

Abstract

In recent years, lithium has emerged as a key element in the so-called dual transformation — both ecological and digital — and its extraction is increasingly seen as a precondition for a zero-emission future. However, this pressure has deepened socio-ecological inequalities in regions of the Global South where lithium is extracted. This thesis analyzes lithium mining in Chile's Salar de Atacama through the theoretical frameworks of ecological imperialism and peripheralization. The analysis focuses on five dimensions — international political economy, ownership structures, the position of local communities, ecological impacts, and processes of peripheralization — through which it critically examines the structures and relations shaping the current extractive regime. These categories are further complemented by comparative analysis of three different approaches — degrowth, ecomodernism, and resource nationalism — which both reveal potential blind spots in the primary framework and help articulate alternative development paths. The findings demonstrate that the Chilean lithium sector remains deeply embedded in unequal power structures, while decentralized and just approaches to natural resource governance remain limited. By combining critical theory with a grounded case study, the thesis contributes to the debate on socio-ecological transformation and offers insights for rethinking current approaches to the green transition.