

# Chapter 2

## Territorializing Capital: Moreno's Gift and the Political Economy of Nature in Argentine Patagonia



Marcos Mendoza

**Abstract** This chapter examines the political economy of nature and the legacy of Francisco Moreno, scientist and explorer, within Argentine Patagonia. Moreno is institutionally recognized for a land donation he made to the federal government in 1903, which is celebrated for inaugurating the national park conservation movement. This Moreno-centric official history, however, has rendered invisible state violence and Indigenous dispossession as preconditions of national conservation. Moving beyond this official history of conservation, the discussion highlights two histories of capitalist territorialization. The first focuses on the clearing-out strategy pursued by the Argentine government to open Patagonia for colonization and agrarian capitalism. The second attends to the re-territorialization of space through the creation of national parks and the promotion of leisure capitalism. Using the concept of “the gift” to assess Moreno’s legacy, this chapter shows that the “spirit of the gift”—heralded by the Argentine federal government—is chained to these two projects of capitalist territorialization. These territorialization histories challenge the halcyon representation of Moreno’s gift promoted by the state. Drawing upon scholarship in political ecology, this study is a contribution to an emerging critical assessment of “the gift” within Patagonian conservation.

**Keywords** Patagonia · Political ecology · Francisco Moreno · National park · Conservation

### 2.1 Introduction

In Argentina, National Parks Day is celebrated on November 6 to commemorate the date in 1903 when Francisco Moreno, explorer and scientist, donated 75 km<sup>2</sup> of land to the federal government to create a public nature park (*parque público natural*).

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M. Mendoza (✉)

University of Mississippi, Department of Sociology & Anthropology, University, MS, USA  
e-mail: [mendoza@olemiss.edu](mailto:mendoza@olemiss.edu)

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Moreno's donation of territory near Lake Nahuel Huapi in northern Patagonia has become recognized by the Argentine National Park Administration (APN) as a foundational act that created the first national park within the country and ignited the conservation movement. This gift was legally incorporated into the new Park of the South established by presidential decree in 1922 and redesignated as Nahuel Huapi National Park in 1934 (Freitas 2021). This baptismal moment positioned Argentina at the cutting edge of international conservation, making it—according to the APN—only the “third country in América” and “the fifth country in the world” to have created a national park (National Parks Administration of Argentina 2012, p. 13). This language extols Argentina as a conservation leader with deep commitments to its biophysical environments and nonhuman populations. Scholars have criticized this Moreno-centric narrative—propagated by the APN—for marginalizing conservation histories that might foreground Iguazú Falls, the Atlantic-forest biome, and the work of Carlos Thays (Freitas 2021; Kaltmeier 2021). The Moreno-centric narrative also renders invisible state violence and Indigenous dispossession as conditions of possibility for national conservation.

Annual celebrations of National Parks Day retell this founding story, highlighting how Moreno's gift established a public domain of “inalienable wealth” (Weiner 1985) that has expanded over the generations into the present-day system of protected areas (PAs). I was fortunate to attend one of these anniversary events in 2009 while conducting ethnographic research in the mountain village of El Chaltén adjacent to Glaciers National Park (*Parque Nacional Los Glaciares*). The event was held in the elementary school auditorium. The audience, approximately 140 people, included schoolchildren, gendarmes, public officials, town residents, and the rangers from the Viedma Lake Section (*Seccional Lago Viedma*), the station in charge of the northern sector of the park. The event kicked off with the presentation of the flags (national and provincial) and the singing of the national anthem. The senior-most ranger gave an opening address focused on the children. A charismatic speaker, Enrique recounted the importance of Francisco Moreno to the park system and explained the value of conservation to the El Chaltén community, which was expanded beyond humans to encompass forests, wildlife, and glaciers. This was followed by a series of humorous skits that explained rules for park conservation, such as not lighting campfires and refraining from littering. The person littering in the park was depicted as a foreign tourist, while the person intervening was represented as a resident of El Chaltén. The resident addressed and sought to educate the tourist—in English—about the rules of park conservation. The skits then segued into a PowerPoint presentation focused on the adults, which briefly explained the history and key features of Glaciers National Park. The event concluded by naming and celebrating each ranger—dressed in their signature tan and green uniforms—as they stood at the front of the room. Then everyone ate cake.

This anniversary event in El Chaltén raises a number of key issues. It indicates how Moreno's legacy remains central to the historical imagination of national conservation. Celebrating National Parks Day is a way to recount a story told concerning a selfless act of gift-giving that would create an expanding patrimony of nature. The ritual singing of the anthem, saluting of the flags, and assembling of state

personnel affirm the official significance of this legacy, but also direct attention onto protected nature. This highlights how the nation recognizes itself not just through flags, anthems, and uniformed officials, but also through the narrative of protection of vulnerable environments threatened by anthropogenic forces such as ranching, mining, and deforestation. This institutional history of Moreno is also a call to an ethics of conservation. Moreno's gift to the nation only means something—the APN suggests—if everyday citizens take up the duty of environmental care and the “greening” of Argentina. To care for nature is to perform an act of citizenship that implies a will to protect and cherish Argentina's national heritage. This ethical injunction is incorporated into the presentation given by rangers, calling upon children and adults alike to be patriotic stewards of the gift.

To apply the scholarship of Marcel Mauss (2000), there is an ethical “spirit” of the gift at work within the Moreno legacy presented by the APN. Mauss's theory of the gift highlights the obligations to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. There are various gifts and counter-gifts to consider. The first entails the gift logic linking Moreno and the Argentine government. Within the APN's institutional history of Moreno, the initial gift of land was received by the state as a foundational donation that was generative of the new category of the national patrimony of protected nature. By receiving the donation, the state had to reciprocate or repay this gift. This act of repayment involved the commitment to honor Moreno's legacy by expanding the system of protected nature. This repayment consists of two sub-gifts: (1) an institutional effort to lionize Moreno as the founding father of Argentine conservation; and (2) the creation of an expanding system of protected nature that indexes the initial gift. However, this first moment of gift exchange opens up a second moment that places the two initial actors (Moreno and the state) into the category of gift-giver and locates the citizenry in the category of recipient. Taken together, Moreno and Argentine state have given the citizenry the gift of the founding idea and institutional realization of the national park system. This sets up the injunction or call for the citizenry to reciprocate. This repayment is fulfilled by practicing an ethic of conservation. The ethic of conservation is an open field of action: volunteering time for trail restoration; creating monitoring groups for endangered species; establishing nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to tap foreign donor networks; or supporting the sustainable development protocols that govern the green economy (Mendoza 2018). This logic calls the citizenry to valorize the first gift (Moreno's donation), and the second gift (the APN's expanding park system), by becoming the third party to this expanding circuit of reciprocity.

The spirit of the gift materializes through the connections of people, organizations, institutions, and nonhumans whose actions are folded into the ethic of conservation. This opens up the gift logic beyond the Moreno–state–citizenry triad to enfold a fourth figure: the foreigner. Foreigners include tourists visiting national parks, paying money to the APN for entrance fees, and contributing to the green economy. The APN calls upon visitors—many involved in leisure pursuits such as trekking, kayaking, birding, climbing, and sightseeing—to practice conservation ethics inside parks (Mendoza 2016). Nevertheless, there are other foreigners in Argentina with questionable motives, such as land barons who have consolidated

massive estates (Sánchez 2007). Facing intense public criticism, such foreigners can work to transform their identities through participation in the spirit of the gift. As discussed later, eco-philanthropic organizations such as Tompkins Conservation have participated in the call to conservation through the buying of properties and the gifting of these to the state to become national parkland.

This institutionalized discourse about Moreno is significant for creating and circulating a conservation imaginary organized around the spirit of the gift and the call to “green” Argentina, which is open to citizens and noncitizens alike. It is also significant for what it does not reveal. This chapter explores the political economy of nature that undergirds the legacy of Moreno’s gift. The discussion takes its point of departure from this routine celebration of National Parks Day but probes the histories of appropriation and extraction that undergird this institutional legacy. I demonstrate that the spirit of the gift is chained to projects of capitalist territorialization in Patagonia. The discussion focuses on two territorialization projects: rangeland farming and Andean conservation. Dispossession and violence are integral to capitalist territorialization, challenging the halcyon representation of Moreno’s gift operative within the APN’s official history. Following a discussion of capitalist territorialization, this chapter explores settler colonialism and livestock farming in Patagonia. It then focuses on the creation of the national park administration, the genesis of Andean border parks, and the efforts of eco-philanthropists.

## 2.2 Territorializing Capital

Capitalist territorialization refers to the production of space for capital accumulation (Brenner 1999; Lefebvre 2004). Capital formation requires the construction of spaces of appropriation that facilitate value extraction from humans, nonhumans, and the environment, adapting to the shifting dynamics of profit seeking, rent capture, and market creation (Harvey 2001; Lefebvre 2004; Moore 2015). As it gains fixity or traction in these produced spaces, capital is established through “systems of resource control—rights, authorities, jurisdictions, and their spatial representations” (Rasmussen and Lund 2018, p. 388). States are integral to the fashioning of systems of resource control that seek to include or exclude certain populations (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995). This is a particularly salient point for Patagonia and the strategy of Indigenous annihilation and the clearing of the region for capitalism and settler colonialism pursued by the Argentine and Chilean governments (Bandieri 2005; Di Giminiani 2018; Edwards 2022; Klubock 2014; Navarro-Floria 1999; Ogden 2021; Rasmussen 2021).

I conceptualize capitalist territorialization projects as sites of gathering that assemble actors around the production of space through appropriation and extraction. These gathering sites are open, thus capable of recruiting expected and unexpected human and nonhuman actors (Blanco et al. 2015; Dicenta and Correa 2021; Ogden 2021). Territorialization projects produce tensions and contradictions as they unfold, which may provoke new strategies to re-territorialize spaces and their

market connections (Brenner 1999; Edwards 2022; Rasmussen and Lund 2018). Territorialization projects also generate imaginaries: shared understandings and interpretive frameworks that shape the practical orientations and value designations that actors ascribe to a particular space (Taylor 2004). Mendoza et al. (2017) discuss the rise of a Patagonian territorial imaginary that—since the 1990s—has framed the Southern Andes as an eco-region earmarked for “green development,” which in and of itself is a contested term within the territory. This eco-region is constituted through the images, representations, and values produced by the conjoining of tourism markets, the outdoor industry, and environmentalism. Though contested, this Patagonian imaginary has enrolled various state, corporate, and civil society actors within an emerging project to extend green capitalism.

This chapter contributes to scholarship by highlighting the intersection of gift legacies and capitalist territorialization. Rather than conceptualizing the “gift economy” as antagonistic and external to the “market economy,” scholars have highlighted how capitalism depends upon various economic logics ranging from markets to sharing to reciprocity to redistribution, as well as appropriating unpaid work and raiding the environmental commons (Gibson-Graham 2006; Moore 2015; Mendoza et al. 2021). My discussion scrutinizes two histories of capitalist territorialization and the production of space in Argentine Patagonia to situate the spirit of the gift and Moreno's legacy. The first focuses on the clearing-out strategy pursued by the Argentine government to open the Patagonian “desert” for colonization and agrarian capitalism. This produced a space of rangeland extraction that—though greatly diminished—continues to structure Patagonian social life in the present. The second focuses on the perceived failure of this first strategy in the Andean borderlands and the re-territorialization of space through the creation of national parks and the promotion of leisure capitalism. In the 1990s, this second strategy began to attract unexpected actors: foreign eco-philanthropists.

### ***2.2.1 Agrarian Capitalism on the Rangelands***

The first aspect of the Moreno gift to consider is the land he received that was then donated to the national government. Moreno's (2002) letter to the Ministry of Agriculture in 1903, explaining his motives, identified the park systems in the United States and other countries as the inspiration. Moreno was given land by the Argentine government in recognition of his services as a scientist exploring Patagonia and contributing to the scientific diplomacy that defended national sovereignty in the Andean borderlands (Wakild 2017). Having received this land grant, Moreno wished to contribute to the founding of a nature park that would benefit “current and future generations” and inspire the Argentine government to set aside “magnificent unspoiled parkland” that would become a “catalyst for human advancement” (Moreno 2002). Moreno gestured toward the benefits of the park for scientific study, visitation by tourists who might marvel at its beauty and appreciate its serenity, and for peaceful transborder coexistence and international conviviality.

What remained unsaid within Moreno's letter was that the land grant was anchored within a history of capitalist territorialization tied to settler colonialism and livestock farming.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Argentine state initiated a territorialization project that sought to open Patagonia for capitalist investment and market formation. This territorialization project was spurred by the Argentine military and the prosecution of the so-called Conquest of the Desert (1878–1885). Social elites viewed Indigenous controlled lands as a “desert” in which civilization was absent, barbarism thrived, and racialized others prevented the exercise of integral sovereignty by the state over its claimed territories (Gordillo 2004; Nouzeilles 1999). The Conquest of the Desert was executed by military forces that first established control over the Pampas region before moving south of the Río Negro into Patagonia. Indigenous groups fought an “asymmetric war” in which they used their superior knowledge of the terrain to avoid engaging in large battles on open ground (Vezub and Healey 2020). The military, however, continued to push south as it succeeded in killing combatants and unarmed groups. Larson (2020b) notes that the “official” narrative of the military conquest ends with the surrender of the cacique Saygüequé in January 1885. Scholars have demonstrated that the “conquest” did not end in 1885 but instead took on new forms of internal colonization that sought to contain ongoing Indigenous resistance (Larson 2020a). Indeed, the war inflicted genocidal violence on Indigenous peoples, as the military established concentration camps for survivors and conscripted Indigenous men into the armed forces (Delrio and Pérez 2020; Larson 2020b; Vezub and Healey 2020). The war machine sought to clear out the “desert” and prepare the way for “progress” based on private property, agriculture, and white settlement.

The Conquest of the Desert had enormous implications for the Indigenous peoples of Santa Cruz. The Tehuelches were a nomadic foraging society integrated into the wider Indigenous networks in Patagonia that stretched across both sides of the Andes and included Tierra del Fuego (Pero 2002). Various Indigenous populations, fleeing violence to the north, took refuge in southern Patagonia. The government created six reservations between 1898 and 1927, including one near Lake Viedma, called Reserva del Lago Viedma, totaling some 200 km<sup>2</sup> (Nuevo-Delaunay et al. 2020; Rodríguez 2014). The Indigenous population was largely confined to reservations where they were expected to “disappear” or “go extinct” based on prevailing assumptions deriving from evolutionary anthropology (Argentine Ministry of Education and Sports 2016). Sited on lands with precarious rights, the reservations were populated by Tehuelche, Mapuche, and Mapuche-Tehuelche families (Argentine Ministry of Education and Sports 2016). In some cases, families were able to establish marginal holdings in the hinterlands away from white settlers where they could engage in hunting, livestock rearing, and horticulture (Nuevo-Delaunay 2012). However, individual holdings and reservations were subject to land grabs by settlers and, later, the state. In 1966, the Santa Cruz provincial government eliminated three reservations altogether, including the Lago Viedma Reserve (*Reserva del Lago Viedma*), and shrank the size of the remaining ones (Argentine Ministry of Education and Sports 2016; Rodríguez 2014). The reservation lands

were sold off, and the government sought to push the resident populations toward urbanized areas where they would be assimilated into the Santacruceño working class (Nuevo-Delaunay 2012).

Territorial dispossession opened Patagonia to white settler colonialism (Bandieri 2005; Gott 2007). The Argentine government supported European immigration as a way to populate the frontier, perceiving white settlers as a biopolitical tool to bring civilization to the desert. European settlers—along with initial waves of Argentine and Chilean migrants—traveled to the region and founded or expanded coastal settlements in Punta Arenas, Ushuaia, Río Gallegos, and Puerto Madryn (Bandieri 2005; Edwards 2022). From the 1880s to the 1910s, southern Patagonia was established as a region integrated into transnational circuits of capital investment tied to the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas) and European markets (Barbería 1994; Harambour-Ross 2016). A landowning class established latifundios (large agricultural estates) on the most fertile and accessible spaces (Oliva et al. 2016). Landowners consolidated territory and created rural leagues (*sociedades rurales*) that pressed for favorable public policies and defended the prerogatives and impunity of elites. This impunity extended to the violent repression of farmworker unions pressing for better working conditions (Bayer 2008; Coronato and Tourrand 2020). This included the notorious *Patagonia rebelde* massacre of hundreds of workers and anarchist organizers in 1920–1921. Inter marriage and business alliances helped stitch together a regional oligarchy that developed companies and consortia that controlled the import-export trade, shipping, banking, and commerce (Bandieri 2005). Subsequent waves of settlers pushed inland into the steppe and sub-Andean zones where they established small- or medium-sized holdings on more marginal territories, sometimes by way of formal leasing contracts and in other cases by informal land occupations (Barbieri 1994).

Territorial dispossession and white settler colonialism facilitated the transformation of Patagonia into a region dominated by agrarian rangeland capitalism. This landscape of capitalist opportunity took material form as a rangeland to be exploited primarily through sheep farming (supplemented by cattle and goat herds). Argentine Patagonia was colonized not just by white settlers but also by the sheep herds driven in from both the south and the north. In 1876, some 300 sheep were transported from the Falkland Islands to southern Patagonia to establish an initial stock (Aagesen 2000). Sheep were also introduced by way of the Pampas (Coronato and Tourrand 2020). Landholders created production systems on *estancias* initially oriented toward wool exports. The advent of refrigerated ships in 1894 allowed the industry to export meat as well (Aagesen 2000). However, this productive model—imposed on Patagonia—had taken shape within the environments of the Falkland Islands and Pampas with higher levels of precipitation (Coronato and Tourrand 2020). In the short run, livestock multiplied and expanded across environments now conceived as “rangelands,” a process that was completed in the late 1930s (Coronato and Tourrand 2020). The sheep population grew to a high point of 22 million in the 1950s before declining over the next 50 years (Coronato et al. 2016; Oliva et al. 2016). Livestock farming began to stagnate as a result of environmental degradation.

Agrarian rangeland capitalism generated significant environmental degradation across Patagonia. Capital accumulation emerges through processes of appropriation that degrade landscapes, destroy plant and animal life (i.e., biota), strip the soil of nutrients, pollute the atmosphere and oceans, and create environmental externalities not incorporated into the valuation systems through which capital grows (Foster and Clark 2020). Extra-Andean Patagonia is dominated by steppe ecologies. Livestock farming—as it was implemented by settler colonists—precipitated environmental damage as this productive system fostered overgrazing, overstocking, erosion, and unsustainable land use (Del Valle et al. 1998; Aagesen 2000; Oliva et al. 2016). Despite warnings from scientists beginning in the early 1900s, the livestock sector continued to spread and exert pressures that outstripped the regenerative capacity of plants and soils (Andrade 2002). This process of deterioration—what environmental scientists refer to as “desertification”—entails plant, soil, and water resource degradation (Mazzonia and Vazquez 2009). Ironically, the very productive model that sought to remake the Indigenous Patagonian “desert” into a landscape of capitalist progress unleashed productive forces that undermined the ecological conditions of accumulation.

After peaking in the 1950s, sheep farming began a long decline. This led to a crisis of the Patagonian estancia that was defined by shrinking stocks, jobs, and profits, which depopulated the interior of the region (Andrade 2002; Coronato et al. 2016). This had serious economic effects on provincial governments trying to maintain the viability of rural society and deal with enormous inequality in land tenure and the abandonment of estancias (Aagesen 2000; Mazzonia and Vazquez 2009). By the end of the twentieth century, there were 500 abandoned estancias out of 1260 total in Santa Cruz alone (Coronato and Tourrand 2020). Del Valle et al. (1998) found that within the 785,000 km<sup>2</sup> that comprise Argentine Patagonia, 93.6% of the region exhibited at least some degree of desertification: slight (9.3%), moderate (17.1%), moderate to severe (35.4%), severe (23.3%), and very severe (8.5%). They argue that the “severe” and “very severe” categories, comprising some 31.8% of Argentine Patagonia, represent zones that most likely are irreversibly degraded (Del Valle et al. 1998). These environments can no longer support livestock. However, land degradation presents an opportunity for new waves of capital accumulation layered atop and alongside agrarian rangeland capitalism and a regional sheep population that still numbers nearly ten million (Coronato and Tourrand 2020). The mining and hydrocarbon industries would soon begin to dominate and convert the interior and coastlines into spaces of subterranean extraction (Shever 2012).

Moreno donated the plot adjacent to Lake Nahuel Huapi with the hope that it would become a “catalyst for human advancement” as a PA (Moreno 2002). This donation was made possible by military violence, the destruction of Indigenous lifeworlds, land dispossession, and white settler colonialism. This territorialization project sought to convert Patagonia into a capitalist rangeland for livestock farming. Moreno had long championed the development and populating of Patagonia with settlers who would help secure Argentine sovereignty. In a letter to General Julio

Roca in 1899, Moreno extols the military leader of the Conquest of the Desert for paving the way for “civilization to take hold” thus allowing Moreno to see his “dreams coming true” sooner than anticipated (Moreno 2002). Moreno talks up the economic potential of the “Patagonian territories,” adding that “extraordinary things could be accomplished there” (Moreno 2002, p. 225).

### ***2.2.2 Andean Conservation, Leisure Capitalism, and Eco-philanthropy***

The second aspect to consider regarding Moreno's gift is how the APN institutionalized his vision for conservation. In the 1930s, a new territorialization project sought to create a national park system and strengthen sovereignty within the Andes. This vision reorganized the Andean borderlands around leisure capitalism based on tourism markets and the selling of an alpine landscape aesthetic. In the late twentieth century, this territorialization project was extended by eco-philanthropic investment.

Agrarian rangeland capitalism emerged against the backdrop of border disputes between Chile and Argentina and lingering concerns about the British Empire. In 1833, the British gained control over the Falkland Islands, adding to their South Atlantic holdings (Dodds and Benwell 2010). An imperial outpost for knowledge production (Blair 2019), the Falklands were also a base for ships to be repaired and resupplied, and a commercial hub linking mainland Patagonia to European markets (Bandieri 2005; Minchinton 1985). Over subsequent decades, there was a back-and-forth diplomatic messaging war by the Chilean and Argentine governments to establish sovereignty claims over Tierra del Fuego and eastern Patagonia (Perry 1980). The 1881 Border Treaty created a legal framework for the division of space along the “most elevated crests” of the Andean cordillera that “may divide the waters” (United Nations 1902). This legal rule proved difficult to apply in practice along stretches of the Andes where the orographic and hydrological lines diverged (Bandieri 2005). The 1902 arbitration case—overseen by the British Crown—more precisely established the international boundary line, with Francisco Moreno serving on the border commission (Wakild 2017). Diplomatic conflicts persisted, particularly in relation to the Southern Patagonian Ice Field (Sopeña 2008). In 1965 there was a small engagement between Chilean and Argentine armed forces that transpired just north of the Chaltén Massif and resulted in the death of one soldier. Ongoing border disputes at times pushed the two countries to the brink of war.

Conservative elites took advantage of the ousting of President Yrigoyen in 1930 to implement a new vision for Patagonia linking conservation, colonialism, and capitalism. This territorializing project sought to facilitate tourism and create a series of national parks in geopolitically sensitive zones. This began with the birth of the Argentine National Park Directorate (DPN) in 1934 (Law 12,103) and the formation of Iguazú National Park and Nahuel Huapi National Park (Kaltmeier 2021). Exequiel Bustillo, the first DPN president, highlighted the intersection of

colonization and conservation in his memoir, “The Awakening of Bariloche: A Patagonian Strategy.” Bustillo viewed the DPN and borderland parks as the means to “carry ahead our civilizing business in the lakes of the South and Iguazú” (Bustillo 1999, p. 123). As signaled by the title of his memoir, Bustillo’s central concern was for Patagonia—not Iguazú and the far north (Freitas 2021). Bustillo (1999) lamented the perceived failure of the government to secure control over Andean Patagonia and lionized the conservation state—the park administration and the PA system under its management—as a heroic agency that had facilitated “the accumulation of capital, population, and all those elements essential for progress” (p. 11). For Bustillo (1999) the conservation state was an “integral tool for colonization” that activated tourism and thus “prepared the ground to complete the conquest” (p. 15). As noted above, the Conquest of the Desert did not end in 1885 (Larson 2020a). Indeed, this conquest logic was repurposed to legitimate and institutionalize an ethic of conservation.

The conservation state promulgated a landscape ideology of alpine aesthetics. This aesthetic took the European Alps as a geophysical referent and landscape category. The designation “alpine” entailed a specific way of understanding this environment—replete with mountains, forests, glaciers, and lakes—that reflected prevailing understandings of the Alps as a site for exploration and tourism for the leisured class (Navarro-Floria 2008). In an 1883 letter, Francisco Moreno (2002) described the Lakes Region as the “Switzerland of South America” and compared Lake Nahuel Huapi to Lake Geneva, imagining a future city to be built by the army, a “New Geneva” that would be “even more majestic than its Alpine counterpart” (p. 218). This alpine vision of the Patagonian Andes was affirmed and extended by Bustillo and the DPN (Navarro-Floria 2008). As Bustillo (1999) writes, the goal was to build the town of Bariloche into a picturesque mountain city as exists in “Switzerland” or “Tyrol.” Bustillo (1999) eagerly quotes the French ambassador’s impressions: “It is at once the Engadine, the Alps of Savoie, Italian and Swiss lakes, l’Esterel, and even the landscapes of Tuscany and Umbria, plus *le grand décor* of the Andes which is unto itself. Truly it is one of the most beautiful corners of the world” (p. 174). Ambassador D’Ormesson’s letter reaffirmed the Lakes Region to be a stunning compendium of Italian, Swiss, and French alpine environments. This alpine aesthetic was enacted through an architectonic style elaborated with respect to public buildings in Bariloche and park infrastructure in Nahuel Huapi (Frischknecht 2006; Picone 2022). The first decade of the DPN (later renamed the APN) began the project of commodifying the Patagonian Andes as landscape experiences to be sold for upper-class leisure activities such as hiking, boating, and sightseeing. The Peronist administration would later open up leisure spaces for the working and middle classes. Beginning with Bariloche and Nahuel Huapi, the conservation state labored to produce space for leisure capitalism through selling aesthetic grandeur and recreational activities.

The conservation state expanded its territorialization project down the length of the Patagonian Andes. This involved the addition of new PAs in 1937, such as Glaciers, Lanín, Los Alerces, Lago Puelo, and Perito Moreno (National Parks

Administration of Argentina 2012). Other PAs followed, such as Bosque Petrificado, Laguna Blanca, Arrayanes, and Tierra del Fuego. Almost all of these parks were strategically placed along the Chilean border to consolidate territorial sovereignty, establish stable population bases, generate communities of Argentine nationals, attract capital investments to build tourism-based economies, and sell the alpine aesthetic to visitors. Until the late twentieth century, however, many PAs in southern Patagonia had minimal tourism infrastructure, fielded small ranger corps to enforce conservation rules, and remained closely connected to estancia-based livestock farming (Mendoza 2018). In Santa Cruz, Glaciers National Park is a case in point. The nascent park service recruited settlers to become the first park rangers. They patrolled on horseback to enforce park rules. Tourism was still incipient, though a trail to Perito Moreno Glacier was established for visitors on horses. A road to the Moreno Glacier was finally finished in the early 1960s, allowing tourists to reach it by automobile (Cousido 2003, p. 163). Not until the end of the twentieth century did Glaciers National Park become a booming tourism destination for sightseers and trekkers to complement the mountaineering expeditions that had long visited (Mendoza 2020).

Alongside the conservation state, this territorialization project gathered together entrepreneurs, workers, and visitors within tourism destinations along the cordillera. Capitalist territorialization projects are contingent sites of gathering and can attract unexpected actors. In the late twentieth century, a new generation of elites began purchasing large tracts of land in Chilean and Argentine Patagonia (Holmes 2015; Sánchez 2007; Tecklin and Sepulveda 2014). One eco-philanthropic organization in particular, Tompkins Conservation, has amassed holdings to create PAs and pursue the goals of rewilding ecosystems, building tourism infrastructure, and donating properties to the Argentine and Chilean governments to be converted into national parks (Beer 2022; Gale and Ednie 2019; García and Mulrennan 2020; Louder and Bosak 2019; Louder and Bosak 2022; Mendoza et al. 2017; Wakild 2009). Tompkins Conservation—especially its late founder Doug Tompkins—has faced accusations of green grabbing and land dispossession (Busscher et al. 2018; Louder and Bosak 2019; Wakild 2009). For Doug Tompkins, Francisco Moreno was a “mythical” person—a founding figure of conservation who should be recognized as Argentina’s “John Muir” (Tompkins 2013, p. 127–129). Through its participation in the spirit of the gift, Tompkins Conservation has sought to construct an eco-philanthropic image in Argentina (and Chile) that advances Moreno’s legacy and the institutionalized ethic of conservation.

Tompkins Conservation has primarily targeted the Patagonian Andes for its land acquisition and conservation efforts. Most significantly, Tompkins Conservation worked with the Chilean government to create the *Ruta de los Parques de la Patagonia* (The Route of Parks of Patagonia), establishing PAs from Puerto Montt to Cape Horn that contain some 17 national parks and cover 115,000 km<sup>2</sup>. As Clare Beer (2022) has shown, Tompkins Conservation attached financing conditionality arrangements to their gift as a way to influence conservation governance outcomes

and secure funding from the Chilean state to PAs within the Ruta de los Parques. In Argentina, Tompkins Conservation has sought to expand existing Andean parks or to create new PAs. The organization donated 150 km<sup>2</sup> to expand Perito Moreno National Park (Butler 2016, p. 69) and has worked to create the new Patagonia National Park as part of a transboundary protected zone that includes Chile's Patagonia National Park—the latter also spearheaded by Tompkins Conservation. In Tierra del Fuego, the organization has endeavored to create a park in Peninsula Mitre to complement the existing Tierra del Fuego National Park (Rewilding Argentina Foundation 2020). Eco-philanthropy has thus contributed to capitalist territorialization based on the expansion of the national park system in the Andes. In southern Patagonia, there is a binational eco-tourism circuit that connects the towns of Ushuaia, Puerto Natales, El Calafate, and El Chaltén and their respective national parks (Mendoza et al. 2017). There is also an important tourism circuit in northern Patagonia linking Bariloche, San Martín de los Andes, Pucón, and Puerto Varas, among other destinations. The goal—for Tompkins Conservation—is to create an eco-tourism circuit that traverses the Ruta de los Parques, generating revenue for Andean communities and building local support for parks, tourism, and green development. The hope is that this Chilean route will fuse synergistically with the existing northern and southern Patagonian corridors, thereby creating a massive park-tourism complex that dominates the Patagonian Andes.

Tompkins Conservation has also targeted coastal and marine environments in Argentine Patagonia. This began with the creation of the Monte León National Park in 2004 in concert with Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina (Butler 2016). It has also sought to build upon the existing Interjurisdictional Coastal Marine Park of Southern Patagonia created in 2008 to which surrounding terrestrial and marine biosphere reserves were added in 2015 (Rewilding Argentina Foundation 2020). Tompkins Conservation has worked to establish a South Atlantic eco-tourism circuit selling the sublime experiences of coastal and marine environments.

### 2.3 Territorializing Moreno's Gift

The year before his death, Francisco Moreno reflected on the significance of his life. Moreno wrote that he had given land to create

a National Park for the benefit of future citizens, so that they may find solace and renewed strength to serve this country. Yet I have nothing to give my children, not even a tiny plot in which to bury my ashes. (Moreno 2002, p. 13)

Moreno's narrative identifies the foundational gift of the national park that he has offered to citizens of Argentina. Moreno frames this gift around its potential to inspire a countergift: that citizens will find "renewed strength to serve this country" (Moreno 2002, p. 13). In contemporary Argentina, the APN has organized the history of the conservation state around the spirit of the gift. It has repaid Moreno by creating an institutional legacy in which he occupies a heroic role as the founding figure of conservation. National Parks Day in Argentina celebrates this legacy and

continues to use the gift as a political resource to teach and inspire children and adults in Andean settlements like El Chaltén, exhorting the citizenry to answer the call to an ethic of conservation. In addition to the discourse of the gift revisited every sixth of November, Moreno's name now adorns libraries, towns, schools, roads, and parks throughout Argentina.

I have argued that this spirit of the gift is chained to projects of capitalist territorialization involving rangeland farming and Andean conservation. The first territorializing project employed state violence to clear out Indigenous populations in Patagonia for white settler colonialism and the creation of estancias for sheep farming. This produced a space for agrarian rangeland capitalism. Over generations, however, livestock farming facilitated widespread environmental change that undermined the ecological conditions of accumulation. Though it endures, sheep farming is significantly reduced compared to its zenith in the mid-twentieth century. New industries—mining and hydrocarbon extraction—have spread throughout the interior and coastal zones, generating expanding circuits of accumulation. A second territorialization project emerged in the 1930s that sought to respond to the perceived failures of the state to establish territorial sovereignty in the Andean borderlands. The conservation state promoted tourism markets and created a series of Andean parks to establish population centers and facilitate renewed colonization efforts. The conservation state enlisted an alpine landscape ideology to sell recreational activities and the aesthetic grandeur of the cordillera, at least initially, to wealthy tourists. The production of Andean space for leisure capitalism was unevenly accomplished, with parks in the south lagging far behind in terms of the tourism infrastructure that existed in Bariloche and Nahuel Huapi National Park. In the late twentieth century, eco-philanthropy organizations like Tompkins Conservation engaged in massive land purchases to create private estates that could then be donated to the Argentine and Chilean governments to expand the national park systems. Eco-philanthropists have thus sought to make (and perhaps launder) their reputations through participation in the spirit of the gift.

One consequence of these histories of capitalist territorialization is the division of Patagonian space into two sections. The Andean domain has been slotted for conservation, parks, and green development. By contrast, the extra-Andean domain (steppe, monte, and coastal zones) has been earmarked for resource extraction industries and infrastructure that intersect and overlap with rangeland farming. Eco-philanthropists—acting in concert with park administration allies—have sought to defend Andean ecosystems through land purchases and deal-making with federal governments, thereby legally placing these outside the realm of livestock farming, mining, and energy extraction. With the creation of the Ruta de los Parques in Chile, there is now a vast set of Andean PAs. There is a mega-park system that links the south (Bernardo O'Higgins, Glaciers, Kawésqar, Torres del Paine, Alberto de Agostini, Yendegaia, and Tierra del Fuego) and a well-established network of the parks in the north (Lanín, Nahuel Huapi, Vicente Perez Rosales, Pumalín, and Corcovado, among others). This legal expansion of national parks has contributed to, reinforced, and deepened the Patagonian territorial imaginary that represents the Southern Andes as an eco-region.

The legacy of Moreno's gift is grounded within histories of capitalist territorialization. The official discourse of the gift is tethered to the progressive creation of an expanding national park system. National parks are symbolically resonant elements of the inalienable wealth protected by the state. In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, center-left and center-right administrations have contributed significantly to the federal system. However, this institutional legacy is equally important for what is not revealed in official discourse. This APN history—retold annually under the auspices of state ritual—has fundamentally failed to recognize and reckon with histories of extraction, violence, and dispossession. This chapter is a contribution to an emerging critical assessment of the gift within Patagonian conservation.

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