
Alpine Masculinity: A Gendered Figuration of Capital in the Patagonian Andes

MARCOS MENDOZA

University of Mississippi

This article investigates the Patagonian ecotourism industry and the spatial production of gender privilege. The analysis attends to how the spatial practices of park rangers, tourism guides and climbers create a gendered space of capital accumulation that devalues and marginalises othered subjects – such as women and non-alpine men – within specific domains of nature. Developing the concept of a figuration of capital, this article argues that the ecotourism industry has facilitated the rise of an alpine masculine subject based upon key bodily values: robust physicality, a conservationist ethic and heroic narration about engaging wilderness.

Keywords: Argentina, capitalism, climbing, ecotourism, gender, masculinity.

The ecotourism industry in Andean Patagonia has grown dramatically since the 1990s as a result of increasing integration into the global tourism market. With the decline of geopolitical tensions between Argentina and Chile, a new regionalism has flourished along the primary tourism circuit that connects national parks on both sides of the border (Mendoza et al., 2017). Expanding tourism revenues have recruited growing numbers of new residents to Andean communities, often from outside Patagonia. Business owners have worked with the Argentine and Chilean park administrations to develop commercial tours inside parks and to market destinations with unique place brands. These Andean parks conserve an alpine landscape composed of temperate forests, fjords, towering peaks and massive icecaps. This alpine landscape has become a space of adventurous play for affluent tourists, who engage in trekking, climbing, kayaking, rafting and other activities. Alpine play by tourists, however, has involved a highly gendered division of support services among local residents, the tourism industry and the park administration. The creation of alpine wilderness as a consumer space has involved gendered boundary-making practices that designate certain subjects as those most fit for specific park environments. Indeed, scholars have drawn attention to how ecotourism produces spaces of inequality in various ways, such as reinforcing existing patterns of uneven land distribution (Horton, 2009), fostering class distinctions and hierarchies (Fletcher, 2014) and segregating ethnic groups (Schellhorn, 2010).

This article investigates the ecotourism industry and the spatial production of gender privilege. I argue that Patagonian ecotourism has facilitated the rise of an alpine

masculine subject organised around cultural values defining the body-environment relationship: the displaying of robust physicality to engage with the difficulties and dangers of nature, the creation of heroic narratives about overcoming these tests, and a conservationist ethic that seeks to limit environmental impacts. The supremacy of this masculine subject depends upon processes of spatial marginalisation that devalue the presence of othered subjects – women and non-alpine men – within key domains of nature, especially the Andean backcountry marked by glaciers and mountains. Alpine men have acquired a powerful symbolic position within ecotourism destinations because of their role in fostering capital accumulation through the stewardship of consumption and generating transnational narratives about the region's alpine environments.

Focused on the Argentine ecotourism destination of El Chaltén, the article shows how three key actors – park rangers, guides and climbers – produce a polycentric space of alpine masculine privilege. These actors engage in spatial practices – environmental protection (rangers), wilderness exploration (guides) and climbing heroism (climbers) – that construct the gendered environment sustaining tourism consumption. To understand the articulation between the gendered environment and capital accumulation I develop the concept of a figuration of capital. Alpine men become spatial agents of capital as they produce the inclusive and exclusive consumer spaces integral to the ecotourism market. Following a brief discussion of methods, I position the concept of a figuration of capital in relation to scholarship on ecotourism, gender and capitalism before moving to examine the gendered spatial practices of rangers, guides and climbers.

This paper draws on eighteen months of ethnographic research (between 2006 and 2011) focused on the Argentine ecotourism destination of El Chaltén and the northern section of Los Glaciares National Park (PNLG), which investigated the development of the Patagonian green economy through attention to tourism consumption (mountaineers and trekkers), conservation (park rangers and land managers) and service production (entrepreneurs and seasonal labourers). Ethnographic data regarding rangers, guides and climbers were generated from 65 semi-structured interviews and participant observation. This involved working as a volunteer ranger in PNLG, giving environmental education talks, maintaining trails, patrolling the trail system and participating in search and rescue missions. I also shadowed commercial guides in the park and lived alongside many in hostels and camp sites. Finally, I pursued a strategy of immersive training to acquire the requisite physical techniques to gain entry to the climbing community, albeit as a relative novice. This entailed practising at the indoor climbing gym and on the rock routes (bouldering and sport climbing) surrounding the village, as well as mountaineering in the Chaltén Massif on peaks with the lowest degree of technical difficulty. The data were coded using a 'grounded theory' approach (Bernard, 2011) to formulate inductive categories and themes for qualitative analysis. To protect research subject confidentiality, I have used pseudonyms for individuals and tourism companies unless explicitly requested otherwise.

Ecotourism, Gender and Capitalism

Ecotourism is a mode of nature-based tourism that seeks to promote the welfare of local communities and to conserve the biophysical environment (Honey, 2008). Idealising 'pristine' landscapes and peoples (Brockington, Duffy and Igoe, 2010), ecotourism is a core sector within the alternative tourism industry that encompasses heritage, rural, cultural and adventure tourism (Gentry, 2007). Recognised as an industry shaped

by the logics of post-Fordist capitalism based on specialised, flexible forms of production and consumption (Fletcher, 2014), ecotourism exists in dialectical opposition to mass tourism. The discursive framing of ecotourism by industry producers and tourist consumers depends upon historically changing and geographically differentiated notions of what counts as 'mass' versus 'alternative' markets (Mendoza, forthcoming). In Argentina, mass tourism is associated with metropolitan Buenos Aires and nearby beaches on the Atlantic coast. Alternative ecotourism is spatialised beyond greater Buenos Aires within remote wilderness areas like Andean Patagonia.

There is a growing literature on ecotourism and gender. Scholarship has tended to focus on ecotourism as a development agenda and potential mode of empowerment, drawing attention to the diverse social, cultural, political and economic variables that constrain and enable women's (and to a lesser extent men's) participation in the market and access to benefits (Scheyvens, 2000; Dilly, 2003; Carruyo, 2008; Walter, 2011; Tucker and Boonabaana, 2012; Tran and Walter, 2014). This literature emerges from an understanding of the structural constraints women face: existing gender roles that limit participation, bias in political institutions, exclusion from the formal economy and the double burden of household reproduction coupled with waged labour (Scheyvens, 2000; Stronza, 2005; Gentry, 2007; Horton, 2009). Despite these barriers, scholars have identified how ecotourism has provided women with opportunities to renegotiate gender roles and to access new sources of income, employment, education and power (Dilly, 2003; Pleno, 2006; Tran and Walter, 2014). With a few exceptions (Carruyo, 2008; Tucker and Boonabaana, 2012), little attention has been paid to gendered subjectivities: how concrete actors organise gender positionalities both meaningfully and relationally within uneven fields of value and power.

The literature on gender has remained largely disconnected from scholarship on ecotourism and capitalism. Scholars have long studied ecotourism as a type of green capitalism that reflects the values of affluent consumers who seek authentic engagements with nature (West and Carrier, 2004; Honey, 2008). Ecotourism destinations are constituted by capitalistic processes of service provision, marketing and branding (Duffy, 2002). As states have embraced ecotourism as a development strategy, the industry has reshaped the politics of access to resources, conceptions of the environment and territorial governance (Horton, 2009; Brockington, Duffy and Igoe, 2010; Erazo, 2013). Though often associated with global neoliberalism (Duffy, 2002; Fletcher, 2014), ecotourism has become – in some Latin American countries – a core economic strategy pursued by post-neoliberal governments (Mendoza, forthcoming). This article brings together the scholarship on ecotourism, gender and capitalism to consider how masculinities are integral to consumption and accumulation. How specific male bodies are gendered through cultural values, socially differentiated from other bodies and spatially associated with particular environments becomes crucial to how capital itself is made productive (Coles, 2009).

Ecotourism as a logic of accumulation depends upon a network of bodies. Marx attended to the representational qualities of capitalism, conceptualising capital as both a 'social relation' and a 'thing' (Marx, [1894] 1991: 953). For Marx, capital is a social relation of domination and exploitation, as well as a material representation that has a thing-like existence. This reified capital has many guises: individual capitalists who personify hierarchies of power, factories owned as investments, and money as a medium of circulating capital in different states of metamorphoses. More generally, capital – understood as a thing-like relation – applies to any human or non-human body that becomes a conduit within a network system of accumulation. Scholars have

increasingly recognised the body as a site of capital formation. Harvey (1998) focuses on the labouring body as a relational entity shaped by productive conditions. Guthman and DuPuis (2006) consider how the consumer body becomes a target for new desires that address problems of over-accumulation. Focusing on ecotourism, Fletcher and Neves address how the industry stimulates the consumer body to seek pleasure in wilderness and overcome alienation through re-enchantment; however, these temporary states of ‘pseudocatharsis’ leave consumers wanting more (Fletcher and Neves, 2012: 68–69). Ecotourism becomes an accumulation engine, since the commodity experience is highly valued but ephemeral, provoking future waves of consumption. Building on these perspectives, this article focuses on how alpine male bodies – labourers (rangers and guides) and niche consumers/recreationists (climbers) – are vital conduits for stimulating and governing trekking-based consumption.

Ecotourism distinguishes, elevates and valorises certain bodies over others within its logic of accumulation. Indeed, Marx ([1894] 1991: 966) famously argued that certain conduits of capital are granted special power – that there is a process of value inversion whereby living labour comes to view capital as the source of all value rather than labour itself. Anthropologists have studied capital as a thing-like fetish and animating power, highlighting imagery of the devil on plantations and mines (Taussig, 1980; Gordillo, 2004), spirit possessions in factories (Ong, 2010) and occult forces at work in neoliberal transformations (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999). These studies share a concern for how capital becomes envisioned as a social force that may consume or protect, overwhelm or reproduce, the prevailing conditions of everyday life. In this article, I employ the concept of a figuration of capital to refer to any embodied conduit for accumulation (human or non-human) that becomes symbolically integral to collective narratives about social life. How, then, do ecotourism-based capitalist economies generate their own figurations of capital that privilege certain bodies and reflect concrete relations of domination and exploitation? How might these ecotourism-based figurations differ from the *spectral* figurations that dominate the cultures of capitalism literature?

Alpine masculinity is a gendered figuration of capital within Patagonian ecotourism. Alpine masculinity is the gendered subject that is constituted in relation to othered gender positions (women and non-alpine men), integral to the reproduction of capital and tourism consumption, and accorded great symbolic value as a site of agency and social power. Though in some arenas women have begun to challenge male dominance, alpine men have maintained a near monopoly over Andean wilderness. Controlling this environment has been vital to reproducing spaces of gendered privilege.

The Trekking Capital of Argentina

The Aonikenk Tehuelche people inhabited the Chaltén zone until the late 1800s. Seeking to open Patagonia to white settler colonisation, the Argentine government deployed military violence to subjugate indigenous societies (Gordillo, 2004; Bandieri, 2005). European immigrants began to populate the Chaltén zone and to establish *estancias* (farms) devoted to livestock farming, primarily sheep and cattle. *Estancia* foremen and gauchos – locally referred to as *paisanos* (men of the land) – laboured on farms, which spread across steppe, forest and mountain environments. Though called upon to perform physical labour and to endure the precarity of frontier life, settler women inhabited a domestic space set apart from the ranges where men worked (Madsen,

2000). This agrarian society thus gave rise to an initial gendering of the environment along the lines of a feminine domestic space opposed to masculinised farms, fields and ranges.

Ongoing geopolitical conflict with Chile over Patagonia prompted Argentine politicians to rethink their commitment to agrarian capitalism, which led to low population densities in the borderlands and enduring security issues regarding territorial sovereignty (Bandieri, 2005). Elite conservationists prevailed upon Argentine politicians to establish a protected area system managed by a national park agency. Recognising the Patagonian Andes as Argentina's version of the Swiss Alps, Administración de Parques Nacionales (APN; National Parks Administration) officials sought to transform the borderlands through foreign tourism-led development based on selling an 'alpine' wilderness aesthetic (Mendoza et al., 2017). Since the 1930s, Patagonian parks have been incorporated into the global consumer aesthetic of alpine landscape that includes the Himalayas, the Southern Alps, Peruvian Andes, Canadian Rockies, and the European Alps. The APN created PNLG in 1937, expropriating land from *estancia* owners. Livestock rearing continued to flourish despite the legal reorganisation of property relations. The founding of El Chaltén in 1985 and the advent of the ecotourism industry, however, increasingly devalued agrarian capitalism and marginalised settler families. The APN began to curtail livestock pasturing and to enforce sustainability protocols inside PNLG. With the growth of ecotourism, a permanent and expanding resident base has been established in El Chaltén, and each year hundreds of temporary service workers migrate to the area from major cities in Argentina as well as neighbouring countries.

Ecotourism has refashioned the gendered agrarian environment in Andean Patagonia through the policing, conservation, and commercialisation of parks to satisfy the desires of tourist consumers. The tourist profile of Chaltén has changed greatly over the last few decades. In the 1980s, the only tourists were mountaineers, mostly from Europe and North America. These climbers circulated representations of the Chaltén Massif as a premier place for world-class alpinism (Kearney, 1993). In the 1990s, hundreds and then thousands of European and Argentine backpackers began to discover PNLG. Tourism revenues supported the creation of businesses and seasonal jobs. The user fees charged by the APN in the southern zone of PNLG (near the town of El Calafate) facilitated the expansion of a conservation state charged with policing the park and enforcing sustainability regulations. An increasingly affluent tourist population – primarily from Latin America, Europe, and North America – has travelled to Chaltén. Branded as the 'trekking capital of Argentina' by entrepreneurs and the park service, Chaltén annually attracts tens of thousands of upper middle-class tourists who take day hikes, backpacking trips and commercial tours. The ecotourism industry has reworked the gendered environment based not only on how the tourist gaze envisions Chaltén as a premier space for trekking adventure, but also on how the park administration and tourism industry support and manage these trekking practices.

Park Rangers and the Gendered Environment

Seccional Lago Viedma (SLV) is the ranger station with authority over the northern section of PNLG. With a staff of two dozen rangers, the station polices the park and implements the conservation mandates of the APN. In the early 1990s, there were only two rangers on the staff, one of whom was Marcela Barros. A feminist pioneer,

Marcela successfully lobbied the APN president to admit women to the national ranger school, taking up a position at PNLG following her graduation. She helped establish the ideal of an egalitarian workload within the SLV corps. The expectation was that every ranger – seasonal and permanent – would rotate between jobs. Women and men spent a similar amount of time giving environmental education talks to tourists at the station, patrolling the trail system and doing maintenance work. The growth of ecotourism generated more revenue for the park but also led to bureaucratic specialisation, opening up two sites of gender-segregated labouring: trail conservation and emergency rescues. Within these two nodes, ranger men participate in the construction of alpine masculinity as a subject position – situated in opposition to women and non-alpine men – that redefines the gendered environment. These rangers become embodied conduits for capital as they engage in the first spatial practice fostering ecotourism: conservation work.

In February 2009, a trail crew labours on the Torre Valley path, swinging axes, rolling boulders and filling buckets with small stones. Working on one of the two main hiking trails, the crew consists of three *brigadistas* (seasonal rangers) and a dozen volunteer rangers, mostly from Argentina, but also from Israel, Germany, Canada and the United States. Ernesto De Angelis is the leader of the trail crew and the SLV chief of park maintenance, responsible for keeping the trail system operational, whether this involves repairs, shutting down degraded zones, or constructing new pathways. The trail crew's conservation goal is to counter the proliferation of small paths off the main trail. Discursively framing their activity as mitigating tourist impacts, the crew covers the paths with fallen trees and builds a well-marked main corridor that channels hikers. This concentrates the damage and allows the adjacent soils and vegetation to recover.

The crew labours to produce a wilderness that mirrors the expectations of the tourist gaze. Rangers have spent years replacing or restoring the trails that gauchos created 'spontaneously' – as Marcela phrased it – over decades of pasturing livestock inside the park. As Ernesto remarked, trail work has involved the construction of one-metre-wide paths that are 'built for comfort' and eliminate the rocky, steep patches that are difficult for elderly and inexperienced trekkers. Rangers have also extracted or minimised overt signs of lasting human impacts – such as barbed-wire fences and the presence of livestock – that contradict the tourist imagination of pristine wilderness. The creation of an efficient trail system has facilitated the expanding circulation of tourist bodies and greater revenue for the industry.

There is a gendered division to trail conservation. Ernesto explicitly identifies 'men's jobs' and 'women's jobs'. He associates men's work with using large, heavy tools (Pulaskis and rock bars) and the moving of boulders. Women's work is identified with lighter instruments (shovels and buckets) and carrying 'filler material' like small stones, sand and wood. Rangers and volunteers raise few objections to this organisational logic, working in gender-exclusive twos or threes throughout the day. The crew successfully rebuilds hundreds of metres of trail over one month, labouring from nine to five in the intense sunlight and enduring the usual irritations of pulled muscles, abrasions and blisters. The manual labour ranges from 'difficult' to 'brutal' – as one volunteer described it – for everyone involved. Each season, Ernesto selects a core group of 'trusted men'. Men who do not perform to his standards face reassignment to working alongside the women. Trail work is thus a domain for the creation of an alpine masculine subject based on robust muscular labour by trusted men who are differentiated from othered subjects viewed as less physically capable. Bodies are divided into three categories:

alpine men, women and other men who lack bodily strength and fitness. The latter category is defined by the absence of specific bodily qualities; such actors are marked by negation as *non*-alpine men.

The emergency rescue is another domain of gender-segregated labouring. Jorge Piazzolla is the leader of the seasonal rangers known as *brigadistas*. Every season, *brigadistas* engage in various rescue operations to deal with visitor injuries and fatalities. An emergency rescue is often a multi-party affair. Rangers work with gendarmes, police and a civilian search and rescue team composed of local climbers and guides. This team is an almost exclusively male domain of action. During these operations, Jorge divides ranger men and women into the categories of 'field rescuers' and 'communication coordinators'. Female *brigadistas* deal with communication management, taking shifts at the ranger station as they monitor radio messages and brief the SLV director. Male *brigadistas* are the field rescuers. They participate in a large group that is organised into small teams. Teams carry the stretchers and swap round every few minutes.

In February 2009, Ernesto receives a radio call from Jorge requesting a group of *brigadistas* and volunteers to assist a rescue in progress. Ernesto sends three *brigadistas* and one volunteer – all 'trusted men' – to the rescue site to help an injured woman and her family. During this tourism season, rangers engage in over a dozen rescues. Some are minor injuries along frontcountry trails, but a few are severe and/or fatal accidents in remote parts of the park. The rangers drop their tools and run up the trail to the location of the stretcher, adding to the handful of mountaineers and guides who have spontaneously joined the rescue. Rangers sweat and strain alongside others, carrying the grateful woman out of the park. Her husband and relatives continue to thank the group as the rescuers move her efficiently over the well maintained trail. Eventually, a team of gendarmes comes running up the trail and adds its labour to the effort. The rangers working for Ernesto peel off from the rescue and hike back to the trail crew where they resume their conservation efforts. Unlike trail restoration, the rescue connects rangers to other social groups, creating a theatre of alpine masculinity that bridges the gap between conservation and public security, while generating heroic narratives about injuries and life-and-death situations in which rescuers intervene. Rescue performances produce instances of pastoral care in which strong, healthy men tend to injured women and men. As the tourism market has expanded, rangers have begun employing more *brigadistas* not only to help engineer more comfortable trails, but also to deal with the growing number of accidents.

In short, conservation is one node in which alpine masculinity has emerged as a gendered subject organised relationally in opposition to women and non-alpine men through performances of environmental care, robust physicality and heroic narration. Conservation helps redefine the gendered environment arising from livestock farming that excluded women from the park's forested and mountainous zones. Women are now incorporated into the social life of nature, but a different line of exclusion is raised between a 'safe' frontcountry and a 'dangerous' backcountry. This highlights a first aspect of a gendered figuration of capital: the establishment of a privileged subject position defined through spaces of normative exclusion that contribute to accumulation. Through trail work and rescues, male alpine bodies are made and play key roles in producing park infrastructure, keeping tourists safe, and protecting nature, thereby advancing capital formation tied to exploiting tourist desires for wilderness. Rangers become conduits of capital as embodied representatives of the conservation work that produces consumer spaces.

Commercial Guiding and Masculine Advantage

Guiding is the second field of spatial practice in which alpine masculinity is produced. Like rangers, guides are spatial conduits of capital; but instead of a conservation focus, guides produce spaces of wilderness exploration and become embodied icons of the consumer narratives sold by the tourism industry. Clients do not just pay for outdoor experiences. They pay for guide-curated excursions marked by personalised care and attention. Granted higher pay with respect to other workers, guides enjoy a position of gender privilege that contributes to socioeconomic advantages over women and non-alpine men.

The commercial guiding sector consists of over a dozen companies that employ hundreds of head guides, assistant guides and porters. Most workers are *en negro* (informal) employees paid in cash. Workers have collectively agreed to only accept the 'list prices' circulated by the inchoate guiding union at the beginning of the season, though there are always rumours of individuals accepting less. Unlike the relative gender parity in staffing among rangers, the guiding sector is an androcentric domain. Well over 90 percent of the guides, assistants and porters (hereafter 'guides' for short) are young men (18–35 years old), mostly Argentine, who migrate to El Chaltén for the tourism season that lasts from October to April. Many ecotourism scholars have identified guiding as an overwhelmingly male-dominated industry (Carruyo, 2008; Horton, 2009; Schellhorn, 2010). Nevertheless, there are women in guiding and their experiences help highlight the industry's gendered constraints and opportunities.

There are a variety of tour options available to visitors in Chaltén. On day hikes, guides lead clients through the park to see the two main destinations: Monte Fitz Roy and Cerro Torre. These hikes take a full day and are upwards of 15–20 km of hiking. Beyond the official trail system is the glaciated backcountry. Off limits to everyone except those with mountaineering expertise, two glaciers – Viedma and Grande – are the focal points for commoditisation by the guiding industry. While Viedma is accessed by boat, Grande involves a three-hour hike and a *tirolesa* (Tyrolean traverse) to arrive at the glacier. A *tirolesa* involves clients clipping their climbing harnesses to a cable that spans a river. The clients hang supine and pull themselves across. Finally, there are multiday backpacking trips that range from hiking through the trail system to a week-long expedition onto the Southern Patagonian Icefield. Though staffed almost entirely by men, the guiding industry normatively constructs the Patagonian wilderness as a gender-inclusive landscape for tourists, using mixed-gender imagery on company signage, brochures, advertisements, and websites. Vendors have mobilised 'fitness level' and desire for 'risk taking' as the organising logics for selecting particular tours. Boating tours are the key options for those of 'moderate fitness' and a 'low desire for risk taking'. Ice trekking and ice climbing tours are opportunities marketed for those of 'medium fitness' and a 'medium desire for risk taking'. The backpacking excursion on the Icefield is the 'highest level' for customers interested in wilderness adventure. The structuring of consumption in terms of fitness and risk appetite has created a differentiated play space for tourists.

Irena Moretti assembles the trio of clients taking her ice-climbing class in December 2008. Besides me, there is a young British couple: Esther and David. The couple have paid hundreds of American dollars for an hour of instruction. As a park volunteer, I received a free excursion from Patagonia Salvaje, the concessionary with a monopoly on the Viedma Glacier tours. An hour earlier, scores of tourists had filed onto a sleek catamaran that motored across Lake Viedma and docked alongside Viedma Glacier. Apart from the three climbers, the rest of the group donned crampons and began to move into the inner corridors of the glacier, exploring the sublime landscape under the

watchful gaze of the guides. The line of trekkers trudged by us with huge smiles on their faces, taking pictures and getting a feel for the novelty of wearing crampons.

David and Esther put on their helmets, harnesses and crampons. Irena leads our group into a ten-metre deep crevasse. She returns to the surface of the glacier and drills two ice screws on the lip to set an anchor point for the rope. Then she abseils to the bottom of the crevasse, where she begins a brief tutorial on ice climbing. Irena ties one end of the rope to the client and secures the other to her harness, putting us 'on belay' to protect us from a fall. David, Esther and I take turns climbing up the approximately 85–90° route, enjoying the kinaesthetic novelty of kicking the front spikes of our crampons into the ice and swinging our ice axes hard enough to gain purchase. Like the other tourists on Viedma Glacier, Esther and David delight in the aesthetic pleasures of backcountry wilderness under the pastoral care of the head guide. Interacting with tourists, guides like Irena work to put into practice the commercial slogan that the guiding company, Patagonia Salvaje, uses to market their tours: 'A Day that Lasts a Lifetime'.

Irena's work as a mountain guide places her in an elite category in the guiding sector. There are a series of divisions operating within Chaltén's ecotourism industry. First, there is a divide between urban-based services (restaurants, retail stores, hostels, etc.) and the park-based guiding sector. The urban services sector is mixed gender, while guiding is overwhelmingly male, as well as the best-paid sector. There is also a division between 'skilled' and 'unskilled' labour. Skilled labour involves technical training, a university qualification and/or foreign language fluency. In the guiding sector, porters are unskilled labourers insofar as they carry gear and food for clients, as well as not being expected to interact with tourists. Head guides are paid as skilled labourers because of their English-language competency and technical credentials as 'tourism', 'trekking' or 'mountain' guides, which represent ascending orders of expertise and legal authorisation to lead the most difficult tours.

Irena is one of the very few women to work as a head mountain guide. From the Andean city of Bariloche, Irena has spent years working her way up the guiding hierarchy and dealing with the overt and covert sexism that defines manual labouring – whether skilled or unskilled – as a masculine activity in Argentina. She has established a stellar record as a top climber with the capacity to tackle the most difficult peaks in the Chaltén Massif. Her ability to compete successfully with men in the mountains has translated into industry confidence in her ability to lead the ice climbing tour. Irena's case is unique insofar as she stands as a female exception to the rule of men over the guiding world. Irena has continued to work on her body – its musculature, tone, and gymnastic competencies – over many years to gain the mountaineering expertise that is monetarily rewarded in the guiding sector. She has worked to challenge alpine masculinity and the normative exclusion of women from the Andean backcountry.

Guides have acquired a public visibility not granted to other seasonal workers. Guides perform key roles for the commercial guiding sector, becoming the most public representatives of the consumer narratives selling alpine wilderness exploration. The communicative competencies of guides are crucial, as they create imagined worlds of wilderness adventure by interweaving the tour experience with a wider set of narratives about the Patagonian Andes. For Esther and David, Irena became a charismatic source of fascination through her attempt to create an intersubjective world defined around tourist fantasy, telling stories about climbing in the Chaltén Massif and her struggles on different ascents. For the vast majority of tourists visiting Chaltén, guides are their most significant resident interlocutors, fashioning narratives about the history of Patagonian exploration and the life-and-death circumstances surrounding alpinism. Guides also educate clients

about the ecology of the park and extend the conservation regulations developed by the park service. There is a politics of embodied visibility at work. Guides (and rangers) become the key actors associated with tourist security, pleasure and enchantment; other local workers – servers, cooks and domestic workers – are devalued as nameless support staff.

In sum, the guiding sector establishes a second node of gender privilege through physical labour, heroic narration, and environmental stewardship. The guiding industry works to perpetuate alpine masculinity, though not without challenge from a small cadre of women like Irena. Guides keep tourists safe, communicate and construct fantasy worlds, and embody the consumer narratives of wilderness adventure sold by the industry. In this way guides become conduits for accumulation. Moreover, the guiding industry offers the best paying jobs in Chaltén's seasonal labour market. The predominantly male world of guiding represents an 'aristocracy of labour' that translates into socioeconomic advantage over woman and non-alpine men who work in town rather than the park. This highlights a second aspect of a gendered figuration of capital: the contribution of gender privilege to the reproduction of social relations of exploitation and domination. Guides enjoy public visibility and higher wages relative to many other workers. Nevertheless, guides are also subordinated to the demands of profit-seeking business owners – most guides, after all, are informal employees stripped of the social benefits associated with formal work in Argentina. By contrast, rangers enjoy formal, unionised employment conditions. This indicates that alpine masculinity stretches across the lines of division between the formal and informal economies, as well as the state and market spheres.

Climbing and the Masculine Vertical Environment

Many rangers and guides are not just waged labourers working for the park administration or for tourism companies, but also recreational climbers. 'Climbing' (*escalada*) refers to three distinct types of activities: bouldering on large stones and rock walls that are close to the ground; sport climbing on the canyon walls that surround El Chaltén; and alpinism in the Chaltén Massif. This leisure pursuit by Chaltén residents intersects with the rarefied world of mountaineering tourism. Each year, 200–300 mountaineers travel to El Chaltén for weeks if not months. Though tourists, mountaineers identify as '*escaladores*' (climbers) to distinguish themselves from the trekker masses, a terminological distinction maintained by residents. These three types of climbing represent a space of social interaction that links rangers, guides and mountaineers around a shared commitment to *escalada* and the inculcation of alpine male values. Climbing is the third field of spatial practice that shapes tourism consumption: the performance of climbing heroism. Rangers, guides and mountaineering tourists become spatial agents of capital as they produce vanguard or exclusive spaces of consumption. Instead of the inclusive tours and glaciated spaces available to anyone with the means, the Andes are set aside as a privileged domain for mountaineering tourism and recreation. Climbers identify the Andean vertical environment as a monumental space of honour, heroism and sacrifice divorced from the quotidian domains below for horizontally mobile trekkers. As they compete for first ascents in the Andes, climbers achieve fame and the right to name routes, generating narratives that situate the transnational value of Chaltén.

Climbers have appropriated the peri-urban environment surrounding El Chaltén. Though climbing is a male-dominated pursuit, there are important differences between

the three types. Bouldering involves climbing, often laterally, on large boulders or low-hanging walls. There is a very lively bouldering scene that includes climbers of varying degrees of training and dedication. This scene is the most gender-equitable zone of climbing, with a significant number of young women. The costs of entry to bouldering are low; the only expense is a pair of climbing shoes. Also, there are many beginner and intermediate routes for residents to refine their technique, or simply to socialise with peers, listening to music, drinking yerba mate, and smoking marijuana. Chaltén has a vibrant counterculture of which climbing has become a key symbol. Far more gender-segregated is sport climbing. Sport climbing takes place on the canyon walls (50–100 metres high) that surround the village. Climbers ascend in teams (two or three members), with the lead climber moving vertically up the rock face and clipping the rope into a set of metal bolts that have been drilled into the wall for protection. The costs of entry are higher. Climbers must purchase ropes, harnesses, helmets and other protective devices. A basic package of gear may cost a beginning climber 400–500 US dollars. Rangers and guides develop their rock-climbing skills in the relatively safe environment that surrounds the town. For many, the goal is to go mountaineering in the Chaltén Massif. Seasoned alpinists act as gatekeepers for aspiring climbers, helping them train and improve their technique, but also judging when they are ready for the Andes.

Mountaineering is the apex of the climbing hierarchy and the social domain most associated with alpine masculinity. Relatively young (18–35 years old) alpinists often group into small teams (two or three members) that make light, fast and self-contained ascents up rock, snow and ice routes. Andean routes often involve hundreds if not thousands of metres of elevation gain that require a day or multiple days to complete. As an elite range within global alpinism, the Chaltén Massif is a key space for acquiring fame and the possibility of becoming an athlete sponsored by companies like Patagonia, Inc., The North Face, or Mammüt. Women comprise less than 10 percent of the mountaineering population, mirroring the gender inequity that exists in the guiding industry. Women struggle against gender barriers in alpinism, facing sexism, scepticism about their abilities, and paternalistic attitudes that deny their very presence in the Andes (Gómez, 2010). Alpinist culture rhetorically embraces an egalitarian ethos that rejects gender, racial, class, national or age exclusions. In practice, however, Patagonian alpinism involves mostly young white men from Argentina and countries in the global north. A key aspect of the cosmopolitan ideology that defines mountaineering is the embracing of ‘clean climbing’ ethics. Developed in the Yosemite Valley in the 1960s and 1970s (Chouinard, 2006), the global discourse of ‘clean climbing’ has come to mean the rejection of tools and protective devices that alter the natural conditions of rock faces. Alpinists view the Andes as a vanishing resource to be conserved, forgoing the technologies and tactics that might create irreversible environmental impacts.

Alpine masculinity has become spatially reified within the Patagonian Andes. The toponymy of the Chaltén zone and the Southern Patagonian Andes celebrates a history of masculine exploration. The principal mountain in the area, ‘Fitz Roy’, bears the name of Captain Robert FitzRoy who led the Beagle expedition that brought Charles Darwin to Patagonia. Argentine cartographers, German glaciologists, and Italian priests explored the Chaltén zone beginning in the late nineteenth century, surveying, climbing and naming key landmarks. Beginning in the early twentieth century, mountaineering expeditions created an increasingly differentiated vertical topography (Kearney, 1993). Each route had its own history of ascents, near misses and fatalities, as well as a wealth of environmental knowledge about the gear, tactics and strategies needed to overcome

its difficulties and dangers. The vertical topography reflected the masculinist legacy of exploration, granting naming rights according to the rule of the first ascender. Andean toponymy commemorated explorers and climbers – FitzRoy, Poincenot, Standhardt, Saint-Exupéry – who have become part of the spatial lexicon for local residents.

This vertical topography intersects with historical consciousness and heroic narration about Andean climbing. There are stories about perilous ascents on the two major peaks – Monte Fitz Roy and Cerro Torre – that most rangers, guides and climbers know and enjoy retelling. Stories about death are a common subgenre since these narratives are instructive to climbers, teaching them about mountaineering risks. For example, Rolando Garibotti reflected on the death of Horacio Bresba, discussing the wet storm that soaked Horacio and his climbing partner Victor on Fitz Roy. Horacio slipped as he was abseiling down the Franco-Argentino route, and then went hypothermic. The question was what should his partner have done? Should he have carried an unconscious Horacio down the mountain? Or should he have descended alone?

Victor left Horacio and thought that he was going to get help for him, and tried to come down here [to El Chaltén] and organise a rescue [...] I don't know if Victor would have been able to put Horacio on his back and rappel down six or seven times to the glacier, and then drag him down [...] Coming down under normal conditions, Horacio was at least three hours [above the advanced base camp of Paso Superior]. Three hours carrying someone who is fucked up means nine hours. (R. Garibotti interview, 18 October 2009)

Though some climbers condemned Victor for leaving Horacio and descending for help, Rolando's point was that it probably would not have made any difference. Victor had no way of warming Horacio's comatose body. Victor might well have died if he had tried to abseil down the mountain with an unconscious partner, and then drag him down a crevasse-covered glacier. Rolando's retelling of this story speaks to the themes of honour, heroism and sacrifice that inform alpine masculinity in the Andes. Much like signposts, these instructive narratives are embedded in vertical space and public memory as reminders of mountaineering perils.

Climbers construct transnational narratives that situate Chaltén's spatial identity in ways that foreground the agency of certain subjects. Though branded the 'trekking capital of Argentina', El Chaltén is equally associated with mountaineering. Indeed, El Chaltén has a unique status in Patagonia as one of two elite testing grounds for world-class mountaineering; the other is Chile's Torres del Paine National Park. By competing for first ascents, climbers angle to inscribe their names into the annals of global mountaineering as history-making individuals. Certainly this is a very rarefied kind of 'world historical' practice, but an important one in configuring Chaltén as a place with transnational value. There is a politics of visibility mirroring that which occurs in guiding and conservation. The act of naming heroic first ascenders is vital to the 'new mythographies' (Appadurai, 1996: 6) being constructed about Patagonian ecotourism destinations. In Chaltén, residents and tourists do not create transnational narratives about the capitalist class of business owners. Instead, they lionise climbers as icons of Andean masculine heroism. Indeed, the Andes are a spatial domain inaccessible to trekking tourists. This act of segregation is integral to their fetish-like quality for tourists, who clamour to get as close as possible on their tours: taking photos, trekking independently to the edge of the backcountry, touring parts of the glaciated backcountry under the watchful gaze of alpine men, but never breaching the imagined boundary

that walls off the Andes – as a dangerous, mythic and history-making domain of value for transnational actors – from mere transnational travellers. Transnational agency is reserved, it seems, solely for the alpine men who are named and celebrated by local residents and within global mountaineering.

This highlights a third aspect of a gendered figuration of capital: the congealment of gendered values within a fetishised environment. Alpine men have established a near monopoly over the exclusive vertical space of consumption and recreation associated with climbing. To return to an earlier point, for Marx ([1894] 1991) the social power of capital rests not simply with its ability to exploit the surplus value of labour, but also its representational value and objectification within a set of material entities, prosaic or elevated. Rather than a social force seen as spectral, threatening or cannibalistic (Taussig, 1980; Gordillo, 2004), alpine masculinity – as a gendered figuration of capital – is eminently valued and celebrated in this social world. It is culturally constructed not only through the everyday actions of rangers and guides who facilitate and regulate tourism consumption, but also through the heroic agency of climbers who situate Chaltén's spatial identity within the global tourism industry.

Conclusion

This article has examined ecotourism and the spatial production of gender privilege in Andean Patagonia. Focusing on El Chaltén and Los Glaciares National Park, I have argued that ecotourism has facilitated the rise of an alpine masculine subject that involves a particular set of actors – rangers, guides and climbers – and bodily values: the displaying of robust physicality, the creation of heroic narratives about overcoming the dangers and difficulties of nature, and a conservationist ethos that seeks to limit environmental impacts. Alpine masculinity is relationally constituted in tension with women and non-alpine men, while situated in a concrete political economy of power and socioeconomic opportunity. Alpine men engage in spatial practices – conservation (rangers), wilderness exploration (guides) and climbing heroism (climbers) – productive of a gendered environment tailored to controlling and fomenting trekking consumption and accumulation. Though alpine men have established a position of control over key sectors of the ecotourism industry and specific domains of Andean nature, women have begun to challenge this regime of 'dominant masculinity' (Coles, 2009), inviting future avenues of possible research.

This article has contributed to scholarship on ecotourism, gender and capitalism by highlighting how significant masculine subjectivities are to the networks of gendered bodies mobilised within ecotourism-centred logics of accumulation. Developing the concept of a figuration of capital, I have underscored how ecotourism-based capitalist economies privilege certain bodies (human or non-human) that become conduits of capital, reflect relations of domination and exploitation, and are central to collective narratives of social life. Different ecotourism markets will 'figure' capital in distinct ways, privileging specific human (alpine men, indigenous women, etc.) or non-human bodies (elephants, quetzals, rhinos, gators, etc.) situated in fetishised environments (glaciers, mountains, coral reefs, etc.). It is quite likely that many ecotourism sites depend upon configuring multiple bodies simultaneously, though in ways structured by capitalist processes of marketing, advertising and branding that consolidate a competitive position within the global (eco)tourism market. Ultimately, though, this analysis demonstrates the value of attending to how embodied subject positions (gender, age, class, sexuality,

race, ethnicity, etc.) are taken up and figured within cultures of capitalism, generating not only powerful spectral forces but also heroic enchantments.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank E. Dürr, S. Walther, J. M. Thomas, A. McDowell, C. Passidomo, and S. Delerme for providing incisive feedback on earlier drafts.

References

- Appadurai, A. (1996) *Modernity at Large: The Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis.
- Bandieri, S. (2005) *Historia de la Patagonia*. Editorial Sudamericana: Buenos Aires.
- Bernard, H. R. (2011) *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. AltaMira Press: Lanham.
- Brockington, D., Duffy, R. and Igoe, J. (2010) *Nature Unbound: Conservation, Capitalism and the Future of Protected Areas*. Earthscan: London.
- Carruyo, L. (2008) *Producing Knowledge, Protecting Forests: Rural Encounters with Gender, Ecotourism, and International Aid in the Dominican Republic*. Pennsylvania State University Press: University Park.
- Chouinard, Y. (2006) *Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman*. Penguin Books: New York.
- Coles, T. (2009) 'Negotiating the Field of Masculinity: The Production and Reproduction of Multiple Dominant Masculinities'. *Men and Masculinities* 12(1): 30–44.
- Comaroff, J. and Comaroff, J. L. (1999) 'Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony'. *American Ethnologist* 26(2): 279–303.
- Dilly, B. J. (2003) 'Gender, Culture, and Ecotourism: Development Policies and Practices in the Guyanese Rain Forest'. *Women's Studies Quarterly* 31(3/4): 58–75.
- Duffy, R. (2002) *A Trip Too Far: Ecotourism, Politics and Exploitation*. Earthscan: London.
- Erazo, J. (2013) *Governing Indigenous Territories: Enacting Sovereignty in the Ecuadorian Amazon*. Duke University Press: Durham.
- Fletcher, R. (2014) *Romancing the Wild: Cultural Dimensions of Ecotourism*. Duke University Press: Durham.
- Fletcher, R. and Neves, K. (2012) 'Contradictions in Tourism: The Promise and Pitfalls of Ecotourism as a Manifold Capitalist Fix'. *Environment and Society: Advances in Research* 3: 60–77.
- Gentry, K. M. (2007) 'Belizean Women and Tourism Work: Opportunity or Impediment?'. *Annals of Tourism Research* 34(2): 477–496.
- Gómez, M. (2010) 'Chicas en el Fitz Roy'. *Vertical Argentina* 7: 24–27.
- Gordillo, G. (2004) *Landscapes of Devils: Tensions of Place and Memory in the Argentinean Chaco*. Duke University Press: Durham.
- Guthman, J. and DuPuis, M. (2006) 'Embodying Neoliberalism: Economy, Culture, and the Politics of Fat'. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24(3): 427–448.
- Harvey, D. (1998) 'The Body as an Accumulation Strategy'. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 16(4): 401–421.
- Honey, M. (2008) *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who Owns Paradise?* Island Press: Washington.
- Horton, L. R. (2009) 'Buying Up Nature: Economic and Social Impacts of Costa Rica's Ecotourism Boom'. *Latin American Perspectives* 36(3): 93–107.
- Kearney, A. (1993) *Mountaineering in Patagonia*. Cloudcap: Seattle.

A Gendered Figuration of Capital in the Patagonian Andes

- Madsen, A. (2000) *La Patagonia vieja: relatos en el Fitz Roy 1948*. Zagier and Urruty: Buenos Aires.
- Marx, K. ([1894] 1991) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 3. Penguin Books: London.
- Mendoza, M. (forthcoming) *The Patagonian Sublime: The Green Economy and Post-Neoliberal Politics*. Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick.
- Mendoza, M. et al. (2017) 'The Patagonian Imaginary: Natural Resources and Global Capitalism at the Far End of the World'. *Journal of Latin American Geography* 16(2): 93–116.
- Ong, A. (2010) *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia*. State University of New York Press: Albany.
- Pleno, M. J. L. (2006) 'Ecotourism Projects and Women's Empowerment: A Case Study in the Province of Bohol, Philippines'. *Forum of International Development Studies* 32: 137–155.
- Schellhorn, M. (2010) 'Development for Whom? Social Justice and the Business of Ecotourism'. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 18(1): 115–135.
- Scheyvens, R. (2000) 'Promoting Women's Empowerment through Involvement in Ecotourism'. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 8(3): 232–249.
- Stronza, A. (2005) 'Hosts and Hosts: The Anthropology of Community-based Ecotourism in the Peruvian Amazon'. *Annals of Anthropological Practice* 23(1): 170–190.
- Taussig, M. (1980) *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*. University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill.
- Tran, L. and Walter, P. (2014) 'Ecotourism, Gender and Development in Northern Vietnam'. *Annals of Tourism Research* 44: 116–130.
- Tucker, H. and Boonabaana, B. (2012) 'A Critical Analysis of Tourism, Gender and Poverty Reduction'. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 20(3): 437–455.
- Walter, P. (2011) 'Gender Analysis in Community-based Ecotourism'. *Tourism Recreation Research* 36(2): 159–168.
- West, P. and Carrier, J. G. (2004) 'Ecotourism and Authenticity: Getting Away from It All?'. *Current Anthropology* 45(4): 483–498.