

**EL PRODUCTO MÁS DEMOCRÁTICO QUE HAY:
CHILEAN FRONTIER CONSTELLATIONS AFTER PINOCHET**

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ABSTRACT

Eric H. Thomas: El producto más democrático que hay: Chilean Frontier Constellations
after Pinochet
(Under the direction of Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld)

In its efforts to consolidate the southern frontier, the Chilean government has repeatedly introduced technologies of governance that target both territory and population in the remote Aysén region. Through processes of territorialization, securitization, and bureaucratization, these technologies proscribe and prescribe practices within certain territories. More recently, transnational environmental activists and organizations have successfully challenged development initiatives in the region. In this context, local actors find themselves doubly alienated—from a state that privileges economic growth over social investment and from activists who privilege environmental preservation over local needs. Locals have responded by circumventing state technologies through novel economic formations and by returning to traditional practices discouraged by the modernizing state. This is evident in local responses to a regional firewood subsidy introduced in 2012. From establishing firewood “cooperatives” to living in multigenerational households, actors demonstrate that local networks and local knowledge can be deployed to challenge state technologies of governance.

Para mi amigo, Jorge,
mi familia adoptiva, Veronica, Eduardo, y Cristóbal,
y mi hermanita, Angie.

And for my parents, Bill and Sandy.

Yo no podría haberlo hecho sin ustedes.

The state effect, with its rearrangements of space and recalibrations of time, was worked out through local relationships and practices held in place by local understandings. (Hershatter 2011:15)

With varying degrees of success, and in some cases with disastrous failure, the postcolonial states deployed the latest government technologies to promote the well being of their populations. (Chatterjee 2004:37)

It was... chaos. (Claudia Poveda Caceres, Regional Director of FOSIS, 2015)

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DELIVERY DAY

June 20, 2015

Puerto Aysén is a place of apparent contradictions. Brightly colored shingle and clapboard houses built in the same Chilote style for generations have been outfitted with satellite dishes emblazoned with the logos of Movistar and Entel. Smoke hangs over the city, lingering above the chimneys of hundreds of houses, while late model Toyota trucks drive along the town's muddy streets. The city is divided by a river into the ribera norte, the oldest part of town, occupied since the first settlers decided to stay in the early 20th Century, and the ribera sur, where rows of new, identical affordable housing units sit in front of a massive athletic complex and an even more massive construction site where the new hospital will soon be completed—a testament to state investments on the frontier

My friend Jorge is a veterinarian for the state agency SernaPesca, who moved to the Aysén region from outside of Talca, a mere two hours from Santiago, in 2008. He lives in an unassuming cabaña on the ribera norte, where today he and I will be hosting an asado to coincide with the Copa America matches that will be televised this afternoon.

Jorge's friend Alex is outside tending the grill while Jorge and I take in the first match of the day on Jorge's massive flat-screen TV. Alex is also a veterinarian, although he works for Marine Farm, a private salmon farming company established during the final years of the Pinochet regime in 1989. He keeps yelling for updates on what he's missing, and Jorge obliges him through the cracked window. Soon, Alejandra and Paula, pololas (girlfriends) of Jorge and Alex, respectively, join us.

The relative tranquility of the gathering, which—aside from the drizzle slowly soaking Alex—could have taken place anywhere in Chile, is interrupted when Jorge’s cell phone rings. He jumps up—Jorge is easily excitable—and heads outside into the rain. I run after him, grabbing my raincoat and calling out, “Que pasó?” (“What happened?”)

“Es la leña!” He calls back. “Ayudame, weones!” (“It’s the firewood! Help me, assholes!”)

The firewood has arrived! We were running low, and Jorge had called to arrange a delivery that morning. Now, upon opening the gate that separates the string of cabañas from the street, we can see a middle aged man and a woman, he in a blue jacket and black beret, she in a brightly patterned sweater and windbreaker pants. They are standing in the back of their camioneta (light truck), covered by a tarpaulin stretched loosely over a metal frame. They are heaving firewood into the soft earth between the street and sidewalk. They greet Jorge, and he shakes both their hands, asking for the woman’s name, as she’s the one he spoke to when he called. Her name is Elisa, and she takes his money—30,000 pesos, about \$47 USD—before resuming her heaving. Both she and her husband, the man in the beret, are cheery, and make small talk with Jorge as they continue to unload the truck. While they are still working, Jorge pulls a wheelbarrow around from the side of the cabaña and begins to load it. I help. Alex is nowhere to be found.

We bring the cubic meter of pre-cut firewood inside the gate, and dump it in the alley between Jorge’s cabaña and his neighbor’s. It takes several trips, and Alex and the girls look on in amusement. When Jorge mocks Alex for being too flojo (lazy) to help,

Alex defends himself by saying he's busy with the meat. Alejandra offers that she would help, but is still tired from having firewood delivered to her house the previous afternoon. Paula says nothing, but watches us as we proceed back and forth with the wheelbarrow until the alley is nearly full. Inside, the woodstove is burning away, the only heat source in the four-room cabaña. Outside, the meat sizzles on the grill, the girls huddle under the roofline, and the rain continues to fall.

The Politics of Firewood

Firewood deliveries like this one are a daily occurrence during the winter in the Aysén region, where passes leading east through the Andes to Argentina and west to the sea have facilitated travel and trade for generations. The need for firewood—and the practices associated with its procurement and use—are part of what sets Aysén apart from the rest of the country.

Residents, whether they were raised in the region or came from other parts of Chile in order to work in one of its rapidly expanding industries, must develop and mobilize firewood knowledge, learning what it takes to keep a fire burning through the long Patagonian winter. In one sense, what it takes is simple, even mundane: a clear chimney, a watchful eye to guard against stray coals, and a steady supply of hardwood—not the soft pine grown on timber plantations—or, for those able to buy a winter's supply in advance, a place to store a surplus. But frontiers are unstable places subject to state interventions and labor flows that challenge even the most mundane practices: timber plantations have replaced native hardwood with Douglas fir; subsidies designed to help “vulnerable” families have caused massive price increases; environmental groups, mostly from outside the region, have pushed for conservation measures that limit local access to public land.

Firewood is therefore not only inextricably linked to the region's past, but also to its present and future. Following protests by angry Ayséninos¹ fed up with the Chilean government's lack of social investment on the southern frontier and the high cost of living in the region (Zibechi 2012), the state agency Fondo de Solidaridad e Inversión Social (Fund for Solidarity and Social Investment; FOSIS) introduced a *bono de calefacción* (heating bonus) for certain qualified residents starting in 2012. This latest "technology of governance" (Foucault 2006:140; Rose 2006:147) targeting the wellbeing of frontier citizens was intended to return the region to its former, depoliticized state. Technologies like the subsidy are often introduced in response to local protests and problems, and for the government in Santiago, the protests in February 2011, which paralyzed much of the remote region, were indeed a serious problem.

In 2012, however, the bureaucrats at FOSIS had no experience with firewood procurement or delivery, particularly on such a scale. Ayséninos on the other hand—whose forbearers were *Patagones* who came over the mountains from Argentina and *Chilotes* who traveled down the fjords from the island of Chiloé—have been in the firewood business since before the formal establishment of the region in 1928.

As a result, the "chaos" that accompanied the introduction of this latest state technology actually provided an opportunity for some residents living on the frontier to redirect state efforts and exploit the dramatic price increases that accompanied state intervention, even as other residents suffered. Because of the importance of firewood, *everyone* in the region was affected by the introduction of the subsidy, and this has had a profound impact on both *how* citizens view the state and *where* they interact with it. Citizens' responses to the firewood subsidy, which has been modified and expanded in

¹ As residents of the region are known.

the years since 2012, have revealed that local knowledge and local networks represent powerful tools for redirecting state technologies and resources.

In Coyhaique, the region's capital and largest city, the government offices that line the streets around the pentagonal Plaza de Armas testify to the Chilean state's role on the frontier, as it has sought to incorporate the region into the national economy via processes of territorialization, securitization, and bureaucratization. In the Chilean south, though these processes have been at work since the founding of Aysén, they accelerated rapidly under the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990). During the *dictadura*, as it is known, state agents mapped vast tracts of land and proscribed and prescribed the activities that could take place within them, inaugurated massive infrastructure projects to connect far-flung parts of the region, garrisoned soldiers and police in frontier towns, and sent technocratic experts to the area to oversee its development. The economic boom in the timber and farmed salmon sectors that characterized much of the 1990s seemed to validate Pinochet's vision, and to demonstrate that the frontier had been settled once and for all.

Yet contrary to conventional wisdom, which argues that processes such as those described above ultimately lead to the stabilization and depoliticization of frontiers, Ayséninos have used their local knowledge—itsself a product of the region's historical remoteness and isolation from the rest of Chile—to redirect and circumvent state technologies targeting both territory and population. In so doing they have shown how local actors can destabilize frontier spaces and gain greater autonomy without *directly* challenging state authority.

Nikolas Rose has written, “the ‘power of the state’ is a resultant, not a cause, an outcome of the composition and assembling of actors, flows, buildings, relations of authority into relatively durable associations mobilized... towards the achievement of particular objectives by common means.” (Rose 2006:148) However durable the associations within the assemblage of state power appeared prior to 2011, the protests and the state’s subsequent efforts to stabilize the region show that the power of the state is still being contested and negotiated by a range of actors. Technologies introduced to placate angry residents as well as the *ways* in which they have been implemented have provided opportunities for Ayséninos to redirect state strategies, even as these strategies have expanded state influence to new sites where it was once absent. Efforts by the state to subsidize and regulate the firewood industry—an industry unique to the region and built around its citizens’ self-sufficiency, ingenuity, and hard work—have shown that the frontier remains unsettled. The state subsidy has made Aysénino fireplaces into a site where citizens can challenge initiatives they consider misguided or even dangerous.

An Unassuming Monument

June 24, 2015

The walk to Los Palos, just north of Puerto Aysén is a muddy one in the winter. It rarely snows in Puerto Aysén—unlike in Coyhaique and other settlements further inland—because the town sits at sea level. Instead, from April to August, there is a virtually constant drizzle that permeates the air and gives everything a damp quality that is only escapable in the presence of a woodstove. The first time I walked to Los Palos, it was in this drizzle, the sky was overcast, and the tops of the mountains that surround Puerto Aysén were barely visible through the mist. In short, it was a day like any other.

Los Palos today is a collection of houses that extend beyond a single fork in the gravel road. The houses are spread out, with fields around them where cattle and sheep lazily graze at the base of steep slopes. There are waterfalls everywhere, as runoff from the constant precipitation seeks the fastest route to the valley floor and then to the fjord beyond. It is the middle of the afternoon, and no one is visible in the fields around the houses of Los Palos. Only a fool—or an errant anthropologist—would be out in the damp cold unless there was a truly compelling reason. There is almost no traffic on the road, except for a Land Rover decorated with bumper stickers reading “No a hidroaysén!” and a passenger door emblazoned with the logo for a local eco-lodge well outside of Puerto Aysén. The driver speeds by me, but then hesitates. As I continue walking, he rolls down the passenger window and gestures down the road, offering me a lift to wherever it is I’m going. I wave him off and he looks over at his passenger, a man with a weathered face and a tangle of gray hair. The two of them smile at me, but shake their heads at each other as if to say, “crazy gringo.”

At the fork in the road, the nearest thing to a “center” of Los Palos, there is a monument, built in stages from 2010 to 2012. It is made of wood, but is sheltered by an aluminum roof. The monument includes a sign describing how in the 1920s, families in the employ of the Compañía Industrial de Aysén were given 40 hectares each for their work, and an additional 40 hectares for every male child over the age of twelve: “A medida que iban llegando, se iba poblando, así los terrenos vírgenes se fueron haciendo campos explotables...” (As they arrived, [the region] was populated, and in this way virgin lands were made into exploitable fields).

Even more striking than this romantic language of the frontier, however, is the sculpture at the center of the monument. It depicts a mustachioed man in a hooded wool coat standing in the center of a rowboat full of firewood, his gaze fixed and his hands on the oars, which dip into the gravel beneath the boat. The figure is carved from a single tree, but the boat is made from individual planks, just as many of the wooden boats in use on the river are today. The monument, however, is unfinished wood covered with a coat of varnish, rather than the garish colors one finds on contemporary launches and fishing vessels. This lends it a certain austere quality. Beneath the hooded man and his boat, a sign reads:

En honor a los que llegaron primero.

Los primeros pobladores de la comunidad fueron colonos que llegaban principalmente de la isla de Chiloe. La actividad económica que realizaban era la venta de leña donde participaba toda la familia y así limpiaban sus campos para hacer empastadas y criar ganado. Cuando el camino era el río la leña se transportaba en botes, hacia la nascente ciudad de Puerto Aysén, donde la vendían a sus habitantes y los barcos de la época que la utilizaban como combustible para producir vapor. Con estos ingresos compraban los víveres necesarios y volvían a sus campos aprovechando la diferencias de mareas, tanto para bajar el río como para remontarlo a su regreso.

In honor of those who arrived first.

The first inhabitants of the community were colonists who arrived principally from the island of Chiloe. The economic activity in which they participated was the selling of firewood, [an activity] in which the whole family participated and in this way cleared their fields to make pastures and raise cattle. When the road was the river, the wood was transported in boats to the nascent city of Puerto Aysén, where it was sold to the inhabitants and to the ships of the era, which used it as fuel to produce steam. With their earnings [the colonists] bought necessary provisions and returned to their fields taking advantage of the tidal differences to come down the river and to re-ascend it on their return.

Frontier Mythologies

Frontiers like Aysén have long been spaces constructed in the popular imaginary as sites where a few “rugged individuals” settle seeking new land and untapped resources that they can exploit. In the United States, this image comes from stories and textbooks, but also from black and white photographs of families homesteading on the Great Plains and men panning for gold in California rivers. According to the mythology of the frontier, these are spaces of conflict between culture and nature, where individuals battle the elements in isolation. But this kind of isolation and self-determination has always been a fiction. The Homestead Act, which allowed families to claim land they settled and cultivated across the American west, was a U.S. Government policy that allowed for public lands to pass into private hands through a very strict set of rules and regulations.² The gold miners who “rushed” to California in 1849 made eastern manufacturers and shipping magnates rich as they bought equipment and paid for passage on the ships that would carry them to the Pacific—ships that would often stop in Valparaiso, Chile en route in order to re-provision and refit. That frontiers are national, rather than *transnational* spaces is also a fiction. In the United States, California miners, many of whom were recent immigrants from Europe, were quickly joined by immigrants from China³, and some who didn’t strike it rich in California moved on to even more remote corners of the world where gold and other precious minerals were being discovered, from the Yukon to Australia.

² Among other things, the Homestead Act of 1862 stipulated that settlers had to continuously occupy the land they sought to claim for five years, and limited the amount of land available to any one claimant or family to 160 acres.

³ And even a contingent from Chile. See Johnson 2001.

Aysén, of course, carries its own frontier mythology—one interlocutor who was born and raised in the region described her grandfather as arriving “*con su hacha de mano*” (“with his hatchet in hand”) to carve out a parcel of land for her family. Patagonia, which today refers to a region that covers more than a million square kilometers of Chile and Argentina, was for much of its history, a land separate from either of the two countries that now govern and seek to profit from its resources. As late as the 1880s, mapmakers demarcated Patagonia as neither part of the Argentine Federation nor of Chile but rather its own bounded territory, stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Indeed, the majority of ships that charted the southern shores and islands of the region were captained by Englishmen. Today, some residents even maintain that the name “Aysén” is actually derived from the English expression “Ice Ends,” supposedly written on the maps of British mariners at the spot where the glaciers of Southern Patagonia give way to the forests and rivers of the North.

It was not until 1870 that the Chilean navy sent Admiral Enrique Simpson⁴ to conduct a hydrographic survey of the southern archipelagoes and chart Patagonia’s rivers, inlets and fjords. This he did in two expeditions from 1870-1871 and again in 1874, naming the deep-water port, Puerto Chacabuco, for his ship in the process (Simpson 2011). At the time of his voyage, Chile had been an independent republic for over fifty years, and charting the region’s coastline was seen as critical to establishing the western side of the Andes as a part of the country.

For residents who settled there, however, Patagonia remained something apart, separated not only by distance from the rest of Chile, but also by custom, climate, and

⁴ Simpson, like the Chilean independence hero Bernardo O’Higgins had ancestors from the British Isles, as did several other prominent members of the Chilean navy during this period. Today one of the Aysén region’s more prominent rivers is Rio Simpson, named for the admiral.

imagination. Historian Thomas Miller Klubock has described the conditions on Chile's southern frontier, and the difficulties the Chilean state faced in its efforts to govern the south during the early 20th century:

[T]he state had only the most tenuous administrative and coercive control over its southern frontier, comprising fully a third of Chile's national territory, and its capacity to exercise hegemony by building a sense of identification with an imagined national community rooted in a shared ethnicity, or with the nation state, was even more limited. The Chilean state's ability to construct hegemonic rule was undermined by the rural population's transience, including frequent migrations to Argentina, and its weak administrative presence. (Klubock 2011:123)

All of this contributed to Patagonia's *de facto* autonomy even as it slowly became a territory within Chile. Today, the history of the region as a space apart factors into the way that residents' born and raised in Aysén understand their identities—and also into how they are understood by outsiders. One interlocutor, who had moved to the region as a young man, tried to explain what it meant to be *from Aysén*. Ayséninos, he said, are fiercely independent, but they come together to face problems or to fight outside interference because of their history as colonizers and their geographic isolation. Generations of Ayséninos had to be independent to survive in the south, he said, but they also had to cooperate with one another in times of need.

Today, the library in Puerto Aysén is decorated with black and white photographs depicting the early years of settlement and these are strikingly similar to images of North American homesteaders. Indeed, Chileans talk about “the south” in much the same way North Americans talk about “the west” and even the way they often talk about Patagonia, as *el extremo sur* (the *extreme* south) conveys a sense of awe, danger, and distance. But here too there have always been international connections and ties to the less romanticized industrial centers in Santiago and Valparaíso. Steamships carrying

European goods made regular passage to Puerto Chacabuco, the region's largest deep-water port, powering their boilers by burning coal on their way south and wood—harvested from Aysén's native hardwood forests—on the return trip north. After the military defeat of the indigenous Mapuche in the 1880s, the government in Santiago began resettling farmers from Chile's central valley as well as newly arrived German immigrants in the south in order to populate the territory with families and to provide a buffer against further Mapuche uprisings in the territory south of the Bio Bio River. The state provided land grants to both individual families and companies provided that they clear the land for agriculture. (Klubock 2004:339)

Early state efforts to populate the frontier, however, stopped at land grants. The isolation of Aysén and its geographic distance from Santiago meant that residents needed to be self-reliant and that they had to do “a little of everything.” Several Ayséninos with whom I spoke described the varied daily tasks and skills they had learned from their parents and grandparents. That the region was successfully populated was more a tribute to the diversity of work undertaken by the earliest arrivals than the Chilean state—something not lost on residents today. Still, the region *was* successfully populated and soon, grain grown by these new arrivals in the south of Chile would feed other settlers as far away Australia. (Mayo 1990)

The Dictator's Vision

Frontiers, thus, should be understood as highly dynamic nodes in transnational networks, subject to state policies and commercial exploitation as well as the will of the “rugged individuals” inhabiting them. Writing on the global connections to be found at resource rich frontiers today, Anna Tsing has described frontiers as “spaces of desire”

where governments and corporations promote the idea of “virgin” wilderness, unlimited resources, and boundless employment opportunities for migrants combine to lead to expansion and large-scale extractivism (Tsing 2003; 2004). Echoing this idea, Danilo Geiger has written, “frontiers recede and advance in relation to changing demands for frontier commodities on regional and world markets.” (Geiger 2008:93) in a process Keith Barney has termed “frontier neoliberalism” (Barney 2009:146). According to Michael Eilenberg, “frontier processes should be seen as cyclical phenomena that wax and wane according to the strength of the state and the pressure of global markets.” (Eilenberg 2014:162) Though much of this contemporary scholarship on frontiers focuses on Southeast Asia, the phenomena and language of frontiers is equally applicable in southern Chile.

According to conventional wisdom, “frontier” discourses are mobilized by the state for the purposes of resource extraction—dependent on pressures from the global marketplace—and territorial expansion. The expansion of the “civilizing state” and the correlated “exclusion of locals by settlers and state planners” (Eilenberg 2014:162) should therefore be temporary processes; the frontier cannot remain a frontier indefinitely and will ultimately be incorporated, both symbolically and economically, into the rest of the nation.

The military junta that deposed democratically elected Marxist president Salvador Allende on September 11, 1973 saw the incorporation of Chile into the global economy as essential to “saving” the country (Stern 2006). The head of the junta, Augusto Ugarte Pinochet and his economic team, known as the “Chicago Boys”⁵ saw the export of

⁵ They had studied under Milton Freidman at the University of Chicago as part of an exchange program with Universidad Católica de Chile.

Chile's natural resources—nearly all of which are located in the country's far north or south— as an engine for free market reforms. Control and integration of the nation's frontiers was now imperative, and Pinochet had a distinct vision for the south of Chile.

Pinochet is an infamous figure. He oversaw the execution or disappearance of over 3,000 Chilean citizens (Rettig Commission Report 1991) and the detainment and torture of more than 38,000⁶ (The National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report 2004). His secret police, known as the DINA (*Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional*)⁷ carried out killings as far away as Buenos Aires and Washington DC. It is important to recall, however, especially during the early years of the military regime, he enjoyed widespread—if not majority—support among Chileans who had disapproved of the political and economic volatility that characterized the Allende years, largely due to interference by the US State Department.⁸ (Stern 2006) This enabled him, along with the leaders of the Chilean Navy, Air Force, and *carabineros* to take sweeping actions for the sake of “national security” and the rapid improvement of the battered economy.

Territorialization

Defined by political geographer Robert Sack as “the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area,” (Sack 1986:19) territorialization under

⁶ Both of these figures are probably extremely low estimates, due to the fact that official investigations into human rights violations under Pinochet are still highly contested and the result of compromises between center-left and center-right parties, the latter of which have consistently favored reconciliation over truth and justice. For an excellent discussion of the political struggles over repression, torture, and disappearances during and immediately after the dictatorship see Steve Stern's *Memory Box* trilogy.

⁷ And later renamed the CNI (*Central Nacional de Informaciones*) after international pressure forced him to take a more clandestine approach to torture and murder.

⁸ It has become clear in the years since 1973—but particularly since the recent declassification of internal State Department memos—that the CIA, with the explicit backing of President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, had imposed an “invisible blockade” designed to “make the economy scream” in order to undermine Allende's government (Garcia Marquez 1974; Winn 2004)

Pinochet first entailed literally redrawing the map of Chile. Pinochet was not content with the organization of the country as it was. What had previously been 25 provinces became 13 regions, each identified with a number, from I (Tarapacá on the Peruvian border) to XII (Magallanes y Antártica Chilena).⁹ Under this new system, Aysén—which had operated as a province since its formal establishment in 1928—was designated *Región XI*.

But the territorialization of the Chilean south meant more than simply changing the names on official maps. Territorialization represented an *assemblage* of contingent biopolitical technologies mobilized to increase the social and economic development of the Aysén region under conditions favorable for securing Chilean government objectives. For states, “territorialization is about excluding or including people within particular geographic boundaries, and about controlling what people do and their access to natural resources within those boundaries (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995:388) For Pinochet and the military regime, this meant establishing natural reserves, national parks, and a *zona franca* (free trade zone) at Puerto Chacabuco as well as expanding the bureaucratic offices and agencies tasked with regulating them.

Today, the *zona franca* enables duty-free imports to the region, supplying the workforce with cheaper cars, fuel, and consumer goods—provided these are used primarily within the region. When it was established it coincided with the military regime’s policy of *apertura*—the dismantling of tariff and nontariff trade barriers. The *apertura* ended the protection of the domestic economic sector (Schurman 2004:302), thereby introducing cheap imports and effectively directing workers who had produced

⁹ Only the Región Metropolitana—essentially greater metropolitan Santiago—doesn’t have a number. It is typically represented with the initials “RM” on numbered maps.

goods for the local economy into rapidly expanding export-oriented sectors. Seafood factories and timber plantations boomed. Other economic sectors collapsed.

Aihwa Ong has written about how the zoning technologies of territorialization represent “specific state strategies that are designed to respond effectively to the challenges of global markets” (Ong 2006:98) a process that is evident in the designation of certain kinds of spaces, the payment of higher salaries to certain state employees for work in these designated spaces,¹⁰ and the regulation of the economic activities allowed in those spaces in Aysén. These zoning technologies offer new opportunities for workers willing to relocate to the far south—particularly for those with technical expertise deemed valuable in the timber and aquaculture industries—but they also create conditions of exploitation, both of workers and of the natural environment, as they produce commodities for the global marketplace.

Securitization

In order to further develop an export-oriented resource economy in the extreme south on its terms, the military regime needed to increase state presence and consolidate power. Fabricated threats of “Marxist guerrillas” intent on civil war provided a pretense for the movement of more troops to the “restless” south. Though the need for a military presence has long been based on the proximity to and porous nature of the border with Argentina—both Puerto Aysén and Coyhaique remain full of fresh-faced young men in camouflage due to their significant military bases—discourses of security and “law and

¹⁰ This is known as the *zona* system, however it does not apply to *all* government employees, and there has been a mobilization to extend *zona* benefits to state employees not currently receiving them such as employees working for the ministry of education. Signs can be found across the Aysén region that read: *Nivelación de zona, ahora!* (Level the zone, now!)

order” were also directed at supposed “domestic threats” by the Pinochet regime during the 1970s and 1980s. As historian Steve Stern has written:

The Chilean South, from Concepción through Temuco and down through the inland territory east and south of Valdivia constituted a symbolic landscape of threat—a territory that harbored MIR [*Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*, Revolutionary Leftist Movement] organizers, guerilla training camps, and hidden arms caches, in other words leftists ready to wage battle with Chilean police and troops... The narrative reminded Chileans that although the regime had achieved normalization and institutionalization, a latent threat always remained present. It required a vigilant state—and justified periods of legal exception. (Stern 2006:288)

What worked in Temuco and Valdivia soon arrived in Aysén. Securitization, an essential step in the development of frontier zones, required soldiers and extrajudicial justice, but it also established new bureaucratic processes. The need for security forces in the extreme south and far north, where vast tracts of empty desert abut the Peruvian and Bolivian borders and where the majority of detention camps for political prisoners operated during the Pinochet years, eventually grew into Chile’s contemporary *zona* system. This system provides higher salaries for certain state employees— originally *carabineros* and other military personnel but subsequently opened up to include other state agencies and even some private enterprises affiliated with state business—who were working in far-flung parts of the country. Maintaining law and order on the frontier, where reinforcements might take days or even weeks to arrive, required loyal soldiers. Reliable payment of government salaries would help ensure that loyalty.

Bureaucratization

As has been well documented elsewhere, during this period, free market principles became the basis of so-called “political liberty” and technocratic experts—with the backing of Pinochet’s “National Security Doctrine”—were tasked with making this

ideology a reality (Valdez 1995:31). These men implemented their market-oriented policies and initiatives, and oversaw the expansion of industries deemed to be in the national interest. This required a military presence in the far south, but more importantly it required bureaucrats and government offices from which experts could direct this kind of economic development.

While Pinochet and his secret police purged most of the academic departments at the Universidad de Chile and Universidad Católica—Chile’s most prestigious universities—in order to eliminate suspected leftists and Allende sympathizers, forestry departments were left largely intact. Soon after, a combination of tax incentives and state union busting allowed the timber industry in Aysén to market its products to international buyers (Winn 2004:19-22; Klubock 2004:347-352; Henne and Gabrielson 2012:152). Aquaculture initiatives undertaken with the help of international experts ensured that Chilean salmon began to appear on tables around the world and to account for nearly 5% of Chile’s export earnings by 2001 (Schurman 2004:320).

The expansion of technocratic governance and efforts to depoliticize this governance have profoundly affected the region and its inhabitants. As noted previously, Foucault’s definition of governmentality as “the conduct of conduct” operating at the scale of a predetermined population is useful here, as is Nikolas Rose’s definition of expertise as “authority arising out of a claim to knowledge, to neutrality, and to efficacy.” (Rose 2006:145) For Pinochet and the rest of the military regime, neutrality was central to their claim of legitimacy as was their claim of expertise, which was largely based on having foreign trained academics in charge of economic policy and on their ability to partner with foreign experts to reform the Chilean economy.

Anthropologist Tania Li has described how “the will to improve” or develop is based on problematization, which she defines as “identifying deficiencies that need to be rectified” and what she terms “rendering technical.” (Li 2007:7) Questions that are rendered technical “are simultaneously rendered nonpolitical” and therefore “exclude the structure of political-economic relations from their diagnoses and prescriptions.” (Li 2007:7) It is easy to see how this would appeal to a totalitarian government interested in placating its citizens without implementing democratic reforms or altering the status quo—and this was certainly the case in Pinochet’s Chile. This “rendering technical” meant an expansion of state bureaucracy across the country, but perhaps nowhere more than in remote areas deemed to be of strategic economic and military importance.

By far the most ambitious piece of Pinochet’s vision for the southern frontier, however, was the *Carretera Austral*. Begun by Chilean army engineers in 1976, this highway literally cut through mountains and forests, connecting distant *comunas* throughout the region and making it possible for workers to commute from larger cities (Coyhaique and Puerto Aysén) to plants processing materials for export located along the coastline. Today, though construction continues, the journey from Coyhaique to Puerto Aysén, which once involved five to ten hours of travel over rutted tracks and under waterfalls, takes just under an hour¹¹ thanks to the *túnel farellones*.

The authoritarian nature of the Pinochet dictatorship brought about massive infrastructure projects, depoliticized administration of resources, fewer restrictions on private enterprise, increased territorialization, securitization, and bureaucratization on the southern frontier as well as the expansion of radio and television—which provided

¹¹ In good weather.

Chileans from Arica to Punta Arenas access to the *same* information, images, symbols, songs, and celebrities.

Surely an autocratic regime which enjoyed widespread support during its early years,¹² an absolute monopoly on the use of force, economists trained at the University of Chicago with missionary-like zeal for transforming the national economy, *and* preferential treatment from the IMF and commercial banks (Valdez 1995:2; Winn 2004:26) should represent an “ideal type” for the study of how frontiers are settled from the top-down. Given the strength of the state and the fastidious attention of state economists to the demand for and production of export commodities, Aysén should have only been a frontier for a period of time before becoming like the rest of Chile following the stabilization of the demand for resources and the related demand for labor in frontier industries.

But conventional wisdom, which privileges the global marketplace and the state as the primary forces creating and demarcating frontiers, fails to account for the destabilizing effect of local knowledge and local networks. Simply put, government officials in Santiago cannot see the harvesting and storing of firewood, the annual shearing of sheep, and the fishing—and illegal smuggling—that goes on in the region’s innumerable inlets. Even the strongest state with the most repressive national security apparatus cannot exert total control over its citizens, and even in our era of hegemonic global capitalism (Harvey 2005) communities are motivated by more than the economy. If frontiers are unstable nodes in international networks, this provides opportunities for

¹² Thanks largely to middle class resentment over the “economic chaos” of the Popular Unity years and subsequent junta propaganda that depicted the actions of the regime as “salvation” from Marxist guerillas and civil war (Stern 2006)

citizens living on the frontier to negotiate and contest state policies—even if they do not contest the state’s authority to implement them.

Ironically, the very economic policies implemented by Pinochet and the “Chicago Boys”—and largely maintained by subsequent administrations following the return to democracy in 1990—have encouraged frontier residents to contest, circumvent, and ignore the plans of the *supposedly* strong state setting the stage for a return to the unsettled past. The establishment of new laws protecting private property, the encouragement of foreign investment, the confiscation of land from indigenous and *campesino* cooperatives (Henne and Gabrielson 2012:52), and, above all, the destruction of the natural landscape for the sake of economic development (Carruthers 2001; Klubock 2004), paved the way for a series of transnational interventions into what had been previously perceived as domestic affairs. One such intervention included the quiet—and legal—purchase of a vast tract of land in southern Chile, prompting an outcry from politicians on the right and left and further isolating the Aysén region, just as national infrastructure projects seemed poised to bring it “on line” with the rest of the country.

Parallels in an Era of “Environmental Justice”

Increasingly, “resource” frontiers from the tropics to the arctic have become environmental battlegrounds, as the scale of the human impact on the planet becomes more widely known. As scientists debate the merits of employing the term “anthropocene” to our current moment, and politicians meet to discuss climate change, remote, often overlooked places like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska (ANWR), have become household names. The opening of the Ecuadorian Amazon to oil

companies eager to tap newfound petroleum has sparked an outcry and a movement in which celebrities from outside Ecuador have taken part. In this context, the ongoing battles over land rights and logging in the Brazilian Amazon seem like old news—and they are: these struggles have received international media attention since the 1980s (Tsing 2005).

What *is* new is the extent to which scholars and ordinary, albeit concerned individuals, are paying attention to the full range of actors who make up what Michael Eilenberg has called “frontier constellations,” where processes of securitization, territorialization, agricultural expansion and migration combine and interact (Eilenberg 2014:157). In the case of resource frontiers, one might add processes of environmental protection and international media coverage to this list. Anna Tsing has written extensively on how “nature loving” has come to be practiced by young Indonesians in a way that is connected to, yet that remains very distinct from, environmentalism as it is practiced by citizens in other parts of the world. They learned similar ways of talking about and appreciating nature that aligned with international standards, yet made them “directly identifiable as Indonesian” in the process. (Tsing 2005:124) Tsing uses links between environmental mobilizations among rubber tappers in Brazil, the Chipko movement in northern India, and her own interlocutors in Indonesia to demonstrate how “activism moves in charismatic packages” (Tsing 2005:227-235) that enter new fields of meaning and of social action when they arrive in new geographical and social contexts.

The conditions in the Aysén region—particularly the complex interactions between transnational environmental organizations, the state, and private industry—are at once uniquely Chilean and indicative of broader forces at work in the contemporary era.

Remote frontiers are often sites rich in natural resources, in part because the geological forces that have made these places rugged and inaccessible for much of human history are the same forces that create the kinds of resources that our species covets.

Additionally, natural resource deposits close to large-scale human settlements have largely been exhausted from earlier exploitation. It is no accident that much of the timber coming to market is extracted from densely forested and sparsely populated corners of Indonesia and, to a slightly lesser extent, southern Chile.

In the Chilean case, the association of environmental activism with the left and the legacy of the right-wing military dictatorship have meant both that battles over the exploitation of nature in Chile often resemble the street battles over human rights abuses and political repression with marches that end in clashes with police and tear gas.

Furthermore, this association means that at the national level, environmentalists make up a small group in a much broader coalition and therefore sit in the “back seat” while other social and political issues are addressed. In the words of political scientist David

Carruthers:

The hardest critic of Chilean development has been the land itself... Even with diversification into 'non-traditional' commodities (such as wine, salmon, woodchips and luxury produce), the over-whelming bulk of the export platform (roughly 80% across the past dozen years) is comprised of minerals, agricultural commodities, and the products of once-lush forests and fisheries. Chile's fiercely unregulated economy provides ample reward for producers who push negative social and environmental costs onto future generations, vulnerable ecological systems or the poorest and most marginalized populations. From the strip mines of the arid north to the scarred forests of Patagonia, the export boom has put the hard squeeze on nature. (2001:347)

In Aysén, however, where a relatively small population spends much of its time at the mercy of the elements, local responses to environmental degradation are complicated and sometimes contradictory. While in places like Santiago Chilean environmental

activists feel they are being ignored while other activism takes center stage¹³, in the far south residents fear that the opposite is true. Chileans may be taking to hiking and trekking in record numbers as steady employment has allowed them the money to buy outdoor gear and the time to take vacations and get outdoors, but most Ayséninos still regard environmentalists as outsiders—and in many cases they are.

Opponents of the proposed HidroAysén mega-project, which called for building five dams in the heart of Aysén on the Pasqua and Baker rivers, organized marches in Santiago, but the umbrella NGO *Patagonia Sin Represas* (Patagonia without Dams, PSR) largely responsible for mobilizing over 170,000 protestors over a period of five days in Santiago in 2011 (Varas et al. 2013) also staged protests in Barcelona and Paris. This was critical in calling international attention to the plan, which would have dramatically altered the landscape in northern Patagonia—a fact brought home by PSR’s use of an image of electric transmission towers cutting through otherwise pristine Patagonian wilderness—and it may have helped legal challenges to the project that eventually stopped HidroAysén¹⁴, but it did nothing to reassure Ayséninos that activists, whether from Chile, the United States, or Europe¹⁵, the owner of an eco-lodge in Puerto Aysén that caters primarily to international tourists seeking the “pure” Patagonia they’ve seen in magazines and on television told me that

¹³ Today, the street protests in Santiago are largely organized by students who have coalesced around the issue of education reform. The cost of attending university has climbed largely as a result of the neoliberal policies implemented during the Pinochet years, and the *Concertación* and subsequent democratic administrations—including that of current president, Michelle Bachelet—have failed to stem rising costs.

¹⁴ The demonstrations convinced Chile’s second largest bank, BBVA, to back out of providing loans for the project (Vince 2010:382). Eventually, with opposition growing and in the face of numerous legal challenges, the Bachelet regime withdrew its support for the project. Today, though it is still mired in the Chilean courts, the project appears to be dead, though other, smaller hydroelectric projects, such as the one at Rio Cuervo, continue (*El Mercurio* April 4, 2014).

¹⁵ A pseudonym.

while clear cutting kilometers of forest to build towers and run transmission lines would be “a crime,” he supported hydroelectric development in the region since currently Aysén has the most expensive electricity in the country and “something must be done.”

Adding to perceptions of environmentalists as “outsiders” who are unconcerned with the residents of the region they are seeking to protect is the work of the late Douglas Tompkins, who died as the result of a kayaking accident in December 2015. Tompkins was a young climber from California when he first came to Chile in the 1960s where he was inspired by the “pure” nature that he found there. Decades later, after founding the Esprit and North Face clothing companies he took advantage of Chilean laws that encouraged foreign investment and fiercely protected private property and began buying land north of the famous Volcán Corcovado.

Tompkins’ intentions may have been noble but his moves quickly unnerved locals. Rumors of his eviction of shepherds used to grazing their flocks on the largely uninhabited land north of Corcovado and his hosting “suspicious foreigners”¹⁶ have not helped to change local perceptions of Tompkins as a meddling outsider. Perhaps most importantly, the location of Tompkins’ Parque Pumalín at one of the narrowest parts of Chile means that it bisects the country, extending from the border with Argentina to the Pacific Ocean. By the time Tomkins had acquired 670,000 acres in 1995 Chilean politicians from both the right and left were calling his moves a threat to national security (Spooner 2011:110). His park is one reason—although not the *only* reason—that the Pan American highway, which runs from north to south from Arica on the Peruvian Border to

¹⁶One rumor claims his ultimate aim is to create a new Jewish homeland in northern Patagonia, a dubious “fact” whose Chilean proponents claim is supported by the presence of Israeli tourists in Patagonia.

Puerto Montt in the Región de los Lagos has not been extended further south into Patagonia.

Even in death¹⁷, Tompkins remains a polarizing figure. The announcement of his death on the website of *El Mercurio*, Chile's largest newspaper generated comments praising him as a "gringo" who did what Chileans had never bothered to do for themselves and their natural patrimony as well as comments damning him as a schemer and an imperialist, and he and Parque Pumalín continue to be frequent topics of discussion among Ayséninos but his case represents the complex reality of transnational governmentality in Patagonia.

As Gupta and Ferguson observe, "many of the 'grassroots groups' opposing globalization are themselves arguably leading examples of it: well organized transnational organizations with offices or affiliations spread out across the world." (2002:990) PSR, which received significant donations from Tompkins, represents one such organization whose mobilization of transnational networks to oppose the construction of hydroelectric dams in Patagonia—and whose images of proposed power lines cutting through the spectacular landscape became a key visual of the opposition movement—continues to have real effects on the lives of Chilean citizens, especially in Aysén.

Environmental organizations, from PSR to Greenpeace to the Waterkeeper Alliance¹⁸ have become a part of the political landscape on the southern frontier, as have similar organizations in other parts of the world. But here, parallels become difficult to

¹⁷ Tompkins died in the hospital in Coyhaique in December 2015 after contracting hypothermia in a kayaking accident.

¹⁸ The president of the Waterkeeper Alliance is Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. who recently appeared in the bilingual *Patagonia Journal* paddling a kayak of his own on the Futaleufú River in northern Aysén.

find. In Aysén, where locals feel that their own economic situation is precarious, their reaction to efforts to preserve the landscape is highly contingent. Furthermore, that Tompkins and other environmentalists have taken actions that residents see as *preventing* the completion of infrastructure projects vital to the incorporation of the region into the rest of the country—and therefore vital to improving their quality of life—complicates the relationship between the state, its citizens, and transnational organizations further. In this context, new forms of transnational governance that are predicated on European and North American understandings of “nature” do not create predictable outcomes.

“Environmental Citizenship” and Double Alienation

Political scientist Alex Latta and sociologist Hannah Wittman have recently argued for engaging with the concept of “environmental citizenship,” citing a growing body of literature on environmental justice in Latin America, which also addresses questions of democracy and participation. Their argument, that “socio-political subjects are mutually constituted with the ecological practices and institutions that they create” (2012:1) bears repeating here, as it succinctly summarizes the situation—both historical and contemporary—in Aysén. Ayséninos understand themselves through their relationship with the Patagonian landscape, and make both short and long-term choices based on the limits imposed by the harsh climate of southern Chile. Their frequent criticism of the government in Santiago is firmly based on an understanding—not altogether inaccurate—that the politicians up north cannot understand the conditions in the cold and rainy south. Recent work in political ecology, like recent scholarship on frontiers, points to parallels to be found throughout Latin America, and indeed throughout the world, where social movements are seeking to make the rights of and *to* nature a

centerpiece of political reform (Gudynas 2011). In arguing for “environmental citizenship” Latta and Wittman have suggested that “rethinking the territorial basis for citizenship helps make sense of the growth of transnational activist networks,” (2012:5) but this falls flat if citizens living on “resource frontiers” cannot find common ground or common cause with activists promoting environmental conservation and preservation, and thus fail to see themselves as part of these activist networks. Residents like Carlos, mentioned in the previous section, may want to see Patagonia remain wild and pristine, but they cannot afford to pay their electric bills under current conditions.

Thus, Ayséninos tend not to see themselves aligned with nature against a rapacious state, but rather find themselves in a space that has been alternately constructed as a resource economy essential for national development and as a kind of “pure” wilderness that must be defended as part of the world’s patrimony. Residents are now subject to *two* powerful external forces—for the visions of nature to which they are increasingly exposed to not represent their lived experiences. On the one hand, expanded state bureaucracy, securitization, and regulation of land use—all hallmarks of territorialization—have created a “host of mundane rituals and procedures” (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:984) in which residents must take part to perform their responsibilities and claim their rights, and the benefits of various programs available to them, as citizens. On the other, transnational non-governmental environmental organizations and activists wield increasing power in the region and are seeking to establish rules where the government in Santiago either has no policy, or where they deem its policies deficient. These organizations are also challenging some of the very development initiatives that

residents view as providing their best option for improving their quality of life in an unforgiving region.

The result has been a kind of “double alienation” for residents. Increased state bureaucracy and development programs aimed at increasing exports for the global marketplace fail to take the needs of frontier citizens into account, even as these programs require the participation of citizens as unskilled labor. Perhaps the best recent example of this comes from the proposed HidroAysén project. While this project, which would have employed Ayséninos as construction workers building dams and transmission towers, the energy generated by the dams was to be transmitted directly to the densely populated Región Metropolitana and the copper mines in the Atacama desert.

Furthermore, the perception among many Ayséninos that they are seen as second-class citizens is exacerbated by the state’s willingness to provide higher pay and other benefits to employees from outside the region who have the technical training to provide the expertise necessary to serve as supervisors and managers at work sites¹⁹ through the *zona* system (for state employees) and other incentives (for private employees working in businesses affiliated with the state, such as Banco Estado). At the same time, residents who see themselves as a part of the landscape and who are proud to call such a ruggedly beautiful region home—and who might otherwise align themselves with environmentalists who are aiming to preserve the region—find themselves and their

¹⁹ Aysén is the only region in Chile without a single university. The result is that residents seeking secondary education must leave the region in order to study and many do not return, either because they have made connections elsewhere in the course of their studies or because they have better opportunities elsewhere upon graduation. Nearly all of the interlocutors I spoke to with grown children informed me that their children had studied in other parts of the country (Valdivia and Concepción are the two most common destinations) and now reside elsewhere.

needs overlooked by transnational and national environmental organizations and activists like PSR and Doug Tompkins, who seem care more about trees and pumas than people.

This “double alienation” from the state and its initiatives *and* from transnational environmental organizations and the strategies that it engenders will be explored in greater detail in the remaining sections of this paper. In Aysén, as in other remote corners of the world where residents are seeking to provide for themselves and their families in precarious yet environmentally significant areas, the only option is tactical navigation between these two forms of governmentality. There are opportunities—and hazards—in dealing with both, and novel formations, alliances, and practices appear to offer the best way forward for frontier residents. The range of local responses to *ad hoc* practical and site-specific state strategies (Ong, from Rose, 2006:100) have revealed the limits of both new and long-standing technologies for governing life on the frontier. Political, economic, and social responses to state policies are highly productive, uniting a heterogeneous population with diverse political views, origins, and understandings of the landscape itself.

A New Subsidy for “Vulnerable” Families

Firewood has been the primary means for powering stoves in Aysén since the first *colonos* (colonists) arrived, and it remains the only viable option for heat throughout most of the region today.²⁰ As has been previously noted, when protestors took to the streets throughout Aysén in February 2011 with a list of demands, perhaps the most salient of these were centered around the high cost of living on the southern frontier. Complaints concerned the cost of electricity and water, which are the highest and second highest

²⁰ One of the few exceptions is the *comuna* of Chile Chico, where the proximity to the border, either via the road to the popular tourist town of Perito Moreno, Argentina or via Lago General Carrera, means that residents can cross into Argentina to buy cheap propane and natural gas.

utility costs, respectively, incurred by residents of any region in Chile. Electricity and water, however, are complicated to administer, and require significant infrastructure to deliver. Any immediate move to placate residents and reopen the roads that serve as arteries for the region's industries would have to be based on something simpler and more readily at hand for the sake of rapid implementation.

The Fondo de Solidaridad e Inversión Social (FOSIS) is an agency within the Chilean government that falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Development. It was founded in October 1990 under the direction of president Patricio Aylwin, who famously implemented a series of social programs to repay what he defined as a “debt” that the government had incurred for the disappearances, torture, and other human rights violations committed during the military dictatorship years. (Han 2011) The FOSIS mission statement reads: “Liderar estrategias de superación de la pobreza y vulnerabilidad de personas, familias y comunidades, contribuyendo a disminuir las desigualdades de manera innovadora y participativa” (“Leading strategies for overcoming poverty and *vulnerability* for individuals, families, and communities, helping to reduce inequality in an innovate and participatory manner.” (FOSIS website, emphasis added)

As a state agency, FOSIS operates offices in every region of Chile in order to provide social services throughout the country. In Aysén, FOSIS maintains a presence in all 10 comunas and has a full time staff of forty-four employees operating out of two offices in Coyhaique and one each in Cochrane, Puerto Aysén, La Junta, and Chile Chico. Their regional director is a short, intensely energetic woman named Claudia Poveda Caceres who laughs easily and organizes furiously. During our meeting, she informed me that FOSIS is not only concerned with *familias pobres* (poor families), but with

familias vulnerables, echoing the focus on vulnerability found on the agency’s website. She said that her staff was always looking for ways to be “closer to the people” in order to work “on the dynamic problems experienced by families,” especially unemployment, imprisonment, and alcoholism.²¹ The FOSIS employees in Aysén come from a range of backgrounds—Claudia mentioned lawyers, journalists, and engineers working out of the Coyhaique office—and come from Aysén as well as other regions. However, as Claudia noted, there are not enough professionals in the region to fully staff the agency due to the lack of training available and the absence of a local university.

When FOSIS was charged with implementing a firewood “bonus” for residents of Aysén in 2012, everyone in the Coyhaique office knew that this would amount to a challenge. For one, this would be a new subsidy, unique to Aysén, and thus there was no national precedent to draw on for guidance. Furthermore, the subsidy would target families deemed “vulnerable” via a complex system of “points” determined by annual income, land holdings, occupation, number of family members, and a variety of other factors. But not all of the “vulnerable” families across Aysén were in the FOSIS database, and many of those who were lived in places so remote as to be inaccessible for the large trucks that transported firewood for most of the winter months. FOSIS would work with the regional government to buy up and redistribute firewood, but they had no one on staff with experience cutting or transporting firewood.

The result, Claudia informed me, was “chaos.” Initial attempts to buy and redistribute firewood to 16,000 qualifying families throughout Aysén had disastrous

²¹ It is a FOSIS policy to provide all subsidies to the *female* head of household whenever possible. Women, as it was explained to me, can be counted on to redistribute the money to extended family living under the same roof and to spend the money on food and winter clothing for children. In the past, when subsidies were given to the male head of household, female family members came to the FOSIS office to complain that most of that money was spent on alcohol.

consequences. With the government buying up large quantities of firewood, the price skyrocketed, jumping from \$13,000 Chilean pesos per cubic meter (roughly \$24 USD in 2012) to \$30-33,000 pesos per cubic meter (between \$50 and \$55 USD at the current rate of exchange). The results were predictable: middle class families who didn't qualify for the subsidy suddenly found themselves with *higher* heating costs and many residents who had previously worked in other industries rushed to enter the firewood market, either cutting wood or transporting it.

Despite the obvious setbacks—and massive dissatisfaction on the part of the local populace—FOSIS pressed on with its mandate to provide the subsidy, and in so doing displayed remarkable flexibility. Going into the subsidy's second year, the agency switched from attempting to buy and redistribute firewood to providing *cash* bonuses of \$100,000 pesos (roughly \$167 USD) with which residents could buy their own firewood from their traditional suppliers. They also continued to seek out and enroll new qualified families²² expanding the initial enrollment from 16,000 families to 23,690 by 2014 (Caceres, personal communication). This new system, providing cash rather than firewood itself, has led to new challenges and to strange sights: the day after our interview, Claudia traveled with the regional manager of Banco Estado, two cashiers from the bank, three *carabineros* and an armored truck to the island community at Melinka (population 1,400) by ferry in order to distribute subsidies there.

But for all the “chaos,” or perhaps because of it, the introduction of the firewood subsidy in 2012 provided residents—including those who did *not* qualify for the

²² They even rolled out a new section of their website where residents can enter their RUT (Chilean national identity number) and see if they qualify, though Claudia freely admitted that this was little help when it came to providing services to families who didn't have internet access either because they could not afford it or because they were older and had never learned to use the internet—or in some cases what it is.

subsidy—with opportunities to tactically shift their practices in order to profit from the state’s intervention and, as we shall see later, complicated other state objectives (notably efforts to curb air pollution) both within the region and across the country.

Novel Responses and New Formations in an Old Industry

In response to the introduction of the subsidy, or more accurately, to a state agency getting involved in the firewood market, residents who had previously been engaged in small scale or part time operations—either cutting or transporting firewood—embraced new practices. Tania Li has written about the apparent contradictions in capitalism on the frontier, synthesizing Marx and Polanyi to demonstrate how “intervention is a condition of growth in the capitalist mode” as experts regulate markets by restricting land use and regulating local practices as government expands its reach. (2007:19-21) Through expert interventions, governments are able to “sustain and optimize processes” rather than to exert total control. This creates space in which actors can operate tactically to take advantage of oversights, errors, or loopholes in official policy as well as to benefit from the conditions created by state interventions.

In Coyhaique and Puerto Aysén, the region’s two largest cities, groups of firewood transporters came together to form what they termed “cooperatives.” One such cooperative was *Coleña Aysén*. I had the good fortune to meet one of its cofounders, a middle-aged man named Gilberto,²³ who still wears the black *Coleña* baseball cap²⁴ years after the cooperative’s heyday and subsequent decline. Gilberto told me that the idea for the cooperative first emerged when the Corporación Nacional Forestal (Conaf, a semi-

²³ A pseudonym.

²⁴ The members of *Coleña Aysén* had hats and fleeces embroidered with the cooperative’s logo. This is actually quite common in Chile, where employees—especially men—show loyalty and pride in their workplace by wearing the corporate logo or slogan to social events after work hours.

autonomous state agency tasked with regulating the timber and firewood industries *and* operating Chile's national parks and reserves) introduced new measures designed to insure that firewood being sold throughout the region was dry in order to reduce pollution, since damp wood produces more smoke. The cooperative really took shape in 2012, however, and Gilberto was its president during the organization's most successful period from 2012-2013. Though they had begun organizing before the FOSIS subsidy was introduced, the sudden jump in prices and the need for ride-along laborers (who do not own trucks themselves, but help to load the trucks in the countryside where the wood is cut) meant that many men who had previously worked only part time and independently joined the cooperative. When the subsidy was announced and FOSIS began to contract with the cooperatives in order to buy in larger volume, Gilberto and the men of *Coleña Aysén* sold more than 2,000 cubic meters of firewood in the first ten days of their contract with FOSIS (Field notes 7/9/2015).

Today, FOSIS's strategic shift from the redistribution of firewood to the dispersal of cash bonuses has diminished the need for and profitability of cooperatives. Gilberto told me during our conversation that he estimates only 50% of those transporting and selling firewood in Puerto Aysén belong to the cooperative in 2015. He told me with ambivalence, "*en Chile no tenemos una cultura cooperativa*" ("in Chile we do not have a cooperative culture") however the short term success of the cooperatives in organizing to meet new Conaf regulations and in mobilizing to take advantage of the FOSIS policy in 2012 and the accompanying "chaos" it brought to the firewood market is striking. Rather than chafing under government restrictions or policies that affected how they could sell firewood, local actors within the industry responded quickly and in novel ways to meet

these new challenges and to improve their economic wellbeing. This response was surely connected to the need for improvisation that has historically been an essential part of living on the frontier, as well as to the informal networks that have bound the community together since before Pinochet. Chile may not have a “*cultura cooperativa*,” but Aysén does, and it always has.

Though he is no longer president of the cooperative, Gilberto has taken advantage of the subsidy to improve his position within Puerto Aysén and to enhance his own economic position. While previously he traveled with only one truck, he used the money he made during the early days of the subsidy to buy a second flatbed truck and he frequently borrows a third from a friend in order to take a “convoy” to sites where wood is cut and stacked. With three men in each cab, he is able to bring back between 50 and 100 cubic meters per trip, and then is able to store this in an *almacén* (storehouse) outside of town and sell it at his own pace—and to take advantage of seasonal price fluctuations that affect those who do not have enough space to store sufficient firewood to get through the winter. This strategy—making fewer trips with more workers to bring back larger quantities—reduces his risk during the winter months when the weather and local roads are unpredictable and keeps the journey, which others must make every 10-15 days, from becoming what he calls “an adventure.”

But Gilberto and other middlemen are not the only ones taking advantage of new and often contradictory policies with regards to firewood. Gualterio,²⁵ who studied forestry and has a number of very strong opinions on the state’s regulation of the timber industry and maintenance of reserves and national parks, also took advantage of the “chaos” of 2011-2012. I met him in front of the two storey house he is building for

²⁵ A pseudonym

himself in Puerto Aysén, and when I asked him about the subsidy, he informed me matter-of-factly: “*pienso que el estado sea responsable por la costa de la leña ahora,*” (“I think the state is responsible for the price of firewood now”) and lamented how the massive price increase caused by the FOSIS intervention meant that anyone who could was selling *any* firewood they could get their hands on, regardless of the quality. No one, he said, who sold independently wanted to wait to cure the wood so that it would burn cleanly and safely (Field Notes 7/8/2015).

He brought me to the back of his *camioneta* to reveal that the flatbed was full of gnarled wood that he had collected. Though it wasn’t cut into the flat, straight, meter long segments found on the back of the *Coleña* trucks, it was indeed very dry. “*Los bosques aquí estan llena de esta,*” (“the forests around here are full of this stuff”) he said, but Conaf’s policy regarding its collection is something of a “gray area.” They have restricted access to the region’s reserves and parks, but this was, in Gualterio’s words, only because it was easier for them to monitor the cutting of new stands of trees than the recovery of deadwood from the forest floor. He cited the risk of *incendios forestales* (wildfires)²⁶ as one of the reasons he thought it was irresponsible for Conaf not to allow individuals to collect what had fallen naturally to the forest floor. When I asked him if he had gone into the reserves and parks to collect what he had in the back of his truck he laughed and shook his head, telling me that he goes to “*lugares que conozco*” (places he knows)—presumably private land where he can operate with the permission of the owner.

²⁶ Chileans in the south have always been sensitive to the risks posed by wildfires, but have been especially attuned to the issue since 2005, when a fire set inadvertently by a Czech backpacker in Torres del Paine National Park burned more than 13,000 hectares. Another fire in the same park in 2012 consumed roughly the same amount of virgin forest and scrubland.

The Place of the Region in a National Conversation

Before we parted ways, Gualterio complained that in Chile, organizations like Conaf are always public-private enterprises and as such are expected to make money. As has been documented elsewhere, the neoliberal mandate that Conaf finance itself has led to the organization collecting a portion of the revenue from unsustainable “chipping,” converting Chile’s hardwood forests into the raw materials for wood pulp (Carruthers 2001:349). Beyond the conflict of interest this represents for an organization that is also tasked with *protecting* Chile’s forests, Gualterio noted two other problems with the way Conaf functions: first, the organization operates like a corporation with a director, and second, because this director is appointed, he functions like a politician.

The introduction of the subsidy in 2012 may have been exclusive to the Aysén region, but its implementation has taken place in the midst of a national conversation on *contaminación* (air pollution). During my fieldwork during the winter of 2015, the pollution in Santiago was national news as a state of emergency was declared and families with small children and grandparents were encouraged to keep them indoors. I was told several times by reputable sources—and perhaps less reputable but no less *emphatic* sources—that Coyhaique is the second most polluted city in the country because of its rapid growth and residents’ reliance on wood burning stoves for heat in the winter months. Coyhaique, like Santiago, is surrounded by mountains and the low-hanging smoke generated by thousands of homes is plainly visible from the roadway as one descends towards the city from the west.

In June 2015, the long-simmering conflict between the heating industry and government agencies seeking to regulate Chile's nation-wide pollution problem exploded in the press. In response to Deputy David Sandoval's assertion that the region needed to change the way residents heat their homes in the face of a massive pollution problem, the head of Conaf's office for Forest Development, José Urrutia shot back:

El producto leña es quizás más democrático que hay, porque beneficia a una infinidad de familias que poseen predios, por lo tanto el beneficio del comercio de la leña que en nuestra región significa cerca de 25 millones de dólares, beneficia a aproximadamente 700 familias de la región, eso no ocurriría con la energía eléctrica o el gas donde nosotros sabemos cómo se concentraría todo ese volumen de recursos en uno, dos o tres proveedores.

Firewood as a product is perhaps the most democratic there is, because it benefits countless families who own parcels of land, and therefore the commerce in firewood means around \$25 million USD, benefitting approximately 700 families in the region, and this will not occur with electric energy or gas where we know how the volume of these resources will be concentrated in the hands of one, two, or three suppliers. (*El Divisadero*, p. 24, Año XXII, No. 6286 July 1, 2015)

This exchange—along with the strategies employed by Gualterio and his stated reasoning for employing them—highlights several key features of the relationship between state and citizen on the southern frontier. First, while citizen understandings of the state as “vertically encompassing” may indeed be grounded in the “routinized practices of state bureaucracies” (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:983) these understandings are challenged as much by evident conflicts between government representatives and agencies and by politics of scale as they are by the increased influence of transnational actors.

Sandoval,²⁷ the deputy representing Aysén in Santiago, has cast his concerns about the firewood industry and his desire for new forms of energy in the region as an environmental concern and one that is in line with national concerns over air pollution. Urrutia, on the other hand, has cast his defense of firewood as better aligned with “democracy” and economic opportunities for all families at the local level—in the process positioning Conaf *not* as an organization concerned primarily with protecting nature (despite its mandate to operate and oversee Chile’s national parks and reserves) but as an organization that will defend family-based small business in order for a more fair distribution of income across the region. Furthermore, the conflict between Sandoval and Urrutia suggests that Gualterio’s understanding of Conaf directors as political actors is mostly accurate.

While Chile has been slow to implement policies to protect the environment in the face of industry and development due to its economic reliance on the export of natural resources (Carruthers 2001) this has begun to change thanks to international discourses of environmental conservation and the increased presence of transnational environmental organizations in Chile. Efforts to maintain the frontier as a depoliticized space through the direction of experts insulated “from external political attempts to govern them and their decisions and actions” (Rose 2002:155) are increasingly challenged as politicians and citizens make use of emergent environmental discourses. This has prompted organizations, like Conaf—which suddenly finds itself out of step with

²⁷ It is worth noting that Sandoval’s party, the Unión Demócrata Independiente (UDI) is widely recognized as the party of Pinochet, and is generally understood to favor economic progress over environmental protection and the concentration of wealth among Chile’s elite political class over redistribution of wealth and social programs. Firewood, an industry wherein regulations have both economic and environmental consequences, often causes politicians to take positions contradictory to what might otherwise be expected.

environmentalists—to seek new strategies (such as economic opportunity and better income distribution within industries) in order to justify their policies.

Thus, the frontier has become a re-politicized space where state actors, from agencies like Conaf and FOSIS, to individuals like Sandoval and Urrutia, debate long-standing practices. Where previous technocratic governance, which saw its apex during the dictatorship years, but which largely continued during the democratic regimes of the 1990s, presented the state and its agencies as unified in their drive towards “progress” and economic development, today concerns about economic justice and environmental protection are seen as legitimate and pressing. Conflicts between state actors have undermined local understandings of the government as “vertical and encompassing” even as citizens still look to the state to set policies and expand infrastructure. When policies conflict with the interest of citizens, citizens increasingly employ environmentalist discourses, like the need to collect deadwood from the forest floor to reduce the risk of wildfire, to justify their defiance of state policies. If experts and politicians fail to understand conditions on the southern frontier, be they economic, environmental, or practical, this justifies political challenges—either direct, as in the case of the “uprising” in 2011, or indirect as in the clandestine use of parks and reserves as sites for wood-collection or the selling of wood that does not meet Conaf’s quality standards. The introduction of the FOSIS subsidy demonstrates the state’s concern with the frontier population’s wellbeing. PSR, the Waterkeeper Alliance, Doug Tompkins and other environmental actors’ legal challenges to the HidroAysén project and other efforts to expand infrastructure—and the success of these challenges—demonstrates international concern for the wellbeing of the natural landscape. Thus, the application of local

knowledge at the intersection of international and national priorities creates a space for Ayséninos to exercise a degree of political autonomy they have not known since 1973.

Local Knowledge

Local knowledge is critical in Aysén, not only for locals navigating and exploiting conditions created by state interventions, but also for “outsiders” seeking to gain credibility with locals at work sites. This starts with firewood knowledge. Fire in Aysén remains a basic necessity. Knowing what constitutes *good* firewood, knowing how to build a fire and knowing how to keep the fire burning late into the night, are all ways of knowing how to *live* in Aysén, and this local knowledge differentiates both Ayséninos and “outsiders” who have mastered this knowledge from residents of other regions. As the monument depicting the *colono* with his boat full of *leña* at Los Palos attests, the firewood industry has been at the center of life in Aysén since the first settlers arrived in the early twentieth century. Locals grow up in front of the woodstove.

But this way of life is mostly unknown to Chileans living north of Puerto Montt, and completely unknown to Chileans living in the *Región Metropolitana*—nearly one third of the country’s total population. Today it is illegal to operate a woodstove or fireplace in many of the *comunas* that comprise greater Santiago, due to concerns about air pollution in the capital.²⁸ Numerous inhabitants of Aysén, both long-time residents and relative newcomers, informed me that their region was unique in the centrality of firewood in daily life. Countless dinner table conversations became sites of informal

²⁸ Although there are ongoing battles over which *comunas* have passed these kinds of restrictions. Many of the eastern portions of the city, notably the affluent communities of Los Condes, La Reina, and Lo Barnechea have no such laws, prompting criticism that the wealthy are allowed to operate their fireplaces for the sake of ambiance, while the poor and working class are denied the right for the “greater good.” In a June 23, 2015 interview with *El Mercurio*, Jaime Leyton, head of the Meteorological Office of Chile noted that Los Condes has the best air quality in Santiago, despite consuming the most firewood, because of its elevation relative to lower, poorer, districts in the city.

“knowledge exchanges,” with friends swapping the phone numbers of their firewood deliverymen²⁹ and chatting about the quality of their last purchase.

Even the state—divided though its agents may be on issues of pollution and regulation within the firewood industry—continues to treat firewood as the only means for heat. In Puerto Aysén, both completed and ongoing housing projects designed to provide affordable housing for qualifying families are constructed around the idea of a central woodstove. While these “state of the art” homes have a gas line and small cement patio for a propane tank that will power a gas stove for cooking and a hot water heater, they have no central heating. Instead, residents are expected to move in with wood burning stoves and, upon deciding where they want them relative to the floor plan (much as one might do with a sofa or dining room set), either install their own chimney or hire a contractor to complete the necessary installation. Each occupied house in the completed development had its own chimney, and the variety of construction methods, designs, sizes, and locations for these chimneys stood out against the uniform design and color of otherwise identical structures. Across the street, where houses are not yet ready for occupancy, the houses remain pristine, awaiting occupants who will eventually install wood burning stoves.

This highlights a central aspect of life in Aysén: hyper-modern practices that have developed since the supposed economic “miracle” exist alongside practices that have not changed in centuries. Homes with satellite dishes and late-model SUVs in the driveway also require covered storage and wood palates for woodpiles. The easiest way to tell if someone is at home is still to look up and see how much smoke is emanating from a creosote-encrusted chimney. In a country where income inequality continues to rise and

²⁹ Or in many cases, the wives of the deliverymen who coordinate deliveries from home.

the differences between rich and poor citizens are painfully obvious, in Aysén the reliance on firewood effects everyday practices across the socio-economic spectrum.

At a dinner attended by both professionals who had come to the region for work and several local colleagues who had grown up in Aysén, firewood and firewood knowledge were the basis for inclusive conversation between supervisors and employees and provided an opportunity for the “transplants” to prove that they belonged, or at least that they were acclimating to their new surroundings. Ronaldo,³⁰ the regional manager for a national bank whose expensive car and recent trip to New York and Miami easily marked him as an outsider, was able to hold forth to several of his employees on how he learned the proper way to build a chimney so that the woodstove could draw properly and so that smoke was not drawn back into the house. Florencia,³¹ an architect by training who works for the government agency SEREMI (Secretario Regional Ministerial) complained that having a woodstove in the house is like having another person to take care of. She described the questions she had to ask herself and her husband in order to get through the winter, to the amusement of the assembled guests: “Did you feed the fire,” and “How is the fire today?” While her frustration with the need to tend to her woodstove may have marked her as an outsider (had she grown up in Aysén these questions might not have struck her as odd or as anthropomorphizing the stove) the affirming nods from around the table—from Chileans who had grown up elsewhere and from locals— implied a solidarity based on shared labor and shared experience that cut across class lines. As long as the discussion was about chimneys, the price and quality of

³⁰ A pseudonym.

³¹ Also a pseudonym.

firewood, and the work involved in keeping the fire going, everyone could participate on a level playing field.

El Incendio

June 29, 2015

Walking back from the bus terminal for Buses Suray, I discover that the street where I've been living in Puerto Aysén has changed dramatically during my weekend absence. At the corner of Eusebio Ibar and Eleuterio Ramirez, four houses burned late on Saturday night, leaving holes in the once crowded streetscape. Miraculously, the house closest to the road survived unscathed apart from dark smudges on the exterior where billowing smoke discolored the blue paint. The houses to the right—a two-story building that I am later told belonged to two families—and to the left were not lucky enough to escape the fire. Local bomberos responded in time to douse the flames or keep them from spreading further, and even managed to keep the houses from burning to the ground, but the damage is enough. The houses, and all their contents, were destroyed.

I pass as the near constant drizzle of the Patagonian winter soaks workers and bystanders alike, and as the family and perhaps a few of their friends sift through what is left of the structure to the left of the only house spared by the early morning blaze. Their work appears to be less about what can be salvaged and more about clearing the space so that a new structure can be erected as soon as possible. Two middle-aged women are working alongside three middle-aged men in sweaters. Their faces are blank as they shovel debris into waiting wheelbarrows. Nearby, two girls, perhaps thirteen and eight years old, are helping by sweeping ash and the remnants of charred objects—a melted spatula, a half-burned calendar—into piles and then lifting these into the wheelbarrow by

hand. Several workmen in blue and orange jumpsuits are wordlessly lifting larger objects—collapsed roof beams and chunks of cracked cement from the foundation—into the back of a truck. Soon, they retrieve chainsaws from the truck’s cab, and begin to deliberately saw what remained of the frame into smaller pieces to be carted away. Before the afternoon is over, the house will go from a skeleton, still marginally protected by the blackened and twisted corrugated aluminum that was once its roof, to a blank space, an empty foundation. Throughout the afternoon, the men of the family and the workmen take turns with chainsaws and hammers, pulling nails and carefully deconstructing all that remained of the home where just Friday I saw the girls playing with a goat that was tethered to the fence. This fence too, like the houses, has been flattened, though in the case of the fence this flattening was deliberate to make room for the pickup trucks that would cart away the debris from the fire.

The other house to the right of the house skipped by the flames and the two-story, two-family home slightly behind are still standing with all their charred contents and shattered windows. No effort has yet been undertaken to reclaim anything inside that might have survived or to begin disassembly of the structures themselves. In the front windows of the house that faced the street, pink curtains are still hanging—sooty and in tatters—in what is left of the downstairs. How the corner house managed to survive I have no idea.

As I slowly make my way towards my own home, less than a block away, the older of the two girls looks up from her dirty work and stares at me. For a moment our eyes meet. She appears impassive and emotionless, incapable of grief or joy, as she wipes her hands on her pants. Then she looks back down and continues her work, giving quiet

instructions to her younger sister. I feel like an intruder, like my presence is a further affront to a family that has lost everything and just wants to get on with their work.

Though I am not the only onlooker, my outsider's perspective on the devastation and the family's resolve, the collective labor undertaken to produce whatever comes next for the victims of fire in Aysén, make me feel like my gaze and curiosity are somehow an invasion.

I walk home, trying to process the sights that greeted me seconds after getting off the bus. When I return hours later, the wooden frame and twisted aluminum that formed the skeleton of the first house, and the family members themselves, are gone. All that remains is the rectangular foundation, swept clean, and the warped cocina. It is likely the culprit—the source of the cinders that ignited the blaze after the family went to bed—and yet it remains. Still intact, this survivor stands alone in the now all-but-vacant lot.

Living with Danger

While firewood represents a means for heating your home and remaining comfortable during the long Patagonian winter, it also represents a danger that is never far from the surface. During the seven weeks I was in the region in the winter of 2015, four homes in Puerto Aysén burned, three of them on the block where I lived. Of thirty families surveyed, two thirds reported that they either knew or were related to someone who had lost their home to fire, and two reported that they had lost their own homes to fire. Data provided to me by the superintendent of the local volunteer fire department tracked 180 household fires, at least 33 of which began because of creosote buildup in the chimney in 2014 alone. According to the superintendent, more than 70% of fires that occur in Puerto Aysén are caused by wood burning stoves, either because residents fail to

clean their chimneys regularly, or because they do not dispose of the ashes generated by their woodstoves safely, causing unnoticed hot coals to ignite other materials.

This highlights another fact of life on the southern frontier: lack of firewood knowledge or the failure to deploy that knowledge can be deadly. Though Aysén is not unique for the wood-frame construction of most houses (this is common farther north in cities like Temuco and Puerto Montt as well as in rural parts of the Región de los Lagos) this construction technique, the proximity of houses to one another in villages and towns, and the reliance on wood burning stoves does create a much higher risk of fire than is found elsewhere in the country.

This risk is a major factor in disputes between neighbors. Several survey respondents told me how concerned they were about their neighbors, either because they were irresponsible or, in one case, because she was allegedly an alcoholic and therefore couldn't be trusted to take care of her stove safely. In Puerto Aysén, where fires can and do occasionally burn whole city blocks, these concerns are hardly unfounded, even if they are presented with the kind of middle-class-sensibility many of us in the United States associate with busybodies who worry about how often their neighbors cut their lawns.

But it isn't simply that certain residents are irresponsible: as Gualterio told me, when the price of firewood skyrocketed in 2012, many firewood traders sought to make a quick profit by selling *any* wood that they could get their hands on, including wood that had been inadequately cured and was therefore still damp when it was burned. This type of wet wood produces more creosote—as does burning soft coniferous wood³²—which

³² Another reason that the replacement of native hardwood forests with pine plantations foreshadows an impending crisis.

dramatically increases the risk of chimney fires. Given that low-income families frequently bought lower quality of firewood because of its lower price, and that these families had less income to spend on regular chimney sweeping, there was a consistent perception among my middle-class interlocutors that while a single fire was a risk to every house on the block, poor families were more likely to cause such disasters.

Trembling Hands

July 8, 2015

I am walking along the northern end of the ribera norte in Puerto Aysén, where a muddy lane runs parallel to a series of marshes, separating them from the shingled houses that mark the edge of town. Most of the houses are one story, and many of their weather beaten wooden doors have rotted at the bottom from the accumulated spatter of years of rain. I am conducting a survey: thirteen questions designed to collect demographic information about residents, their relationship to FOSIS and the newly introduced firewood subsidy, and their opinion on the state's role in the region. Beyond the "data" this survey will hopefully yield, it is a good way to start conversations—conversations that will shed light on things I haven't thought to ask or include in the survey.

But knocking on strangers' doors in a steady drizzle is a daunting task, and today, the fifth day that I have gone house to house on a particular block, I feel beaten down and frayed, not unlike the waterlogged and battered wooden doors where I'm knocking. I have learned, however, to boost my success rate by looking at chimneys first—smoke is a telltale sign that someone is there to answer the door—and to have my university identification in hand. Even a university ID in English establishes credibility and demonstrates that I am not selling anything.

I knock on the door of low-slung brown house with a sagging roof. An old woman in thick glasses answers the door, and after looking me up and down, invites me into the house. This is common, I have discovered. If residents are willing to talk, they are also determined to be hospitable and to bring you inside. I have been offered tea and coffee on multiple occasions and am always seated by the fire as I awkwardly launch into my questions.

The old woman sits down on an upholstered bench by the cookstove—the only source of heat in the house—and rubs her hands together gingerly. She is wearing an apron and a heavy black sweater. She adjusts her glasses and looks at me expectantly. She tells me that she does receive the bono de calefacción from FOSIS, but bemoans that it isn't enough. As she holds her wrinkled hands over the cookstove, I can see them shake. She tells me that she has recently been diagnosed with diabetes, and that she doesn't think that they have her on the correct medicine. I recognize her symptoms now. My grandfather had similar shakes when he took the wrong dose—or more often, when he failed to take the required dose—of insulin.

She tells me that she worries every day about paying for her medical bills. She is living on her late husband's state pension. He was a carabinero (police officer) here in Aysén, she tells me, like many of the men who settled here in the 1950s and 1960s. One of her two daughters lives in Coyhaique, the regional capital an hour up the road. The other is in "the north." Her description makes me think that this daughter is likely in Antofagasta, but she never mentions the city by name. She laments that her daughters don't see her anymore, but says she understands that they have to work.

Trying to turn the conversation back to firewood and FOSIS, I ask her if she thinks the state could spend more on the bono. She becomes emotional, raising her voice, which shakes like her hands, “I used to be able to buy, but the cost went up and I also got sick and had to spend money on medicine.” She holds up one hand, and I can see a long burn along the edge of her palm. I am not sure, and do not ask, for the direct connection between her burn and her illness, but with the tremors in her hands and the need to fuel the cookstove, I suspect she accidentally placed her hand on the surface. She is starting to cry. I am extremely uncomfortable. I feel like an intruder; like the information I am here to collect is only increasing her suffering. The knowledge that I explained my project, presented my credentials, and attained informed consent before entering the house does nothing to assuage my guilty feeling. I nod as she continues. I no longer feel like I can direct the conversation towards my survey questions. I can only listen.

“Look,” she says, “before the firewood was much cheaper. How Aysén is expensive! Everything!” I nod again. We stare at each other in silence and she adjusts the teapot in front of her on the stove. Feeling as uncomfortable with the silence as I am with my position as surveyor, I ask if she thinks the state can help in other ways. She shakes her head. “One has to think,” she begins, “With all the help that they give—and I am grateful, thanks to God—what is it doing to the people? What is it doing to the republic?”

I wait for her to continue, but she looks down. The tears in her eyes seem to hang there, rather than rolling down her cheeks. Awkwardly, I fumble with my papers. I see no option but to ask my next question: whether she knows anyone in the neighborhood who has experienced an accidental fire.

“Oh yes.” She says. “And with all the sacrifices people make here, to lose everything!” She raises her trembling hands and adjusts her glasses. “And I don’t know why it happens!”

She pauses again, and then adds an afterthought, softly, as if speaking only to herself: “Every day is worse here in Aysén.”

The Costs

Not all destruction wrought by woodstoves in Aysén is catastrophic. Personal injuries on or around the stove are common, particularly among children and the elderly. Having multiple generations in the same small house is common in Aysén, and more than one survey respondent suggested to me that moving extended family into a shared house was a strategy they had employed since the introduction of the FOSIS subsidy. Because most elderly people collecting a pension qualify for the subsidy, this is a means for adult children—who are typically responsible for the care of elderly parents anyway—to defray heating costs for themselves and their own children even if their income level is not low enough for them to receive the subsidy. Since many more affluent families have abandoned this traditional inter-generational model of living in favor of a more “modern” lifestyle in which only the nuclear family lives under the same roof, the risk of burns is also higher among lower income residents.

Still, the basic problem for most survey respondents is the same, regardless of their socioeconomic status: the state’s interference in the firewood market, beginning in 2012, brought about massive price increases.

For middle class residents’ whose middling salaries are enough exempt them from the subsidy, this simply means that their cost of living during the winter months more

than doubled. For those who do qualify—particularly elderly people living on a fixed income—the subsidy is not enough to offset the price increase. Multiple residents informed me that they need to burn firewood to heat their homes seven to nine months out of the year, depending on the weather. The average household burns roughly 3 cubic meters of firewood per month,³³ which at post-subsidy prices means that they incur a cost of between 90-99,000 pesos each month. The current subsidy is 100,000 pesos. This means that the subsidy pays for them to heat their home for one month. Assuming that they are heating their homes with firewood for eight months out of the year but that the subsidy offsets the cost for one of these months, residents are now paying roughly 693,000 pesos per year to heat their homes. Before the introduction of the subsidy in 2012 the same household would have paid roughly 312,000 pesos per year. This represents an increase of 381,000 pesos per year, or roughly \$573 USD.

It is not hard to understand, when looking at the cold numbers, that this represents an untenable increase for many families. They simply do not have the means to pay, but they also cannot move. Most of the families that qualify for the subsidy qualify because the head of the household either does not work or works for depressed wages as a manual laborer in one of the region's main industries—aquaculture, fish processing, or timber. When talking to an elderly woman, however, who lives on her deceased husband's pension and who must decide between paying for her medication or paying to heat her house, the situation reveals itself in starkly human terms. Here, gender, age, and socioeconomic status combine to render certain bodies particularly vulnerable to the

³³ This is a very rough approximation based on data collected from friends and from my survey of 30 households, but is dependent on whether the household uses propane or firewood for their *cocina* (cookstove) and whether the cookstove is the primary heat source as well, or whether there is an additional *estufa* (woodstove) whose sole purpose is heating the house. This, in turn, is connected to the socioeconomic status of the household.

market fluctuations that have accompanied state interventions on the southern frontier. Because of her reliance on a state pension, the woman I spoke to on July 8 qualifies for the subsidy, but she has no means of increasing her monthly allotment, which is calibrated based on her late husband's years of service and final pay grade and not connected to fluid costs of living. Furthermore, the conditions in Aysén³⁴ encourage adult children to move away in order to pursue higher education or white-collar work. Whereas in the past, extended kin networks might have provided support, today elderly Ayséninos may have no one living close enough to respond in times of need—or medical emergency.

None of this is to say that the state is unfeeling, or oblivious to the situation. Numerous survey respondents told me that they believed the Chilean state had the best intentions when it created the regional subsidy. And the FOSIS employees administering the subsidy live in the region—so they rely on firewood as much as the citizens they are attempting to serve. But the fact remains that this particular state technology, targeting the wellbeing of the population living on the southern frontier has had devastating consequences that are only fully revealed through conversations around the hearth.

Conclusions: Unsettling the frontier

Though the Chilean far south has been subject to efforts to incorporate it into the larger national territory since the 1870s, and was established as part of the Chilean state in 1928, it was not until the 1970s that the state became “vertically encompassing” (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). The authoritarian nature of the Pinochet government, along with the technologies available to the regime meant that by the time Chile returned to democracy under the leadership of Patricio Aylwin in 1990, the state's presence on the

³⁴ Perhaps first and foremost the absence of a university in the region.

frontier was firmly established. If frontier processes “wax and wane according to the strength of the state and the pressure of global markets” (Eilenberg 2014:162), then the raw power of the dictatorship combined with the demand for Chile’s natural resources in the global marketplace should have meant the stabilization and “resolution” of the frontier. After all, Pinochet’s was a government which routinely established “states of emergency” to justify its policies and which disappeared, tortured and imprisoned tens of thousands of its own citizens through a bureaucracy of terror.

Indeed, the arrival of government bureaucrats and other designated “experts” *did* render frontier problems technical (Li 2007), making them into deficiencies to be rectified through specific interventions and programs targeting certain sectors of the population. The frontier remained a depoliticized space subject to decisions made in Santiago, where the top priority was and continues to be growing the national economy through free trade and the export of raw materials.

And yet, new technologies introduced to settle frontier problems and reduce economic deficiencies may have ultimately set the stage for the recent *unsettling* of the frontier. Tax breaks for forestry firms and the consolidation of territory into large-scale plantations ensured that native tree species were displaced by pine grown for export. The establishment of the *zona franca* in Puerto Chacabuco flooded local marketplaces with cheap manufactured goods from across the Pacific, furthering the collapse of local production and helping to drive locals into unskilled labor in the forestry and aquaculture sectors. The *zona* system heightened tensions between locals and newcomers with “advanced knowledge” deemed valuable by state agencies and corporations. Laws established to protect private property and encourage foreign investment brought foreign

energy companies and environmentalists to the region, setting up clashes over dams and raising questions about the future of Patagonia's natural landscape.

If, as Aihwa Ong has written, “the exercise of power depends on a variety of technologies that target populations as well as territory in order to solve problems of wealth, growth, and security” (Ong 2006:100), then the *failure* of these technologies in the eyes of citizens certainly poses a challenge to power, however authoritarian in nature. This is what happened in 2011, when powerful transnational forces and local resentments combined to destabilize and effectively *unsettle* the frontier.

The state's first effort to “put the genie back in the bottle” and remake the frontier into a depoliticized space took the form of the FOSIS firewood subsidy for vulnerable families. This subsidy was certainly “invented in an ad hoc way” from practices and procedures—and one might add material in the form of native hardwood—“that happened to be available” (Rose 1999:2) but it did nothing to depoliticize the region. Instead, it mired the state—particularly FOSIS but also the *carabineros* charged with protecting state agents and armored trucks full of cash—in a political arena for which it was woefully underqualified.

Firewood, however, has always been political for Ayséninos, and it is perhaps the last remaining sector of the economy where their local knowledge enables them to engage in practices wholly beyond the reach of the state. From Gualterio, who forages for deadwood on his friends' property (and likely in nearby national parks and reserves as well) to Gilberto, who helped establish Coleña Aysén as a cooperative that could take advantage of the sudden flood of government cash and provide benefits to its members,

local responses to the subsidy used local knowledge to avoid the “disastrous failure” of the latest government technology (Chatterjee 2004:37).

Local knowledge and the firewood practices it engenders are not limited to its procurement and sale. Ayséninos consider the safe use of woodstoves to be part of civic responsibility, and for outsiders who have come to the region to work in its export industries, demonstrating firewood knowledge represents an important strategy for gaining acceptance. More than once while I was in the field, interlocutors boasted to friends and coworkers that I knew how to split logs and start a fire without a struggle,³⁵ for this gave me—and by extension, them—social capital.

Finally, the centrality of the hearth in Aysén has meant that even as the state has sought to “modernize” life there, families still engage in traditional practices that have been abandoned elsewhere, like multi-generational households. The subsidy actually *encouraged* these practices in many cases, since the elderly nearly always qualify and working class parents often earn just enough not to. Local knowledge and local practices ensure that no matter how powerful the state, citizens living on the frontier maintain a measure of autonomy. Self-sufficiency is a source of pride and regional identity among Ayséninos, as well as among outsiders who have come to stay in the extreme south.

This does not undermine state power in Aysén. As the numerous agencies that line the streets around the Plaza de Armas in Coyhaique attest, the Chilean state has been *powerfully* present on the southern frontier for nearly forty years, and present for nearly a century before that. But state power in Aysén is indeed “an outcome of the composition and assembling of actors, flows, buildings and relations of authority into relatively durable associations” (Rose 2006:148), and recent events have shown that the

³⁵ Benefits of having grown up in rural Maine, where the winters are almost as long as they are in Aysén.

associations promoted during the dictatorship years and throughout the 1990s are far less durable than the government in Santiago once thought. The frontier, it seems, is far from settled.

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