Big Water
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After the Paraguayan War (1864–1870), the border between Argentina and Brazil became a source of tension as the two countries disputed a 3.5-million-hectare swath between the Iguazú and Uruguay Rivers. The conflict was finally resolved in 1895 with the arbitration of U.S. president Grover Cleveland. But the vision of a border alarmingly open to foreign influences continued to inform the ways in which politicians, visitors, and the military in the two countries saw the region in the following years.

Iguazú Falls, shared by Argentina and Brazil, was one of the most sensitive spots along the border. The 2.7-kilometer-wide system of waterfalls on the Iguazú River became the focal point of a dispute between the two countries over the hegemony at the borderlands (see fig. 4.1). In 1889 the Brazilian Empire decided to establish an army outpost and agrarian colony on its side of the border just twenty kilometers from the falls. The Brazilian Colônia Militar da Foz do Iguaçu (Military Colony of the Mouth of the Iguazú) eventually gave rise to the city of Foz do Iguaçu, which became a municipality in 1914. But before that, the founding of the colony sparked a “national park arms race” around Iguazú Falls when Edmundo de Barros, an army lieutenant stationed at the outpost in the 1890s, decided to nail a sign on a big tree, four kilometers from the falls, with the inscription “National Park, March 1897.”
Although such a national park existed only in the mind of the Brazilian lieutenant, it was nonetheless a presage of three different developments that would occur simultaneously on both sides of the border. First, state officials from both countries adopted (and adapted) national park policy as an instrument for pushing greater federal investment in the frontier zone. Second, Iguazú Falls—with its massive scale, growing number of visitors, and binational ownership—was construed as a prime target for the national park plans of local and federal officials in Argentina and Brazil. Third, in the 1930s the military and politicians in both countries started calling for the nationalization of the frontier against the excessive influence of foreigners coming from across the border. This in turn influenced park proponents to shape national park policy for colonization purposes.

These three developments happened concomitantly on both sides of the border. However, in this chapter I focus solely on Argentina, the country that offered the most extreme case of using national park policy for border colonization goals. In this chapter, therefore, I analyze the territorial motivations behind the creation of Iguazú National Park in 1934 in the Argentine territory of Misiones along the border with Brazil. It is true that the park owed much
of its creation to the adoption, by park proponents, of international ideas about environmental conservation. Yet territorial concerns at national and local levels proved to be even more decisive in legitimating the establishment of the park. The choice of the binational Iguazú Falls as the site for a national park was part of the move by Argentine officials to use protected areas to control borderlands. By bringing economic development to and territorial domination over a sparsely populated border zone, the proponents of Iguazú National Park aimed to integrate a distant periphery into the rest of the country. To Argentine politicians and high-ranking officials, national park policy fit into their desire to promote the nationalization of a borderland seen as underdeveloped and too susceptible to foreign influences. A park would guarantee their share of control of a symbolic landmark (Iguazú Falls), promote regional development through tourism, and put forward colonization projects along the country’s international borders.

**PLANNING A NATIONAL PARK FOR THE BORDER**

By the turn of the century, a 200-kilometer band of subtropical forests separated Iguazú Falls from the population centers of South America’s Atlantic coast. Argentine firms dotted the area, exploiting timber and wild yerba mate with a predominantly indigenous and mestizo labor force working under a system of debt bondage. The mighty Paraná connected this borderland to Buenos Aires, and a small number of wealthy visitors had started using returning yerba mate ships for an upriver tour to the mythical falls. Once at the mouth of the Iguazú, visitors from Buenos Aires were forced to disembark on the Brazilian side because of the lack of infrastructure in Argentina.

One of these visitors was Juan José Lanusse, governor of the Territory of Misiones (1895–1905), which contained the Argentine side of Iguazú Falls. Lanusse visited the falls in 1898 with family and friends as guests of Nuñez y Gibaja, an Argentine steamboat and logging company. Like other visitors at the time, the party had to trek through Brazil to reach the falls, thus seeing them from inside the “national park” created by the Brazilian lieutenant Barros. Astonished by the scenic view of the falls, Lanusse devised a plan to bring tourists from Buenos Aires, located 1,700 kilometers downriver. His vision included the creation of a regular steamboat service to the area and a dirt road cutting through the forest to the Argentine side of the falls. Furthermore, drawing from the example of the “national park” established by Barros in Brazil, Lanusse lobbied the Argentine
government for the creation of a national park at the Argentine side of the falls. For this he passed in 1902 a provincial decree that set aside the lands around the falls for the creation of a park.4

Convinced by the validity of Lanusse’s proposal, minister of the interior Joaquin V. Gonzalez commissioned French landscape designer Charles Thays to design a plan for an Argentine national park around the falls. Since 1891 Thays was the director of the Buenos Aires Office for Parks and Walkways, and as such he was responsible for designing many of the city’s Paris-inspired boulevards and plazas as well as the city’s zoo and botanical garden. In April 1902 Thays and his team disembarked in Iguazú for a two-month stay in which they surveyed the Argentine side of the falls and designed a plan for the future national park. Thays was not only impressed by the falls but also by the Avenida Aguirre, the still unfinished road commissioned by Lanusse that connected the modest port at the mouth of the Iguazú to the cataracts upriver. Awed by the 20-meter-wide dirt road cutting through the dense jungle, Thays expanded it into a grid of walkways and roads in the plan he presented to the Ministry of the Interior (see fig. 4.2). His idea for a park in Iguazú was based on the same principles of ordered and Cartesian nature present in the French-inspired parks and plazas he had designed in Buenos Aires.5

National park ideas gained momentum throughout Argentina during this period. A year after Lanusse lobbied president Julio A. Roca for the establishment of a national park in northern Argentina, the famous explorer Francisco P. Moreno returned eight thousand hectares of public land he had been granted around Lake Nahuel Huapi for the creation of a “natural park” in the south.6 In 1908, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock delimited the tracts for the creation of the national park in Nahuel Huapi while Congress passed the Territory Development Act, which gave the federal government powers to dispose public land and build railroads in Patagonia.7 In 1909, a group of northern congressmen led by deputy Marcial Candioti and senator Valentino Virasoro protested the exclusion of the Territory of Misiones from the 1908 Territory Development Act and drafted a bill for the development of the northern territory. The new law, passed in September 1909, provided for the creation of a railroad connecting the falls to the rest of the country. More importantly, it also provided for the purchase—or if that was impossible, the expropriation—of a seventy-five-thousand-hectare tract of land at the border with Brazil for the creation of a national park to facilitate visitation to the falls and a military colony like the one Brazil had established on its side twenty years before.8
The new 1909 law situated the military colony and the national park on the border with Brazil as the mainstay for the development of Misiones. The plan presented by Thays in 1902 required revision to incorporate the new demands of border colonization introduced by the 1909 law. This time it was the Ministry of Agriculture that commissioned Thays in 1911 to update his project for Iguazú National Park, and the architect presented his new plan along with a detailed explanation to Minister Adolfo Mujica in 1912 (see fig. 4.3). In the new plan, Thays pointed out that a lush subtropical forest still surrounded the falls. The intervention of the federal government, therefore, was needed to avert industrial and commercial development such as the one that had spoiled the U.S.-Canadian Niagara Falls. But Thays was not himself an enemy of development, as his plan for the expanded twenty-five-thousand-hectare reserve reveals. It included a railroad, a new town, a military colony (larger than the one established in Brazil in the 1890s), highways, farms, hotels, and a casino. For Thays, all this development could not only be harmonized to match the natural beauty of the falls and the surrounding forest but in fact it would improve it. To him, the difference between his plan for Iguazú and the uncontrolled development of the Niagara Falls was the planner’s mind, who was positioned to improve nature to better suit human needs without spoiling it.9

However, the contradiction between development and conservation did not go unnoticed by Thays’s contemporaries. His main critic was Paul Groussac, a traveler, writer, and literary critic who, like Thays himself, was also a Frenchman living in Buenos Aires. After visiting the falls, Groussac argued that if Thays’s plan were ever implemented it would reproduce the systematic degradation of the natural scenery created by tourism experienced in places such as the Swiss Alps. For Groussac, the project bore the “incongruity between the term ‘virgin forest’ and the barbarisms of [the proposed] boulevards, plazas, casinos, etc.”10

THE CREATION OF THE PARK

The Argentine side of Iguazú Falls was privately owned by Domingo Ayarragray, an Uruguayan-born entrepreneur from Buenos Aires who had acquired the seventy-five-thousand-hectare estate surrounding the falls in 1907. Although the 1909 federal law provided for the government purchase or eminent domain of the estate, little had been done since then. Ayarragaray, in turn, built a hotel near the falls and improved the infrastructure to cater to the intermittent stream of wealthy visitors coming from Buenos Aires and abroad.11
FIGURE 4.3 Plan for a national park on the Argentine bank of Iguazú Falls by Charles Thays, 1911. Courtesy Carlos Thays, Parque Reserva del Iguazú: Plano de trazado general (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Agricultura, 1911), Biblioteca Nacional de la República Argentina.
The development of this incipient tourism industry rekindled the Argentine government’s decision to purchase the area. In 1926, the Ministry of Agriculture commissioned agriculture engineer Franco A. Devoto and forest technician Máximo Rothkugel to survey the Ayarragaray estate and assess its market value in preparation for its nationalization or purchase by the state. Their report exposes the contradiction between conservation and colonization that dominated Argentine environmental policy up to the 1950s. On the one hand, Devoto and Rothkugel dismissed Thays’s plans for a park modeled after the plazas of Buenos Aires, arguing that tourists arriving in the new national park sought experience with a forest in its “natural state,” not the “combed and perfumed” nature of the urban parks. All interventions should, therefore, be subtle, avoiding the introduction of alien species (the few existent would be extirpated), reforesting man-made clearings, and using rustic materials like wood and stone in the buildings. On the other hand, their report emphasized, in geopolitical and racial terms, the need to create a military colony similar to the one founded in Brazil in the 1890s.

For the two engineers, the founding of a military colony would create the conditions for the “Argentinization” of the borderland. Northern Misiones already had a few other colonies, but these were mostly made up of Brazilian settlers, and the lack of Argentines impeded their cultural assimilation. Although they valued the “racial purity” of these settlers—the majority descended from Germans who immigrated to southern Brazil eighty years before—Devoto and Rothkugel despised their Brazilian “creole culture” and their material poverty. They criticized the Brazilian settlers for abandoning “the work ethic” that characterized their Teutonic forefathers. Another problem was the close-knit nature of the German Brazilian communities, for their inwardness kept them isolated from the rest of Argentina. Using the indigenous Guarani or the mixed population already present in this border region for a state-sponsored colony was out of the question for the two engineers from Buenos Aires. Colonization, like tourism, should focus on whites only. They believed a new colony should harbor people from different European backgrounds to avoid the brewing of a group identity that could hamper a national one. The colony’s goal was to transform white immigrants into Argentines.

The Argentine government purchased the seventy-five-thousand-hectare estate, along with the hotel and other properties, through an agreement between the ministries of agriculture, interior, war, and finance on March 12, 1928, paying three million pesos to Ayarragaray’s inheritors. Although the land had been turned public, the creation of the Parque Nacional del Norte—as the project
was called in the 1920s—still required congressional approval and the establishment of a government agency in charge of implementing it. The initial failure in creating another national park, the Parque Nacional del Sud in Nahuel Huapi, served as a lesson for national park proponents in Argentina. This latter park was established by a presidential decree in 1922 in the lands donated by Francisco P. Moreno in 1903 in Patagonia, but due to the lack of institutional support, it existed mostly on paper until 1934. The years following the purchase of the Ayarragaray estate in 1928 were especially turbulent in Argentina, with a military coup and the two-year interregnum of fascist-leaning General Uriburu (1930–1932). It was only after the rise to power of General Augustin P. Justo in 1932 that the national park in Iguazú would be created.14

In the meantime, the Argentine army took control of the estate until a final decision was made. The military maintained a small garrison with sixteen troops and exploited, through a concessionaire, the groves of wild yerba mate inside the estate. The hotel by the falls, which now was state owned, was also operating through a concessionaire, the Dodero Company. The Argentine army authorized people living in the estate to temporarily plant fruit trees in existent clearings and to cut firewood for personal consumption, but commercial logging as it had been previously practiced was strictly prohibited. Army officials understood that their mission was to keep the estate free of any significant intervention until the definitive boundaries between the area of the military colony and the national park were set.15

Since the early 1900s, the push for the creation of this national park in northern Argentina was accompanied by similar developments in the southern part of the country. In the 1930s, the combination of these two separate national park projects gave the final push for the passing of the 1934 national park law that created the Iguazú and Nahuel Huapi national parks and the Argentine national park agency. In the beginning of the decade, a group of Argentine businessmen and politicians with real estate interests in northern Patagonia led by Luis Ortiz Basualdo and Exequiel Bustillo started lobbying for the creation of a national park commission by the government. Their goal was to rekindle interest in the national park in Nahuel Huapi in the south and use it to promote infrastructure works and develop tourism around Bariloche. But their knowledge of national parks and conservation was fairly limited. Basualdo first introduced Bustillo to the theme as a strategy to restart stalled state investment in southern Argentina. It was an unlikely combination of conservation policy and real estate development. Yet these members of the Buenos Aires elite, with family, friendship, and
business ties to the conservative groups in power since 1930, adopted national park policy as a strategy to bring development to Patagonia.\textsuperscript{16}

In 1931 the government established a new Parque Nacional del Sud commission (a first commission had existed from 1924 to 1925), and in 1933, the new commission was expanded and renamed simply Comisión de Parques Nacionales (National Parks Commission), now with Bustillo at its head. More importantly, the commission incorporated the creation of Iguazú National Park among its responsibilities. The commission’s main focus was on Nahuel Huapi and Patagonia in the south, and its members were only superficially invested in Iguazú and the northern part of the country. However, they wanted to ensure a legacy of functional national parks, and the inclusion of Iguazú, a national park in advanced stages of implementation, meant greater institutionalization of national parks as policy. They wanted to avoid the fate of past isolated initiatives that focused solely on the creation of Nahuel Huapi as a park and overlooked the institutional structure to support it. The inclusion of Iguazú in the responsibilities of the new commission also responded to the general demand among politicians and the military for using national parks as a tool for the development and nationalization of border zones, a discourse quickly adopted by the members of the national park commission. This was made clear in the 1933 presidential decree expanding the commission that stated, in its seventh article, that national parks located on international boundaries had the mission to “develop a policy of nationalization of borders.”\textsuperscript{17}

The personal connections of national park commission members with the Argentine political ruling class facilitated the passage of the bill in 1934.\textsuperscript{18} Socialist senator Alfredo Lorenzo Palacios presented the only objection: the revision of an article requiring all employees in border national parks be born Argentines. Palacios objected that even for senators such as himself, nationality was not required for sworn office. Senator Cruz Vera, who presented the bill, explained that the planned national parks were located in border areas “flooded with foreigners” and the article was meant to “Argentinize” the border.\textsuperscript{19} Despite his candor in explaining the geopolitical reasoning behind national park creation, the article was removed, and the bill was finally approved into law. Law 12103, also known as the National Park Act, established the legal framework for the Argentine national park system. The 1934 act not only created the first two national parks in the country, but also established a national park agency, the División de Parques Nacionales (DPN; National Parks Division). One of the main tasks of the new agency was the nationalization of border regions and the
development of settlements. For this, the National Park Act provided the DPN with the powers to dispose public land within parks and reservations. The agency could grant temporary permits for tenants or sell public land in areas reserved for real estate development inside national parks. The DPN’s mission was to set the location of new population centers, plan street grids, build urban infrastructure, and sell urban and rural lots of public land within a five-thousand-hectare limit. In sum, the national park policy in Argentina expected to conciliate the contradictory goals of preservation, public use, and urban development.20

For Bustillo and the other members of the DPN, passing a national park law proved to be easier than convincing other sectors of the state to comply with the new legislation and recognize the powers of the new national park agency. The army, which had assumed control of the Ayarragaray estate after its acquisition in 1928 and was required to hand over the area to the DPN in 1934, resisted for seven years before finally transferring the area to the national park agency in 1941 (see fig. 4.4). Anticipating this sort of resistance, in July 1935 Bustillo sent General Alonso Baldrich, then one of the directors of the DPN, to take official possession of the Campo Nacional del Iguazú (Iguazú National Camp), as the military called the estate after 1928. The army handed over to the agency the hotel and other properties inside the estate but not the control of the land. In August a presidential decree stipulated that of the estate’s seventy-five thousand hectares, twenty thousand would be kept by the army and fifty-five thousand would be transferred to the DPN as a national park. A final boundary between the two areas was to be defined by an agreement between the national park agency and the army.21

Setting those boundaries proved to be difficult, as it required the armed forces to accept transferring their sovereignty over a sensitive border area to a new agency whose members had yet to prove their seriousness. The minister of war, General Manuel A. Rodriguez, purposefully delayed the delimitation as a way to postpone the transfer of the area to the DPN. Rodriguez believed the estate and its infrastructure were too important to be given to a “commission created by some politicians’ whim” that “could disappear or be substituted by another commission with different ideas.”22 In the following years, he and his successors at the Ministry of War continued making vague promises to delimit the boundaries without doing much to advance the matter.23

The position of the military started to change by the end of the decade mainly due to their own failure in bringing settlers to populate the border. In a 1939 memo General Martin Gras, army chief of staff to Minister of War Carlos Marquez, recognized the army’s failure in establishing a military colony “to
settle an Argentine population in the region to cooperate with the armed forces deployed at the border.” Gras blamed the region’s subtropical forests for their failure in attracting settlers from the temperate pampas to populate the area.24

Another important development was the initial success of the DPN in intervening on the borderland. Five years after its creation, the DPN had already proved its capabilities not only with the extensive infrastructure it had developed in the Nahuel Huapi National Park but also in the improvement of the properties in Iguazú. Starting in 1935, the agency had renovated the hotel, built pathways and trails by the falls, installed piers at three different points along the Iguazú River, initiated the construction of a thousand-meter-long grass landing strip near the falls, and finished the construction of the park headquarters. It became clear that the DPN’s plan to develop the border through tourism and colonization could succeed where the military had failed.25

At the beginning of 1939, the Ministry of War, through its engineering department, initiated the demarcation of the boundary between national park and military camp. The boundaries were defined, and the army passed over the control of the estate to the DPN through a presidential decree in September 1941. The decree designated five hundred hectares of public land inside the national park to be sold to private parties for colonization; the rest of the land, both in the park and in the army area, would remain public.26

Behind the infrastructure developed by the DPN in Iguazú was a philosophy that subordinated conservation to colonization. Bustillo recognized that “national park” as an idea lacked a clear doctrine and common principles shared across the board. To him, the lack of an international consensus on national park norms freed him to envision an “eclectic” view of parks as catalysts for border development. He understood tourism would inevitably demand intervention and development in protected areas. He also questioned the existence of “unspoiled” natural spaces as defended by park proponents at the time. In his mind the development, colonization, and conservation of national parks should go hand in hand. To Bustillo there was no point in maintaining a park unspoiled if it posed a threat to sovereignty or brought harm to the economy.27

A TOWN FOR THE PARK

After the 1943 military coup in Argentina, Bustillo became politically isolated and resigned in the following year from his position as director of the DPN.28
His resignation and the later rise of Perón to power brought important changes to the national park policy in Iguazú, among them, greater investment in developing an urban center inside the national park. The area initially designated for settler colonization comprised a five-thousand-hectare zone in the northwest limits of the national park, where a hamlet called Puerto Aguirre was located (see fig. 4.5). The location was where tourists from Buenos Aires disembarked to visit the falls. The plan to transform the humble hamlet into a thriving frontier town was part of the national park agency’s program since the park was gazetted in 1934. Yet despite a couple of infrastructure works initiated before 1944, much of the investment in Iguazú was hindered by Bustillo’s greater engagement in the national parks in Patagonia. After his resignation the Argentine national park agency finally started parceling land and selling lots in the hamlet to prospective Argentine settlers, as provided by the 1934 national park law.²⁹

The hamlet—which had its named changed from Puerto Aguirre to Puerto Iguazú in 1943—also started receiving greater federal investment channeled through the national park agency.³⁰ A major intervention was the opening of a hospital and the campaign to eradicate malaria in the region. In 1945 the Argentine national park agency started building the hospital and sent a physician to deal with the malaria problem in the region. The disease was a major complication for the development of the border zone, and the construction of a hospital in Puerto Iguazú would attend not only to tourists and park personnel but also to the entire population of northern Misiones. Between February and March of 1946, an outbreak was successfully contained thanks to the action of the national park agency, army doctors, and foreign physicians from Paraguay and Brazil.³¹ The national park administration coordinated a response to the outbreak, providing doctors with transportation to distant areas and establishing a temporary clinic to tend to the local population. The hospital would only be finished after the containment of the outbreak, but once inaugurated, the local population would no longer have to procure medical treatment in Foz do Iguacu, dispelling the concerns of many in the government about the excessive dependence on neighboring countries. The hospital was finished in October 1946 and occupied a two-story building with thirty beds, a surgery room, a laboratory, and a pharmacy (see fig. 4.6). The park also worked to improve the sanitation of the future town by moving its planned center to higher ground, farther from the mosquito-infested zones by the Iguazú River. Much of the new area was occupied by second-growth vegetation, and the park administration took measures to clear it of its underbrush.³² A provisional water system was
implemented to tap water from a nearby creek, and the first set of streets in Puerto Iguazú was also provided with sewage systems. The campaign against malaria continued in the following years, with periodical DDT spraying of areas that contained the *Anopheles* mosquito. The campaign was so successful that in 1948, just two years after the outbreak, no new cases of malaria were registered.\(^3\)

The first plan elaborated by the national park agency for the new town was presented in terms of a sanitary intervention on the small population already living in the area. Embedded in the national park investment in Puerto Iguazú was the desire to transform the border population into model Argentine citizens.
Continuing with a policy of universal education inaugurated in Argentina in the 1870s by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, the national park agency established a first primary school in the 1930s in Puerto Iguazú and a second one in the late 1940s near the falls. Along with an education, the schools provided children with meals, clothes, shoes, and books. It was also the desire of park directors to oversee minute details of settlers’ life and mores. Besides requiring all children to attend school, park authorities also pressured settlers in Puerto Iguazú to formalize cohabitation through civil marriage—a civil registry office was established by the Argentine national park agency in 1945.34

Settlers interested in moving to the region had to apply and be approved by the national park agency before purchasing any land. Initially the requirements for new applicants were strict, and of the seventy-two requests filed in 1947, fifty-three were rejected.35 The agency intended to occupy the border with a population of entrepreneurial Argentine-born settlers, but many applicants failed to meet such criteria, whether because they were foreigners, poor, or failed to constitute a legally sanctioned nuclear family. And yet these were the people attracted to Puerto Iguazú by the job opportunities in tourism and construction, and their lack of legal access to land did not impede them from occupying the many unsupervised stretches of woodlands still available in the town. Concerned with the growing problem of “undesired settlers and squatters,” the agency initially threatened to resort to “judicial action and the use of force” to evict them.36 However, the chronic situation of labor shortage went a great way toward convincing park authorities of finding a place in Puerto Iguazú for these unqualified migrants.37

By 1950 Puerto Iguazú was a booming town. A road connecting the park with the rest of the country, the National Highway 12, had been opened two years earlier. A daily bus line linked Iguazu to Posadas, and a stream of cars, buses, and trucks started reaching the park.38 The agency began to build a new three-hundred-bed hotel in the town center to cater to the growing influx of tourists. Several new buildings sprung up across Puerto Iguazú, and the agency issued permits for the operation of various new business. Because building was expensive—materials and specialized labor had to be brought from other areas—and access to permits was limited, a housing shortage took root in Puerto Iguazú. Private property building also had to compete for labor and materials with the construction of urban infrastructure by the national park: in 1950 alone, besides the new hotel, the national park agency also opened several new streets, concluded earthworks in dozens of urban and semirural lots in the
town, and built fifteen houses for park personnel as well as several warehouses, shops, and offices. All this development was, in the end, the result of policies pushed forward by a national park agency.\textsuperscript{39}

CONCLUSION

Iguazú National Park fomented experimental ways of promoting territorial occupation, leading to a protected area that diverged from the prevailing national park models of the time. The 1934 national park law had provided for the parceling and selling of sections of national park land for the development of border settlements, and from the 1940s to the 1960s, the Iguazú National Park administration engaged in promoting the settlement of Puerto Iguazú. Argentine national park proponents consciously deviated from their initial inspiration from the U.S. national park system, conceiving parks such as Iguazú (adjacent to Brazil) and Nahuel Huapi (adjacent to Chile) as tools for the colonization and occupation of borderlands. The colonization mission of Iguazú National Park was no accident, as it was already present in the first plans designed by Thays in 1902 and 1911. Since the beginning, national parks in Argentina had as part of their mission the development of population centers and the establishment of infrastructure for dwellers inside park boundaries. The goal was to attract settlers to nationalize a borderland deemed dangerously open to foreign influences, and the newcomers should fit into a model of Argentine citizen put forward by park proponents and government employees.

This citizenship ideal initially relied on a racialized vision of settlers as being of European descent (or even actually European). Later, the racial overtones of this ideal were put aside, but park officials continued to count on an influx of patriotic settlers to lead the process of border nationalization. In the view of many, settlers in Puerto Iguazú should be Argentine, Christian, and legally married—foreigners were excluded, especially those coming from neighboring Brazil and Paraguay. This set a bar too high for a colonization policy applied to a porous borderland region with a tradition of transborder settlement. Park officials, therefore, had to compromise and accept settlers who failed to meet their requirements. This tension between the mandate of border nationalization and the realities taking root in the borderland slowly abated in the following years, as the national park agency steered its focus from colonization to a stricter view of conservation in the 1960s. In 1970 the Argentine national park agency
emancipated Puerto Iguazú and retraced the boundaries of the park to exclude the area of the town. It was the end of a policy of border colonization that had guided the park administration for thirty-six years.

Until the 1930s, the Argentine state had lagged behind its international rivals in the race to control territory and nationalize borders. The establishment of Iguazú National Park in 1934 was an attempt to reverse that trend and to reassert Argentina’s power in the region. Argentina created one of its first national parks both to control its side of the magnificent Iguazu Falls and as a response to the earlier creation of a military colony across the border in Brazil. The park was conceived as a means to take possession and occupy a borderland that, in the eyes of the Argentine leaders, was threatened by cross boundary influences. For more than three decades this combination of conservation ideas and geopolitical thinking guided the enviro-territorial policies employed in Iguazú National Park, helping to shape broader ideas of territory and nationhood throughout the country.

NOTES


3. The word Iguazú derives from a Tupi-Guarani root meaning “big water” and is spelled in several different ways in the documents—Iguacu, Iguassú, Iguazu, and Iguazú. In this article, I chose to keep the Spanish Iguazú.


13. Ibid., 177–91.


15. Ministerio de Agricultura to Administración General de Parques Nacionales y Turismo, Expediente 4132, year 1952, with excerpts from Comisión Pro-Parque Nacional del Sud to Ministerio de Agricultura, Expediente 9758, year 1933, Archivo Administración de Parques Nacionales.


18. In his memoir, Bustillo gives details on the passing of the bill. The senate commission designated to examine and approve the bill was not invested in advancing the matter, so Bustillo used his extensive network of family and personal connections to put things in motion and collect a majority of signatures to bring the bill to a vote. One of the senators in the commission, Antonio Santamaria, was Bustillo’s wife’s uncle. His brother, Jose Maria, was a deputy in the chamber. He also used his contacts in the press to lobby. He asked editor friends in *La Prensa* and *La Nación* to write editorials in support of the bill. Bustillo, *El despertar de Bariloche*, 107–8.

27. Gustavo Bustillo, El despertar de Bariloche, 361–76.
28. After Bustillo, the national park agency changed its name eleven times, reflecting the instability that characterized the Argentine political life since the 1940s. To avoid introducing different acronyms, I will refer to the inheritor agencies as “Argentine national park agency” hereafter.
30. The town, which originally was called Puerto Aguirre, was renamed Puerto Iguazú in 1943, but between 1951 and 1955 it had its named changed to Puerto Eva Perón. After 1955, it went back to being known as Puerto Iguazú.
31. By that time the military outpost founded by the Brazilian government across the border had developed into the thriving frontier town of Foz do Iguaçu, there was a hospital and an airstrip.


34. Administración de Parques Nacionales y Turismo, Memoria correspondiente al año 1948, 23; Memoria correspondiente al año 1946, 14–15.

35. Administración de Parques Nacionales y Turismo, Memoria correspondiente al año 1947, 71.


37. One of the biggest difficulties faced by the national park agency was finding skilled labor in the region. Workers had first to be taught how to use wheelbarrows, shovels, helmets, and explosives, which took a long time and created delays. Accidents were frequent, and in two occasions workers had to be tended by the Brazilian doctor from Foz do Iguaçu. José Gorgues (retired Iguazú National Park employee), in discussion with the author, August 2014; Ivan Romaro to Dirección de Parques Nacionales, “E/Informe de obras ejecutadas en el Parque Nacional de Iguazú”; Administración de Parques Nacionales y Turismo, Memoria correspondiente al año 1946, 109.

38. Administración de Parques Nacionales y Turismo, Memoria correspondiente al año 1948, 23.


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