

The secrets of the “Forest”: Tourist images of Puerto Patriada (Argentine Patagonia)¹

Los secretos del “Bosque”: imágenes turísticas de puerto patriada (patagonia argentina)

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes debates –from an anthropological approach which combines fieldwork with the study of documents from state archives and other sources– about how images and secrecy practices interplay in the pleasure economy and attractiveness disseminated by the tourism device in Puerto Patriada, Chubut province –Argentine Patagonia. It examines the way in which, through gaze framing and secrecy formulas constructed and disseminated by tourist policies in Puerto Patriada, the contradictions of the capitalist system are recodified, new and old ways of understanding the term “natural” not only as a material fact but also a moral one are expressed, and pedagogies of ordering and intervention in the space, resources, and subjects are shaped according to this new model of development. Also, it will reflect upon how these “gazes” and their vanishing points were configured and redefined.

Keywords: tourism, nature, secrecy practices, counter images, Argentine Patagonia.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo se propone discutir -desde una aproximación antropológica que combina trabajo de campo con relevamiento de documentos de archivos estatales y otras fuentes– cómo interjuegan imágenes y prácticas de secrecía en la economía del placer y la atraktividad propagada por el dispositivo turístico en Puerto Patriada, provincia de Chubut –Patagonia Argentina. Examina la forma en que mediante encuadres de la mirada y fórmulas de secrecías elaboradas y propagadas en las políticas turísticas en Puerto Patriada se recodifican las contradicciones del sistema capitalista, se plasman nuevas y viejas formas de comprender “lo natural” como un hecho no solo material sino también moral y se procuran conformar pedagogías de ordenamiento e intervención en el espacio, los recursos y los sujetos acordes con este nuevo modelo de desarrollo. Asimismo reflexiona sobre cómo se fueron configurando y redefiniendo esas “miradas” y sus puntos de fuga.

Palabras Claves: turismo, naturaleza, prácticas de secrecía, contra-imágenes, Patagonia Argentina.

¹ This article was translated by Erin O’ Byrne.

INTRODUCTION

When I arrived in Lago Puelo, in 2004 —a locality in the Andean mountain range bordering Chile and located in Comarca Andina del Paralelo 42° of Argentina Patagonia—, members of the Cayún Mapuche community used to point out certain darker green patches that differed from others within the mountain that is part of their territorial space. In the palette of greens that appear above the Andean mountain range —they showed me— the darkest ones correspond to the cultivation of pines that was promoted from the 1960s through the 1980s, whilst the rest of the green tonalities belong to that which is classified as “autochthonous or native” species —cypresses, lenga beeches, Dombey's beeches, Antarctic beeches, etcetera— which are currently highly valued in the region. For a person who has recently arrived from a city like Buenos Aires, as I had, it was difficult to notice this distinction, easily discerned by them, in the wooded landscape. Not thus to understand, drawing on the conversations held, the profound effect that these patches had in their lives and how these green tonalities formed a long-lasting archive or vestiges of complex experiences that they had been through and continue resonating in their subjectivity, territorial practice, and current struggles.

As time went by, through my continued fieldwork I learned to differentiate each of the trees in Comarca Andina del Paralelo 42° —here after Comarca o Comarca Andina— where I develop my research; and I began to observe that these dark patches were reproduced with greater or lesser intensity in other localities that make up the Comarca. Since the 1990s, as part of neoliberal economic policies, the localities of El Hoyo, Lago Puelo, Epuyén, and El Maitén —in the province of Chubut— along with El Bolsón —in the province of Río Negro— came together to form Comarca Andina del Paralelo 42° to promote development and tourism in all of these localities². In 2011 I extended my research to Puerto Patriada —an area and tourist waterside resort place in the locality of El Hoyo. In the range of options for tourists that exist in this locality —neighbour-

ing Lago Puelo—, the visit to Puerto Patriada is one of the most promoted options. On the journey to the waterside resort place, I was surprised when I noticed that the area showed itself to be a cluster of pines in which the diversity of the “native” forest scarcely appeared, something which contrasted notably with the official discourse and images from which the “tourist gaze” (Urry, 1992) of this space has been configured and organised.

In this article, I intend to reflect on these contrasts. I analyse the form in which images and secrecy practices interplay in the pleasure economy and attractiveness disseminated by the tourist device in this area. The study is based on anthropological research combined with the study of documents from state archives, brochures, journalistic articles, and web pages. Firstly, I present some conceptual notions which I draw upon to examine this interplay. Later, I discuss how through gaze framing and secrecy formulas created and disseminated by the tourist policies in Puerto Patriada, the contradictions of the capitalist system are recodified, new and old ways of understanding the term “natural” —not only as a material fact but also a moral one— are captured and pedagogies of ordering and intervention in the space, resources, and subjects are shaped according to this new model of development. Additionally, I reflect on how these “gazes” and vanishing points were configured and redefined.

WAYS OF SEEING AND SECRECY PRACTICES

The tourist policies suppose the configuration of a logic and exhibition frame that can be analysed as an object —in its content— and as a practice, that is, as a producer of a gaze or “ways of seeing”. These ways of seeing —using the notion of Berger (2007)— or “tourist gazes”³ —using the terms of Urry (1992)— do not refer to individual vision but rather to an ability, culturally inscribed, learned, and redefined in time which is related to a political epistemic field created and organised systemically both discursively and visually (Larsen and Urry, 2011).

² The reform of the National Constitution enacted in 1994, within a neoliberal framework, gave autonomy to municipalities and with it, opened the possibility to form micro-regions including interprovincial ones (Etchebehere et al.s/f). The formation of micro-regions, regions, and counties has been part of a wider policy that promotes tourism in Patagonia. The creation of Comarca Andina formed part of a program of Patagonian micro-regions in which the National Commission for the Promotion and Development of the Patagonian Region (Comisión Nacional para la Promoción y Desarrollo de la Región Patagónica, CONADEPA) played an important part. At the same time as Comarca Andina del Paralelo 42°, the formation of Comarca de los Alerces is initiated. Both are joined by what is known and promoted as Corredor de Los Lagos, which extends from Aluminé, in the province of Neuquén, to Río Pico, in Chubut (Strategic Plan to Manage the Forrestral Reserve of Lago Epuyén”, Characterisation and Diagnosis 1999).

³ Although I will not focus on the issue of the tourist gaze specifically but rather on the role that the visual images play in their construction, I wish to stress that as Urry (1992) asserts, there is not just one tourist gaze but rather in any case, variability of tourist gazes according to socio-historical contexts, genders, generations, social classes, etc; hence the use of the plural.

In the case of tourist images, the visual representations that are produced and publicised through media, brochures, web pages, etc., are fostered by both state and private tourist agencies. These images that impose the policies of places, produce the real, model or discipline relationships, behaviours, sensibilities and gazes, are framed in networks of specific historical relationships, and aesthetic patterns to be followed. Poole (2000) invoked the concept of the “visual economy” to think about the political complexity of visual images, their organised character, relationship with economic dynamics, circuits of production and circulation and implications in the formation of relationships and subjectivities.

Even when the encounters promoted by tourist activity are saturated by a universe of images of different types and effects, those encounters appeal, in their majority, to the enjoyment of visually contemplating and experiencing places (Larsen and Urry, 2011). They do so through rules and styles modelled by dominant aesthetic regimes that organize that vision of physical forms and material spaces as “interesting” and “lovely”, “dreamlike” and/or “pleasurable” and even, as I will show in this work, as “natural”. So, dealing with the visual field implies not only asking questions about socio-historical patterns of looking and ascertaining the itineraries and effects that have followed certain images but also, at the same time, examining what is kept silent or out-of-field, and its vanishing points. Within the discourse and images configured around tourist spaces, the silences are administered under divergent logics. One of those logics of silencing that plays a key role in the images disseminated by tourism is the secret.

Deleuze and Guattari (2006) divide the secret into three components: the contents of the secret (wrapping); the action of the secret, its influence and dissemination (secretion), and the perception of the secret. Here I suggest that the form through which the desire and attractiveness are constructed by tourist policies –dimensions which are indeed economic– is not only through the production, circulation, and consumption of visual images but also through a secrecy practice. The secret inserts itself in these policies as a productive resource with substantive value for the tourist market.

As Giraud (2007) indicates, while secrecy as a practice operates in all societies, it entails a particular kind of silencing that implicates a setting concerning the subjects following the closing off of shared information and that, for this reason,

creates exclusions –of those with whom the information is not shared– as well as affinities, alliances, and senses of belonging among those who share it. In this sense, the secret is important not only in terms of its contents, tied to the valorization of certain information –the text, i.e. keeping a secret– but also from the social ties created by its implementation –its wrapping, that is to say, keeping the secret– (Gallego Dueñas, 2005). However, together with these operations of hiding and sharing, the secret also operates through its unveiling (Gallego Dueñas, 2005; Jones, 2014).

Particularly in the official tourist discourse, secrecy is a dominant logic of action –tied to the governability, market, and reproduction of the hegemony of the time– and it is organized, as I see it, under two different modalities or mechanisms that seek to create attractiveness. The first is tied to the action of making it public, in which the secret appears associated with a positive sense, like a “locus of desire and charm”. It concerns those policies in which this becomes a strategic procedure to be constructed and utilized as a resource for exhibition and externalization, insofar its attraction and power lie in the possibility that it might be revealed (Jones, 2014). In these cases, the secret is the marketable tourist object itself, a source of interest, and fascination around a mystery that the tourist industry would lay bare. However, beyond giving an account of its contents, this industry announces it as a sign or product to be explored. I am referring to those tourist spaces that base their discourse and images on promoting “the discovery” of hidden, unknown, concealed places and/or particular ways of life pertaining to certain social sectors, as the case may be, but in order to allure the recipient of the discourse and images, they do not reveal them completely. They, therefore, appeal to the “discovering” of “the secrets” of those spaces and/or social sectors, “their magic, mythology, and mystery”, including those who had been stigmatized or were of little interest to the capital in other eras.

Together with this tourist practice of the secret as the locus of seduction, there is another modality whereby the secret is used in these policies upon which I would like to focus on in this article. I am referring to what I will denominate as the “setting of the secret”; that is, that which should be blocked because it is associated with conceptions, worldviews, and practices that are considered dangerous and confrontational, in this case, toward the order of the official gaze it wishes to disseminate.

The aforementioned modalities or mechanisms are not mu-

tually exclusive. Tourist policies that configure the secret as an object of desire to be exchanged can coexist with secrecy practices based on protection and concealment. In both cases, they are formulas of institutionalised secrecy that establish power relationships and discipline ways of seeing and intervening in the ways of life, space, and subjects. What follows below is about these institutionalized images and their secrecy formulas, that is, about the secret as a “locus of desire” and the “settings of secrecy” immersed in the tourist policies in Puerto Patriada and their effects.

THE TOURIST RECONVERSION OF AND DEGRADED FOREST

As I have pointed out, I travelled for the first time to Puerto Patriada in 2011, but I gained a profound knowledge of this area and waterside resort place when I approached one of the Mapuche communities—the Pulgar Huentuquidel community—which, in 2010, had gone to recover the territory that they had been stripped of. In particular, when Elba, Lala, Valentín, and Daniel, members of this community, told me about the experiences, transformations, and expropriations of indigenous territory, that had taken place following the installation of a sawmill in the area. This expropriation joined those that had resulted from military campaigns carried out in Patagonia—the “Conquest of the Desert”—towards the end of the 19th century.⁴

Puerto Patriada is located on the northern bank of Lago Epuyén, approximately 14 km from the centre of El Hoyo. In 1944, after the military campaigns at the end of the 19th century, this border area was included in what was decreed as an “area of national security” (Decree N° 15.385). The decree formed part of the national government’s interest in stopping “foreign” settlers, mostly Chileans and Mapuche people—who had been historically classified by the state as “Chileans”—from regularising their territorial occupations, which was thought to put Argentine sovereignty at risk in those spaces.

In 1964, the declaration of this space as the “Lago Epuyén forest reserve” (Decree N° 527/64) prolonged this situation and brought the reserve under the jurisdiction of the Provincial Department of Parks and Forests. The creation of this forest reserve was justified as a way of preserving a forest that was systematically threatened by repeated fires⁵ to a point that impeded the intensification of farming practices of those who resided there, since it was understood that this degraded the environment. But it was also combined with a policy of industrial development, implemented in different parts of the Andean mountain range, for which state institutions issued concessions to private sawmills for the exploitation of what is called the “native” or Patagonian Andean forest—cypresses, lenga beeches, Dombey’s beeches, Antarctic beeches, etc.—for industrial exploitation, replacing them with implanted pines coming from the northern hemisphere; which, at that time, were considered more profitable. The policy for the utilization of forest resources by the state in Puerto Patriada was not new. In 1949 a “forest barracks” had been established (Carabelli, 1999). However, from 1960 to 1980 the exploitation of the forest was developed via two methods; first through a “system of extraction” or selective cutting of native trees and then a “system of clearfelling” which sacrificed the existing Patagonian-Andean forest (Tozzini and Crespo, 2018). Additionally, in Puerto Patriada this policy had peculiar characteristics compared to other Andean regions in Patagonia, because a large part of the exploitation of the forest was granted to one sawmill only and its owner carried out—concurrently—a kind of “civilizing action” or policy of social discipline in this border area, and for this reason, he baptized it “Puerto Patriada”.⁶ In effect, the forest industrialization was part of a wider public policy in this region that, through its articulation with this private actor, proposed installing capitalist production methods, nationalized border spaces, modified behaviours, values, and indigenous practices, while appropriating territories that were occupied by Mapuche families or constrained them in their methods and use of resources with promises of “progress” that were not fulfilled in the end⁷ (Crespo, 2018).

⁴ Conquest of the desert was the name given to military campaigns carried out at the end of the 19th century in Argentine Patagonia. These campaigns involved, among other things, the extermination of a large part of the indigenous population in Patagonia, expropriation of their territory, and subordination of those who remained alive to the capitalist economy and the national state.

⁵ Up until that time it had witnessed significant fires in 1902, 1909, 1917, 1924, 1944, 1960, and 1963 (Valtriani, 2008).

⁶ This policy enabled the sawmill owner to assume the role of the state in this border area. An analysis of the effects and affects produced by this development project and the complex relationships initiated by this industrialist can be found in another article authored by me (Crespo, 2018).

⁷ As well as the fact that numerous occupied territorial spaces were being fences for forest exploitation, SAFE also acquired the rights to territory historically occupied by the Monsalve family on the coast of Lago Epuyén. Some works assert that he bought this space even though he did not officially register the property because of objections raised by the province (Valtriani, 2008). In 2010 the family publically identifies and organizes itself as a Mapuche community Monsalve and it denounces the cession of the land was carried out under fraudulent manoeuvres and that once the Monsalve grandfather had died they set fire to his house to install the sawmill there (Interview with DM and AC in 2015 and with LM in 2019).

The configuration of the forest reserve and the reforestation driven by that sawmill from 1960 to 1980 did not mitigate the fires as had been hoped. In 1973, 1979, 1987, 1998, 2004, 2011, 2012, and 2015 major fires occurred and every new fire contributed to the propagation of pine seeds that invaded the region, eroding, acidifying, and desertifying the floors; affecting and reducing the diversity of flora and fauna; reducing the quantity and quality of water, but also, modifying the ecology of the fire. The uncontrolled growth of pines made the area more flammable and created problems concerning access to “safe” water for the inhabitants (Raffaele et al., 2018).⁸

Towards the end of the '80s state agencies began to visualise the failure of this project, at least for environmental conservation and local “economic progress”. In 1983, the space of Puerto Patriada started to be incorporated as one of the options for tourists in El Hoyo (Valtriani, 2008). Concurrently, the sawmill started to experience an economic slump and declared bankruptcy in 1995. Towards the end of the 1990s, and in particular, following the economic crisis that erupted in Argentina in 2001 and the enactment of the National Law of Tourism N° 25.997 passed in 2004, tourism became of great relevance on the national level as a way of resolving regional economic inequality. Since then, while localities of Comarca Andina have seen an increase in the number of tourist visits, the resort of Puerto Patriada—within El Hoyo—was configured as the epicentre of recreational and sporting tourism of great affluence, both for people from outside and residents of that locality and neighbouring ones.

The region went from being a place used exclusively for the exploitation of its natural forest resources to a landscape to be consumed. It could be said that the tourist policies are, to date, the last link of colonialization in the region and as a kind of palimpsest of different extractivist actions have been growing since their initiation by the “Conquest of the Desert”. Like layers that accumulate on top of each other, these policies have been established upon the subjugation of the indigenous people, the extraction of their territorial spaces, unresolved territorial conflicts, changes to their ways of life and values, and degradations of the

environment, recodifying the “residues and ruins” of that forest policy in a positive tone to be consumed from a contemplative gaze.

Tourism configured the space as a landscape, transforming it into a kind of merchandise or product with exchange value. Infrastructure was created in the area that was formerly inexistent: a gravel road was built leading to the waterside resort place and, over time, cabins were erected and camping sites were opened, small food stalls were designed along the coast of the lake, kayak and equine rental became available, festivals were organized, etc. During these years, the old tensions among the locals increased whose possession of the land, until the present day, has not been legalized and the drive towards tourism produced an increase in property value in the area. One product of the construction of this road and tourism is that the whole trajectory leading to the waterside resort place has witnessed an increase in the cabins and houses built there.

The tourist actions unfolding in Puerto Patriada were designed to incorporate those who live there into a commercial circuit, working in the sale of foodstuffs, kayak rental, etc. Towards 1999 the burnt wood from the great fire of 1987 that locals could remove was dwindling and the management plan carried out in the area by state institutions considered the necessity to incorporate the locals in other economic activities that would enable them to receive an income (Strategic Management Plan of Lago Epuyén Forest Reserve). These alternative economic activities formed part of an interest in regulating both the extractivist activities pertaining to forest resources—today; they are even less valuable as a product of consecutive fires—, and the shepherding of animals, which, for years, have been considered to affect the environment. However, even when various locals take part in the tourist economy of the place it is—as suggested by Dimitriu (2002)—a seasonal economy and complementary to local incomes, which are distributed unequally, fortifying an existing asymmetry regarding resources, the possibility to take decisions about the current and future use of them, including decisions about their territorial space.

⁸ According to a report conducted in 2018, this issue prompted the National Institute of Agriculture and Livestock Technology to carry out a participative project whose objective is to guarantee the availability of water to the inhabitants and have reserves to mitigate the fires (Cf. Raffaele et al., 2018).

In 2003 the region was recategorized as a “resort for multiple uses of Lago Epuyén” with the objective of “promoting the management of natural and cultural resources in an environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable way and to conserve a representative sample of Andean-Patagonian ecosystems” (Article 3, Decree 418/2003).⁹ This recategorization of the region was understood as a way to regulate, in a harmonious way, the productive activities along with the preservation of natural environments. This led to the zonification of the zone –approximately 20000 ha.– in three areas with different degrees of protection: 1) protected area, 2) recovered area, as a consequence of consecutive fires in the place, of its exhibition and alert and; 3) area for multiple uses. Within the area for multiple uses, named for its “ecological, productive and landscape aptitudes, to develop activities in accordance with the preservation of the environment”, the exclusive use of Lago Epuyén in Puerto Patriada for tourist, recreational, and sporting purposes is included.¹⁰

FRAMES, SECRETS, AND COUNTER-IMAGES

The insertion of the waterside resort place of Puerto Patriada in the tourist market and as a “reserve for multiple uses” required not only an ordering of the space and subjects, absolutely unthought of in previous eras, but also an aesthetic of the area’s exhibition that generates the interest of the visitors. In this context, the diffusion or tourist marketing appealed in part to the revealing of a hidden secret as a form of attraction –Those who visit it are guaranteed a hidden treasure in the province (“Summer in the pandemic: Five heavenly Argentine beaches, without tumultuous crowds... nor sea” in La Nación newspaper, 15/01/2021)– announcing it as a lure, differentiating

its contents; and especially, the enjoyment of immaculate and timeless nature.

Nature colonized brochures, web pages, and festive events created in Puerto Patriada through images and descriptions of the space that emphasise three interrelated aspects. On one hand, its crystalline lake, “natural beauty”, and “imposing mountains” creating a “majestic” “Andean mountain range paradise”. On the other hand, through the enunciation of the locals living in connection with nature, producing organic agriculture and making homemade sweets. Finally, highlighting the presence of a “native” or “Andean-Patagonian” forest of which but a few remnants or recently planted examples can be found:

Enchanting landscape, accessible and offering the most varied range of leisure choices, Puerto Patriada is characteristically boasts a coast with small beaches, shielded from winds, with calm waters and great transparency allowing for the enjoyment of fishing and adventure activities.

(<https://www.argentinaturismo.com.ar/lago-pue/puerto-patriada.html> 14/11/2020)

(...) the visitor will find natural beauty both in the flora and fauna. The lake is surrounded by enormous mountains, eternally snow-capped, meaning that the landscape is an escape for the eyes and soul. In its waters, aquatic sports, such as kayaking, rowing, sailboats, and also fly fishing, can be practised. In it, motorized sailing is prohibited. “Puerto Patriada” is the ideal place to enjoy a well-deserved rest.

(<https://www.patagoniaexpress.com/index.php/destinos/home-el-hoyo/excursiones-en-el-hoyo> 14/11/2020)

⁹ “Reserve for multiple uses” is understood as “areas principally managed for the sustainable use of their natural resources. It contains natural systems, scarcely modified relatively speaking, that are managed to secure their protection in the long term and maintain their biological diversity, while also providing a constant stream of natural services and productions to respond to the needs of the community” (Strategic Management Plan of Lago Epuyén Forest Reserve, Characterization and Diagnosis, 1999:26).

¹⁰ After the creation of the reserve, an Advisory Council was constituted, comprised of technical staff from the current Secretary of Chubut Forests; representatives of the executive and legislative authorities of Epuyén and El Hoyo; representatives from provincial institutions that regulate the use of the resources and activities in the area; representatives from non-governmental organizations; and neighbours and providers of tourist services in Epuyén and Puerto Patriada. This Council was comprised to advise the Secretary of Forests as to the management of the reserve.

(...) Puerto Patriada is accessed by a mountainous gravel path that crosses a valley containing numerous organic smallholdings and establishments selling homemade sweets, fresh fine fruits (during the summer season) and jams, framed by the majestic Andean-Patagonian forest. (<http://www.turismoruta40.com.ar/elhoyo.html> 14/11/2020)



Fig. 1. The coast of Lago Epyuén in Puerto Patriada. Seen to the left. The photograph was taken from the blog Tripin that lifted it from the source of the Official Website of El Hoyo (Available at: <https://tripin.travelpuerto-patriada-el-hoyo>)



Fig. 2 Photograph of the waterside resort place of Puerto Patriada from the article titled "Summer in the pandemic: Five heavenly Argentine beaches, without tumultuous crowds... nor sea", La Nación newspaper, 15/01/2021. The credit of this photo belongs to "Turismo El Hoyo"

The official images and discourse spread since then have created a kind of postcard landscape in which nature is naturalized and their pristine and timeless manner is over-exhibited for their consumption. Even when a description of the existence of forestry with pines in the area appears on a webpage occasionally, the classification of this forestry under the notion of “forest” fortifies this naturalization – to get into natural forests and afforested places until arriving at the extreme north of Lago Epuyén (https://web.archive.org/web/20121104101747/http://www.comarcaandina.com.ar/puerto_patriada.htm 14/11/2020)–. The creation of the “Provincial Festival of the Natural Beauty of Puerto Patriada”, in 2010 also speaks to this. Devised to generate other tourist attractions, the performance of this festival recreates country Creole activities –omitting indigenous presence–, and constructs a mode of seeing the space as “natural” from its locals –even when, paradoxically, they all know and many have lived through these policies of reforestation–, instructing them about how their care is officially conceived:

Puerto Patriada is without a doubt one of the most important natural places that we have in Comarca Andina, and it is our responsibility to take care of it so that all the inhabitants of El Hoyo, Comarca, and those who choose us as a tourist destination can enjoy it (Mayor of El Hoyo, March 2014).

The representation of Patagonia, and in particular the Andean mountain range region, as a space of nature, is settled upon a series of gazes constructed and sedimented in Argentina that, with some variables, divergent interests and effects, can be traced back to the period of expansion of the national state (López, 2003). Since then, these ways of imagining, representing, and utilizing nature superimpose and even –as indicated by Dimitriu (2002)– contradict each other. Towards the end of the 19th century and after the Conquest, this region was considered “empty” of occupation, not recognizing the indigenous occupation in the area. This was in part as a product of the dehumanization of indigenous people before the Conquest, and in part because after the Conquest of the Desert a narrative that the region had been emptied by the Conquest was proliferated, and also because of the existence of a conception of indigenous peoples’ nomadism as a failure to occupy the space (Crespo, 2011). This image linked to nature was prolonged and redefined in time in Comarca Andina where Puerto Patriada is found, as held by Dimitriu

(2002), associating itself as “a place free of pollution” and “organic”; that is, tied to ways of life and natural values.

The official photos, discourse, and events diffused “from” or “in” Patagonia, are framed, in this way, in a genealogy of ways of seeing the area that are disconnected from the structures of domination, social contradictions, and policies that unfolded over time. Combined with the declaration of the area as a reserve, usually associated with a space that is focused on the protection of nature, these images, discourse, and events eclipse the traces of violence expressed through the pines. They silence the expropriations, fires, and the lack of regulation of territorial possession, and also transfigure the degradation or ruins caused by development into a veneration of a landscape intended to be consumed as naturally heavenly.

Some authors have considered the ruins and debris of systems of domination not as fixed or inert in the past but rather in their durability, their rhythms, their affection, and their vital refiguring (Stoler, 2008). In tourist contexts some “ruins” are highlighted under a halo of romanticism and nostalgia; others referring to less glorious pasts acquire a position whereby they are exhibited as histories of memories of injustice; but there are others that are more amorphous, related to the spoils and failures of capitalism, that are silenced or omitted (Gordillo, 2018). Gordillo (2018) emphasises how some debris present in certain areas of Salta, a province in the north of Argentina, configure topographies of the forgotten. But in Puerto Patriada, more than forgetting –a notion that hastily presupposes a loss or absence of knowledge or memory (Dakhli, 1998 in Briones 2020)– the tourist policy distils secrecy practices. It does so through various formulas and means. On one hand, as I indicated, through its own language and ways of saying: invoking the space as a secret to be revealed. But, especially producing secrecy or as I denominated them in the previous part, “settings of secrecy” that hide and limit the possibility of an undesired revelation. Through the use of certain notions in a distorting sense, the configuration of silencing and repetitions, the framing or focus on certain images and the conformation of certain cultural performances, these policies create social relations, spaces in which everybody in the area knows they have been sacrificed for state and industrial policies of forestation and limit the possible risks.

Without a doubt, the naturalization of nature encapsulates the contradiction of our cultural praxis (Santamarina

Campos, 2009) and the secrecy practice that traverses it is part of a political-pedagogical strategy that forms the gaze around social, natural orders, and desirable citizens. Those pointed means and formulas divert the gaze towards that which is meant to be looked at, neutralizing certain surroundings, painting the beauty of social spaces and nature that has been degraded, the residues and scars from structures of domination that endure are hidden, and concealing that which corrodes it: creative and critical measures with which some Mapuche people in the area, under correlations of unequal power, dispute and try to be heard and shown today, their demands for rights.

The secret functions in this way, dressing up that which is unacceptable and taking it to the land of the desired, making it fit within beauty standards or placing it in the world of the natural. The images disseminated for tourism, of placid and wooded nature and locals that value natural production, aim to construct in the visitor the idea that it is a protected area that should be cared for, even though it was sacrificed, in which state measures over the last few years, intended to modify this situation, have been scarce, partial, and fragmented. They also target the locals

themselves, who despite having a negative opinion of the pines —some of whom call them “filth”, the “dirtiness of the countryside” and others characterise it as “the worst ecocide carried out in the whole Comarca”— training them in the practices valued today while they subserviently incorporate them, within this circuit of the market, and they dissuade them from undesired economic activities.

The degraded materialities are accommodated in the fictions of this new development policy that has tourism as an apex and (in)visible secrets and tensions and disputes as a base. But the secret that these tourist proposals hide should not be understood literally. It should be seen, using the terminology of Deleuze (1984), as that which is “out-of-field”; to be precise, that which cannot be seen or heard but is present, insists, and subsists. Despite the transparency of the lake, its snowy mountains in the distance, and a landscaped cliff, the landscape exhibits and speaks about that which is meant to be kept secret: the fire burnt wide swaths of the forest which stand out,¹¹ the offshoots of pines abound everywhere, and the indigenous territorial conflicts are hung in signs and flags that are visible from the path leading to the waterside resort place.



Fig. 3. In the margins of the path, near the waterside resort place, the uncontrolled offshoots of pines, a product of the fires, can be found. Photograph: Carolina Crespo (2020).

¹¹ The fires continued in the area even after the recategorization of the space as a reserve for multiple uses.



Fig. 4. Photograph from the coast of Lago Epuyén in Puerto Patriada. The direction of the gaze towards the right allows one to distinguish the effects of the fires. Photograph: Carolina Crespo (2020)

Since 2010 these secrets have been answered by Mapuche communities that went to recover their territorial spaces, through counter images —banners, flags, inscriptions

on the ruins of the factory of the sawmill and/or feminine figures— publically shown in the path towards the waterside resort place.¹²



Fig. 5. Ruins of the forest factory with inscriptions in Mapuzungun and in Spanish, made by the Francisco Monsalve Mapuche Community, that recovered this territorial space. The inscription appeals to the National Law N° 26160 of the indigenous territorial survey, enacted in 2006, that impedes the eviction of indigenous people during that survey. Photograph: Carolina Crespo (2020).

¹² Only the abandoned forest factory and the inscriptions that two Mapuche communities carried out on the walls of the ruins when, in 2010, they started their processes for territorial recovery, are out of the direct eye line of tourists; although it is publically known in the locality.



Fig. 6. Banners and flags in the territory recovered by the Pulgar Huentuquidel Mapuche. Photograph: Carolina Crespo (2012)

The indigenous territorial recovery was the product of a lack of response to their demands in the sphere of state bureaucracy. Two lines of arguments were maintained to legitimate the recovery of their spaces. On one hand, the evictions and deceptions in which those forest projects were wrapped in, where they and their families had participated as workers contracted in sprints cutting down the existing forest, carrying the wood into the freezing water of the lake, planting pines, and even constructing wire fences in their own territorial spaces that they were no longer able to use to reside in, connect with, and/or for their livestock.

they took the best wood, the Dombey's beeches, radial, cypresses. They cut that wood down and they took it away. So, my brother says, they said to him (...) to granddad that they had to remove the animals because supposedly the animals were the ones eating the plants. But I never saw an animal grab a chainsaw and cut down a cypress [he says with irony]. It was that they took the best wood and they started to plant pines. There were no schools here either, here there were a lot of sawmills (...)

and so my brother says, "Granddad, Papi –he called him Papi– Papi, do you know that they are cutting down the trees?! And my granddad would say to him "shut up because they know what they're doing". Of course granddad never imagined what they were going to do! The damage they were going to do! He was happy because they were carrying out work, but the work that they were doing had an ulterior motive. They took 33 hectares from him. (Interview with LP, 2012)

They deceived him here; they said they were only taking wood. To the deceased Pulgar, they said that they would take the wood and the land would remain. But after that, they started to put up wire fences and they grabbed everything from here to there (...) what that company did was a disaster. These were some pretty native forests! And there was grass, see? There were lots of clovers. And they burnt everything with the pines, can't you see that the pine doesn't leave... it burns everything. Back then countryside... they let everything spoil, completely. (Interview with VL, 2013)

almost all of the pine plantations that are over there, were done by us. From the house of Mojón Blanco which is everything from Puerto Patriada to the other side, I worked on that entire pine plantation there. I was 16-17 years old. The first thing they did was burn the wooden fence. And they started to overturn trees. At that time I was placed as an assistant to someone in charge of a chainsaw. So me and him, we cut down all the Dombey's beeches that were here, all the cypresses (...) Then (...) they don't hand it over to the Pulgar family, they hand it to Bosques, the closed field. And Bosques says "Well, now this belongs to Bosques". (Interview with DP, 2014)

The communities emerged to debate not only that the pines were the ruins of a capitalist development system that impoverished nature and ended up being the fuel that has made the fires increasingly dangerous, something that everybody knows and laments in the region, including the state agents themselves. They accompanied these accounts with others that were less visible and audible for divergent ideological or ontological reasons. That is, those policies assumed a long-standing form of "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey, 2004) that involved expropriations or pressures as to the use of territorial space and the intent to trace morality through ways of life, productive practices, worldviews, and sociability excluding indigenous ways of life. In 2010 one of the communities that recovered their territory legitimated its space appealing to another conception of territoriality based on relationships that, as Mapuches, they maintain with their environment. Directed by Mapuche wisdoms associated with their grandmother and by the struggles that she had previously carried out against the imposed wire fences, they sustained that the placentas of some of them had been buried there; meaning that their bodies had never left that space: "something of one is left behind. It's something, one feels something. Because part of one is there inside" (Interview with LP, December 2013). This understanding of territoriality as part of their own bodies and their bodies as territory lies outside that which is understood by the images and epistemic conceptions of space that dichotomize nature-culture.

However, even when these fires, pine offshoots, and conflicts can be seen, the secrets that traverse the images of this area as natural and wooded enables the sedimentation of the idea, especially for external visitors arriving to

the Andean mountain range, that the space is a beautiful and natural forest. This sedimentation has been made possible not only because of the reasons I previously outlined. Additionally, because the representation of a landscape of mountains, pines, and a crystalline lake, that forms part of the picturesque imaginary of European latitudes and North America, have been configured as models of beauty in Argentina. In 2018, a survey carried out with 300 tourists –22% resident in the Comarca, 3% from abroad, and 75% from the rest of Argentina– indicated that, in general, tourists perceive the area to be "consistently conserved", and even though the majority of the visitors knew about the exotic species, a high percentage did not relate them with processes of environmental degradation or loss of conservation, and more over, they positively assessed the offered by the reserve for leisure (Raffaele et al. 2018).

CONCLUSIONS

In Puerto Patriada, the tourist images materialize and normalize the range of meanings and assessments attributable to "nature" and the term "natural", underscoring the practices that should be followed for its care versus those which need to be limited.

As I have described in the course of this article, new development policies in the region are traversed by the secret as a strategy to set the framework for this configuration and circulation of a construction of the area as part of pleasurable nature. Particularly in the interrelation with pleasure regimes and of naturalization of space, the secret was converted into enduring capital that can be worked through different formulas. Reflecting on these secrecy practices that are projected in nature allows for the exploration, on one hand, of the perceptive regimes configured around certain Patagonian regions and, on the other, of the process by which these visual images have given form to an economy of "attractiveness" in which the responsibility for public policies and capitalist undertakings in the region upon certain subjects, their ways of life, and the environment is concealed.

In a study conducted in Bali, Dwyer (2009) emphasises that the silence that occurred there should not be thought of as a blank space or an absence but rather as a political product that has its own complex genealogies. During my first approaches to researching indigenous experiences and the forest development policy promoted in Puerto Patriada, a local commented to me that, during the 1970s,

a journalist from a national magazine had written an article about the region, which had been given the title “The owners of silence”. This was shared with me, after having explained that in the past, many of them who were living in precarious conditions and were even strongly stigmatized for being Mapuches,¹³ could not complain about the abuses they had lived through in Puerto Patriada. “They respected authority”, he told me, more so in that era during which there was a dictatorial government in Argentina.¹⁴ I was never able to find that article, I am thus unaware of its contents, but in the context of these experiences and lived histories made secret in Patriada, this account proved significant to rethink the existence of a genealogy of silence in the area¹⁵ and reflect upon how the secret—as a specific modality of silencing—supported by tourism has not only marked them in different ways up until the present but also forms part of the exercise of discursive control by the state about experiences that are ongoing.

Since 2013 this area constitutes a pilot site that the network of the National Observatory of Land Degradation and Desertification whose principal objectives are to prevent, monitor, and mitigate the degradation of land (Raffaele et al., 2018). Even though many locals and state agents know about the environmental degradation produced by the forest development policies during the '60s and '80s and the socio-environmental problem, created by the interrelation between production and fires and the invasion of pines, few thread it together with asymmetric historical experiences of exclusion and discrimination of indigenous people, lying not only in the territorial realm, but also, in a more holistic sense of the public policy maintained since the conformation of the national state and in its continuity with the creation of the province and municipality. Only an attentive gaze to these materialities and counter-images that persist in its interior, and a capacity to listen respectfully to those who are talking out loud about the experiences suffered but hidden by the machinery of tourism, can “discover” that which confronts conceptions of the world that are risky for the hegemonic gaze.

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¹³ Discrimination operated in such a way that a large part of those in the area who were indigenous did not self-identify publicly as such at that time and, even, many who bear a Mapuche surname still do not do so today.

¹⁴ Even so, some made written denouncements to state institutions, asserting their discontent about the limitations imposed on their use of their land; others cut the wire fences intended to close off the land, and finally, others admitted their animals to prohibited spaces, objected to doing certain tasks at the sawmill, and, in their majority, ended up going to work at other places (Crespo, 2018).

¹⁵ In other articles, I analysed the itineraries of silences that have left their mark on the región, especially those tied to the Mapuche peoples and the Conquest of the Desert (Crespo, 2017).

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