

Interrogating green discourses in Patagonia-Aysén (Chile): green grabbing and eco-extractivism as a new strategy of capitalism?

Este texto propone que en Patagonia-Aysén (sur de Chile) los discursos de la naturaleza y neoliberalismo tienen una asociación estrecha. El actual discurso del desarrollo de tipo “verde” se presenta como una práctica capitalista, una renovada forma de colonización que crea una narrativa en torno a la necesidad de proteger este entorno prístino porque es una “Reserva de Vida”. Para explorar más a fondo estos complejos procesos, el artículo presenta el trabajo de campo realizado entre los años 2017 y 2019 en los municipios de Tortel y O'Higgins. A través de un extenso trabajo de campo que consideró entrevistas y análisis del Conservador de Bienes Raíces (CBR) de la región, investigamos la evolución de los derechos de propiedad privada en ambos municipios durante un período de 29 años (1989-2017) con el fin de ilustrar los cambios en la propiedad de la tierra que se habían producido. En este sentido, se propone el concepto de eco-extractivismo para distinguirlo como un proceso de *Green Grabbing* por parte de los inversionistas extractivistas en Patagonia-Aysén.

Palabras clave: Patagonia-Aysén; discursos de la naturaleza; conservación de la naturaleza; neoliberalismo; eco-extractivismo.

Abstract

This paper argues that in Patagonia-Aysén (Southern Chile) nature discourses and neoliberalism have a close association. The current discourse of “green” development is presented as a capitalist practice, a renewed form of colonization that creates a narrative around the need to protect this pristine environment because it is a “Reserve of Life”. To explore these complex processes further the paper presents fieldwork undertaken from 2017 to 2019 in the municipalities of Tortel and O'Higgins. Through extensive fieldwork that encompassed interviews and analysis of the Land Registry (Conservadores de Bienes Raíces, or CBR) of the region, we investigated the evolution of private property rights in both municipalities over a period of 29 years (1989-2017) in order to illustrate the changes in land ownership that had occurred. The paper puts forward the concept of eco-extractivism, in order to identify green grabbing processes undertaken by extractivist investors in Patagonia-Aysén. Keywords: Patagonia-Aysén; discourses of nature; nature conservation; neoliberalism; eco-extractivism.

1. Introduction

Green discourses emerged in Chile as part of a change in the practices of corporate capitalism during the 1990s, in which the function of the natural world was no longer merely to be exploited, but instead became a new strategy of accumulation for capital (Kopnina 2017; Liverman and Vilas 2006) or “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2014), similar to other

areas of the world in the 1970s and 80s. Here, nature is understood as a potential source of investment that needs to be privatized on distinct scales in order to be economically valued and transacted on the global market (Ahlborg and Nightingale 2018, Bakker 2010; Katz 1998). Behind this shift in the capitalist economic model, new concepts, practices, spatial interventions and emerging discourses based on the environmental market and services, came into existence as part of the driving forces of development (Bassett and Gautier, 2014; Liverman 2004). Other actors also formed part of this process such as environmental groups, consumers (e.g. eco-tourists), transnational corporations and institutions; all relevant entities in the (re)production of a global environmental discourse that would transform not only the human-nature relationship but also the political economies of all countries, and most especially those categorized as emerging markets (Liverman 2004; McAfee 2016). By the end of the 20th century, then, the protection and conservation of the environment were no longer practices incompatible with economic growth.

Having long been considered a territory for agricultural exploitation and colonization by the Chilean state, akin to geographical imaginaries associated with western regions of the US or *Far West*, more recent socio-cultural constructions of the Patagonia-Aysén region in southern Chile have changed markedly. From the 1990s onwards, the region began to be linked more frequently with conservation, preservation and protection of the environment. An image of the “intemperate rainforest”, as Bruce Braun (2002) called it, was re-appropriated by colonial discourses but this time with the objective of purifying its nature, framing Patagonia-Aysén as a “pristine” landscape that required preservation (Jazeel 2014). In this way, the forest, once perceived as useless and unusable given its incompatibility with agricultural conquest, gradually came to be a fundamental tool in a new discourse of development. Furthermore, the regional government of the Patagonia-Aysén region began to be promoted under the slogan, *Aysén, Reserva de Vida* (Aysén, Reserve of Life), making explicit the move away from the logics of extraction and exploitation of natural resources, which until recently, was a platform and characteristic inherent to Chilean neoliberalism established from the start of the military dictatorship (Aliste et al. 2018).

Since then, there have been a growing number of contributions on the topic from geographers who have applied a political ecology or postcolonial perspective, to critically interrogate the discursive framings of territories for development and conservation. These have critically examined political-economic structures, power relations and/or property rights (Ahlborg and Nightingale 2018; Dauvergne 2016; Dempsey 2016; Harvey 2014; Heynen and Robbins 2005; Holmes 2015; Holmes and Cavanagh 2016; Huggan and Tiffin 2007; Liverman and Vilas 2006;

Nixon 2015; Robbins 2012). A significant challenge that remains in these debates, however, relates to ways of overcoming binary understandings of society-nature that are used to explain interactions with neoliberal transformations of recent decades. Moreover, it is essential to broaden the discussion around the commodification of nature by considering it as a heterogeneous phenomenon, highly dependent on the specific historical-geographical context, as is the reinterpretation of the concept of environmental governance during this process (Bakker 2010; Bassett and Gautier 2014; Hinchliffe 2008, Kopnina 2017; Büscher, Dressler and Fletcher 2014; Liverman and Vilas 2006).

Finally, and of particular relevance to the research presented here, the parallels and tensions between ‘neoliberalism’ and ‘environmentalism’ as ideological discourses (McCarthy and Prudham 2004) still need to be explored in more depth. As Holmes (2014) points out, in recent years research has emerged within geography that aims to explore the ‘neoliberalization of nature.’ Some of these explore liberal conservation as a display of the logic and tools of free market capitalism to save nature. Neoliberal conservation and green utopias have received multiple criticisms regarding their arrogance, inefficiencies in the conservation of biodiversity, and the facilitation of land grabbing or other similar processes by powerful actors, among others (Büscher et al 2012; Holmes 2014; Tecklin & Sepúlveda 2014; Dauvergne 2016; Dempsey 2016; Hora et al. 2018; De Matheus et al. 2018; Aliste et al.2018).

Following the work of Larsen (2015), we contribute to these debates through the example of Patagonia, identifying its status as a post-frontier territory that coexists with processes of green land grabbing, environmental degradation and social exclusion. The post-border devices, “are deeply entangled in territorial and capitalist logics” (Harvey 2005: 91), since they do not usually question the profit and accumulation desire or the fundamental state policies to consolidate the territorial power” (Larsen 2015: 150). The projects associated with carbon capture, mitigation and conservation of biodiversity, the penetration of highways and eco-extractivism, appear within the new post-frontier narrative associated with the discourse of sustainability and nature conservation in Patagonia-Aysén.

With this in mind, the Patagonia-Aysén case study discussed in this paper seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the complex interaction between capitalist neoliberal projects, environmental programs and discourses of development in the 21st century, as well as some of the consequences of these discourses. It is our aim to explain how the discourse of development in Patagonia-Aysén, while rooted in conservation, is, in fact, equally capitalist and shaped by unequal power relations between the center-periphery. This ‘green’ discourse has radically reconfigured organizational and institutional agreements that characterize relationships with

the natural world in this region (Himley 2008). The way this manifests is through the emergence of a new land market that incorporates the so-called "green grabbing" phenomenon, a process of accumulation of land, although this time justified in terms of environmental protection or environmentally friendly projects. This process, however, is predominantly undertaken by large investors whose other investments are in extractive industries, hence our use of the term 'eco-extractivism'. Our paper reveals how land changed hands, from colonist-pioneers to neo-colonist businessmen, who we also refer to as eco-colonists as their discursive rationale is closely associated with the progressive environmental value of their lands, as well as capitalist speculation based on that value. We argue that this special and sustainable discourse of development in Patagonia-Aysén has merely become a new modernizing project; a renovated form of colonization that creates the narrative around the necessity to protect this pristine natural environment because it is a 'Reserve of Life'.

From this perspective, the 'green' discourse is also transformed into a discourse of capital and ends up becoming, parallel to the exploitation of the natural resources of other areas, a renovated discourse of development in the form of "green grabbing", or the appropriation of land and resources for environmental ends (Fairhead et al., 2012). It is important to point out that this paper focuses on the actions of large capital and does not account for other initiatives of protection and nature conservation led by local communities (e.g. the creation of the Marine Protected Area Pitipalena-Añihue in the north of Patagonia).

2. More than political frontiers, discursive frontiers

We suggest that in Patagonia-Aysén, throughout the 20th and the start of the 21st centuries, alongside a physical and political frontier, a discursive frontier has been created that is part and parcel of the construction of a territorial imaginary on a national scale. Just like the physical and political frontier, the discursive frontier implies a definition of a geopolitical space and the construction of a geographical imaginary linked to the subjectivities and socio-political systems of each historical moment (Escobar 2013; Núñez et al., 2018). In turn, various processes of "territorialization" and "re-territorialization" stemming from this discursive border have produced multiple socio-spatial configurations of resource access, use and control in the region (Bassett and Gautier 2014; Haesbaert et. al. 2011). The 'rationalization' of austral spaces, historically originating from positions, points of view and the interpretations of a political center (i.e. the state), have come to define what is or is not considered as 'developed' in Patagonia-Aysén. This process can also be understood as the deployment of center-periphery

discourses of development (Núñez, Aliste and Bello 2014; Aliste 2010). This production of periphery and marginality therefore came to mark the limits of the geographical representations imposed on Patagonia-Aysén. While in the 19th century the region was defined based on its integration (or lack thereof) into a “national geography” (Núñez 2013), throughout the 20th century a dichotomous civilization (center) - barbarism (periphery) relationship defined the majority of the accepted cultural perspectives (that is, for someone excluded). In this reiteration based on a binary culture-nature rationale, colonial development continued to be measured based on its ability to domesticate nature, with the aim of incorporating ‘the forest’ within the periphery of culture (Huggan & Tiffin 2007; Gregory 2001).

This image of a modernity ‘yet to come’ was also one of the pillars of the discursive frontier that was emphasized in Patagonia-Aysén. In line with Kant’s description of the rational man (“Enlightenment is man’s leaving his self-caused immaturity”), the newspaper *Diario de Aysén* published in 1981 stated that “Aysén is a distant and abandoned youth” (Aysén, *el jóven distante y abandonado* 1981: 5). From this perspective, the nation is certainty (i.e. parent, authority) and the frontier is Other (i.e. child, dependent), essential for justifying nationalism: “The nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin and turns that loss into the language of metaphor transfers the meaning of home and belonging.... across those distances, and cultural differences, that span the imagined community of the nation-people” (Bahbha 2011: 176). Therefore, nationalist development discourses that placed heavy emphasis on integration established notions of a ‘mature’ and ‘developed’ political center as the nation’s guarantor, which were subsequently used by the center to justify controlling and defining Patagonia-Aysén’s future.

Following Larsen (2015), we could even frame Patagonia as a post-frontier, where nature and social and cultural processes are regulated by an institutional system subject to legal and governance standards, which define and establish conservation practices and natural resources. From the implementation of the *Carretera Austral* during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet until today, Chilean Patagonia has been in a post-frontier era. Larsen defines the post-frontier as “the host of new regulatory technologies, practices and institutions that nominally close, yet more accurately characterize and restructure, contemporary resource frontiers” (Larsen 2015:2). The post-frontier assemblages connect the practices of eco-extractivism and the discourse of sustainability in new ways; while nature within the frontier discourse is associated with resource extraction, the post-frontier emphasizes biodiversity and ecology.

Notwithstanding the lack of substantial changes to such narratives of development over the past two decades, their interpretation has today developed into a particular valorization of the

protection and conservation of nature. Nature has become a new paradigm, in an ontological sense, and a new social dispute in these austral territories (Hora 2018; Aliste et al. 2018, Holmes 2014). This new environmental rationality (Leff 2004) has therefore come to confirm and ratify the peripheral position of Patagonia-Aysén. In other words, it is no longer a peripheral territory in relation to the nation, but on a global scale, Patagonia-Aysén is presented as a pristine, 'edenic' and exclusive landscape. This time, however, this exceptionality or difference is no longer sustained by the state encouraging 'pioneers' or 'patriots' to occupy these 'distant lands' and integrate these territories into the nation (this discursive frontier described Patagonia-Aysén as an isolated, marginal, peripheral space, all definitions with negative connotations) (Núñez 2011; Arenas, Salazar and Núñez 2011). In effect, towards 1990, the negative connotation of the isolation historically attributed to the area instead developed into a valorization of that difference. The territorial border is still a discursive one, but now, in a context marked by globalization, the discourse is centered on nature and conservation, and the geographical imaginary is rooted in Patagonia-Aysén as a 'Reserve of Life'. The discursive frontier of Patagonia-Aysén is no longer understood in relation to just the nation, but instead to global power centers as well.

3. The discourse of nature and new capitalist practices: the case of Patagonia-Aysén?

From the 1990s onwards, regional discourses of development in Patagonia-Aysén placed emphasis on sustainability in the context of globalization (Leff 2004). Prior to this, these discourses imposed a predominantly extractivist relationship with nature centered on its valorization as a "natural resource", where the forest was often razed to make way for large livestock farms (Aliste et al. 2018). In the last two decades, there has been an imperative to conserve the forest, now valorized as native, as it represented a 'Reserve of Life'. In this restructuring of geographical knowledge in Patagonia-Aysén, a new mechanism promoting conservation for the social appropriation of nature gained traction. Here, nature is invoked as a resource for humanity that brings with it new rationales and thereby a new territoriality at the expense of other areas that do not fit with this pristine image of the natural landscape (Braun 2002; Gonçalves 2001). This led to the procuring of territories for development and conservation based on a new form of enclosure linked to processes of land privatization, a familiar appropriation strategy of 'green capitalism' more generally (Bassett and Gautier, 2014; Tecklin & Sepúlveda 2014; Hora 2018; De Matheus et al. 2018). In this shifting of geographical

imaginaries, the nature in question starts to be defined from a perspective that values the uniqueness of the landscape and that, through the acquisition of land, transforms it into an income monopolized by capital (Harvey, 2007; Leff, 2004; Dempsey 2016; Dauvergne 2016). Underpinning this process of privatization and commodification, the concept of biodiversity emerges as one of the principal standards of the global environmental discourse. This biodiversity seeks to be internationally valued for its potential genetic wealth; its ecosystem services and its role in carbon emissions capture (Leff 2004). As Escobar (1998) explains, this discursive framework is based on pre-established models, objects, theories, actors and strategies that reduce the idea of biodiversity, a complex ecological system, to a simple narrative of threats and possible solutions. In other words, geographical interventions and specific regional policies that derive from an alliance between the state and various actors that control these discourses of development (especially international non-governmental organizations), are closely connected to predominant power relations (Peluso 1993; Jazeel 2014). Simplification of the natural landscape to 'ecological reserves' through the implementation of regional environmental programs enables the restructuring of capital's relationship with nature, giving it the economic value necessary for its subsequent commodification (Laurín 2015).

A concrete example of this process in Patagonia-Aysén can be found in the "Aysén Regional Development Strategies" published from 1990 onwards. These propose sustainability as a guiding principle and consider the environmental characteristics of the region as a competitive advantage, "that should be safeguarded in order to maintain the production of goods and services of all types, particularly those linked to the special interest tourism industry" (*Gobierno Regional* 2009). Concurrently, the region adopted the slogan "Aysén, Reserve of Life", which "invited the creation of a sustainable society, one that can persist across generations and is capable of achieving the wellbeing of the population, relating in a harmonious way with the natural surroundings without compromising the capacity for development of future generations" (*Gobierno Regional* 2009).

Through a growing regional institutional apparatus, then, the new global environmental discursive strategy is permeating the local social imaginary in such a way that it is also becoming accepted by the population (Escobar 1998; Núñez et al. 2019). These strategies in turn come from world power centers and dominate the ecological discourses of conservation and preservation at the same time as they continue to reproduce the logics of capital (Harvey 2014; Núñez et al. 2019). For instance, this capitalist accumulation of land dispossesses the old colonist-farmers who require "cleared land", (i.e. land with no forest cover), to give meaning to

both their economic and their cultural activities. There is no space for this within the new environmental rationality. Thus, just as defining the frontier as unintegrated territory was useful for the state's consolidation of the 'civilized' nation, the valorization of nature in the 21st century also obscured other intentions: the privatization of nature, and consequently, the privatization of the notion and image of 'nature'. In other words, when we talk about privatization, we mean that the idea of nature is captured by new specific groups that project it as a civilization stage on a global scale (Dempsey 2016; Aliste et al. 2018).

If we observe the new global geo-historical structures previously described, and specifically in the region of Patagonia-Aysén, suggestions that the capitalist system is incompatible with the conservation of ecosystems appears to lose all credibility (Alimonda 2011). Furthermore, as Harvey (2014: 253) suggests, the strength of the interaction between capital and nature can be explained through the inherent contradiction of capital, as if there are serious problems in the capital–nature relationship, then this is an internal contradiction within and not external to capital. In other words, capital is capable of reinventing both itself and its relationship with nature in certain areas (Boltanski and Chiapello 2002). We have called this new nature-culture relationship forged by global capital, "eco-extractivism", where nature continues to be interpreted as a stage, as something separate from the subject (Núñez et al. 2019).

Indeed, conservation, just like extraction, becomes a necessary mechanism for the control and appropriation of nature. They are two sides of the same coin. As we will explain in the following sections, the Patagonia-Aysén region has become an attractive and accessible space for those who seek to develop businesses based on the conservation and preservation of nature. This appeal, which twenty years ago did not exist, was enhanced by the construction of the *Carretera Austral* during the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1988) (Urrutia et al. 2019). This opened an area that had seemed impenetrable and made accessible natural resources that had global ecological value. This 'green utopia' (defined from a capitalist perspective), therefore, imposed a series of tactics and mechanisms that fixed a new relationship between the human and the non-human, in which the character of a natural Patagonian landscape at the 'end of the world' would be valued for its commercialization.

Using the empirical case studies of two municipalities in the Aysén region, we explore the process of change in ownership of land and the objectives of these changes. We argue that these have been promoted and justified by green discourses, developing the phenomenon of green grabbing, that in turn validates a form of eco-extractivism.

4. Methodology

To explore these complex processes further the paper presents fieldwork undertaken between 2017 and 2019 in two areas of the Patagonia-Aysén region, namely the municipalities of Tortel and O'Higgins. Through extensive fieldwork that encompassed interviews and analysis of the Land Registry (Conservadores de Bienes Raíces, or CBR) of the region, we investigated the evolution of private property rights in both municipalities over a period of 29 years (1989-2017) in order to illustrate the changes in land ownership that had occurred.

Considering these antecedents and using the data of the property register, we charted changes in the ownership of land during the period 1989-2017 in the municipalities of O'Higgins and Tortel in the Land Registry of the Province of Capitán Prat (see Fig. 1). Both municipalities are located in the far southeast of the region of Aysén (Region XI of Chile), bordered to the north by the municipality of Cochrane and to the east by Argentina. The province spans an area of just over 37,000km² with a population of 4,638 (Censo, 2017), making it one of the most sparsely populated provinces in continental Chile. 61.3% of the province's population live in urban areas and the remaining 38.7% reside in rural areas. O'Higgins and Tortel have certain characteristics in common. First, they are bordered by the Northern and Southern ice fields (*Campos de hielo Norte y Sur*), some of the largest ice fields in the world after those of Antarctica and Greenland. Their presence amplifies the geopolitical significance of these areas given the large reserves of fresh water they hold. In both cases, the population is low (no more than 700 inhabitants in each case) and until recently, there was no land route to these towns (in 1999 a road was opened). Economic activities in both areas were traditionally associated with extensive livestock farming, logging and artisanal fishing. Both have been seen as symbols of a long-term colonization, a process also called the 'chilenization' of the area; 'chilenization' that was sustained by the discourse of the pioneer/founder/colonizer who came to dominate the socio-geographical imaginary (Serje 2005).

In 1989, property titles in the municipalities of O'Higgins and Tortel were divided amongst old colonists and fiscal lands, until 1990 with the return of democracy, the situation began to change, with the appearance of a new type of landowner in the region that we refer to as "neo-colonist" or "eco-colonist". From approximately 1990, both municipalities have become representative of the policies of special interest tourism development (e.g. adventure sports, photography, sailing, trekking) and bastions of what is recognized as the 'Reserve of Life'. As an example: "The community of O'Higgins will make tourism of special interests a sustainable

economic activity, based on the collaboration of the actors involved, in the responsible use of their resources and in the positioning of the image ‘Capital of the Patagonian Glaciers’” (O’Higgins municipality). Closer examination of these changes in land ownership, then, enable an analysis of the changing capital-nature relationship in the region of Patagonia-Aysén. The research process took approximately 3 years and was complemented by participant observation and interviews between 2017 and 2019. Fourteen people were interviewed in the field, through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. In each interview, we explored aspects of daily life, experiences and memory, seeking to investigate the changes (in land ownership, neighbors, activities, customs and habits) our respondents had witnessed in recent years. The relationship between the inhabitants of Tortel and O’Higgins and their appreciation of nature was also studied in depth. We interviewed 5 people who were former inhabitants and settlers, 3 public officials and 6 new owners.

Figure 1 Area of study: Patagonia-Aysén region



Source: Authors

5. Ownership structure control and eco-colonisation in the south of Patagonia-Aysén

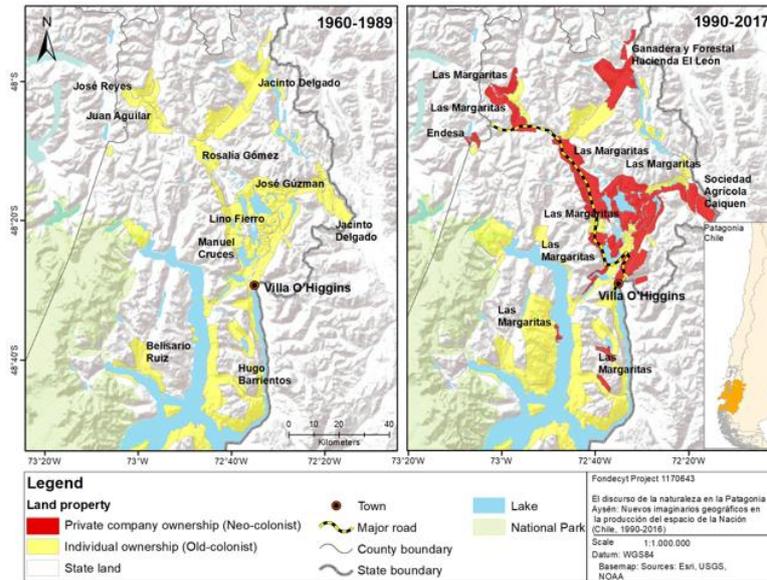
One of the most visible faces of this new re-appropriation of nature in the Patagonia-Aysén region is precisely the stockpiling or ‘enclosure’ of land, an acquisition that attracts global capital and that increasingly draws on environmentalist discourses. In practice, the change in perspective in the development discourse for these communities triggered a reformulation of what had been considered essential in previous stages. An example of this was the state’s attempt to override the process of colonization, avoiding programs of induced colonization – which, as we have discussed, were the dominant mode of development from 1930 to 1990 –

and the parallel attempt to promote private investment projects, especially in the areas of tourism and conservation, as well as demanding environmental assessments of new investments in the area. An emblem of this process was the “Invest in Patagonia” program implemented by the *Ministerio de Bienes Nacionales* (Ministry of National Assets), which sought to strengthen and consolidate this change in public policy towards the region (*Ministerio de Bienes Nacionales* 1999).

This transformation in the development discourse, however, is primarily evident in changes to land ownership in both O’Higgins and Tortel. One of the processes that would give strength to the ‘normalization of nature’ in both municipalities was precisely the acquisition/speculation of extensive swathes of land in order to protect their ‘natural riches’. Even though this phenomenon was evident before 1990, it was from this decade that the purchase of lands from old colonizers by businesses or parties interested in making use of land rich in biodiversity, defined as ‘globally unique’, became more marked. From this perspective, what is rare and unique in both municipalities takes on a key role in economic terms as it is value-based, ratifying a new social construction of nature in which a series of narratives and discourses normalize what is understood or not as natural (Bustos, Prieto and Barton 2015).

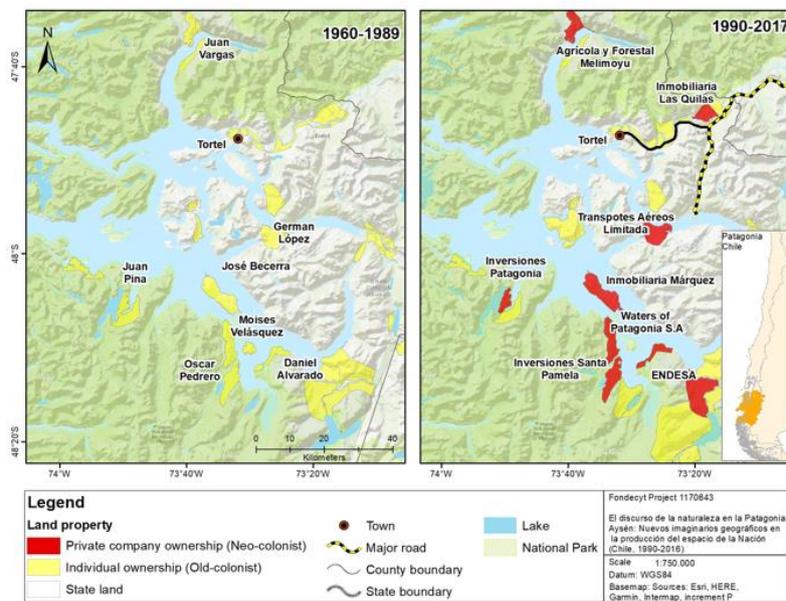
From 1990, then, it was possible to observe the appearance of a new type of landowner who we refer to as the eco-colonist, a term that refers to businesses, individual or corporate, interested in acquiring large areas of land from colonists. They typically have a common interest in preserving the pristine, wild and untouched natural landscape, which, as a result, also becomes a source of investment. To visualize this change in graphic terms, Figures 2 and 3 show how from 1960 to today, old colonists like Aguilar, Gómez, Fierro, Cruces, López, and Vargas, among others, started to concede possession and ownership of land to corporate names such as: *Las Margaritas S.A.* (S.A. refers to a public limited company or corporation), *Ganadera y Forestal Hacienda El León S.A.*, *ENDESA S.A.*, *Sociedad Agrícola Caiquén*, *Inversiones Santa Pamela*, *Waters of Patagonia*, *Inversiones Patagonia*, among others. This phenomenon can be understood as green grabbing, and, in this case, as a form of eco-extractivism associated with the actions of these kinds of investment companies.

Figure 2. Evolution of land ownership. O’Higgins, 1989-2017.



Source: Authors

Figure 3. Evolution of land ownership, Tortel 1989-2017



Source: Authors

Thus, land ownership changes hands from colonists or pioneers to neo-colonists or eco-colonists, and this transaction is imbued with a discursive rationale tightly associated with the environmental value of the land, and equally strongly with capitalist speculation based on that value. In **Tables 1 and 2** some examples of the sequence of this change in land ownership are shown in greater detail.

Based on these changes of land ownership, it seems appropriate to ask, who exactly are these neo-colonists of O'Higgins and Tortel? Although it is impossible to standardize, it is possible to highlight certain characteristics that give a clearer view of this new social landscape. First, the new owners have no need to live in the region like their colonist predecessors. Second, they are united by the value, both economic and moral, that 'protecting nature' implies. Finally, they represent another discourse of development, one that is seen as cutting edge, as vanguard and advanced.

Effectively, these eco-colonists have been generating changes in the use of the land, from the rearing of livestock to nature conservation and increasingly tourist development. In contrast to what occurred with the colonists, these new owners buy large tracts of land and subscribe to a new conservationist discourse reflected throughout Patagonia-Aysén. The landowners setting up these new estates are, for the most part, investors linked to economic groups that have recognized opportunities to incorporate new assets into their already large investment portfolios. Thus, Patagonia-Aysén as a region hosts unique territories with a value that is recognized globally, attracting these new "green" investors. The relationship between supply and demand is increasingly favorable for them as these 'pristine' territories become scarcer and the demand for (re)encountering them continues to grow, resulting in an increasing number of examples of green grabbing.

The case of company *Las Margaritas S.A* in the municipality of O'Higgins is illustrative here. While various media sources have given coverage to the activities of this company, few have actually pointed out the impact it is having in the region of Patagonia-Aysén. The investment group, under the name of *Las Margaritas S.A.*, bought a 1,600 hectare property called *Las Margaritas*, 20 km north of Villa O'Higgins in March 2002. Based on data in the Land Registry, the company currently owns more than 30,000 hectares in the region and is in negotiations to control new property. From the beginning of the *Las Margaritas* project, as we have verified during fieldwork in the region (2017-2019), the company has been interested in protecting the environment. It has stopped livestock farming on its lands and has expressed interest in conserving the *huemul* (a native deer) in the area, which represents another milestone in the environmentalist imperative that is gaining ground in the region. In fact, this has had an impact on the proliferation of puma and the consequent reduction in the scarce livestock that still remains in the few lands still dedicated to this work (Libuy 2016; Amigo 2016).

The inhabitants of O'Higgins point out that, "... everything has changed. Now few livestock remain and those who have arrived do not allow anything in the forest to be touched. Many settlers have sold, and the puma has returned, which prevents us from having cattle as before"

(Colonist, personal communication, 01/2018). In the same way, another neighbor explains: “Making a living from raising livestock is no longer possible. Today the protagonists are those who have arrived and who want their fields untouched, to remain the same. We, those of before, can’t live here anymore, we don’t know what to do ...” During an interview, another colonist who had sold his *hacienda* (large estate) in O’Higgins through a broker, explained: “My property was approximately 1,200 hectares, and I could only use around 100 hectares, because the rest was all forest, lakes and mountains... so I think I got a good deal, just over 200 million pesos [US\$ 300,000] from *Las Margaritas S.A.*” (Colonist, over 60 years old, personal communication, 01/2018).

In this way, the purchase of property by companies with the aim of gaining large tracts of land, which guarantee the dominion of the new frontier metaphor of environmental conservation as well as a high-level tourism product linked to environmental conservation policies, has caused speculative processes. The result of which has been the displacement of inhabitants who have ended up selling their land, a process which can be interpreted from various perspectives as a new form of colonialism, imposed upon peripheral countries. The conservation of nature has become profitable for capital, fundamentally through the previously mentioned profit of the monopoly (of land, its biodiversity, ecosystems, etc.) as well as the sale of exclusive services in the world. Consequently, in the same manner as the *Las Margaritas S.A.*, numerous economic groups, businesses and investors who are influential in the national economic and political context, have invested in Patagonia-Aysén or in adjacent areas. In general, they are all icons of extractivism, but now also referents of conservationism as well. As Laurín (2015) mentions, when they are defined as reserves of resources, the establishment of areas destined for preservation corresponds not just to a biological process but a political one in which, conditioned by power, conflicts of interest come into play, converting themselves into potential instruments of hegemony (Laurín 2015). As Descola (2012) and Latour (2017) discuss, a new construction of nature has started and with this an ideological foundation that materializes in practices that feed a subjectivity that is ultimately transformed into a new ‘fetish’ of the discourse of Modernity (Quijano 2000). This ‘green’ discourse, then, is an extension of the capitalist system, and ends up being, in parallel with the exploitation of natural resources of other areas, a new development discourse with an ecological imperative. In the words of Boltanski and Chiapello (2002), these processes are part of the new spirit of capitalism.

6. Conclusion

Based on our own research in Patagonia-Aysén and the existing international literature (Kopnina 2017; Dauvergne 2016; Dempsey 2016; Holmes, G. 2015; Heynen and Robbins 2005; Liverman and Vilas 2006, and others), we conclude that if ‘neoliberalism’ and ‘nature’ are taken for granted as static and inert entities, any comprehension of the multiple ‘socio-natures’ that are created by the neoliberal context at different scales becomes far more complex. This scalar heterogeneity is particularly important in the case of Latin America, where the social, political, economic, institutional and environmental conditions differ vastly between areas and states.

In Patagonia-Aysén, following the definition of Swyngedouw (2011), Nature is *mobilized*. This “new” nature is today sustainability and conservationism, a valorization that comes from a social expression that has been configured predominantly in the past two decades. This social production of a “sustainable” nature is not neutral. Its production was never neutral, even at the end of the 19th and throughout the 20th century, when various areas of Patagonia were labelled as “empty” or “desert”, or later used for livestock production that required territory to be incorporated into the nation. In the geographical and historical continuity of a center-periphery development discourse, the world’s discovery of a *natural nature vocation* at the end of the 20th century was also far from neutral. In other words, the *naturalization of nature* in Patagonia-Aysén presents another perspective: the colonization of an unquestionable geographical knowledge or meaning, relevant at national and global scales, that becomes a new form of development encapsulated in imaginaries like the “Reserve of Life”. The links from this process between capitalism and conservationism is, from our point of view, a clear form of extractivism, albeit framed as eco. Consequently, we have called it *eco-extractivism* (Núñez et al 2019). One of the most important findings of this work is the evidence of green grabbing process in progress in Patagonia-Aysén, with an important participation of agents and investors coming from the extractivist activities in other regions in Chile and away. In this sense is the proposition of the eco-extractivism concept, in order to distinguish as a green grabbing doing by extractivist investors.

It is therefore appropriate to ask where these new development discourses come from, how they appear, and the affects they have on everyday lived space. How do these socio-geographical presences and absences that silence or highlight places on a global scale come about? How can you explain to the colonist-pioneer that the forest is effectively sacred, that it is the path of modernity and that, therefore, the farming landscape needs to disappear? In the specific case of Patagonia-Aysén that we interrogate here, the problematization of this re-appropriation of nature as a “Reserve of Life” seeks to enrich the discussion around the multiple

possible combinations between society-nature and forms of environmental governance in a neoliberal context (Bakker 2010). Studying the impact of specific discourses of development and the identification of socio-geographical presences/absences can contribute to imagining alternative methods for the production of nature in the search to generate environmental policies in which sustainability depends, above all, on environmental justice (McAfee 2016).

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Table 1 Evolution of land ownership, municipality of O'Higgins 1980-2017

N°Rol (Property identification number)	Names	Surnames	Year	Hectares
221-24	Las Margaritas	S.A.	2009	4895
	AFW Chile	S.A.	2007	4895
	Carlos Francisco	Ossandón	2005	4895
	Óscar	Fierro Isla	1999	4895
	José Armando	Guzmán	1980	4895
221-32	State Lands			
	Hacienda El León	Limitada	2006	553
	Aureliano	Quelín	1983	553
221-42	State Lands		1980	553
	Las Margaritas	S.A.	2010	3794
	Rolando	Luna Gómez	2002	3794
	Rosalía	Gómez Díaz	1988	3794
	Rosalía y Otra	Gómez Díaz	1984	3794
221-48	State Lands		1980	3794
	Las Margaritas	S.A.	2008	2621
	Moisés	Aguilar R.	2008	2621
	Juan Rosamel	Aguilar M.	1988	2621
221-54	State Lands		1980	2621
	Hacienda El León	Limitada	2006	7925
	Jacinto Oporto	Delfado S.	1983	7925
	State Lands		1980	7925

Source: Authors

Table 2 Evolution of land ownership, municipality of Tortel 1980-2017

N°Rol (Property identification number)	Names	Surnames	Year	Ha
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241-29	Green Forest Global Reserves	C.V.	2013	945
	Irian	Landero	1983	945
	State Lands		1980	945
241-34	Soc. Agrícola y Forestal Melimoyu	Limitada	2010	225
	Simón	Arriagada Ruíz	1984	225
	State Lands		1980	225
241-33	Soc. Agrícola y Forestal Melimoyu	Limitada	2008	630,7
	Olga	Ganga Roa	2002	630,7
	José y Otra	Vargas Ganga	1999	1262
	Juan Manuel	Vargas Oyarzo	1984	1262
	State Lands		1980	1262
241-44	Inversiones Santa Pamela y Otros	Limitada	2001	1229
	Hotelera de la Patagonia	Limitada	1998	1229
	Manuel	Suárez T.	1998	1229
	Oscar	Pedrero Ayala	1985	1229
	State Lands		1941	1229
231-44	Empresa Nacional de Electricidad	S.A	1996	3150
	Las Inversiones	S.A	1995	3150
	Las Inversiones	S.A	1992	1145
	Daniel	Alvarado V.	1987	3150
	State Lands		1980	367.5

Source: Authors