

Nostalgia for la montaña: The production of landscape at the frontier of chilean commercial forestry[☆]

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Agrarian change
Forest
Tree farms
Intergenerational relations
Trialectics of space
Representational space

ABSTRACT

Chile has a well-documented structural dependence upon resource extraction, yet less is known about the social and symbolic significance of the environmental changes related to such a dependence. Since 1973, Chile's timber plantation complex increased nearly seven-fold in terms of area, prompting deep socioecological transformations in the countryside. In this paper, we focus on the workings of memory and nostalgia among peasant farmers living at the fringes of tree-farm expansion. Based on qualitative research and participatory mapping in three mountainous villages, our main argument focuses on the affective dimensions of land use change, particularly that nostalgia resists the symbolic reproduction of monocultures, while its absence seems to accept tree farms as an unescapable, unfolding process. We characterize three peasant categories of landscape: *la montaña* (native forest), *el monte* (successional forest), and *el bosque* (timber plantations). The peasants' use of the words *montaña* and *bosque* is of particular interest, as it counters the false discursive equivalence between timber plantations and forests that has been adopted by forestry and climate-change policymakers alike. Our case provides an in-depth analysis of the ways rural dwellers inhabit monocultured landscape, entangled with memories and emotions. Paying attention to gendered and intergenerational dynamics, as timber farm expansion has taken place over the last forty years, our results have the potential to inform ongoing discussion of mitigation policies based on global afforestation in the Global South.

1. Introduction

The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.

–Milan Kundera 1979. *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*.

What is the role of nostalgia in a world that is being environmentally degraded? In this paper, we focus on the affective dimensions of memory and nostalgia among peasants living adjacent to tree-farm expansion in south central Chile. In the late 1970s, a package of neoliberal reforms and incentives led to profound landscape transformations—replacing native forest with an export-oriented commercial timber complex (Niklitschek, 2007). Over the next thirty years, tree farm coverage increased from 330,000 to more than 2 million hectares, while exports increased more than thirty times in real terms, from US \$ 153.5 million in 1976 to US \$ 5271 million in 2016 (INFOR, 2018). In 2018, the

Compañía Manufacturera de Papeles y Cartones (CMPC) was the only Chilean company leading an economic sector in the Forbes ranking, with US \$5.4 billion in market value (FORBES, 2019).

The spectacular ascent of the Chilean forest industry might be seen as a specific case of land use transformation, yet understanding its consequences has implications for parallel cases elsewhere. Currently, as a proposed means of adaptation to and mitigation of climate change, a new global wave of tree-farm expansion is well underway across the Global South. Ongoing international negotiations pledge to plant 101.2 million hectares of tree farms by 2030 (Lewis et al., 2019). Brazil, China, Indonesia, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo are leaders in this regard—having promised to increase their acreage of intensively-managed monocultures, particularly eucalyptus, pine, and oil palm. Brazil, for example, plans to increase its (already extensive) plantations of commercial timber by 270%. Nigeria pledged to increase from 420 thousand ha to 13.8 million ha planted by 2030. Whether or

[☆] The Chilean funder agency request to acknowledge it in the following way: This research was supported and funded by CONICYT+FONDECYT +11150281.

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not these targets are feasible or desirable, it is clear that commercial timber operations are and will remain a major part of rural development schemes for decades to come. Thus, the massive socioecological transformation initiated in Chile some forty years ago might provide insights into the long-term, intergenerational effects of such dramatic landscape transformations—perhaps prompting caution on the part of policymakers and development practitioners.

There are multiple reasons for concern. Tree farms, labeled as “forest” by their advocates, account for nearly half of the afforestation pledges for climate change mitigation under the label of “forest,” even though there are radical differences between biodiverse forests and timber plantations in terms of carbon sequestration and species conservation, among others (Chazdon and Brancalion, 2019; Heilmayr et al., 2020; Lewis et al., 2019). Several investigations have documented the biophysical externalities of tree farms, such as: the reduction of water flow (Huber, 1992; Huber et al., 2008; Lara et al., 2009; Little et al., 2009), intensification of sediment production (Cisternas et al., 2001; Oyarzun and Peña, 1995), and an increased frequency of wildfires (McWethy et al., 2018). The expansion of tree farms is also correlated with impoverishment, the proletarianization of rural dwellers, and land conflicts (Andersson et al., 2016; Clapp, 1998; Gerber, 2011; Otero, 1984). Yet, different states and international organizations alike consider plantations to be “forests,” a false equivalence that has remained in place despite the compelling evidence to the contrary.

In short, although Chile’s economy is well known as a neoliberal laboratory and resource extractivism (Harvey, 2009; Liverman and Vilas, 2006), less is understood about the ways rural communities experience and signify such profound changes over time. In rural areas of Victoria, Australia, Barlow and Cocklin (2003) described how tree-farm expansion implied a deep reconfiguration of the social life in rural areas. Thus, in this work, we explore the impacts, socioecological entanglements, and affective/symbolic transformations on the ground. We focus on the meanings assigned to diverse landscape elements, such as: native forest regrowth and tree farm expansion, in relation to the social and economic change previously described elsewhere (Andersson et al., 2016; Barlow and Cocklin, 2003). Based on thirty months of qualitative inquiry, theoretically, this work draws upon Lefebvre’s (1974) “representational space” to unwrap deeper, symbolic aspects of commercial forestry in rural communities. We take an explicitly geographical framework to disentangle the workings of capital expansion in the hills and mountains of Araucanía.

First, we elaborate Lefebvre’s theoretical trialectics of space. Second, we introduce the research context. Third, we summarize phenomenological accounts of the landscape and the socioecological transformations experienced in the study area. Finally, we contrast the different symbolic and affective orientations towards the land and their effects upon the reproduction of monocultured landscapes. We conclude by synthesizing our empirical data with the theoretical literature. Our work makes a critical theoretical intervention, suggesting that affect matters in rural development outcomes. We argue that nostalgia is crucial, yet often underestimated, force in environmental transformation. Alongside the social production of zones of abandonment, we highlight important alternatives to deforestation and seek to contribute to a more democratic debate about rural futures in Chile and other forested areas in the Global South.

The work presented here is based on participant observation conducted for three years, forty semi-structured interviews, extensive field notes, participant observations, and three extensive participatory-mapping exercises conducted with the neighbors of three small villages. This information is complemented with a review of the relevant literature, land cover change, and census data (CONAF, 2016; INE, 2019, 2017; Zhao et al., 2016). Conducting fieldwork in insulated rural settings was somewhat difficult at first. We began by attending monthly meetings of the local farmers’ and peasant committee, elders’ meetings, women’s workshops, and conducted interviews with associations’ leadership. Thereafter, having developed relationships and trust with

interested research participants, we took time to repeatedly spend time with peasant families in their homes and farms. Our work included 60% of the households identified in participatory mapping (49/84 households in total). To ensure the validity of research results, a closing workshop was conducted in each of the surveyed villages during their monthly meeting. By combining innovative, participatory methodologies, we hoped to make our findings relevant and comprehensible to participants.

1.1. Spaces of nostalgia

Henri Lefebvre contends that space is not “natural,” or a given—but “a social product” (Lefebvre, 1991: 26). As he writes, sociopolitical contradictions are materialized in space “[they] ‘express’ conflicts between sociopolitical interests and forces. It is only in space that such conflicts come effectively into play and in doing so become contradictions of space” (Lefebvre, 1991: 365). The social production of space, according to Lefebvre, takes place dialectically along three axes—spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. Spatial practices are related to the use of the immediate physical environment in everyday life. Representations of space, on the other hand, are abstract conceptualizations of the space (e.g., zoning, urban planning), and are often rooted in academic and discursive constructions of space, with associated disciplinary authority. Representations of space are a key dimension of power wielded by academics, the state, urban planners, among others. Finally, representational space is *lived space*, appropriated by people, replete with symbols and emotion. As such, representational space is invested with enormous *social power*—the site of memory, nostalgia, desire, abjection, and/or indifference. In this paper, our focus is on representational space: contributing to an emergent and lively literature within cultural geography.

Our research lends credence to Sultana (2015, 2011), who, for example, argues that emotions are critical matters in resource struggles. In rural Bangladesh, emotions like anxiety, humiliation, and joy are entangled in women’s everyday strategies to secure safe water for themselves and their families. Similarly, González-Hidalgo and Zografos (2017) demonstrate how negative emotions, collective memory, and political rituals influence the process of political subjectification and correlated resistance strategies observed among Mapuche communities struggling against forestry conglomerates in Araucanía, south-central Chile. Berghöfer et al. (2008) explore intergenerational feelings of belonging, particularly the way cultivation reproduces care and concern for the land. In short, representational spaces are the sites where emotions and everyday social life is expressed, where relations between humans and non-humans are negotiated, all of which are key items for the production and reproduction of the landscape as a whole.

With such a dialectical perspective in mind, we observed the emergence of shared representational space and time informing two divergent orientations towards the natural world. Nostalgia fueled efforts to preserve the landscape for future generations, and its absence resulted in a sort of indifference towards it. In our formulation, we understand nostalgia as longing for a more desirable past (Bonnett, 2015). In this sense, our case departs from other scholars who have characterized nostalgia as inherently reactionary (Greene, 1991; Lasch, 1984), coming closer to the insights of Raymond Williams, who writes:

[Nostalgia] invokes a positively evaluated past world in response to a deficient present world. The nostalgic subject turns to the past to find and construct sources of identity, agency, or community that are felt to be lacking, blocked, subverted, or threatened in the present. The ‘positively evaluated past’ is approached as a source for something now perceived to be missing; but it need not be thought of as a time of general happiness, peacefulness, stability, or freedom. Invoking the past, the nostalgic subject may be involved in escaping or evading, in critiquing, or in mobilizing to overcome the present experience of loss of identity, lack of agency, or absence of community (Tannock, 1995, p. 452).

To make our argument, first let us first provide an introduction our

particular research setting. This foundation will allow us to further explore the ways peasants conceive, value, and classify three forms of local landscape: *la montaña* (mountain-feminine), *el monte* (mountain-masculine), and *el bosque* (forest-masculine). Thereafter, we focus on the lived tensions and contradictions of living in an increasingly abandoned farmscape.

2. Setting: Nahuelco

The study area, Nahuelco ¹ is in the ecotone of the Mediterranean and the Valdivian temperate rainforests, near 38°S. It is in a mountainous coastal area (from 500 to 750 m.a.s.l.), characterized by very thin and poor soils. Average precipitation is 1420 mm (Sarricolea et al., 2017). Access to our research settings was complex, particularly during the winter months (June and July) due to snowfall and intense cold. This region is notorious for its extraordinary vascular plant diversity. Flora includes evergreen forests of *Nothofagus* species as well as other native evergreens, such as: *Gevuina avellana* and *Eucryphia cordifolia* (Mittermeier et al., 2004; Myers et al., 2000 Bannister et al., 2011). The coastal range is home to the most extensive and rapid replacement of native forest with tree farms—a process initiated in the late 1970s (Echeverría et al., 2007). Tree farms, in contrast to native forest, are monocultures owned by transnational forestry conglomerates, most notably Mininco (Leyton, 2009; Miranda et al., 2015).

From the 1880s, ancestral Mapuche territory was seized by the Chilean military (Leiva et al., 2013). Chihuailaf (2014) characterizes this as a hectic process of territorialization whereby the state slowly gained control of the area, thereafter awarding concessions to private companies or individuals. This scenario resulted in land speculation, territorial monopolization by barons, and outright banditry. Oftentimes, the state awarded the land to “colonizing societies,” and in some cases, European migrants were granted allotments. *De facto* land occupations and public land auctions displaced the Mapuche, who were forced into “reducciones”² and their land rights were reduced to *Mercedes de Tierra*, provided there was proof of “continuous and effective land occupation” (Gobierno de Chile, 1866; sec. 6,7). On average, the Chilean state gave 5.5 ha to each indigenous individual (Almonacid, 2009), while each male *colono* (colonist)³ received an average of 40–75 ha, depending on soil quality.

Later, the Ministry of Land and Colonization promoted the migration and settlement of *colonos*. The newcomers were landless sharecroppers and renters recruited from large *haciendas* located in south central Chile. Some *colonos* were attracted by the prospect of artisanal gold mining and, most importantly, by opportunities for secure land tenure. Upon arrival, they gradually cleared the forest to make space for homes, crops, and pastures, and established scattered homesteads in the mountains and hillsides. This “far-west” character of the area persisted throughout much of the twentieth century and was also reinforced by its geographical isolation. However, connectivity has improved in the last twenty years.

As in many colonial settings in the Americas, the local economy was built on the blending of the ongoing economic activities related to forest products and the appropriation of indigenous knowledge. For example, *colonos* harvested tree bark from *santo* (*Saxegothaea conspicua*) and *ulmo*,

(*Eucryphia cordifolia*)—valuable sources of dye and tannin, that were then sold to nearby emerging dye industry. They also grew a native variety of white strawberries (*Fragaria chiloensis*), first domesticated by the Picunche people—and later, the Mapuche. This species was cultivated for at least 1000 years, until its extinction in the late 20th century (see Hancock et al., 1999). Families established an oxen-powered commercial network that tied hillside villages to nearby towns, commercial hubs, and the global economy. After the dye and strawberry canning industry closed, the local economy re-oriented towards the logging of native forest.

At first, old growth trees were manually harvested by male duos, armed with *corvinas* (5-m long saws). Once cut, trees were fed into steam-powered, tractor-like sawmills, locally known as *ransomes*⁴. The *ransomes* were run by teams of twelve men, who fed fuels and trees into the machines, and sometimes risked their lives and bodies to do so. Many of the elderly males lost fingers and eyes to the *ransomes* since they had to work very close to the mechanical saw during their ten to 12-h shifts.

By the late 1970s, the *ransomes* were abandoned. Today, their rusting carcasses line the streets of impoverished rural towns (Fig. 1). Having exhausted most of the reserves of old-growth forests, peasant families began to sell and produce firewood and charcoal—the main fuel source in the region. Wood was chopped by hand, transported via oxcart, and then deposited in nearby ovens or homes. Today, some families continue to produce charcoal in underground ovens, built and sealed to control the combustion process.

Since the 1990s, the time when neoliberalism became the hegemonic global model, the influence of the state has grown notably in Nahuelco. Due to the geographical isolation of Nahuelco, the land reform program (circa 1970) was short-lived in this location, and only reached productive soils located along fertile plains near the rivers, some 30 km away in today’s roads. Previously, the state had remained generally absent from daily life in mountainous areas. For example, we were told about intense winters in the 1980s, when heavy snowfall and rain blocked the paths peasants used. To prevent hunger, older residents remember the military sending in helicopters with food and supplies. Rural electrification only



Fig. 1. Ransomes carcasses in the main street of a nearby town.

¹ The names of the actual places and other details have been changed to ensure anonymity.

² Legal term created by the Chilean State under Law of 1866 that “created” locations for indigenous people. The word *reducciones* literally means “reductions”.

³ The peasants we worked with identified themselves as *colonos* (i.e.: non-indigenous people). Their relationship with their Mapuche neighbors was commercial and friendly, but not central to their relationship with the forest. Only one elder (almost 100 years old) mentioned that Mapuche lived in the area in the XIX century, before the “colonization” process begun.

⁴ Named after its UK manufacturer Ransomes, Sims and Jefferies Limited.

arrived in 2000. The insulated and isolated character of the region is very relevant for the timing and intensity of broader national processes, such as agrarian reform and national entrepreneurial programs, which came later than in central areas and valleys.

Gradually, since 1990, the first democratic elections led to the consolidation of a neoliberal project through the installation of a stronger state presence and the promotion of entrepreneurial ideals. In the late 1990s, the implementation of state-sponsored forestry programs intentionally focused on smallholders. The previous state program, DL 701, was a cost-sharing afforestation program allocated to large landholders, who were reimbursed up to 90% of their planting costs. In contrast, the newer version of DL 701, known as Law 19,561, incentivized the expansion of commercial forestry for smallholders (Reyes and Nelson, 2014). In support of this program, Chilean forest service *extensionistas*⁵ arrived at small and medium-sized homesteads offering to help peasants obtain USD\$300–600 per hectare in state subsidies for the cultivation of eucalyptus and pine (*Facultad de Agronomía e Ingeniería Forestal*, 2014). Foresters handled the bureaucratic procedures, procured saplings—and even occasionally helped with the planting. They were responsible for payments as well. In turn, farmers maintained, harvested, and sold timber—generally to larger companies who monopolized the market and were able to set their own prices (UDEDEC, 2009).

In short, over the course of the 20th century, the mountain villages of Nahuelco changed permanently—what started as biodiverse old-growth forests, was transformed to accommodate agriculture and ranching, until the ascent of timber monocultures that continually expand. The role of the state in this final transformation cannot be overemphasized. Manual classification and aerial photography demonstrate that between 1979 and 2014, at least 38% of the total native forest was lost (SAF, 1978; Zhao et al., 2016). The expansion of the timber industrial complex displaced hundreds of villagers. As Juan, an elderly peasant, explained:

*Lots of families used to live around here, but everyone left ... At the time, Mininco's sales representatives went door-to-door offering immediate sales for the land. It was very cheap. The families got nothing. Now, all that is left is Mininco*⁶.

During the time of our research, rural schools and churches remained closed. Children had to attend boarding schools in peri-urban institutions. Despite the predominance of commercial timber farms, by 2015, agriculture and forestry only contributed 9% to regional economic activity (INE, 2017a). As Mininco is exempt from paying property taxes, it contributes very little to public service provision and human development (Andersson et al., 2016). As a result, Nahuelco's inhabitants earn Chile's lowest per capita average income of US\$363 per month (Datawheel, 2017). For someone without formal education, such as farmers, income tends to be even lower. The mean income is US \$186 while median is just US \$91 per month (INE, 2019, p. 33). Given the difficulties of access, rates of educational attainment are well-below the national average (6.6 as opposed to 9.3 years).

Within the villages we visited, households were characterized by the noticeable presence of elderly people, a few middle-aged adults, and young children⁷. According to the 2017 census, the entire population of this census tract decreased by 26% (INE, 2017a). However, according to

⁵ An *extensionista* a contractor paid by the forest service to recruit landowners and produce management plan. The state pays him or her on a basis of area managed and management plans produced, accepted and executed.

⁶ Mininco is part of CMPC (Compañía Manufacturera de Papeles y Cartones), which was the largest company in market value in the forestry sector according to the 2018 FORBES ranking. In 2018, CMPC the only Chilean company leading a productive sector.

⁷ For every 100 women there are 110 males, slightly above the national rural average, dominated by males (INE, 2017b). The ratio of people at not at the working age (i.e.: children and elders) to people at working age is 62.3, while the national rural average is 44.1.

more detailed data from the rural hospital that serves this specific area, the number of people registered there decreased by 47% between 1976 and 2018. For the few (mostly elderly) residents who remained, living in the countryside has become increasingly precarious. For example, one of our informants was suffering from kidney failure and had to travel 3 h to obtain dialysis treatment multiple times per week. Many of their adult children urge these aging farmers to leave the mountainside, largely for health reasons.

The expansion of tree farms coincided with the dismantling of public services. To make matters worse, the region is ravaged by wildfires often. In December 2011, we estimated⁸ 1,000 ha of pasture, native forest, and tree farms went up in flames. The area burnt at that time represented 10% of the total area we worked on, yet one village was hit particularly hard. Its residents now confront significant soil erosion, drought, and exposure to wind and sun. Even today, nine years after the wildfire, people still recall it as a major biographical milestone in their lives.

While the peasants were poor in financial terms, they continue to produce food for themselves and the market, raising cattle, chicken, sheep, potatoes, charcoal, and timber. Productive labor is gendered. Men are responsible for cattle ranching, potato planting, and cutting wood, while women care for children and grandchildren, kitchen, orchard, and domestic animals. In the patchy remnants of native forest, women forage for nuts (*Gevuina avellana*) and native berries (*Ugni molinae*). Men and females sometimes work as Mininco security guards.

3. An emic exploration of the local landscape

In the frigid winter months of 2017, we developed a participatory mapping exercise to shed light on local histories and perceptions of agrarian change. Sitting around kitchen tables, we showed aerial maps of the villages to residents, and asked our informants to identify places of social, environmental, and economic significance. These maps helped to evoke narratives and histories of people, places, and times now rendered obsolete by tree farm expansion. We learned of a socially vibrant past—with regional dances, horse races, fishing trips, waterfalls, rodeos, religious services, and rural schools. Their narratives were also punctuated by natural disasters, such as: forest fires, tsunamis, and earthquakes. Hardships figured strongly in their testimonies. Our informants estimated that nearly half of their neighbors migrated elsewhere, data confirmed by records from the rural hospital, which indicates a 47% reduction in patients.

Beyond these oral histories, this exercise tipped us off to distinctive conceptual categories of landscape. We came to understand that *la montaña*, *el monte*, and *el bosque* (which, when translated to English mean mountain, mountain, and forest) correlated with specific representational spaces that provided insights into distinct values, aspirations, and agroecological ambitions. In this sense, *la montaña* referred to surviving fragments of old native, evergreen forest. Far from a singular object, it is a heterogeneous, multispecies assemblage. The forest itself has a complex canopy, large emergent trees, and dead standing logs that provide shelter and perch for bird species, which, in turn, facilitate forest regeneration (see Fig. 2). The farmers who managed to preserve a bit of *la montaña* were proud of this accomplishment. During our walks

⁸ The area burnt was estimated by analyzing Worldview 2 images, which have a 2-m resolution. Using the Enhanced Vegetation Index (EVI) we compared the vegetation cover before and after the known date of the wildfire. EVI is less sensitive to saturation and high-density vegetation, such as in forest areas (Terrestrial Biophysics and Remote Sensing Lab, 2002; USGS, 2000). The area burnt was estimated by analyzing Worldview 2 images, which have a 2-m resolution. Using the Enhanced Vegetation Index (EVI) we compared the vegetation cover before and after the known date of the wildfire. EVI is less sensitive to saturation and high-density vegetation, such as in forest areas (Terrestrial Biophysics and Remote Sensing Lab, 2002; USGS, 2000).



Fig. 2. A Montaña landscape. La Montaña is a heterogeneous canopy of multiple species.

with them through forest patches, they readily identified species used for food, medicine, and fuel. They told us that *la montaña* was home to diverse fauna, even mountain lions (*Puma concolor*).

Beyond its physical qualities, *la montaña* exerts an affective and even moral force—linking peasants with their ancestors. This, after all, was the landscape their forebears encountered in the 1930s. Geographically isolated, they survived in extraordinarily harsh conditions. For example, Alvaro, a retired farmer said:

When we came, there was no house. Our huts were made of a plant called ñocha (Eryngium paniculatum). It was terrible in those years, but we still lived there. We went hungry sometimes. We went through everything, little animals [livestock] died ...

Alongside these challenges, elders described the positive qualities of *la montaña*. Symbolically, they associated it with vitality, strength, and life—a place of family, collective work, natural beauty, plentiful water, productive soil, and biodiversity. For example, Angelo, spoke fondly of his childhood:

I was the happiest child. Sugar in my tea was enough to make me smile. We walked 9–10 km a day, but I was the happiest when I was running. I had a good “horse” and I never got tired. You know what my little horse was? A branch of maqui (Aristotelia chilensis)! I climbed on the maqui branch and that was my horse. I would ride my maqui branch all the way to the road and back. I will never forget it.... Do you know how beautiful it is to walk, climb, and explore the mountains on narrow paths? There is nothing like it.

Beyond such imaginative and recreational opportunities, the native forest provided a measure of social security. The seasons were marked by mutual aid, trust, and collaboration among settlers. Reciprocity was an integral part of everyday life. Many spoke of the *minga*, a local tradition of collective work and mutual aid. Friends and kin gathered together to complete major tasks (e.g., home construction, timber harvesting), and hosts would provide food and beverages in exchange for labor. Such practices create significant social capital in the mountains. According to Maria, a 60-year old farmer:

Back then, people used to do these jobs as a kind of minga. Everyone returned the favor. For example, you would come to my house and I’d say, “Tomorrow I am going to saw wood, help me!” Later, I would help you. It was common at that time, because there was no other way, few people could pay workers. It was beautiful.

As *la montaña* disappeared, so did the *minga*. The replacement of native forest with timber plantations entailed a different set of social and productive relations. For instance, harvests of eucalyptus are currently completed with temporary laborers and heavy machinery. Thus, communal reciprocity was replaced with a regime of sporadic, individualized wage labor.

As a result, it seemed clear that *la montaña* evokes complex, affective remembrances of a difficult past, only partially surviving in the present. Moreover, their distinction between *bosque* and *montaña* is all the more striking as it counters the discursive equivalence made by timber

corporations and state agencies. Within state-sanctioned representations of space, areas covered by native vegetation or by exotic tree plantations are fundamentally the same—they are both considered to be “forests”. For example, the Chilean Forestry Institute (INFOR) reports a figure on “forest resources”—conflating plantations and forests. The forest service’s webpage (CONAF) indicates that in Chile, “forests cover an area of 17.6 million hectares” (23% of the national area), which lumps native forest and tree plantations into the same conceptual scheme (CONAF, 2020; INFOR, 2018). This same figure reappears in the Chilean FAO country profile (Fig. 3B FAO, 2020). There have been advances in national reporting, but government publications still obscure the differences between forests and plantations in outreach material (Fig. 3. A and C). This conflation and omission, under the label “green cover,” may even have economic consequences, as Chile is still a leading player in climate change negotiations of 2020. Biomass, energy, and greenhouse emission reductions by means of tree plantations could be a profitable business venture for the forestry sector (Farfán, 2019). Indeed, as of June 2020 the World Bank launched a media campaign promoting Chile’s successful forestry model, as means to plan a green recovery from the COVID19 pandemic (Casma, 2020; CORMA, 2020; World Bank, 2020a). This specific discursive construction of “forest” is the epitome of spatial representation in Lefevre’s terms: the symbolic space of power. This false equivalence was also strongly rejected by scientists and conservationist NGOs during the discussion of the Native Forest Law in Chile (1992–2008, Manuschevich and Beier, 2016).

In contrast, peasants’ representational spaces are largely absent from public discourse, negotiations and perhaps most importantly, from state forest policy. Calling into question the dominant conceptions of the landscape, peasants have subverted these categories in their own representational spaces (Lefebvre, 2009). Their patchy landscape is a complex and emotionally dense space, with temporal associations and accompanying orientations towards the past, present, and future.

In addition, our team was surprised to find that *la montaña* is conceptually distinctive from *el monte*, which had considerably more negative connotations. *El monte* refers to a successional forest stage—a patchy amalgamation of native species. Comparatively homogeneous, it is predominated by second growth *canelo* (*Drymis winteri*). This landscape is unsuitable for harvest or extraction: the high density of immature saplings and shrubs hinders the movement of both cattle and humans. Depending on whether the landowner requests a simple permit for cutting (*Recuperación del Bosque nativo y de fomento forestal*, 2008), or on how the forestry management plan is presented, handled, and sanctioned, the forest service might allow the “clearance” of *el monte*; but in some other cases, might forbid it. Legal restrictions on agriculture and ranching mean that *el monte* cannot be used for potato planting. Unlike *la montaña*, *el monte* is considered to be unhealthy and weak, populated with immature, sick, and relatively worthless trees. As such, this landscape is economically and ecologically useless for farmers. It does not produce firewood or fodder, nor is it useful as a provider of protection from winds or from the sunshine. Simultaneously, *el monte* has another, arguably more profound, meaning. It is the physical testament of emigration and rural abandonment, a painful reminder of the loss of a lively past. Symbolically laden with sorrow, *el monte* represents the passage of time and the passive regrowth of the forest. This feature resonates with Di Giminiani and Fonck (2015), who write of deep feelings of loss in the wake of emigration and forest regrowth in Coilaco Valley, located in the Andes Mountains.

With its dense and messy vegetation, *el monte* is diametrically opposed to an actively “cleaned” landscape. In this case, “clean” refers to an open, empty, and even topography—suitable for agriculture. In Latin America, “clean” landscapes are deeply imbricated with Western ideals of colonization and hard work (Di Giminiani and Fonck, 2015; Root-Bernstein, 2014). Alejandra and Carlos (a couple in their early thirties) made this very clear. They pointed to the map, noting the “clean” qualities of a particular patch of land. *El monte*, in contrast, was considered to be dirty and undesirable. “It is only useful for raising

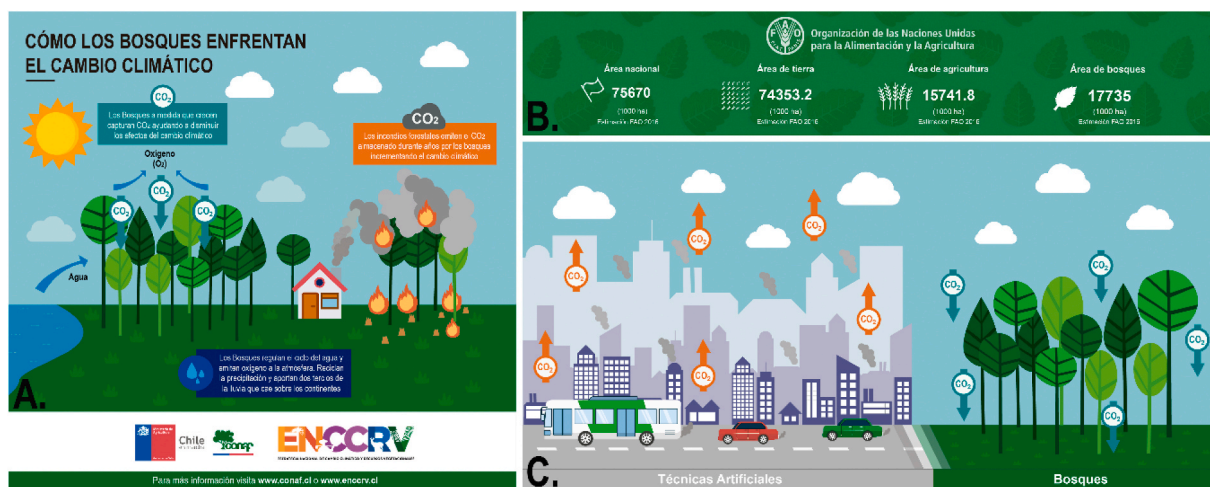


Fig. 3. Examples of official representations of forests in outreach material and international statistics. A. Infographic “How forests face climate change” published by the Chilean Forest Agency shows that all forests produce O₂, sequester CO₂, regulate the water cycle and are prone to wildfires. Source: (CONAF, 2019) B. Chile’s country profile at the Food and Agriculture Organization website. The total hectares amount of “forest” includes both native forest and tree farms. Source: FAO (2020). C. Left side indicates “artificial techniques” that release CO₂, in contrast on the right panel depict how [natural] “forest” absorbs CO₂. Source: (CONAF, 2019). In all three examples, there is no indication that tree farms do not perform the same ecosystem function that native forests do.

insects. That is it. That is why people leave the land, as there is no work there.” Therefore, unlike actively cleaned and managed farms, *el monte* is understood to be abandoned, dirty, and useless. Alejandra’s and Carlos’ testimony resonates strongly with Di Giminiani and Fonck’s findings; to cultivate as sing of people’s existence.

In short, Nahuelco is a dynamic landscape due to the concomitant processes of forest degradation, cleaning of the land, tree farm expansion, land abandonment, and forest regrowth (ecologically known as succession), all of which can also be detected through forest structure and composition, and quantitative spatial analysis (Fig. 4). Overall, in our conversations, farmers mentioned how *el monte* is gaining space on the mountains. Farmers did not conceptualize *el monte* as an integral part of forest succession, nor did they appreciate that with time and care, *el monte* might once again become *la montaña*—the valued habitat for birds, mammals, and humans. Perhaps their displeasure with the relatively slow rates of succession may be related to their familiarity with rapidly growing pine and eucalyptus species⁹. It seems that peasants’ representational spaces are dialectically constructed in relation to past, present, and future imaginaries and memories of places with regard to

productive conditions.

Indeed, unlike *el monte*, the timber plantations of *el bosque*, grow rapidly. These manicured monocultures are neatly arranged in straight lines and clear-cut every ten to twenty years (Fig. 5). *El bosque* is also a complex and ambivalent representational space—explicitly understood to be the culprit for socioecological ruination, it is responsible for the destruction of roads, watersheds, wildlife habitats, and communities. At the same time, occasional company contracts and odd jobs were valued—especially when crop prices were low, or crops failed, and in times of financial emergency. Cutting a *metro ruma* (cubic meter of eucalyptus or pine) was a relatively easy means to obtain much needed cash. When finished, farmers stacked their wood near the road where buyers would occasionally pick them up. Exotic timber, unlike native forest fragments, was a much more efficient source of liquidity in hard times. This feature is important when considering the precarious state of the Chilean social security system. Elderly pensions barely cover basic needs, and the dual (private/public) systems of health and education are highly segregated. Thus, when a family member falls ill, access to money is often a matter of life and death (Han, 2012). Indeed, the lack of a social security system in



Fig. 4. *El Monte*, a successional forest dominated by thin saplings of Canelo (*Drimys winteri*).



Fig. 5. *El bosque* consists of tree lines of Pine plantations planted in large continuous extensions.

⁹ The biophysical conditions in southern Chile allow these species to grow at one of their fastest rate worldwide.

Chile sparked the recent revolt of October 2019—the most sustained and violent observed since 1990’s democratic elections.

4. Ties to the land: to remember or forget?

Although Araucanía’s peasants might have shared the same vernacular, they espoused divergent orientations and values towards the environment they inhabited. Some described the land and forest as an extension of family histories and articulated intensely nostalgic sentiments. Having witnessed such dramatic socioecological transformation firsthand, some women and men expressed a desire to learn from past transgressions. For example, Pedro, a 71-year old farmer expressed a clear sense of regret:

“We destroyed la montaña. We did it to survive. We worked it too hard, just to take timber for ourselves and a bit to sell.”

Communal and ecological destruction was viewed as particularly tragic among those who felt closest to their ancestors. For them, abandoning the countryside was akin to severing a direct connection with kin. Collective histories and memories of sacrifice and hardship kept them in place. Some hoped their descendants would remain in the countryside and thereby honor the legacy of their elders. Rodrigo, a 71-year old farmer, asked, rhetorically: “How hard was it for my father to get this land? It would be ugly to sell it and give it away ... There is no amount [of money] that would compensate for what it is truly worth!” Rodrigo lived alone on the mountain. His kin moved to cities elsewhere. He purchased their plots from his sisters and brothers to ensure that the land would stay in the family in perpetuity. He stubbornly refuses to sell it to Mininco or other forest companies. For Rodrigo, the land is irreplaceable—valued and described as a transcendent space that links the generations and grounds them in place. For people like him, *la montaña* is a tangible, living memory (*recuerdo*), something material to be saved and preserved. In Chile, souvenirs often bear the label “*recuerdo de*” and the specific place where the object was acquired. Thus, the word *recuerdo* denotes an animate, material object that embodies and carries a memory from its place of origin.

That being said, these peasants didn’t conceive of preservation in the ways often presupposed by environmentalists and NGOs in the Global North (Kopnina, 2017; Martinez-Alier, 2003). Several national and international NGOs have been involved in long, weary (and sometimes effective) judicial and extrajudicial struggles to protect the environment and preserve the Chilean forest (Arnold, 2003; Manuschevich, 2016; Risley, 2014). However, NGOs often tend to frame the forest as an empty, *uninhabited space*—untouched, wild, and pristine. Possibly, as a strategy of communications for the press, forests have been described as if they were sacred cathedrals, at least in public discussions of the Native Forest Law (Manuschevich, 2016; Manuschevich et al., 2018).

The NGOs’ discourse is fundamentally different from the *lived landscapes* of Nahuelco. As Alberto, a 59-year old farmer explained, “When I’m gone, my grandkids are going to take care of two things: first, their stomachs, and second, always the environment.” His statement demonstrates that *la montaña* is not simply a romantic landscape to be preserved for the sake of preservation. Rather it is an *inhabited space*, with resources needed for human and nonhuman survival. Yet, it is increasingly endangered. Carmen, a 70-year old female peasant put it bluntly when she said:

“La montaña is almost gone.” She continued:

This is why we are conserving what survives. The native forest preserves the memory for future generations. Youth today don’t know what it is like to work in the countryside, but I want them to remember how we lived!

Beyond these emotional connections between place, history, ecology, and memory, some women explicitly promoted the preservation of native trees as a means to protect water supplies and make a living. As Elisa, a 71-year old female farmer put it, I want to keep the native plants because we need water. Without water we cannot farm. We cannot live.

The trees protect the water. In the future, I hope to produce hazelnuts, because they have a good price and guaranteed return.

Water was very important to the women of the mountainside. They clearly articulated the interrelation between water and life, related to their gendered tasks. Women tend to work in activities related to self-sustenance, such as: producing food, raising chickens and other small animals, and raising the children, while men tend to work in market-based and exchange activities, such as: selling their produce, firewood, cattle, and/or their own labor. We speculate that such market-based daily activities diminish male awareness regarding local water conditions and supply. For example, women oversee home gardens to produce food for the family. Beyond this material aspect, well-grown home gardens, which can also include ornamental flowers, are a source of pride and recognition among women, who we observed bartering seeds—which formed the material basis of a network of social interactions. They were well aware of the severity of the coming water crisis: without water, their gardens would wither away, along with their food, bodies, and sociality in general. In this way, peasant women recognized the central role that *la montaña* might play in sustaining a more equitable rural future. In recent years, they have witnessed and become leaders in the emergence of a thriving domestic market for Chilean hazelnuts (*Gevuina avellana*), gathered from patches of native forest. With decent economic returns and relatively high (and stable) prices, these nutritious nuts have led a number of families to re-think their relations with *la montaña*, as they hope to cash-in on this niche commodity. However promising, the profitability of this fragile enterprise depends, for now, on a single buyer in this area.

Another group of farmers did not articulate sentimental views of the landscape, and instead, spoke of it in instrumental terms—as the source of cash and assets to purchase a better life elsewhere. At least in our interactions, this group did not articulate emotional attachments to the land, forest, or their ancestors. In contrast, their references to native forest were contemptuous. Highly pragmatic and economically squeezed, these farmers put it bluntly: “Farming is not profitable anymore,” Luis explained. “The prices of inputs just keep getting higher, and the prices for our crops are too low, this is killing us. The corporate timber farmers are doing great, but the rest of us are not.” As a result, many small-scale farmers were eager to sell their land and earnestly hoped their descendants would pursue more sustainable, urban futures. However, at present, there are few buyers in this particular area. In our conversations, we learned that this group did not view deforestation or environmental degradation negatively. For them, the 2011 wildfire (caused by an unattended charcoal oven) was a *positive development* as it brought in external assistance from the regional government (in the form of subsidies, housing, and employment). It was, in other words, a blessing in disguise. Thereafter, sympathetic forestry agents responded to the inferno by loosening restrictions on native forest exploitation and wood extraction. As a result, they had significantly more space for cattle ranching. Diego, the 47-year old leader of a peasants’ association, explained the economic benefits of ranching, when compared with other alternatives:

Cattle are the peasants’ bank account ... I have two land plots, but I would like to get more pastures and expand my herd. With cattle, you just walk them from horseback. Basically, you make money while sitting down!

In this area, 2 ha of chemically-fertilized pasture can support one cow with a newborn calf; while a weaned calf can be sold for approximately US \$500 (Demanet Filippi, 2017; González and Tapia, 2017). Keep in mind that the average annual salary for someone without a formal education is a mere US \$2281 per year, and the median is just US \$ 1102 (INE, 2019, p. 33). Therefore, selling two calves each year is equivalent to the median salary. The viability of this strategy depends on the amount of land legally available for ranching. But the most important point here, as Diego pointed out, is that ranching does not require the arduous physical labor demanded by other crops, such as, planting potatoes, working for a daily wage, or the highly feminized labor of foraging for hazelnuts. Rather, successful ranching depends strictly on

the amount of land one owns.

Diego also rejected the idea of reforestation with native species. Exotics matured within one or two decades, as opposed to the fifty + years required for native species (depending on the site and management). Therefore, to make a living out of native species, in their view, would require an unfeasible amount of time. How would already poor peasants make a living from that? It was not worth the effort. Diego was not alone in this regard. A significant number of peasants we spoke with were adamant about the incompatibility between native forest conservation and economic prerogatives. After all, native trees grow slowly, especially when compared with eucalyptus and pine. Carlos, a 37-year old leader explained, “If I plant native trees, I will never see any benefit from them. Sure, my grandchildren could harvest the timber, but I wouldn’t profit from it.” For many, conservation of native forest was understood to be simply unviable. Temporal constraints and unfavorable credit structures were powerful deterrents. As a result, fully aware of the environmental costs associated with commercial forestry, they opted to plant exotic species. Given such challenges, it is not surprising that many farmers viewed that the separation of their descendants from farming was inevitable, desirable, and necessary. In the few remaining farms in Mininco country, money is desperately needed. These families highly valued formal education as a means to transition out of the farm sector. After all, environmental degradation undermined the present and future livability of Nahuelco. Without water, how could they farm? Juan, a 37-year old male farmer summarized his family’s strategy well.

We sell one or two cows every year to save money for university ... I hope my children finish high school, because there will be no trees left when they grow up. There will be nothing for them here. They must study or work with their own hands somewhere else.

Others shared Juan’s disillusionment. When asked about his dreams for the future, Fidel was reluctant to respond.

It is too premature to know. Everything is changing so fast. It is impossible to know what to expect. The rhythm of change is just too fast. With global warming, it is even worse. The temperature is increasing. Here, it will become like the north and the north will be like the south ... The problem is that peasants depend on agriculture, but farming is not valued. My children are going to have to build their lives somewhere else. It is too hard here. My daughter sometimes talks about having a house here—but I tell her, just for vacations, not to live.

While Fidel discouraged his children and grandchildren from becoming farmers, he and his wife, Sara, had no intention of leaving the land. Sara told us, “I want to live in the countryside until the end of my days.” Notions of impending generational alienation were widely shared.

In one of our final focus groups, respondents told us about their visions for the future. Renaldo articulated the non-nostalgic group’s perspective:

“Why would our children stay here? They just need the land. They need it to sell it off to Mininco and take the money. No one will remember that we lived here”.

This conception of the future is concomitant with the notion of cleaning in the sense articulated by Root-Bernstein (2014): as an attempt to erase the past. It is telling that they predicted environmental disaster, destruction, and the wholesale abandonment of their hillside villages—all future property of the timber company. For some of them, this future is inevitable, therefore, it makes no sense to remember, or attempt to be remembered. They do not show nostalgia for the past or eagerness for the future—they are condemned to inhabit a thoroughly difficult present. Among the non-nostalgic group, certain patterns stood out. Those who grew up during the imposition of Chile’s neoliberal reforms most commonly articulated fatalistic discourses. Their earliest memories were not those of reciprocity and plenty, but of hardship and individualized struggles for survival. There were exceptions, however. For example, Alejandra and Carlos (the young couple mentioned earlier)

grew up in the region and were highly knowledgeable about agriculture. They grew potatoes, raised goats, and foraged for nuts and mushrooms. Occasionally, Carlos moonlighted as a Mininco security guard. They lived in a modest wooden home, lacking electricity and indoor plumbing. Carlos’ siblings and relatives left Nahuelco. “It was too hard for them—you know, living so far from the city, without good roads or transport. It isn’t easy.” While peering over the aerial maps, Carlos told us what it was like to grow up in the middle of the socioecological transformation. “Before, all of this was native forest, *pura montaña*.” Carlos reflected on what had changed in his lifetime:

Positively speaking, the roads are better ... But things have not changed that much ... We have cleaned out a bit of the forest, because, clearly, we cannot eat pura montaña, we cannot live or feed ourselves without planting and clearing a bit of the forest. We cannot eat firewood!

We could see on the map that they had carefully managed and preserved the forests around their farm. Indeed, Carlos’ knowledge of local trees and native species was remarkable, and he took great pride and care in his patch of forest. Carlos planned to leave an old growth tree for his daughter as her “inheritance.” When state forestry engineers insisted that he remove the tree, he refused. He explained (conspiratorially), “The forest engineers want to take it out because it is not straight, but I refused. This is for my daughter. I am going to keep the trees that I know have a future.”

Carlos and Alejandra were well aware that they were special, a vanishing breed in the region. They were extremely young when compared with the majority of their neighbors. “Young people aren’t interested in the countryside,” Carlos explained.

Most youth have already left the countryside. Outsiders, the city folk, they don’t valorize the countryside. For example, the price of potatoes has been a disaster for us. No one is willing to pay a decent price for wood either. No one values what we produce. Prices are just too low. There is no income here anymore, and so, everyone left.

Alejandra and Carlos would like to have more land, but their biggest worry for now is getting electricity. Infrastructural investments are costly. When asked about the future, they were reluctant to respond. “We don’t know what tomorrow will be like, how can we predict that?” With some prodding, they timidly shared some of their hopes and dreams with the team. Carlos explained:

Sometimes I think I would like to go into eco-tourism. You know, open a place with horseback riding, fishing, biking, camping, a zip line, perhaps? There is a very beautiful place that isn’t too far from here. You can reach it on foot. It is close to the river, in the middle of the forest. But, for now, this is just my crazy dream.

Alejandra, an extremely talented cook, shared Carlos’s ambition and hoped to open a restaurant on-site.

5. Conclusion: productive nostalgia

In Chile, a living laboratory of neoliberal reforms, many studies have documented the negative socioecological transformations as experienced by Mapuche communities (Bacigalupo, 2007; Cárdenas and Antileo, 2006; Carter, 2010; González-Hidalgo and Zografos, 2017). However, much less has been written about the ways *colonos* (non-indigenous) people have experienced such transitions. In this paper, we have documented how Nahuelco’s peasants remember and inhabit these transitions, bringing attention to the role of nostalgia in the construction of different positions towards environmental degradation, as well as in the internalization of capitalist logics. The expansion of timber plantations in Nahuelco not only occurred physically, on the ground, but also affectively, leaving emotional scars on the hearts and minds of its inhabitants. Here we highlight Lefebvre’s perspective on representational spaces as a useful starting point from which to explore such processes. Much can be learned from paying closer attention to the way in which peasants’ emic, phenomenologically-lived categories call into question dominant discourses.

Our paper has also contributed to discussions on nostalgia—an

emotion that has garnered significant attention as of late (especially in the literature on populism). However, we have come to understand it differently, and perhaps, more productively. The concept of nostalgia is closely related to the psychological concept of *solastalgia* articulated by Albrecht et al. (2007). Solastalgia refers to the psychological distress caused by environmental degradation accompanied by a sense of powerlessness. In contrast to nostalgia, solastalgia makes references to the specific situation where someone has not changed location, and yet one's homeplace has changed so much that it is irrecognizable and no longer provides a sense of 'solace', strength, or support; rather, it produces anxiety, stress, and pain. Solastalgia has been used to describe the feeling produced by environmental changes, such as: natural disasters, resource extraction, gentrification, industrialization, war, and land use change (Galway et al., 2019). Although there is agreement that solastalgia is related to a notion of place (Galway et al., 2019), this aspect have not been further theorized. As noted by Askland and Bunn (2018), the concept of solastalgia, as it has been elaborated thus far, remains underpinned by a static conception of the human-nature divide. This philosophical underpinning leads—perhaps inadvertently—to a normative approach, where a more critical and multisystemic analysis would be better suited. Thus, in this work, we have attempted to advance in a more dialogical view of landscape transformation and the general notion of loss (i.e.: nostalgia), yet future work could seek to elaborate further the affective and phenomenological experiences of solastalgia and its intersection with the production of space.

While our research did not explicitly intend to focus on embodied memories of labor, our informants continually evoked stories of hard work on the land. This should not be surprising, given the importance of labor as an everyday part of peasant life, a point of socialization, and common matrix of relations with the non-human environment. Marx's well-known conceptualization of labor—as a process in which both humans and nature participate—provides a useful framework to bring together these elements. Through labor, humans transform nature and themselves. By manufacturing food, clothing, shelter, and other products, their work modifies the landscape. Therefore, we regard labor as a crucial form of spatial practice. At the same time, work creates meaningful, emotionally dense representational spaces that are vividly remembered and inhabited. Nevertheless, the transformation and appropriation of nature is necessarily a class project—leading to working class alienation. As Marx warned us long ago, under capitalism, workers are alienated from multiple items: nature, their production, one another, and even from themselves. In consequence, the worker and the capitalist have fundamentally different relations with nature. Where workers are intimately involved with the social transformation of nature, capitalists are limited to abstract relations to nature, mostly by means of legal contracts, measurements, and calculations related to the profitability of the resource in question.

Among the peasants we came to know, we observed profound ambivalence towards resource extraction. In capitalism, ideological relations between capitalists and nature predominate, defining discourses and knowledge about nature (i.e., spaces of representation). For example, a worker may understand his or her relation to nature as predicated on private property, where the material content is regarded as a mere accident, a troublesome phenomenon that can and should be superseded. Previous research in Chile has documented that, in the context of a dominant neoliberal-capitalist regime, many peasants have internalized the subjective logics of private property (Berry, 2009; Lund, 2016, 2011; Manuschevich, 2016).¹⁰ We understand this process as an ongoing subjective and objective form of alienation, whereby dominant

capitalist spaces of representation actively marginalize those representational spaces in conflict with accumulation strategies. In consequence, workers become subjectively alienated from *their own lived space*—a process we call “spatial alienation”.

Contrary to arguments that consider nostalgia to be inherently reactionary, we have found that nostalgia for the past, particularly a desire for a past remembered as better, can fuel oppositional practices in the present. Significant groups of peasants in Nahuelco reject the timber industrial complex as natural, inevitable, or desirable, and their rejection is sustained by memories of a past remembered as more diverse, equitable, and far less lonely. Some of them are taking action to deter the expansion of Mininco—within the limits of their individual possibilities and resources. Nostalgia, in this case, therefore, provides fertile ground for an emergent (albeit fragile) brand of individualized peasant politics. By contrast, we observed that the lack of nostalgia may result in a sort of fatalistic political subjectivity—one resigned to the present and aligned with the interests of timber conglomerates. At least in our interactions, we observed a valuation of nature in purely instrumental terms, on the basis of its exchange value alone, leading to spatial alienation from the land. Far from being viewed as a product of neoliberal state policy, such a separation was viewed as inevitable. For them, neither conservation of native forest nor farming was a desirable future. Thus, for this generation of middle-aged male farmers, deforestation is a neutral development. It represents progress and by clearing space to produce cattle and *metro ruma*, they were not very concerned with the negative environmental impacts of such productive practices. As they did not see their futures on the land, they were uninterested in remembering an irrecoverable past. It was just a matter of time, after all, before they or their descendants sold the land, cashed out, and built their futures elsewhere—hopefully, in a place where their labor fetched a better price. The tone of many discussions with participants was strikingly fatalistic. We often heard remarks, such as: “Nobody will remember that we lived here.” Stranded in a sea of commercial timber, accumulation seemed to be the only reasonable survival strategy. By converting nature into money, they absolved themselves from environmental concerns. Given such a dismal scenario, it is not difficult to understand why collective forgetting has become such a crucial social practice, at least in the public sphere—*after all, in a world that values accumulation above all else, why bother to remember?* With the absence of memory, neoliberal expansion is naturalized rather easily, and other forms of more collectivized social organization, and strategies to defend them, appear to be on the decline. With one to defend them, will wane away rather fast. That being said, it is never possible to ensure that even in this non-nostalgic group, some very well-kept sentiments of nostalgia remain, despite our intense search in this three-year ethnographic work.

While many observers have been keen to point out the importance of class differentiation in understanding the ideological and material heterogeneity of peasant communities (Bernstein, 2002), our findings foreground the importance of generation and gender. Elders were most likely to espouse nostalgic agrarian imaginaries and articulate positive memories of rural lives marked by hard work, family bonds, natural abundance, and relative social security. Unfortunately, their voices and influence have waned with the passage of time. Few occupied positions of leadership and authority at the time of our research. In contrast, farmers born in the 1970s (at the beginning of Chile's neoliberal experiment) grew up in an altogether rural world. Environmental degradation, social fragmentation, and precarity accompanied the expansion of tree farms, and survival became a more individualized affair. Within producers' associations, their voices dominated discussions of Nahuelco's developmental future. There were few exceptions, which suggests that supportive public policies for younger farmers are warranted. Moreover, gender is a relevant factor for environmental attitudes and values. It is important to recognize women as possible promoters and agents of native forest preservation and hazelnut collecting. This niche crop is a promising, economically viable alternative to deforestation and commercial timber. These female peasants too,

¹⁰ Moreover, a defining trait of neoliberalism, as compared to other forms of capitalism, is the conscious determination to intervene upon society at a deep cultural and ideological level, shaping the public sentiment against “collectivism” and in favor of private property, markets and entrepreneurialism (Mirowski, 2009; MPS, 1947; Von Hayek, 1948).

warrant a supportive institutional framework to encourage their entrepreneurship and facilitate market access. Nahuelco's women are not alone. In other areas of Chile, women are foraging non-timber forest products, as it provides them with a degree of economic independence, particularly in times of hardship and unemployment—typical of the twenty-year cycle of industrial afforestation (Recolectoras de productos silvestres, 2003). During times of timber harvesting, or every ten to twenty years, the large forestry conglomerates provide significant employment to locals. These non-timber forest products are a steady economic activity but are considered an “additional” activity to the household's “main” job and income source provided by males. As of now, their voices and visions have been largely sidelined by male leadership, who dominate commerce, and forestry managers.

In this paper, we have argued that peasant representational spaces are different from official discourses and are interpreted in relation to socioecological changes observed around them and its emotions. For example, the near universal disdain for *el monte* ought to be understood not only in terms of its resistance to capitalist accumulation, but also in terms of the social dynamics that it evokes. In our case study, ecological succession has been associated with outmigration. Thus, besides negative feelings, *el monte* also evokes a strong desire for transformation—to fully use the land and prove that it is still inhabited and potentially useful. To the peasants in Nahuelco that still remember it, *la montaña* is their own home, the space where they used to live, which they would like to bring back, or to which they would like to return, in other words, the place where they belong.

Overall, our research documented a troubling spatial and temporal rupture with land and history in Nahuelco. In contrast, peasant representational spaces fueled by nostalgia for a previous social and ecological time, seemed to counter the spaces of representation promoted by the state and timber conglomerates and even by dominant conservation movements.

Considering that, tree farms are strongly promoted by international agencies as means to mitigate to climate change (Lewis et al., 2019; World Bank, 2020b), timber plantations will continue to be a large driver of change in rural areas, particularly in the Global South. Therefore, future research in rural studies ought to examine land use change and its connections to the politics of emotions, along with the dynamics of generation and gender. This will help to produce a critical perspective of the impacts and workings of such policies on the ground in rural communities. Our hope is that their perspectives matter to national policy makers. We speculate that what we observed in Chile, after forty years of tree-farm expansion might foreshadow plausible futures across the Global South.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Daniela Manuschevich: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Investigation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Visualization, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Mel Gurr:** Methodology, Investigation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Funding acquisition. **Carlos A. Ramirez-Pascualli:** Conceptualization, Writing - review & editing.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.09.010>.

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