

# Chapter 2

## Extractive Economy and Mobilities. The Case of Large Copper Mining in the Antofagasta Region



Carolina Stefoni, Fernanda Stang, and Pablo Rojas

### 2.1 Introduction

The most recent population censuses show a clear increase in international migration in Chile over the last few decades. If in 1992 there were 105,070 foreigners (0.8% of the total population), the *Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas* (INE) and the *Departamento de Extranjería y Migración* (DEM)<sup>1</sup> projected for 2019, a total of 1,492,522 people (7.8% of the national population) (INE & DEM, 2020). Different research has focused on how Chilean society generates exclusion and discrimination, revealing a deep process of racialization and criminalization, linked to the constitution of the nation-state itself (Tijoux & Palominos, 2015; Trujillo & Tijoux, 2016; Stang & Stefoni, 2016; Pavez, 2016).

A less studied aspect is the relationship between migration and the development of large-scale economic projects (dams, road infrastructure, ports, mines, among others), which is precisely the discussion to which this chapter seeks to contribute.

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<sup>1</sup>Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas-INE (National Institute of Statistics) and the Departamento de Extranjería y Migración-DEM, equivalent to the US Citizenship and Immigration Services.

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C. Stefoni  
Universidad de Tarapacá-Chile, Santiago, Chile

F. Stang (✉)  
Universidad Católica Silva Henríquez, Santiago, Chile  
e-mail: [fstang@ucsh.cl](mailto:fstang@ucsh.cl)

P. Rojas  
NGO Fractal, Santiago, Chile

We are interested in identifying the different types of mobilities that take place, and how they are related to the development of mining in northern Chile, specifically in the Antofagasta region, since it is an economic activity that has been historically linked to the arrival of workers from different places and countries. Indeed, mining represents, on average, more than 57% of the economic activity in the Antofagasta region, sometimes reaching 65%. Its importance at the national level is evident, as it generates more than 45% of the country's mining Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and contributes 25% to 30% of total exports at the national level (GORE Antofagasta).<sup>2</sup> Since its origins, this activity has followed an extractivist development model, regardless of who assumed the leadership in the production and export of resources, be it the state or large private capital, in different historical periods.

This region is home to the third largest foreign population in the country (100,122 people). This figure represents 11% of the regional population, being the second region with the highest percentage of international migrants in relation to its local population (INE & DEM, 2020). The region has been a historical destination for people from different latitudes of the country, especially from the central zone and some southern regions, as well as for people from neighboring countries such as Bolivia and Peru, and from more distant places such as the former Yugoslavia – mainly Croatsians – or China, at the beginning of the century. All these immigrants have played and continue to play a key role in the development of the city and the region. However, not all of them occupy a similar position in the social structure.

In order to analyze the relationship between mining activity in the Antofagasta region and mobility, the concept of mining extractivism will be used, as this term includes crucial elements to understand how migration reproduces a matrix of structural inequality that perpetuates the neoliberal development model of this kind of economy. It is interesting to mention that studies on mining extractivism tend to recognize the socio-environmental costs (Svampa, 2019), but not how the precarious conditions in which many immigrants find themselves are also related to the conditions of production in this type of activity. Based on the emblematic case of Antofagasta, we will show that the city incorporates national and international migrants in a differentiated and unequal way, thus marking the possibilities of work and the limits that their labor and migratory trajectories face.

In methodological terms, this analysis is based on previous and more recent research carried out in Antofagasta. The first one was commissioned in 2016 by the Regional Government of Antofagasta in order to prepare a diagnosis of the international migratory situation. Two other ongoing projects also considered in this study started in 2019 and 2020.

Within the framework of previous studies, 28 individual and 5 group interviews were conducted with key informants, divided in the following categories: regional government officials; local government officials; national legislators representing the region; members of social organizations of and for migrants, including religious ones; members of informal settlements committees; officials of the security forces

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<sup>2</sup> See Gobierno Regional de Antofagasta (2016).

and foreigners; judicial officials and members of the academy, and a group interview with municipal officials and the CODELCO (National Copper Corporation) in the city of Calama. Documentary sources, such as official documents and press releases were also reviewed. In the 2019 study, nine life stories and five in-depth interviews were conducted with international migrants residing in Antofagasta (Colombians, Peruvians, Bolivians and Dominicans). Two in-depth interviews with internal migrants and seven semi-structured interviews to key informants were also carried out. The textual corpus generated was analyzed using the NVivo program. The 2020 project provided a review of the bibliography regarding the framework of recent migratory movements toward the north of the country.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first one briefly reviews the concept of mining extractivism; the second one describes the case of Antofagasta as an emblematic example of the extractivist economy; the third one describes and analyzes the different migratory movements that have occurred in the region, their relationship with mining development, and the main socioeconomic conditions in which migrants find themselves: internal migrants, commuters, and international migrants. The fourth section offers some final remarks.

## 2.2 Mining Extractivism

Extractivist economy has been pointed out as a developmental model based on a system of capital concentration and on a predatory exploitation of natural resources, such as minerals, land and marine resources. Acosta (2011) states that extractivist economy, far from new, dates back to the conquest and colonization of Latin America, Africa and Asia:

Extractivism is a form of accumulation that began to massively emerge 500 years ago. With the conquest and colonization of America, Africa and Asia, the world economy began to be structured: [for example] the capitalist system. This method of extractivist accumulation was determined, since then, by the demands of the metropolitan centers of nascent capitalism. Some regions were specialized in the extraction and production of raw materials, in other words, primary goods; while others assumed the role of manufacturing producers. The former exports nature, the latter imports it. (Acosta, 2011, p. 85)

The transformation that the global economy underwent at the beginning of the twenty-first century represented a reorganization of this economic model. Romero et al. (2017) point out that current extractivism is characterized not only by the massive and scarcely processed appropriation and extraction of natural resources, but also because it operates from a network that allows it to simultaneously connect multiple scales in the production process. Extractivism, according to the authors, operates in territorial enclaves located in areas rich in natural resources, together with a transport network and energy supplies that allow the resource extraction site to be directly and autonomously connected, to speed up commercialization and exportation to international markets (Gudynas, 2009, in Romero et al., 2017, p. 232).

Gudynas emphasizes that extractivism refers to a method of appropriation rather than a method of production; that is, the removal of large volumes (or limited volumes) of unprocessed natural resources, which are export-oriented (Gudynas, in Svampa, 2019). Nowadays, we would find ourselves in a third and fourth generation extractivism, which would be characterized by the intensive use of water, energy and resources.

Svampa (2019), on the other hand, points out that since the end of the first decade of 2000, we are witnessing a new phase called neo-extractivism, which is characterized by acquiring new dimensions determined by the global scale of the projects, the national and transnational actors involved, and the emergence of great social resistance that began to question the advance of the “commodities consensus”, and to elaborate a narrative against dispossession, focused on the defense of values, such as land, territory, common goods and nature (Svampa, 2019). For the author, neo-extractivism is located at the center of the contemporary accumulation of capital, because – following the line of critical and ecological Marxism – its maintenance and reproduction requires an increasing number of raw materials and energy. This has been called the “second contradiction of capitalism”, alluding to the appropriation and destruction carried out by labor capital, infrastructure, urban space, nature and the environment (Svampa, 2019, p. 18).

Neo-extractivism is also related to the crisis of the modernity project and to the global economic crisis. The latter, based on the consequences generated by the neoliberal policies carried out from the 1990s onwards, which deepened social inequalities at the global level. These inequalities facilitated the installation of economic models focused on the intensive commodification of nature, which had the enthusiastic support of progressive governments in Latin America, who articulated a narrative of support and favored extractivism continuity, under the argument that it would be a possibility to advance in development and social rights (Svampa, 2019):

The update [of extractivism] in the 21st century brings new dimensions at different levels: global (hegemonic transition, expansion of the commodity frontier, depletion of non-renewable natural assets, socio-ecological crisis of planetary scope), regional and national (relationship between the extractive-exporter model, the nation-state and the collection of extraordinary income), territorial (intensive occupation of the territory); in short, political (emergence of a new oppositional political grammar, increase in state and parastatal violence). (p. 21)

In line with what has been stated so far, maintaining mining activity, one of the main pillars of the extractivist economy in Chile, entails action in three dimensions (Romero et al., 2017): (a) the constant exploration and exploitation of deposits to maintain competitiveness, (b) increased investment in technology to maintain low-cost production, and (c) the increasing production and accumulation of waste, which usually contains high levels of contamination due to the particulate matter it generates (Romero et al., 2017, p. 232).

A final important aspect is that neo-extractivism needs to be constantly sustained by the State through legislation, agreements and specific measures that guarantee the possibility of continuing to extract mineral despite the human, environmental and social costs. In mining, the role of the State has been key, precisely because it is

the one who has facilitated the transition from an extractivism carried out by a state company, to one led by large consortia and foreign capital.

As we mentioned earlier, the relationship between neo-extractive activities and labor mobility has been less explored. The existence of a relationship between the “capitalist world order” and the different expressions of migration as a mechanism of differentiation between workers – guest workers, migrant workers, posted workers, among others – (Castles, 2013) is a relatively dense topic in migration studies. Saskia Sassen, analyzed, for example, expressions of new “classes of serfdom” in global cities, made up of migrants and especially women (Sassen, 2003). Mezzadra (2012) showed the functional role of the illegalization of migration for contemporary capitalism and its class relationships. However, this relationship is relatively absent in the specific case of mining. In this regard, this text tries to make a contribution from a particular case, with specificities that do not necessarily enable its extrapolation, but that could open new lines of thought.

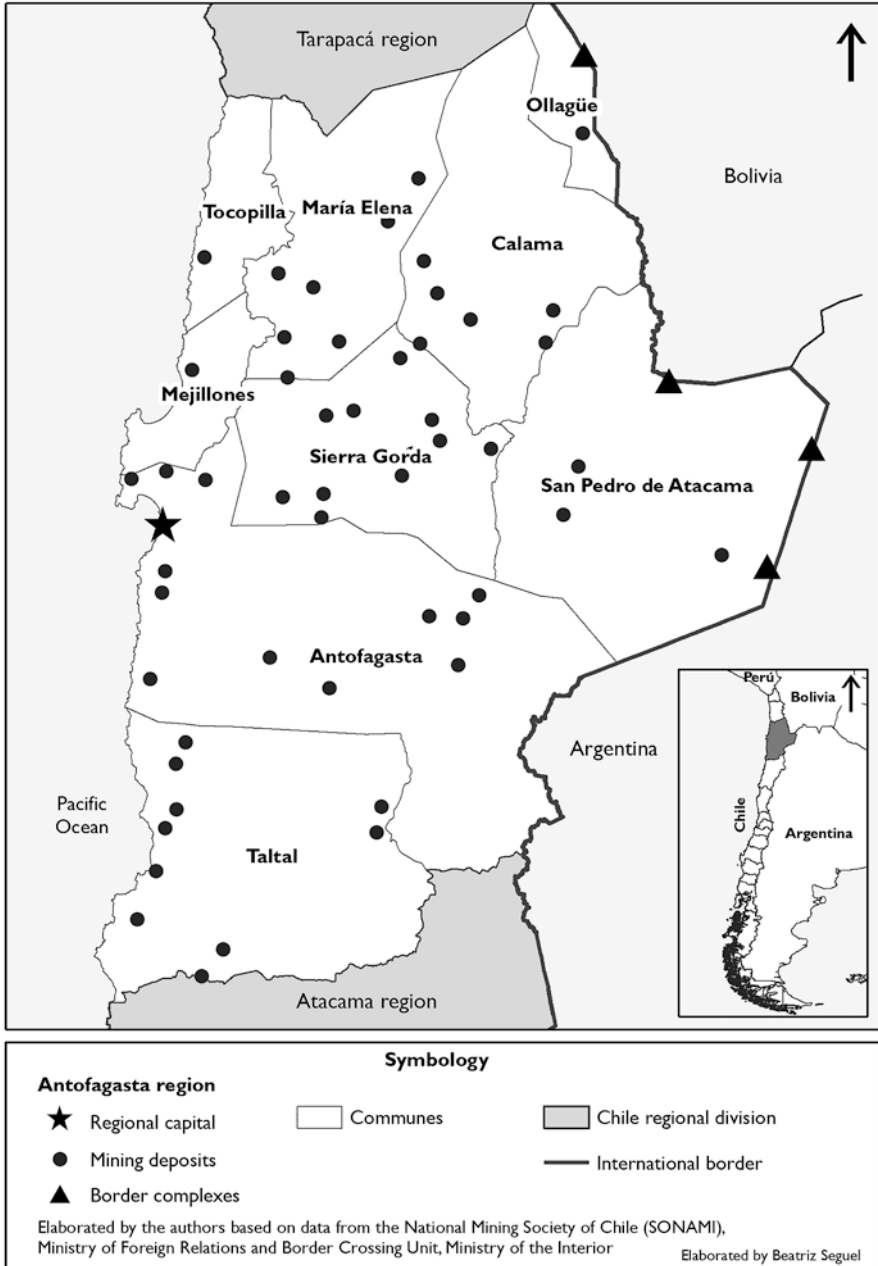
### 2.3 Antofagasta Region: The Centrality of Copper

The Antofagasta region is located in the north of Chile. To the north, it is limited by the Tarapacá region, to the south with the Atacama region, to the east with the department of Potosí in Bolivia and with the provinces of Jujuy, Salta and Catamarca of Argentina; and to the west with the Pacific Ocean. It has an area of 126,049 km<sup>2</sup> (16.7% of the national surface), which makes it the second largest region in the country. Administratively, it still maintains the same three provinces established by the Balmaceda government (1886–1891): Antofagasta, El Loa and Tocopilla, and nine municipalities: Antofagasta, Calama, Tocopilla, Mejillones, María Elena, Taltal, Sierra Gorda, San Pedro de Atacama and Ollagüe (Map in Fig. 2.1).

The region has 607,534 inhabitants (3.5% of the national total), of which 315,014 are men (51.9%) and 292,520 are women (48.1%). Of the total population, 94.1% reside in urban areas (Census 2017).

The settlement of the region began with Juan López in 1866, and the discovery of saltpeter (potassium nitrate), which favored the arrival of capital and workers. In 1868 the Bolivian government founded the city of Antofagasta, aiming to sustain the development of this activity. In 1870 the Caracoles mine was discovered, giving way to the period known as “the silver rush” and the consequent increase in population. Few years later, the Pacific War (1879–1883) determined the incorporation of the territories of Tarapacá and Antofagasta to Chilean sovereignty (GORE Antofagasta).

The region grew at the rate of the saltpeter boom. At the end of the nineteenth century, more than 60 saltpeter offices were in operation, attracting a growing number of workers from various parts of the country, Bolivia, Peru and further afield. All of them contributed to the city’s development, giving it a unique multicultural nature for the time (González, 2001). Various authors recognize the importance of Chinese, Croatian, English, Spanish and Bolivian immigrants (Rojas et al., 2013).



**Fig. 2.1** Antofagasta Region, administrative division and mining projects  
Elaborated by Beatriz Jaramillo for the FONDECYT project No.3190674

The end of the saltpeter cycle in the 1930s marked a period of impoverishment in this region (González, 2001); and although the Chuquicamata plant, owned by the *Chile Exploration Company* North American company was inaugurated in 1915, the results of its deposit took a few decades to become visible (GORE Antofagasta).

Therefore, the history of the Antofagasta region is marked by the exploitation of mineral resources (silver, saltpeter, copper and currently lithium), which have become the backbone of the development of the region and the country. Currently, Antofagasta is a leader in the production of copper, molybdenum, apatite, lithium carbonate and chloride, nitrates, anhydrous sodium sulfate and iodine (GORE Antofagasta).<sup>3</sup> According to the Report of the Oficina de Estudios y Políticas Agrarias (Agrarian Studies and Policies Office) (ODEPA for the words in Spanish),<sup>4</sup> based on data from the Central Bank, regional mining activity represented 52.6% of the region's GDP in 2019, and 49.6% of mining activity at the national level (ODEPA, 2019). Antofagasta contributes 9.7% of the national GDP (Table 2.1). According to the study carried out by Cademartori (2008), the foreign direct investment per inhabitant is one of the highest in the country, which added to the important share it has in national exports, generates a GDP per capita of 2.7 times the national average. The following table shows how mining, followed by construction and financial and business services, are the most relevant economic activities in the region.

**Table 2.1** Gross domestic product of the Antofagasta region, 2016

Activity	Regional GDP	Participation	Country GDP	Region/country
Agricultural-forestry	4	0.03%	4416	0.1%
Fishing	11	0.1%	622	1.7%
Mining	7401	52.6%	14,916	49.6%
Manufacturing industry	716	5.1%	14,907	4.8%
Electricity, gas, water and waste management	711	5.1%	3884	18.3%
Construction	1447	10.3%	9468	15.3%
Commerce, restaurants and hotels	506	3.6%	16,155	3.1%
Transport, information and communications	672	4.8%	12,097	5.6%
Financial and business services	1442	10.3%	22,112	6.5%
Housing and real estate services	299	2.1%	10,870	2.7%
Personal services	655	4.7%	16,667	3.9%
Public administration	216	1.5%	6812	3.2%
Total GDP	14,056	100%	145,363	9.7%

Source: ODEPA (2019)

Volumes at prices of the previous year chained, reference 2013; billions of pesos chained

<sup>3</sup> See Gobierno Regional de Antofagasta (2016).

<sup>4</sup> Oficina de Estudios y Políticas Agrarias (ODEPA) translated as Office of Agrarian Studies and Policies.

Mining has therefore been the engine of the regional (and national) economy; however, in the 1990s, the production model that had CODELCO as the privileged protagonist changed radically as a result of the entry of large private capital and multinationals, which managed to dramatically increase the production of the mineral. The change was caused by the policies to attract foreign capital, implemented during the dictatorship and consolidated during democratic governments, which generated extremely attractive conditions for foreign investment, specifically, the Constitutional Organic Law on Mining Concessions (1983); the Foreign Investment Statute (DL 600) and the Chilean Tax System (Cademartori, 2008). These regulations, together, allowed the granting of concessions for the indefinite exploitation of mining substances; established a tax invariance and left a series of legal loopholes that allowed companies to reduce the amount of taxes and thus optimize the profitability obtained. The result has been an increase in production in the hands of private capital: if in 1990 CODELCO generated 77% of the national copper production, in 2000 its production fell to 33%, despite the absolute increase in this company's production. In the same period, private production increased four times, and direct foreign investment went from US\$5000 million (1974–1989) to US\$11,000 million (1990–1998) (Cademartori, 2008, p. 95), showing the neo-extractivist nature of this activity.

Faced with this scenario of sustained growth, consequences have not always been positive for the inhabitants of Antofagasta. Most of these refer to the quality of life of the population and inequalities perceived by its inhabitants, which do not necessarily have to do with income levels. In fact, according to the CASEN 2017 survey, poverty level was one of the lowest in the country,<sup>5</sup> as was multidimensional poverty<sup>6</sup> (Table 2.2). Incidentally, the usual indicators show that Antofagasta is one of the least unequal regions of the country. The inequality index that shows the relationship between the income received by the 10% of households with the highest income, and that of the 10% with the lowest income, also places Antofagasta among the least unequal regions; it is the second in fact, with a value of 14.5, compared to 44.8 in Araucanía, the most unequal of all according to this indicator (Mieres Brevis, 2020).

**Table 2.2** Income and multidimensional poverty rates, Antofagasta, 2017

Territorial unit	Poverty measured by income	Multidimensional poverty
Municipality of Antofagasta	5.06	16.6
Antofagasta region	5.1	16.4
Country	8.6	20.7

Source: Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional de Chile (2020)

<sup>5</sup>Fourth place in the regions with the lowest percentage of poverty (1.6%).

<sup>6</sup>Second lowest, with 16.4%, after Magallanes (10.8%), compared to Araucanía (28.5%), the highest nationwide.



This development had strong social implications. One of the visible consequences are the environmental costs, which began to be denounced by civil society organizations, in line with one of the characteristics of neo-extractivism pointed out by Svampa (2019). One of the most critical aspects is the use of water by large-scale mining, in a region where water is extremely scarce. Another critical issue is the high and dangerous levels of pollution to which the population is exposed.

The National Institute of Human Rights (INDH) systematized the main environmental conflicts active in this region,<sup>7</sup> of which we highlight the effects that the forms of mineral storage have on the population. The sheds where it takes place are located in the center of the city, close to educational establishments, kindergartens and health centers. In 2013 the community began to warn about the presence of particulate matter with heavy metals. In 2011, a study demonstrated the high rates of cancer in the Antofagasta region, which double and, in some cases, triple the national average. Few years later the Medical College of Antofagasta, together with the Institute of Public Health, identified high levels of arsenic and lead in the blood of students in the sector.

Although these conflicts show that the environmental costs of this extractive economy affect the entire population, it is also true that, in many cases, the most vulnerable and unprotected population experiences them with greater force. In the region, this population tends to be concentrated in the informal settlements that have emerged in Antofagasta and Calama, inhabited by nationals and foreigners, who opt for these places due to the high cost of renting in the city (Centro de Investigación Social Techo Chile, 2015).

The growth of informal settlements exemplifies one of the paradoxes of this region: it has one of the highest income averages in the country, and yet, part of its population cannot afford living expenses. According to Contreras et al. (2019), the rental price of a house in the northern sector of the city (lower class) is US\$965, in the central area (middle class) US\$1590, and in the southern area (high class) US\$1469. The housing deficit and the high salaries associated with mining tend to generate a difficult to sustain price inflation for those who are not related to the mining industry; an issue that drives them to the margins of the city, to lands that are devalued for being close to garbage dumps and for not having urban facilities. These informal settlements are made up of light materials – although in some cases cement is used –, without a sewage system, drinking water or electricity. The SIIS-TMDS study indicates that 13.5% of people in this region live in households lacking basic services (similar to 14.1% at the national level), and 19.5% of households are overcrowded (in comparison with 15.3% nationwide). It is a reality that hits people's lives hard, leaving them exposed to high social vulnerability.

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<sup>7</sup> See: National Institute of Human Rights (2021).

## 2.4 Types of Migration in Antofagasta

The characteristics and forms of work associated with mining economy (whether state or privately) have generated various types of mobilities throughout the history of the region. In turn, this has left the traces of a social integration determined by factors such as nationality, ethnicity, skin color, social class and gender.

In this field work, accompanied by a literature review, the following types of mobilities were identified: internal migrants who came to live in Antofagasta; commuters who go to work in shifts while maintaining their residence of origin (be it professionals or operators); international immigrants from neighboring countries; emigrants leaving this region to live elsewhere, and international immigrants from the global north (Caucasian and skilled). In the next section we will refer to the first three, since they are the ones who most contribute to the mobility of people in the region.

### 2.4.1 *Internal Migration. The Historic Search for “El Dorado”*

As it has been pointed out, the Antofagasta region has been subject of historical migration, with both international and internal migration.<sup>8</sup> Internal migration dates back to the very origin of the city (Recabarren, 2016). Those who came to this region, actually, did so firstly attracted by the guano activity, then by the saltpeter boom (1880–1930), and later by copper mining. Both the saltpeter activity and the copper industry, even before the arrival of large private capital in the 1990s, operated under settlements known as company towns. This is a non-traditionally designed urban city, created by the company to concentrate capital and labor as much as possible; it includes: construction of houses, facilities for public use (schools and hospitals, among others) and industry, in the same territory where the extraction of the natural resource takes place (Garcés et al., 2010).

In 1915, the Chile Exploration Company founded the Chuquicamata mine, under this company town model. As the copper nationalization process was consolidated, Chuquicamata became part of the CODELCO state company, along with other mining sites such as El Salvador, Andina and Teniente. All these company towns became part of a centralized managed system under CODELCO (Garcés et al., 2010). The company towns maintained the hierarchical social division imposed in the time of “the gringos”, which was expressed urbanistically in sectors for supervisors, sectors for employees and others for workers. The nationalization of copper (1971 under Allende’s administration), a milestone in the country’s mining history, allowed foreigners (mostly North Americans) to be replaced in managerial positions by

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<sup>8</sup> Internal migration is defined as the movement of people within the borders of the same country and implies the establishment of a new residence, temporary or permanent (INE, 2020).

Chileans, many of whom were professionals from the central zone of the country. This did not alter the social organization of the company towns.

The migratory trajectory of Viviana's family (48 years old, daughter and ex-wife of a miner), currently living in Antofagasta and born in Chuquicamata, illustrates the processes described in literature on a micro-social scale. Her father, a crane operator in one of the mines, arrived from Ovalle (IV Region, Coquimbo), a city located about 950 km from Antofagasta, and her mother from Santiago (Metropolitan Region), located about 1300 km away:

He [his father] emigrated there [to the mining company, when it was owned by American capital], and then my mother and my father got married and the company gave him a house, for them and my brothers (...) They [their parents] met in Santiago, because the *Chuquicamatinos* [people from Chuquicamata], as we call them, had a very good economic situation because they earned a lot of money, so they traveled a lot. My mother lived in Santiago... and there, they met, in Santiago; and he married her and took her away, because that's the way it was back then; he took her away. (Viviana, internal migrant, 2021)

After the closure of the Chuquicamata company town in 2007, the family moved to the neighboring city of Calama – as happened with a large part of the mine workers<sup>9</sup> – and later came to live in Antofagasta; then they migrated again to Santiago, to return to Antofagasta some years later.

Viviana's quote highlights two relevant topics: on one hand, the generalized perception regarding the high income of mining workers, and on the other, the way in which gender marked (and still marks) an unequal and stereotyped inclusion in the social structure of this mining region. Pedro is another internal migrant who currently resides in Antofagasta, son and grandson of miners, and worker in a contractor company that provides services to a mining company. He brings to this story another relevant aspect of the specificity of the relationship of women with the mining economy. He remembers that until the early 1970s, compensation was paid for children, a relevant element in the construction of what Pavez (2016) calls the marriage and family contract of mining:

Something that was maintained at that time [of the nationalization of copper], and later was removed in the military government of the dictatorship, is that the gringos, regarding the workers' wives, paid more wages to the workers of the company, why? Because they paid [the women] to give birth; the more children the women had, the more compensation they gave them... Our mothers earned more money than the workers themselves. (Pedro, 63 years old, internal migrant, mining contractor worker, 2021)

Pedro's family has an internal migration trajectory that is similar to Viviana's. He was born in Coquimbo – 880 kilometers from Antofagasta – where his father was a native, who migrated to Chuquicamata, and work as an operator in the mills, a phase of the mineral production process. Pedro describes this hierarchical social landscape of the company town in times of 'the gringos' – a hierarchy that, although determined by the role in the class relationships, coincided in certain aspects with

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<sup>9</sup>CODELCO built entire towns for the transfer of families from Chuquicamata to the neighboring city of Calama.

the distinction between “white” international migrants who held supervisory positions and national employees and workers:

The main ones were the Americans, in those days the American Exploration Company; then, there was the American sector [inside the company town], that’s where they lived; the employee sector, where the Chilean supervisors lived, where my grandfather lived, and another sector where the Chilean employees lived, they were called the *‘fundidos’*, which was where the workers lived. At the same time, they had an American market, where the ABCI went to buy, a grocery store [type] 1 for the ones that followed in rank; a grocery store [type] 2 for the employees, and a grocery store [type] 3, for the common people. (Pedro, 2021)

However, the level of attraction of internal migrants has changed in recent decades, as a result of changes in the organization of work. This has facilitated commutative type movements, as it will be analyzed in the next section. In addition, this change also responds to the high cost of living in the city (Aroca & Atienza, 2008; Stefoni et al., 2017) and, to the consequences that the extractivist activity has on the natural and social landscape of the city, which have made Antofagasta an unattractive place to reside on a regular basis (Rodrigo & Atienza, 2014). The consequences of the mining activity on the health of the people who reside in the surrounding areas is one marker of this. Viviana, for example, blames the contamination of the city for his son Asperger’s syndrome, –she lives in front of a shed in which extracted mineral is stockpiled. She also claims that both her in-laws, who lived in front of a refinery, died of lung cancer.

The available data show that although the region has been gaining proportional weight over the total national population from the 1970s onwards, Antofagasta is one of the main population-expelling regions in terms of recent internal migration (in the last 5 years). As can be seen in Table 2.3, based on data from the 2017 census, the Antofagasta is the region with the highest negative net migration rate in the entire country (–11.4); in other words, it is the one with the least attractive internal migration (INE, 2020). In the previous census (2002), its net migration rate was instead positive, but only slightly above 0.

The low attractiveness of Antofagasta for the national population allowed to introduce two types of migration that we have already mentioned: commuters and international migrations, both that will be discussed in the next sections.

#### 2.4.2 *Commuting. Work in One City and Live in another*

In the 1990s there was a shift in regional mining activity that ended with the company town model, which materialized in the closure of the Chuquicamata camp and the transfer of its population to Calama, located in the same region. The arrival of international capital introduced a new form of labor organization, known as mining camps system, inspired by the principle of economic efficiency, which externalizes the costs of labor reproduction. The company builds rooms for their workers and provides services, such as, food and other basic supplies. This figure favored the

**Table 2.3** Recent internal migration among regions of Chile, 2017

Region	Immigration rate	Emigration rate	Net migration
Tarapacá	17.88	26.50	-8.62
Antofagasta	15.43	26.85	-11.42
Atacama	15.02	23.43	-8.41
Coquimbo	20.17	12.40	7.77
Valparaíso	16.82	11.67	5.15
Libertador General Bernardo O'Higgins	15.55	12.52	3.03
Maule	14.07	10.34	3.73
Biobío	11.11	11.19	-0.08
La Araucanía	15.84	12.84	3.00
Los Lagos	14.45	13.00	1.45
Aysén del General Carlos Ibáñez del Campo	25.58	25.83	-0.25
Magallanes y de la Antártica Chilena	24.72	25.14	-0.42
Metropolitana de Santiago	7.54	9.79	-2.25
Los Ríos	20.68	17.82	2.85
Arica y Parinacota	20.01	20.15	-0.14
Ñuble	16.07	14.26	1.81

Source: MIALC database, Celade-CEPAL

Note: The unknown, resident abroad for 5 years, resident abroad and not applicable categories were excluded. Children under the age of 5 were also excluded

increase in commuters: people who work in the mining companies installed in the region, but who maintain their families and their habitual residence in places other than the one where they work (Rivera, *n.d.*; Rodrigo & Atienza, 2014). The private sector also provides housing for supervisors and high-income workers.

According to Aroca, by the mid-2000s, the Antofagasta region had the highest rate of commuters in the country, which meant that about 10% of the region's workforce resided in other regions, and, of these, 73% came from distant places more than 800 km away (Aroca & Atienza, 2008). According to the 2002 census, the region received 16,517 workers residing in other regions (Aroca & Atienza, 2008, p. 102). The reception of commuters, related to mining activities, is a process that characterizes the northern regions of the country. Antofagasta in particular has high levels of specialization in three sectors: mining, construction, and financial and technical services. These last two activities, as the authors point out, are closely related to mining; these three together represented almost 75% of the commuters arriving in Antofagasta (Aroca & Atienza, 2008, p. 112), confirming the close relationship of this form of mobility related to mining extractivism in the area.

A more recent study revealed that the proportion of commuters in the region reached 16% in 2017 (Paredes et al., 2018). In addition, this study showed that commuting workers, hired under the FIFO-DIDO modalities (Fly-in/Fly-out, Drive-in/

Drive-out),<sup>10</sup> have higher salaries than those who reside in the region; they earn 8.6% more specifically.

This type of mobility is closely related, as we mentioned, with new work modalities in the mining sector, replacing the company town with the shift system, implemented massively since 2006 (Stefoni et al., 2017): 4 days off and 4 days in, or 7 days off and 22 days in, these are some of the ways in which these shifts are organized (Aroca & Atienza, 2008), and, in some way, this can be one of the profiles that neo-extractivism adopted regarding human resources. As a group leader in a contractor company that offers maintenance to the tracks of the ore transportation train-rail, Pedro closely knows the reasons and implications that this new workstyle brings. Half of the employees he works with live in other regions, he says, and he describes the reasons behind this life decision:

In my opinion, (...) it would be more comfortable for me to have seven days off to go to my home, to be with my family, where I have more peace of mind than here in Antofagasta. For example, in the IV Region, if I lived in La Serena, Ovalle, Coquimbo, I would have a better quality of life than I have here in Antofagasta. Why? Because of food cost, housing costs and other things one may be tempted with; the famous beerhouses, things that happen in Calama, things that happen here in Antofagasta; so, one prefers, from my point of view, to be with the family, enjoying the days off, and well; when the time comes to go back to my shift, I leave at night that day, I have to be at 9 PM at my job. What does workers do? He gets on a flight at 12 PM midday, at 2 PM he is at the airport, at 5 PM they take him up to the camp, he goes to work, on Monday or Tuesday, when he finishes on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, he leaves early, takes a flight at 12 PM and at 2 PM he is at home with his family again. (Pedro, 2021)

One of the participants of a focus group carried out in Calama (Stefoni et al., 2017) also reported on this process, and added a key aspect to understand the differentiated forms of integration in regional society according to the types of migration: the executives and supervisors, that is, the highest segments within the CODELCO organization – the case to which the testimony refers-, come from Santiago or from other regions of the center and south of the country:

A large part of the executives, I would dare to say 100% of our supervisors, do not live in Calama, they live in Santiago, La Serena, Concepción... They do not spend any of their salary here in Calama. They leave absolutely nothing in Calama. They emigrate, they leave, and of all that money they generate in the region, they don't spend it here, they only spend on food, which is subsidized by the company. (Focus group participant, Calama discussion, 2016)

Another aspect that emerges from this quote is that this commuter population, although it benefits from copper extraction, does not spend resources in the city where they work, a fact verified and studied by researchers on the subject: “Interregional commutation, unlike migration, has a weak economic impact on destination cities, since most of the demand for goods and services from commuters is made in the place of residence, and not in the place of work” (Aroca & Atienza, 2007).

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<sup>10</sup>Form of hiring long-distance workers who are transported by plane to distant mineral extraction areas, where they work in shifts, to return to their usual place of residence, in a different region. In the case of the DIDO mode, the transport is carried out by land.

This kind of migrants, according to what the qualitative evidence shows, is mostly national and male, a trait that generally characterizes mining activity, despite the fact that in recent times there has been a greater incorporation of women, generally considered “reproductive” within the mining field (Pavez, 2016). Although they have higher incomes than local workers, they do not necessarily constitute a homogeneous group. There are differences between the personnel hired directly by the mining companies, and those employed by the contractors that provide services to them. Likewise, there are differences between various levels of specialization and training: “Operators arrive, second-order employees, they are just another worker, we have everything, technicians, engineers, and operators”, explains Pedro, describing this heterogeneity. He also points out that, given the automation of many tasks, the hiring of maintenance technicians for various machinery has been prioritized. The independent contractor, in general, performs the work that the worker that depends directly on the mining company cannot:

The work that the contractor staff does, is the one that the plant staff [of the mining company] does not..., the contractor personnel come through bids, for example for the maintenance of the sulfide plant, so, it is quite risky, given the level of contamination that exists in the sulfide plant... Obviously, local companies from the region enter the biddings, but mostly from the Metropolitan Region, or large regions such as Concepción; who apply for large bids... And they, due to their origin from Santiago, will privilege hiring people from Santiago (...). They maintain their staff, their organization chart, and when there is a lack of people to do the “dirty work,” they come and publish [the job vacancy here] ...; there, they publish for the people they need, only accepting a limited number, and when they get their team, they arrive and they start to work.

In the case of the workers we also have a scale, because we have the engineers, who have a salary more or less equivalent to that of the client company. Then comes a guy who is the senior worker, the one who dominates all the work, who has a number of people in charge, also his salary is more or less good in relation to the others, and almost similar to what the workers of the client company earn. Then comes the foreman, who earns a little less, about 2 million, depending on the company and the work they are doing. Then come the operators, who do not earn so much money, a million and a half, a million eight. (Pedro, 2021)

In one of the fragments of Pedro’s interview, cited above, there was a topic that has been highlighted in the literature on the social mining landscape of Antofagasta (Salinas & Barrientos, 2011; Pavez, 2016): the beerhouses, night clubs, and in more general terms, sex work, which in these territories is also significantly linked to mining activity. Although we do not intend to delve into this topic, it is interesting to briefly address sex work in the context of mining activity, as it allows us to understand another way in which gender affects unequal integration in the region and the city. In addition, because it is related to international migratory movements, in line with the increase in the participation of foreign women in sex work (Pavez, 2016). Lastly, because it is possible to notice the elements that contribute to the construction of representations around the lifestyle of those who receive very high salaries in this sector. Regarding this last point, Mercedes (Dominican migrant) and Pamela (Colombian migrant), both nightclub workers before the pandemic, provide



testimonies that contribute to describe the profile of commuting workers who arrive at Antofagasta:

Most of them were commuters... most of them Chilean, some other foreigners, Bolivians, Colombians, Dominicans (...). Most of them worked in the Escondida Mine, on machines, none were from the underground mine, no; almost all of them worked with machinery, and foreigners, Bolivians and Colombians, who work with food, things like that, restaurants... Most are people who handle money, because a lot of money is spent on these things, almost all of them are economically stable people, who spend a million pesos in one night... On a night with a woman, that woman calls another, he spends a million pesos... One million [US\$1,470], some of them 300 (thousand) [US\$730], others 600 (thousand) [US\$822], it depends on how expensive the place is, where it is located, how expensive the drinks are, sharing the private, those things... Especially with the fortnight payment or end of the month, the 30th... Most were commuters, from Iquique, Copiapó, many from Santiago". (Mercedes, 30 years old, Dominican migrant)

Most of them are miners who live in other places, and/or work here only certain days of the month, and for most of them it is about recreation... Mostly, the ones that really pay for the women, so to speak, are Chilean, the Colombian foreigners come to the clubs to spend just a little money, they only go to watch... They worked in heavy machinery, managing heavy machinery, others rented heavy machinery to a certain mining company (...) In earnings, I was doing very well, in one night I made 380 thousand pesos [US\$520] for me, from 11 PM to 3 AM. For the club, from the client I was with, it was about 5 or 6 million pesos [between US\$6,849 and US\$8,219], from a single client with a [credit] card... Most of them went to spend, it was a very good economy. (Pamela, 24 years old, Colombian)

### 2.4.3 *International Migration, the “Chilean Dream”*

Although, as we saw in previous sections, the projected image of Antofagasta operates by favoring the replacement of internal migration by commutation, to the extent that the city and the region are not perceived as propitious spaces to reside regularly, something different happens with international migration, at least according to the empirical evidence collected. For international migrants who have arrived in recent decades, Antofagasta appears as a desired destination, where they can obtain high incomes, which undoubtedly acts as an element of attraction, although most of this population is not directly employed in positions related to mining:<sup>11</sup>

So, from experience, I can tell you that, more or less, within mining, we are talking about salaries of \$1,300,000, \$1,400,000 [between US\$1,780 and US\$1,917] and more, and there is no limit (...), if we see it within the population, only 15% of the local population that is settled in Antofagasta works in mining, the others work in public services, private services

<sup>11</sup>According to data from the Internal Revenue Service (SII) for 2019, most of the total workers were employed in construction companies (17.5%), dedicated to administrative and support services activities (12.1%), education (10.7%), wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (10%); manufacturing industry (9.7%); transportation and storage (7.9%); accommodation and food service (6.7%), and lastly, mining and quarrying (5.4%). It is clear that several of these items, however, are indirectly related to the mining activity.



within the city, in other types of companies, even in the sea, but the percentage that really receives that millionaire salary is very small... Exactly, that is the problem, the average of everything rises, so what do you do? It [the salary average] is calculated based on that, and everyone thinks that here we earn millions, and raise prices, they raise the house mortgages, (...), then, it's like a pressure cooker. (Group interview with officials of the House of Diversity, Municipality of Antofagasta, 2016)

The oldest available census records reveal the historical presence of international immigrants (Table 2.4), which in its beginnings was much more diverse in terms of the continents of origin. On the other hand, according to the latest censuses, the migrants come mainly from South America, and between 1930 and 1952, there was a presence of Europeans, Asians and North Americans, who represented a quarter of the international migrant population. The persistent presence of the Bolivian

**Table 2.4** International migrant population of the Antofagasta region, 1930–2017

Census	Total population	Total foreigners <sup>a</sup>	% foreigners (of total population)	Main nationalities or countries of birth (% of the total number of foreigners)
1930	178,765	11,729	6.6	Bolivian (39%), Spanish (8%), English (6%), Argentinian (6%), German (5%)
1940	145,147	6424	4.4	Bolivian (41%), Yugoslav <sup>a</sup> (10%), Spanish (7%), Chinese (5%), Japanese (3%)
1952	184,824	5268	2.9	Bolivia (40%), Yugoslavia <sup>a</sup> (11%), Spain (7%), USA (7%), Argentina (6%)
1970	221,751	1109	0.5	Not specified
1982	302,475	1489	0.5	Not specified
1992	408,874	3019	0.7	Bolivian (45%), Argentinian (20%), Peruvian (6), Brazilian (4%), Spanish (4%)
2002	481,931	5860	1.2	Bolivian (40%), Argentinian (16%), Peruvian (15%), Ecuadorian (5%), Brazilian (4%)
2017	607,534	62,663	10.3	Bolivian (38%), Colombian (31%), Peruvian (18%), Argentinian (3%), Ecuadorian (3%)

Source: Official publications of the results of the 1930, 1940, 1952, 1970 and 1982 population censuses. Special processing of the census databases available on the INE website, 1992 and 2002 censuses

Notes: 1952 corresponds to country of birth and not nationality. It includes a small number (around 100) of nationals. 1970: Population 5 years of age and older. Recent migrants (arrived within the 5 years prior to the census), according to habitual residence in 1970. 1982: Population 5 years of age and older. Recent migrants (arrived within the 5 years prior to the census), according to habitual residence in 1977. 1992 and 2002: The total population corresponds to habitual residents

<sup>a</sup>The historical presence of the Croatian community in the region is known, so it is striking that it does not appear in the table. It is likely that most of the people listed as Yugoslavs are actually Croats, but were registered with their nationality or official country of origin, prior to the independence of Croatia (Zlatar, 2002)

population also stands out, around 40% throughout the years, which is related to the bordering nature of this country, and the ethno-national ties linked to the fact that Antofagasta corresponds to a territory that, before to the Pacific War, belonged to Bolivia.

The information in Table 2.4 must be interpreted with caution, since it is not a strictly comparable series per se: the data corresponding to the 1970 and 1982 censuses refer to recent migration; that is, it occurred in the last 5 years, which is why these figures are significantly lower. Even so, it is possible to make some general remarks: the way that the proportion of international migrants decreased between 1930 and 1952, which could be associated with the end of the saltpeter cycle; and, on the other hand, the remarkable growth of the last decades, particularly since the 1990s, a date that coincides with the reforms that allowed the entry of large international capital, for example.

Indeed, the international migrant population has grown significantly in the last two decades: 77.6% of habitual residents declared that they had arrived between 2010–2017, and 15.9% between 2000–2009 (INE, 2018). The growth is unquestionable: 327% between 2005 and 2014, according to estimates by the DEM and the INE, reaching 8236 people in 2014 (DEM, 2016) and 62,663 in 2017 (2017 census); in other words, a growth of 222% in the span of 3 years (2014–2017) (INE, 2018).

In addition to this increase, there has been a relevant change in the national composition of the international migrant population: migrants usually came from Bolivia, but the 2017 census showed the notable growth of the population from Colombian, which represented 1.6% in 2005, and then became the second most common source of international migrants, with 30.7% of the total, following Bolivia (38.4%) and over Peru (17.8%). This is a population group with a greater presence of women: 53% compared to 47% of men (data calculated by the authors based on the INE's online database), which is preferably inserted in the commerce and services sector.

There are a series of factors that affect the precarious insertion of these migrants: the inflation that the mining economy causes in the city's cost of living (Stefoni et al., 2017), an immigration legislation that pushes them into irregularity or makes their regularization difficult – condemning them to long periods of temporary immigration status – and strong discrimination and racism towards these groups. This is materialized in complex conditions of habitability (abusive leases and self-construction in land takeovers – informal settlements – where conditions are extremely precarious), fluctuating work trajectories marked by abuse in working conditions, and ethno-racial discrimination, which also acquires specificities in the case of Afro-descendant women.

There is, in fact, a notable difference in the insertion of old international migrants (of European origin) and current ones (of Latin American origin):

The first generations of migration here in Antofagasta were, in a certain way, these first-class migrants, so to speak, mainly people who came with another economic situation and who developed jobs, developed industries here in the city. However, there were also many Bolivians and Peruvians who were employed in the industry. But today we have a greater

number of people who are interested... in commerce, in retail. (Member of pro-migrant social organization, 2016)

Although this ancient immigration is not the subject of this article, its mention is necessary because it shows, on one hand, the close historical relationship between migration and the extractivist economy. On the other hand, it reveals the persistence of the articulation of labor insertion processes in these activities, with the colonial matrix, resulting in a hierarchical classification of the population based on its national origin and the ethno-racial construction to which it is subjected, in addition, the sex-gender construction and mining work has had traditionally a male and white-national profile. The previous quote alludes precisely to that hierarchical structure of the city's first migrants: Croats, Spanish, English, Italians, Germans, French and Americans, on one side, and Bolivians in the other. The latter, in addition, were the original population of the territory that later belong to the Chilean State after the Pacific War Pacific. The Bolivians were afterward joined mainly by Peruvians and Colombians, and Venezuelans in the most recent period – which is why they do not appear in the data records. That differentiating structure persists to this day.

The few international migrants who are inserted in tasks more closely linked to mining, which are those who have a devaluing ethno-racial mark in this colonial matrix, work as operators in unskilled positions and, consequently, are worse paid:

—¿Do you work directly in the mineral extraction?

—Not in the extraction, but we are installing some fans, so that... to oxygenate, yes, so that there are better conditions; to be able to breathe, ventilation, all the oxygen.

—Sure... how did you specialize in that type of task?

—Look, I don't consider myself a master, because most of them are technicians. What happens is that, after this job, when I worked with the Spanish, I think they called me more because they saw that the technicians, all those who did the assembly, uh, there was someone missing to supply them with the tools, and for that you need someone who walks a lot, a walker, to go there, to come here. Then I got to work with some Koreans. (...) And the Koreans too, they were dedicated to building the thermoelectric. (José, 52 years old, Peruvian migrant living in camp, 2019).

This qualitative description has its correlation, for example, in the wage gap that exists between migrants from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, and migrants from other countries of origin: based on data from the CASEN 2015 survey, it was calculated that, in Antofagasta, the former have an average salary of 3,444,909 Chilean pesos [US\$3445], while the latter of 378,101 pesos [US\$518]. Alternatively, national workers receive an average salary of 597,936 pesos [US\$819] (Fundación Casa de la Paz, 2018).

This “unfavorable” intersection of foreignness, ethno-nationality, social class and skin color, which are structural conditioning factors in unequal insertion in the destination society, is mainly materialized in a problematic chain that links the difficulty to regularize immigration status, with the difficulty in getting a job. One of the consequences of this is the difficulty of finding a place to live, which translates into renting under abusive conditions and, as a consequence, displacement to the informal settlements to solve this housing problem through self-construction. This

chain characterizes recent migratory trajectories; and the fact that the destination society constitutes a mining enclave, plays a significant role in these trajectories, because it acts as an attractive factor, and because of the inflation of the cost of living in these territories:

And they always have the... philosophy, the idea that this is a... mining area, and everyone earns a lot of money. It's like... 'everyone earns a lot of money, they pay a lot', when they don't, no... not all the population works in the mining area. Very few of those who work in the mining area are from here. (...) So... not everyone earns the same, there are people who work and earn the minimum, and to rent a room here, a small room, uh... they charge you 120... 150 thousand pesos, and you earn 300... which is what a person normally earns... so... uh... people are tired of that, of the abuses in the leases. And what do people choose to do? Go to the camps". (Rubén, 48 years old, Colombian migrant living in the camp, 2019)

The intricate relationship between the complexities of accessing a legal immigration status and the difficulty of getting a job, if you do not have a permanent residence visa, is another critical aspect that marks these trajectories, and one that has been persistently mentioned in the literature. The vicious visa-contract circle, which determines a precarious insertion in the job market, added to the high cost of housing in Antofagasta, has led to the displacement of many of these migrants to the informal settlements. It is true that this situation does not exclusively affect the migrant population (59.8% of the residents in city camps were international migrants, according to the Regional Land Registry of Camps, 2015); however, aspects related to the condition of foreigners exacerbate the problems that derive from this housing decision, which in recent years has generated a very significant increase in the population living in these settlements (Table 2.5).

Ethno-national and racial discrimination also affect this process, because as we have found in the studies considered for this article, there are many testimonies from migrants, especially Afro-Colombians, who have been denied rent precisely because of their origin.

Among the various problems that living in camps implies – difficulties in accessing basic services, poor connectivity with the rest of the city and lack of urban infrastructure, among others –, one of the most pressing is the fear of eviction:

That is what they tell us, because the camps must disappear... So, our children, who have grown up, who have lived the eviction with us, they say: 'Are they going to evict us? I don't want to leave here, because I have my friends here, I can go out to play with my friends, we play soccer'. This is the only worrying thing we have in the camp. I think I don't sleep well, like peacefully, when the government says eviction, when the government says that we are in a risky zone, that there is no way of mitigation. (Elena, 46 years old, Bolivian migrant resident in camp, 2019)

**Table 2.5** Camps and families in the Antofagasta region, 2011–2018

Year	2011	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Camps	28	28	29	55	56	60	59
Families	1061	1146	1276	4100	6229	6771	6831

Source: Centro de Investigación Social Techo Chile (2018)

We also mentioned that the sex-gender dimension produces specific materializations of this unequal insertion of migrants in the territory. This situation especially affects Afro-descendant women, and in particular Colombian women, in a complex network with foreignness, nationality, skin color and class. The literature has exposed numerous evidences of this social process (Méndez et al., 2012; Tijoux & Palominos, 2015; Pavez, 2016).

## 2.5 Closing Words

By approaching migrations from the point of view of mining extractivism, we became aware of the different movements of people that have occurred throughout the history of Antofagasta, and we were able to understand the relationship that each of them has with its main economic activity, mining. This more comprehensive view of mobility allowed us, in turn, to understand the different positions that these different groups occupy in the social hierarchy of Antofagasta, as well as that of other smaller cities within this region. Thus, the class, ethnic-national and gender structure, together with the racialization processes, sustain the social inequality that characterizes the region (and the other regions of the country, with their specific expressions), forcing us to question the role that public policies have had in reversing their persistence.

The centrality of the extractivist economy has benefited from these inequalities, and in many ways, has contributed to their perpetuation. Although it is true that Antofagasta is the region with the highest national income, its development has been sustained on the differentiated forms of social and labor insertion of its inhabitants, and, among these differences, migration has acted as a relevant factor, with different senses, according to national origin and other hierarchical markers.

Although there are demographic and territorial specificities that would require the collection of empirical evidence from other scenarios to advance structural claims about certain aspects of the relationship between mobilities and mining extractivism; it is possible to argue that these extractive production areas emerge as strategic sites for the analysis of the complex assemblages between different types of mobilities and inequalities, in addition to their historical variations, which is a line of work that would be important to continue developing.

There are other mobilities that were not addressed in this study; for example, the emigration that occurs from this region to other parts of the country, or the emigration from rural locations in the *altiplano*, as a result of water scarcity due to mining activity. These other mobilities also need to be studied, regarding the extractivist economy and its migratory chain.

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**Carolina Stefoni** holds a Master in Cultural Studies from the University of Birmingham and a doctoral degree from the University Alberto Hurtado in Chile. She is currently a Researcher at the *Centro de Sociedad Tecnológica y Futuro Humano* of the Universidad Mayor in Santiago. She is also research associate at the *Centro de Estudios sobre Conflicto Social (COES)*. She has published extensively on migrations, gender and public policies in Chile. She is a researcher at Universidad de Tarapacá-Chile. She is also research associate at the Center for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies(COES). She has published extensively on migration, gender, and public policies in Chile.

**Fernanda Stang** has a doctor degree in Social Studies from the University of Cordoba in Argentina. She is a researcher at the Center on Social Sciences and Youth (CISJU) at the *Universidad Católica Silvia Henríquez*. She is part of the research group on “Migration, Precarity and Citizenship” (N. 3190674) in Chile.

**Pablo Rojas** holds an MA in Social Psychology. He is a human right activist, union leader and member of the NGO Fractal. He has several publications in issues such as sexual work, housing and the city, community work and the student movement in Chile.

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