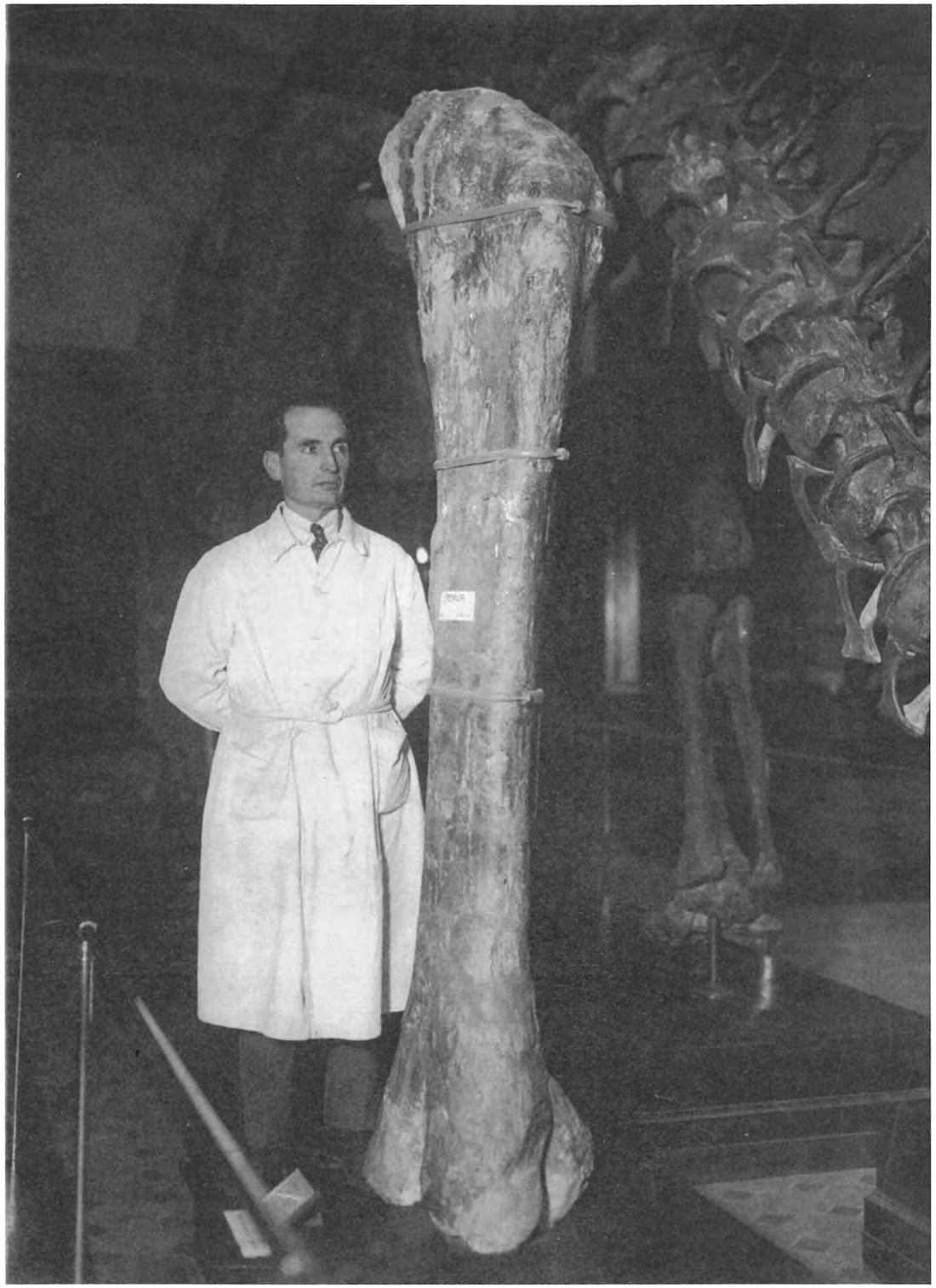


Museum of La Plata, Zoological section, "antideluvian femur".
Archivo General de la Nación Dpto. Doc. Fotográficos. Buenos Aires. Argentina.

BONES OF THE NATION
The Museum of La Plata, Argentina 1884–1888

BY ANA MARÍA LEÓN

IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY, ships leave Liverpool and Manchester and head west, carrying iron tracks, beams, girders, and other building components across the Atlantic. They dock in the port of Buenos Aires.[1] The cargo is unloaded and the tracks are laid out, spreading and growing across the *pampas*, the vast Argentinian plains, as the spidery extensions of a large railroad network—by 1914, it will be claimed as the tenth longest in the world, the pride of Argentina.[2] The conquest of this territory is requisite to its transformation into a site of extraction, cropped for grain and cattle to be processed and shipped back to Europe. But this land is not empty: traces of the Pleistocene remain, from the bones of large mammals to the live descendants of the first human inhabitants of the American continent.[3] These traces are to be contained within a new building.

Acknowledgements: I want to thank the editors for their comments, Mark Jarzombek for first pointing me to the long history of the Tehuelche, Andrew Herscher for reading and commenting, Fernando Luis Martínez Nespral for his kind help with a visit to La Plata, and the Decolonizing Pedagogies Workshop for providing a space to discuss settler colonialism in the Americas.

1 The port was built on 1889–1897. See Jorge O. Gazaneo, Mabel M. Scarone, "Arquitectura de la revolución industrial en la Argentina," in *Documentos para una historia de la arquitectura argentina*, ed. Marina Waisman (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Summa, 1984), 113–117.

2 See Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz, *Historia de los ferrocarriles argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Ed. Fabro, 2014 [1940]).

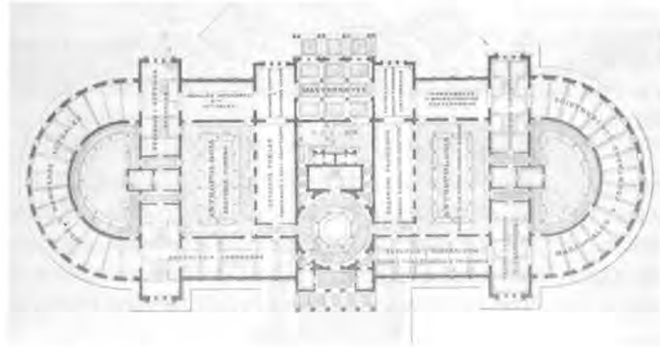
3 The Pleistocene is the geological epoch comprehending roughly from about 2,588,000 to 11,700 years ago, at the end of the last glacial period and the Paleolithic age used in archeology.

In the middle of the *pampas*, a grid is built; within this grid, the Museum of La Plata.[4] The museum can be understood as an apparatus that allows us to trace different networks of exchange operating at vast distances in time and place, from the British Empire to the Argentinian *pampas*, and from Pleistocene bones to the nineteenth-century wars against the peoples of the Americas. Standing at the crux of these networks, the museum was instrumental in dissociating Indigenous populations from their contemporary context and presenting them instead as subjects belonging to a distant past. In doing so, the institution became complicit with processes of genocide and empire expansion, linking these networks of resource extraction and industrialization to the decimation of one of the oldest populations of the American continent.

The presence of the Tehuelche—a tribe known for its large stature, whose presence in the region extends to about 14,500 BCE—in the museum's original display, holds the key to this Argentino-British project of territorial expansion. In the halls of the Museum of La Plata, an evolutionary march of specimens culminated with an exhibition of live natives, spinning their looms and discussing their lives.[5] One of these natives was involved with the preparation of exhibition materials: Lonkgo Modesto Inacayal, a Tehuelche chief liberated from a prison camp by Francisco Pascasio Moreno, founder and director of the museum.[6] In 1885, Inacayal and members of his clan were incorporated into the museum: first, as a living samples, and after their death within the walls of the museum, as anatomical displays. They joined a tradition of exhibition and display of human bodies—primarily people of color—that extended from Europe to the Americas, including the United States, Brazil, and Argentina, and which lasted well until the twentieth century.[7] In Argentina, this live exhibition played a specific role within the discourse of the state.

In recounting his travels through Patagonia, Moreno openly acknowledged raiding Tehuelche burial sites to increase his collection of human remains, which joined the collection of the museum. He described his relationship with Tehuelches and their bodies with detachment. Speaking of a Tehuelche he had previously befriended, he remembers:

> *Near the sherif's station is the cemetery of the colony, and there was the corpse of my friend Sam Slick, good Tehuelche, son of the cacique Casimiro Biguá. (...)*
>
> *He allowed us to take his photograph, but by no means to measure his body and especially his head. I ignore the curious anxiety which made him act in this way, for later, when I met him once again at Patagones, even though we had remained friends, he would not let me get near him when he was drunk, and a year later, when I returned to that spot to undertake my journey to Nahuel Huapí, he declined my offer to come with me, claiming that I wanted his head. That turned out to be his destiny. Days after my departure he went to Chubut and was viciously killed there by two other Indians during a night of orgy. On my arrival I learned of his mischief, found out the spot where he had been buried, and on a moonlit night exhumed his corpse, the skeleton of which remains today in the Anthropological Museum of Buenos Aires; a sacrilege committed for the sake of osteological research on the Tehuelches.*
>
> *The same I did with the bodies of the chief Sapo and his wife, who had died in previous years at the same spot during one of the tribe's visits. Both were buried on the Christian cemetery, albeit maintaining the indigenous practice of the sitting position of the corpse.*[8]



Top: Carl Heynemann and Henrik Aberg, Museum of La Plata, 1888. Archivo General de la Nación Dpto. Doc. Fotográficos. Buenos Aires. Argentina.
Bottom: Carl Heynemann and Henrik Aberg, Museum of La Plata, floor plan, 1888. Courtesy Museo de La Plata.

4 A detailed institutional history of the Natural History Museum in Argentina has been written by historian Irina Podgorny. See Irina Podgorny, *El sendero del tiempo y de las causas accidentales: los espacios de la prehistoria en la Argentina, 1850–1910* (Rosario: Prohistoria Editores, 2009), and Irina Podgorny, *El Argentino Despertar de Las Faunas Y Las Gentes Prehistóricas. Vol. 2. Libros Del Rojas* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA-Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, 2000). Historian Jens Andermann has examined the museum's history in his research on the rise of natural history museums in Argentina and Brazil. See Jens Andermann, *The Optic of the State: Visuality and Power in Argentina and Brazil* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007). Graciela Silvestri has written on the multiple interpretations of the pampas by the Argentinian avant-garde. See Graciela Silvestri, *El lugar común: una historia de las figuras de paisaje en el Río de la Plata*, ed. Juan Suriano (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2011). I wish to complement the research of these historians by offering a reading that links the museum with the erasure of the pampas, the expansion of the Argentinian railroad network, and the long reach of the English industrial revolution.

5 Podgorny, *El sendero del tiempo*, 194.

6 Inacayal and other members of his clan had been deported to a prison camp in the Tigre delta after General Roca's Campaign of the Desert. They were lodged at the museum and encouraged by staff to help prepare exhibit, produce "ethnographic materials." They were also submitted to detailed measurements and photographic sessions. Andermann, *The Optic of the State*, 55. For Inacayal's story see the documentary: *INACAYAL: La Negación de Nuestra Identidad*, directed by Myriam Angueira and Guillermo Glass, (2011; Buenos Aires: Instituto Nacional de Cinematografía y Artes Visuales). We don't have the names of the other Tehuelche in the group. The museum was created in 1884 and the building was officially inaugurated in 1888.

7 For other Brazilian and Argentinian case studies see Andermann, *The Optic of the State*. Perhaps one of the best known cases of human display is that of Saartjie "Sarah" Baartman, one of several Khoikhoi women exhibited in early nineteeth-century Europe under the name of the Hottentot Venus. She died in 1815. In Europe, such displays lasted well into the twentieth century, for instance at the Paris Colonial Exhibition of 1931. In the United States, a man from the Yahi people was found at Butte County, California in 1911 and incorporated into the exhibition at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. As part of her performance piece with Guillermo Gómez-Peña, "The Couple in the Cage" (1992–1993), artist, writer, and curator Coco Fusco has compiled a critical history of these live exhibitions—it goes up to the exhibition of a black woman midget in Minnesota in 1992. See Coco Fusco, "The Other History of Intercultural Performance," *TDR*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Spring, 1994), 143–167.

8 Francisco Pascasio Moreno, *Viaje a la Patagonia austral: 20 de octubre de 1876 a 8 de mayo de 1877* (Buenos Aires: Sociedad de Abogados, 1879), 29.

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Museum entry rotunda with images of the pampas. Archivo General de la Nación Dpto. Doc. Fotográficos. Buenos Aires. Argentina.

British historian Jens Andermann has read Moreno's detachment as ironic contempt mobilized to erase the violence exerted by the museum.[9] But there is a more insidious problem in Moreno as collector of human remains and agent of the museum, and it has to do with the transformation of the Argentinian territory into a space that harkened back to the Pleistocene past at the same time as it was projected into the future conjured by the Industrial Revolution. The word genocide, which I have used to describe the eradication of the Tehuelche, did not exist until 1944, when Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin created it to describe the Nazi policies of systematic destruction of European Jews. It is with this admittedly anachronic term that I want to open up the story of the museum's practices—a crime committed for which there was yet no name.[10] As Tehuelche bodies and bones were incorporated the Pleistocene display, the savage nature of the *pampas* was ready to be retrieved and reconstructed.

We can see the logic of this exhibitionary complex in the organization of the exhibition itself, arranged as a loop to suggest an infinite march through time. Upon entering the building, a double-height rotunda welcomed visitors with paintings of the "prehistoric *pampas*" in the ground floor. The balcony surrounding this space in the upper floor displayed paintings of paradigmatic Argentinian landscapes from different points of its territory, including the Andes mountains, the rainforest, and the rivers. Andermann has noted how this arrangement situated the *pampas* as the literal and metaphoric central axis of the Argentinian territory. From this point, the visitor was directed into a circular procession through a series of rooms. Caught within this loop, two double-height rooms catalogued different types of bones and fragments, human and animal. The side hallways were laid out as half circles, their turning rotation accentuating the movement through the hallways and the evolutionary narrative propelling the visitors through the museum. While the first curve displayed the skeletons of ancient specimens, the second one exhibited contemporary animals, stuffed and reconstructed to highlight their present existence. The fabrication of these creatures was done in the forty deposits, workshops, laboratories and other rooms located in the basement, beyond public access. The large space and ample infrastructure dedicated to these activities points to the extraneous labor required to fabricate these histories.

The long galleries—illuminated by large skylights—still display the largest skeletons, oriented along their main axis. Thus these creatures march with us, their directionality emphasizing the collective evolutionary journey propelling all creatures into the future. Dry phalanges and claws click against the polished marble bases, extremities are

9 Jens Andermann, "The Museo de La Plata, 1877–1906," in *Relics & Selves: Articles*, http://www.bbk.ac.uk/ibamuseum/texts/Andermann04.htm, accessed 20 July 2020.

10 Most historians discussing these events agree on the use of the word genocide, although few Argentinian historians have argued against it. For a discussion on the topic see Walter Delrio, "Del no-evento al genocidio. Pueblos originarios y políticas de estado en Argentina," in *Eadem Utraque Europa 6*, No. 10–11 (June-December 2010): 219–254; and Diana Lenton, Walter Delrio and Ana Ramos, Diego Escolar, Pilar Pérez, Florencia Roulet and María Teresa Garrido, Verónica Seldes, Liliana Tamagno, Julio Esteban Vezub, "Debate: Genocidio y política indigenista: debates sobre la potencia explicativa de una categoría polémica," in *Corpus. Archivos virtuales de la alteridad americana*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Second semester 2011). For a summary of Argentinian research on Indigenous groups and the abuses they have been subjected to see Claudia Salomón Tarquini and Romina Casal, "Los pueblos indígenas de Pampa y Patagonia, siglos XVIII-XX: Un breve estado de las investigaciones," in *Papeles de trabajo* 9 (16): 22–55.

Workshop for the Zoology hall at the Museum of La Plata. Courtesy Museo de La Plata.

carefully propped up by thin rods. Other creatures swoosh over our heads, seeming to fly under the cast iron beams, hanging from delicate threads. We blink as the sun filters through the glass skylight up above. Iron beams and Megatherium bones are displayed together, as naked armatures—a small reminder of the iron tracks that brought them together. When Moreno arranged this room, he was intent on increasing the quantity and scale of the display. In a letter to a collaborator, he wrote:

> *We need at least two hundred more skulls and some skeletons for the anthropological gallery to give a good impression. ... I insist on the convenience of having great predators ... We need to obtain something to fill these hundreds of meters as soon as possible.*[11]

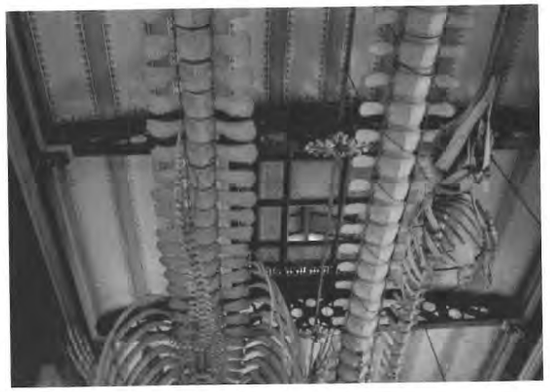
Indeed, when the museum first opened several galleries remained empty and closed off to the public. But the scientific community did not get a good impression, and many of Moreno's colleagues protested: surely pedagogical intent here had trespassed into vulgar spectacle—the crowded skeletons were arranged in an aesthetic of the gigantic, meant to overwhelm visitors through sheer size rather than instruct them.[12]

Foreign visitors had different complaints. Visiting the museum in 1893, British naturalist and geologist Richard Lydekker was favorably impressed by the quantity and richness of the collection, yet simultaneously horrified by the classification methods of Argentinian paleontologists.[13] Instead of revising found bones against Richard Owen's classifications, in La Plata paleontologists had assumed each bone came from a new species, resulting in an enormous number of new "types" and creating great difficulties

11 Moreno, in Ameghino 1935, letter 453, in Florentino Ameghino, *Obras completes y correspondencia científica* (La Plata, 1935), cited in Andermann, "The Museo de La Plata," http://www.bbk.ac.uk/ibamuseum/texts/Andermann04.htm, accessed 20 July 2020.

12 Jens Andermann, *The Optic of the State: Visuality and Power in Argentina and Brazil* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), 49.

13 Richard Lydekker, Universidad Nacional de La Plata, and Facultad de Ciencias Naturales y Museo, *The La Plata Museum* (London: Rait, Henderson, 1894), 10. See also Andermann, *The Optic of the State*, 45.



Detail of bones and iron girders at Mammals Hall, reproducing nineteeth century display c. August 2011. Image by author.

in the process of exchanging specimens with other institutions. The Argentinian dismissal of British classifications had a nationalist origin. In contrast to natural history museums in Europe and the United States, which had the resources to collect specimens from around the world, in La Plata the museum was primarily stocked by local findings, a circumstance that was was mobilized to serve the narrative of the state.

In 1825, the United Kingdom signed a treaty with Argentina, making it one of the first countries to recognize Argentinian independence (1816). At the time, England was turning from an agricultural nation into an importer of grains, meat, and wool. Argentina's expansive plains and temperate climate provided an ideal territory to cultivate these crops and herd cattle (this was the case also of Australia and the United States). However, the ownership of this potentially lucrative territory was up for dispute. While the Argentinian state had been founded by criollos, that is, Argentinians of Spanish descent, the *pampas* were still populated by Indigenous peoples including the Mapuche, the Ranquel, and most strikingly, the Tehuelche.[14] Starting in 1833, and in several subsequent campaigns throughout the nineteenth century,

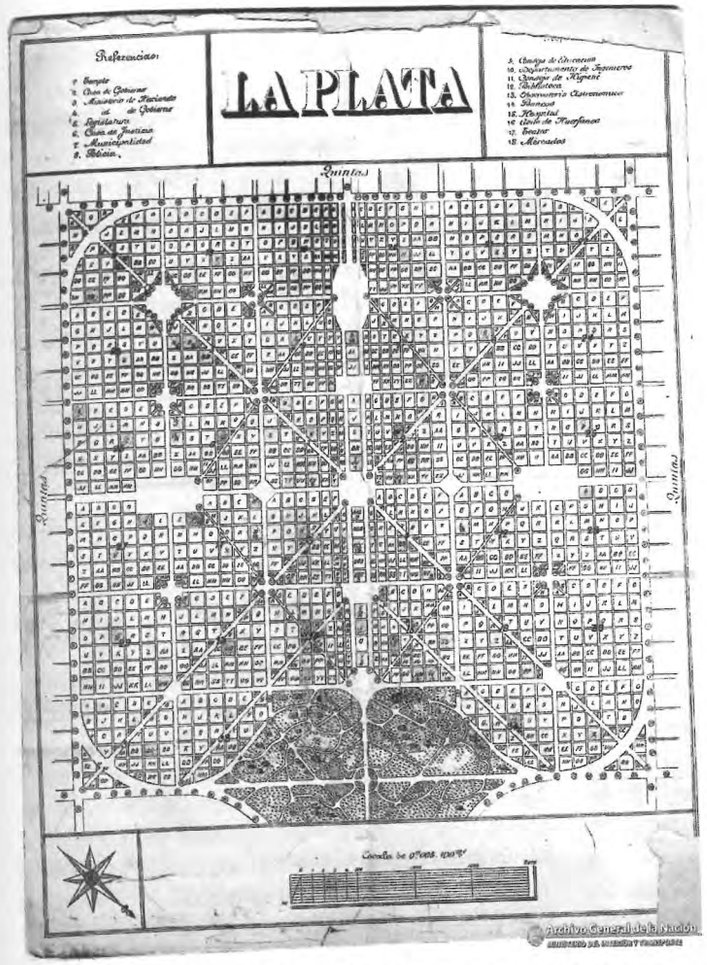
Display at the Museum of La Plata c. August 2011. Image by author.

known as "the Conquest of the Desert"—a deceiving name, as these plains are not a desert—, the Argentinian state waged war against its Indigenous populations, with the express objective of exterminating them. Minister of War Julio Argentino Roca was adamant about the urgency of this enterprise:

> *Our self-respect as a virile people obliges us to put down as soon as possible, by reason or by force, this handful of savages who destroy our wealth and prevent us from definitely occupying, in the name of law, progress, and our own security, the richest and most fertile lands of the Republic.*[15]

14 Throughout the processes of European colonization in the Americas, and the later criollo-led independence wars, many Indigenous groups sought refuge in more distant, less desirable regions of the continent, including the heights of the Andes mountains, the Amazon jungle, and in what was to become Argentina, the pampas and all regions distant from more populated cities. For a summary of these processes see "The Colonial Foundations," in Thomas E. Skidmore, Peter H. Smith, James Green, *Modern Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

15 Quoted in Alfredo Marcelo Serres Güiraldes, *La estrategia del general Roca* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Pleamar, 1979), 377–378.



Pedro Benoit, Plan of La Plata, 1880. Archivo General de la Nación Dpto. Doc. Fotográficos. Buenos Aires. Argentina.

The result of these confrontations was the decimation of the Indigenous population and the near-extinction of the Tehuelche. Yet not all of these populations were eradicated. Large groups were imprisoned, paraded around Buenos Aires, and then relocated to concentration camps—called "indian deposits"—to be used as forced labor. In this sense the genocide of the Indigenous populations living in Argentina should be understood as a parallel chapter to the structure of settler colonialism in the United States. Historian Patrick Wolfe has described these processes as a structure, not an event, to highlight their ongoing development up to the present—of which more later.[16] Wolfe describes settler colonialism as an ongoing structure that seeks to eliminate the native in order to access the land. In Argentina, this land—several million hectares—was either given away or sold at reduced prices by the state to groups vinculated by family or economic ties to the governments of the period.[17]

At around the same time, Charles Darwin's visit to Argentina called attention to the presence of fossils of extinct mammals in the *pampas*. In 1832, Darwin's ship The Beagle was anchored in Bahia Blanca—a settlement about 400 miles southwest of Buenos Aires, near the site the first campaign against the Tehuelche was getting under way. Just as its first human inhabitants were being eradicated from the Argentinian *pampas*, the ancient remains of their companions: Megatheriums, Glyptodonts, and other creatures of the Pleistocene were being unearthed from the same plains.[18]

16 Patrick Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 8, no. 4, (December 2006), 387–409.

17 According to historian Felipe Pigna, between 1876 and 1903 the Argentinian state gave away or undersold 41,787,023 hectares to 1,873 landowners linked by economic and/or family ties to the different regimes of that period. Felipe Pigna, *Los mitos de la historia argentina 2* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Planeta, 2005).

18 The discovery that these giant mammals had been contemporaneous with a human presence—that is, the existence of a paleolithic man in the Americas—was initially met with resistance in scientific circles in Europe and the United States, but embraced in South America. See Podgorny, *El sendero del tiempo y de las causas accidentales*, 107. Argentinian paleontology estimates an overlap of 4,000 years between Homo sapiens and these large mammals. See Mariano Magnussen Saffer, "La Gran Extinción del Pleistoceno," Museo de Ciencias Naturales "Lorenzo Scaglia" *Mar del Plata, Argentina*, http://paleoweb.ar.tripod.com/notas21.htm, accessed 22 June 2016.

Carl Heynemann and Henrik Aberg, Museum of La Plata, 1888. Undated drawing. Archivo General de la Nación Dpto. Doc. Fotográficos. Buenos Aires. Argentina.

Darwin's findings confirmed the *pampas* as the territory of the remote past, where the bones of fantastic creatures might be unearthed, like a latter-day Laocoön, to confirm Argentina's greatness via the presence of the remains of these gigantic mammals. These bones and fossils populated the collections of National History Museums in Europe, up until 1864, when the provincial government banned these remains from leaving the country.

Other remains soon confirmed that these large mammals had not been the only population of the Argentinian *pampas* during the Paleolithic era. Starting in the late 1850s, Argentinians including Italo-Argentinian paleontologist Florentino Ameghino, Estanislao Zeballos, and aforementioned Moreno excavated the remains of Paleolithinc humans, establishing the presence of these groups as one of the first human presences in the Americas.[19] Such a discovery gave the young nation the arguments to claim itself as a possible "cradle of humankind"—a site of origin, rather than a peripheral locality. It is in this light that we must understand Moreno's narrative of friendship and tomb raiding: caught between the state-sanctioned genocide of the Tehuelche, and their conflation with Paleolithic human remains as markers of the nation's sublime past. The narrative of bigness was extended here to cover not only the bones of large mammals, but also those of the legendarily tall Tehuelche.

With the native population out of the way, the Argentinian *pampas* were ready for large-scale cultivation. British investment and Argentinian landowners combined to engineer this territory, transforming it into a transnational network involving ports, ships, granaries, refrigeration facilities and other components linking both sides of the Atlantic.[20] Additional infrastructure had to be built to connect these facilities to the *pampas*: The Argentinian railroad network was started in 1855 but its different systems were sold to mostly British companies by 1890.[21] By then, it extended across almost 10,000 kilometers. Private investment meant private tracks, laid out to transport these goods: from their origin in the *pampas* to the port of Buenos Aires, and from there across the Atlantic. The railroad tracks, sheds, depots, signaling booths, and other built components of this system were built following British guidelines, and its iron structures were manufactured in England and shipped to Argentina, to be assembled there.[22] A network of meatslaughter and refrigeration facilities were organized from the Argentinian side.[23] A large workforce was needed to replace the original population: this new population was also shipped from Europe, mostly from Italy and Spain, heeding the call of Argentinian advertising and incentives and giving this country one of the largest percentages in foreign-born population at the time.[24] The narrative of the Argentinian nation was thus constructed by the erasure of Indigenous populations and their replacement with displaced European groups.[25]

As the plains were transformed into a cattle-production machine, discussions over customs duties in the port led to a failed insurrection in the province of Buenos Aires. To solve these separatist tendencies, the state gave the city of Buenos Aires federal status, and officially established it as the capital of Argentina. At the same time, it decreed the creation of La Plata, a new city to become capital of the province. Located about 30 miles southeast of Buenos Aires, La Plata was designed and built by topographer Pedro Benoit, and officially founded in 1882. The city was laid out as a perfect square crossed by two forty-five degree-angle diagonals, almost perfectly aligned along the north-south and east-west axis. Benoit's French roots and Freemason affiliation point to some of the possible formal origins of the scheme, while recent research by historian Fabiola López-Durán suggests additional motivations related to eugenics discourses also transplanted from France.[26] Rounded corners limited the confines of the original square, which was itself subdivided into a grid of six by six squares, punctuated by a park on each corner. Each of these squares was in turn subdivided into a grid of six by six blocks. On the northeast side of the city, one of the squares was assigned to house a large park, designed by French landscape architect Charles Thays, who had trained in Paris and later relocated to Argentina. Within this French landscape, German engineer Carl Ludwig Wilhelm Heynemann (known in Argentina as Carlos Heynemann) and Swedish architect Henrik Aberg (known as Enrique Aberg) designed the Museum of La Plata.[27] Early drawings suggest that they initially envisioned a landscape populated by representatives of its Paleolithic fauna. Heynemann and Aberg wrapped a Neoclassical façade around a symmetrical Beaux-Arts plan, but left parts of the iron structure exposed on the inside, similar to some of the train stations spreading across the country.

19 Ameghino was later fired by Moreno. See Irina Podgorny, "Human Origins in the New World? Florentino Ameghino and the Emergence of Prehistoric Archaeology in the Americas (1875–1912)," in *PaleoAmerica*, 1:1, 68–80, DOI: 10.1179/2055556314Z.0000000008. Among other topics, Podgorny discusses the skepticism and anxiety produced in nineteeth-century Europe by the realization that human remains in the Americas might date back as far as the Paleolithic.

20 The United Kingdom was the first to make widespread use of refrigeration technologies to freeze meat and transport it by ship from its colonies to the British Isles. The first ship retrofitted with a refrigeration unit was commissioned in New Zealand in 1881. See Colin Williscroft, *A Lasting Legacy: A 125 year history of New Zealand Farming since the first Frozen Meat Shipment* (New Zealand: Rural Press Limited, 2007).

21 The railroads were initially started with Argentinian capital in 1855, but the liberal policies of president Bernardo Mitre led to their adquisition by mostly British companies. The most important instance being the Western Buenos Aires Railroad which was sold in 1890. These transactions were criticized for undervaluing the companies. Scalabrini Ortiz, *Historia de los ferrocarriles argentinos*.

22 The British used similar strategies in areas controlled by the East Indian Company and later the Raj in the Indian subcontinent.

23 For more on this meat-processing network see Fabiola López-Durán, "Meat Milieu: Spacial Dynamics of Production and Bodies in Modern Argentina," paper presented at Export Commodity Cultures: Designing Latin America, Niko Vicario and Ana María León, organizers, LASA 2016, New York.

24 Initial incentives were conflated with populations eager for work in Italy and Spain, leading to large migrations from these countries rather than from the northern countries that the Argentinian elites would have preferred. These migration patterns were carefully supervised. Statistics of population flux were compiled by Revista de Estadística Municipal de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, which focused on the city of Buenos Aires as the main port of entry. For a brief summary of this history in English see Skidmore, Thomas E., Peter H. Smith and James N. Green, "Argentina: Progress, Stalemate, Discord," in *Modern Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

25 For an analysis of the eugenics undergirding this project and its architectures see Fabiola López Durán, "Machines for Modern Life," in *Eugenics in the Garden: Transatlantic Architecture and the Crafting of Modernity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018). For nuanced, recent research into the racial politics of Argentina see Paulina L. Alberto and Eduardo Elena, *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina: The Shades of the Nation* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

26 See López-Durán, *Eugenics in the Garden*, especially "The Architectures of Puericulture and Hominiculture."

27 It was not the first museum of this type in Argentina, the Museum of Natural History of Buenos Aires was inaugurated in 1827, contemporaneous to similar institutions in Latin America. Andermann, *The Optic of the State*, 27–29. The Museum of La Plata was the first purpose-built natural history museum of the continent. Andermann, 45.

The museum building went through a few renovations throughout the twentieth century until it was designated a National Historic Monument in 1997. The exhibition display was substantially redesigned in the 2010s.[28] One of the galleries has been preserved with the original nineteenth-century display of the evolutionary march. In one of the upper galleries, a recent renovation lays out the history of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. Here, visitors are greeted by a video monitor in which an Argentinian, non-Indigenous man gives the following instructions on the living presence of Indigenous groups in the country, currently known in Argentina as "originary peoples":

> *It is important that we think of the originary peoples and it is important to respect them and integrate them.*

Indeed, Tehuelche people still live in Argentina, but as the man in the video suggests with his demeanor and phrasing, they are still othered.[29] Little is said here, or in the museum at large, about the painful processes that sought to eradicate them, and prompted them to retreat and isolate themselves. On the other side of this room Moreno's studio has been conserved as a relic—visitors can peek into it through a pane of glass. A sign in front of the studio informs us of the last restitution made by the museum: Inacayal's *poncho*, delivered to representatives of the Council of Mapuche-Tehuelche Communities and the Nahuelpan Community from the province of Chubut. The introductory video and punctilous mention of the return of a garment creates the impression of an institution that has thoughtfully reconsidered its past. The display informs us that

> *The restitution of this valuable object, that symbolized a relationship of respect between Inacayal and F. Moreno today represents a new stage of fraternal dialogue between the Museum and the originary communities.*[30]

However, the restitution process was more complicated. Argentinian laws sanctioned in 1991 and 2001 established that remains should be made available to the communities that requested them.[31] Inacayal's remains were partially returned in 1994. In 2006, the group *Colectivo Guías*, a self-convened organization at the School of Natural Sciences and Museum of the National University of La Plata, verified that the restitution had been incomplete and parts of Inacayal's body had been held back by the museum, as well as the remains of his companions.[32] A second

28 For details on the design of the new exhibition display see María Alejandra Inacio, "La arquitectura y el diseño de exhibiciones en el Museo de La Plata," I Congreso Nacional de Museos Universitarios (October 2010, La Plata, Argentina), http://sedici.unlp.edu.ar/handle/10915/42022, accessed 20 June 2016. Rooms were renovated at different moments throughout the 2010s.

29 As many as 27,813 people self-recognized themselves as Tehuelche in the 2019 census. Censo Nacional de Población de 2010, Argentina.

30 "La restitución de este valioso objeto, que simbolizó una relación de respecto entre Inacayal y F. Moreno hoy representa una nueva etapa de diálogo fraterno entre el Museo y las comunidades originarias." Text in front of Moreno's ofice as noted on March 2019.

31 Several attempts have been made to start restitution, starting with Law 23.940, dated 1991, which established the transport of the remains of Incayal (sic.) to Tecka, in the Chubut province. Law 25.517, sanctioned in 2001 and ruled by Congress in 2010, established that the remains of aboriginal individuals that are part of both public and private collections should be made available to the native peoples and communities that request them. For more on the restitution of remains in Argentina see María Luz Endere, "The reburial issue in Argentina: a growing conflict," in *The Dead and Their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy and Practice*, ed. Cressida Fforde, Jane Hubert, Paul Turnbull (New York: Routledge, 2002), 266–283.

32 For more on Colectivo Guías, see Colectivo Guías: Grupo Universitario de Investigación en Antropología Social, http://colectivoguias.blogspot.com. The group works with indigenous groups in Argentina in order to identify human remains in museum collections, in particular those of the Museum of La Plata, and proceed with restitutions. For an interview with the group, see Ana Gutiérrez, "Prisioneros de la ciencia—Entrevista al Colectivo GUIAS" in *Analytica del Sur: Psicoanálisis y Crítica* 1 (July 2014), http://analyticadelsur.com.ar/prisioneros-de-la-ciencia/. According to Colectivo GUIAS, the museum retained parts of Inacayal's brain, scalp, and left ear, as well as the remains of his partner, whose name is not on record, Margarita Foyel, Tafá, and an unidentified young girl. They all died in 1887.

Video monitor display in the upper galleries of the Museum of La Plata c. March 2019. Photo by author.

restitution was secured in 2014, comprising not only the *poncho*, but also remains of Inacayal, his partner (no name on record), and his niece Margarita Foyel. Currently, the museum still holds human remains in its collection.[33] Per the request and continued activism of Indigenous groups in Argentina, human remains have been taken out of exhibition, but the restitution process has been delayed because of the challenges of identifying individual remains—per its own website, the museum accepts requests for the "restitution of claimed individuals."[34] In the nineteenth century these groups were decimated, their tombs raided, and their bodies and bones catalogued, archived, and displayed. In the current display, the genocide of Indigenous people is elided, their presence presented as a chapter within the longer histories of the continent, and the history of Inacayal and other indigenous captives is incomplete. By choosing to omit its many complicities against these populations, the museum repeats the gesture of eradication.

In 1845, writer, journalist, and later president Domingo Sarmiento wrote the historical novel *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism*. This reflection on the early political struggles between the Argentinian cities and countryside became a key model of Argentine nationalism. The novel sketched out Argentina as a clash between the cultured, European-like metropolis against the savage, barbaric *pampas*. To Sarmiento, the desolate *pampas*

33 *INACAYAL: La Negación de Nuestra Identidad*, directed by Myriam Angueira and Guillermo Glass, (2011; Buenos Aires: Instituto Nacional de Cinematografía y Artes Visuales), and *Colectivo Guías*, http://colectivoguias.blogspot.com. According to the group, there are still 10,000 human remains in the Museum of La Plata.

34 For the museum's position, see http://www.museo.fcnym.unlp.edu.ar/antropologia_investigacion, accessed 20 July 2020.

discouraged any type of society, yet at the same time this landscape gave the Argentinian people a uniquely poetic nature that was key to the nation's identity:

> *What impressions does it leave in the inhabitant of the Republic of Argentina to gaze into the horizon and see... not to see anything; because the more he sinks his eyes in that uncertain horizon, vaporous, indefinite, the more it retreats from him, the more it fascinates him, confuses him, and sinks him in contemplation and doubt? Where does that world end that he wishes in vain to penetrate? He doesn't know! What is beyond what he can see? Loneliness, danger, the savage, death!!!*[35]

Picking up on various discourses on the sublime, Sarmiento transformed the *pampas* into the menacing, awe-inspiring presence of the infinite, invading and infecting the whole country with a simultaneous attraction and repulsion towards the unknown. To this irresistible force, he juxtaposed the metropolis, proposing that through the civilizing agency of the city, analogous to Europe, the nation might resist the barbaric impulse of the American plains. Sarmiento's dichotomy between civilization and barbarism stands at the crux of the Museum's paradoxical logic: elevating the archaic past—the supposedly barbaric inhabitants of the *pampas*—can only happen through its destruction, brought about by the civilizing enterprise that allows for the understanding of their scientific value. The museum was the agent that produced the transubstantiation of the Tehuelche: from inconvenient presence in the *pampas* into scientific specimens; both confirming the narrative put forward by the Argentinian state and collaborating with the transformation of its plains into commodified territory. The violent eradication of the native population by the Argentinian state, and the transformation of this territory into a systematic extraction economy by the British Empire were in this way silenced under the guise of science, whose authority sanctioned the national mythology that allowed the state to lay claim to the *pampas*. At the end of the nineteenth century, the dialectic of the enlightenment was on display at the Museum of La Plata—but there was no one there to see it.

Postcript

In 1985, the first professional war crimes exhumation group, the Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense (EAAF, Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team), was assembled in Argentina, in collaboration with United States forensic anthropologist Clyde Snow.[36] The team conducted the first systematic exhumations and produced important evidence to identify the desaparecidos, people disappeared by the Argentine Military Government during the Dirty War (1974–1983).[37] In 2016, on the fourtieth anniversary of the 1976 military coup, a series of exhibitions related to the memory of the desaparecidos were held at the ESMA, a former detention space now turned into a space of memory.[38] Here, the work of the EAAF on human rights violations was shown together with an exhibition by Colectivo Guías documenting their work on the identification and restitution of human remains from indigenous groups exhibited in museums in La Plata and around the world, titled "Prisoners of Science." Brought together by the identification of human remains, the legacies of the Dirty War joined the ongoing processes of settler colonialism to illustrate these long histories of necropolitics.

35 Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo* (Buenos Aires: Librería La Facultad, 1921 [1845]), 78

36 See "History of EAAF," in http://eaaf.typepad.com/founding_of_eaaf/ , accessed 28 June 2016, and Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman, *Mengele's Skull: The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetics* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012).

37 The term "Dirty War" is used to include the short presidency of Isabel Perón (1974–76), which was followed by the 1976 military coup that led to the self-denominated National Reorganization Process.

38 "Una jornada para la memoria colectiva," *Página 12*, (17 March 2016), http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-294769-2016-03-17.html, accessed 29 June 2016.