Middle of nowhere: a place of war memories, commemoration, and aboriginal re-emergence (La Pampa, Argentina)

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Abstract

This article addresses a particular aspect of Rankülche re-emergence in the context set by policies of recognition and aboriginal identity politics in the province of La Pampa (Argentina). It focuses on the analysis of a memorial recently built in the 'middle of nowhere'. Specifically, it explores relationships between spatial practices, material objects of commemoration, and memories of a war of conquest, attempting to identify different modes of connecting landscape and memory ('landscapes of memory' and 'landscape as memory') and their consequences for the struggles for aboriginal recognition.

In a more general sense, the article attempts to show that this landscape is a social space lived and built by the performance of multiple forms of memory, which are shown in the competing spatial practices around material forms of representing and remembering past events. This landscape is in this way a particular work of the art of remembering.

Keywords

Argentina; war; memory; landscape; identity politics; Rankülche.

In a landscape that most people in Argentina would describe as the 'middle of nowhere', a monolith, a monument, and a mausoleum have sprouted within the last eight years, expressing the entanglement of memory and materiality.

In this place, in the present-day northern province of La Pampa (Argentina), stood Leubucó, the ancient main settlement of the Rankülche Indians,[1] until it was abandoned by its inhabitants and later destroyed by the national army around 1879. This violent event was part of the so-called 'Campaign of the Desert' against the native peoples who inhabited the regions of Pampa and Patagonia, claimed as national land by the political and moral élites settled in Buenos Aires and other provinces (Fig. 1). The raid over

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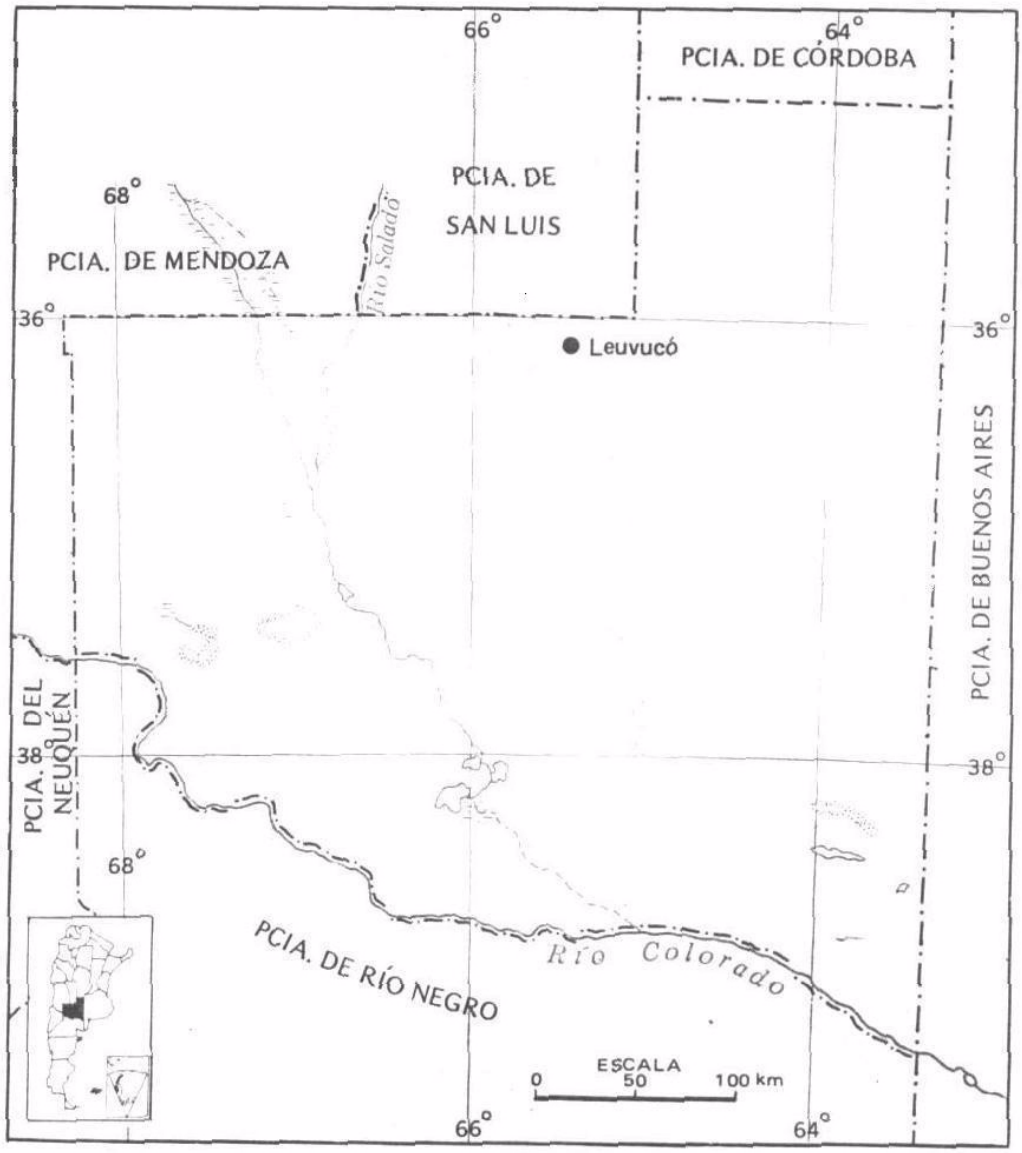

Figure 1 Map of the province of La Pampa with location of Leubucó (from *Manual Estrada de La Pampa* 1992: 46).

Rankülche homeland was the final blow of decades of frontier expansion that would consolidate state's control over this territory by disarticulating the *de facto* indigenous sovereignties. As a master national narrative, the Conquest of the Desert makes sense of the war of conquest of the Indians as an historical necessity. The legitimate existence of the Argentine nation, of a province like La Pampa and of the local communities found today in the old frontier line, depends on official and unofficial acts of commemoration of this victory of civilization over its barbarians.

The main goal of this article is to explore the relationships between spatial practices and materiality through the analysis of the memory of the war of conquest. The relevant context of interpretation is provided by aboriginal identity politics in present-day Argentina, as it is expressed in the so-called 'Rankülche issue' in La Pampa.[2] Disputes over Rankülche identity cannot be isolated from a more general trend which makes the 'struggle over the past' a reflexive landmark that organizes Argentinean contemporary political processes and requires corresponding theoretical efforts (Quatrocchi-Woisson 1995).

This article is the outcome of a series of individual projects that coincided in spatial and theoretical terms in this 'middle of nowhere' of Argentinean history. A long-overdue subject in local archaeology, the relationship between pre- and post-colonial history and contemporary aboriginal identities demands a dialogue between different disciplines, actors, and perspectives. In this regard the confluence of the authors embodies the search for a multi-sited approach to the aboriginal past and present in Argentinean society. Two archaeologists and one social anthropologist, in their various incarnations as colleagues, friends, distantly related immigrant descendants, and in one case as a former local dweller, decided to approach the issue, finding a common ground among their different experiences. As members of a dispersed and over-stressed intellectual community, the authors believe that a critical analysis is always a collective project that is enriched by shifting spatial and theoretical locations (see Strathern 1995). It is acknowledged that the voices of local actors are scarce and only indirectly present in this article; a future project should definitively include their active participation in the delineation of common goals in research inquiries (e.g. Lilley and Williams forthcoming).

Indigenous spatial practices in the past

As has been widely discussed, for Westerners the landscape is usually a setting, something to be appreciated in visual terms and constructed through the rational principles of perspective. Seen as a picture or as a map, the landscape is not lived but 'looked at', something external to persons and generally apprehended along the lines of the nature/culture dichotomy (Cosgrove 1984; see also Bender 1999; Gosden and Head 1996; Ingold 1993; Thomas 2001). However, the action of remembrance as 'engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past' (Ingold 1993: 153; Hodder 1985: 14) uncovers another dimension. From this point of view, landscape may be regarded as a narrative created by experiencing the land through learning about the ancestral past, what ultimately develops the sense of place that generally sustains identity. In this regard, both the continual occupation of certain locales and the relocation of others can reflect

habitual practices and belief systems, passed through generations of people inhabiting a landscape and perceiving their surroundings (Curtoni 1999). The archaeological identification of this spatial recurrence gives evidence of the process of place making in the past, a process, constructed through the rhythms of habitual tasks, that also builds individual bodies and social landscapes (see Lazzari 1999). The intricate relationship of these past processes and the struggles and negotiations around their re-signification in the present constitutes a central node in our discussion.

The following archaeological analysis must be understood as in dialogue with the current process of Rankülche re-emergence. People self-defining as Rankülche (but not necessarily recognized by others, hence the disputes) are distributed all over La Pampa, in cities, country towns, villages, and rural posts. They show a range of occupations. In rural areas, we find small-holders and peons; in semi-urban and urban sites, the Rankülche live on *changas* (temporary, unqualified jobs) and social security plans. A minority is employed in the public sector.[3] Unlike other indigenous groups in the country, the Rankülche is re-emerging as a people from the condition of an extinct or vanished tribe after defeat, dispersion, and acculturation, into *criollo* (in the sense of 'mixed') population throughout the twentieth century (Lazzari forthcoming).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Rankülche people were known as having a spatialized social dynamic that separated those living in the *pampas* from those in the bush land. These different settings not only comprised places of actual settlement, but also implied areas of influence and dominion. These spaces cannot be separated from the meaningful activities that created both positive and negative values central to community reproduction (in the sense of Munn (1986)). For instance, the native tree known as *huitru* (*prosopia caldenia* or *caldén)* was avoided in pathways because it was considered as the residence of *gualichos* (evil spirits) (De Angelis 1969). However, this Rankülche past world was neither homogeneous nor isolated. In this period a frontier society was being built under a civilizing project that sought occupation with war and diplomacy as their main tactics. Given the nature of the article we have de-emphasized the field of interactions between the Rankülche and other agencies, including other indigenous groups and white settlers, but it should be kept in mind that Rankülche spatiality in the past has to be understood as an effect of diverse historical and spatial processes.

Colonial and Republican chroniclers from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would identify among the Rankülche certain traits of their sociopolitical organization. It was based on a hierarchy of authorities from secondary to main chiefs called *lonkos* or *caciques.* The appointment to the position of lonko was originally acquired by election but during the nineteenth century it became a hereditary process (Bechis 1998). The authority of lonkos was built upon the differential capacity for managing information, constructing political alliances and controlling key resources such as cattle and horses (Mandrini and Ortelli 1992). Indigenous camps were linked by sets of complex routes and pathways called *rastrilladas* (in Spanish) that followed a circular pattern. Although they served sometimes as routes for the traffic of cattle towards Chile, the rastrilladas were mainly the nervous system of the Rankülche sociopolitical organization, regulating the circulation of people and resources between a hierarchy of camps that were ordered according to the social distance from the main chiefs (see Fig. 2 and Plate 1). Furthermore, these roads connected multiple places beyond utilitarian or political considerations that were central

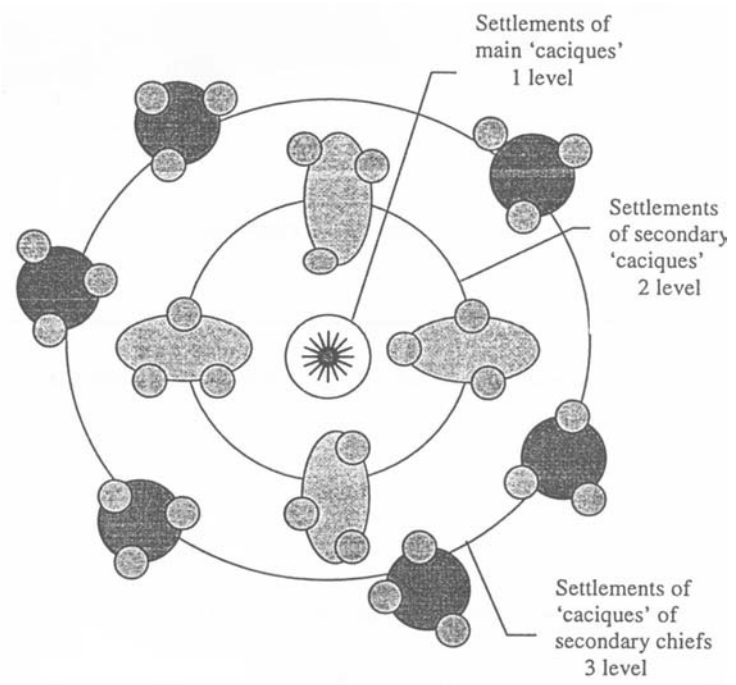

Figure 2 Model of past Rankülche settlements (from Curtoni 1999: 39).

Plate 1 Ancient rastrillada. Photograph by R. Curtoni.

to communal life. The overall pattern was a fluid constitution of a hierarchy of settlements linked by a circular structure of movements between camps that imbued a peculiar series of rhythms to daily and seasonal life.

This circular spatialization of Rankülche settlements and territories has been analyzed to consider the location of the main indigenous camps and the complex distribution of pathways that connect all of them (Curtoni 1999). These tracks were traced in a customary way by the intense and constant traffic of men first and animals later on (Diaz Zorita n.d.). The knowledge, access, and control of these pathways were fundamental to permit mobility and entrance to other territories. The powerful lonko controlled many routes and the best waterholes and pasture zones. The imprinting of the landscape through circulation was crisscrossed by the interrelations with other indigenous groups that were fostered by different circumstances, such as exchange, kinship, political and marriage alliances, and special social gatherings. In this way, the perception of the landscape was in itself social, as it happened in reference to other people, the ancestors and cosmogony. Within this social field, it can be said that places had the status of persons (Tilley 1994). For instance, each gender had exclusive places in which activities forbidden to the other were performed, such as the transmission of sacred songs between women (Fernández Garay 1997: 163). The process of naming also shows this, as pre-colonial Rankülche place naming went from the description of topographic features (e.g. *Naico* or 'spring water' and 'cacique Pincen's settlement'), to the evocation of events and mythical actions (e.g. *Tronul* or 'where scary spirits appear', *Langhelo* or 'place where people were killed'). Naming also alluded to belonging, provenance, and even everyday activities (*Luan Lauquen* or 'place of social meetings', *Calchahue* 'where women cut their pubic hair', *Curralauquen* or 'lagoon with stones and settlement'). It is thus possible to argue that social identity was performed and reproduced in reference to the landscape. During the nineteenth century the emergence and recognition of well-defined territories and central camps under a lonko called *cacicatos* ('chiefdoms' in Spanish) was related to this process of identification between people and places. This created a sense of belonging and attachment to specific localities that was bound up with the referential identification of lineage groups with particular settings. Social identity was reproduced through time in order to maintain and ensure lineage associations with certain places and to differentiate between groups. In this way, strong attachments to specific places were developed through a few generations of cultural tradition and of 'being in the world' in the rapidly changing context of frontier society.

Overall, what has been described as Rankülche spatialization in the past suggests a sense of attachment and belonging to specific places, as well as a sense of reciprocal emplacement and identification related to the major community. In this sense, Rankülche people developed an awareness of places manifested on different scales (see Tuan 1977), such as the perceptions of central places and those others linked to the figures of main lonkos (Bechis 1989). Senses of belonging and perceptions of social distances, to these chiefs, implied a concentric way of dwelling, encompassing the whole territory of the lineage. The continuity of these conceptualizations over years created sedimented traces of meaning (Tilley 1994), which were transmitted as coming from time immemorial (de la Cruz 1806, in De Angelis 1969: 243).

In order to legitimize the nineteenth-century war of conquest, this Rankülche dwelling space was identified as a 'barbaric space', a space in which its dwellers had neither culture

but the power to destroy both. White society considered the Rankülche as basically a mobile group whose attachment to the land did not conform to the instrumental relation between man and land (nature) fostered by ideologies of conquest and territorial expansion. As the author of the constitutional project of the Argentinean nation said, 'my country is a desert half populated and half civilized' (Alberdi 1979 [1852]: 241–3). The military conquest implied not only the dramatic reordering of indigenous spatiality by dispersing and relocating the survivors in pastoral colonies and missions, but also the physical transformation of the landscape by allotting tracts of land following a Cartesian grid to facilitate the development of private property (Curtoni 1999: 70). Therefore, since the first advances of frontier society, multiple spatialities seem to have increasingly coexisted making of this landscape a complex and multi-layered bundle of space, time, and socio-spatial practices.

The struggles over a place of memories

The contemporary landscape of western La Pampa, still seen as a desert by most Argentinean inhabitants, has more recently become the site for struggles of meaning about this violent past, particularly since the construction of a memorial in 1994 in the former central

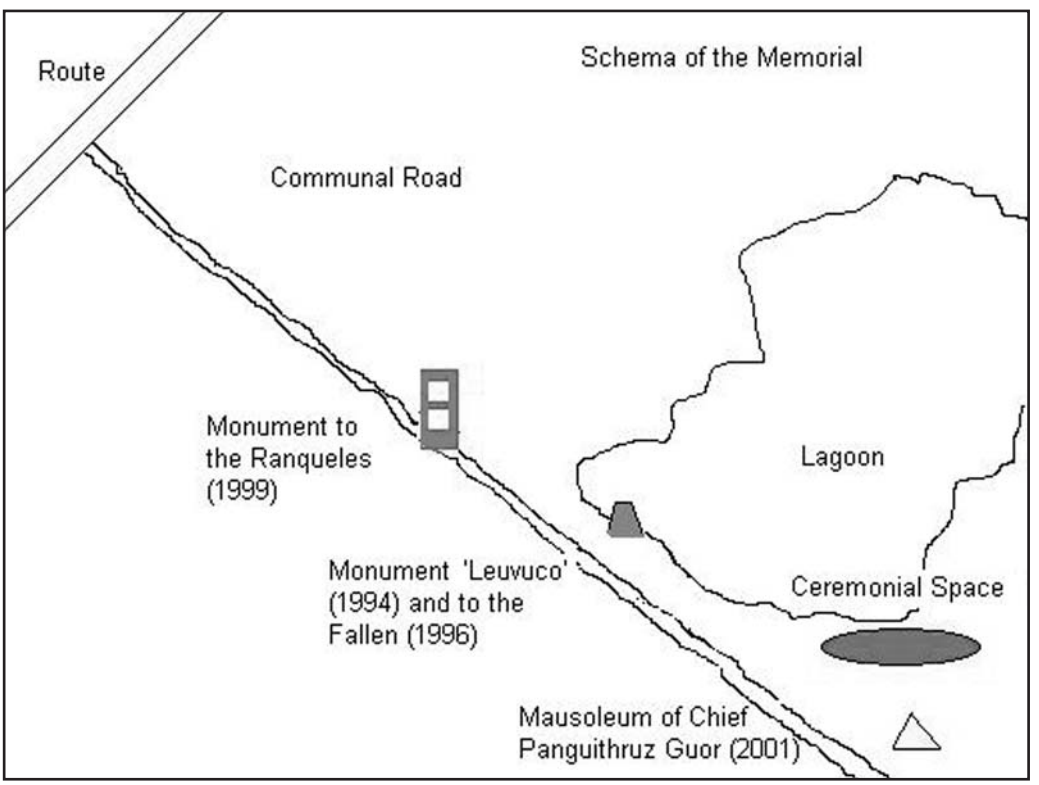

Figure 3 Schema of the memorial.

settlement of the Rankülche, next to the Leubucó lagoon (Fig. 3). Since then, three other memorials have been installed in the same area, revealing, in their cross-references, the intentions to dispute aspects of the past and collective identities (aboriginal and provincial above all).[4]

The Leubucó lagoon is located 25 km north of Victorica, the first settlement founded by the conqueror Argentinean army and presently capital of the department. In 1996, an Indigenist organization with the assistance of the provincial Undersecretary of Culture inaugurated a monolith to mark the place (Plate 2). It is a 2m-high, truncated pyramid on top of which stand two crossed *tacuaras* (spears) as a symbol of peace. Three other texts are attached to the front face of the pyramid. The plaque 'Monument Leubucó' reconstructs the place as an object of remembrance. A replica of the provincial coat of arms claims ultimate sovereignty over the territory where the memory work is emplaced. Finally, a third plaque advances an interpretation of this place of memories asserting that it is a 'Tribute to the fallen in the name of civilization'. In this manner, the old foes – the Rankülche Indians and the *milicos* (the military) – are merged as 'the fallen' and the war of conquest is euphemized as a civilizing mission.

In November 1999 a 'Monumento to the Ranqueles' was inaugurated in the same place. It was erected as the result of the co-operation of the provincial Undersecretary of Culture with Rankülche activists who nevertheless had little control over the final outcome, such as the shape of the statue and the name of the monument. The 'discourse' of landscape and memory was edited by interpolating a new object that would give a new meaning to the place and the fallen in the name of civilization. To begin with, the monument was located some 200m ahead of the monolith, resulting in the visitor bumping

Plate 2 Monument Leubucó. Photograph by A. Lazzari.

Plate 3 Monumento to the Ranqueles. Photograph by A. Lazzari.

into it without actually noticing the latter (Plate 3). Other detours emerged from the formal features of the object.

The statue is an 8m-high hollow statue, laminated with ochre metal plaques. Designed by an Indigenist artist, the rectangular volume looks like a giant, with an inverted cone as a head, a folded right arm holding a spear, and two extremely long legs without feet. It represents the supposed relations of the Rankülche to their territory. At first glance, we see a 'blind' sentinel looking at the lagoon, but then we discover small human figures scanning the landscape around. These are contained in the chest of the giant, representing the eight main Rankülche warrior chiefs (*La Arena* 5 October 1999).

The design of the statue envelops in a modernist aesthetic the Undersecretary of Culture's version of the Rankülche re-emergence. It conveys, through its formal features, the paradox of 'erasing-while-showing' implied in the hegemonic discourse that labels the Rankülche as a tribe from the past yet to reappear in the present. Rankülche reactions to the monument, while publicly thankful, also seemed shocked by its shape (as expressed in comments such as 'occidentalist', 'Robocop', 'parrot-cage'). This reaction perhaps indicates an estrangement from their experience and practices of place-making.

More recently, in 2001, a hollow wooden structure was built 500m away from the first monument and about 800m from the second one (Plate 4). It is the innermost monument of all, housing a relic, the skull of the heroic Chief Panguithruz Güor, also known as

Mariano Rosas. Over a 1m-high square base of caldén logs, emerges a pyramidal cusp of the same height, three of its sides allegorizing historical Rankülche lineages and the fourth the Rankülche tribe as a whole. On the *Güor* (fox) side, there is a glass canopy allowing the observer to meet the skull's hollow eye orbits. Also directed toward the lagoon, the skull's eyes seem to be there not to capture the landscape but as part of the aboriginal identity to be seen. The Rankülche created their own ritual space next to the mausoleum, cleared out the bushes around a *Rehue* (ritual pole) and announced the beginning of their own memory work following a reinvented ritual calendar.

The skull of Chief Mariano Rosas was buried after a struggle to bring it back from the deposits of the Museo de La Plata in the city of La Plata (Province of Buenos Aires). Mariano Rosas was a legendary Rankülche chief in the resistance to the state campaigns but he died before the final disarticulation of his people. The campaign for the repatriation of the remains was one of the main cultural battles fought since the inception of aboriginal organization around the mid-1980s. It was a long struggle that included lobbying at the National Institute of Indigenous Affairs (INAI), the National Congress, the Museo de La Plata, and the provincial government. Historical accounts narrate how, after the last skirmishes, the soldiers looted the Chief's tomb. While the silver articles were kept, the bones were given to the naturalists who accompanied the expedition as the tribute of war to science. Immediately, they donated them to contribute to the building of the state's collections of aboriginal skeletons (see discussion in Podgorny and Politis 1990–2).

Plate 4 Monument to Chief Panguithruz Güor. Photograph by A. Lazzari.

The memorial is an apparatus of charged textual and visual cross-references, materializing different strategies in the current disputes and negotiations around aboriginal recognition. These strategies have been implemented to direct the reading of this former central place in Rankülche life, thus narrowing the possible interpretations of that past. Although different groups of interest are involved, they are always under the patronage of the provincial government. This shifting game of consensus and dissent seeks to euphemize the foundational violence of the Argentinean state. It reveals the native people as both trapped in this logic of the poisonous gift of state recognition, while struggling to become visible as an autonomous people.

The memorial perimeter purports the re-indigenization of people who were not seen as aboriginal until very recently, by recovering and mourning certain pasts of the Rankülche Indians through the narrative of the Conquest of the Desert. In the process of aboriginal re-emergence, claims are played against each other in terms of a dispute between the national (and provincial) epic of war and civilization and the aboriginal discourse of reparation. The memorial defines the arena of aboriginal recognition in the context of provincial pluralism; it defines the parameters of what is the public past to be constructed about the temporal, spatial, and collective continuity of the Rankülche Indians as well as where, when and how to commemorate it. This is all the more important given powerful common-sense belief that designates the Rankülche as a 'vanished tribe'. But, as we pointed out, the re-emergence of Rankülche identity as a living people is caught in the hegemonic mechanism of 'erasing-while-showing'. This mechanism seems to revolve around the notion of the place 'as given'. It is in the hope of disentangling the complexities of this hegemony (in the sense of Williams (1977)) that we address the constitution of landscape as a work of the art of remembering. In the next sections we explore the theoretical links between landscape and memory, and, as a heuristic device, we pay attention to the remembrances and spatial practices of current visitors to the memorial.

Landscapes and memory

It is a common assumption that the relation between landscape and memory results from the capture of memories on the land in the form of architectural or other visual landmarks. Memory is thus conceived as the 'appropriation' of a landscape seen as an object and not affected by the project of its representation and remembrance (Küchler 1993: 103). By concentrating on the encoding of memories instead of on the process of remembering in itself, the historical and political importance of non-Western forms of representation is missed. Consequently, instead of thinking in terms of 'landscapes of memory' (that is, of places that work as *aide-mémoires*), landscapes could be seen '*as* memory' in themselves, that is, an inhabited space which is the effect of processes of remembering or 'memory-work' (Küchler 1993: 104). However, these 'effects' are not just reflections of social processes but also 'affects', the impacts of identification that can generate new possibilities for social action (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

The monuments are thus nodes in a network of spatial relations that can be described as the 'spatial texture' of the monument (Lefevbre 1964). An analysis of the lived and represented spaces as constituted in the spatial texture of the monuments can show that

social spaces are more than texts to be read or decoded (Lefevbre 1964). If we consider, following Küchler, that memory is not about 'possessing memories' but a 'memory work' through inhabiting, the analysis of the spatial practices associated with remembering and forgetting is required. In this case, the space of past wars continues to be so in the present because it constitutes a window of space-time whose operation must be controlled through specific forms of material culture, intertwined with national discursive economies. These forms of material culture stand in a metonymic relationship with what was and what could be: they constitute visible and contingent nodes in the field of the invisible past and present possibilities of retrieving meaningful, affective pasts. This approach to memory and identity shows that the landscape is neither inert matter nor a stage, but a specific configuration that exists precisely because people with different trajectories dwell in a particular field of remembrance and forgetting.

In this field several forms of 'memory work' or processes of memory building are present. Memories can be seen as constituting different *genres* or forms of representation that unfold over time by referring not only to their contexts and to the 'original' event, but also to their own histories and internal structure as texts (Olick and Robbins 1998: 130). One of the most visible forms (and one of the more pervasive memory genres) is monumental memory, a linear succession of peak events, apexes, climaxes, epitomized in the 'war memorial' genre (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991). In the Rankülche case, all groups privilege the war memorial genre, although employing different formal properties in the design of the monuments themselves.

Yet, these landmarks are not necessarily part of the same representational genre. An alternative interpretation would be that, despite their participation in the process of 'erasure through memorialization', some of these landmarks are also part of other genres as manifestations of different types of memory (Young 1993). A central aspect here is the role of the spatial practices that constitute the landscape *as* memory, a type of memory work that is not specific to a particular society or time but is part of a different form of representation and experience. The analysis of this form of memory work shows more clearly how recalling, as a spatial practice of lived bodies, is neither 'conservation' nor 'construction' but both (Halbwachs 1980; Merleau-Ponty 1962). A heuristic experiment may prove to be useful for exploring the role of spatial practices in seeing recalling as embodied process.

The threads of memory: spatial practices of visitors

'Do you remember what the object of commemoration was in that place?' one of us asked. 'A people', answered the interlocutor assuredly, 'an aboriginal people . . . I remembered *the* huge Indian with little chiefs inside . . . Also the tomb of *chief* Mariano.' This visitor, a middle-class female urban dweller, was asked in Buenos Aires about her recollections of her visit to the site of Leubucó a year before. The 'aboriginal people' being commemorated at the place were associated in her recollection to the two latest and most salient objects arranged within the memorial site.

There were two other embodiments of memory that were supposed to be remembered by the visitor but, nonetheless, were left out. Among the things 'forgotten' were the

lagoon and the monolith. Yet both were announced and offered to the visitor within the same memorial site, as part of an intended orchestration of memory of things past. By receding into oblivion, these two objects left significant traces for the evocation of the Rankülche as an aboriginal pre-existent people. The lagoon in particular, generally thought of as a natural and stable background for the drama of history, appears and disappears because its mass of water is critically altered by the rain regime and subterranean streams. The fluid and ambiguous presence of the lagoon, which the monolith attempts to deny by assuming it as permanent, shows how unhelpful the objectified visions of the landscape can be to understanding the works of memory. We may hypothesize that those visitors who do not see the lagoon may not see the Rankülche identity while still having a grasp of it through dwelling.

Others threads of selective recalling, as well as concrete ways of walking and inscribing the place, coincide in this 'middle of nowhere'. While the traditionalist association made this lagoon the endpoint of the *incursion* and the re-enactment of a historical example of how to deal with Indians 'in their own territory', the Rankülche envisioned it as the 'resting home' of their foremost chief. Their *devoted pilgrimage* from the city of La Plata to Leubucó set the mark for a new beginning in the struggles for recognition. Both threads are in dialogue with the massive monument to the 'friendly Indian', the blind figure that embodies all the lonkos. When asked by one of us about its significance, lonko Canuhé complained that it had been made by an 'indigenist' artist who, although a human rights activist, did not represent their interests. Canuhé, nonetheless, accepts it as a 'gift' because it somehow recognizes their present existence. As he stated in an interview it was *a first step*:

> We understand it is a tribute of the Provincial State to the Rankülche people and it has three meanings for us. First, recognition of our people; second, the establishment of a new relationship between the Provincial State and the representatives of our people; and finally, it is the first step toward the restitution of the remains of Mariano Rosas that will be accomplished in the beginning of year 2000.
>
> (*La Arena* 10 November 1999)

This monument dramatizes the state recognition of native warrior power, but in fact erases the war in this will to assimilate, consequently diverting attention from the present where not only 'cultural' recognition but also 'material' reparation (related to land claims) are at stake.

The memory pathways are in polemic dialogue, by trying to erase specific aspects enhanced by each artefact. While the monolith seeks to render the civilizing process legitimate, to euphemize the war, and to minimize any kind of state recognition of Indian past bravery, the mausoleum attempts to mark the place in almost an organic fashion. It is our contention that this form of commemoration by the Rankülche, although connected to the formal appearance of monuments and the logic of inscribing the land, also constitutes a different type of memory work that is genealogically linked to past forms more akin to the logic of the landscape as memory. Key indicators of memory as dwelling are the creation of a ritual space around the mausoleum as well as the recent installation of a communal tent that houses Rankülche tokens of self-representation (with photographs and crafts), of their process of commemoration.

This indicates that the mausoleum is more than an inscription on the land, but a relational effect of dwelling.

Finally, there is a different kind of action, that of the person who, after deviating by several kilometers to get there, drew an insulting graffiti on the memorial, perhaps expressing the ambiguous relation between the invocation/imposition of remembering and the personal need to carve one's memories.

These trajectories indicate the importance of spatial practices in recalling and forgetting. The movements between monument, monolith, and mausoleum, whether through ritualizing or desecrating practices, show that this place has become an artefact of memory in itself, a creation of several agents – including the authors of this paper – a 'museum' of the Rankülche culture (in the sense of Castañeda 1996).

A textured landscape: memory, nature, history

The memorial of Leubucó is an apparatus of charged significance, materializing the different strategies around Rankülche re-emergence. The interaction among these three artefacts of memory (or four with the combination monolith-lagoon) defines disputes on what should be remembered and forgotten. Each monument embodies the forgetting of the other, a kind of willful forgetting – by means of a selective remembering – with productive social consequences (Battaglia 1992; Casey 1987).

Regarding the Rankülche mausoleum that houses the skull, we have argued that is not just a hegemonic 'appropriation'. This artefact does not constitute a form of 'false consciousness', but is a way of remembering that is genealogically linked with past forms of memory work. In other words, it is the confluence of different forms of memory genres whose connections to past forms is neither the blind reproduction of an essential inheritance nor a complete creation (see Thomas 1999).

The analysis of the contemporary landscape in a long-term perspective yields past and present forms of dwelling as entanglements of material practices and mutually constituted visions. The past landscape *as* memory is a carving of the land linked to the memorial-mausoleum of the Rankülche. This artefact of memory goes beyond the function of representation, as it also evidences a process of representation inseparable from the act of remembering and dwelling (Küchler 1993). We have identified similarities in past and present memory work, but the affinities between them do not amount to a direct link. More accurately, in the Rankülche case the ambiguity of the material form of the memorial and the concrete spatial practices around it signal the complexities of this battleground. The mausoleum is a powerful object where different genres meet, a provisional resolution of the predicament of Rankülche re-emergence. The landscape reveals that social spaces interpenetrate each other and no description can render exactly or totally their meanings (Lefevbre 1964). The 'readings' of signs, theirs and ours, are just another way of living a specific space, a way of enacting it that is tightly related to specific social processes that coincide – and sometimes collide – in places such as Leubucó.

The present encoding of memories through the monumentalization of specific events is in constant and irresoluble tension with a different memory work, one that creates the

landscape as a peculiar and unique work of the art of remembering. It is only through acknowledging the constitutive agency of what modernity has seen as mere 'background' (the landscape as theatre or scenery) that we can learn how to remember something positive about the Rankülche in present-day Argentina. We have attempted to make this point by relating the chronology of inscriptions of the place and the associated spatial practices of recalling and forgetting to the memory work under the theoretical banner of 'landscape *as* memory'.

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Notes

1 For the purposes of this article we shall use Rankülche as the ethnic identity marker. Since the early 1990s the term Rankülche has increasingly been used in the public sphere of the province of La Pampa as a Rankülche phonetic transcription of the Spanish terms Ranquel, Rancul, or Ranquelino/a. It presupposes a structure of agency around the organization of indigenous political claims. Only twenty years ago, 'Ranquel' would be the preferential term for things aboriginal –material cultural, language, social life, population stock, ethnohistory, etc. Though still in circulation, 'Ranquel' has been challenged by 'Rankülche', showing that now it may make a politically sensitive difference to refer to the aboriginal people in their 'own terms'.

2 We use 'aboriginal' following Claudia Briones' (2000) expansion of Jeremy Beckett's Australian-based concept of 'aboriginality'. Beckett (1988) considers it as a distinct type of ethnic identity within nation-states characterized by the fact that their bearers are (self) considered as descendants of the first inhabitants. 'Descent' and 'pre-existence' (to the conquerors' and settlers' society) creates an 'imagined community' across indigenous 'ethnic peoples', not only in one country but in transnational spheres ('Fourth World'). Briones emphasizes the necessity of tracing 'aboriginal' identity formations along the historical trajectory of each ethnic entity, taking into account the complex connection between transnational, national, and local communities' stereotyping of the 'first-timers'.

3 Rankülche organizations estimate that total Rankülche population would approach to 3,000, around 1% of the total provincial population.
4 During his last visit to the place in August 2002, Axel Lazzari found yet another building, a chapel-like shrine with majolica featuring an Indian baptism by Franciscan missionaries in 1870. We would not include this new feature in our argument. It suffices to note the authoritative claims involved in the fact that this last construction, sponsored by the locally powerful Salesian Fathers, has been placed (apparently without resistance) at the very beginning of the memorial circuit.
5 This plaque was put by a traditionalist association to commemorate a peace mission, the so-called excursion to the Rankülche in 1870 (see Mansilla 1997).

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