Narratives About the Past and Cognitive Polyphasia: Remembering the Argentine Conquest of the Desert

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The Conquest of the Desert was a military campaign waged by the Argentine government against the indigenous population during the late 19th century. This period of national organization and territorial expansion involved the extermination of the native populations, with thousands being killed or sold to wealthy landowners. This article reports the findings from an ethnographic study conducted in a city founded by the military forces during this period, where nowadays descendants of the military men and the European immigrants live alongside the descendants of the original inhabitants. In observations of the symbolic resources of the city and in interviews and discussions with descendants of European and military men, we identified 2 distinct narratives about this historical process: a traditional account concerning the peaceful coexistence of colonizers and indigenous groups, and a revisionist account that emphasizes the genocide of indigenous groups and the looting of their lands by the Argentine military. We consider the juxtaposition of these 2 narratives as an expression of a state of cognitive polyphasia that allows Argentine people to espouse a "politically correct" version of the past while, at the same time, denying the conflict between colonizers and indigenous groups. We submit that this juxtaposition serves to make it possible for them to cope with the collective guilt that arises in relation to their ancestors' behavior, while at the same time delegitimizing ongoing indigenous claims about past injustices and the need for historical reparation.

Keywords: narratives, history, cognitive polyphasia, collective guilt, intergroup conflict

Between the years 1874 and 1885, during a period of territorial expansion and national organization, the Argentine government carried out a military campaign (the Conquest of the Desert) into territory inhabited by various indigenous groups. This campaign involved the appropriation of territories so extensive that they constitute more than half of the territory of today's Argentine Republic. During this campaign, thousands of indigenous persons were killed or sold to wealthy new landowners; those who survived were forced to assimilate into the dominant culture and become invisible as a cultural group.

It was only 100 years later, in the 1980s, that indigenous groups in Argentina began achieving some appreciation in terms of their group rights,[1] even though they still live largely in the midst of poverty, discrimination, and sociopolitical exclusion.

Indeed, the history of the Conquest of the Desert has been largely known and thought of in terms of a hegemonic narrative, implied still now in numerous symbolic resources (Zittoun, Duveen, Gillespie, Ivinson, & Psaltis, 2003), such as national monuments, school textbooks, and street names, which represent the Argentine military as being an important force responsible for creating and organizing the new nation and for overpowering and defeating the uncivilized and violent indigenous tribes that constantly attacked the southern frontier of Buenos Aires.

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[1] As a result of indigenous groups' demands, the Argentine National Constitution, amended in 1994 (Art. 75, inc. 17), offers recognition to their ethnic and cultural preexistence and guarantees respect for their identity, their right to a bilingual education, and the communitarian property of the lands they had historically inhabited.

It was in the context of the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the "Discovery of America" in the early 1990s (Carretero & Kriger, 2011) that the mistreatment of indigenous groups first became a focus of serious controversy all over Latin America. And in Argentina specifically, the advent of a democratically elected government in 1983, after decades of military governments that consistently repressed any sort of popular demands, made it possible for indigenous groups to acquire some measure of political visibility. Historians and anthropologists began challenging the traditional hegemonic narrative, giving rise to a more critical narrative that emphasizes the massacre, torture, and looting carried out by the Argentine military against the indigenous groups. This shift, in turn, brought about the questioning of a fundamental part of the historical account of the "glorious origins" of Argentina and its national identity.

Any accounts of the past implicate a political dimension, in that they can negate or legitimize the historical basis of claims for reparation for past injustices. Moreover, historical negation increases opposition among groups, because history is one of the sources to legitimize the current claims, providing them with temporal continuity (Sibley, Liu, Duckitt, & Khan, 2008). The intervention of historical narratives in current intergroup relations and their role in creating individuals' identity have been studied from different theoretical and methodological perspectives, such as social identity and self-categorization theory (Postmes & Branscombe, 2010), social representations theory (Sibley et al., 2008), cultural psychology (Carretero, 2011; Hammack, 2008), and conceptual change theory (Carretero, Castorina, & Levinas, 2013). Despite the differences among them, research from these varied perspectives has yielded convergent empirical evidence suggesting that the past is collectively remembered in ways that contribute to shaping a national identity of which people can be proud. However, social groups in general, and nations in particular, sometimes have to grapple with a negative aspect of their history, especially if their ancestors committed some collective actions in the past that are morally questionable in the present, such as the killings and looting carried out or supported by the Argentine government during the Conquest of the Desert. Belonging to a national group tends to evoke emotional responses about the actions of members of one's group, even when the individuals in the present bear no personal responsibility for actions performed decades before (e.g., Doosje & Branscombe, 2003; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). Thus, it makes sense to ask in what ways the descendants of those who carried out the Conquest of the Desert remember and represent this historical process, what strategies they employ to preserve a positive identity in the face of a critical historical narrative that foregrounds evidence of immoral acts carried out by their ancestors, and whether, and if so how, they think of the long-term implications that such historical processes may have had for the indigenous groups that coexist with them today.

Understanding how individuals narrate historical events such as the Conquest of the Desert may thus be of great importance, because such narratives can and have been used to legitimize social inequality and the political exclusion of indigenous groups all over Argentina and, in particular, in the city where we carried out our study.

Appropriation of Historical Master Narratives

Narratives about the past have a fundamental role in the construction of individual identity. The meaning-making process individuals engage in to understand the world and their own existence follows a narrative structure (Wainryb, 2011; Wainryb, Brehl, & Matwin, 2005), and those narratives are anchored in specific social contexts (Hammack, 2008; Wainryb & Recchia, 2015). Moreover, in the process of becoming social actors, individuals appropriate the collective meanings constructed by members of their social/cultural group across history. Therefore, individuals develop their own sense of themselves within the framework of cultural "master narratives" (Alridge, 2006). The psychological process of "appropriation" of a cultural tool, such as a master narrative, refers to its transformation by an agent to make it his or her own (Wertsch, 1998). Thus, narratives about the past are cultural resources that constrain and empower identity formation. In Hammack's (2008) terms, identity can be understood as "ideology cognized thorough the individual engagement with discourse, made manifest in a personal narrative constructed and reconstructed across the life course and scripted in and through social interaction and social discourse" (p. 223).

However, master narratives can be contradictory, because in everyday life one and the same phenomenon may be attributed different or even opposite cultural meanings. Particularly in periods of social transformations, such as the one that Argentine people are currently undergoing in regard to the understanding and meanings of the Conquest of the Desert, the traditional narrative coexists with more challenging versions of the past. Generally, existent cultural representations or narratives are not merely abandoned at once and replaced by new ones but rather are amended. Moreover, it is possible that periods of social change entail the juxtaposition of competing representations embodied in different social discourses, even though these meanings may be incompatible. It is important to understand that those competing meanings are not isolated pieces of knowledge or scattered meanings without relation to one another; rather, they coexist in a process of both tension and exchange (Jovchelovitch, 2008). From this perspective, regardless of whether one narrative of the past is more accurate than another, different narratives must be considered in relation to their function in each group. Moreover, those narratives are implicitly accepted by public opinion as "the objective truth" about a group's history and legitimize political and social arrangements in the present.

At the individual level, people would be able to perceive a contradiction between cultural meanings only if these meanings were expressed simultaneously in their discourse, but this contradiction is not resolved in favor of one or the other or toward a state of consistency. The notion of cognitive polyphasia (Jovchelovitch, 2008; Moscovici, 1961) proposes that these collectively constructed contradictory meanings correspond, at the individual level, to different logics of thought. To consider different logics allows individuals to endorse contradictory beliefs or narratives without feeling uncomfortable. Contrary to classic approaches to developmental psychology, this perspective puts forth that the development of thinking does not merely evolve from a less to a more valid or complex point of view but that different types of thinking can coexist without conflict between them (Barreiro, 2013; Wagner, Duveen, Verma, & Themel, 2000). This inconsis-

tency can be understood if the situated use of cultural meanings is taken into account. Different situational contexts pose different demands, which may be satisfied via different (and sometimes contradictory) discursive forms (Jovchelovitch, 2008).

Specifically regarding historical master narratives, Carretero and Bermudez (2012) pointed out the existence of a number of dimensions in these narratives about the origin of one's nation, produced and supported for mass media and school teaching. One of those dimensions has to do with the moral character of the narratives. In other words, this moral dimension offers fundamental moral examples and directions for possible future actions, because historical master narratives are socially constructed to operate as moral vectors for the actions of individuals. Generally, they present a distinction between "good" and "bad" historical agents or events, where the "good" is associated with the national "we," and the "bad" is related to "they." Then the moral virtues are always on the "we" side (Carretero & Bermudez, 2012). Although the goal of this dimension of historical master narratives is quite obvious, unfortunately its characteristics and functions have not been studied enough from an empirical perspective (Carretero & Bermudez, 2012).

Identity and Collective Guilt About One's Group Past

From a social identity and self-categorization theory perspective (Postmes & Branscombe, 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), rendering unfavorable characteristics of the ingroup more salient could be threatening for individuals' identity. Nevertheless, this perspective has obscured the specificity of cultural meanings in the study of identity development (Hammack, 2008), emphasizing the importance of interindividual processes in the definition of the personal self. From this perspective, the comprehension of social phenomena as historical processes is influenced more by contextual relevance and group comparison than by accuracy or objectivity. Thus, social context can be a source of threats to individuals' identity as well as a source of potential resources to deal with those threats.

There is evidence that negative emotional consequences can lead to a loss of self-esteem, when it becomes apparent that belonging to a specific group implies enjoying some illegitimate privileges historically obtained at the expense of another group (Doosje & Branscombe, 2003). This phenomenon of emerging negative feelings for ingroup behaviors includes the experience of guilt about actions performed in the past, even when there is no direct personal responsibility for the group's negative history (McGarty et al., 2005). Hence, collective guilt refers to group-based feelings that can result from an inconsistency between the moral values or conventional norms accepted by a social group and the behavior of other ingroup members. This feeling usually leads to compensatory behaviors toward the victims of past injustices (Powell, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2005). However, when people feel it is not possible, feasible, or desirable to compensate the victims, they may implement different strategies to avoid the sense of guilt. One is to deny that members of the ingroup did something questionable (Ellemers et al., 2002), but if individuals cannot merely deny that some morally questionable behavior really happened, they will find a way to justify it. In this vein, the attribution loci for explaining the historical process could be different depending on the positive or negative consequences for ingroup members' image. For example, in a study by Doosje and Branscombe (2003), Germans tended to attribute the causes of their own actions during the Holocaust to external factors or to situational elements, such as the general historical context, rather than judge their ingroup behavior in isolation. On the contrary, Jews tended to considered internal or dispositional attributional factors, such as German people's aggressive nature. Another strategy to avoid collective guilt is to perceive the ingroup and the outgroup as relatively heterogeneous, thus blurring the differences between them (Postmes & Branscombe, 2010). This strategy allows individuals to ignore their social categorization in a threatening context, inasmuch as their ingroup is perceived as being constituted by individuals with varied tendencies or inclinations. Another way to blur the differences between groups is by changing the dimensions along which they are compared and emphasizing more general or abstract categories (e.g., Europeans, Argentineans, Indigenous people); typically, changing the level of self-categorization allows for repositioning of social identity (Ellemers et al., 2002).

Juxtaposed and Contradictory Narratives About the Argentine Conquest of the Desert

The aim of our study was to ascertain how the past is remembered and retold by descendants of those military men who participated in the "conquest" and the European immigrants who occupied the conquered lands. Therefore, we carried out an ethnographic study to explore the content and structure of the narratives about the Conquest of the Desert present in the symbolic resources and individual discourses of residents in a town founded by the Argentine military forces during that historical period. In this town (nowadays a small city), located in southern Buenos Aires, the descendants of the founding military and of European immigrants who arrived at the beginning of the 20th century to settle down in the "conquered" lands, live alongside descendants of the Mapuche and the Tehuelche indigenous groups who originally inhabited that territory. As is also the case in the rest of Argentina, during the last three decades, the local indigenous community in this city has started to organize, standing up for its rights and demanding compensatory action and cultural recognition from both the national government and the city residents. Such recognition has been slow to come, however. As is shown in the findings that follow, city residents still claim that "there are no real indigenous people here" or "these folks are not really descendants of the indigenous; they merely disguise themselves as indigenous people to get money from the government."

Method

We conducted observations of daily interactions among different actors in the community. This strategy provided us with useful insights into the collective narratives expressed by different symbolic resources as well as by discourses expressed in daily interactions among the city's inhabitants. Two of us (Alicia Barreiro and Cecilia Wainryb) spent 1 week in the city, during which time we visited the local museum and the city hall, as well as family homes of the city's inhabitants and various public places. Altogether, we collected 39 transcript pages of information corresponding to daily observations as well as 103 photographs.

We also conducted 10 meetings with 30 social actors (e.g., lawyers, politicians, psychologists, historians, doctors, teachers), as well as eight individual interviews (approximately 90

min each) with key informants (e.g., a social scientist, a local historian, a teacher, a former political figure). Although we also conducted interviews with members of the indigenous community, the focus of this article is on the memories and thinking of the members of the group that currently hold the political, economic, and cultural power—that is, the descendants of Europeans and military people.

Results

Narratives Expressed in Collective Symbolic Resources

Analyses of the materials thus collected indicate the existence of contradictory narratives about the past. For example, inside the city hall, framing the entrance to the Office of the Secretary of Culture, there are two busts of the most important local historical figures. On the right side, there is a clearly labeled bust of General Villegas, the military man who founded the city. On the left side, there is a bust representing the indigenous Chief Pincén. However, Pincén's bust is not labeled—indeed, the gypsum column that supports Pincén's bust had previously belonged to the bust of a different Argentine military man. Approximately ten years ago, as the movement for indigenous vindication began, the local authorities decided to replace the bust of the military personality with that of Pincén, but they never replaced the bronze plaque in the gypsum support. Therefore, it is impossible to know with any certainty who the indigenous man being commemorated is.

Another example refers to the names chosen for the city's streets. All the avenues and major arteries have been named to commemorate military figures; the main street is named after General Villegas, the main person in charge of the "conquest" in the region. By comparison, only a few years ago was the name Chief Pincén given to a street in the city: This is a narrow street located in the outskirts of the city, bordering the countryside. Within social groups, the names of streets, plazas, or monuments act as *memorials* (Connerton, 2009) that encapsulate a well-known narrative. They bring the past into the present, placing memory in the context of ordinary settings of human beings (Hebbert, 2005). Moreover, those who name social places or construct symbolic objects (such as monuments) are typically aware of the memories that they want to diffuse or impose. Generally, changes in street names are the result of social or political revolutions that demand that the past be understood in a new light. Thus, in commemorative streets naming, sociopolitical conflicts are actualized in the geographic territory. To give the name *Pincén* to a precarious street in the outskirts of the city may be interpreted as a form of perpetuation of indigenous people's exclusion. The same relation between social prestige and commemoration is expressed by the only neighborhood with the name of an indigenous person: In the opinion of most of our interviewees, that neighborhood is the poorest in the city, with the most significant levels of delinquency and violence.

A third example refers to the naming of the most important local festivity to commemorate the city's founding date. It is important to highlight that the commemoration of the past helps to constitute collective memory by means of participation in shared social practices (Halbwachs, 1925/1992). Thus, participation in the founding festivity involves people's deliberate and conscious awareness of and attempts at understanding the past being commemorated. But it also involves people's less reflexive and less conscious presence and participation in a social *locus*—in this case the city's main square—symbolically reconstructed for the purpose of remembering (Connerton, 2009). In 1996, the name of the festivity commemorating the founding of the city was changed from the National Week of the Conquest of the Desert to the National Week of the Campaigns of the Desert. This change aimed to blur the specific reference to the military conquest and the ensuing massacre and submission of the indigenous population. This change, as well as the changeing of streets' names, could be interpreted in terms of a political intervention aimed at transforming historical collective narratives about the city's founding. Significantly, however, even after the name change, the typical celebrations, which last an entire week, do not include any organized participation of the indigenous community or any references to its members. Several interviewees noted, furthermore, that, 2 years ago, one of the political representatives of the indigenous community was invited for the first time to give a speech during the festivity; because this individual spoke about the indigenous people's claims for restitution of their land, she was heavily criticized in local newspapers and not invited in subsequent years.

We consider that these examples suggest a contradiction in the attempts to vindicate the indigenous past of the city and to protect the collective identity conformed by the appropriation of the traditional narrative about the Conquest of the Desert. On a fairly explicit level, these examples suggest recent attempts at including indigenous characters and culture in the commemoration of the past. However, at a more implicit level, they suggest the political opposition between social groups and the continued derogation of indigenous figures and their culture. In this respect, we suggest that these examples reflect the tension between two narratives of the past—a more recent one, vindicating the figures of the indigenous community and questioning the behavior of the Argentine State in the 19th century, and the older narrative, supporting a positive national identity offering national heroes as models of loyalty and courage—is not entirely given up.

Narratives Expressed in Individuals' Discourses

Our research discerned, consistent with the conflicting meanings expressed in symbolic resources, similarly conflicting meanings in the interviews we conducted among city residents about the Conquest of the Desert and its long-term consequences. As we show below, one narrative speaks about the positive and peaceful relations that existed between the military men and indigenous groups, thereby minimizing the morally questionable actions of the military toward the indigenous people. The other account of that same historical period emphasizes the massacre, the abuses, and the looting suffered by the indigenous groups at the hands of the military. Next we present abbreviated transcripts of individual interviews that serve to illustrate the juxtaposition of both these narratives in the discourse of individual inhabitants of this city. The first transcript is from an interview with a social scientist who works at the local historical museum.[2]

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[2] The precise job and position of key informants is slightly altered in order to preserve confidentiality. The translation from Spanish to English is verbatim and retains the original leapfrogging between past and present tenses.

"The Argentine government offers them [referring to the colonizers] lands, it offers them materials to build their houses, it offers them seeds and tools to cultivate the land, and it offers them protection in the form of a trench and forts. Why wouldn't they want to come? It was all peaceful. Why? Because there were no aboriginal people . . . There was nobody here. . . . Some say that when General Villegas arrived, he found Indians . . . He arrived on April 12, 1876, and the town was founded. . . . Roca [the minister of defense] is the one who orders General Villegas to arrest Pincén. Why? Because up to that time there had been a kind of mutual respect between Pincén and Villegas, they called each other "Bull." Bull Pincén and Bull Villegas. [Approximately one hour later, during a walk through the local museum, while we were looking at pictures depicting Pincén and his family being held captive] "Going back to the aboriginal people, well . . . their families were divided, some of their children were adopted out, women became servants, the husbands were held prisoners . . . they didn't have so many options . . . Because you dig a trench, you isolate them from resources, where would they go to find their food? They don't have water, they can't go to find animals to hunt. They were enclosed. Either you surrender or you die like that. And they became more and more ill. And the Church baptized them, in the name of the church they changed their identity. See her? [points to a woman in a picture] She was with Chief Pincén, and her granddaughter [a local woman living in town], tells of how soldiers used to cut their heels, so they couldn't escape."

If we take into consideration this account of the Conquest of the Desert as a whole, it is difficult to understand in any coherent way the references to the "peaceful take" and "the mutual respect between Chief Pincén and General Villegas" mentioned by the interviewee, together with the evidence of forced capture, enslavement, and torture. Also, the reference to the absence of indigenous people in the region is inconsistent with the reference to Chief Pincén and his people living there. Thus, this interviewee's account of the past suggests a juxtaposition of a narrative about the peaceful foundation of the city and a narrative about violence and abuses committed by the Argentine army against the indigenous people during the same time frame.

We consider this juxtaposition to express a state of cognitive polyphasia (Jovchelovitch, 2008). For this interviewee, the narrative about the glorious foundation of the city may support a sense of social identity; abandoning such a narrative may be threatening to her. Nevertheless, she also knows of the tragic history of the indigenous peoples, so she cannot merely negate these facts either. Thus, both contradictory narratives become expressed alternatively in her discourse, depending on the demands of the context, without establishing a coherent relation between the two. In this way, cognitive polyphasia may operate as a strategy to avoid guilt about her ancestors' actions. Similarly, some of the same features suggestive of contradictory narratives may be identified in the next interview by a local historian whose specific interests lie precisely in the history of the conquest:

In the Conquest of the Desert, the armed conflict was followed by something even worse. They say that after every revolution comes a cultural revolution. They exploited the indigenous people, they forced them to work and in return they gave them permission to have a small shuck next to some pond, they exploited them, they forced them to work, and in return they allowed them to raise a few small animals but they took their lands away. Lands that nobody has ever paid for; they just took their lands away. And nowadays landowners, the descendants, can't even explain how they have acquired those lands. . . . I'm

on the side of the "Indians" . . . My view is that they [referring to the colonizers] could have shared . . . Since there was a need to share, they could have shared little more equally, no? That was a shame. [Latter, referring to the current claims of the local indigenous community] I agree that they should make demands, they should maintain the claim alive and ask for their rights. I doubt they will ever be recognized. That's why, always when I speak with Julio [a local indigenous person] I tell him that they should be working hard on the cultural side of things. They have to preserve. . . . The only solution would be if someone comes and expropriates the lands and gives them back. But Julio always says to me, Julio is a plumber, and he says to me, "if they give me the lands back, I'd sell them, because I don't know how to work the land."

Even though the interview with this individual lasted approximately 2 hours, and even though he explicitly depicted himself as being "on the side of the 'Indians,'" he did not, at any time, mention the more harrowing elements of the Conquest of the Desert, such as the massive killings and torture. He only included in his account of the past the looting of lands and questioned the unfair "sharing." Moreover, even though he referred to the looted lands and stated that "someone must expropriate them and must return them to their rightful owners, he underscored that the crucial task at hand is "to save the indigenous culture," because presumably the indigenous people would merely sell any recovered lands, thereby undermining their actual claims for territorial restitution.

To further our arguments, next we present abbreviated records of some of our meetings with the city's inhabitants. The discursive interactions during these meetings were not audio-recorded to facilitate more spontaneous dialog and encourage people to express their views with less inhibition. Thus, the records presented below are based on our field notes; phrases given with quotation marks are verbatim. The first transcript records the interactions during a dinner with a local upper-middle class family. The couple hosting the dinner were both well-known and respected professionals in the city.

One of the hosts begins the conversation by telling us about the times he was a child at school, and he had a friend in his class whose last name was "Pincén," though he didn't remember his first name or whether he had any relation to the Chief. He did remember, however, that if anyone called him "Indio," the boy would get angry and would beat up whoever called him that. . . . Later in the conversation the same host said that "there were no Mapuches in this town," "Chief Pincén was not from here, he was from Rio Cuarto in Cordoba (a different town in a different province)," "Pincén was the son of an 'Indio' and a white woman, that's why he was so tall." Later on he explained that the soldiers had killed "Indians" during the "Conquest of the Desert," adding "I don't know what would had happened if the Spaniards had not arrived." Later in the conversation, when we asked him what he thought of the ongoing claims of the local indigenous community and why such claims may not have come up at an earlier time, he responded: "I'm sorry, but to be honest, and this is what I really think, they do it for the money." And his wife added: "They can get fellowships now, to send their kids to study in Buenos Aires [the capital city]." And the husband added, "You should do a survey among my friends. You'd see that no one agrees to give lands to these fucking Indians." And the wife commented, in a low voice "I met lots of people who surname was Pincén, that doesn't mean they feel like indigenous people."

In this transcript we identify, once more, one narrative about the past that acknowledges the presence of indigenous people as a

social group and another that negates their identity as such. Note, for example, that one of the meeting participants mentions the presence of indigenous people in the town since his childhood, but also denies their indigenous *identity*—indeed, he claims that they themselves did not feel like "Indians." Note, too, the use of the term *Indians,*[3] which is typically thought of as disparaging when used by people who are not members of the indigenous community. Note also that there is no reference to or allowance for the possibility that, in the past, members of indigenous groups may have hidden (or not proclaimed openly) their indigenous origins precisely because it was considered inferior or humiliating. At the same time, both participants underscore some sense of certainty that indigenous people *today* assert their identity only for the purpose of economic gain, rather than because of a true sense of identification with a culture. We submit that the suggestions that these individuals are not "truly" indigenous people are meant to, or at least tend to, erase or obscure their ties to a cultural group—in effect an outgroup. Such a move may also work to deny or obscure the existence of two distinct groups and a historical conflict between them, thereby implicitly also maintaining a positive image of the ingroup. It also bears mentioning that when the killings that were part of the Conquest of the Desert were mentioned during the meeting, participants attributed them to the Spaniards rather than to the Argentine military forces. This distortion (even if unwitting) could be understood as blurring their own ancestors' responsibility for these events. A related form of moral justification was identified among middle-class university students and can be hypothesized as a rather common feature of Argentine historical narratives. Similarly, in the research by Carretero and Kriger (2011) Argentine university students could not coherently justify why the natives were killed by military forces if they were Argentinean. In this case, surprisingly, the students argued in an ambivalent way that the natives were not aware that they were Argentine.

The next excerpt records the discussions observed during a meeting with members of the Local Council, with eight representatives of the two political parties.

> The meeting began with participants introducing themselves and the political party they represented; in turn we introduced ourselves as social scientists conducting a study of the local indigenous community. Participants thus variously commented on how the vision of history has changed in the last decade. For example, one commented that "There is a change now in how history is told, it's a different history now"; most participants expressed agreement with this statement. A woman, who besides being a member of the Council also introduced herself as a history teacher, commented that she tries to "provide another version of the history to her students." She explained that some years ago town people used to celebrate "the appropriation of indigenous territories in the 'National Festivity of the Campaigns to the Desert'" and speculated that this may have been the reason why, when she was much younger, people might have felt ashamed of being (or being known as) indigenous. She also commented that "but these were really really good people." A few minutes later, as people went around the table making comments, a different participant commented: "My experience is that when you tell someone that you are working with "Indians," everybody tells you: they are going to screw you"; many participants nodded in agreement. She continued: "This entire group, all of these people in the local indigenous community, they just don't work, they are unemployed" –this in spite of the fact that during the entire meeting people variously asserted about specific

members of the indigenous community: "he's a taxi driver"; "she's a teacher"; "he works in construction." Participants added comments such as: "If you lend them something, they won't return it to you"; "They're always asking for something." One of the participants mentioned that during the last mayoral political campaign, one of the candidates (the current mayor) promised to the indigenous community that he would provide them with housing, but (she said) he did this only to win the election and never filled that promise. Another commented that now representatives of the indigenous community come frequently to the City Hall to see him, in an attempt to talk to the mayor, and they "come wearing their 'ponchos' and drinking their 'mate' [a local drink which, coincidentally, everyone at the meeting was drinking]. And they just sit and wait." And another interjects "Have you seen how they come here and sit and wait and wait and wait. Like they can wait for 500 years!" And someone else commented "Yes, and they are making demands about things that happened 500 years ago!"

This meeting was striking because, at the very beginning of the meeting, all of these local politicians (who were representative of different parties along the whole political spectrum) mentioned a "new history" that recognizes the past genocide of indigenous peoples, which had been neglected for almost a century. Nevertheless, literally a few minutes later, when we directly asked the same politicians to discuss the ongoing claims and demands of the local indigenous community, they referred to them as lazy and argued that it makes no sense for them to have such claims and demands in regard to events that happened 500 years ago. No participants in this group articulated any explicit connection between the narrative about the terrible massacre of indigenous people during the 1880s and the ongoing claims of their descendants. Indeed, we think it is meaningful to note that the very reference to events having happened "500 years ago" may act so as to displace the conflict to a time before the creation of the Argentine State (which happened 200 years ago) thus, implicitly, denying the responsibility of both the Argentine nation and people.

Discussion

The data presented in this article strongly suggest the coexistence, within one community and perhaps more significantly within individuals, of two distinct and, indeed, conflictive modes of thinking about the Conquest of the Desert. We have shown that these contradictory meanings are expressed in collective symbolic resources, such as commemorative busts and street names; and we have also shown that these meanings are appropriated by individuals in an effort to make sense of their own history. Contradictory—or at least incoherent—narratives expressed in the discourse of individuals suggest a state of cognitive polyphasia. In this respect it is important to clarify that the perspective we assume in this work emphasizes the *sense* that people make of their history and their experiences. We focus on the truth value that individuals attach to these memories and tellings; we do not consider—for it is irrelevant in the context of this

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[3] Although *Indian* is not the acceptable term to refer to indigenous people, because it builds on the mistaken assumption of the first Spaniards colonizing the area (i.e., that they had arrived in India) and denies their true identity, we did observe that members of the local indigenous community often use this term colloquially to refer to themselves without considering it offensive. It is, however, typically considered offensive or derogatory when used by nonindigenous people.

work—whether a certain narrative is a more or less accurate version of the past. And yet, from a historiographical perspective, there exists a broad consensus about the need to revise the traditional master narrative about the Conquest of the Desert and replace it with a more critical telling.

As we already mentioned in the introduction, Argentina is undergoing a period of symbolic confrontation between two opposite versions of the "conquest of the desert," in which the newer, more critical narrative, operates as a polemical representation (Moscovici, 1988) of the past. As mentioned by Moscovici (1988; Moscovici & Personnaz, 2001), at times when minority groups organize themselves and succeed at imposing their meanings about disputed events on the rest of society, significant transformations of collective meanings become possible. Moreover, the versions about the past expressed in each narrative have distinct implications for Argentine society, one of them tending to preserve the status quo and the other tending to transform it by legitimizing the claims of indigenous peoples.

It is also important to mention that the distinct narratives we have been referring to were constructed during different historical periods. The traditional narrative was consolidated during the "conquest" and was not questioned until the 1980s. Therefore, most adults in Argentina have constructed a sense of their national identity by appropriating such a narrative and its ensuing symbols. To date, their positive ingroup image becomes threatened via an alternative narrative that foregrounds the morally questionable actions of their forefathers. Thus, the notion of cognitive polyphasia puts forth that when individuals are faced in their everyday life with a phenomenon that challenges the ways in which they have always made sense of their world, including their own identity, they may often rely on models of explanation that gain broad social acceptance within their social group despite contradictory evidence. This explains why participants in this study may have affirmed aspects of the traditional historical narrative even as they themselves are familiar with the evidence of massacre and torture put forth in newer versions of the past.

In this way, the phenomenon of cognitive polyphasia allows individuals to support two contradictory narratives, each of which presents distinct benefits. On the one hand, they may hold critical views of the past actions of the Argentine military, while at the same time continuing to think of those ancestors as heroes. Similarly, they may on the one hand narrate the injustices suffered by indigenous peoples and acknowledge their descendants, while at the same time denying their historical continuity or the legitimacy of their demands.

The interviews we conducted and the interactions we recorded cogently express the juxtaposed coexistence of both types of narratives and show how individuals move from one narrative to the other without apparent conflict and also without allowing one type of narrative to inform or affect the other. Our work suggests that, for the most part, individuals are not cognizant of the conflicting views they themselves expressed. It is important to note that they also do not seem to be aware of the repercussions that their own ways of narrating the past have for their relationships with and attitudes toward the indigenous communities in the present; the persistent ongoing implications of historical processes go largely unacknowledged.

Thus, we think it might be useful to develop educational strategies that help underscore the juxtapositions and contradictions between narratives, so as to promote transformations in individuals' understanding of the past and, ultimately, in the future of intergroup politics and relations. Such strategies might help overcome the state of cognitive polyphasia via the guided production of cognitive conflicts that could allow the possibility for individual conceptual change (Carretero et al., 2013). Specifically in reference to historical knowledge, if a nation's historical perspective is shaped by people who are not knowledgeable about the procedures employed by historians—such as the selection of available evidence about the past, the formulation of hypotheses, and the evaluation of those hypotheses (Limón & Carretero, 2000)—then cognitive conflict may be produced. Besides, for improving the comprehension of historical processes it is necessary to understand the multicausality of history, in which individual and collective motivations interact with social and political causal factors in a complex and sophisticated manner, far away from a dichotomous moral interpretation of historical processes (Carretero, 2011).

We further suggest that future work should also address the ways that members of indigenous communities narrate this historical period. Their views have been largely ignored, both in society and in historiographical research (Carretero & Kriger, 2011). A better understanding of everyone's versions of the past seems necessary for addressing contradictions among them; constructing a complex and nuanced comprehension of past, present, and future sociopolitical processes; and pursuing transformative agendas in the search for social justice.

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