

A large, stylized, light gray tree graphic is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the page. The tree has a thick, dark gray trunk and several branches extending upwards and to the left. The foliage is represented by large, rounded, light gray shapes. The background is a light gray gradient.

Beyond the “Yellowstone Model”: The Origins of National Parks in Brazil and Argentina

Olaf Kaltmeier¹, Frederico Freitas²

BOOK REVIEW

Kaltmeier, Olaf. *National Parks from North to South: An Entangled History of Conservation and Colonization in Argentina*. Inter-American Studies 34. Trier; New Orleans: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier; University of New Orleans Press, 2021.

Freitas, Frederico. *Nationalizing Nature: Iguazu Falls and National Parks at the Brazil–Argentina Border*. Latin American Studies 122. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

¹ Ph.D. in Sociology (Münster University). Professor of Iberoamerican History at the University of Bielefeld. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6396-4585>. e-mail: olaf.kaltmeier@uni-bielefeld.de

² Ph.D. in History (Stanford University). Assistant Professor of History at North Carolina State University. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8662-0627>. email: f_freitas@ncsu.edu

The research on national parks is still a major issue in environmental history. Whereas early works focused on the development of specific parks or the importance of nature in the imagination of the nation,³ recent research is more interested in the role played by national parks in the continuous process of state formation. As Wilko Graf von Hardenberg, Matthew Kelly, Claudia Leal, and Emily Wakild have argued, national parks and systems of conservation are intrinsically related to modern states’ policies and the emergence of a veritable “nature state” between the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.⁴ The national park policies in Argentina and Brazil are a case in point to explore this rise of the nature state and analyze the practices, discourses, imaginations, and spaces related to this new field of practice and knowledge. This review analyses our two monographs—Frederico Freitas’s *Nationalizing Nature* and Olaf Kaltmeier’s *National Parks from North to South*. These books bring to light the role of national parks in propping up state-building and territorial formation in Argentina and Brazil in the twentieth century.

We developed our monographs in separate, unbeknownst to each other. Despite that, our books ended up converging into similar points on the establishment of national park policies before the 1980s in Latin America, as they analyze in detail the formation of national parks in the Southern Cone. *Nationalizing Nature* focuses on the parallel foundation of Argentine and Brazilian national parks around the Iguazu Falls. *National Parks from North to South* sheds light on the early period of the genealogy of national parks in Argentina from the 1890s to the 1940s.

In the reviews that follow, we read and comment on each other’s books. We conclude that the books not only complement each other but they support the following historiographical interventions.

First, our books put into question the narrative of a unilateral spread and adoption of the “Yellowstone Park model.” Instead, we show that Argentina and Brazil adopted ideas selectively from different North American and European sources (see

³ See Sterling Evans, *The Green Republic: A Conservation History of Costa Rica* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999) for Costa Rica, and for Mexico: Emily Wakild, *Revolutionary Parks: Conservation, Social Justice, and Mexico’s National Parks, 1910–1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011). For the United States, see Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967).

⁴ Wilko Graf von Hardenberg, Matthew Kelly, Claudia Leal, and Emily Wakild, “Introduction,” in Wilko Graf von Hardenberg *et al.*, eds., *The Nature State: Rethinking the History of Conservation*, Routledge Environmental Humanities (Oxford: Routledge, 2017), 1-16. See also Olaf Kaltmeier, “The Nature State. Rethinking the History of Conservation. *Historia Ambiental Latinoamericana y Caribeña*,” *HALAC - Revista de la Solcha* 9, no. 2 (2019): 272–276.

Kaltmeier, 6-81), from US and Canadian national parks to French landscape architecture and Prussian sustainable forestry. Beyond such north-south diffusion, we demonstrate park proponents were also influenced by ideas crossing borders from neighboring countries, especially at the Brazil-Argentina border (see Freitas, 59-96), where models of frontier development were mimicked and incorporated in park planning. In this sense, we argue for a variety of imaginations of national parks. It is only in the 1960s that we observe the institutionalization of a globalized homogenous park model.

Second, we make the strong argument that nature conservation, not to speak of preservation, was not the primary concern of park politics and policies in Argentina and Brazil in the first half of the twentieth century. Instead, national parks were primarily conceived of as tools for state development, territorialization, and modernization. Thus, the parks served not only as “instruments of colonization” and “border nationalization” (Freitas, 8) but also as “bridgeheads” (Kaltmeier, 173-181) for the consolidation of state-controlled spaces in peripheral regions. Park politics in Argentina and Brazil offer an example of how states produce territory through conservation policies based on imaginaries of colonization, border control, development, and modernization.

Third, in this sense, our books intervene critically in the historiography of the “fortress model” of conservation and the idea of parks without people. There is considerable historiography on this, both for the United States, which deals with the idea of wilderness,⁵ and Africa, with its legacy of colonial game reserves.⁶ There is also an attempt to propose Latin America as an alternative model of parks with people.⁷

⁵ See William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996), 69-90; Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Karl Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). In the case of Brazil, see Antônio Carlos Sant’Ana Diegues, *O Mito Moderno da Natureza Intocada*, 6th ed. (São Paulo: Hucitec, 2008).

⁶ See Jonathan S. Adams and Thomas O. McShane, *The Myth of Wild Africa: Conservation without Illusion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Roderick Neumann, *Imposing Wilderness: Struggles over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Dan Brockington, *Fortress Conservation: The Preservation of the Mkomazi Game Preserve* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

⁷ Stephan Amend and Thora Amend, eds., *National Parks without People? The South American Experience* (Quito: IUCN/Parques Nacionales y Conservación Ambiental, 1995); Kathryn Hochstetler and Margaret E. Keck, *Greening Brazil: Environmental Activism in State and Society* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Emily *Revolutionary Parks*; Emily Wakild, “Environmental Justice, Environmentalism, and Environmental History in Twentieth-Century Latin America,” *History Compass* 11, no. 2 (2013): 163-76; Mark Carey, “The Trouble with Climate Change and National Parks,” in *National Parks Beyond the Nation: Global Perspectives on “America’s Best Idea,”* ed. Adrian Howkins, Jared Orsi, and Mark Fiege (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 267. For a brief discussion of conservation in Latin America, see John Soluri, Claudia Leal, and José Augusto Pádua, “Introduction: Finding the ‘Latin American’ in Latin American Environmental History,” in *A Living Past: Environmental Histories of Modern Latin America*, ed. John Soluri, Claudia Leal, and José Augusto Pádua (Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books, 2018), 1-22.

Our case studies complicate this tale, for they show parks which both erased people (indigenous and locals) and promoted settlements (of white-ish “model citizens”). This includes constructing planned cities in the parks (Freitas, 97-144; Kaltmeier, 110-120) and the touristification of landscape.

With these interventions, our books contribute to the debate about the intersection of conservation policies and state-formation in Latin America. Given the early process of Republican state-building in Latin America and, simultaneously, the existence of vast territories out of state control, it seems that this contradiction between the imagination of the state as master of space and the de-facto fragmentation of the territory claimed by the nation-states was a specific Latin American trigger for park politics in the first half of the twentieth century.

COMPETING PARK POLITICS: ARGENTINE AND BRAZILIAN BORDER-DEVELOPMENT AND THE IGUAZÚ-FALLS

KALTMEIER ON FREITAS.

The Iguazu Falls are one of the most well-known tourist attractions worldwide. This unique natural monument, and the biome in which it is located, is protected by two national parks in different countries—Brazil and Argentina. Frederico Freitas dedicates an environmental-historical monograph—long overdue—to this remarkable constellation. The centerpiece of *Nationalizing Nature: Iguazu Falls and National Parks at the Brazil-Argentina Border* is the multifaceted discussion of how the governments in Brazil and Argentina from the 1930s to the 1980s used their respective national parks as instruments not only to protect this “natural wonder” and develop it for tourism, but above all to assert their respective geopolitical claims in a peripheral and barely developed border region. Thus, looking through a magnifying glass at the Iguazu Falls, Freitas is able to elaborate how two different nation-states used “parks as instruments for border nationalization” (8). With this approach, Freitas moves away from a unilateral history of national parks in nation-building by analyzing the national efforts of Argentina and Brazil within the transnational tension of comparison, competition, and mutual observation.

In this context, state spatial planning policies from the 1930s onward are initially the focus of interest in the book. Freitas identifies two factors as the main differences for the effective construction of the Argentine *Iguazú* National Park, which was not just a “paper park”: federal land control and a strong national park agency. In Argentina, the establishment of national park legislation and a national park agency—the first in Latin America—was the initiative of Exequiel Bustillo. Freitas is able to show how the National Park Administration in Iguazu finally asserted itself against the territorial-administrative claims of a powerful military. The Argentine national park authority was not concerned with environmental protection but with the colonization and nationalization of the borderlands. This is also evident in the urban projects within the national park, which date back to the plans of Carlos Thays at the turn of the century. In Brazil, on the other hand, as in other Latin American countries, the national park section was integrated into the Forest Service agency (191), which was accompanied by administrative restrictions. In the context of the Brazilian *Iguaçu* National Park, the Brazilian Forest Service was hardly able to assert itself, especially against local actors and settlers. Analyzing the mechanisms, legal regulations, and institutionalizations, Freitas makes an important comparative contribution to the emergence of “nature states.”⁸

While the foundational period of the national parks was characterized by the imaginary of colonization and geopolitical border control—keeping in mind the importance of tourism—a change took place in the 1950s that was also reflected generationally (113). In 1944, Bustillo left the National Park Service in Argentina and a new director, Lucas Tortorelli, took over, committed to a US-influenced discourse of environmental protection and conservation (115). Increasingly, the Brazilian and Argentine parks inscribed themselves in, according to Freitas, an “international national park paradigm” (118). In doing so, Freitas contributes with a specifically Latin American perspective to a global environmental history as proposed by Gissibl, Höhler, and Kupper in *Civilizing Nature*.⁹ With this internationalization of park politics and concepts, the idea of the “parks without people” gained importance. In Argentina, all settlers had already been relocated from the park by 1970 (142). In Brazil,

⁸ See the debate on the concept of the nature state at Wilko Graf von Hardenberg *et al.*, *The Nature State*; and Olaf Kaltmeier, “The Nature State.”

⁹ Bernhard Gissibl, Sabine Höhler, and Patrick Kupper in *Civilizing Nature*.

however, the situation was more complex due to the “lack of tools of territorial intervention” as well as land speculation and the issuance of fraudulent land titles to settlers (149). Large-scale resettlement projects to evict the remaining settlers from the park did not take place until the Brazilian military dictatorship, the most intense period of political violence and state terrorism, especially between 1970 and 1974. In the process, settlers were branded as *subversivos* and persecuted by the dictatorship. Thus, in Brazil, the concerns of conservation policy were mixed with national security imperatives.

After analyzing the national parks from the geopolitical perspective of spatial planning, Freitas then goes into more depth on the micro-level and the conflicts over poaching, illegal logging, and heart-of-palm theft. In doing so, Freitas conceptually follows Karl Jacoby’s seminal book *Crimes Against Nature*.¹⁰ Thus, Freitas shows how these increasingly illegalized practices unfolded in a transnational space. For example, the very presence of poachers and loggers from Brazil in Argentina led to veritable diplomatic tensions. While settlers in the borderlands skillfully exploited these interstate conditions, regular criminal networks also developed, such as the groups harvesting palm hearts (231).

Overall, the book impresses the reader with its use of excellent, self-made maps. Freitas brings this cartographic expertise to bear, especially in his final chapter. Here he contrasts the ground-perspective (which vividly traces the conflicts over resources, territoriality, and nature conservation in the thickets of the forests and on the rivers) with “The View from Above” (239). However, this is not just a metaphorical bird’s-eye view perspective, but rather Freitas evaluates historical aerial photographs and satellite data. In this way, Freitas opens up new source material for research in environmental history. The analysis of the images and the visualization of the results are particularly useful for the detailed recording of deforestation. For example, Freitas contrasts the development of agricultural colonization projects and urban settlements in western Paraná from 1953 and 1980 (262), demonstrates the presence of small Guaraní settlements in the Brazilian park (271), and shows the different spatial development along the binational park boundary (274).

¹⁰ Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature*.

Practices of comparing and the geopolitical constellation was now, according to Freitas, hardly geared toward the parks acting as “peace parks.” But, on the other hand, the parks did not promote territorial conflicts either. Instead, they shifted them to the level of symbolic politics. Thus, the parks were imagined and managed as national geopolitical entities, which were in permanent competition with each other for better management, broader extension, and international attention. The United Nations, which as early as the 1980s had called for the establishment of a transboundary UNESCO World Heritage Site to be jointly managed by Argentina and Brazil, has hardly been able to understand the stubborn geopolitical nationalism of the two neighboring countries.

THE ECLECTICISM OF COLONIZATION: THE ORIGINS OF NATIONAL PARKS IN ARGENTINA

FREITAS ON KALTMEIER.

Argentina was one of the first Latin American countries to establish a national park system in the first half of the twentieth century. The history of the creation of the country’s first national parks is usually told from the institutional perspective of the national park agency itself. No other person was more influential in shaping this narrative than Exequiel Bustillo. He was the first head of the Argentine national park agency (1934-1944) and the most consequential proponent of national parks in the 1930s. Bustillo would eventually fall out of favor at the end of his tenure at the agency. Yet his ideas about conservation continue to shape the mythology about the origins of national parks in Argentina. Bustillo synthesized his tale of national park genesis in his memoir, *El Despertar de Bariloche*, published in the 1960s.¹¹ Here, Bustillo provides readers with the classic storyline of the creation of national parks in Argentina: the parks were the result of visionaries, people like Argentine explorer Francisco Moreno, American engineer Bayley Willis, and himself, Bustillo, presented as the most important Argentine park founding father. For Bustillo, there is a linear narrative connecting the earlier park proponents to himself. Furthermore, Bustillo lays out his vision of parks as aristocratic leisure spaces for the Argentine elite.

¹¹ Exequiel Bustillo, *El despertar de Bariloche: una estrategia patagónica* (Buenos Aires: Editorial y Librería Goncourt, 1968).

In this excellent monograph, *National Parks from North to South*, Olaf Kaltmeier aims to go beyond the trappings of Bustillo's self-serving mythology of national park genesis. He does so through three different operations. First, he shows how national parks in Argentina resulted from a *transnational* space of circulating ideas that put together many different conservation models. By doing so, Kaltmeier casts light on a series of historical characters, such as natural scientists, previously erased by Bustillo's focus on his oligarchic inner circle of businessmen and politicians. Second, by focusing on the web of different influences circulating in Argentina, Kaltmeier identifies the distinct national park proposals ignored in the traditional *Bustillista* account. Such proposals paint a surprisingly diverse picture of the ideas behind conservation circulating in Argentina, ranging from protected areas as strict nature preserves to national parks as engines of tourism and real estate development. Third, Kaltmeier recognizes the integral connection between national parks and the colonization of border areas in Argentina between the 1910s and the 1940s. Here, Kaltmeier's research overlaps with my own work on parks as tools for borderland nationalization.

The book is divided into two parts. It begins with the first proposals for the creation of national parks in Argentina. They appear in the first decade of the twentieth century, simultaneously in Andean Patagonia in the south (around the lake Nahuel Huapi) and in Misiones in the north (at the Iguazu Falls). Both were areas shared with Argentina's historical competitors, Chile and Brazil, contributing to the proposals' geopolitical framing. Despite that, Kaltmeier demonstrates how in these first years of national park imagining, other proposals took the national park idea beyond geopolitical considerations. For some, such as the French-Argentine landscape architect Carlos Thays, parks should also harmonize aesthetic interests and economic concerns. For others, such as the natural scientists organized around the Academia Argentina de Ciencias Naturales, parks should focus on species conservation and the protection of vegetation and landscapes in different parts of Argentina, away from the border.

The book's second part analyzes the Argentine national park system in its first year, after the passing of the ambitious 1934 national park law and the creation of a dedicated national park agency. The focus now is primarily on Nahuel Huapi National

Park in the south, with some attention paid to Iguazú National Park in the north. Kaltmeier rightfully recognizes that, by the mid-1930s, Bustillo’s view of national parks had become hegemonic. What did his project entail? National parks ought to be established as “instruments of colonization” of border areas. In this way, parks would promote the settlement of farmers in border areas, favoring European or European-descent settlers over those of Indigenous descent (e.g., the Mapuche in Patagonia or the Guarani in Misiones). The Argentine state also used parks to ramp up urbanization in border areas. In Misiones, the Argentine National Park Agency took charge of establishing a town, Puerto Iguazu, to populate the borderland—a story that I also covered in my work. In Nahuel Huapi in the south, the Argentine National Park agency was even more aggressive, investing hefty sums in transforming Bariloche, the existing hamlet, into a full-scale European ski resort. The agency also created other villages in and around its Patagonian national parks, acting as a frontier development agency.

In the book’s final chapters, Kaltmeier applies the concept of “colonization” to the introduction of neophyte species to Patagonia. He discusses attempts to acclimatize alien plants in the Argentine national parks, which goes against present-day ideas about parks protecting autochthonous flora. Kaltmeier also retraces the transferring to Argentine Patagonia of animal species from the northern hemisphere, e.g., European deer and North American moose and bison. The goal behind such initiatives was to “correct” the landscape of South American parks, which “lacked” large charismatic species similar to the ones populating their counterparts in North America. The colonization of Patagonian waters with alien species of trout and salmon is another aspect brought to light by Kaltmeier. Since the 1930s, the Argentine National Park Agency promoted Patagonia as a paradise for sport fishing.

In his concluding chapter, Kaltmeier utilizes the concept of “bridgehead” to come to terms with the two main tendencies he identified in the Argentine national parks. On the one hand, the Argentine state used the parks as actual bridgeheads in their colonization project in frontier areas. After 1934, the agency was consistent in its policy of using parks to settle the borders. On the other hand, this period was preceded by decades of debate about parks that brought into Argentina a collection of different transnational ideas— e.g., the US-based Yellowstone model of national park, French landscape architecture, Prussian forestry, Belgian park ideals. In the author’s

words, the parks ultimately resulted from a "decidedly heterogeneous ensemble of different, sometimes conflicting practices and techniques." (177)

REFERENCES

Adams, Jonathan S., and Thomas O. McShane. *The Myth of Wild Africa: Conservation Without Illusion*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

Amend, Stephan and Thora Amend, eds. *National Parks without People? The South American Experience*. Quito: IUCN/Parques Nacionales y Conservación Ambiental, 1995.

Brockington, Dan. *Fortress Conservation: The Preservation of the Mkomazi Game Preserve*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.

Bustillo, Exequiel. *El Despertar de Bariloche: Una Estrategia Patagónica*. Buenos Aires: Editorial y Librería Goncourt, 1968.

Carey, Mark. "The Trouble with Climate Change and National Parks." In *National Parks Beyond the Nation: Global Perspectives on "America's Best Idea,"* edited by Adrian Howkins, Jared Orsi, and Mark Fiege. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016.

Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." In *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by William Cronon, 69–90. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996, 69–90.

Diegues, Antônio Carlos Sant'Ana. *O Mito Moderno da Natureza Intocada*. 6th ed. São Paulo: Hucitec, 2008.

Evans, Sterling. *The Green Republic: A Conservation History of Costa Rica*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999.

Gissibl, Bernhard, Sabine Höhler, and Patrick Kupper, eds. *Civilizing Nature: National Parks in Global Historical Perspective*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2012.

Hardenberg, Wilko Graf von, Matthew Kelly, Claudia Leal, and Emily Wakild. "Introduction." In *The Nature State: Rethinking the History of Conservation*, edited by Wilko Graf von Hardenberg et al. Routledge Environmental Humanities. Oxford: Routledge, 2017, 1–16.

Hochstetler, Kathryn and Margaret E. Keck. *Greening Brazil: Environmental Activism in State and Society*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

Jacoby, Karl. *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Kaltmeier, Olaf. “The Nature State. Rethinking the History of Conservation. *Historia Ambiental Latinoamericana y Caribeña*”. *HALAC - Revista de la Solcha* 9, no. 2 (2019): 272–276.

Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American mind*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967.

Neumann, Roderick. *Imposing Wilderness: Struggles over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

Soluri, John, Claudia Leal, and José Augusto Pádua. “Introduction: Finding the ‘Latin American’ in Latin American Environmental History.” In *A Living Past: Environmental Histories of Modern Latin America*, edited by John Soluri, Claudia Leal, and José Augusto Pádua. Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books, 2018, 1–22.

Wakild, Emily. “Environmental Justice, Environmentalism, and Environmental History in Twentieth-Century Latin America.” *History Compass* 11, no. 2 (2013): 163–76

Wakild, Emily. *Revolutionary Parks: Conservation, Social Justice, and Mexico’s National Parks, 1910–1940*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011.

Received: 06/05/2021
Approved: 23/05/2021