

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 seaboard 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.

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(Continued after the Index)

Nationalizing Nature

*Iguazu Falls and National Parks
at the Brazil–Argentina Border*

FREDERICO FREITAS

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To Olívia and Aurora

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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, *Iguaçu*. 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

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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.”