our own security, the richest and most fertile lands in the Republic (General Roca in Maybury-Lewis, 2002: 45).

The first phase of the military campaigns came to an end in 1885 with the surrender of the chief Sayhueque (Stefanelli, 2019). The outcome of the Conquest of the Desert, from the state's point of view, was a phenomenal success. Fuelled by the arrival of European immigrants (Droller, 2017) and intensive railway building (Salerno, 2014), the vast new territory under cultivation turned Argentina into an agricultural powerhouse by the turn of the twentieth century. By this time, wages in Argentina had reached 96% of those in the UK (Sanchez-Alonso, 2010). This period is often celebrated in Argentina as a golden age, particularly, though not exclusively, by the political right (Larson, 2020).

This celebratory narrative continues to shape Argentine political culture (Delrio, 2017). It is evident both in contemporary right-wing nationalism and in the material landscape of northern Patagonia, where the legacies of the Conquest of the Desert remain politically, symbolically and often materially present for Mapuche communities (Magallanes, 2019; Larson, 2020; Pérez Zavala, 2008). Roca went on to become President of Argentina, serving two non-consecutive terms between 1880 and 1904. In Río Negro province, a statue of him on horseback stands in the central square of Bariloche, and the Mapuche settlement of Fiske Menuko was renamed General Roca.

The Desert as a Colonial Imaginary

The arrival of the settler colonial state of Argentina as conqueror in northern Patagonia in the late nineteenth century produced a singular problem for the state: the desert. What had been the absolute outside of Argentina was now internal territory, and the state had to deal with the incorporation of Indigenous peoples and their land into a national body that had, until that moment, identified itself as its opposite. The desert as a colonial imaginary is as absence, without life: those parts of the earth that are outside of modernity. As such, desert spaces have often been the sites of modernity's greatest excesses: colonial massacres, forced marches and, in the latter part of the twentieth century, the ideal sites for nuclear weapons testing (Henni, 2022).⁴

⁴ Unavailable to the Argentine state of the late nineteenth century, one way of dealing with the desert is, quite literally, to irradiate it.

Whilst the geographical term *desert* refers to an area of land that receives no more than 25cm of rainfall a year (National Geographic, 2023), the colonial conceptualisation of the desert covers many geographies that are not deserts. The term desert itself in the context of northern Patagonia has its history in colonial territorialities that stem from the construction of the frontier. The desert was considered to be an unproductive space, ‘disposable in the name of progress’ (Escolar and Saldi, 2017: 272). Although much of northern Patagonia can be geographically classified as a desert due to its low rainfall, Alfred Hasbrouck (1935) explains that much of the area was not truly desert but rather, in his mind, fertile agricultural land, suitable for what he called modern irrigation, due to the presence of large rivers of Andean meltwater and abundant groundwater. In referring to modern irrigation, Hasbrouck (1935) disregarded the agricultural techniques of the Indigenous Mapuche, who were already farming and living on the land. A related military campaign which began in 1884 in the forested Chaco region in northern Argentina was referred to as the *Conquista del Desierto Verde* (Conquest of the Green Desert) with desert more nakedly referring to the fact that it was an area outside of the control of European settlers (Gordillo, 2014).

The desert thus refers to a colonial ‘dialectic of civilisation and barbarism’ (Gordillo and Hirsch, 2003: 5). Desert spaces are not devoid of life rather they contain complex and vibrant ecologies that belie the settler colonial imaginary of the desert as a ‘blank space on the edge of time’ (Cheng and de Lara, 2019: 1078). The application of time here is critical because, as places outside of modernity, they share a link with colonial imaginaries of indigeneity that place Indigenous people also out of time.

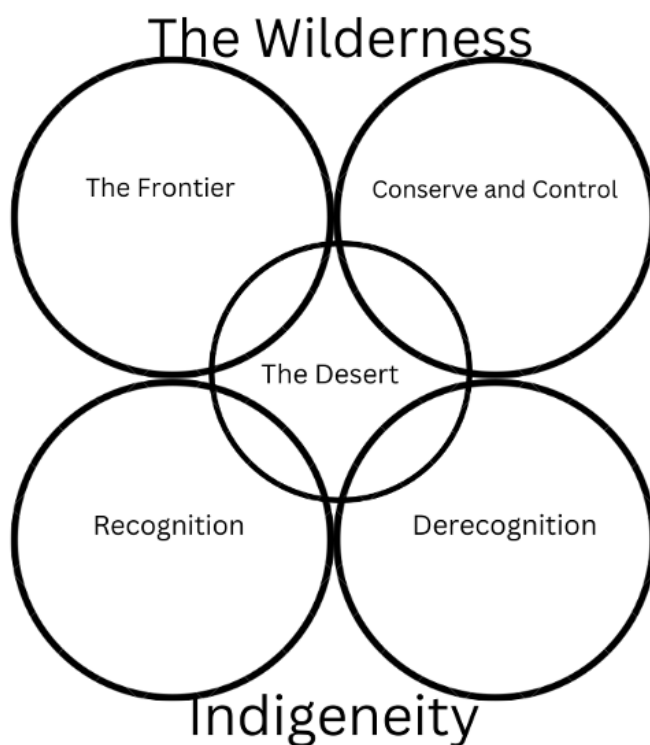
This linkage within the colonial mindset represents a settler colonial imaginary of the desert where ‘the perceived savagery of locals and that of terrain became indistinguishable from one another’ (Gordillo, 2018: 56). As such, for the settler colonist, the desert represents a duality. First is the savage other of Indigenous people (Gordillo, 2016). The second is the ‘wasteland’ (Cronon, 1995) of the wilderness. The desert thus represents a contradiction for the settler colonial state. Its otherness is inherent to the settler state’s identity, as it’s opposite, yet as a territory *in potentia* its incorporation into the state is an objective.

Ordering the Desert: Colonial Logics of Space

With the incorporation of the desert into the national territory of Argentina in the late nineteenth century, the state has attempted to deal with the contradictions of the desert in a number of ways. Firstly, the Western Cartesian binary between humans and nature was imposed as a universalising framework (Raftopoulos and Coletta, 2016). This splits the colonial imaginary of the desert, previously viewed as the totality of the outside, into two distinct categories: its people and its land. The former was seen as the undesirable other through their indigeneity as the ‘despised nonwhite part of the nation’ (Gordillo, 2016: 242). The latter was unordered land, a non-territory designated as the wilderness. This was earmarked as potential territory available for incorporation into one form of capitalist production or another. One example is the large-scale irrigation infrastructure suggested by Hasbrouck (1935), which sacrificed large parts of the region to create ‘European oases’ for fruit and wine production (Escobar and Saldi, 2016).

This represents a hegemonic spatial order that is imposed by the state through the settler colonial logics of elimination. I identify this as the Western spatial ontology. Its hegemonic ordering of space in northern Patagonia is illustrated in the following diagram:

Figure 1 The Colonial Order of the Desert



Source: Author's own work

As the diagram demonstrates, both indigeneity and the wilderness are dealt with by the state through two overarching strategies each.

The Wilderness is divided into two colonial territorialities through processes of territorialisation, which will be explained in the following chapter. The first is the extractive frontier (Leys and Raftopoulos, 2025), which is an extreme space of capitalist production where raw materials are extracted towards an inevitable post-exhaustion ruination. The second is the conservation frontier, which is an exclusive project of conservation grounded in the genocide and dispossession of the Conquest of the Desert (Rasmussen and Mendoza, 2023: 322). Here control over territory and both frontiers are imagined by the settlers as pristine and empty, prior to their arrival, as *terra nullius*

(‘nobody’s land’). As such, the extractive frontier represents notions of progress through an application of modernity in the form of extractive industries. The conservation frontier, is conversely, an imaginary of a pristine past. Here we can see how the Western spatial ontology is at once both a spatial ordering, and a temporal one. It is an ontology because it is world-making and, through its universalising claims, world-wrecking (Blomqvist, 2023)

Indigeneity is also divided between two colonial imaginaries. The first is *de-recognition*, which is an umbrella term for the numerous ways in which the colonial state has attempted to vanish Indigenous peoples. It is a process of de-recognition because the existence of Indigenous people had previously been recognised, firstly through their construction as the ‘savage other’ (Gordillo, 2016), a counter-point against which colonists constructed their own identity (Canessa, 2017). However, through territorial inclusion, the continued presence of this Indigenous other presents a problem.

In the Argentine context, a genocide was first unleashed in order to literally make Indigenous people disappear. The survivors were then forbidden from being Mapuche as part of a long and painful history of attempted assimilation, which included banning Indigenous languages, cultural expressions, as well as kidnapping children and sending them to violent, abusive and murderous residential schools. These practices sought to assimilate the Mapuche into what Romaine Green (writing in the similar Chilean context) describes as ‘useful citizens of the working nation’ (2020), inferior copies of the White European (Geder and Ghidoli, 2019). A second project is that of recognition, which is an aspect of neoliberal multicultural logic. Recognition attempts to deal with indigeneity by creating a defanged *indio permitido* (permitted Indian) (Rivera Cusicanqui, cited in Hale, 2004; Burman, 2020). This concept will be explored later in this Kappa and in the second article of this thesis.

3

Theory

The following chapter is divided into three sections. Part 1 establishes the three primary debates with which this thesis engages, identifies its contribution to them and explains how these bodies of literature inform the thesis as a whole. It begins by discussing settler colonial studies and explaining how settler colonialism is understood in this thesis as a particular structure of asymmetrical power relations that shapes encounters between the settler colonial state and Mapuche worlds. Criticisms of settler colonial studies are then discussed, including how a focus on the logic of elimination may reduce Mapuche worlds and agency to products of settler colonialism. Building on this, the field of political ontology is introduced to understand how this asymmetrical encounter can account for radical difference and world-making. The thesis' conceptualisation of the state is then explained through diverse lived experiences, while ontologies are understood as connected, rather than separate, through a shared materiality. The final section discusses how resistance is understood in this thesis as heterogenous and intrinsically imbued with temporal and spatial logics. It is explained how building on the previous two sections, resistance can be world-making.

From this foundation, Part 2 develops how the thesis theorises space and how domination in northern Patagonia is enacted. The section discusses territory and territorialisation as ongoing processes. Here, the hegemonic spatial regime of the Western spatial ontology is conceptualised as produced through colonial and capitalist logics, with particular attention to border theory, the construction of the frontier, extractivism, conservation and the construction of what this thesis terms *TINA-spaces*.

Part 3 then examines how the hegemonic spatial regime of the Western spatial ontology is sustained through neoliberal multicultural recognition and

forms of slow violence, and how this regime is contested through strategies of slow resistance.

Together, these three parts provide the theoretical architecture through which the thesis understands contemporary territorial conflict in northern Patagonia. From this basis, the thesis examines how hegemonic relations are spatially and temporally produced, naturalised and reproduced, while remaining subject to emergent and sustained forms of resistance that can operate both against and through them. The different theoretical approaches mobilised across the four articles are therefore not treated as a single, unified theoretical tradition, but as theoretical resources that address different dimensions of a shared problem. Together, they allow the thesis to examine the relationships between settler colonial domination, hegemonic space and Indigenous world-making, providing theoretical coherence across the four articles.

Part 1: Theoretical Debates and Intervention

Settler colonialism

Scholarship on settler colonialism has long emphasised the genocidal logic of the *elimination of the native* as foundational to the formation of settler states (Wolfe, 2006; Veracini, 2010). Originating as a concept in Palestinian literature of the 1960s (see Schayegh, 2024; Zaqout, 2026), settler colonial studies (see Wolfe, 2006) is concerned with understanding colonial formations in which the settlement of *Indigenous* land by colonisers becomes the organising logic of colonial rule (Veracini, 2010). Central to this is Wolfe's (2006) argument that settler colonialism should be understood as an enduring structure organised around the logic of the elimination of the native. This structural perspective foregrounds the ongoing processes through which Indigenous peoples are displaced, assimilated or otherwise removed in order to facilitate permanent settler occupation (Rosenow, 2023).

As such, settler colonial studies have long connected the logics of settler colonialism with those of genocide (Totten, Parsons and Hitchcock, 2002; Short, 2016). However, Wolfe (2006) points out that not all genocide is settler colonial and that the logic of elimination does not always result in genocide. Elimination rather, is understood more broadly as a 'range of processes through which Indigenous claims to land, political recognition, and collective status are undermined or rendered obsolete' (Stridh and Johansson, 2025: 481).

Nevertheless, the elimination of the native and genocide have historically converged, with ‘settler colonial logic manifesting as genocidal’ (Wolfe, 2006: 387). As such, settler colonialism can be understood as an inherently ethnocidal structure insofar as it is oriented towards the removal, absorption or disappearance of Indigenous peoples in order to facilitate their dispossession and the settlement of their lands (Totten, Parsons and Hitchcock, 2002; Short, 2016). The structural approach of settler colonial studies therefore provides a conceptual framework for analysing genocidal logics in settler colonial contexts as part of an ongoing process (Rosenow, 2024).

The relationship between settler colonialism and genocide also connects this literature to broader debates on colonialism and modernity. The Holocaust, generally considered the paradigmatic example of genocide in the twentieth century (Hinton, 2002), was explained by Aimé Césaire (2000) as an extension of European colonial violence. The unique aspect of the Holocaust, he argued, was that it was perpetrated in Europe against a European people, rather than against the ‘not-Europe’ of the colonised world, and that Europeans had ‘tolerated [...] Nazism before it was inflicted on them’ (Césaire, 2000: 14). Zygmunt Bauman (1991) develops this argument further, contending that, rather than representing a return to pre-modern barbarism, the Holocaust was embedded within the civilisational and state-making processes of modernity itself. As such, Walter Dignolo has presented coloniality, the enduring structures of colonial power, as the *darker side of modernity* (2011).

From this perspective, the emergence of Western Europe as the global centre of power constructed the world through imposed ‘geocultural’ notions based on a ‘racial social categorisation’ of the world’s population (Quijano, 2000: 217). While genocide studies continue to debate whether genocide is best understood as a temporally bounded event or as an ongoing process (Rosenberg, 2012), and legal definitions emphasise questions of intent (Goldberg, 2026), settler colonial scholarship favours structural understandings centred on enduring relations of elimination (Wolfe, 2006; Schayegh, 2024).

Within settler colonial studies, processes of racialisation have been the basis of debates about how settler societies reproduce themselves (Svirsky, 2021) and the particular forms these processes take in different colonial contexts (Veracini, 2022). This thesis embeds itself in an ethnographically orientated study of a particular hegemonic spatial regime in a particular place (northern Patagonia), that is recognised by scholars as settler colonial (Rosenow, 2024; Schayegh, 2024). Accordingly, this thesis does not engage in detail with other

colonial architectures, such as saltwater colonialism, where colonialism primarily takes the form of the overseas extraction of resources and labour (see Veracini, 2010; Stridh and Johansson, 2025). However, there is an ongoing debate in settler colonial studies as to what the specificities of settler colonialism are within colonialism more generally (Schayegh, 2024), and whether it constitutes a distinct category of colonialism (Veracini, 2013). It is important to note that this thesis follows Wolfe (2006) in understanding settler colonialism as a distinct and ongoing colonial *regimen*⁵ organised around the logic of elimination. In this thesis, settler colonialism provides the overarching historical and political context through which contemporary conflicts over land, territory, recognition and extraction in northern Patagonia can be understood.

Settler colonial studies have not been immune to criticisms of potentially reproducing the same colonality that they seek to critique. Firstly, an Anglo-bias towards British and American imperial projects has been identified within settler colonial studies (Rosenow, 2024; Schayegh, 2024; Castellanos, 2017; Taylor and Lublin, 2021; Englert, 2020). This bias has often excluded Latin American contexts, and it should be noted that there is not necessarily an agreed terminology for settler colonialism in the Spanish language (Taylor and Lublin, 2021). While scholars have increasingly applied settler colonial frameworks to Latin America (e.g. Rosenow, 2024; Castellanos, 2017; Taylor and Lublin, 2021), Argentina, and Patagonia in particular, represent something of an exception within the region (Lublin, 2021; Delrio, 2015). This is due to a number of factors, such as the relatively late date of the invasion compared with much of the region and the role of British finance in funding it (Delrio, 2015; Nagy, 2022). The invasion of Patagonia, beginning with the Conquest of the Desert, has therefore been interpreted as a more archetypal form of settler colonialism, comparable in many respects to Anglo settler projects (Taylor, 2018).

Secondly, the outcome of hierarchical racial categorisation presents a number of problems in the relationship between the settler and the native (Englert, 2020). A focus on a structure of elimination risks assuming that Indigenous peoples *have* been eliminated while also ‘caricatur[ing] Indigenous responses’ between a ‘false binary’ of co-optation and resistance (Macoun and Strakosch, 2013: 436). In this sense, ‘settler colonialism is unable to transcend itself, precisely because it is conceptualized as a structure’ (Snelgrove, Dhamoon and

⁵ I use the term *regimen* in this particular place, rather than *regime*, to emphasise settler colonialism as a systematic and ongoing structure and does not necessarily relate to any particular government or set of policies in its inherent logic.

Corntassel, 2014: 9). Scholars have warned that this may lead to an unproductive focus on settler guilt (Tuck and Yang, 2016) and denies settlers the possibility of anti-colonial action (Snelgrove, Dhamoon and Corntassel, 2014). Alissa Macoun and Elizabeth Strakosch point out that, while ‘settler colonialism struggles to narrate its own end’, it can be countered by ‘approaching the theory as an account of settler desires’ (2013: 435). Desires here are understood structurally as the securing of settler futures through continuous possession of territory and the elimination of Indigenous claims with the aforementioned diverse processes of eliminatory violence. As such this section, with its recognition of settler colonialism as a structure, is followed by a discussion of political ontology which provides a lens for looking beyond structures of hegemonic power.

Further to this discussion, scholars have argued that an exclusive focus on the elimination of the native risks obscuring the contradictory ways in which Indigenous labour is incorporated into exclusionary settler societies (Englert 2020). Sai Englert (2020) points to a common paradox in settler colonial states whereby Indigenous labour, while undesirable, is nevertheless utilised through complex racialised formations. In the Palestinian context, primary settlement dynamics were formed through the prioritisation of Jewish settler labour and the exclusion of Palestinians from the labour market (Zaqout, 2026). Yet increasing labour demand, particularly in construction, led to the exploitation of Palestinian labour in order to build the settler state on top of themselves (Englert, 2020). In Patagonia, a similar process, though distinct, due to goals of assimilation, occurred during the early Peronist governments (1946-1955) through what Hernán Schiaffini (2019) calls the ‘construction of the Mapuche worker’. Likewise in Chile, Mapuche labour was incorporated through assimilationist policies that sought to include Indigenous people at the lower rungs of society as ‘useful citizens of the working nation’ (Green, 2020).

These contradictions can be understood through Anibal Quijano’s argument that race, in its modern meaning, emerged from colonialism itself (2000). The settler paradox arises because the desire to create a settler society without the native simultaneously depends upon the continued existence of Indigenous peoples as a racialised and subordinated population. In the Latin American context, Spanish colonists travelled to the Americas expecting to reinvent themselves as *hidalgos*, the nobility, raising their social standing relative to Indigenous peoples (MacLachlan & Rodríguez, 1980). As such, many settler societies require both the elimination of the native and their preservation as subaltern. For some settler colonial contexts, such as the United States, one

way of managing this contradiction was through the concurrent elimination of Indigenous peoples and the importation of enslaved Africans as what Veracini (2010) terms ‘exogenous others’. However, Patagonia, conquered at the end of the Atlantic slave trade did not have this option available.

In this thesis, settler colonialism is understood as the historical and continuing structure that organises settler desires (Macoun and Strakosch, 2013). As such, it informs how I understand the state and other actors that represent situated hegemonic power (such as extractive industries) and the logics through which they encounter Indigenous peoples and worlds under asymmetric relations of power (Escobar, 2020). As aforementioned, this view is married with scholarship from political ontology in order to account for forms of Indigenous political agency that should not be reduced to a simple settler native binary.

Political Ontology – the State as a Lived Experience and the One-World World

The term *ontology* is used frequently throughout this thesis, and its importance ebbs and flows in the articles. It is central to articles one and two, where it serves as a principal lens of analysis and as an immanent background in articles three and four. Ontology, however, must be discussed. The above section makes it clear that settler colonialism as a structure, is well placed to understand settler desires. Mapuche agency and world-making, however, cannot be solely understood through the relationship to this structure. Throughout my fieldwork, Mapuche contacts would often discuss their worldview through cosmology and the difficulty of making non-Mapuche ‘understand’ them, as described explicitly by Noah in article two. These encounters forced me to confront the limits of my own understanding that what my contacts were telling me could not be reduced to a different interpretation of a world I already knew.

As such, I approach ontology with the oft-quoted line from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: ‘There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than dreamt of in your philosophy’. This describes a fundamental tenet of my approach in this thesis, namely that I cannot, and do not claim to, have a full understanding of Mapuche worlds. Nor does my own apprehension of reality provide me with the authority to presuppose one reality against which different ontologies should be compared. Rather, realities are understood as enacted through situated practices (de la Cadena, 2015; Escobar, 2020), meaning that ‘to take Indigenous “knowledge” seriously [...] Indigenous “realities” need to be taken seriously’ (Burman, 2022: 261). These realities are diverse and constitute

‘partially connected, but radically different’ worlds (Escobar, 2020: 27). It is the meeting of these worlds, at the ontological fracture zone, where this thesis points its analytical lens. Here, materiality becomes key because materialities bodies, territory, ecology, violence, etc., are nevertheless shared between these worlds, making them impossible to seal off from one another.

Within much Latin American scholarship, ontology has become closely intertwined with decolonial thought (Jaramillo-Aristizabal, 2022), particularly through attempts to understand colonialism as an ontological project, what Troillout (1995: 89) refers to as the ‘ontological order of the West’. The Latin American decolonial critique of classical Marxism criticises an understanding of history shaped by eurocentrism, as colonialism for Marx was an outcome of modernity, as opposed to a constituent part (Tornel, 2022; Mignolo, 2011). This reconceptualisation of colonialism also questions the ontological assumptions of modernity itself and how it established a particular understanding of reality (Burman, 2016b). The colonality of this ontology is explained by Arturo Escobar through its universalism as the ‘one-world world’ (2020: 9). This is a construction of modernity that, through colonialism and capitalism, has been globalised.

Developed by the Argentine anthropologist Mario Blaser, political ontology has a dual and interrelated meaning. Firstly, it refers to ‘the politics involved in the practices that shape a particular world or ontology’ and, secondly, to ‘a field of study that focuses on the conflicts that ensue as different worlds strive to sustain their own existence as they interact or mingle with each other’ (2009: 877). Within this framework, political ontology recognises how Indigenous knowledge systems *are* dismissed as ascientific (De Carvalho and Flórez-Flórez, 2014) and rendered difficult to recognise within the dominant institutions of Western-style nation states (de la Cadena, 2015). As Martin argues, Western notions of science rest upon an assumed separation between ‘(scientific) truth and (cultural) belief’ (2020: 361), a distinction that has historically enabled Indigenous knowledge to be recognised as an exotic and anachronistic object of study, rather than as the product of ‘critical and knowledgeable thinkers’ (Burman, 2018: 60). As such, the field of political ontology studies ‘the relationships between worlds including the conflicts that result when different ontologies or worlds strive to preserve their existence in their interactions with other worlds, under asymmetric conditions of power’ (Escobar, 2020: 25). Article one of this thesis describes these interactions as ontological fracture zones. Political ontology’s emphasis on world-making gives particular significance to lived experience and situated practices as knowledge

about the world is generated relationally, as opposed to from the inside of a detached human mind (Burman, 2016b). A focus on lived experience draws attention to how worlds are encountered and made meaningful, with knowledge understood as inseparable from practice (de la Cadena, 2015).

The state in this thesis is described in distinct ways, as an actor with agency that moves across territory through its institutions, and as an entity that is produced. These descriptions are not mutually exclusive. In line with political ontology, the state is understood as a relational production that is experienced. As such, a state formation can both arrive, in 1878, as an invading military force that imposes its sovereignty on new territories, and be relationally produced as a hegemonic entity through systems of domination (McNeish, 2021). Here, lived experience is understood ‘as a formative ontology of the state’ (Visan and Mountz, 2025: 1446), with the state being produced through relational experience. On the one hand, the state is experienced through the actions of institutional labourers with the drawing of borders, the conquering of territories, the parcelling out of land grants, and identifying citizens and aliens, along with a plethora of other hegemonic practices of domination that bring the state into being. On the other hand, the state is produced as the experience of that domination, dispossession, genocide, land grabbing, and the resistance to such practices, through the insistent enactment of different worlds. This understanding provides a means of attending to how a universalising hegemonic spatial order, enacted both as and by the state, is experienced from differently situated positions. Lived experience therefore provides an important point of connection between ontology and politics (Tornel, 2023), demonstrating how dominant structures of power and the emergence of counter-hegemony are (re)produced, but also where encounters with other ways of world-making become perceptible (Burman, 2016b; Visan and Mountz, 2025).

The one-world world assumptions of the settler colonial hegemonic spatial regime are at the same time racial, spatial and temporal, based in historical and enduring notions of Eurocentrism and White supremacy. Article one of this thesis describes a particular form of this as the ‘Western spatial ontology’, which is an ‘ongoing universalising project of world-making that describes how space is produced in settler colonial contexts’. The spatial and temporal hierarchisation of coloniality is illustrated in the opening chapter of Joseph Conrad's (1899) *Heart of Darkness*. The narrator, sailing on the River Thames after returning from his experiences in the colonised Congo, looks out at the modern, late Victorian metropolis of London and is struck by the thought: ‘This also has been one of the dark places of the earth’ (Conrad, 1899: 2).

Conrad was comparing London's historical position as a periphery of antiquity's Roman Empire and the contemporary position of the Congo within the context of European colonialism. For Conrad, darkness is used as a triangulation of race, time and space imaginaries, whereby the colonised other of the not-European exists in the past of the European. This aligns with Blaser, who uses John Locke's 1690 statement that 'in the beginning the whole world was America' (cited in Blaser, 2010: 3). These are examples of a colonial mythology, which understands the European invasion of the Americas and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the transformation of their lands into European-style farms, considered by Locke to be the 'completion of God's creation' (Moloney, 2011: 191), as a burdensome moral imperative and a teleological inevitability of racial superiority.

Rather than unsettling colonial binaries, investigating ontological difference risks reifying Western and Indigenous ontologies as internally coherent and mutually exclusive worlds (Burman, 2016b). In encountering Indigenous knowledge, Western institutions have frequently dismissed, delegitimised or actively destroyed Indigenous ways of knowing (Chandler and Reid, 2020). Historical examples, such as the systematic looting and destruction of Maya codices in the sixteenth century, illustrate that colonial encounters were not only struggles over territory but also over knowledge itself. At the same time, the political ontology literature emphasises that Indigenous ontologies should not be understood as isolated cosmologies existing outside of the modern (Querejazu, 2016), rather existing in spite of it (Burman, 2016a; Blaser, 2013). Instead, *they* continue to inhabit, shape and contest contemporary political life. As de la Cadena reminds us, Indigenous worlds already 'inhabit, participate, and influence the nation-state that we all share', even when our world cannot fathom it (2015: 62). While de la Cadena is referring specifically to her own position as a Peruvian, as David Graeber and David Wengrow (2021) have demonstrated, the project of modernity, beginning with the European Enlightenment, was deeply influenced at its social, political and economic core by the contemporaneous meeting with Indigenous worlds. The challenge, therefore, lies not in incorporating Indigenous perspectives into an already existing world, but in recognising that the assumed universality of modernity has always been contested.

Resistance as World-Making

Resistance is understood in this thesis as heterogeneous, often involving direct confrontation but also emerging through a range of insistent practices

discussed in the articles, including negotiation, presence, (re)signification, the preservation of alternative futures and material interventions in public space. While the study of resistance as a social phenomenon has historically been associated with Marxist analyses of class struggle, with revolution representing its most transformative expression (Scott, 1985), scholarship on resistance has expanded beyond an emphasis on direct confrontation with an identifiable source of ‘repressive power’ (Sato, 2007). Subsequent relational approaches have broadened the understanding of resistance as an analytical category to encompass more dispersed and everyday practices of contestation (Katz, 2004; Lilja, 2021). These approaches do not necessarily negate the structural inequalities between those exercising and those resisting power. Rather, they draw attention to the diverse practices through which asymmetrical power relations can be reproduced and contested (Sato, 2022).

However, structuralist understandings of power relations may reduce those subjected to power to an objective production of that power, creating a paradox whereby it becomes impossible to think about the ‘subject’s resistance to that power’ (Sato, 2022: 14). This problem is particularly acute in settler colonial contexts, where, as aforementioned, a focus on the logic of elimination may risk reducing Indigenous people’s agency to a binary between co-optation and resistance (Macoun and Strakosch, 2013). Political ontology may allow me to move beyond this, as it provides a lens through which to view world-making under asymmetrical conditions of power (Escobar, 2020). Resistance as world-making can thus oppose a hegemonic spatial regime while enacting alternatives to it. This ontological resistance is conceptualised in article one as *perpendicular resistance*.

The productive aspect of resistance connects with Mona Lilja’s (2021) development of constructive resistance, through which dominant discourses of restricted possibilities are challenged through the production of alternative images of the future (Lilja, 2021). The insistent nature of such resistance over time, means that effects may only emerge gradually. This follows from Homi Bhabha’s notion of the ‘time lag’ (1994), whereby repeated practices of constructive resistance can accumulate, creating the conditions through which new ideas and values become thinkable or acceptable (Lilja, 2021). Resistance can consequently involve both opposition to existing arrangements and practices that make alternative futures imaginable. Lilja’s (2021) distinction is useful precisely because non-cooperative and constructive forms of resistance need not be mutually exclusive. Actors can confront existing arrangements while

also attempting to preserve or produce alternatives within conditions that substantially constrain what is possible.

Of particular importance to this thesis is the spatial and temporal character of resistance. Several scholars have emphasised the importance of spatialities and temporalities in understanding resistance (Baaz et al., 2016; Lilja, 2022; Motta and Seppälä, 2025), including the material dimensions of resistance practices (Baaz et al., 2016). Lilja, for example, argues that dominant temporalities connect past, present and future in ways that legitimise power and construct the future in ‘suitable’ ways (2021: 126). Wade et al. (2024) conceptualise a permanent present in relation to a peri-urban Indigenous community in Bolivia. They become fixed in a permanent present as their past is not recognised as legitimate and their future is threatened by displacement. Article three in this thesis presents a similar process through which the past and the future are foreclosed. This is conceptualised as the *temporal-lock*, which functions as a mechanism by which non-extractivist past and future alternatives are systemically foreclosed.

Resistance can consequently operate through contesting the spatial and temporal positioning of political subjects by power. Practices of resistance ‘draw on and produce a critical consciousness’ in opposition to situated ‘conditions of oppression and exploitation at various scales’ (Katz, 2004: 251). Presence, insistent and over time, can therefore become politically significant, not only as a declaration of autonomy but also potentially constituting ‘a political strategy of resistance to power’ (Sato, 2022: 64). Articles two and four develop this relationship through notions of *slow resistance* and *present-making*, which examine how the insistent and explicit presence of Mapuche people in particular places challenge broader colonial strategies of absencing Indigenous peoples. Spatial resistance can also concern the categories through which territory itself is organised as a hegemonic spatial regime. Such resistance does not require withdrawal from the institutions that impose such regimes. Rather, actors may negotiate with, strategically utilise or cross-cut state structures without necessarily accepting the spatial assumptions through which those structures organise territory.

The conceptualisations of larger resistance strategies operationalised and developed in the articles of this thesis, *perpendicular*, *slow*, *constructive* and practices such as *present-making* and *(re)signification* build upon relational and productive understandings of resistance, applying them to the particular spatial conditions and ontological encounters of settler colonialism in northern

Patagonia. Resistance here is understood as manifesting at times as direct confrontation, but also as productive resistance (Lilja, 2021), which is persistent over time and world-making.

Part 2: Theories of space

Territory

The emergence of the post-Westphalian nation-state from the seventeenth century in Europe involved a fundamental reorganisation of political power around the modern, Western notion of *territory*. For modern social-contract thinkers such as Hobbes, sovereignty was not an abstract force of divine right, with political power organised as a mirror reflection of a cosmological order, rather a *dominion* that required a set, *material* domain in which to act (Elden, 2013: 341). Territory thus became the spatiality of sovereign authority, which is to say that ‘territory is the space over which administrative sovereignty is held in place by government’ (Kahn and Bint, 2014: 221). Sovereignty and territory are, from this perspective, mutually constitutive. The sovereign requires a delimited space in which to exercise power, and that space becomes imbued with meaning as *territory* through the sovereign’s authority over it. The dual assemblage of the nation (its people) and the state (the mechanism by which they are governed) is held together by a third, silent partner: the materiality of territory (Elden, 2017). This normative definition of territory is critically interrogated in the following section to reveal both its limitations and its underlying coloniality.

The historic and Eurocentric understanding of territory and the state outlined above is referred to in this thesis as the Western spatial ontology. It describes the historically constituted set of assumptions through which European modernity came to understand space as something that is inherently measurable, divisible and governable (Elden, 2013). As such, the Western spatial ontology frames territory as a fixed, bounded and ultimately natural spatial unit. This ontology of space, anchored in notions of enclosure and property, is not neutral, and is a founding structure of the colonial world order that stemmed from Europe, beginning around the same time. Drawing from a critical perspective informed by Gramsci’s (1971) concept of ‘cultural hegemony’ and Lefebvre’s (1991) notion of space as produced, the Western notion of territory is to be understood, not as natural, rather as the product of a historically specific hegemonic spatial regime, developed in this thesis as the Western spatial ontology.

In Europe, the construction of the nation-state is understood as being between two teleologic models which Kahn and Bint (2014). describe firstly, as progressive territorial expansion, or the ‘French model’ of state before nation. Secondly is the unification of lands where common language speakers live, or the German model of nation before state (Kahn and Bint, 2014). Both models, however, rely on the aforementioned assumptions, namely that land and people must be *ordered, bordered and lorded* in order for territory to *become*. That is, territory must be measured, divided and governed (Elden, 2013). However, a problem arises with such models in the settler colonial context. Here, nation-state making projects must deal with Indigenous peoples and their land, who are paradoxically constructed as both internal others, challenging racialised notions of the nation, and external threats, occupying lands the state wishes to control (Canessa, 2017).

The notion of territory within the Western spatial ontology differs from other concepts of organised space, such as ‘terrain, space, place, jurisdiction, sovereignty and border control rights’ (Nathwani, 2025: 204), by effectively becoming an assemblage of them all. This unifying logic has enabled European nation-states to universalise their own spatial logic while obliterating Indigenous, relational and non-bounded forms of spatial ordering (Escobar, 2020). Such ontological imperialism produces the idea that this form of territoriality is both a natural and inevitable form of organising space, rather than a particular product of Western modernity. As such, territory as a static place is limited as an analytical category and would permit one to fall into the trap of understanding the Western spatial ontology through its own notions of naturalness.

Territory as process

This limitation underscores that, for this thesis, territory is not a static outcome of a relationship with the world, understood as natural, i.e. territory, the *noun*. Rather, it is a continuous process of territorialisation, the *verb*, that emerges through the hegemonic capitalist and colonial logics of the nation-state. While originating in the organisation of modern Europe, the Western spatial ontology is a territorial logic that has historically been reproduced as a universalising model of political organisation through colonial expansion (Quijano, 2000). As Europe progressively conquered and dominated the ‘not-Europe’, this ‘coloniality of power’ violently transplanted and imposed European ways of knowing, mapping, and ultimately ordering land across other worlds (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2011; Escobar, 2020).

It is at the borders of territory where we begin to see the chimera fall apart, as the assumed ordered lines of modernity blur into one another in the interstitial zones of the *nepantla*, where multiple realities converge (Anzaldúa, 1999). These zones destabilise the Western spatial ontology, fracturing what White (2007) identifies as the mutually reinforcing notions of state, nation and territory. The production of space is continuous (Lefebvre, 1991) and, in a world structured by capitalist and colonial logics, territorialisation actively (re)configures space, embedding relations of authority and domination while simultaneously generating resistance. This process moves us beyond territory as a fixed, bounded object towards an examination of the continuous production of space within capitalist modernity (Lefebvre, 1991).

The Production of Space, Unification and Settler Myths

Space, for Lefebvre (1991), is socially produced. Certain fragments of nature are chosen for their intrinsic characteristics (caves, plains, etc.) (ibid. 49) and imbued with meaning through our relationships to these spaces. Here, I use the term *absolute space* to refer to a historically embedded form of spatiality. The advent of capitalism and its abstraction of labour in turn act upon this space to create *abstract space*, which is enclosed through the *Western spatial ontology* of maps and borders. This bounded abstraction is stratified through a distinction between spaces that are centres of wealth, which fan out to peripheries, whereby the former subsume the latter, so as to ‘mould the spaces it dominates [...] often by violent means to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters there’ (Lefebvre, 1991: 49), and to continuously accumulate wealth at the centre. Colonial violence can therefore be understood as an extension of this production of abstract space, erasing pre-existing spatial relations, or spatialities, by violently reconfiguring the colonised world, even as Indigenous peoples persist and resist.

In the Americas, abstract space from the European perspective was produced in the imaginary of the frontier. Lefebvre’s (1991) concept of *unification* regards the incorporation of space into structures of capital accumulation and hegemonies. This process produces what is termed in this thesis as hegemonic space. Abstracted spaces in colonised places are given names and integrated into production systems (Williamson, 2023), acquiring their modern meaning as a process alongside and within the historical development of capitalism (Lefebvre, 1991). Thus, the abstraction of space is inherently linked to nation-state building, capitalist relations of production and the Western spatial ontology, with the ‘capitalist trinity’ of ‘land, capital and labor’ (Lefebvre, 1991: 282).

In the settler colonial context, this process is marked by the necessary violence of invasion. This colonial imaginary of the desert is constructed as a conflictual space ‘where violence is cloaked in rationality and a rationality of unification is used to justify violence’ (Lefebvre, 1991: 282). The rationality of unification, the dispossession and displacement of Indigenous people who live there, are key parts of the state’s national mythology. Such settler myths often provide ideological justifications for genocidal territorialisation by turning lived-in Indigenous territories into the frontier. What was referred to in the United States as ‘Manifest Destiny’ (Briones and Delrio, 2007), in South Africa as the ‘Great Trek’ (Park, 2021) and in contemporary Israel the narrative of ‘making the desert bloom’ (Holtermann Entwistle and Plonski, 2025), are all part of a general settler colonial narrative of *terra nullius*. These narratives, and often legal regimes, of violent dispossession understand Indigenous spaces as uninhabited wilderness (Rosenow, 2023; Wolfe, 2006).

In Argentina, the unifying and genocidal violence of the Conquest of the Desert became a ‘founding myth of the Argentine state’ (Cersósimo and Barbosa Lopes, 2019: 3). Through this conquest, Indigenous territory was transformed into abstract, empty space in the national imaginary, making it claimable. The inherent contradiction between the state’s desire for ‘the most fertile lands of the republic’ (General Roca in Maybury-Lewis, 2002: 45) and the construction of the desert as void was synthesised through genocide and invasion. Unification thus combined territorial acquisition with a racialised national identity.

David Maybury-Lewis describes these processes as occurring on the ‘edges of modernity’ (2002: 43), where the boundaries of the state are marked by a violent colonial formation of the *nepantla*, (Anzaldúa, 1999), with the violence emerging from the universalising claims of the Western spatial ontology. This constructed frontier is at once spatial, temporal and cultural. The state simultaneously wishes to subsume the frontier as part of its territory whilst casting those lands as outside the protections of the liberal state (Mignolo, 2011). Here, the supposedly universal principles of modernity, such as the rights of man, which are embedded into the construction of the liberal state (and are incorporated into Argentina’s founding constitution), were not applied equally to Indigenous people (de Jong, 2021). This is the frontier, a space produced through abstraction and exclusion through a racialised application of modernity.

Territorialisation: The Production of the Frontier

Territorialisation refers to the processes through which space is transformed into territory under capitalist logics of production (Dorn and Hafner, 2023). This process generates hierarchies of productive industries and social relations (Rasmussen and Lund, 2018), a dynamic that is clearly visible at the frontier (Acosta García and Folds, 2022).

The frontier is a particular modality of territorialisation specific to colonial and post-colonial contexts that is unresolved. As a social construct, the frontier was most famously theorised by Frederick Jackson Turner in his *frontier thesis* (1921). Turner, building on the United States' mythology of the 'American West', viewed the frontier as an empty *wilderness*, in spite of the Indigenous peoples already living there (Rasmussen and Lund, 2018). He attributed the values and identity of the nation-building project of the United States to the domination of the frontier. The desert of northern Patagonia is equivalent to Turner's American West insofar as they are products of the same process of settler colonial territorialisation, whereby the displacement of Indigenous peoples and the occupation of their lands is a logical outcome of settler colonial state building processes (Watts, 1992).

The frontier, as understood in this thesis, is not a place (Thompson, 1987). While frontier zones are materially and spatially produced, the frontier itself is better understood as an unresolved modality of territorialisation through which space is repeatedly reorganised under settler colonial and capitalist logics. As such, frontier spaces remain inherently unstable, either being transformed as they are incorporated into stable parts of state territory or being continually remade through successive waves of accumulation. Beginning with territorial conquest and the domination of the other, territorialisation produces the frontier as new industries and forms of production emerge. This process is often cyclical, where earlier modes are rendered obsolete, and forms of accumulation recreate the frontier as capitalist expansion reorganises space (Rasmussen and Lund, 2018). In this way, the frontier is re-territorialised: remade repeatedly, often within the same geographic space. Yet it remains inherently unstable.

As aforementioned, the frontier forms the settler colonial imaginary of the *nepantla*, that is, at once the basis of settler identity, a temporal notion of progress, a zone of exception from state legal regimes, a material zone of resource extraction and a conceptual borderland between colonial and racialised notions of 'civilisation and barbarism' (Gordillo and Hirsch, 2003: 5).

The Extractive Frontier and TINA-spaces

The extractive frontier represents a further and contemporary modality of territorialisation. Here, frontier space is configured as a ‘zone of sacrifice’ (Juskus, 2023) in the service of an inherently unsustainable form of capital accumulation: extractivism (Leys and Raftopoulos, 2025). Extractivism as an ideology is dealt with in detail in the third article of this thesis. The terminology of the extractive frontier is used in preference to other formulations such as *resource frontier* (Rasmussen and Lund, 2018), *capitalist frontier* (Tsing, 2003) or *frontiers of accumulation* (Watts, 1992) as I am specifically concerned with extractivism in frontier spaces. This thesis understands extractivism, as a ‘particular ontological assemblage of social and planetary exploitation’ (McNeish and Shapiro, 2021: 3). Following Gudynas (2018), extractivism is defined by the extraction of resources that leads to inevitable ecological exhaustion, leaving behind post-extraction ruination and enduring ecotoxic legacies (Ye et al., 2020), while channelling wealth from the local into global systems of accumulation (Raftopoulos, 2022; Blanes, Rodrigues and Gonçalves, 2023).

The extractive frontier is legitimised through notions of development and progress. These function as a temporal narrative that situates extractive expansion as both necessary and inevitable, promising national progress and prosperity while obscuring the uneven distribution of its costs (Svampa, 2019; McNeish, 2021). In Argentina, extractive projects such as fracking in Vaca Muerta are framed as national imperatives, essential to economic recovery and sovereignty. For example, the current (2026) President of Argentina, Javier Milei, described the Vaca Muerta fracking megaproject as a national ‘panacea’ (*La Nacion*, 2025). These narratives draw upon long-standing imaginaries of frontier progress, echoing the original settler colonial project of conquest, which similarly justified territorial expansion through promises of productivity and civilisation. Calls to renew the Conquest of the Desert are common in right-wing discourse in Argentina (see Delrio, 2017).

My concept of *TINA-spaces*, developed in the third article of this thesis, explains how extractivism persists at the same sites over time, despite environmental damage and repeatedly deferred or abandoned promises of progress. I argue that this is something existing frameworks do not fully capture. *TINA-spaces* describe extractivism as a material and spatial ideology that reproduces itself through the cyclical elimination of alternatives, creating dependency and generating consent, thereby presenting extractivism as inevitable. This occurs through a temporal-lock that erases pre-extractive pasts and alternative futures;

the monopolisation of local economies, which makes resistance appear self-defeating; and the production of consent via jobs, infrastructure and deferred promises of post-extraction renewal. Drawing on Gramsci (1971), extractivism in *TINA-spaces* functions as a hegemonic project, embedding economic dependency and consent to reproduce existing power relations and sustain the extractive frontier.

In northern Patagonia, fracking represents the latest iteration of the extractive frontier (Hadad et al., 2021; Rasmussen and Lund, 2025), with the Vaca Muerta fracking mega-project constituting an archetypal TINA-space. Unconventional oil and gas extraction has followed the exhaustion of conventional deposits (Raftopoulos and Short, 2024). The extractive frontier here is a cyclical frontier as it is remade over and over again as new generations of extractive industries form (Gudynas, 2018), with new technologies and resource demands replacing older ones. This enactment of the temporal-lock through cycles of dependency and consent in TINA-spaces leads to the imposition of a permanent present (Wade et al., 2024). At the same time, the extractive frontier, through its own contradictions, creates cracks, through which new forms of resistance can emerge.

Exclusive Environmentalism: The Frontier of Conservation

Northern Patagonia, like many other settler colonial contexts, has undergone a second and concurrent project of frontier territorialisation. Echoing what Paul Robbins has called the ‘conserve and control thesis’ (2019) whereby the hierarchy of production is reorganised through a converse process of the production of a commodified nature (Youdelis et al., 2020). In Argentina, this has taken the form of the creation of zones of wilderness as national parks, that was predicated in part on hopes for White settler tourism (Rasmussen and Mendoza, 2023; Kaltmeier, 2022). Such parks constitute colonial impositions that are ‘rooted in the common idea about the protection of nature and on the belief that such protection can be best achieved by separating humans from nonhuman nature’ (Ramutsindela, 2019: 207). The national park thus becomes a sanitised wilderness, kept locked in a permanent past. The dominant colonial imaginary of conservation sees no place for people, and that ‘in order for a place to be wilderness, it had to be uninhabited’ (Rashkow, 2018: 818).

This forms a contradiction, as the national parks of settler colonial regimes have been predicated both on their preservation *as found* by the colonisers and on either the forced removal or forced essentialisation of Indigenous people already living there (Rashkow, 2018). This represents a form of territorialisation in which the hierarchy of production is defined by ‘sanctuarisation’,

whereby Indigenous knowledge, peoples and places are essentialised and co-opted as belonging to a romanticised past that must be rigidly conserved.

This settler colonial sanctuarisation has historically displaced those who cannot or do not fit patterns of the *indio permitido*. This is a state-sanctioned and legitimised idea of Indigenous peoples who consent to being placed within such reserves and becoming ‘exotic objects of consumption’ (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2015: 83). Such projects are rooted in the coloniality of the ‘Environmental Noble Savage’ (Redford, 1991), producing a time deceleration, with the implicit attitude of Indigenous peoples as belonging to the past.

Border Theory and the Xawümen Mapuche

Article one of this thesis uses border theory. The purpose of border theory in this thesis is to bridge the gap between a Lefebvrian understanding of space, that I use to examine the colonial impositions of the frontier and the desert, and Mapuche spatial ontologies. Lefebvre (1991) would be insufficient for this, as a Western theory that understands the process of territorialisation within capitalism. With this, we can understand only one side of this fracture, which would mean falling into the trap of attempting to understand Mapuche resistance solely within the context of the Western spatial ontology.

Border theory provides a means of bridging this gap by understanding the interstitial space of the border as an ontological fracture zone. The connection with Lefebvrian theory and territorialisation is made easy as borders are also understood as a process. Stemming from the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1999), and her conceptualisation of the borderlands, borders can thus be understood as creating ‘order through the construction of difference’ (Newman, 2003: 15). From this perspective, ‘bounded territories and borderlands are the outcome of the continual interactions and intersections between the actions of people (agency) within the constraints and limits placed by contextual and structural factors (structure)’ (Brunet-Jailly, 2011: 3). Anzaldúa (1999) introduces the Nahuatl word *nepantla*, which refers to an in-between space, to understand borderlands as zones where different realities meet.

As such, in the first article of this thesis the *Xawümen Mapuche* is introduced as an emic Mapuche conceptualisation of how territory is related to and shared. This notion of territory is radically different from the Western spatial ontology, producing an ontological fracture in which different realities converge. The *Xawümen Mapuche* is understood as the ‘conscience that the land continues and that all precise or referential demarcations unites it rather than separates it’ (Pehuén, Quiñones and Letelier, 2019: 46).

Part 3: Reproducing and Resisting the Settler Colonial Order

Neoliberal Recognition and De-recognition

As discussed above, the genocidal Conquest of the Desert was undertaken by the Argentine state in order to kill and displace Indigenous peoples and populate the valuable agricultural lands with European settlers (Delrio et al., 2010; Pérez, 2011: 6). Yet, as Indigenous people who were not displaced or murdered were now inside the new borders of the settler state, this presented a problem for the state: how could the common enemy of White settlers be incorporated into the White settler state? The first reaction was a violent *de-recognition*, whereby Mapuche people were cast as the internal other, or enemy, and confined to the past (Briones and Lepe-Carrión, 2024; Pérez, 2011; Urzúa and Schiaffini, 2023). This process is explored in article two of this thesis.

This was done in order to ‘civilize’ the natives’ (Fuentes Peña, 2024) and teach a hegemonic narrative of the ‘extinction of Indigenous people in Argentina’ (Nagy, 2017: 56). The clear contradiction between the continued visibility of Indigenous peoples and the wishful thinking of their *absence* in colonial discourse was solved in many Latin American countries through the construction of a homogeneous, mixed-race national identity of *mestizaje* (de la Cadena and Starn, 2007). In the Argentine context, however, this becomes a further problem due to Argentina’s historical self-identification as a White settler state (Pérez, 2011). This is an underpinning of the current reactionary narrative of the right-wing in Argentina, namely that the Mapuche in Argentina are Chilean, i.e. foreign, as opposed to Indigenous.

Recognition is understood in this thesis as a particular policy arrangement within the broader project of neoliberal multiculturalism (Postero, 2007; de la Cadena and Starn, 2007; Coulthard, 2014; Burman, 2020), following the neoliberal policies of governments since the 1983 return to democracy in Argentina. Multiculturalism as a set of policies is outlined by Will Kymlicka (1996: 26), whose work provides a basis for the benign state recognition of minority rights and identities. In this way, the settler colonial state is able to deal with indigeneity by accepting a permanent difference between a hegemonic settler identity and Indigenous minorities. Minority identities can thereby be subsumed as *different* into the national polity, but ‘in a stable and morally defensible way’ (ibid. 26). Across this period, many states introduced land reform

programmes and forms of the recognition of Indigenous land rights, albeit vaguely, in the Argentinian constitution of 1994 (Rep. Argentina, 1994).

However, critical scholars have questioned the extent to which such forms of recognition maintain colonial relations of power (Hale, 2004; Postero, 2007; Coulthard, 2014; Burman, 2020). Nancy Postero (2007) highlights the contradiction between constitutional recognition and the continuing reluctance of states to redistribute land and wealth or constrain extractive development in marginalised areas where Indigenous peoples often live. As such, scholars have argued that neoliberal multicultural policies are often ‘little more than a strategy of management, containment, and global capitalist expansion without any real change to structures of racial hierarchy and economic inequality’ (de la Cadena and Starn, 2007: 8). Recognition, instead, tends to focus on cultural aspects. Article two of this thesis, in alignment with Burman (2020), makes the argument that recognition within neoliberal multiculturalist policies is, in fact, merely a modicum of recognition, of a ‘defanged’ and essentialised Indigenous subjectivity (Wade, Burman and Lilja, 2026), that is offered as a reward for forgetting radical politics of territory. Recognition then, in the context of neoliberal multiculturalist policies, runs into the same paradoxes of unwanted, but necessary, and persistent Indigenous existence in the settler colonial state explained in the previous section on settler colonialism.

Glen Sean Coulthard (2014) explains recognition as ‘the ability to entice Indigenous peoples to *identify*, either implicitly or explicitly, with the profoundly *asymmetrical* and *nonreciprocal* forms of recognition either imposed on or granted to them by the settler state and society’ (ibid. 25). Such partial recognition is exemplified by what Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui referred to as the *indio permitido*, or permitted Indian, of an idealised and essentialised Indigenous subject who is excluded from asserting territorial rights or transformative resistance (Rivera Cusicanqui cited in Hale, 2004). This concept is explored in articles one and two of this thesis. At the same time, such policies and processes of partial recognition provided a political opportunity which in the context of the concurrent 500-year anniversary of Columbus arriving in the Americas in 1992, became catalysts for new formations of Mapuche identity (Kizu Iñcin, 2024).

Slow Violence and Slow Resistance in the *longue durée* of Settler Colonialism

The expansion of our conceptualisation of violence beyond direct forms of physical violence is most commonly associated with the work of the Norwegian sociologist Johann Galtung (1969), who in 1969 published his concept of *indirect* or *structural violence*. Structural violence, as opposed to personal violence, reflects social injustices that are stable within a social order (ibid.). This is to say that structural violence is not limited to the bruises and breaks of bodily destruction, rather it can also take the form of a deliberate deprivation of basic human needs, exploitation and discrimination, including racism or sexism. Particularly, structural violence does not have an individual perpetrator; rather, it is violence that is baked into social structures (Galtung, 1975).

Rob Nixon (2013) expanded the concept of structural violence to include *slow violence*. This addition reflects the growing understanding of the unequal distribution of environmental damage and destruction globally, as well as the global placement of extractive and polluting industries in the more marginalised areas of the world. *Slow violence*, then, describes the creeping onset of an unequally distributed degradation of life-sustaining conditions (ibid.). Whilst the violent aspect of this appears obvious in the context of structural violence, *slowness* is worth investigating.

Slowness is particular, as it describes something that takes place over a long time with the effects or the metaphorical bruising, potentially taking a long time to manifest. In this sense, slowness is not simply a speed; rather, it is an experience. In extractive areas, these can often be the health complications that appear in the wake of extractive industries. This becomes acute in many marginalised areas as large extractive multinational corporations can simply ignore or lobby against health and safety legislation and environmental protections (Svampa, 2019). Ander Izaguirre (2018) explains the horrific deaths from silicosis among artisanal miners in Potosi, Bolivia. Deaths caused by years of working in unsafe mines without adequate respiratory protection. But also, Izaguirre details the wider social problems that stem from these young deaths, including alcoholism, physical violence and reckless gambling which is endemic amongst the miners (ibid.). This slow violence is demonstrated by the damage it causes, being both understood as inevitable, but not until sometime in the future. This is a violence that is prevalent and growing

in Vaca Muerta, with numerous rare cancers being identified in the region (delacalle, 2023)⁶.

Slow violence, then, is a violence that can happen unseen, as in the silicosis of miners, where slowness makes it as imperceptible as it is devastating. The slow violence of fracking operates in a similar vein. It encompasses subterranean destruction and their ground level striations, such as infrastructure, the inward economic migration of workers employed by oil and gas companies and ancillary industries (Short and Szolucha, 2016). Through these processes, the extractive frontier is continually reterritorialised, extracting finite resources towards an inevitable post-exhaustion ruination.

Pauline Wakeham (2022), writing on the Palestinian context, makes the argument that the structure of settler colonialism itself enacts forms of slow violence. Slow violence therefore is a concept that can allow us to explore the long and intergenerational violence, as well as the genocidal and ecocidal (Short, 2016) logics of the ‘long emergency of invasion’ (Wakeham, 2022), beyond the direct violence of colonial and colonist atrocities. At the extractive frontier, the extreme use of violence by the state against marginalized Indigenous peoples in marginalized Indigenous places is often in stark contrast to the restraint used by state forces in wealthier, non-Indigenous areas (Gilio Whitaker, 2020). When violence is enacted not as an event but as a structure that unfolds over time, resistance cannot be limited to moments of disruption but must also operate across the same temporality through insistence. As discussed previously, resistance at the extractive frontier is less about singular acts than about sustained practices that refuse erasure and insist on presence.

Settler colonial slow violence aims at absencing Indigenous people through diverse strategies of elimination. Resistance to this slow violence can therefore itself take a slow form. Homi Bhabha (1991) provides the concept of the *time-lag*, ‘a form of cultural memory that unconsciously haunts the present’ (O’Riley, 2007: 6). In postcolonial contexts, the time-lag, understood as a form of remembering, can become a tool of resistance against settler colonial logics, and forms a basis for understanding resistance in northern Patagonia that is backed by the memory of genocide and the rejection of modern narratives of partial recognition and de-recognition. As such, the time-lag becomes visible

⁶ This is an interview with Alberto Costa, who is representing the International Tribunal of the Rights of Nature. This is also something that was confirmed to me by a contact who is a medical doctor at a large hospital in the city of Neuquén.

in acts that mobilise the past as something that is not over, rather unresolved. Through material acts of present-making and memorialisation, actors insert this mobilised past into spaces (such as settler colonial cities) and times (the future) that have been and continue to be designated as non-Indigenous.

Here, we see an everyday form of *slow resistance* against slow violence, beyond ‘overt acts of resistance in public’ (Saunders and Al-Om, 2022: 539). Slow resistance, like slow violence, takes place over a long time, with its consequences potentially imperceptible for some time. In the settler colonial context, the mere act of living openly as an Indigenous person can itself constitute a form of resistance. Indigenous peoples ‘exist, resist and persist’ (Kēhaulani Kauanui, 2016: 1), or as my contact, the Mapuche leader Noah, put it: ‘our existence is the resistance’. Slow resistance as insistent existence over time constitutes a fundamental challenge to hegemonic power, rejecting colonial narratives of discovery and progress that place Indigenous peoples as belonging to the past. Because settler colonial violence persists beyond the initial moment of invasion and operates slowly through time, resistance can likewise operate through duration and insistence.

Such narratives of resistance to the slow violence of the settler colonial state have been specifically used in the Palestinian context by a number of authors (e.g. Amira, 2021; Rijke and Van Teefelen, 2014; Wakeham, 2022). The Palestinian concept of *Sumud* is somewhat related to slow resistance. This is not to suggest that *Sumud* and slow resistance are the same thing, nor that one constitutes a form of the other. Rather, *Sumud*, has been articulated as the resilience of ‘staying in place’ (Marie, Hannigan and Jones, 2018) as a form of resistance to colonial occupation. It resonates with slow violence as it is also a long-term and multigenerational strategy, spanning over a century and multiple forms of colonial occupation (Rijke and Van Teefelen, 2014). Slow resistance in the settler colonial context is conceptualised as a multigenerational and ontological resistance of radical difference enacted through practices such as present-making and (re)signification. In this way, slow resistance can turn a ‘negative resistance into a positive re-existence’ (Tlostanova, 2011: 67). The presence of Mapuche symbols and bodies in settler colonial spaces, such as the city, the fracking site, or the park keeper’s lodge, maintains a challenge to settler colonial logics of elimination.

Summary of the theory chapter

This chapter has laid out the theoretical framework of the thesis. Split into three parts, part one establishes the overarching theoretical debates that inform the thesis. Firstly, settler colonialism provides a means of understanding the enduring structures of asymmetrical power in the region (see Wolfe, 2006; Veracini, 2010; Rosenow, 2023). Secondly, political ontology allows for the encounter between the settler colonial state and Indigenous worlds to be investigated while accounting for ontological difference and Indigenous world-making without reducing these to mere products of settler colonial power (see Blaser, 2009; de La Cadena, 2015; Burman, 2016b). Building on this, the third section of part one discusses studies on resistance and how resistance is understood in this thesis as heterogeneous, spatial, temporal and potentially world-making (see Baaz et al., 2016; Lilja, 2021). As such, the first part of the theoretical framework sets up the overarching structure of hegemonic power, as well as how that power encounters Indigenous worlds, and how productive forms of resistance can enact world-making.

Part two discusses theories of territory and territorialisation (see Rasmussen and Lund, 2018; Raftopoulos, 2022) as ongoing processes through which the hegemonic spatial regime of the Western spatial ontology has been produced, and how, in turn, the extractive frontier and the frontier of conservation (see Leys and Raftopoulos, 2025; Rasmussen and Mendoza, 2023) have been produced as hegemonic space. Part two ends by presenting border theory and the *Xawüimen Mapuche* to discuss how alternative relationships to territory can be produced (see Pehuén, Quiñones and Letelier, 2019). Part three of the theoretical framework examines how settler colonial relations of power have been reproduced through notions of recognition and de-recognition, how settler colonial structures of power have enacted slow violence, and how this has often been contested through different practices of slow resistance.

Together, the three parts of the theoretical framework allows the thesis to address how settler colonial structures and processes shape relations to territory, while simultaneously examining how Indigenous and allied actors resist these processes and enact alternative relations to territory. Bringing these different theoretical approaches into conversation is important because the research problem and research questions concern not only the structures of settler colonial power, but how these are spatially and temporally produced and reproduced, encountered by Indigenous worlds, and contested through heterogeneous forms of resistance. The framework therefore provides a means of

addressing the spatial, temporal and ontological dimensions of the research problem without treating any one theoretical tradition as sufficient on its own. The following chapter explains how this theoretical framework informed the methodological and analytical approach through which the research questions were addressed.

4

Methodology and Method

Introduction

This chapter explains the research design of my PhD project and how it allows me to answer the research questions outlined in chapter one:

RQ1: How do structures and processes of settler colonialism shape relations to territory in northern Patagonia?

RQ2: How do Indigenous and allied actors enact resistance to settler colonial territorialisation in northern Patagonia?

The introduction first outlines my methodological standpoint. Part 1 then discusses the research and analytical methods used in the project. Part 2 addresses the ethical considerations arising from the research.

Following from my theory section, the methodology of the research has been conducted within the broad umbrella of qualitative research (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey, 2011: 9). Specifically, this thesis adopts a qualitative, ethnographically oriented methodology grounded in the theoretical and epistemological commitments developed in the preceding chapters. I distinguish here between methodology and methods. Methodology refers to the epistemological and theoretical commitments that shape what can count as knowledge in this research and the kinds of claims that can consequently be made. Methods, however, refer to the practical means through which empirical material was generated and analysed. The methodological position developed below therefore informs both the selection of particular methods and the interpretation and limits of the knowledge they produce.

Alex Gillespie, Vlad Glăveanu and Constance de Saint-Laurent set out a list of questions for the researcher to answer. Their third and fourth questions are particularly relevant here: ‘What types of truths are we looking for?’ and ‘How do we reach valid or truthful knowledge?’ (2024: 37). The authors continue that “Truth with a capital ‘T’ is timeless, independent of humans, while truth with a lowercase ‘t’ is related to direct observations and experiences of the world, dependent thus on humans” (Gillespie, Glăveanu and de Saint-Laurent, 2024: 40). The distinction raises an important question concerning the kinds of knowledge claims that can be made from qualitative research. Donna Haraway’s (1988) concept of ‘situated and embodied knowledges’ is useful here. This recognises knowledge as produced from particular positionalities and encounters rather than a detached position from outside the world(s) being studied. In this it is ‘an argument against various forms of unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims’ (Haraway, 1988: 583). The intention is therefore not to provide a comprehensive account of all actors involved in territorial conflict in northern Patagonia, but to develop an in-depth understanding of these conflicts grounded primarily in my engagement with Mapuche and allied actors.

Presence, in a number of different ways, has been crucial to this thesis and is conceptualised in articles two and four, and as such my own presence, in the form of ethnographic engagement, has therefore been key. Ethnography, I argue, provided the most appropriate basis for the research design, as the emphasis on situated knowledge required more than interviews. My presence in northern Patagonia allowed me to become familiar with the places in which these struggles occur, to attend meetings and demonstrations and to develop relationships with the people involved. Ethnography also allowed the direction of the research to respond to what I encountered in the field rather than being determined entirely in advance, as encounters in the field ‘have an influence on research design, assumptions and approaches’ (Lembke, Lalander and Galindo, 2020: 15). As will be discussed in this chapter, access, the selection of participants and, ultimately, some of the avenues of inquiry pursued in the articles emerged during fieldwork.

This methodological position follows from the theoretical understanding of space developed in the preceding chapter. While, as explained in the section on political ontology, the materiality of territory is shared between worlds, space and territory as process are produced relationally through practices and relations of power. This means that territorial conflict cannot just be investigated through analysing competing claims over an objective notion of space.

It must also concern the practices through which territory is made meaningful, organised and experienced, as well as the processes of power through which particular spatial orders have been produced and made to appear natural or inevitable. A methodology concerned with these processes must consequently be capable of attending to the complex and situated relations of power and resistance.

Alongside space, time is also key methodologically. The present is inherently connected to the past and the future and, as such, temporality is theorised in distinct ways throughout the articles. I present the concepts of *present-making*, *TINA-spaces*, the *temporal-lock* and *perpendicularity*, which, at different scales, all recognise the key relationships between temporality, spatiality and power. This reflexively informed and was informed by my use of partial life history interviews (Atkinson, 1998; Stern, 2010). These interviews allowed participants to move between time, past experiences, present concerns and future imaginaries, enabling the research to avoid ‘flattening out the complex temporal domain that speakers operate in’ (Telling, 2026: 2), without foregrounding the present. As such, the research design incorporates discussions of both past and future imaginaries.

While I entered the field with early formulations of the research questions and theories used in this thesis, the research developed through the fieldwork and then through the analysis of data. Encounters in the field raised questions and themes that I had not anticipated, while recurring themes in interviews, conversations and observations increasingly directed my attention towards particular issues. Ontology, for instance, was something I had assumed would be peripheral to the research before embarking on fieldwork, and its centrality only emerged over time. These emerging narratives led me back to the empirical material, while engagement and re-engagement with theory provided new ways of making sense of what I was learning. As such, ethnography ‘facilitates an inductive and iterative approach whereby thick description leads to the development of research questions’ (Reeves, Kuper and Hodges, 2013: 1367). The analytical process was therefore primarily inductive and iterative, with the developing interpretations prompting repeated engagement with both the empirical material and relevant theoretical literature.

Part 1: Method

Geographic context

Three periods of fieldwork were undertaken. The first lasted four months, beginning in February 2023 and ending in June 2023. The second round began in March 2024 and ended in July 2024. A third period of fieldwork was conducted in March and April 2025 as part of a research stay in Mendoza with CONICET.⁷ During the first two periods, I was mainly based in the city of Neuquén, which is the capital of Neuquén Province, located at the confluence of the Neuquén and Limay rivers. It sits on the border between Neuquén and Rio Negro provinces. As a central location, and the political centre of Neuquén province, it was an ideal base for the fieldwork, having good connections by bus and train to other areas. While based there, I often took public buses to Cipolletti, Allen and Fiske Menuko/General Roca in the province of Rio Negro, as well as visiting Añelo, the central hub of the Vaca Muerta fracking megaproject. Travelling to Añelo meant catching a ride with a contact, as the town has no public transport connections. I also stayed in the city of Mendoza, Mendoza Province, in March 2023, April 2024, March and April 2025, and in Malargüe, Mendoza Province, in April 2024.

All contacts referred to in this thesis, both in the Kappa and the articles, have been pseudonymised or anonymised to protect their identities. This will be discussed in the ethical considerations section.

Access

Negotiating Access and Participant Vigilance

Gaining access to the communities and people with whom I wished to work was particularly challenging. My strategy began in the months before my arrival. I contacted Argentine scholars in the field, as well as movement leaders whose contact details were publicly available. I sent emails introducing myself and my project. Some of the feedback I received, particularly from movement leaders, indicated that many movements and groups collectively discuss whether an applicant researcher or journalists is allowed access to meetings or to members. I was told that journalists from national and international

⁷ The National Scientific and Technical Research Council of Argentina (*Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas*).

organisations are often refused access. While I was also told that organisations in the area are more accommodating of academics, there is still a high level of distrust, with many being rejected. One movement, despite being extremely kind and courteous towards me, decided not to grant me access in 2023, due to an increase in tensions around land seizures and the approaching provincial elections.

This vigilance is completely understandable. Over the last few years, a number of activists have been killed, with state forces being accused of responsibility for their deaths. These include the high-profile deaths of Santiago Maldonado (Front Line Defenders, 2019) and Rafael Nahuel (Agencia Presentes, 2023), alongside the detention of numerous Indigenous and environmental rights defenders. This is added to the long history of persecution of the Mapuche from the genocidal Conquest of the Desert onwards. Raw memories of the violence, murder and forced disappearances of the 1976–1983 dictatorship mean that it is important to recognise the high stakes for activists when permitting access to outsiders. Concerns surrounding infiltration and covert surveillance are therefore legitimate and valid for Indigenous peoples engaged in land conflicts with state and corporate actors. In her work with the Sarayaku people in the Amazon, María Teresa Martínez Domínguez (2008) reports, for example, that community members believed oil company workers had masqueraded as journalists in order to gather intelligence.

I was politely asked to leave two meetings, one in April 2023 and another in June 2024. In both cases, activists were present who did not know me, and I was told they felt uncomfortable with my presence. This is, of course, absolutely reasonable, particularly as I had heard numerous stories of people who had introduced themselves as journalists or academics who then turned out to be working for the police or extractive companies.

Friendship as Method/Outcome

Access to the field therefore became a slow and worthwhile task of getting to know people. While I am uncomfortable with the terminology of *friendship as method* (Tillmann-Healy, 2003), as friendship cannot be engineered as method in a technical sense, relational engagement shaped the conditions under which the research became possible. As such, all my interviews were conducted with people whom I considered friends already, or with people with whom I later became friendly with. This is what I refer to as *friendship as outcome*.

I worked closely with activists, organisations and other scholars on the ground to become familiar with movement meetings, elites and activists, while continuously negotiating access (Reeves, 2010). This meant that we got to know each other quite well. In Mapuche meetings, it is often expected that everyone introduces themselves at the beginning and has their say at the end. This meant that I was unable to settle into a role of a passive observer; rather, I was expected to give an opinion on the topic of discussion, which emphasises the participant aspect of participant observation.

Yet a methodology that is based on building friendships presents a number of problems. My intention was to engage with people and make friends in the field, honestly and in an organic manner. This involved getting to know people and remaining in contact with them afterwards (including through social media messaging and sending postcards). Both for my research, and my personal life this was an enormous success, and I made a great number of friends while performing my work. However, there is an important conceit to lay bare here: friendship cannot truly, and should not attempt to, obscure the problematic relationship between researcher and researched (Flick, 2022). Considering this, friendship-based approaches have been criticised for obscuring power asymmetries and compromising analytical distance (Stacey, 1988; Tillmann-Healy, 2003). In a context of surveillance, violence and exclusion, friendship for this thesis functions as a fragile basis of trust. However, this trust neither resolves nor conceals the underlying problems I have mentioned.

This was made clear to me by an awkward interaction with my friend and contact Diego, who is Mapuche and the leader of a Mapuche organisation. In May 2024, we were discussing the local University of Comahue's decision to declare itself an intercultural institution, and I asked him what he thought of this decision. Diego looked me in the eyes and said: 'Are you asking me as a friend or for your job?' I, taken aback and somewhat embarrassed, explained to him that, while I consider him a friend, I was asking this for my job. Herein lies the contradiction: can this friendship be genuine if it's predicated on gathering information for my career? It is a stark question, and one I do not have the answer for, beyond my intense feeling of friendship for this person. For his part, Diego accepted my response and answered my original question.

Leaders-first approach

By approaching movement leaders first, I was able to interact with politically engaged actors who are well-established in the area and know what is at stake.

Through these relationships, I benefitted from their complex context orientation, as well as their role as gatekeepers to foster a ‘non-oppressive approach’ (Martínez Domínguez, 2008), as leaders are likely better able to ascertain whether I posed a threat or not, before allowing me further access.

From there, I gained access to movement actors who, while perhaps not engaged as the leadership, undoubtedly have unique and illuminating stories to share. In doing this, I was attempting to go with the flow of the movements, participating in meetings, demonstrations, and other sorts of events. Each occasion on which I participated in a demonstration or meeting provided an opportunity to extend my network and to invite people to tell their stories in an interview. I would speak to someone I already considered a friend, and they would often introduce me to new people. The leaders-first approach was intended to provide a less intrusive entry into participants’ social worlds. Rather than approaching individuals without any prior connection and asking them to disclose personal experiences, I allowed relationships and introductions to develop through sustained participation in movement activities.

However, such gatekeepers inevitably shaped my understanding of the context and conflict in both useful and limiting ways. While this approach facilitated access and trust, it also meant that my initial encounters were formed through movement hierarchies, a limitation that friendship-based relationships could not entirely undo.

Data Collection

Participant Observation

The ambition of this thesis is to contribute to what Brown and Strega (2005) call *research from the margins*, which is not the ‘research of the marginalized but research by, for, and with them/us’ (ibid. 7). This means that my goal has not been to conduct fieldwork solely dedicated to registering the peril people face, but to let them speak about what reality looks like from their perspective. What emerged was often surprising and, in many cases, far removed from my initial assumptions. This approach, as part of ‘scholar-activism’ alongside the movements, can be a ‘way of producing theory from within a joint project of knowledge production’ (Burman, 2018: 61), with interlocutors potentially having an ‘active stake’ in the research process (ibid.). However, it must also be acknowledged that adopting such a research standpoint may put me at risk of

“extractivist ethnography” (ibid.). This tension is discussed further in the ethical considerations section of this chapter.

Participant observation allowed me to immerse myself in the local context, getting to know community members and activists, reading their behaviour and, at the same time, as a foreigner, be read by them. Moreover, attending assemblies, meetings and protests allowed me to see and take notes on how people interacted and formed connections and alliances with different national and international actors (Wolff, 2001).

In the city of Neuquén, I attended 15 protests in the form of marches, as well as three marches in Mendoza. In Neuquén, I attended seven movement meetings and a further two where I was asked to leave. No notes were taken from these two but if there had been I would have destroyed them. In Malargüe, I went on a field excursion with CONICET to visit a Mapuche *Werken*, who took us to meet a number of *Lofche*.⁸ I also attended two festivals organised by an anarchist theatre group in Neuquén in defence of an outdoor public space that has been co-opted to provide a community theatre.

Semi-Structured Interviews as Partial Life Histories

During my fieldwork, I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews. Nine of these were conducted with Mapuche people who were members of explicitly Mapuche movements. These included one interview with a *Lonko* (leader of a lof) and two with *Werken* (spokesperson or messenger of a lof). As movement leaders these three interviews allowed me to appreciate the dynamics of the social space as experienced and described by these actors (Bray, 2008). Through these semi-structured interviews, I was able to explore participants’ perspectives on land issues and resource disputes in the region. Moreover, they provided insights into how Mapuche and allied movements work; how ideas of success and failure are enshrined in their politics and understandings of achievement; and how alliances and coalitions with other groups are formed and maintained over time.

These interviews also enabled an interpretation of political opportunities which rely on the use of past experiences and contextual understandings (de

⁸ A Mapudungun portmanteau of Lof and Che. Lof refers to a particularly Mapuche formation that is often rendered in English and Spanish as ‘community’. It refers to the Lof as both a ‘tangible and intangible space of the land [Lofmapu], and the Lof as a community of people who inhabit or transit that space [Lofche]’ (Cañuamil and Ramos, 2016: 5).

Moor and Wahlström, 2019). The remaining 11 interviews were conducted with a mixture of politicians from different parties within the left wing '*frente izquierda*' (Left Front) alliance (two interviews) and movement actors from disparate groups who did not hold leadership positions (nine interviews). All interviews were conducted in Spanish, which is my second language and was either the first or joint first languages of the interviewees (with the other being Mapudungun).

The semi-structured interviews were conducted as partial life histories (Stern, 2010). Life histories in this thesis allowed individuals to explain how they understood their identities in relation to their activism over time, as well as to contextualise 'broader societal changes' (Corrigall-Brown and Ho, 2013: 2), in their own lifetimes and through stories that have been told to them. Participants were encouraged (and often needed none) to talk about their own memories and recollections, as well as family and local histories that had been passed down to them, with particular emphasis on interactions with land and landscape and how these had changed over time. Speaking to participants about the landscape as a material object helped to provide accounts of the interventions of extractive industries, infrastructure projects and national parks, and of how participants made sense of them as part of their own histories and how it affects their lives (Hellberg, 2015). Life stories can help us to comprehend the universe around us and provide key insights into the ontologies and cosmologies of our interlocutors, with their knowledge of the space and time from which they are speaking (Atkinson, 1998). The use of partial life histories is therefore key to understanding resistance in the region, as multigenerational and ontological.

In determining an adequate sample size of interviews, I followed the concept of 'information power' (Malterud, Siersma and Guassora, 2016), whereby a judgement is made relating to the richness of the data generated as opposed to participant numbers. Across the 20 in-depth partial life history interviews, themes became increasingly recurrent, with later interviews providing diminishing additional conceptual insight. This led me to conclude that my sample size was "enough to achieve [my] research objectives" (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006: 77). These factors informed my decision to conclude this form of data collection after twenty interviews.

Participant Selection

There was no single method that I used when approaching participants for an interview, for a number of reasons. Ethnographic fieldwork typically involves a ‘relatively open-ended approach’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 5), where the project itself develops in the field as different avenues of research and potential participants emerge, with ‘decisions about whom to interview’ developing over time (*ibid.* 5). I did not predetermine all the individuals whom I would interview. In the first instance, I can simply say that this is because I did not yet know who they were, and in the second instance because this would have severely limited the potential scope of the project. While taking a leaders-first approach allowed me to contact some movement leaders online before arriving in the field, regarding the use of the internet, I follow Renan Gonçalves Leonel da Silva, who argues that, despite the benefits of partial early access to the field, such ‘pre-fieldwork virtual methodologies cannot replace ethnography’ (2026: 571). As such, interviewees and contacts in general were primarily emergent in the field. Presence in the field allows for meeting new contacts in surprising ways. For instance, I play the guitar and am also interested in building guitars. One morning, while walking around the city of Neuquén, I dropped into a luthier’s (guitar builder’s) studio. During the course of a conversation, as he explained the particular aesthetic and sonic characteristics of some native woods, he mentioned that he had bought some of this wood from a Mapuche community in the south of the province. Seeing the opportunity, I asked if he would be willing to put me in contact with them. A week later, I interviewed a leader of that community.

In more appropriate methodological terms, participant recruitment combined purposive, chain-referral and emergent sampling (Heckathorn, 2011). Purposive sampling is essentially understood as the judgement call made by the researcher regarding who would be most useful for the relevant study (Ahmed, 2024). Chain-referral sampling, which functions as an avenue of snowball sampling, is often used interchangeably (see Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981). It ‘yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest’ (*ibid.* 141). The initial selection of interviewees was purposive insofar as I sought participants with direct involvement in the social movements and territorial conflicts relevant to the research questions. Initial movement contacts (see section on the leaders-first approach) also acted as gatekeepers, introducing me to other potential participants, producing a chain-referral process (Heckathorn, 2011) through which the network of interlocutors expanded.

However, recruitment was not confined to these networks. The extended presence associated with ethnographic fieldwork generated encounters and relationships that could not have been specified in advance, some of which subsequently developed into research contacts and interviews, such as the above example. Participant selection was thus iterative, with decisions about whom to approach developing alongside my increasing knowledge of the field, its actors and the relationships between them. The resulting sample does not claim statistical representativeness of actors involved in territorial conflict in Northern Patagonia; rather, participants were selected according to their situated experiences and their relevance to the analytical focus of the research.

Who I Did Not Speak To

There is, however, a key limitation that I wish to highlight. The focus on in-depth partial life history interviews with movement leaders and activists provided rich information about the conflict from one particular side, which is reflected in the research questions and articles of this thesis. As such, the ethnographic absence of the other side of this conflict must be acknowledged and explained. From its inception, the research was not designed as a comparative study of the perspectives of the territorial conflicts in the region between social movements in opposition to forms of territorialisations, and the state institutions and extractive corporations who design and then carry out these activities. Nor was the research intended to focus on the way that these actors articulate alternative claims to, and imaginaries of, the territory. Rather, its analytical focus is on the encounters with these settler colonial and neoliberal processes and on the strategies and practices through which resistance movements articulate alternatives to them. For this reason, the interviews and the project are concerned with depth as opposed to breadth as I did not seek interviews with representatives of state institutions or extractive companies, rather I sought information-rich accounts from actors whose situated experiences correspond directly with the analytical focus of the research (Malterud et al., 2016).

However, this creates tensions that have been discussed in ethnographic methods literature. Lynn Chancer argues that there is a disparity between ethnographies that study ‘down’, as opposed to ‘up’, explaining that ‘studying elites [...] has been a relatively less trodden path’ (2020: 238). Marginality and centrality to power are inherently relational (Smith and Pitts, 2007), and as such it ‘makes little sense to overstudy the lower end’ (Chancer, 2020: 257). However, this does not mean that every ethnography that deals with hegemonic relations of power must engage ethnographically with both hegemonic and

subaltern actors. This thesis explicitly seeks to contribute to ‘research from the margins’ (Brown and Strega, 2005), as discussed elsewhere in this chapter, and thereby provides a particular vantage point from which to examine encounters between worlds under conditions of asymmetrical relations of power. This allows the thesis to examine how these relations of power are encountered without claiming to provide an ethnographic account of how or why particular institutional or corporate decisions are made.

My choice of analytical object and participants can therefore be understood as a choice of vantage point, rather than as an assumption that asymmetrical power relations can ultimately be explained without ethnographic reference to hegemonic power. While political and corporate actors are not themselves the ethnographic objects of study, this does not mean that state institutions or extractive companies are absent from the analysis. As discussed explicitly in article four, their presence in public discourse is ubiquitous in the visual landscape of the region. This is in both a material and discursive sense. Whether it be the large pickup trucks emblazoned with the logos of fracking companies, political party advertisements that foreground images of fracking as related to prosperity, or even the curation of the Neuquén city museum, as discussed in article two. The articles also contain numerous quotations from, and examples of, readily available literature and imagery produced by industries and government actors. However, as I did not interview these actors, my accounts of the institutions and corporations they represent are limited to the documentary evidence available, my observations and chance encounters with them in the field, and the situated understandings articulated by my interlocutors. As such, this asymmetry in representation in the thesis is both a methodological choice and a limitation. A broader research design incorporating ethnographic research within state institutions and extractive companies could have produced a different account of this territorial conflict, particularly regarding institutional decision-making and the understandings of those involved in implementing extractive projects. Such an account, however, would necessarily answer a different set of questions from those posed in this thesis.

Graffiti and Protest Signs

One aspect of negotiating access in the field to potential contacts is that there were lulls in data collection, particularly during the early stages of fieldwork. During these periods, I began looking for other forms of data that were readily accessible. I noticed that social media content produced by movements and activists is readily available and had been used to great effect by previous

researchers for studies on discourse and collective framing (e.g. Raftopoulos and Specht, 2022). Inspired by these studies I became interested in the graffiti I saw in urban centres and was struck not just by the textual or visual content of these pieces, but also by their spatiality.

While walking around urban centres in the field and visiting other particular sites of interest, such as the outside of military museums, it became clear that graffiti was often used to articulate resistance both through the actual discourse it produced (Proehl, 2024) and through the spatiality of where it was placed. I therefore chose to incorporate graffiti as empirical material. While attending protest marches, I also began to think of protest placards as mobile forms of this spatial presence.

As a form of data collection, I began taking photographs of graffiti and other forms of street art on walks through urban areas. At protests, I also took photographs of placards and banners that people were carrying. I always asked for permission before taking photographs at protests and took care to avoid including people's faces in order to protect their identities (Rodriguez Grey, 2022). Where this was unavoidable (people tend to hold up signs close to their head, and it's awkward to ask them to hold things in certain ways), I cropped them out of photographs that I saved.

Document Analysis and Triangulation

A key limitation of life history methods is that the stories are told in the present (Atkinson, 1998). Patchy memory and biographical alterations ranging from narrative inconsistencies to straight-up fabrication for whatever reason are always potential hazards for the researcher. In light of this, documentary analysis was also used. Sources included local issues of local daily newspapers, such as *Rio Negro Diario*, which is available online, local history books, as well as provincial archives. At times, documentary evidence also constituted a key source of data, such as the use of Plan Neuquén 2020 in article three. These sources were also used to supplement the thesis' other empirical material and, where appropriate, to triangulate factual claims, including through the corroboration of evidence from interviews (Bowen, 2009). Documentary analysis also enabled an in-depth contextual orientation of the situation (Friedhoff et al., 2013: 5) in northern Patagonia and allowed me to remain abreast of current events while away from the field.

Analytical Approach

This project mobilises multiple forms of empirical material as data. The articles emerged through the empirical material, as opposed to being planned beforehand, through a primarily inductive thematic analysis in which themes were developed from the data (Reeves, Kuper and Hodges, 2008). Inductive thematic analysis is a ‘process of coding the data *without* trying to fit it into a preexisting coding frame, or the researcher’s analytic preconception’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 83). Inductive, here, does not imply that the analysis was approached as theory-free. Rather, themes were progressively developed through repeated engagement with the interview transcripts (ibid.), with arguments developing as themes repeated and overlapped.

The articles were written in a different sequence from that in which they appear in the thesis. Article four was developed first, followed by articles two, one and three. This sequencing influenced the analytical process in two ways. Firstly, as coding and interpretation remained iterative throughout the project, insights developed during the writing of later articles prompted repeated returns to the interview transcripts and field notes, allowing themes to be expanded and reconsidered. This also meant that the later articles drew on, and were the product of, a larger body of empirical material.

Secondly, I changed. The skills of a researcher develop, as in any other profession. As researchers in the field develop their abilities through experience and become better observers, they can ‘generate more questions which can be answered by observation’ than ‘less talented observers’ may be able to (Levine et al., 1980: 43). As such, my skills as a researcher developed over the course of this PhD and over the different periods of fieldwork.

Here, it should be noted that, as the fieldwork was conducted over a number of years, returning to earlier interview data became key, as older data could be reinterpreted in light of insights gained from later interviews. The first five interviews had already been transcribed and initially coded by the time of the second period of fieldwork. Article four was the first article written chronologically and, as such, draws upon fewer interviews than the other articles, since fewer interviews had been conducted at the time of writing. While data from later interviews is not included in article four, insights gained from later periods of fieldwork did not contradict its analysis and, at times, corroborated my initial findings.

As such, the project and the articles developed over time, including data collection. Ethnography is generally conducted chronologically (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2009) and, as such, data collection, coding, translation and analysis develop over time. While I do not claim to have conducted a traditional longitudinal ethnography,⁹ in which ethnographers return to the field repeatedly over many years (O'Reilly, 2012), my research design, involving several periods of fieldwork over a number of years, encountered some of the same issues. For instance, returning to the field had a number of benefits, such as seeing the place change over three years, as opposed to if the fieldwork had been conducted continuously over a single nine-month period. However, as data compiled over multiple years is presented together in the articles, I run the risk of unproblematically presenting it in the 'ethnographic present' (ibid.). As temporality is a key consideration in my work, the articles make clear that the data were collected during different periods of fieldwork. This is important because the context itself developed over the course of the research. Things changed, and these changes affected the ongoing research. When I arrived for my second period of fieldwork in 2024, the right-wing libertarian economist Javier Milei had been elected president on an explicitly anti-Indigenous platform of ruthlessly reducing the size of the Argentine state. This was a significant event, and while the transition itself is not discussed in the articles, Milei himself is.

Analysing Interview Data

Each interview was transcribed verbatim using a number of different programmes (such as Microsoft Word and A-Train) on a trial-and-error basis before I settled on NVivo. All transcription was done in Spanish. The interview transcripts remained in Spanish throughout coding and analysis in order to minimise any distance between the verbatim Spanish and its eventual translation. This was also a technical issue, as I preferred to listen to the original audio track while reading the transcript. Translation was undertaken only when quotations were selected for inclusion in article drafts. As the whole process, from recording the interview through to the publication of translated fragments, was carried out by me as the researcher, I take on the role of what Poblete (2009: 632) refers to as the 'genuine intermediary', bridging the speech of interviewees and the reader through an apparently uncomplicated but legitimate intervention. Translation is here understood as uncomplicated because it 'reflects the need to communicate' without questioning the nature of what is

⁹ Over time, it is my ambition for my work to develop in this direction as I make repeated visits to the field.

communicated (ibid. 632). However, this assumption of translation as uncomplicated somewhat overlooks the hegemony of English as a global *lingua franca* in academia (Ferguson et al., 2011). As explored later in this chapter, this raises questions of coloniality (Burman, 2018), as I am ultimately making my interviewees speak English (Poblete, 2009). While the intervention of translation is necessary, translated quotations cannot be treated as neutral reproductions of interviewees' speech. In addition to Spanish, many Mapudungun words were used in the interviews. Mapudungun terms were not translated; rather, the original words were left verbatim, with either a footnote explaining their closest meaning in English or an explicit explanation in the subsequent text. For this, I used a number of Mapuche scholars, as well as my copy of Alberto Moreno's Mapuche-Español dictionary (Moreno, 2016) to corroborate my interpretations.

After transcription, passages of text were assigned codes, which were developed and then connected into broader themes. Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke pose two key questions regarding thematic analyses: 'what counts as a pattern/theme' and 'what "size" does a theme need to be?' (2006: 82). There is no set standard for answering either of these questions (ibid.), and thus these decisions are left to the researcher. In ethnographic research, this process of recognising patterns is informed not only by the transcripts themselves but also by the researcher's accumulated familiarity with the field. Interview transcripts are not surprising to a researcher if they conducted the interviews themselves. As such, when transcribing and then reading the transcripts, different subjects that were mentioned triggered memories of different documents, conversations, meetings and other interviews, allowing me to recognise narratives from elsewhere. For instance, when one interviewee began discussing the tragic death of Rafael Nahuel, I recalled, a previous interviewee who had discussed it, a protest placard that I had seen with his name on it, and a newspaper report I had seen about the inquest into his death. This prompted me to make connections with my other sources of data, allowing for a broader theme to develop regarding martyrdom and memorialisation, which is discussed in article four.

Coding proceeded inductively through repeated readings of each transcript. Initial descriptive codes captured recurring subjects such as state violence against activists, extractivism, territory, language and family experience. Codes were assigned to passages of text in which an interviewee discussed a particular subject, with individual passages often assigned multiple codes. These descriptive codes were subsequently compared across interviews to identify broader patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Emerging interpretations

prompted repeated returns to the original transcripts, allowing codes to be re-organised and repeatedly checked against the empirical material. This included material that complicated or contradicted the developing interpretations.

As the coding progressed, I focused increasingly on how descriptive codes were linked within individual interviews and across participants. For example, discussions of extractivism were rarely narrated in isolation. The inductive process here had a certain messiness attached to it. As linkages between codes recurred in the data, initially separate descriptive codes needed to be interpreted as part of broader themes. The movement towards these broader themes was a messy and non-linear process. As such, some themes were started and abandoned when it became clear that there was insufficient data to support them, ‘while others might collapse into each other (e.g. two apparently separate themes might form one theme)’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 91). Participants frequently connected disparate subjects, for example, contemporary extractive industries, longer histories of territorial dispossession and state violence, as well as the development of fruticulture and rural de-population.

The genesis of article three provides an example here. While conducting an interview, the interviewee told me about Plan Neuquén 2020, described in detail in the article, which was a white paper produced by the provincial government in 1997. This led me to search the provincial archives for the document, which I subsequently found and treated as data, as explained in the following section on documentary evidence. The information contained in the document then led me to look once again through my codes on extractive industries, national parks and local agriculture. The document addressed a number of issues that had also been raised by different interviewees. As such, the analysis and arguments of article three developed as the documentary evidence was connected to a number of issues raised independently by different interviewees. Comparing these accounts with the documentary evidence shifted the analysis towards the question of how and why fracking had developed in the region. This was in spite of the provincial government’s earlier plans, its recognition that conventional oil was becoming exhausted, and the identified need for more sustainable forms of development. The arguments developed in article three emerged from pursuing these relationships across different types of data. The significance of a potential theme was therefore not determined by frequency alone, but by the recurrence of particular relationships across interviews and their relevance within the wider dataset.

Analysing Participant Observation

While the interview data provided direct recordings of interviewees' accounts, participant observation generated a more open-ended body of empirical material, with the goal of this method being to 'just observe everything in sight' (Blevins, 2017: 1188). This material was recorded in two different types of notes, understood as forms of representation, distilling moments experienced by the researcher through their five senses into (eventually) written accounts (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995). The first are fieldnotes. These consisted of reflections on different moments that occurred during fieldwork and were written down in notebooks that I carried with me at the first opportunity. The second were what Simon Ottenberg refers to as headnotes, 'the notes in my mind, the memories of field research' (1990: 144). These notes comprised my reflections and memories of informal conversations and observations while participating in events and meetings, as well as the wide variety of situated experiences that I accumulated through time spent *in situ* during fieldwork. Informal conversations and observations are not treated as interviews, as I do not have verbatim recordings or transcripts from which to quote.

Fieldnotes, as the more tangible form of data, were transferred from my notebooks to Microsoft Word files and coded in the same way as the interview transcripts. The Microsoft Word versions were not verbatim copies of the handwritten fieldnotes because these had been written in shorthand. When transferring them to the computer, I expanded them into a longer form, often as narrative vignettes. This allowed me to describe, in as much detail as I was able, the context of the conversation or observation. I did this in cafes while in the field, as close to the original note-taking moment as possible, so the recorded moment was relatively fresh in my memory. In my analyses, headnotes are important for moments that fall into gaps in the written record, where at the time I had not considered their importance. When such a moment occurs to me, I write it down, usually as a narrative vignette, and mark it explicitly as a memory as opposed to a fieldnote. My treatment of headnotes is different because the reliability and detail of memory inevitably diminish and change over time (Ottenberg, 1990). Retrospectively recorded headnotes are therefore treated as memories and distinguished from fieldnotes recorded contemporaneously.

An example of a headnote and how I used it comes from a conversation I had with a friend in Neuquén. We were discussing something that appeared at the time to be unrelated to my fieldwork. She explained that she had recently

driven across the border to Chile to buy some computer components and have the tyres on her car replaced, since both were much cheaper in Chile. My friend continued by explaining that Argentine customs officials charge citizens and residents driving back across the border a hefty tax if they have obviously new tyres, and that mechanics in Chile therefore offer an extra service to Argentine customers. For a small charge, they burn off the small rubber hairs left over from the moulding process so that the tyres do not appear so clearly new. This is apparently usually enough to fool customs officers. When writing article one, which discusses borders, this headnote became a useful way for me to contextualise the international border and how Argentines relate to it. This does not appear in the article, but it informed the way the border is interpreted and discussed.

The analysis of participant observation was not conducted separately from the analysis of the empirical material. I repeatedly returned to my fieldnotes during the research and writing process, particularly when themes emerging elsewhere prompted connections with events or conversations encountered during fieldwork. Similarly, headnotes, which remain with me, frequently prompted recollections of discussions or observations that I had had with someone else. This happened both in the field and later during the process of analysis. These notes shaped how I subsequently interpreted interviews, photographs and documentary material, as my understanding developed through movement between these different forms of empirical material.

Analysing Photographs

While I took many photographs during my time in Argentina, which serve as reminders of my fieldwork and its context, most did not form part of the analysis in this thesis beyond their occasional use in presentations and on the cover of this thesis. The exceptions are the photographs I took of urban artistic interventions, as explained in a previous section. In total, I took 376 photographs of urban artistic interventions in northern Patagonia. Additionally, while travelling in Gulumapu (Chile), I took a further 124 photos of urban artistic interventions in the cities of Temuco and Santiago de Chile. The Chilean photographs helped to contextualise the cross-border aspects of the Mapuche struggle, providing a context orientation. The photographs from northern Patagonia were organised into a coded system of files and analysed inductively according to recurring visual themes. As the majority of these photographs are visual reproductions of text (as in graffiti or protest placards), this was often a relatively straightforward process. For instance, a photograph of a piece of graffiti

that says ‘*Carlos Fuentealba Presente!*’ was coded into a file with other pictures that depicted activists who had been killed by security forces. I was able to interpret this text through contextual knowledge, as I had asked people in the field who the person depicted was and had encountered online media sources discussing his murder in 2007 (e.g. World Organisation Against Torture, 2007). Murals, in particular, were more difficult to interpret. As such, I usually discussed their imagery with contacts in order to understand it better, which allowed the murals to be categorised later. Initial categorisation was informed by repeated viewing of the images. I then modified Marie Hoop et al.’s (2022) typology of urban artistic interventions (UAI) to respond to my empirical material. I did this by eliminating some categories that I believed did not speak to my material and adding the category of *Reactionary UAIs* to encapsulate a form of UAI that I identified in my dataset that was not covered by the original typology.

As the photographs were of text or images situated in a particular place (northern Patagonia), many of the interventions contained imagery and text with locally specific meanings. I therefore regularly discussed selected photographs with local contacts to better understand these meanings, and any relationship to the locations in which they appeared. I used these opportunities to ask contacts what certain phrases or images meant in order to challenge, refine or corroborate my own interpretations. This was a continuous process and included discussions through the social messaging platform WhatsApp when I was not in the field. These discussions often provided valuable insights into the symbolism and even the production of particular interventions. For instance, while walking by a mural with a group of contacts, I asked how they interpreted a large mural that we passed, and one person told me that they had been one of the artists involved in its production. This provided valuable insights into the mural’s intended symbolism and its production.

The 14 photographs reproduced in article four were selected for their textual and spatial political relevance to Indigenous and allied activism and because they illustrated the analytical categories developed through the modified version of Hoop et al.’s (2022) typology. Their inclusion was not intended to provide a comprehensive catalogue of urban artistic interventions, but to support and illustrate the broader interpretive arguments developed from the visual dataset.

Analysing Documentary Material

Documentary material was a source of data throughout the research. This consisted primarily of online newspaper and magazine articles, printed newspapers purchased and collected during fieldwork, and pamphlets, flyers and other printed materials collected at public events. These documents were used to contextualise participants' narratives, follow and corroborate events and provide insight into the public circulation of political claims and representations, thereby allowing for the triangulation of data (Bowen, 2009; Friedhoff et al., 2013).

The material was collected continuously throughout fieldwork and organised thematically. Paper documents were placed in organised folders, with digitised documents likewise stored in digital folders. Analysis followed the same inductive principles applied to the interview material, as demonstrated by the previous example of Plan Neuquén 2020. Pamphlets and other printed materials were particularly valuable because they documented forms of political communication that often received little or no coverage in the mainstream media. These materials provided insight into how organisations presented their own objectives, histories and political demands, complementing both the interview narratives and the visual analysis of urban artistic interventions.

Connecting to the theory.

This section will explain how the primarily inductive and iterative process of analysis outlined in the previous sections was carried through into the development of arguments in the four articles. Themes that developed from the empirical data were brought into conversation with theoretical concepts in order to understand their situated significance and broader relevance. This was a two-way process. While theoretical concepts provided a means of interpreting the empirical themes, the data also shaped my engagement with theory, including the development of new concepts where existing conceptualisations were insufficient.

The back-and-forth movement, from raw data, to codes, to the development of themes, to the arguments made in the articles, was both iterative and reflexive. As explained, while the analysis of data is primarily inductive, it was not theory-free, nor was it a one-way process. Themes were produced from the data 'at the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data' (Braun and Clarke, 2019: 594). Concepts

were utilised or developed through engagement with theoretical literature to provide a means of interpreting what the empirically identified themes might tell us. It was from this movement between themes and concepts that arguments developed. As such, the theoretical framework of this thesis informed both the planning and argumentation of the articles, and the writing of those articles also often led to looking at other theories, in order to understand my data better.

Over the course of the research, I approached the field with a number of questions, yet the processes of doing fieldwork and collecting data, and then the analysis of that data, refined these questions and raised further ones. Addressing the questions raised through this process required conceptualisation, both to understand the situated significance of what the empirical data was describing, and to understand its broader relevance (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The process of conceptualisation in this thesis has two general, though often overlapping routes. Knowledge production through article writing is a relatively messy process, at least for me, that includes crucial feedback, re-drafts, abandoned arguments and developing ideas. The first route was the application of a concept already established in the literature, with a contribution made to how such a concept is used or understood. Secondly, when existing conceptualisations did not seem sufficient to explain what was emerging from the empirical material, I used a combination of the data and relevant literature to develop bespoke concepts for the articles. While it should be noted here that two of the articles were co-written, I was entirely responsible for data collection and primary analysis. In both cases, I approached my co-writers with an article proposal, which was then discussed and developed collaboratively. For instance, article two uses key concepts from both of my co-writers' previous work, which I suggested be combined in the article proposal.

An example of the first route of conceptualisation can be found in articles two and four. The conceptualisation of resistance as slow has been developed by a number of scholars across disparate literatures since the mid-2010s (e.g. Murrey, 2016; Saranillio, 2018; Lilja, 2021; Pain and Cahill, 2022; Saunders and Al Om, 2022; Fung, 2023). It broadly refers to a number of ways of discussing resistance as a *longue durée*. In this thesis, the primary sources for slow resistance are firstly Tamara Saunders and Natasha Al Om (2022), who explicitly use the term slow resistance to understand the slow violence of the treatment of asylum seekers in the UK. Secondly, Lilja's (2021) development of Bhabha's (1994) time-lag, is crucial to understand the temporal dimensions of resistance, as both resistance and its potential outcomes develop over time

through (re)signification (Lilja, 2021). This was particularly crucial as the themes of family history and territorial conflicts converged, spanning multiple generations, with the way in which contacts would discuss the struggle as projected into the future. As such, slow resistance provided a means of conceptualising the situated temporality of resistance that emerged from the data and interpreting its broader significance within territorial conflicts.

For the second route, article three provides a key example. After engagement with literature on extractivism and frontier-making, it became clear that, while this literature contains a great many concepts, I required a further concept to make sense of my data. As the arguments developed, it became clear that a particular assemblage of dominant temporal and spatial narratives of extractivism and the foreclosure of a well-developed alternative future did not appear to be covered by existing literature. As such, the combination of frontier-making, extractivist logics and settler colonial narratives of a *terra nullius*, required its own conceptualisation. Therefore, in the article, I propose and develop the concept of TINA-spaces, which responds to my data.

It must be emphasized that while these routes outline my approach to theory and its integration with my empirics, the individual articles are significantly messier than this two-route binary implies. The evolution of an argument often required a layered conceptualisation. For example, while article two hinges on slow resistance, slow resistance is understood through its application over time in the same place, as such the spatial aspect of this resistance also needed to be conceptualised, which was developed with present-making. The problems of neoliberal multicultural recognition are discussed using Burman's (2018) concept of black-hole indigeneity as a starting point, to understand the political implications of essentialised recognition projects. A further conceptualisation was necessary, that emerged out of the analytical process of translation. The English translations of *conocer* and *reconocer* (to know and to recognise respectively), did not adequately connect the two words, as such re-knowledge responds to this and allowed for a discussion of emic notions of recognition by some Mapuche.

Part 2:

Ethical Considerations

As part of this research, I submitted a detailed ethics application to the Swedish Ethical Review Authority, which was approved prior to the start of fieldwork.

The application and review process took into account the ethics of data collection, its use, and, in particular, how the data would be stored. This approval, however, should not be understood as the endpoint of the ethical responsibility of this thesis or of my own responsibility as a researcher. The Swedish ethical review system has been criticised from a social science perspective for being grounded primarily in biomedical research ethics (Bülow et al., 2026). This presents a problem, as concepts that are relatively clear in biomedical research, such as sensitive personal data, can become more open to interpretation in qualitative research, where forms of potential harm may be contextual and ongoing (Allmark et al., 2009).

As such, the research for this thesis was conducted with the intention of going beyond formal ethical approval in order to maintain high ethical standards both during and after the completion of the research. Central to this approach is the principle of continuous, informed consent, which formed the underlying basis of my relationships with research participants. The following section outlines the considerations guiding my research.

Positionality

The positionality of the researcher in relation to the peoples and places represented in research requires an effort to understand ‘how our own basket of privileges and experiences conditions our knowledge and research’ (Ackerley and True, 2008: 695). My own background as White, male and British positions me within historical, colonial, and multifaceted relations with my case study.

A British Researcher in Argentina

While far removed from the focus of my research, the UK fought a war with Argentina within living memory over control of the Malvinas Islands. This came up often in conversations in the field, so much so that it became somewhat routine for me to explain my position regarding the islands. I was particularly uncomfortable telling people that I was British around the anniversary of the conflict on 2 April. This was not due to a fear of violence, rather the intense feeling that this was a raw wound.

When walking to the local library, I would pass a monument to the 649 Argentines who were killed in the war, a monumentalisation that demonstrates the lingering presence of geopolitical violence in the spaces of everyday life.

A particularly shocking aspect for me was seeing the images of the war shown on Argentine TV. In the UK, we are used to seeing a set number of images and videos of the conflict that essentially makes invisible the Argentine ‘enemy’. Seeing images of vulnerable teenagers smiling and drinking mate in their con-script uniforms was something I found both eerie and heartbreaking. This confrontation produced personal discomfort and also shaped how national history affected how I was encountered in the field.

Legitimacy and the White Northern Researcher in the Global South

As a White researcher from the Global North, entering the field in the Global South to work with Indigenous peoples, I am steeped in this history of colonial exploitation. James Baldwin, in saying that ‘Whiteness is just a metaphor for power’ (in Beliso-de Jesus and Pierre, 2020: 65), captures a tension that I embody: that my Whiteness may simultaneously position me with both authority and suspicion. This highlights the importance of ongoing colonial structures of power in contemporary research (Gani and Khan, 2024). While I did not consciously seek to mobilise my positionality as White, British and male strategically, these positionalities undoubtedly shaped encounters in ways that were outside my control.

In response to this embodied tension, researchers may be tempted to narrow their work to highly localised dynamics as a way of managing positional discomfort or avoiding engagement with broader structures of power. However, this risks what Beliso-de Jesus and Pierre call a ‘fetishisation of a particular kind of ethnographic localisation’ (2020: 65). Focusing on the particularities of highly localised dynamics may ignore larger structures of power, such as White supremacy (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2003). Such a perspective risks misreading the field as existing outside such large structures. My research, therefore, aims to navigate this tension carefully, seeking to attend to both local experiences and broader structural contexts without parochialising or exoticising the people with whom I work (ibid. 2003: 5). Tillman presents two key and difficult questions for my ethnographic work: ‘who should study whom?’ and ‘should or can Whites conduct this type of research?’ (2002: 4). There are no easy answers to these questions. This crisis of legitimacy raised by Tillman’s (2002) questions will always be present simply because legitimacy is a social construct. While histories of colonial domination, racial prejudice and unequal gender dynamics make particular aspects of my positionality crucial to discuss, e.g. that I am White, British and male, it should also be remembered that multiplicities of positionalities affect social researchers in almost all locations. As

such, the researcher is the perennial outsider to the life worlds of our interlocutors.

Legitimacy, in Tillman's (2002) sense, can only be encountered and negotiated in the field, with the informed consent of the people whose lives we seek access to. As researchers, we depend on principles of honest dialogue, consultation and engagement. This has meant, for me, working with other academics in the field, my supervisors and contacts to ensure informed consent, autonomy, well-being, safety, anonymity, and dignity for interviewees throughout my fieldwork (Iphofen, 2013). While it is important to recognise the coloniality of the relationship between my contacts and me, an overemphasis on my own positionality within larger structures, such as race, and any *guilt* that stems from this may permit me to remove agency from my contacts. People can say no and most undoubtedly would have if they felt I was wasting their time. This complex negotiation is exemplified in the following encounter from my fieldwork.

The first time I met Diego, a Mapuche movement leader who was introduced in a previous section, was during the initial stages of my fieldwork in 2023. A member of a teaching union, through which he is also connected, had given me his contact details. I introduced myself on WhatsApp and explained my project briefly, asking him if he would like to meet and perhaps conduct an interview with me. He agreed, and after some back and forth regarding when and where we could meet, I found myself a week later sitting in the café of a gas station on the outskirts of Neuquén city. I had arrived 30 minutes early. As I explained access to the field was difficult, and this meeting represented a significant opportunity for my faltering PhD project. Diego arrived with a friend, who I would also later get to know, and despite my protestations and offer to buy them both a coffee, they bought their own and sat down. I immediately began explaining my project once again to the two gentlemen before Diego cut me off.

He began asking me who I was, where did I come from? I told him that I was from a small town in the north east of England. He asked me who my parents were, what were their jobs? I explained that my father had been a tractor mechanic and that my mother was a schoolteacher, but that they had both retired now. He asked about my grandparents, and I explained that, on my father's side, my grandfather had been a number of things, from binman to a small-holding farmer, and that, on my mother's side, my grandfather had been a toolmaker (*matricero*) and that my grandmother had worked in a leather

factory. This went on for some time. Diego asked about my great-uncles and aunts and great-grandparents, and I told them the history of shipyard workers, coal and lead miners, tenant farmers and motorway builders. At the end of this inquisition, Diego made a humming sound and said, ‘I see, so you’re a worker’, instantly positioning me in a way, in his mind, that I had not really considered for myself. This is not a positionality that I claim, nor do I know its precise meaning for Diego. I told him because he asked, and now I have told you.

I do not presume to know what this means regarding the research, apart from that the history of my family has informed the person that I am in uncountable ways, just as it has for Diego, who told me his own history at a later date. As I have mentioned, legitimacy is ultimately a social construct, and as such my positionality, while fixed in a number of bounded ways, that I am White, British, male, etc., is also negotiated in the field. This does not negate the structural inequalities of my position as a White, Northern researcher working with Indigenous peoples in the Global South, which cannot be negotiated away through individual relationships. Rather, the encounter demonstrates that structural positionalities co-exist with more contingent forms of identity that can emerge through relationships in fieldwork. I arrived at this encounter thinking I knew which aspects of my positionality *mattered*. However, in regard to what it means for the people that I interact with, it is not necessarily the whole story of how I am viewed.

My Dictaphone remained untouched on the table, and while I came to know Diego and his friends and family well, the interview I had asked him for never happened.

Ethnography as a Colonial Legacy

Ethnography itself has a long and problematic history as part of colonial *science* and the scientific justification of colonialism. Ethnography has often been posited with the idea of justifying colonial domination: from nineteenth century conceptualisations of the *White man’s burden* through to eugenic ideas in the twentieth century. Ethnographic research was shot through with the attitude that ‘Whites – by virtue of their self-proclaimed racial and cultural superiority – had the right to go anywhere, investigate anything and take from anyone’ (Hough, 2017: 651). In the Argentine context, anthropological exhibitions at the World Fairs of the late nineteenth century were used to erase Indigenous peoples from the national identity and present ‘a white, modern identity for the

nation that would [...] permit it to enter the global capitalist system not just as provider of raw materials but as cultural equal' (Kerr, 2017: 62).

There must be no pretence that the colonial relationship has been resolved in modern times. I am a Northern researcher working for a Northern institution who has, with the notable exception of a book chapter published in Spanish with UNAM (Wade et al., 2026), published in journals and attended conferences mainly situated in the Global North. The case/site, empirical material and contacts who participate in my research are, however, all situated in the Global South.

The European academy propagates a rewards system that, as Anders Burman points out, promotes a 'form of anthropology that is incompatible with any genuine commitment to change the world' (2018: 51). Scholars such as Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang (2012) have criticised the easy adoption of radical emancipatory discourses by Western researchers as metaphor. In settler colonial contexts, this can have particular consequences for Indigenous peoples, as such metaphorisation may amount to 'moves to innocence' through settler guilt (Tuck and Yang, 2012: 3), without counteracting the aforementioned 'settler desires' (Macoun and Strakosch, 2013).

Much work has already been done to challenge, problematise and disrupt these hegemonic notions of 'normal' (Milner, 2007). However, persistent colonialities, particularly in the North-South research hierarchy, demonstrate the importance of an ethical understanding of researcher positionality and of the implicit or explicit role researchers may play in entrenching and reproducing colonial relations of power. Although I have the ambition to challenge this dynamic, the structure of academia as it exists makes it difficult. While I have attended conferences in Chile and published the aforementioned book chapter, the most prestigious journals and conferences are usually situated in the Global North. This extraction of data from the South, in order to be primarily used in the North puts me at risk of the aforementioned 'extractivist ethnography' (Burman, 2018), a monster which scientists with decolonial inspirations must strive to deconstruct (*ibid.*).

Exploitation and Decolonial Thought

The ethics of this thesis are not, however, limited to methodological or procedural concerns. As discussed in the section on political ontology, non-Western thought has been traditionally treated in Western academies as an anachronistic

object of study, with no inputs of its own and judged as inferior to the objective ontology of the West (Burman, 2022). Rather, any insights gained from the not-West are purely the result of some diligent Western researcher's 'discovery' (Said, 1989: 212).

While scholars in recent decades have increasingly emphasised the urgency of decolonising the social sciences (e.g. Tuck and Yang, 2012), resorting to ontology may itself be limited in capacity to question the political underpinnings of Western science endeavours. Zoe Todd (2016) criticises the ontological turn, arguing that it retains an inherent ethnic bias towards the traditions of the European Enlightenment. A bias that feels doubly unfair given recent research that demonstrates that Indigenous knowledge and the encounter with it, from the fifteenth century onwards, formed the foundations of Enlightenment thought (Graeber and Wengrow, 2021). Political ontology, as discussed in a previous chapter and mobilised in this thesis, partly responds to this problem. However, it must be recognised that the continued exclusive nature of academic institutions has often led to the repackaging of Indigenous concepts, cosmologies and modes of living as a 'Euro-Western academic narrative [...] spinning itself on the backs of non-European thinkers' (Todd, 2016: 7).

A potential response to this is decolonial thought, which attempts a humbling of the 'colonial-modern episteme' (Shilliam, 2012: 333). This is to say that it highlights the epistemologies of the colonised and dispossessed as legitimate and valuable contributions to knowledge production (ibid.). This leads to a potential contradiction, as I am bound by the requirements of producing a PhD thesis, which include publishing academic articles and engaging in debates with other scholars, primarily within the Western academy. However, Reyes Cruz (2008) points out that an approach cannot be considered decolonial if I merely propagate the tradition that, for research to be valid, it 'has to be inserted in colonial traditions, [...] within legitimized intellectual production' (2008: 655). I attempt to engage with this tension in a number of ways.

Firstly, while I do not claim to be a decolonial scholar myself, I approach my research through the lens of decolonial thinking. This approach is informed both by Latin American decolonial scholarship (e.g. Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2011) and by genuine engagement and collaboration with Southern scholars and activists. As such, it informs both my approach to fieldwork and the theoretical framework of my research. I worked directly with Argentine and Mapuche scholars in the field, as well as with local activists. Of particular importance is 'citing and quoting Indigenous thinkers directly, unambiguously

and generously' (Todd, 2016: 7). Secondly, there is the issue of access. In engaging with Argentine academia, it should be recognised that the vast disparities between research institutions in the Global North and Global South are pertinent with 'research funding, scientific equipment and skilled human resources' (Boshoff, 2009: 415) concentrated in the Global North. This inequality produces an 'advanced capacity to disseminate' through privileges associated with language and access.

Access is particularly important to my research because, when negotiating my own access to the field, I heard a recurring complaint from three Mapuche women. They had spoken to many researchers who had subsequently left, after which they had never read nor seen the outcomes of the research to which their interviews had contributed. This complaint was exacerbated by a sense that Mapuche people themselves were not being taken seriously as researchers or knowledge producers. This is a discomforting thought, namely that academic work about them, that I may have read could be available and circulated without their knowledge or access to it.

As such, I am committed to making all of my research published as part of this thesis, as well as my research going forward, available to the communities with whom I work. In light of this, it is my ambition to publish all the articles from this thesis open access, thereby negating the need for university libraries or individuals to pay access fees (Karlström, Aksnes and Piro, 2024). This is a work in progress. When choosing journals, I therefore consider the existence of open access agreements as a primary factor in deciding where to submit my work. Currently, both article two and article four in this thesis have been published open access. Additionally, physical copies of the thesis will be sent to the institutions and organisations with which I have worked, meaning that the research will be accessible, regardless.

A final aspect to recognise is that of language. In colonial contexts, 'language oppression' (Roche, 2019) has historically been a key tool in the domination of colonised peoples. In northern Patagonia, military violence and other forms of suppression, such as forcing children to attend residential schools, have, since the Conquest of the Desert, marginalised Mapudungun and actively imposed the colonial language of Spanish as the dominant language of the region. It was in Spanish that I spoke with my contacts. Further to this, I am a native English speaker writing a thesis in English, the dominant global language of academic discourse (Burman, 2018). These linguistic conditions shape what can be heard, recorded and ultimately represented in this thesis and

must therefore be understood as a limitation on the knowledge produced rather than as a neutral medium through which it is conveyed. This cannot be resolved; rather, it is addressed through an ongoing self-reflection to understand and accurately portray what people told me.

In summary, I have engaged in continuous dialogue and reflection in an attempt to redress, at least in part, the historical inequalities that my research positionality may help to reinforce. However, it is also true that my positionality does not determine my behaviour. In essence, I committed to keeping an open mind to the insights gained during my fieldwork and to trying to articulate a way in which my contribution can be meaningful. This constant dialogue incorporated the input of my supervisors, my colleagues and the people I worked with in Argentina. It has always been my intention to approach the field with humility.

Security and Consent

My Security

Security can be split into two areas of responsibility, the security of the researcher, and the security of interlocutors and others involved in the fieldwork. It is pertinent to recognise that my safety and behaviour in the field are responsibilities that I have to the University as well as to the people with whom I engage. Whilst it is not necessary to go into detail on this topic, because a lot of the decision-making responds to circumstances encountered in the field, it suffices to say that my safety was an ongoing concern related to my own judgement of situations and how well-informed I was of the bigger picture (Nelson et al., 2017). To remain informed, I kept abreast of local and international news and listened carefully to the advice of my local contacts as well as my supervisors regarding what was and was not a good idea.

The Security of My Contacts

The security of my research partners was paramount and was based on open consent and continuous feedback to verify what my interlocutors and research partners were comfortable with. Consent was a key issue when working with people in situations that could be politically tense. I relied on numerous actors as gatekeepers, cross-checking and critiquing my engagement with interlocutors. Additionally, I placed emphasis on the importance of oral, informed and continuing consent with my interlocutors in the field.

Data Protection

As a researcher, I have an ethical responsibility for the protection of data (Ducato, 2020). To this end, the data is pseudonymised or anonymised. Interviews were recorded on a device that could not connect directly to the internet and were transferred to computer files via an encrypted USB stick and stored in my Gothenburg University secure storage folder. Informants' names were not written down, nor were they asked to state their names or addresses during the recording. Rather, a system of pseudonyms for people, of my own devising, was used when cataloguing the interviews and my notes. The protection and storage of these data conform to the European Union's GDPR data management regulations.

5

Summary of the Articles

Figure 2: Article Summaries

Article	Theoretical Frameworks	Research Questions	Method	Main Findings
1	Gramscian cultural hegemony, border theory and perpendicular resistance	How have the imposition of settler colonial administrative and international borders in northern Patagonia affected Mapuche territorial understandings and practices of resistance?	Partial life histories, participant observation, Mapuche cartographic analysis	Colonial and provincial borders in northern Patagonia fragment Mapuche territories. Mapuche resist these borders ontologically, while such borders remain contested relational spaces.
2	Slow Resistance, Re-signification, present-making, neoliberal recognition and de-recognition	In what ways are different resistance-signs articulated by Indigenous movements, in a context of de-recognition? How does present-making function as a practice of (re)signification in the context of alliance-making? What can this tell us about the concept of 'slow resistance'?	Partial life histories and documentation	Many Mapuche enact long-term resistance through presence. This challenges neoliberal narratives of neoliberal recognition and de-recognition

3	Extractivism, TINA-spaces and Lefebvrian Space	How does the spatial enactment of neoliberal inevitability renew the extractive frontier in Vaca Muerta through the spatial and material ideology of extractivism, and how does this conversely shape resistance to extractivism?	Partial life histories and documentation	Extractivism persists despite impending post-exhaustion ruination through TINA-spaces. Resistance emerges by exploiting structural fissures. Alternative imaginaries are obliterated, but this is contested.
4	Urban Artistic Interventions (UAI)s, present-making	How do local Indigenous and allied actors make their presence and resistance visible in public spaces, and in what ways do these practices build alliances, consensus, and alternative imaginaries?	Participant observation of protests, ethnographic photography, and framing analysis	Many Mapuche use urban spaces to assert identity and build alliances, challenging dominant settler colonial narratives.

Article 1

Mapuche Resistance and Perpendicularity on the Border: the Case of Wallmapu

Submitted to *Territory, Politics Governance*, under review

The article examines the colonial imposition of borders in northern Patagonia and the ways in which Mapuche communities resist these borders through particular aspects of a form of ‘ontological disobedience’ (Burman, 2016b; Burman, 2023), which the authors conceptualise as *perpendicular resistance*. Contemporary border conflicts are situated within the historical violence of the genocidal campaigns carried out by the Argentine and Chilean states in the late nineteenth century. These campaigns dispossessed Mapuche peoples of their lands and imposed Western spatial logics that continue to shape administrative borders today, both internationally between Argentina and Chile and provincially within Argentina.

It is argued that these borders are neither neutral nor natural divisions, but rather products of the Western spatial ontology that was imposed through colonial violence. The international border along the Andes, framed as a *natural* watershed divide, severed Mapuche territory and transformed the mountains from a central, connective space into a peripheral frontier between two settler colonial states. Similarly, provincial borders in Argentina reproduce colonial logics. Such imposed borders are shown to be incompatible with Mapuche notions of territory.

Drawing on border theory, the article reframes borders as interstitial zones rather than fixed lines. Through interviews and participant observation, it demonstrates how Mapuche resistance operates ontologically. A key example is some emic Mapuche cartography, which often depicts Wallmapu, a coherent Mapuche territory, as perpendicular to the hegemonic Western axis, with North at the top and South at the bottom. This cartographic reorientation re-centres the mountainous Andes, which are peripheralised in Western maps as the border between Chile and Argentina, as well as the waterways that stem from them. As such, they challenge representations of Patagonia as an empty desert and articulate an alternative imaginary of the territory.

The emic Mapuche concept of the *Xawümen Mapuche* is presented as a way of relating to and sharing territory. Compared with the *Wigka Frontera* (foreign border), it is so radically different from Western notions of bounded territory that it presents a challenge to the universalising Western spatial ontology. In this way, the metaphor of perpendicularity is extrapolated from cartographic logics to understand Mapuche resistance as ontological, or perpendicular, as it meets Western coloniality at the ontological fracture zone of the border.

The article further explores how state recognition of indigeneity functions as a bordering mechanism that fixes identity within bureaucratic and territorial frameworks. While recognition can provide access to rights, it often requires accepting the state's authority as a bordering agent. Conversely, the role of border memories in shaping Mapuche identity reveals how cross-border displacement and attempts at cultural erasure have both fractured Mapuche identity and provided spaces for its new expressions. These experiences exemplify how borderlands function as the in-between space of the *nepantla*, where multiple realities converge (Anzaldúa, 1999), emerging from cracks in the desert.

Contribution

This article challenges hegemonic border discourses by presenting a new conceptualisation of resistance. *Perpendicular resistance* is presented as a form of resistance that is both spatially and ontologically framed. Extrapolated from radical Mapuche cartography, the concept disrupts conventional ideas of territoriality, suggesting that resistance rooted in alternative worldviews is particularly resistant to co-optation by modern state mechanisms of control.

In conclusion, the article argues that Mapuche perpendicular resistance challenges the Western spatial ontology by reframing borders and identities as contested and relational spaces rather than as fixed lines of ordered modernity. In doing so, the Mapuche borderlands emerge not only as sites of marginalisation but also as zones of possibility where alternative worlds and future imaginaries are enacted.

Article 2

‘Our existence is the resistance’: features of Mapuche slow resistance.

Published: Wade, P., Burman, A., and Lilja, M. (2026). ‘Our existence is the resistance’: features of Mapuche slow resistance. *Third World Quarterly*, 47(6): 1065–1085. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2025.2606918>

Article two examines some Mapuche resistance in northern Patagonia through the concept of *slow resistance*, emphasising practices of *present-making*, alliance-building, and the repeated use of signs as strategies that challenge neoliberal forms of recognition and de-recognition. Rather than focusing on the immediate confrontations of direct action, the article argues that this Mapuche resistance often unfolds over time as slow, in the background to moments of direct action. This is done through an insistence on presence, memory and radically different imaginaries of land and identity.

A central focus is the public display of Mapuche identity through bodily presence and the display of explicitly Mapuche symbols as a form of *present-making*, or making one’s presence felt. In northern Patagonia, it is common to see explicit Mapuche representation at protest mobilisations, often alongside or as part of causes that are not explicitly Mapuche. This consistent presence fractures hegemonic essentialising narratives that position Indigenous people and their politics as separated, both in time (as relics from the past) and space (as inherently rural), from contemporary struggles. By participating in broader political mobilisations while visibly asserting Mapuche identity, activists reject the package offer of a partial and essentialised recognition as the indio

permitido. Instead, many Mapuche enact a form of resistance that is grounded in consistent present-making over time. The concept of *re-knowledge* is introduced as a counterpoint to top-down neoliberal multicultural recognition, as an assertion of a radical politics of territory through emic narratives.

The article extends present-making to historical territorial struggles, particularly in relation to national parks and extractivism. It critically interrogates the Western conservation paradigm, as well as Western notions of progress with extractive projects. Using the examples of Nahuel Huapi National Park and the Vaca Muerta fracking megaproject, the article understands both as based in settler colonial notions of the Wilderness and the Cartesian dichotomy between humans and nature. This logic clashes with Mapuche ontologies, in which *mapu* (land) and *che* (people) are relationally inseparable (Pehuén, Quiñones and Letelier, 2019).

In the case of the national park, Mapuche slow resistance is discussed through narratives of ancestral presence as many Mapuche contest the legitimacy of national parks as timeless wilderness. Instead, despite being willing to work with the institution, many Mapuche understand the national park as an imposed territorial regime with definite historical origins. In the case of Vaca Muerta, Mapuche and allied environmental movements have also utilised complex strategies of slow resistance. Such strategies range from supporting monitoring and compensation claims to the involvement of the International Tribunal for the Rights of Nature. The Tribunal's report declared that fracking in Vaca Muerta constitutes an instance of ecocide and ethnocide (Veredicto, 2024). This exemplifies how such coalition-building can amplify resistance while maintaining Mapuche political distinctiveness.

The article shows how some Mapuche organisations engage in complex and non-exclusive forms of identity construction that contrast with Spivak's (1988) notion of *strategic essentialism*. Many Mapuche groups encourage recognition of Indigenous ancestry and solidarity. Campaigns such as *lñche Mapuche Ñgen* challenge state de-recognition, particularly in census politics, and also counter projects of de-recognition through both the erasing-assimilation produced by the colonial violence of residential schools and ahistorical settler narratives of the Mapuche as Chilean invaders.

Contribution

This article introduces the concept of slow resistance to the study of activism in northern Patagonia, emphasising how resistance emerges over time through consistent and insistent practices of present-making. This work expands the understanding of Indigenous resistance by showing how some Mapuche resistance is not just immediate but is also built through sustained action that challenges forms of essentialising recognition and erasure. It contributes to the literature by positioning slow resistance as a key, non-passive strategy for countering settler colonial projects of eliminatory violence through de-recognition and neoliberal projects of partial and essentialised recognition.

In conclusion, the article argues that this Mapuche resistance navigates a tension between selective recognition and de-recognition. Through slow resistance and practices of present-making, many Mapuche groups and activists construct counter-hegemonic narratives that reject essentialising neoliberal multiculturalism and insist upon Mapuche presence and distinctness. This resistance is productive rather than merely oppositional, taking place over a long period of time. By insisting on their existence through present-making, many Mapuche (re)signify indigeneity as relational and intersectional through their continued inscription in the land. This presents a fundamental challenge to settler colonial narratives of absence and containment.

Article 3

TINA-spaces and Neoliberal Inevitability: The Extractive Frontier at Vaca Muerta, Argentina.

Submitted to *Antipode*, under review

This article introduces and applies the concept of *TINA-spaces*, based on Margaret Thatcher's maxim for neoliberalism, 'There Is No Alternative'. The article analyses the persistence and regeneration of extractivism at the extractive frontier, using the Vaca Muerta fracking megaproject as a case study. *TINA-spaces* are understood as spatialised and materialised forms of neoliberal ideology through which extractivism is reproduced as inevitable in particular places through the imposition of a *temporal-lock* and the generation of dependency and consent.

TINA-spaces are a Lefebvrian spatial production, placed in a permanent present of continuing extractivism as alternative future imaginaries are foreclosed through the *temporal-lock*. A dependency on extractive industries is enacted, which, through the internalisation of inevitability, cyclically generates consent. The article draws on interviews as well as a historic white paper policy

document to trace how TINA-spaces enact extractivism as inevitable by obliterating alternatives. Conversely, the article examines how the contradictions inherent in *TINA-spaces* create cracks from which resistance emerges within these constraints.

Historically, the extractive frontier in Neuquén reshaped rural economies and depopulated agricultural and livestock areas. This depopulation reorientated long-term social reproduction and sustainable rural livelihoods towards short-term extraction and demonstrates the illogical ideology of extractivism. Here, impending post-exhaustion ruination is pushed further into the future but remains itself, inevitable.

In the 1990s, declining conventional oil reserves prompted the development of Plan Neuquén 2020, which envisioned a transition towards agroforestry and tourism. However, the continuing pull of extractivism and the implementation of a new generation of extractivism (Gudynas, 2018) through fracking led to the plan's abandonment in favour of revitalised extractivism. This illustrates the obliteration of alternatives in TINA-spaces, where extractivism is continuously produced as inevitable despite repeated unfulfilled promises of progress and transition.

Despite these constraints, resistance emerges within TINA-spaces, exploiting the fissures created by their inherent contradictions, as broken promises of progress and increasing environmental degradation become increasingly apparent. Many Mapuche communities negotiate pragmatic agreements with state and corporate actors along with broader alliances that leverage local, national and transnational networks to contest extractivism at the ideological level. Interventions such as the 2025 International Tribunal for the Rights of Nature report on Vaca Muerta exemplify how resistance reframes extraction in moral and legal terms. Such resistance is both non-cooperative, directly opposing extractive projects, and constructive, fostering alternative future imaginaries.

Contribution

This article contributes the concept of *TINA-spaces*, which are not just physical spaces but ideological processes through which the inevitability of extractivism is constantly reproduced. By tracing the history of extractive policy in Neuquén, it shows how, even when promises of transition away from inherently unsustainable extractivism are made and understood as necessary, they

are discarded in favour of maintaining the extractive frontier as inevitable. The key contribution here is showing that TINA-spaces are not static. Within these spaces, contradictions emerge: the titular cracks in the desert provide openings for resistance, making TINA-spaces dynamic sites of both oppression and possibility.

In summary, the article demonstrates that TINA-spaces operate through the obliteration of alternatives, implemented through a temporal-lock, dependency and the generation of consent. This reproduces extractivism despite ecological degradation and unfulfilled promises of progress. However, the mechanisms that enforce extractivist inevitability also generate conditions for resistance, opening a space for the imagination of post-extractivist futures. The TINA-space framework thus provides a critical lens for understanding the persistence of the extractive frontier and the potential for socio-ecological challenges to extractive hegemony.

Article 4

“No Hay Una Sola Historia”: Collective Framing of Urban Artistic Interventions in Argentine Northern Patagonia

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The article examines how social movements in northern Patagonia, particularly those associated with the Mapuche people, use urban artistic interventions (UAI), for example, graffiti, murals, protest placards and other forms of public art, to assert presence and resistance in public spaces. These interventions perform present-making, a form of slow resistance that challenges hegemonic narratives, including the settler colonial ‘myth of the vanishing Indian’ (Berry, 1960) and settler colonial histories of urban development. Through UAI, these movements communicate agency and injustice, making Indigenous identity and environmental concerns visible in cities shaped by settler colonialism.

UAI are separated into a typology adapted from Hoop et al’s (2022) classifications based on what the UAI communicate. These categories are: 1) social communication, which aims to mobilise movement actors and potential allies into collective action. This can involve mobilising and internalising discourse; 2) protest UAI, which function as direct calls to and for action; 3)

utopian experimentation, which presents alternative futures. Various causes, such as Indigenous territorial struggles and environmentalist issues, are often presented as somewhat inherently intertwined, rather than arguing for a particular cause or solidarity. Such work can be powerful and is often reflected in the fact that pieces are usually brightly painted, complex murals; and 4) reactionary UAI, which often overlays other UAIs as a form of negation and demonstrates how UAIs are frequently layered in complex discourse and discussions, presenting alternative views.

The article argues that UAIs produced in the name of the Mapuche and allied movements are often aimed at demonstrating solidarity and reaffirming presence as part of a slow resistance over time. Graffiti and murals that articulate Mapuche demands reject Indigenous erasure and assert presence within urban space, especially when placed near sites of state authority such as police stations or military museums. This spatiality allows their messages to directly confront institutions of historical and contemporary state power, amplifying their impact. In addition, the use of both Spanish and Mapudungun is understood as communicating across audiences, reinforcing Mapuche solidarity while positioning Mapudungun as a living language within the settler colonial city. In this way, UAIs enact a form of slow resistance, collapsing past narratives of colonial invasion and future aspirations for Wallmapu into the present.

Artistic interventions can mobilise public attention towards concrete political and environmental struggles, particularly regarding Mapuche claims that are often closely linked to anti-extractivist movements and the protection of water. Calls for the release of Mapuche prisoners and imagery of water, mountains, and ancestral beings intertwine protest with notions of social and ecological justice. Whether confrontational or legally sanctioned, such works foster alliances between Mapuche and environmental movements and present Indigenous agency as both rooted in historical struggle and oriented towards the possibility of a just future.

Contribution

The key contribution of this article is demonstrating the function of UAIs as potentially powerful tools of resistance that combine cultural expression with political action. UAIs can, for example, communicate Mapuche solidarity, assert a presence in the urban landscape and challenge settler colonial narratives of elimination. By positioning these artworks in strategic locations, UAIs can confront state power, producing space for ongoing, visible struggle.

In summary, UAIs in northern Patagonia combine discourse, spatiality and time to produce slow resistance. This is done by connecting Indigenous presence with other struggles and asserting it in politically significant urban locations. These interventions create visible threads of continuity between past and present struggles. The article demonstrates that UAIs are not only artistic expressions but also strategic tools for mobilisation that can articulate and perhaps shape alliances through claims to justice, solidarity and the presentation of utopian future imaginaries.

6

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that contemporary territorial conflicts in northern Patagonia cannot be understood without confronting the colonial imposition of the Western spatial ontology. The Conquest of the Desert produced new border regimes through the abstraction of lived-in Indigenous space. The colonial imaginary of the desert was territorialised through a Lefebvrian (1991) abstraction of space, with the frontier constructed as an unstable modality of this process, now remade as the extractive frontier. This repeating process continues to structure extractivism, conservation, recognition and, conversely, resistance. By rendering the Indigenous Mapuche territory of Wallmapu divisible and administrable as abstract space, the settler colonial state obscured both the violence through which this spatiality was produced and the persistence of Indigenous Mapuche territorial relations. This persistence, however, articulates Wallmapu as both preceding the settler colonial state and projecting beyond it into the future.

Across the thesis, the desert emerges not only as the colonial imaginary of an empty or neutral landscape but also as a construction that imperfectly resolves the contradictions of settler colonialism. The colonial state's attempt to order conquered Indigenous land through the Cartesian binary of humans and nature fragmented Indigenous worlds into the administrable categories of wilderness and indigeneity. These fragments were then managed through the twin logics of the extractive frontier and a frontier of conservation, on the one hand, and hegemonic state-led notions of recognition and de-recognition, on the other. Yet none of these strategies has resolved the fundamental contradiction at the heart of the colonial imaginary: the continued presence of the Mapuche and their inscription in the land. The state cannot wish Indigenous presence away, nor can it fully incorporate it without undermining the racialised identity upon which the settler colonial state's territorial claims rest. The two research questions asked how structures and processes of settler colonialism shape

relations to territory in northern Patagonia (RQ1), and how Indigenous and allied actors enact resistance to settler colonial territorialisation (RQ2). In response to RQ1, the thesis demonstrates that settler colonial relations to territory continue to be produced through processes of bordering, extractivism and conservation and through practices of recognition and de-recognition that organise land and Indigeneity according to particular spatial and temporal relations. In answer to RQ2, the thesis demonstrates that Indigenous and allied resistance operates through heterogeneous strategies such as perpendicular and slow resistance and through practices such as present-making, re-knowledge, alliance making and urban artistic interventions, which contest these relations while enacting alternative relationships to territory.

The combined analysis has shown that settler colonial and neoliberal projects in northern Patagonia operate through totalising Western narratives of inevitability and *naturalness*. Borders appear as natural divisions, extractivism as the only viable future. Similarly, Indigenous disappearance is presented as a *fait accompli*, while hegemonic notions of progress are positioned as beyond question. These narratives are not merely discursive but are materially and spatially enacted. They shape landscapes, modes of production and the everyday lives of the people who live in this place.

These dynamics produce what this thesis understands as the totalising horizon of TINA-spaces, where alternatives are systematically foreclosed. Yet this process of totalisation is never complete. The persistence of Mapuche presence and ontological disobedience through strategies such as slow and perpendicular resistance continually expose the fragility of these claims to hegemony. Resistance, as analysed in this thesis, does not primarily take the form of frontal opposition to state power, nor does it conform neatly to liberal frameworks of recognition or rights. Instead, it emerges both within and against the spatial and temporal constraints imposed by settler colonialism. It is ontological in that it rejects the foundational assumptions of the Western spatial ontology as a hegemonic spatial regime that is both natural and inevitable. This opposition is not always articulated as a single political programme but is enacted through an insistence on alternative ways of relating to territory. As such, this resistance is world-making.

Taken together, the thesis argues that resistance in northern Patagonia cannot be understood solely as opposition to specific projects such as borders, national parks or extractive developments. Rather, it must be understood as a sustained challenge to hegemonic power based in colonial spatialities and

ontology. In contesting the underlying assumptions of progress, identity and what is to be done with the land, many Mapuche and allied actors engage in resistance that is productive, relational and articulates a future, even when it operates within severe constraints.

Contributions

Returning to the metaphor of cracks, this thesis intervenes at the fracture zones where these cracks occur. Theoretically, they form at the intersections between settler colonial studies, political ontology and studies on resistance, and empirically they form at the ontological fracture zones where different realities meet. Settler colonial studies have accounted for the structure of the elimination of the native over time (Wolfe, 2006; Veracini, 2010), and scholars have also discussed the contradiction between the logic of elimination and how some settler states incorporate Indigenous labour (Englert, 2020). In discussing settler colonial relations over a century and a half, the thesis maps how the logics of elimination have not only endured but changed through time, in this place. These changes have moved from genocidal strategies of eliminatory violence (Wolfe, 2006) to the assimilatory violence of elimination by ‘civilising’ residential schools and incorporation into the labour force (Schiaffini, 2019), through to the more recent projects of neoliberal multicultural recognition (Postero, 2007; Burman, 2018) and what this thesis identifies as de-recognition (Wade, Burman and Lilja, 2026).

As such, this thesis contributes in the first instance by building on Wolfe (2006), empirically demonstrating that the structure of invasion reveals how contemporary territorial conflicts in northern Patagonia are linked to the legacy of settler colonial invasion and occupation as an enduring structure. In the second instance, the thesis takes this further. Utilising literature on frontier-making (Rasmussen and Lund, 2018; 2025; Rasmussen and Figueroa, 2023), I argue that settler colonial structures of power persist through their capacity to be spatially and temporally reproduced in changing territorial forms. The extractive frontier is renewed cyclically, with new technologies and mineral demands (Gudynas, 2018; Dorn, 2022), while the conservation frontier is renewed as an empty wilderness (Cronon, 1995) through multiple waves of accumulation by dispossession (Rasmussen and Mendoza, 2023: 322).

This thesis demonstrates how the colonial frontier emerges as a dynamic modality of territorialisation through which the enduring structure of settler colonialism is continually reproduced. Past and future imaginaries are

contested between hegemonic power that presents the reproduction of hegemonic space as *natural* and *inevitable*, and diverse counter-hegemonic practices of resistance that are often world-making. In this vein, the thesis presents the concept of perpendicular resistance to describe how many Mapuche resistance practices cross-cut the spatial assumptions of the hegemonic spatial regime. In northern Patagonia, Mapuche actors may reject the Western spatial ontology through which the settler colonial state produces territory as hegemonic space, while simultaneously negotiating with and strategically using the institutions through which that ontology is imposed. This perspective adds an ontological dimension to Gramscian (1971) notions of hegemony and counter-hegemony, as perpendicular resistance demonstrates how different spatial ontologies can encounter each other with resistance operating both against and *through* colonial spatial orders while simultaneously enacting Mapuche spatial ontologies. Perpendicular resistance, therefore, is a resistance that enacts world-making.

The thesis further intervenes in the frontier (e.g. Rasmussen and Lund, 2018) and extractivist scholarship (e.g. Gudynas, 2018; Svampa, 2019) by developing the concept of TINA-spaces, which adds a specific temporal and spatial dimension to studies of extractivist regions. Existing literature on frontier-making has demonstrated how frontiers are produced and reconfigured through ongoing processes of territorialisation and the expansion of resource control (Rasmussen and Lund, 2018; Leys and Raftopoulos, 2025). TINA-spaces build on this literature by explaining how an already established frontier can be continually renewed through the material, spatial and temporal production of extractivism as inevitable. The recognition of temporality in these spaces is a specific contribution of its own with the concept of the temporal-lock, as a mechanism employed by hegemonic power in extractive zones that forecloses both non-extractivist pasts and alternative imaginaries of a post-extractivist future. Scholars have discussed the renewal of extractivism through different “generations” of technologies and mineral demands (Gudynas, 2018), and the spatiality of extractive zones has also been posited as “zones of sacrifice” (Valdivia, 2015; Juskus, 2023). The contribution of TINA-spaces is to conceptualise the extractive frontier not only as the process through which territory is incorporated into extractive relations but as a spatial, temporal and material ideological process through which those relations must be continually reproduced as the only viable future. Importantly, this process is never complete. The contradictions produced by extractivism, including ecological degradation, exhaustion and repeated unfulfilled promises of development, produce

cracks in hegemonic notions of the real (Burman, 2017; Lilja, 2021), through which constructive resistance and alternative future imaginaries can emerge.

Studies of resistance have demonstrated that resistance can operate through practices that are constructive (Lilja, 2021), while political ontology provides a means of understanding such practices as potentially world-making (de la Cadena, 2015). As such, this thesis intervenes to foreground the situated temporality of resistance, in the settler colonial context, over the *longue durée* and slow violence of invasion (Wakeham, 2021). Slow resistance operates across temporalities through practices such as (re)signification and present-making that are projected across time as both repetition of past practices and the signalling of the future struggle. These forms of resistance are, following Roland Bleiker (2021) and Lilja (2021), constructive as they articulate alternative ways of relating to land and articulating identity based in Mapuche ontologies. Slow resistance in this thesis is not presented merely as a form of resistance that takes place over a long period of time. Rather, the thesis contributes an understanding of slow resistance in which the connection between past, present and future is itself a means through which resistance operates.

By foregrounding ontology, temporality and spatiality, this thesis contributes to understanding how settler colonial power endures and how it is conversely made unstable. I argue that the desert, far from being a “blank space on the edge of time” (Cheng and de Lara, 2019: 1078), can be interpreted as an intensely contested space where hegemonic and counter-hegemonic worlds collide. Within this, resistance persists not because alternatives are guaranteed, but because hegemony is never complete. It is precisely within the contradictions of settler colonial and neoliberal projects that cracks in the desert appear. Here, other futures continue to emerge and endure. Wallmapu lives, both as a memory of the past and as a hope for the future.

Amulepe taiñ weichan

Let the struggle continue

Svensk Sammanfattning

Den argentinska bosättarstatens erövring av norra Patagonien år 1878, gav upphov till ett särskilt problem för staten: öknen. En kolonial föreställning om ett absolut utanför införlivades nu i Argentina och gav upphov till en långvarig territoriell konflikt som består än i dag.

Denna avhandling undersöker hur bestående bosättarkoloniala processer formar territoriella relationer i norra Patagonien samt hur urfolket mapuche och allierade aktörer bedriver olika former av motstånd. Genom att föra bosättarkoloniala studier i dialog med politisk ontologi, teorier om rum samt relationella perspektiv på motstånd begreppsliggör avhandlingen samtida territoriella konflikter som en del av bosättarkolonialismens *longue durée*. Studien använder en kvalitativ, etnografiskt orienterad metodologi och bygger på deltagande observation och partiella livshistoriska intervjuer, liksom på dokumentära källor och konstnärliga interventioner i urbana miljöer.

Avhandlingen argumenterar för att bosättarkolonialismen verkar genom tillämpningen av en hegemonisk rumslik ordning som har gjort urfolksterritorier tillgängliga för omvandling till fronter för resursutvinning och naturskydd. Dessa rumsliga relationer reproduceras kontinuerligt genom gränsdragningar, extraktivism och exkluderande naturskydd, vilka av hegemoniska maktordningar framställs som naturliga och oundvikliga. Samtidigt syftar av partiella erkännandepraktiker och fråntagande av erkännande till att osynliggöra urfolk, både i tid och rum.

Hegemonin förblir emellertid ofullständig. Mapuches ihärdiga närvaro och motstånd blottlägger bestående sprickor i bosättarkolonialismens rumsliga och tidsliga ordningar. Genom dessa sprickor växer olika former av motstånd fram. Dessa praktiker utmanar föreställningar om urfolkens frånvaro, bygger allianser och artikulerar alternativa relationer till territoriet. Avhandlingen begreppsliggör därför motstånd inte enbart som opposition mot specifika territoriella projekt, utan också som produktivt och ontologiskt. Detta motstånd

är världsskapande: det utmanar de rumsliga och tidsliga antaganden genom vilka den hegemoniska bosättarkoloniala makten kontinuerligt reproduceras.

Artikel I: Denna artikel argumenterar för att införandet av administrativa gränser, internationellt mellan Argentina och Chile och federalt i Argentinas norra Patagonien, har sitt ursprung i en västerländsk bosättarkolonial rumslig ontologi, grundad i det våldsamma skapandet av den koloniala fronten. Artikeln arguerar för att medan vissa former av mapuchemotstånd mot staten som gränsdragande aktör visar att sådana gränser är oförenliga med deras förståelse av territorium, möjliggör mapuches korsande relationella ontologier samtidigt strategiska förhandlingar med samma bosättarkoloniala institutioner. Denna ontologiska olydnad ifrågasätter själva föreställningen om vad en gräns är, där mapuchebegreppet *Xawümen Mapuche* står vinkelrätt mot både västerländska bosättarkoloniala rumsligheter och temporaliteter. Med utgångspunkt i deltagande observation och semistrukturerade intervjuer med mapucheaktivister introduceras begreppet *perpendicular resistance* för att visa hur många mapuche utövar ontologisk olydnad genom kartografier, rumsligheter och minnen. Artikeln utforskar urfolks självbestämmande bortom suveränitet och erkännande och ger insikt i hur vissa mapucheterritoriella kamper uttrycker ett alternativt världsskapande genom unika sätt att veta och vara.

Artikel II: Denna artikel undersöker mapuchefolkets *slow resistance* i Argentina, med fokus på praktiker för (om)signifiering av bosättarkoloniala narrativ genom en närvaroskapande politik (*present-making*, att göra sin närvaro kännbar). Som svar på nyligen genomförda lagstiftningsförsök att delegitimera mapucheidentitet och markrättigheter, samt historiska processer som har osynliggjort mapuche, argumenterar artikeln för att motstånd här inte enbart handlar om omedelbar konfrontation, utan om en uthållig och strategisk process över tid. Detta motstånd är förankrat i minne, territorium och identitet genom en bestående inskrivning i landet. Genom att avvisa både statens frångående av erkännande av urfolk och det selektiva erkännandet av *indio permitido* hävdar mapucheaktivister en radikal *re-knowledge*-politik, som sammanlänkar land och identitet genom emiska narrativ. Detta motstånd är långsamt eftersom processer av (om)signifiering bygger på en konstruktiv upprepning av tecken över tid.

Artikel III: Denna artikel begreppsliggör den materiella och rumsliga tillämpningen av neoliberal ideologi i utvinningszoner som *TINA-spaces* (*There Is No Alternative*), med frackingmegaprojektet Vaca Muerta i norra

Patagonien som fallstudie. Sådana rum synliggör ett sätt på vilket utvinningsfronten förnyas på specifika platser. *TINA-spaces* upprättar ett påtvingat permanent nu, eller ett *temporal-lock*, som syftar till att systematiskt utplåna både för-extraktivistiska förflutna och föreställningar om en post-extraktivistisk framtid. På så sätt förnyas extraktivismen över tid på samma plats, vilket skapar beroende och genererar en instabil samexistens mellan samtycke och motstånd. Återskapandet av utvinningsfronten i dessa rum genom dessa mekanismer skapar en cyklisk dynamik där extraktivismen blir alltmer förankrad trots ökande miljöförstöring. Artikeln visar att extraktivism i *TINA-spaces* framställs som rationell och oundviklig, trots den förestående fördömden efter att resurserna har uttömts. Artikeln bygger på semistrukturerade intervjuer genomförda av författaren och triangulerade med dokumentära källor.

Artikel IV: Denna artikel undersöker hur ett långsamt motstånd mot hegemoniska bosättarkoloniala narrativ om framsteg och osynliggörandet av urfolket mapuche artikuleras genom den diskursiva och materiella närvaron av urbana konstnärliga interventioner (*urban artistic interventions*, UAIs) i argentinska norra Patagonien. Detta görs genom att undersöka de temporaliteter och rumsligheter som präglar UAIs som materiella interventioner i den offentliga diskursen. UAIs analyseras genom inramningskategorierna social kommunikation, protest, utopiskt experimenterande och reaktionära UAIs. Frågan som besvaras är: "Hur synliggör lokala urfolksaktörer och allierade aktörer sin närvaro och sitt motstånd i offentliga rum, och hur bidrar dessa praktiker till att bygga allianser, konsensus och alternativa föreställningsvärldar?" Materialet består av fotografier tagna av författaren under fältarbete 2023, semistrukturerade intervjuer med rörelseaktivister samt deltagande observation vid rörelsemöten, evenemang och protestmarscher.

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The 1878 arrival of the Argentine settler state as conqueror in northern Patagonia produced a singular problem for the state: the desert. A colonial imaginary of the absolute outside was now incorporated into Argentina, sparking a long-running territorial conflict that endures to this day.

This thesis examines how enduring settler colonial processes shape territorial relations in northern Patagonia and how Indigenous Mapuche and allied actors enact diverse practices of resistance. Bringing settler colonial studies into conversation with political ontology, theories of space and relational approaches to resistance, it conceptualises contemporary territorial conflicts as part of the *longue durée* of settler colonialism. The research employs a qualitative, ethnographically oriented methodology, drawing on participant observation and partial life-history interviews, as well as documentary sources and urban artistic interventions.

It is argued that settler colonialism operates through the application of a hegemonic spatial regime that has rendered Indigenous territory available for transformation into extractive and conservation frontiers. These spatial relations are continually reproduced through processes of bordering, extractivism and exclusive conservation which are presented by hegemonic power as natural and inevitable, while practices of partial recognition and de-recognition attempt to absense Indigenous peoples, both in time and in space.

Hegemony, however, remains incomplete. Insistent Mapuche presence and resistance expose persistent cracks within settler colonial spatialities and temporalities. Through these cracks emerge diverse practices of resistance. These practices contest narratives of Indigenous absence, build alliances and articulate alternative relationships to territory. The thesis therefore conceptualises resistance not solely as opposition to particular territorial projects, but as productive and ontological. This resistance is world-making, challenging the spatial and temporal assumptions through which hegemonic settler colonial power is continually reproduced.