Nationalizing Nature

Today, one-quarter of all the land in Latin America is set apart for nature protection. In Nationalizing Nature, Frederico Freitas uncovers the crucial role played by conservation in the region’s territorial development by exploring how Brazil and Argentina used national parks to nationalize borderlands. In the 1930s, Brazil and Argentina created some of their first national parks around the massive Iguazu Falls, shared by the two countries. The parks were designed as tools to attract migrants from their densely populated Atlantic seabords to a sparsely inhabited borderland. In the 1970s, a change in paradigm led the military regimes in Brazil and Argentina to violently evict settlers from their national parks, highlighting the complicated relationship between authoritarianism and conservation in the Southern Cone. By tracking almost one hundred years of national park history in Latin America’s largest countries, Nationalizing Nature shows how conservation policy promoted national programs of frontier development and border control.

Frederico Freitas is an assistant professor of Digital and Latin American History and a core member of the Visual Narrative Initiative at North Carolina State University. He is the coeditor of Big Water: The Making of the Borderlands between Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay and a recipient of an NEH fellowship.
CAMBRIDGE LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

General Editors
KRIS LANE, Tulane University
MATTHEW RESTALL, Pennsylvania State University

Editor Emeritus
HERBERT S. KLEIN
Gouverneur Morris Emeritus Professor of History, Columbia University and Hoover Research Fellow, Stanford University

Other Books in the Series

121. Islanders and Empire: Smuggling and Political Defiance in Hispaniola, 1580–1690, Juan José Ponce-Vázquez
120. Our Time Is Now: Race and Modernity in Postcolonial Guatemala, Julie Gibbings
119. The Sexual Question: A History of Prostitution in Peru, 1850s–1950s, Paulo Drinot
118. A Silver River in a Silver World: Dutch Trade in the Rio de la Plata, 1648–1678, David Freeman
116. Violence and the Caste War of Yucatán, Wolfgang Gabbert
115. For Christ and Country: Militant Catholic Youth in Post-Revolutionary Mexico, Robert Weis
113. Corruption and Justice in Colonial Mexico, 1650–1755, Christoph Rosenmüller
112. Blacks of the Land: Indian Slavery, Settler Society, and the Portuguese Colonial Enterprise in South America, Weinstein/Woodard/Montiero
111. The Street Is Ours: Community, the Car, and the Nature of Public Space in Rio de Janeiro, Shawn William Miller
110. Laywomen and the Making of Colonial Catholicism in New Spain, 1630–1790, Jessica L. Delgado
109. Urban Slavery in Colonial Mexico: Puebla de los Ángeles, 1531–1706, Pablo Miguel Sierra Silva

(Continued after the Index)
Nationalizing Nature

Iguazu Falls and National Parks at the Brazil–Argentina Border

FREDERICO FREITAS
North Carolina State University
To Olivia and Aurora
Contents

List of Figures, Maps, and Tables  page viii
Acknowledgments  x
Note on Terminology and Orthography  xiv

  Introduction: Boundaries of Nature  1
  1 Nationalizing the Border  23
  2 Playing Catch-Up  59
  3 A Park and a Town  97
  4 Land Conflict  145
  5 Surveillance and Evasion  194
  6 The View from Above  239
    Epilogue: The Resilience of Boundaries  279

Bibliography and Sources  286
Index  308
Figures, Maps, and Tables

FIGURES

0.1 Iguazu Falls, as seen from Brazil  
1.1 Plan for a national park on the Argentine bank of Iguazu Falls by Charles Thays, 1902  
1.2 Plan for a national park on the Argentine bank of the Iguazu Falls by Charles Thays, 1911  
2.1 Plan for a national park on the Brazilian bank of Iguazu Falls by Edmundo de Barros, 1897  
2.2 Land concessions and ports on the Paraná River, 1919  
2.3 Budget and visitors in the Brazilian National Parks  
3.1 Iguazu National Park Hospital, 1947  
3.2 Proposed national parks and Argentine phytogeography  
3.3 News of the death of a jaguar in Iguazu National Park, 1962  
4.1 “Routes of the National Park Committee,” c. 1966  
4.2 Expropriated estates in Iguacu National Park, 1973  
6.1 Colonization projects and towns in western Paraná  
6.2 Frame 13349, possible locations of Guarani communities inside Iguazu NP, Brazil, 1953  
6.3 Iguazu National Park borders

MAPS

0.1 Iguazu National Park, Argentina, and Iguazu National Park, Brazil, c. 2020  
1.1 Iguazu National Park, Argentina, and Iguazu National Park, Brazil, in 1941  
2.1 Most common routes to Foz do Iguacu before the 1930s
### List of Figures, Maps, and Tables

2.2 Iguaçu National Park expansion, 1939–44  
2.3 Territory of Iguaçu, 1943–46  
3.1 Planning of Puerto Iguazú, c. 1950  
3.2 Change in Iguazú National Park boundaries, c. 1950–80  
3.3 Dwellings around Iguazu Falls, c. 1960  
4.1 Iguaçu National Park, Paraná, Brazil, c. 1970  
4.2 Iguaçu National Park, Settled Area c. 1975–80  
5.1 Fauna violations at Iguazú National Park (AR), 1960–74  
5.2 Fauna violations at Iguazú National Park (AR), 1975–80  
6.1 Land cover at Iguaçu National Park, 1953  
6.2 Land cover at Iguaçu National Park, 1967  
6.3 Land cover at Iguaçu National Park, 1980  
6.4 Land cover at Iguaçu National Park, 2014  
6.5 Iguaçu National Park, c. 1980

### Tables

1.1 Guests at the Iguazú Hotel  
1.2 Investment in national parks, 1935–42  
1.3 Investment in national parks by population and area, 1935–42  
1.4 DPN’s revenue share, 1935–42  
3.1 Survey on the population of the recreational zone, Iguazú National Park, 1961  
3.2 Residents in Iguazú National Park, inside the protected area, 1958–62  
4.1 Comparison between censuses  
6.1 Colonization projects along the BR-277  
6.2 Population growth in western and southwestern Paraná (BR) and Misiones (AR)  
6.3 Area (km²) covered by native forests in the state of Paraná, Brazil, 1930–79
Acknowledgments

Throughout the years, several organizations generously supported the research for and writing of this book. Research in Brazil was funded through the Graduate Research Opportunity Funds from the School of Humanities and Sciences at Stanford University and the Albert J. Beveridge Grant from the American Historical Association. Research in Argentina was made possible with the support of the Center for Spatial and Textual Analysis at Stanford and the John D. Wirth Fund at the Department of History at Stanford. The writing was supported by the Geballe Dissertation Prize Fellowship at the Stanford Humanities Center, the Department of History at North Carolina State University, and a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship.

This book is the result both of my personal effort and of the support of many individuals who offered me advice and friendship over the last decade. My highest debt is to my three mentors at Stanford University: Zephyr Frank, Richard White, and Mikael Wolfe. It is hard to find the proper words to acknowledge Zephyr for his guidance and exceptional generosity. Zephyr always played the right role at the right times: rigorous mentor, exceptional colleague, and true friend. Richard White was crucial in my development as a historian, offering precious advice on distilling chapters into their essential arguments and situating the research in the broader themes of environmental history. I am also indebted to Mikael Wolfe for his guidance and interest in my professional development.

I benefited from comments and suggestions from many colleagues who read different chapters of this book: Ryan Edwards, José Augusto Drummond, Richard W. Slatta, Mi Gyung Kim, and K. Steven Vincent. My special thanks go to Jacob Blanc, not only for offering insightful
Acknowledgments

comments on rural Brazil but also for our friendship and partnership in different academic endeavors. I am also extremely grateful to those who provided feedback on the entire manuscript: my friend Andrea Rosenberg and the two readers selected by Cambridge University Press. Grateful thanks also go to the editors at Cambridge, who guided this book through the review, editing, and publication processes: Kris E. Lane, Matthew Restall, and Cecelia Cancellaro.

Throughout the years, numerous other people contributed to this project through conversations and feedback. I am grateful to colleagues and faculty I met during my time at Stanford, including J. P. Daughton, Ana Minian, Jon Connolly, Gabriel Lee, Rodrigo Pizarro, Victoria Saramago, George Phillip LeBourdais, Dylan J. Montanari, David Gilbert, Lena Tahmassian, Andrew Gerhart, Leonardo Barleta, and Mateo Carrillo. At Stanford, I had the privilege to engage with digital humanities researchers at the Spatial History Project and the Center for Spatial and Textual Analysis (CESTA): Matt Bryant, Celena Allen, Jake Coolidge, Nicholas Bauch, Ryan Heuser, Jason Heppler, and Maria dos Santos. I especially thank Erik Steiner for being an inspirational digital humanities scholar and a friend. I am particularly indebted to research assistants Eli Berg and Peter Salazar, who worked on some of the data used in Chapters 5 and 6.

At North Carolina State University, I found a welcoming interdisciplinary community of scholars. I am very grateful for the support I received from my colleagues here, including Matthew Booker, Todd Berreth, Arnav Jhala, Erin Sills, Daniel Burton-Rose, Adriana de Souza e Silva, Ross Bassett, Alicia McGill, Katherine Mellen Charron, David Ambaras, Megan Cherry, Xiaolin Duan, Sandy Freitag, Tammy Gordon, Nicholas Robins, Akram Khater, Verena Kasper-Marienberg, and David Zonderman. Thanks also go to Courtney Hamilton, Ingrid Hoffius, and Norene Miller, for their dedication and professionalism to faculty and students. Research in this book benefited from a partnership with the Program in Geospatial Information Science and Technology at NC State. Special thanks go to Eric Money and Juliana Quist, at the program, as well as Emily McNamar, who worked on some of the data used in Chapter 6. Within the greater North Carolina community of scholars, I am grateful to a few people for the opportunity to present on aspects of this book: John French, Christine Folch, and everybody else at Duke University’s Global Brazil Lab; Cynthia Radding at UNC-Chapel Hill; and Jürgen Buchenau and Oscar de la Torre at UNC-Charlotte.

Numerous other colleagues have helped shape my scholarship in many ways through commentary on this book, guidance to sources, collaboration in
Acknowledgments

panels, publications, and research projects, or conversations about history and methodology. In the United States, I would like to thank Emily Wakild, Thomas D. Rogers, Seth Garfield, Rafael Ioris, Myrna Santiago, Christopher Boyer, Matthew Vitz, Paul Katz, María de los Ángeles Picone, Daryle Williams, Zeb Tortorici, Patrick Iber, and especially Matt Spurlock for their support and friendship. In Ecuador, Nicolás Cuvi. In Colombia, Claudia Leal. In Argentina, Graciela Silvestri and Marina Miraglia. In Paraguay, Carlos Gómez Florentin. In Brazil, I am grateful to Luciano Figueiredo, Antonio Mylskiw, Douglas Libby, Junia Furtado, Regina Horta Duarte, Yuri Gama, Martha Rebelatto, Sigrid Andersen, José Augusto Pádua, José Luiz de Andrade Franco, Lise Sedrez, Eunice Nomari, Sandro Dutra e Silva, Luis Ferla, Marcela Kropf, Eduardo Góes Neves, Gabriela Pellegrino Soares, Iris Kantor, Lincoln Secco, Carla Viviane Paulino, Leonardo Marques, and Daniel Strum. Special thanks go to my longtime friends outside academia, especially Ruy Fernando Cavalheiro, Tagori Mazzoni Vilela, André de Martini, André Mesquita, Lucas Monteiro de Oliveira, Daniela e Felipe Madureira, Luiz Menezes, Pedro Arcajo Matos, Pedro Carvalho, Alexandre Fanucchi, Luciano Juliatto, Paulo Sérgio Sangiorgio Jr., and Tarcísio de Arantes Leite.

Many assisted me in my research in Brazil and Argentina. In Rio de Janeiro, thanks to Paulo Roberto Boechat at the CENDOC-Aeronáutica and Rosane Coutinho at the Arquivo Nacional. Special thanks go to Tereza Cristina Alves for helping me find my way in the maze of the Brazilian National Archives. Several people helped me in Curitiba, including Solange de Oliveira Rocha at the Arquivo Público do Paraná; Célia Carneiro at the DER-PR; Luiz Augusto Loyola Macedo at the IBGE office in Curitiba; Ronilson Campos, Rodrigo Asturian, and Fábio Pagliosa Ulkowski at the INCRA office in Curitiba; Arnaldo Alves de S. Junior at the Justiça Federal do Paraná; Gislene Lessa and Izaïas Alves Pereira at the ITCG-PR; and Mauricio Savi. In Foz do Iguaçu, I want to thank Lara Luciana Leal Seixas, Aluízio Palmar, Lígia Basso, Alexandre Palmar, Adilson Borges, Pedro Berg, and Adilson Simão for their help in this project. My research at the Iguaçu National Park would not have been possible without the assistance of Ivan Batiston, Julio Gonchorowski, Antonia Monteiro, Apolonio Rodrigues, and Raphael Xavier. At the INCRA office in Cascavel, Emilio Stachowski was generous in sharing his time and resources. In Brasília, I am grateful for the help of Átila Ribeiro at IBAMA and Daianne Bezerra de Freitas and Marli dos Reis Alves Soares at ICMBio. I would also like to thank Maria Tereza Jorge Pádua for an enlightening interview.
In Puerto Iguazú, the people at the APN-NEA – Fernanda Fabbio, Guillermo Gil, Andrés Bosso, Fabián Gatti, and Marcelo Cavicchia – supported me in every way. Exceptional thanks go to Luciana Nicola, whose tenacity enabled me to conduct research at the Iguazú National Park archive. At the park, I enjoyed fruitful conversations with Daniel de la Torre, Justo Herrera, and Nancy Arizpe. In the town, Guillermina Hope, Osni Schreiner, and the late José Gorgues kindly shared their stories. In Buenos Aires, most of my research was carried out at the APN archives and library, and this was only possible thanks to the dedication of Sergio Silva, Laura Staropoli, and Catalina Coali. Sergio Pedernera at the Patrimonio e Instituto Histórico in Buenos Aires also offered valuable help.

I was lucky to have family support during the decade I spent researching and writing this book. I am grateful to Érica and her family – Luís, Thomas, and Maria Clara, and to Dulce and Joceli, for their support and for being part of what I am. A special thank-you to Heidi and Robert, whom I was lucky to encounter along this journey. I am also immensely thankful to my wife, Robin, a pillar of love, support, and companionship. Finally, I dedicate this book to Olivia and Aurora, who I hope will someday be inspired by this work.
Note on Terminology and Orthography

Iguazu is a term of Tupi-Guarani origin meaning “big water,” “a great amount of water,” or “abundance of water.” In Spanish it is spelled Iguazú, with an acute accent on the final u. In Portuguese it was Iguassú until an orthographic reform in the 1950s changed it to its present form, Iguazu. Iguazu was originally the name of the 1,300-kilometer-long river that serves as the boundary between Argentina and Brazil in its final 130 kilometers before flowing into the mighty Paraná River. It is also the name of the binational set of massive waterfalls that justified the creation of two national parks in the 1930s, which are the topic of this book. Here, I chose to keep the modern Portuguese spelling “Iguaçu” for the Brazilian park, Iguaçu National Park (Parque Nacional do Iguaçu); the Spanish spelling “Iguazú” for the Argentine park, Iguazú National Park (Parque Nacional Iguazú); and the English spelling “Iguazu” for geographical features such as the Iguazu River and Iguazu Falls.

I also use the word “settler” to refer to the farmers who moved into the Argentine–Brazilian borderland throughout the twentieth century. These farmers, the majority of whom were of European descent, identify themselves as colonos in Brazil, which can be roughly translated as “members of a colony” (i.e., a colonization project). In Argentina, to a lesser extent, a similar group of people is referred to as pobladores – “populators.” In Brazil, they are also “colonos” for government agencies and in legislation, to such an extent that the Brazilian Congress even created a dia do colono (day of the settler) in 1968 to celebrate their role as frontier pioneers. The word “colono” acquires different meanings in other parts of Brazil, but in the Brazilian South, where Iguaçu National Park is located, it invariably refers to Brazilian migrants of European origin from other...
Note on Terminology and Orthography

southern states who acquire land in frontier areas. Most “colonos” who moved to the area between the Iguazu and the Paraná rivers between the 1950s and 1970s trace their origin to the Italian and German immigrants who arrived in Brazil’s southernmost state, Rio Grande do Sul, in the nineteenth century. “Poblador” has a similar meaning across the border in Argentina. To avoid switching back and forth between the Portuguese and Spanish versions of the term, I chose to refer to all of these migrants as “settlers.”
MAP 0.1 Iguazú National Park, Argentina, and Iguaçu National Park, Brazil, c. 2020.