

# HYDRO POWER or PRIVATE POWER

## Forging Effective Resistances to River Development in the Chilean Landscape



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### ¿HYDROPOWER?

This thesis centers on **hydropower** development and questions its **continuing expansion** as subsequent ecological and social challenges continue to compound. Connected through the **political ecology** context, these issues largely present themselves through hydropower impacts, **privatized** water management obligations and social **power relations**. Although hydropower can be generated in an ecologically unobtrusive and **locally beneficial** manner, factor dependent, the **global pattern** exposing the **contrary to this ideal** cannot be ignored. I establish this stance drawing from several realms: the current **international presence** of hydropower, scientific impact analyses of river **basin fragmentation**, the political and **economic influences** upon water allocation, human relations to water management, and finally **social responses** to development decisions.



### BÍO BÍO

The Bío Bío, located in **Pehuenche territory**, was the first major damming controversy in the **post Water Code Chile**. Despite opposition, much of it emanating from **Mapuche** communities, **Endesa's** Pangué dam was completed in **1994**, followed by their Ralco dam in **2004**. These projects emphasized the **institutionalized preference** for hydro development and the levels of resistance necessary to combat the power of **private industry**.

### FUTALEUFÚ

The Futaleufú has remained a free-flowing river within Chilean borders despite Endesa owning its **non-consumptive water rights**. Although the river is virtually unprotected, **plans to dam** the Futaleufú were curtailed in **2014**. While the proposal captured both local and international attention, the effective response time was aided by a **knowledge base** created by those which relocated from **Bío Bío**. Resistance continues through local **NGOs**, **kayaking community** members, and other supports.

### BAKER & PASCUA

Patagonia's Baker & Pascua basins evaded an **Endesa dam network** proposal in **2014**. "Patagonia Sin Represas" is arguably the most **powerful anti-hydro campaign** Chile has seen. With major **funding** and sustained resistance, the movement utilized **social protests**, **international media** coverage, **endangered species** arguments, **external MW** analyses, and various **legal claims**, which slowed project plans and **dissuaded investors**.

### PUELO

The Manso is a main tributary of the Puelo River. **Mediterráneo** proposed a **run-of-river** project on this tributary which the Chilean government approved in **Nov. 2015**. As the Puelo River is closer to the main **electricity line** than others further south, incentive for development is high. The project has met resistance from local and international environmental groups, as well as community opposition. Legal strategies such as Mapuche claims regarding indigenous rights violations and others have slowed plans.

### MAIPO

The **Maipo Basin** is located about thirty miles **southeast of Santiago**. Despite sustained local opposition since **2008**, American **AES Gener** and the **Luksic group** are currently constructing a **run-of-river system** which will siphon the Maipo's **main tributaries**. The energy will flow to an AES Gener **mine** and potentially Argentina. Despite contested **MW** predictions, **potable water** issues, community **tourism concerns**, and other



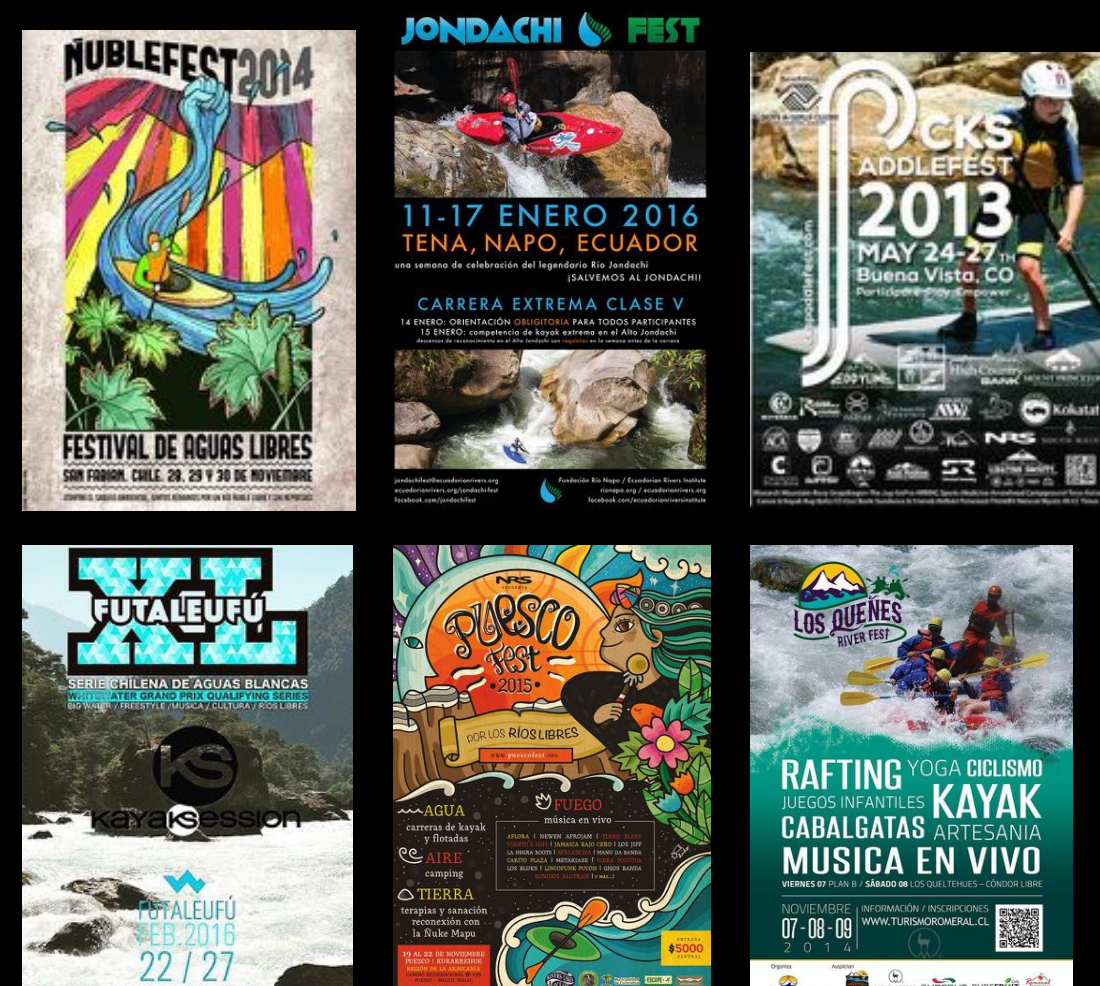
### ¿CHILEAN RESISTANCE?

Like many others, the Chilean government continues to promote hydropower as their **dominant "renewable"** energy, despite contention of this portrayal due not only to river **fragmentation ramifications** and **community degradation**, human and other, but also to underlying **profit motivations**. The core of this study, focusing on the numerous **strategies** social resistance movements utilize in combating hydro developments in Chile, is largely established through the **semi-structured interviews** I conducted there in January **2016**. I emphasize the ways in which Chile's **multilayered relationship** with hydropower has been built on a privatized platform, solidified by legislation and **political allegiances** to industry. The subsequent environmental regulations and energy demand specifics I present help illuminate the disputed integrity of the **centralized Chilean government**, and ultimately the **five case studies** displayed to the right. As these studies depict, the **institutionalized promotion** of hydropower in Chile has, and currently is, being fought through strategies which have varying degrees of **effectiveness**.

dynamics, the project moves forward. While members of the **No Alto Maipo** and other environmental groups have spoken with the **investors directly**, filed numerous **legal claims**, and organized **large protests**, several issues hold back the campaign. These problems include: citizen **political passivity**, relatively low levels of **international attention**, influences of **private industry**, and the basin's close proximity to central **electricity lines**. However, the fight is far from over.



### FORWARD MOMENTUM



The fundamental issue here is that **social upheaval** generated by Chile's and other nation's **relationships with hydropower** is not a new concept. Although several **international guidelines** for hydropower development, which aim to preserve ecologic and social prosperity, have been articulated in the past two decades, it is clear that in the cases of **privatized water management** systems, such guidelines are **ineffective** as long as there is **no political accountability** for their implementation.

As the end goal of **free-flowing** and healthy rivers is one that many can agree on, the incentives **tourism** offers, for example, have the potential to generate greater **social engagement** and ultimately **political pressure** to fortify **river conservation**. While tourism must be **developed responsibly**, the posters to the left depict several effective and **growing festivals** celebrating rivers and the people who appreciate their worth **beyond economic gain**. As the hydro era has yet to be legitimately curtailed, tourism is only part of a complicated **social resistance equation**.

“It's better to start with something on a local lever, it's like a small stone in your shoe, now you don't care, but maybe one week, or one month, you feel totally destroyed with a small stone, it's growing.”

Mauricio Fierro