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Artifacts of Representation: The Makings of Indigeneity in Argentine Museums

A.K. Sartor

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ARTIFACTS OF REPRESENTATION: THE MAKINGS OF INDIGENEITY IN ARGENTINE MUSEUMS

by

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B.A. in Anthropology

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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B.A., Lee University, 2013
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ABSTRACT

Museums are an integral part of a nation's identity formation - showcasing to national and international visitors what it means to be part of that nation. In Argentina, where national identity is tied to deep colonial roots, indigenous contributions in museums are often essentialized into a form that can easily be absorbed and appropriated by non-indigenous Argentines, as part of a legacy of an ethnic past. For my research, I visited museums in Argentina and cataloged how indigenous people were represented in order to analyze Argentina's interactions with the indigenous people that are often believed not to exist. My thesis aims to engage with these representations of indigeneity in order to better understand and explain the role of the museum in a nation's educational and political systems and how various methods of showcasing cultures marked as other can lead to lack of knowledge and support for the complicated histories and present day issues of ethnic minorities. I use this information to discuss how relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous people are affected by museum representations of indigeneity and how that leads to political and structural action or inaction.
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Introduction

In the two months I spent in Argentina, I only had three direct interactions with indigenous people. The first encounter was at an indigenous protest camp, situated at a major intersection in the middle of Buenos Aires. I played with some girls, maybe three or four years old, who pointed at pictures from a Dragon Ball Z sticker book while their parents asked passer-bys to sign indigenous rights petitions. Tents and tarps shielded families from the biting wind while they slept on mattresses or sleeping bags. The signs and banners posted around the camp made their mission clear – they weren't going to leave until the president heard them. However, despite the central location (the protest was located on Avenida de Mayo and Avenida 9 de Julio, two major streets connected to various public transport routes as well as motorist and pedestrian trafficways) and the proximity to national government (Casa Rosada, the house of the president, was a short walk away, as was the national congress building), the protest failed to get much attention from the people of Buenos Aires, much less government officials, even in the center of federal power in the capital of Argentina.

The protestors were mostly from the Toba and Wichi groups, who live in the northern regions of Argentina. After my time in Buenos Aires, I went to the city of Resistencia, in the northern Chaco province. While I was researching there, I met some Toba who had organized a cultural center/museum to showcase their cultural traditions to Resistencia residents and visitors. A wall full of plaques, ribbons, and certificates advertised the success of the Coro Qom, a group that travels around the region spreading
traditional Toba/Qom music, and the men I met were happy to show me around the museum and tell me about their displays of cultural artifacts, which was often done with the assumption that, as a visitor to the museum, I would have no background knowledge about the Toba or any other indigenous groups in Argentina.

Finally, I went to a Christian mission school in the Wichi village of Laguna Yacaré in the northern province of Formosa, which is located down many miles of winding dirt roads, has no running water, and has only very limited access to electricity. While I was there, I observed the different ways the teachers, who were white Argentines from the bigger cities, interacted with both Wichi students and creole students (who came from surrounding villages and didn't intermingle with the Wichi much). One of the workers at the school directly told me that this distinction is important, and that Wichi children don't have the same potential as creole children. "Es en su sangre," she said, meaning "it's in their blood." This was the general consensus at the school, both among the adults and the children. Wichi students were just there until they dropped out, and if they did graduate, their degree wouldn't take them further than the next village over, regardless of their desires and ambitions. Meanwhile, creole students were being groomed for college applications and jobs in the cities, which many of the students (both Wichi and creole) desired.

So what makes these three interactions significant? In a way, they each reflect a different perspective of indigenous people in Argentina. The first one is a mixture of denial and oppression. While refusing to acknowledge the existence of indigenous people, the Argentine state is also denying them basic rights (Gordillo and Hirsch 2003,
Delrio et al. 2010. Sutton 2008, Lozano 2005). When indigenous people are seen, they are usually either viewed as cultural anomalies or as backward and impoverished by nature, if not both. However, Argentine indigenous lives and cultures have much more nuances and depth than these stereotypes (Hecht 2012, Langer 2003, Miller 2001, Vivaldi 2011).

As a way of examining the ambiguities surrounding the place of indigenous people in Argentinian history and society, I studied the representation of indigenous history and society in Argentinian museums. I looked at museums in order to understand how they reflect national ideologies concerning cultural and ethnic groups, how they actively shape public perceptions, and how they can even contribute to the inclusion or erasure of those cultural and ethnic groups. Using the specific example of museums presenting indigenous groups in the nation of Argentina, I examined several museums in both Buenos Aires and Resistencia, looking at markers of indigeneity and displays of indigenous history to find out what type of ideology the museums are promoting and how that affects the Argentine population's relationships with indigenous groups. Although it was not surprising to find an essentialized notion of indigeneity, which is common in settler-colonial states, my research was helpful in understanding the specifics of what contributes to that notion and looking at it in terms of national influence through the museum. This project will examine processes of representation in each museum to highlight what is reflective of common Argentine ideologies and what is counteractive to them.

Argentina is a country with rich history, starting with indigenous migration from the north and continuing to recent participation in global politics. It is part of Latin
America, a region known for its indigenous heritage as well as Spanish conquest. However, Argentina, along with neighboring Chile, is distinctive in the way it emphasizes European heritage and minimizes indigenous influence. Because of Argentina's history and location, its interactions with ideas of indigeneity are particularly important, and national identity construction at times conflicts with the historical background of the nation. This discrepancy can lead to a narrative of Argentine nationhood that does not fully acknowledge indigenous aspects of history and culture (Rock 1987, Grimson 2005). Indigeneity is a political and multifaceted concept, developed by scholars such as Povinelli (2002), Sturm (2011), Simpson (2014), Barker (2011), and Comaroff and Comaroff (2009), and at times it is assigned while others it is voluntarily claimed. For the purposes of indigeneity in Argentina, I will be developing on specific examples by Gordillo and Hirsch (2003), Vivaldi (2007, 2012), Miller (2001), Warren (2009), and Hecht (2012), as well as my own experiences from my fieldwork.

Much of Argentina's history can be found in truncated versions in the nation's many museums, which showcase what are presented as the highlights of the country's development. Indigenous histories in nations which do not have a majority indigenous population are handled in manners as diverse as the countries responsible for them, and even within the same country there is some variation in how indigeneity is treated. For this project, I analyze indigenous representation in select museums in Argentina in order to understand how museums contribute to national perspectives on indigenous populations. I will look at how the constructions of indigenous people in museums, in the context of historical and contemporary representations, reflect existing notions of
indigeneity and how they affect visitors' perceptions of and interactions with indigenous groups. I will consider the cultural and historical influences of indigenous people in the nation of Argentina and examine where and how they are placed in museum displays and timelines in order to investigate how museums contribute to and supplement state education systems on the topic of indigenous groups.

As part of the cultural and educational framework of a nation, museums have a strong influence on the mindset of the people. They sit at the intersection between government positioning and popular opinion, attempting to showcase a nation's history, art, scientific advancements, and much more. People of a wide variety of ages, races, and social classes come to museums, including people who are not otherwise exposed to a nation's public education systems. The framework of understanding that comes from within a museum is not unique to any specific nation. Museums have become popular academic, social, and cultural institutions worldwide, and are present in many diverse countries. Museums operate as a chance for a nation to show off what makes them unique as well as to educate its citizens about its art and history. Because of this, museums hold an important place for displaying ideas about what makes a nation, which can be seen especially in how nations handle indigenous histories (Sandell 2002, Roberts 1997, Falk and Dierking 2012).

This place is crucially important because it is the people, the ones who are visiting the museums, sitting in the lectures, and attending the events, that are responsible for electing government officials, petitioning for social change, and passing information on to the next generation. Public education prepares a generation to assume the roles of active
citizens, but it is limited by what is on the public agenda. Museums can be accessed by people at all stages of life and education, and the material is not regulated in the same way as in state education systems. In a popular democracy, such as Argentina, it is imperative that citizens have access to the types of knowledge and ideas that can lead to strong choices politically, socially, and economically. Museums, through providing knowledge to the people, can influence national character and decision making.

Museums are also distinctive in their ability to influence travelers and citizens alike. Visitors from other places near and far come and see museums as an overview of the place they are visiting. Families, couples, and social groups go to museums as an activity or outing, and are often unaware of how the museum can build upon what they have previously learned in other settings. By presenting information in different formats than formal education, such as integrating sensory experience and visual narrative, museums concretize, simplify, and potentially reify the enormous complexities of national history and culture. Through their wide accessibility, museums can reach broad and diverse audiences, even more so than traditional school systems (Hein 2002, Falk and Dierking 2000, Hooper-Greenhill 2007).

In Argentina, museums are especially important in how they present indigenous people, because Argentina has rejected indigenous narratives in media (Delrio et al. 2010), literature (Hanaway 2003), and education (Gordillo and Hirsch 2003). This denial of indigenous presence and historical contributions strongly contrasts with much of Latin America, where indigenous cultures are openly acknowledged to be integral parts of the nation (Earle 2007). Argentina, along with some other South American countries such as
Chile, has presented itself as a “white” nation, fitting patterns of settler colonialism identified with Australia and other societies built on European immigration (Wolfe 2006, Gott 2007). However, because of its proximity to countries in which indigenous identity is a large part of national formation, as well as its unique history and development, Argentina is unable to embrace its European identity as exclusively as the most extreme settler colonial nations. This leaves indigenous groups in a paradoxical situation, one in which they are recognized to some extent but are nevertheless struggling to survive, both culturally and physically, in a society that also denies their existence, actively hinders their development, and trivializes their identities (Gordillo and Hirsch 2003, Lozano 2005, Ko 2014).

Museums in Argentina are often backed by state funding, and most can be visited for little to no cost by travelers and locals alike. Although many museums are supported by the state and include representations of indigenous groups, most involve little to no oversight by the state or contributions by indigenous people. This shows opportunities that aren't being taken to provide more holistic representations of indigenous groups without fear of backlash from the state (Sandell 2002). According to Peggy Levitt (2015), who studies the impact of museums of various types on national identity, “museums' power extends far beyond their buildings. They each play some part in influencing how we envisage and talk about our nations and their place in the world – and the images and vocabulary we use to do so” (140). Levitt looks at the potential of museums to foreground voices that are not often heard and show objects that might strike more controversy, and how this can lead to real social change. Museums can highlight the diverse values of
complex societies, addressing the experiences of different audiences. This presents serious challenges, but by engaging with diverse groups, museums can be places that provide deeper meaning and, such as in the case of this study, speak to what it means to be indigenous in a complex, large scale society such as Argentina today.

The issue of indigenous representation in museums is one that can be applied to most, if not all, settler colonial states, and there are many similarities between Argentina and more commonly recognized settler colonial environments such as Australia and the US. However, it is also important to acknowledge the differences that are inherent in Argentina's positioning in Latin America. Scholars have addressed Argentina as a settler colonial state (Gott 2007) and as a place in which indigeneity is ignored or denied (Ko 2014, Delrio et al. 2010, Gordillo and Hirsch 2003), but they have not explored the shifting interactions between the state and indigenous groups as a framework for discussing the unique role museums have in representing indigenous issues to the public, which is what I will be doing in this thesis.
Methods

For my thesis research, I visited museums in Argentina's capital city of Buenos Aires as well as the city of Resistencia in the Northern Chaco province during the summer of 2015. In each city, I visited museums that showcase history or ethnography in some way, and selected three museums in each location to feature extensively in my research. I visited these six museums many times throughout my stay in Argentina and cataloged the data presented, especially when concerning displays of indigeneity. The three museums I visited in Buenos Aires were: Museo Histórico Nacional, Museo Nacional del Hombre, and Museo Etnográfico Juan B. Ambrosetti. In Resistencia, they were: Museo del Hombre Chaqueño, Museo Histórico Regional Ichoalay, and Centro Cultural y Artesanal Leopoldo Marechal.

Fig. 1: The museums visited in Buenos Aires
In each museum, I attended guided tours when they were available, both in Spanish and English when both languages were offered. By participating in guided tours, I was able to see how museum displays are presented to visitors by the guides. Through this, I could get a more complete picture of how exhibits are designed to be interpreted. I photographed displays, took notes on the information, and drew maps of museum layouts in order to see how visual and spatial representations reflected indigenous ideology and to compare them to non-indigenous displays in the same museums. Looking at non-indigenous displays allowed me to make statements about representation with a broader perspective and gave me something to contrast indigenous displays with. I also spoke more in depth with museum officials about how the museums are organized and how information and artifacts are chosen, which gave me more complete data about museum decisions and perspectives. Additionally, I attended events, visited community centers, and spoke to local people throughout the Buenos Aires and Northeast Argentina areas, especially those having to do with indigenous activity, as a means of gleaning information about how indigeneity is displayed in other contexts, some of which are similar to museums and some of which are very different. Through this process, I was able to grow my knowledge of non-indigenous views of indigeneity in Argentina as well as how indigenous and non-indigenous groups interact (or don't).
In this thesis, I will use information gathered both by means of traditional research and that of my own physical experiences, through which I was able to access information in a way that would not have been possible with only electronic and paper resources. The ability to walk through a museum and be present in the exhibits enabled me to fully engage with each museum, and my position as an American allowed me to see each museum from an international visitor's perspective. Additionally, my presence in the museum allowed for interaction and dialogue that would have been more difficult using online communication, and my ability to observe visitors' interactions with the museum gave me insight into others' perspectives that would not have been possible otherwise. Though these museums are only a small representation of the country as a whole, I believe that each museum I investigated is able to contribute a unique but consistent outlook on museums and indigeneity in Argentina.

Additionally, because I was able to be physically present in Argentina, I could attend indigenous cultural movements, such as protests and performances, visit areas of
indigenous integration, and look at historical archives as well as present cultural
interactions. Most significant of these was an indigenous protest on the corner of Avenida
de Mayo and Avenida 9 de Julio in Buenos Aires, in which protesters had people walking
by sign a petition for indigenous land rights. In each city I visited, I looked for evidence
of indigenous presences and influences. I took note of indigenous handicrafts when they
were sold, and examined artwork and statues in each city. I also spent a week in a rural
Wichi village, Laguna Yacaré, in the northern province of Formosa. During that week, I
got to know several members of the Wichi community, interacting with them in their
home environment, and hear some of their histories and perspectives. These experiences
gave me additional context to draw on when presenting my data, keeping the areas and
situations surrounding it in mind.
Museum Selection

The first museum I selected was El Museo Nacional del Hombre. This museum was lesser known – very few of the Argentinians I spoke to knew about it, including my first hosts in Buenos Aires, who live right down the street. The website is simple, and the building unassuming. However, this museum holds a strong indigenous focus, and is part of a larger building that also houses anthropological research. The museum staff are also researchers or connected to research in their own right, and the lady who gave me a tour was a scholar who works in the upstairs portion of the building. Because of this, El Museo Nacional del Hombre seemed like a place for genuine knowledge sharing and credible research. This museum is set up and funded by government institutions, and has a .gov web presence.
Next, I went to El Museo Histórico Nacional. This museum is much more well known, and it is situated in the corner of a large public square. Tourists and school groups make frequent trips to this museum, and it is staffed by uniformed guards rather than independent researchers. Though much of the museum focuses specifically on Argentine historical figures, namely Juan Manuel de Rosas and José de San Martín, there is a segment devoted to indigenous groups. I chose El Museo Histórico Nacional because it is a key example of how Buenos Aires projects Argentina’s history to visitors, including but not limited to pre-conquest. This museum also is backed by the government, and is located on federally funded land. The website is .gob.

The last museum I selected in Buenos Aires was also a clear choice. El Museo Etnográfico Juan B. Ambrosetti may not be well known by the common people of Argentina, but scholars both in Buenos Aires and in the United States encouraged me to go to this museum. As an ethnographic focused museum affiliated with the university, it is a good example of a research-based museum that is also showcasing the role of indigenous groups to the national public. The staff is knowledgeable and helpful, and there is also a large library accessible to visitors of the museum that would like to look further into ethnographic, historical, and cultural topics. Rather than .gov or .gob, this museum is connected to the Universidad de Buenos Aires, and so is .edu. However, the university is affiliated with the government, so it would be safe to say that this museum is government sponsored in some ways as well.

In Resistencia, the first museum I chose was Museo Histórico Regional Ichoalay, which displays an overview of the region beginning with Spanish expeditions (1526) and
The sections are laid out pretty clearly, with “Pueblos Originarios,” “Conquista Militar,” and “Inmigrantes” written on the walls. This made the museum a good choice for looking the comparisons between these groups (Indigenous Peoples, Military Conquest, and Immigrants), which are often placed in contrast and overtake each other in timeline development. This museum is part of a regional program designed to enhance cultural experiences in the Chaco, run by the Instituto del Cultura (Cultural Institute), which has the motto “Chaco: Todas Las Culturas.” (Chaco: All of the Cultures).

The next museum, El Museo del Hombre Chaqueño, was chosen for similar reasons. Although this museum was larger and more complex, much of the content was separated in a similar style, which made it a good museum to use for making comparisons in representation between these three major groups. Also, El Museo del Hombre Chaqueño has a different perspective on the present day interactions of indigenous people and contemporary popular culture than the other museums I visited, making it an important contributor to the study. This museum is also sponsored by the Instituto del Cultura.

Finally, I chose El Centro Cultural y Artesanal Leopoldo Marechal, as a museum that is run by indigenous people themselves. This choice is a little bit different because it is officially an arts and culture center rather than a museum, but it contains displays, wall text, photographs, and even the exact same types of handicrafts that the other museums have. Though some of the information is a different, it is similar enough to be placed in
the same category, and the differences are worth considering as a location that is run by indigenous people to exhibit their arts and culture. However, despite these differences, like the other two museums in Resistencia, this museum is sponsored by the Chaco's Instituto del Cultura.

Important cultural factors in museum representations are not limited to history and ethnology museums, which are the types of museums I describe in this study. In my time in Argentina, I also visited political, art, and natural history museums in order to look for indigenous representations in those museums as well. Although I found some interesting information in these museums, I decided to limit my scope to the six museums selected in order to have a stronger focus and less confusion when it comes to sorting data.

**Difficulties**

Each museum presented a unique set of challenges, and each city had characteristics that, at times, made my research more complicated. Additionally, preparing for this research from my home in the United States was difficult due to the varying availability of information available about the museums online and inability to definitively select museums for the project without having gone in and experiencing them. Some information was difficult to find online, which made it hard to plan my visits, even from within the country. I also did not have regular access to a telephone during my time in Argentina, which made communicating with the museums more difficult. Although I did prepare by practicing Spanish, which I could already speak at a fluent level, there were times when language barriers did make things slightly harder to
understand, especially when factoring in the difference between Argentinian Spanish and
the Spanish spoken in countries I had been to previously, such as Mexico and Ecuador.

In Buenos Aires, it was difficult to spend the amount of time necessary in each
museum due to adjusting to the schedules (most museums were closed Mondays and
Tuesdays, which I had not been prepared for) and trying to navigate the city's extensive
public transport systems. Most of the places I stayed were far from the center of the city,
and I had to budget my time to allow for up to two hours of commuting to the museum
each way. Because I spent multiple hours in each museum when I visited, and I went to
each museum several times, this was at times a challenging process.

Resistencia, as a much smaller city, was easier to get around, but I also had to
factor in scheduling issues, such as the two hour break in the middle of the day that is
taken for *siesta*. Because of this, some museums did not even open until later in the day,
while others closed early. I often came into the center of the city in the morning to begin
my research, and had to find somewhere to spend the *siesta* that was closer and cheaper
than taking the bus back to where I was staying. This was complicated because, as a local
in Resistencia informed me, being out in *siesta* is as dangerous as being out in the middle
of the night. So, I had to time my museum visits in a way that would coordinate with not
being out extensively by myself during a *siesta* period.

Each individual museum had its complications as well. El Museo Nacional del
Hombre often did not have people available to talk to me about the exhibits, as it was a
smaller part of a larger project, and the consistent employees were security guards that
could answer some questions but were not prepared to extensively discuss the
information in the museum. El Museo Histórico Nacional had a similar issue – there were many security guards who were trained to answer questions, but other than pre-arranged guided tours there wasn't anyone with deep knowledge of the information that could explain the exhibits. In contrast, the employees of El Museo Etnográfico were well informed and interested in talking to visitors, both in tours and one-on-one, but sometimes the guides were very knowledgeable about issues that had little to do with my thesis (such as the exhibit on Bolivian adornments) and less so about the parts I was more interested in learning about.

In Resistencia, the museum that posed the most challenges was El Museo del Hombre Chaqueño, because it was undergoing renovations in the time that I was there. Although I was still able to walk around and see all the exhibits, the staff of the museum were not as readily available to give tours and explanations. Additionally, it was closed at times it would normally be open because of these renovations, sometimes for entire days or weeks. I had similar issues with El Centro Cultural y Artesanal Leopoldo Marechal, because many of the staff were out of town for winter vacations. I was able to get tours, but several of the times I came the museum was closed when it would have otherwise been open, and some of the times it was open there was no one there except the person who let me in (usually someone who went upstairs to work on other things while I looked around the museum). This made getting information challenging, and resulted in more frequent trips to the museum than would have been necessary otherwise. El Museo del Histórico Regional Ichoalay, on the other hand, had attentive staff that were present and available to give tours or answer questions. One thing that made this museum
complicated, however, was that it was hard to get time to look around without an employee assisting, and each time I came it was a different employee, which meant I got a lot of repeated information and was not able to build up as strong of a relationship with the staff members as I was in some of the other museums.

Data Collected

The data I have collected is largely in the form of notes and photographs. I categorize museum photos according to the type of data being photographed, the material presented in the photo, and which museum the photo is located in. I use photographs to analyze museum signs and labels as well as images and display layouts. I refer to my notes for details of guided tours, layout of the museums, and information concerning the people attending and working at each museum.

The data gathered from visual displays and photographs is important because it shows how indigenous and non-indigenous people are characterized and represented in a visual way. How a group of people is visually represented can speak toward national perceptions, and is important for analyzing relationships. Notes taken of experiences walking through the museum allow me to relate and draw from my embodied practice, which can show the experience a visitor might have when approaching these types of information. This embodiment is key to understanding what visitors go through when they enter the museum and how the displays and information is presented in an experiential way, which affects what knowledge the visitor takes with them when they leave.
I analyzed written texts in the museum, looking specifically at tenses used, categories of indigeneity, names of people, and trends in description that made for interesting comparisons. Through this analysis I am able to look at both subtle and overt manners of communicating knowledge concerning indigenous groups and the alignment with history, media, and education that these terms and descriptions can provide.

Looking at objects in the museum is telling because it shows what the museum found relevant enough to take up valuable space with three dimensional artifacts. Additionally, as these artifacts are often acquired at a cost, it speaks volumes about a museum's priorities on what to display. Examining objects in display cases, hung on the walls, sitting on pedestals, and even laid out for guests to interact with suggests what kind of image the museum is attributing to each category of object, and allows investigation as to what these objects can represent.

By asking questions and going on guided tours, I was able to see a deeper version of the information portrayed in the museum, and I was able to clear up questions and confusions that I may have had about displays. Conversations with museum staff and time spent listening to the tours given enabled me to attain knowledge that only some visitors are privy to, which deepened my experience and allowed me to engage more strongly with the material.

The last observation point in the museums was the approximate logistics based on my interactions and observations. I took note of how crowded each museum was, how the staff interacted with the public, who worked there and who visited. These notes are rather
brief, only giving an overview of what each museum attracts, but this is helpful in seeing how each museum is extending its influence in Argentinian society.

Finally, my data that comes from experiences outside the museum is an important supplement, because I am able to draw on these conversations and observations in order to better understand and put into context what I was seeing inside of the museums. Most notably, the indigenous protest I attended in Buenos Aires and the Wichi village I visited in the northern Formosa province gave me more of a background with Argentine indigenous groups, while my relationships and interactions with non-indigenous Argentinians in my time there gave me insight into some of the ideas typical Argentine citizens have concerning museums and indigeneity.

The data I collected leads me to believe that much of the displays I cataloged in these museums represent fragmented portions of indigenous history and an abbreviated understanding of indigenous lifestyles today. This is largely due to a focus on conquests and resistance, rather than domination, and on artisan products without much else to represent modern day indigenous cultures. I believe this reflects a partial vision of indigeneity in Argentina, similar to that represented in many other settler colonialist societies, which puts the disenfranchised category of indigenous groups as either a historical occurrence that is no longer affecting present day society or as a quaint, antiquated presence that does not require the same legal rights and treatment as non-indigenous groups (Gordillo and Hirsch 2003, Ko 2014, Vivaldi 2007).

In the country of Argentina, the role of the museum is especially vital when it comes to presenting indigeneity. The positioning of indigenous history in Argentine
museums builds on narratives of national identity that is taught in schools, showing a version of history that has been accepted as the national norm. While each museum has a slightly different perspective, the role of the museum as national identifier leads each museum to hold a similar timeline and understanding of how the nation is formed, including past and present events as well as more abstract concepts of racial identification and cultural formation (Sandell 2002, Levitt 2015, Lonetree 2012).

The exhibits I analyzed show a version of indigenous history that is in many ways glossed over. In most museums, emphasis is placed on cultural artifacts and history before colonization, possibly a brief understanding of rebellion against colonial forces, and then a segment on artifacts and traditions that exist in the current era. Very little, if anything, is said about enslavement, eradication, and massacre of indigenous people, and very little is said about indigenous struggles today. The few exhibits that mention indigenous groups' interactions with the government put it in a very positive light, highlighting national recognition, land rights, and bilingual education. These aspects of indigenous acknowledgment and multiculturalism can be significant; however, these exhibits do not mention the controversies involved with these issues, which often involve broken promises and violated laws (Povinelli 2002, Hecht 2012, Grimson 2005).

The collection of museums I visited represent various political, social, and academic standpoints, and results varied depending on which museum it was, as well as which city it was located in. These distinctions are crucial to understanding the process of indigenous representation in museums in settler colonial societies, and by looking at how museums present diverse pictures of indigeneity, we can also see how they can be
widened to include more comprehensive views of what it means to be indigenous in Argentina, which can be reflected on indigenous groups throughout the world.
Literature Review

Other/Subject

In my research, I borrow from the ideas of Edward Said (1978), Johannes Fabian (1983), and Michel Foucault (1982) in order to formulate my understanding of subject and object as can be seen with indigenous groups as well as what is presented in museums. These terms are useful when one person or group is looking at another and marking them as “other,” as being something separate and outside of their own conceptions of identity. Said's (1978) signature work of Orientalism discusses European perspectives and influences on the Orient, which can be applied to the processes of European investment and shaping of Spanish and Portuguese conquistadors in Latin America. Said discusses how this skewed power relationship leads to European conceptions of the other that are recreated and reproduced, with little or no input from the people who actually belong to those cultures. I take this idea of a dominant culture speaking for and presenting a less dominant culture in order to examine the situation in Argentina's museums.

Anthropology as a field of study has been focused on determining this idea of the other. Fabian (1983) explains the idea of the other in terms of the study of anthropology, claiming “it [anthropology] strives to constitute its own object – the savage, the primitive, the Other” (1). The construction of an other is accompanied by the transfer of information, spreading knowledge about the other from a distanced point of view, which Fabian states is necessarily “... a temporal, historical, and political act” (1). The labeling
of differences and spread of distanced knowledge can lead to political misuse and cultural misunderstandings, especially when the notion of difference is forged by a discrepancy in power, such as when dealing with settler-colonialism and indigenous groups.

I will be engaging with Fabian's conception of the other, especially in terms of temporality, to connect to the work done in museums, showing how the distancing of the other is effected both in time and space, which can change the way culture groups are portrayed and understood. The other is positioned by the museum in space and time through the use of verb tense, labels with dates, timelines, and chronological placement. In the case of indigenous groups, this placement often contributes to notions of temporalized indigeneity, located in time before Argentina was formed as an officially recognized nation state, which means indigenous people are viewed as being apart from Argentina as a nation state.

As a means of deepening understandings of indigenous representation, I attempt to address these “others” not only as objects of study, but also as subjects in their own right (Emerson et.al., 2011). Subjectivity, which encompasses lived experience and interactions with the world around them, is a means of understanding my own position as an anthropologist as well as the positioning of the people I was working with. The social and cultural conception of the subject, developed and expanded by Sherry Ortner (2006), affects individual and group interactions and can be constrained by power structures. It is impossible to look at a subject without considering the contexts in which he or she is situated.
The subject, as explained by Foucault (1982), who discussed subjectivity in terms of state systems, is a result of a struggle with a certain type of power, one which “categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him” (781). The power that Foucault discusses is tied to the idea that the state shapes identity through overarching structural control. Foucault emphasized the importance of looking at power relations when considering the state, subjectivity, and institutions. In the case of indigenous representation in Argentina, there are several aspects to each of these categories that need to be addressed. Foucault wrote “power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not reconstituted 'above' society as a supplementary structure” (Foucault, 1982, 791), which implies that in order to address issues of power, it is necessary to look at more than just one form of power, such as Argentina's presidential rule, but rather to look at how power is embedded in society, such as through media presence, legal forces, and, of course, the museum.

Looking at subject formation in the museum is a similar process as looking at object formation in the museum. The difference is, to encounter a subject, one must take into account the perspectives of the people addressing (museum workers), the people being addressed (visitors), and the people being represented (in the case of this thesis, indigenous groups). An object is immovable and permanent. A subject, on the other hand, is constantly changing, and therefore cannot be presented and described quite so easily. Taking into account the nature of the subject, as well as the perspectives of the people involved in presenting it and receiving it, can be helpful in understanding what it truly
means to be on display. The idea of the other must be expanded to account for the
subjectivity of the members of the group in question, forging a dual understanding of
people known to some as other and others as self.

*Settler Colonialism*

The study of settler colonialism is a relatively new field, having arisen from the
need for scholars in anthropology, area studies, history, and other related disciplines to
distinguish between varying types of colonial interactions. The distinction that marks
settler colonialism is the process of settling that involves eliminating or assimilating the
native people and the establishment of an essentially new nation, rather than the colonial
desire to exploit native peoples and extract labor with the goal of supporting a home
country. “The successful settler colonies ‘tame’ a variety of wildernesses, end up
establishing independent nations, effectively repress, co-opt, and extinguish indigenous
alterities, and productively manage ethnic diversity” (Veracini, 2011, 3). Settler
colonialism exists to absorb – the goal is to minimize difference through assimilation,
while colonialism maximizes difference through exploitation (Veracini, 2011).

The differences between settler colonialism and colonialism are important, but at
times hard to mark. One key difference is that colonialism implies a continued
relationship with the country of origin, while settler colonialism leads to the development
of a separate nation. This nation comes at the cost of the people already present in the
land, either through physically exterminating them or by forcing them to be culturally
assimilated. As Patrick Wolfe (2006) so bluntly puts it, “the question of genocide is never
far from discussions of settler colonialism” (387). Although settler colonialism and
genocide are not synonyms, the two certainly seem to go hand in hand. “Settler colonizers come to stay …. settler colonialism destroys to replace” (388). Once the natives are gone, either through forced removal, physical genocide, or genetic assimilation, the invading force can begin establishing a new regime. This regime may contain traces of the original inhabitants of the land, but settler colonial forces continue working to eliminate these traces.

Though Argentina is not often put into the category of settler colonial because of its geographic location in Latin America, which includes countries with a different model of conquest and integration, there are many ways that Argentina fits the qualifications to be a settler colonialist nation. In fact, Richard Gott (2007) argues that not only Argentina, but other countries in Latin America as well, hold white settler ideals that are reflected in their race, class, and ethnic relations. Gott discusses the phenomena that left white settlers as a minority, but one with elite power over indigenous groups. Of Argentina, he writes of the indigenous extermination and European immigration that gave it its white characteristics, and he compares this situation to neighboring Chile, in contrast to Latin American countries further north. Fear of the ethnic other, in this case the indigenous people, led to extreme measures of violence and replacement, and Europe, along with the whiteness associated with it, was seen as a model to aspire to. These ideals, though connected with the times in which European settlers were expanding their reach into what was then established indigenous territory, could be applied just as easily today in looking at how Argentine non-indigenous populations come into contact with and dialogue about indigenous people.
The concept of indigeneity is not easy to define. Indigenous identity is contested and fought for, largely in the political, legal, and economic spheres, in countries all around the world. Terms such as “indigenous,” “native,” and “aboriginal” are sometimes used interchangeably, as are their Spanish equivalents, and it can be difficult to specify exactly what these mean and who is to be included. Even the definitions that can be written down and used in legal cases are extremely problematic. For example, looking at Australian law, contestations about the definition of Aboriginal people has been a consistent problem. Article 36.11, dating from a source in 1991, states, “The legal historian, John McCorquodale, has reported that since the time of white settlement, governments have used no less than 67 classifications, descriptions or definitions to determine who is an Aboriginal person” (Kinship, n.d.).

Theorizing indigeneity isn't only complicated because of the difficulty of defining the term, but also because of the risks and benefits involved with claiming indigenous identity. This term is used to establish connections and validate use of resources, but it is also used to continue historical legacies of oppression, dominance, and erasure. Although indigenous situations vary widely from country to country, there are components of indigeneity that remain similar in each case. Indigenous people are generally seen as the original inhabitants of a given area, which is a concept loaded with complications and uncertainty. Popular ideas of indigeneity include expectations of performance in order to demonstrate belonging to a location rooted in ideas of a pre-colonial past. Difference is required, but also restricted, largely by specific ideas about what indigenous
performances should look like and how much difference is considered socially acceptable (Povinelli 2002). Many people who now work for recognition have recent ancestors who fought against being labeled as indigenous (Tallbear 2013). Even within indigenous groups, processes of recognition and access differ from situation to situation. There are groups that fight for global recognition (Simpson 2014), tribes that fight for national recognition (Barker 2011), and individuals who fight for membership to stay in their tribal group (Povinelli 2002).

When it comes to indigeneity in Argentina, the situation is compounded by recent indigenous law and activity, as well as the history of violence and erasure that led to today's situations. Argentina's 2010 census has this qualifier to explain indigeneity: “Se considera población indígena a las personas que se autorreconocen como descendientes (porque tienen algún antepasado), o pertenecientes a algún pueblo indígena u originario (porque se declaran como tales)” (Censo, 2010). This translates to: “People are considered indigenous that self-recognize as descendents (because they have some ancestor) or belong to an indigenous group (because they declare themselves as such).” However, it is clear from the attitudes and regulations on indigeneity that, in practice, it isn't that simple. Indigenous identity is constantly questioned, whether due to the use (or lack thereof) of indigenous languages, such as that with the Toba children described by Ana Carolina Hecht (2012), or due to lack of cultural visibility, such as with the Mapuche communities described by Sarah Warren (2009). Argentinian indigenous groups often find themselves questioning their own identities as well as that of one another – who is
qualified to be labeled as indigenous, and how does one perform in such a way to
maintain that distinction?

The complications are brought further when being labeled as indigenous holds the
possibility of more harm than benefit. Because of racisms and negative associations with
indigeneity, some indigenous people would rather not be marked as such. However,
despite uncertainty in visual and linguistic identifiers, many indigenous people are not left
with the option to choose whether they want to be identified as indigenous or not. As
ethnic and cultural markers leave indigenous people unmistakeably indigenous, though
the deeper meaning of the term can be hard to determine, it is important to discuss what
specific issues are involved in constructing indigeneity in Argentina, past and present.

*Argentina's Indigenous Background*

To achieve the status required to fight previous acts of ill treatment and
discrimination, indigenous people groups in Argentina have to combat the notion, first
and foremost, that they do not exist. Additionally, they have a myriad of negative
stereotypes to confront from the people who do believe that they exist. Because of this,
there is often a desire to unify as indigenous people and create petitions and protests, such
as the one I attended in Buenos Aires, that solidify the idea of indigeneity and indigenous
rights. However, this can be problematic when claiming indigenous identity means
playing into essentialized notions that contribute to racialized frameworks of
understanding what it means to be indigenous (Hecht 2012, Gordillo and Hirsch 2003, Ko
2014).
By using strategic notions of essentialization, such as those developed by theorists such as Irma McClaurin (2001) and Raka Shome (1996), indigenous people can claim their otherness in a way that benefits them, as long as these strategies “produce or accommodate self-expression, cultural translation, representation, and activism” (McClaurin 55). This allows marginalized groups to gain access to resources and recognition, though doing so may perpetuate one-dimensional understandings of indigenous identity.

The process of identifying oneself as indigenous is challenging enough, but the added challenges of self-identification in a way that is accepted by the surrounding society as well as the state are far more complicated. Warren (2009) emphasizes the role of performance in identity construction, describing how indigenous groups must showcase their indigeneity in a way that is received by the surrounding culture. In addition to making indigenous presences visible to non-indigenous people, these processes can create solidarity and cultural pride in the surrounding community. The way this is done can often be a strategic use of essentialization, taking stereotypes about indigenous people and using them in a way that increases visibility, such as Warren's example of Mapuche youths wearing traditional clothing in their state ID photos or the Coro Qom at the Centro Cultural Leopoldo Marechal using traditional clothing and instruments to carry out important cultural ideas.

Argentina has a reported population of 13,835,751 people, and of that population, 955,032 identify as indigenous. Indigenous people take up 6.9% of the population, based on self-identification in the 2010 census (Censo, 2010). There are 35 separate indigenous
groups identified in Argentina, and of these, most of the resources I have focused on deal with the Toba, Wichi, and Mapuche (Warren 2007, Vivaldi 2007, Hecht 2012, Gordillo 2003). The regions I visited are populated with Toba and Wichi people, who live in the northeast, while the Mapuche live further south. My experiences with the Toba were limited to the people I met in the Centro Cultural as well as the Buenos Aires protest (which also included the Wichi), and my experiences with the Wichi were limited to the protest as well as the week I spent in the province of Formosa. I had no extended personal interaction with any of the other indigenous groups.

Argentine indigenous identity is a category that has been addressed in politics, media, marketing, and education (Delrio et al., 2010, Gordillo and Hirsch 2003, Ko 2014). There are laws concerning Native “status and capacity,” meaning “the ability of Native people to engage in the cultural practices which help to constitute their individual and collective identities,” (Levin, 1993, 18) The regulation of Native identity seems to fall on the shoulders of many different organizations, including the law, before falling on the shoulders of the actual bearers of Native identity, the Native people themselves.

In Argentina, this regulation has taken many different forms, ranging from denial of any sort of indigenous groups (Delrio et al. 2010) to complete extermination (Lozano 2005) to requirement of indigenous people to perform in a way deemed appropriately indigenous (Ko 2014). This is due to a long legacy of unsteady relations between Argentina's connections with Europe and Argentina's place in Latin America. With early contact, indigenous people were seen as a threat to Spanish conquistadors, and were consequently forced to assimilate or be exterminated, though it is quite clear that not
all indigenous groups followed this directive (Miller 2001, Hecht 2012, Gordillo 2006). Claudia Lozano writes of 19th century Argentina, “The state agents made the racial ideology and political economy of the progress, order, and superiority of European societies and of European men their own. The anxieties of the population about cultural differences were the bases of the implantation of this ideology” (610).

The anxieties that Lozano refers to can still be seen today, as she writes, “The racism and impunity that characterize the political culture of Argentina are very strong cultural artifacts that allow for the continuity of a policy of invisibility and disappearance” (619). Despite the existence of laws that are designed to encourage and protect indigenous culture, educational, political, and social systems are not structured around these laws. Why is that? I argue that a large part of it has to do with the legacy to which Argentina belongs – one of overriding indigenous concerns with white interests and supplanting indigenous populations with European immigration.

In addition to the history and material reality that make up indigenous identity, there are the issues of stereotyping and essentialization that make it difficult for indigenous people to step outside of those ideas and operate in a different capacity. This can be a result of overgeneralizing and consequent unfair treatment, both by Argentine citizens and the governing body itself. “Racial stereotyping,” explains David Goldberg (1993), “is taken to overgeneralize from a narrow data base of empirically perceived racial characteristics to their assumed status as core traits of the alien racial stock” (125). This can fall into more than one pattern: in the case of Argentina, individuals marked as indigenous not only possess traits, such as ethnic markers and language use, labeling
them as such, but they also lack the traits, such as whiteness and European cultural practices, that are widely accepted to symbolize Argentina, therefore excluding them from the very nation that was taken from their ancestors by Spanish exploitation.

Argentina has a strong immigrant population, particularly from Western European countries, which is supported by the Argentine government. The way history is viewed by Latin American countries is often related to political connotations of indigeneity and immigration. In Argentina, as a country that supports immigration, the way history is portrayed has a lot to do with integrating immigrants into their new country as well as attracting more immigrants to come. Integration of immigrants, even as far back as the 19th century, included children learning about the history of Argentina – history being issues that solely were connected to military conquests and government policies. Historical writing, both in scholarly works and in children's textbooks, has always been a way for Argentina to showcase the types of history that the leaders want citizens to learn – which often means excluding indigenous backgrounds and stories (Earle 2007).

Indigenous history is all but erased in Argentine textbooks, which strongly contrasts with other nations in Latin America, such as Mexico and Peru. In Mexico and Peru, as explained by Rebecca Earle (2007), indigenous art is taught in elementary schools, and preconquest images can be found in public places, such as palace murals and postage stamps. (196-199). Earle cites examples of 19th century Argentines refusing to use the term “indigene,” claiming that the creoles were in fact the indigenous ones, as opposed to new immigrants (218-219). In Argentina, indigenous people weren't only seen
as a hindrance to national goals of whitening, but also as an obstacle to creole Argentinians for achieving the legitimization of their status as native Argentinians.

Stereotypes about indigenous people in Argentina can be seen in the media, in schools, and in societal processes, as described by Delrio et al. (2010), Hecht (2012), and Ko (2014). Nancy Hanway's (2003) work explores similar stereotypes and conceptions of indigeneity that are present in literature and art, in myth as well as museum. She looks at the constitution of an Argentine citizen, through gender, race, and class (which is often assumed with race). She writes, “In early 1850s Argentina, many national politicians and writers dreamed of a land that was white, Europeanized, and civilized, a feat that would be accomplished in their view by European immigration” (19).

Leslie Ray (Kefala 2011) writes about Argentina as a nation that “wants to be European” (141). She uses examples of media presentation, such as magazines, advertisements, and newspaper comics, as well as historical situations such as the Conquest of the Desert and work of leaders such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and Francisco P. Moreno. The media examples that Ray uses do not completely exclude indigenous people, but rather represents them in a way that is directly associated with poverty (such as charity ads) or humor at their expense (as is the case with an indigenous character that is the brunt of a joke in the comics). After analyzing a specific Sunday insert in a prominent Argentina newspaper, she writes, “So in this I believe not atypical example, while European-looking women and children are desirable, indigenous children evoke a sense of pity and/or humor, and are only allowed into the space of magazines in such terms” (141).
The idea of a whiter Argentina was not only encouraged by the political leadership, but also by the nation's artists and writers. Politicians urged the white population of the country, and artists and writers showed what a white national character looks like. White, educated, upper class citizens are shown as ideal, though they are weak and highly sexualized, Darker bodies are portrayed as strong, but dangerous, representing a world that is as foreign as it is threatening, such as in the classic Argentine novel *Amalia* (written by José Mármol in 1851) (Hanway, 2003, 19).

In poetry, as well, ideas of indigenous people being barbaric or foreign are transmitted. In *Martin Fierro*, a two part narrative poem written by José Hernández and published in 1872 (*La Ida*) and 1879 (*La Vuelta*), Hanway explains indigenous people are seen as not belonging in Argentina, even in the wild, rural region of the pampas, and are therefore excluded from citizenship and access to power (Hanway, 2003, 149). Indigenous territory, in turn, is seen as the refuge for those who do not belong in Argentine society – a place for social outcasts.

The importance of land and space can be seen in these narratives, as well as in the museum and in government documentation. Hanway uses spatial examples, such as that of specific pieces of land, to show racial distinctions in literature. The space of the pampas is used to denote uncertainty of belonging and ownership, while Buenos Aires is marked as white, cultured, and civilized. The concept of the body is used as well, showing national icons as white and feminine, while indigenous bodies are dark and threatening. The way spaces, places, and bodies are represented, especially in well-known
national discourse, can be very significant in terms of understanding national identity formation and racialized constructions of the other.

Looking at examples of Argentine literature, especially that written in such crucial points of Argentine nation making, can help understand the background of indigenous representation in Argentina. The ideas reflected in museums and media have developed over the last few centuries, and these works of literature contributed to them. Indigenous people are seen as not belonging to a primarily European national discourse or are represented as bodies contrasting with white bodies, showing a dichotomy that can be found in the landscape as well, with supposedly “wild” indigenous territory contrasting with the “civilization” found in the bigger cities, especially Buenos Aires.

Indigenous issues, though rooted in history, are shifting with the times. The late 20th and early 21st century have brought more access to mobilization and more global recognition of indigenous issues. Speaking specifically of these issues in Argentina, Lozano (2005) writes, "Indigenous populations have changed their way of life by migration, education, urbanization, and industrialization" (608). However, even when indigenous people are involved in politics, there is a tendency to ignore their requests once a political party gains power. In her conclusion, Lozano states, "self-determination and autonomy of the indigenous population is paradoxically dependent on international support" (623). The ability to have international acknowledgement of indigenous groups is important, not only for the awareness of those in the various countries that are participating in global dialogue, but also to lend support for the indigenous groups that might not have access to resources otherwise.
Museum Representation

Said (1978)'s work highlights the complexities in European envisioning of non-European groups, and how materialism and essentialization can affect not only how Europeans conceptualize the “other,” but also how this other forms and develops, both psychologically and materially. This idea is developed further by John and Jean Comaroff (2009), who show that these ideas lead to “cultural entitlement” and “commodification of identity” (32), which can be as much a case of European ideas taking power over non-European people as it can be a case of empowerment for previously poor and disadvantaged indigenous groups. These ideas of culture and identity can get quite complex, however, because there are multiple dimensions that can be lost in the attempts to capitalize on a simplified conception. Ethnicity itself, the Comaroffs write, is “vested in subjective beliefs and identities” (39) which cannot be clearly projected on a movie screen, sold in a street market, or displayed in a national museum.

The role of the museum is to educate, but there is no reason to believe it cannot do so in ways that go against the nationally accepted narrative of social history. Museums can be locales for exploring difficult truths, such as the Tenement Museum in New York (Sandell 2002), which showcases histories of poverty and immigration. Ruth Abram writes, “When historic sites get history wrong, they trivialize it, mislead the public, and render history peripheral” (Sandell, 2002, 131). By fully acknowledging the painful truths that are part of a nation's history, a museum gives people a window into the legacies that continue into present day, and allows them to acknowledge issues in the present day. “By
insisting on 'truth,' we help illuminate some important concepts, which, if taken to heart, could inform and improve lives” (135).

This idea is taken seriously by theorists in museum studies. Hilde Hein (2000), for example, emphasizes the importance of inclusivity and cultural awareness in the museum. She describes the museum as “an institution with a life and project of its own” (107) – more than the sum of its parts. As this living institution, museums have a responsibility to embrace difference, to showcase multiple narratives, to welcome visitors of all backgrounds into an environment of learning. Part of this responsibility is reflected not in what museums show, but in how they show it.

Meaning in museums is moderated by the visitor, as well as by the museum staff and the museum's sources of funding. How objects are displayed plays a huge role in how objects are interpreted, and how objects are brought into the museum influences how they are displayed. Museum representation is a complicated issue, which is affected by many factors, such as: “visitor characteristics, community interests, artifacts' availability, design constraints, and ulterior educational messages” as well as “historical background, aesthetic quality, visitor perspectives, educational goals, and design interests” (Roberts, 1997, 128).

Museum workers use the context of assumed prior education and experience to bring new information into the visitor's knowledge base. This can be the reinforcement or expansion of a concept, or it can be the introduction of a new idea or refinement of one previously learned. In addition to knowledge base, predetermined ideas and expectations about the museum itself can determine how and what the visitor learns. People come to
museums from all different perspectives and walks of life, and it would be impossible to create an exhibit that was equally enticing and enriching for all of them. However, it is possible to have museums set up for successful impacts on their visitors, especially through awareness of who the consumer base is for each museum. “Cradle-to-grave learning has long been a goal of our society, but it is increasingly becoming both a necessity and a way of life” (Falk and Dierking, 2000, 213).

The issue of how to present indigenous histories and identities in a museum space is complicated, and ridden with anxieties and misunderstandings. Amy Lonetree (2012) discusses tribal museums that must privilege the voices of the tribe, which is hard to do when funding comes from the state, as is the case, to some extent with all the museums I visited in Argentina. She addresses the difficulties of Native representation, but also the importance, writing “The good that museums could do for addressing and healing historical grief and trauma and for putting Native peoples on a positive, self-empowering path can be squandered all too easily” (198). Though the opportunities are there, they are not easy to take, and museums often do not move in an inclusive, empowering direction for Native peoples. However, Lonetree states that there is potential for this to change, and for museums to “promote healing, revitalization, and nation building for Indigenous peoples” (198). For Argentina, there is a long way to go, but that doesn't mean that the potential isn't there.

Carolyne Larson (2015) looks at the multiple meanings that can be placed on anthropological objects, especially those in Argentine museum collections, and how national identity can be claimed and defined by these objects, even when the cultural
values themselves are not taken with them. She discusses the cultural ideologies leading into museum developments in Argentina, including desire to showcase European style progress and desire to reinvent historical traditions implicit in indigenous artifacts.

The issue of indigeneity can be seen more clearly in regional museums. Rather than fighting to be seen as white, European society, more rural regions of Argentina clamored for acknowledgment of the patchwork history and ethnic mixing that led to their identities. “Regionalists saw criollo and indigenous cultures as mutually strengthening – but also distinct – elements of northwestern identity” (Larson, 2015, 119). Unlike the museums in Buenos Aires, museums in cities further away from the capital had the desire to embrace their own national identities, which acknowledged indigenous existence in a way that just wasn't possible in Buenos Aires. In the northwest, Larson writes, “indigenous cultures played a role in regional identity politics that resonated strongly with many and thus lent themselves easily to scientific and cultural promotion and popularization” (119).

Creole identity is necessarily shaped at least in part by indigenous identity, and both are components of Argentine nationhood, regardless of “narratives of national whiteness, which have so influentially shaped Argentina’s historiography” (Larson, 2015, 177). However, though some depth can be found in these museums, it is not enough to change the major issues of indigeneity and erasure that Argentina is dealing with today. Larson discusses the value of creole incorporation of indigeneity, but there is still more work to be done, both addressing the difference between indigenous meanings and creole
ones, and incorporating the idea of these integrations and differences to a side of Argentina that is more European focused, such as the museums of Buenos Aires.

Museum positioning in indigenous representation is multi-faceted. On one hand, the positioning of indigenous artifacts in museums contributes to the idea that indigenous people groups existed in the past, and are not a prominent feature in modern day Argentina. This is visible in displays such as those discussed by Gastón Gordillo and Silvia Hirsch (2003) who argue that “The forging of the Argentinean nation through its assault on the desert confined indigenous groups to an obscure background within the imagined national community” (4). This is in contrast to nearby nations, which have stronger focus on indigenous interaction with creole populations. If anything, indigenous groups in Argentina are remembered as “a wild and destructive force... that had to be wiped out to give birth to the nation” (5). This can be seen in museums as well as government legislature and school textbooks.

On the other hand, museums that show more recent depictions of indigenous people tend to do it in a way that highlights poverty and traditional lifestyles, enforcing stereotypes that associate indigenous people with being somehow backward or impoverished. The use of traditional crafts, clothing, and instruments to display modern day indigenous culture can instill a sense of pride for a distinct group of traditions, but it can also be used to continue a mindset that associates indigeneity with the past or a unindustrialized lifestyle. However, this can get complicated when some indigenous people, such as the Toba who hunt in the undeveloped region known as the bush (Vivaldi 2007, 2011) and the Wichi living off of small, individual agriculture, such as in Laguna
Yacaré, do participate in lifestyles that are located outside of industrialized areas of Argentina. Others, such as the Toba living in the cities (Hecht 2012), Mapuche participating in political events (Warren 2009), and Wichi and Toba protesting in Buenos Aires, are involved with modern struggles and lifestyles that are not properly captured through a one-sided look at unindustrialized indigeneity, which is often what is offered in the museums.
Indigenous Erasure as Political Alignment to Settler Colonial Societies

When I began my fieldwork in Argentina, I was told from multiple sources, both at home and abroad, that indigenous people did not exist in Argentina. However, I knew from my research that there are several indigenous groups that have a significant population, even though they are not often acknowledged. As my work in Argentina continued, I saw more and more what these people were really telling me. Indigenous people clearly exist in Argentina, but they are not part of the national narrative. Indigenous voices are not included in popular media or government offices. Indigenous faces are not seen in advertisements or magazines. Indigenous laws are an afterthought rather than a core component of Argentine legislation. But what does this mean? Does it mean that indigenous people are not part of contemporary Argentine society? Is there a lack of indigenous people in the Argentine nation? Or does the way that society is portrayed imply more of a lack than there really is?

During the time I was in Buenos Aires (Summer 2015), an encampment of indigenous people from the north was set up on a major intersection in the city. There were banners and signs demanding an audience with the president, and entire families, several with small children, were living in tents there for extended periods of time. However, people I met living in Buenos Aires told me that there were no indigenous people in the country. The discrepancy shows something more than a casual trend of unobservance. It is evidence of a carefully crafted narrative of what it means to be Argentinian.
Argentina is not the only country that operates on such racially constructed ideas of belonging and nationhood. This pattern is common in countries that were founded by mass immigration, usually involving the elimination or subjugation of the natives. Latin America, as pointed out by Gott (2007), is not usually recognized as belonging to this pattern, but the fact remains that the region is a result of Spanish and Portuguese expansion, just as the United States and Australia are results of British imperialism. Because of its Latin roots, Argentina often is not acknowledged as a white settler colonialist nation, and due to its location within South America, Argentina is not always thought of as being dominated by whiteness. However, the media images Argentina puts out are very much emphasizing a white face to the country (Ko 2014), and the cultural emphasis on everything European (Ray 2011) shows anhein allegiance to settler societies stemming from Europe.

South American countries occupy a space in between the white washing of British settler colonialism and the imperialistic integration of Spain's influence in Central America. Because of Buenos Aires' convenient port and the distance between it and the rest of Latin America, Argentina has always been a hub of immigration, something that has only grown in the past two centuries (Bastia and vom Hau 2014). European immigration contributes to Argentina's national picture of whiteness. This alignment goes both ways. More European immigration leads to a whiter Argentina, while an image of a white Argentina leads to more European immigration. In order to maintain the notion of whiteness and keep up immigration from Europe, Argentina as a country tends to minimize or deny the presence of indigenous people as well as other Argentinians of
color (Ko 2014). Denying the legacy of indigenous people in Argentina is not an easy thing to do, especially not in an era of globalization of politics. Contemporary policies (Lozano 2005) call for indigenous acknowledgement and forms of reparations that are not often seen implemented, as evidenced by the petitions and protests in the capital, among other situations and events.

Argentina's tendencies to deny indigenous groups have affected how the country and the groups present within are viewed throughout the world. Even in countries such as the United States, with access to ample information and resources, it is evident that knowledge about indigenous populations in Argentina is limited at best. In Argentina itself, people can walk by an indigenous protest every day and still not realize the population exists. The protest I observed, which was established in February 2015, has gotten local and international media attention (Rebossio 2016). The protest, which called for a presidential audience and national recognition, involved indigenous people from Northern Argentina, specifically the Formosa and Chaco regions, and "reclaman por el derecho a las tierras que consideran ancestrales, el mantenimiento de los recursos naturales sin explotación comercial masiva, un mejor acceso a la educación, la sanidad, el agua potable, y la electricidad y un fomento de su cultura” (Para. 1). Translated, this means they were fighting for “rights to lands considered ancestral, maintenance of natural resources natural resources without massive commercial exploitation, better access to education, health, drinking water, and electricity, and promotion of their culture.”

Many people, both in Argentina and abroad, have access to these basic rights and resources and might not realize that some populations have less access than they do.
Some people in Argentina ignore these issues because they believe they aren't real. Others don't know enough about them to contribute to the debates. The encampment was at the intersection of Avenida 9 de Julio and Avenida de Mayo, two major cross streets in Buenos Aires. Bus routes, the express bus (Metrobus), and subways go through this intersection – in fact, there are several subway stops nearby, as two major subway lines (A and C) converge at this very intersection. In the few weeks I was in Buenos Aires, I crossed this protest many times, as it was in such a centrally located high traffic location. Signs and banners clearly described the predicament of the people, with cries such as “Presidenta, No Se Vaya Sin Recibirnos” (President, we won't leave without you receiving us) and “Basta del despojo de nuestro territorio ancestral!” (Enough dispossession of our ancestral territory!) and, most explicitly, “Somos indígenas y luchamos por nuestras tierras!” (We are indigenous and we fight for our land!) Nevertheless, many people I spoke to in the city claimed not to know that indigenous people existed, much less that they were fighting a decades long battle for land and resources.
In the museums I visited, displays of indigeneity followed a pattern. In history museums, they were often the first exhibits encountered by the visitor, and they often ended with the introduction of conquest. In ethnology museums and cultural centers, they were focused on artifacts such as clothing and earthenware, and dealt little, if at all, with interactions between the indigenous people and the rest of Argentina, especially post-conquest. El Museo Histórico Nacional, for example, starts out with a hallway that is painted with text introducing the museum, as well as a brief overview of the geographic events that led to the forming of Argentina. After this, the hallway is populated with artifacts, snippets of information, and photographs relating to indigenous lifestyles. The text at the beginning of the hallway reads thus:
“La historia de nuestro territorio comienza hace más de mil diez años: desde los cazadores recolectores hasta los desarrollos regionales y la llegada de los Incas. Estas poblaciones fueron ocupando diversos espacios ecológicos, interactuando con ellos y desarrollando estructuras sociales, económicas, y culturales de diferente complejidad. Con la conquista española se produjo una alteración en el devenir de los pueblos originarios y sus culturas. Fue un largo proceso de casi quinientos años hasta que se logró el reconocimiento de su preexistencia étnica. El Museo Histórico Nacional, en conjunto con otras instituciones culturales, presenta distintos momentos de esta larga y a veces olvidada historia, en reconocimiento a todos los aportes, significados, y saberes que dieron a nuestro país y que componen nuestra diversa y plural identidad.”

Translated, it reads:

“The history of our territory begins more than ten thousand years ago: from the hunter-gatherers to regional developments and the arrival of the Incas. Those populations were occupying diverse ecological spaces, interacting with them and developing social, economic, and cultural structures of varying complexity. With the Spanish conquest, there was a disturbance in the development of native peoples and their cultures. It was a long process of almost five hundred years until recognition of their ethnic ore-existence was achieved. El Museo Histórico Nacional, together with other cultural institutions, presents distinct moments in this long and sometimes forgotten history, in recognition of all the contributions, meanings, and knowledge that they gave to our country and that make up our diverse and plural identity.”
Although this sign does give recognition to the contributions of indigenous people to Argentina, historically and culturally, the wording and location of the text seems to emphasize the idea that indigenous people are a thing of the past. They “dieron,” or “gave,” their knowledge, in preterite, which is past tense for a completed action. They “fueron ocupando,” or “were occupying,” diverse ecological spaces, in past tense as well. The sign acknowledges the disturbance in native development and lack of recognition that came with Spanish conquest, but never redeems these problems with a hint of still extant indigenous cultures.

This is a pattern throughout museums in Buenos Aires, and I believe it has a lot to do with the attitudes that are displayed in regards to indigeneity. Even though this particular museum also has a brief section on current events, labeled “Situación Actual,” it is clear that the message being portrayed is that indigenous people groups existed before conquest and should be recognized as part of Argentina's diverse history, rather than part of their present.

This ideology is reflected in museums in Resistencia as well, but in a slightly different way. The museums I visited in Resistencia occasionally do acknowledge the current existence of indigenous people, especially the Centro Cultural Leopoldo Marechal, which is designed specifically to cater to the larger indigenous populations in the Chaco, where it is located. However, this museum showcases indigenous culture in a way that is almost solely looking at indigeneity in a traditional way, displaying indigenous traditional beliefs, handmade crafts and pottery, and the Coro Qom, which is a group of people that identify as Qom, who sing in their indigenous language, playing
traditional instruments, and wearing matching outfits that are meant to represent Qom culture, such as white collared shirts and hand woven tan vests.

Though this cultural center clearly shows indigenous people as a group that is alive and demonstrating their traditional culture and values, it doesn't do much to dissuade the notion that indigeneity is a thing of the past, which looks as if it can only be embraced by restoring traditional understandings and artifacts. People in Resistencia may know that indigenous people are still around, but they may also be hesitant to acknowledge them as a group willing and ready to participate in modern politics, economics, and culture, a phenomenon that I attribute to museum representations such as this one, that leave little room for growth and integration.

Resistencia falls into the category of regionalism, as described by Larson (2015) in her discussions about the northwest. Unlike Buenos Aires, which clamors to be seen as European, Resistencia is aware of its indigenous connections and is willing to showcase them – but only in a certain way. Argentine regionalism often involves embracing an identity that is more accepting of indigenous as well as criollo culture, but it doesn't seem like a coincidence that Resistencia has an area called “Barrio Toba” (Toba Neighborhood) that is known for being dangerous, and doesn't have much that is easily accessible to the public.

Indigenous histories are often co-opted as a source of pride in national identity for a nation that has little interest in the indigenous groups themselves. As explained in Ko (2014), difference is exaggerated rather than used as a tool toward equality. Indigenous peoples, like immigrants from neighboring countries such as Bolivia, Paraguay, and
Brazil, are seen as a threat to the Argentine economy and way of life. The same system that allows for museums celebrating an indigenous history also allows for fear of indigenous people today, in cases where the indigenous groups are acknowledged at all. As Lozano (2005), puts it, “The racism and impunity that characterize the political culture of Argentina are very strong cultural artifacts that allow for the continuity of a policy of invisibility and disappearance” (619).

The way that the public learns about indigenous people is mediated through several major factors: public (and private) educational institutes, government laws and interventions, personal interactions and experiences, news and media, and information portrayed in museums. Museums are far from the only source of information surrounding indigeneity, but they are a factor that most citizens and visitors to Argentina have in common. Media tends to showcase white faces (Ray 2011), education is limited to indigenous culture as history and folklore (Delrio et. Al 2010), legal reforms are often ineffective and misleading (Lozano 2005), public opinion often pushes people away from authentic interactions with indigenous groups (Sutton 2008), and many museums were designed to showcase a version of national progress that involves whitening and moving past indigenous experiences (Larson 2015).

These factors, as well as deeper roots in racial identity and colonialization, contribute to the understandings that people in Argentina have about indigenous populations. Because of the stilted versions of indigeneity presented through school, the media, legal discourse, and public opinion, Argentine indigenous groups consistently struggle to be recognized and understood in a way that is beneficial to their needs and
desires. Museums, as institutions contributing to public knowledge, have a role that could stand for more comprehensive understandings of indigeneity, but as of right now, the major museums in Argentina are portraying a similar image to that of the systems it joins in with as a state institution.
Museum Experience as Societal Education Connected to Racialized Others

The times spent in museums do more than just connect visitors to a national identity narrative. They show visitors ideologies that reflect a worldview, one that can be absorbed and carried away without realizing it. "In this way, museums became not simply purveyors of object knowledge but creators of that knowledge and judges of what constituted knowledge itself" (Larson, 2015, 56). This is prominent in the case of racialization, especially in nations such as Argentina, which carry a white settler colonial narrative in addition to a history of pushing indigenous groups into the past. The tendency when dealing with indigenous groups in Argentina is to create a narrative that either leaves indigenous people in a certain time in history or creates a version of indigeneity that is impossible to separate from the category of racialized other that separates an indigenous Argentinian from what seems to be shown as a "true" Argentinian citizen. This idea is important, not only for the Argentinians that are more recent results of European immigration, but also for the Argentinians who self-identify as creole.

The importance of indigenous representations in Argentina go beyond looking at racial ideologies in Buenos Aires, an area well known for its depiction as a white, settler-colonialist, state. It is important to consider the Argentinians in other regions as well, where it is more common for people to identify as creole, and see how indigenous museum representations are affecting the sense of identity and nation making that is connected to more creole parts of the country. While Larson (2015) addresses how indigenous displays are received in Buenos Aires as well as in the more creole dominated
Northwest, the reaction of indigenous people to indigenous displays remains elusive. Larson writes that the movement of creole Argentines to embrace indigenous representations in museums "transformed anthropology into a nationally useful science that linked indigenous cultures to their own national heritage and landscapes, changing them from racially and politically marginalized others into strategically embraced indigenous ancestors" (177). However, I would argue that the fact that creole Argentines embrace these representations as ancestral does not fully allow for indigenous people groups to be connected to their "own national heritage and landscapes," largely because the discussion of museums is always from a perspective that is not indigenous.

El Museo Etnográfico displays this idea in its photo exhibit. One of the rooms in this museum is dedicated to photographs of indigenous people in the Chaco, separated by category. Categories range from “Risas” or “Smiles” to “La Mirada del Exotismo” or “The Look of Exoticism” to “En La Aldea” or “In The Village.” The photographs are in black and white, and most show indigenous people wearing limited clothing, living and working in traditional environments. However, there are also examples of indigenous people wearing Western manufactured clothing, particularly in the one section that is not in black and white, which is “Una Mirada Propia,” which will be discussed in the following paragraph.
Throughout the exhibit, the guides as well as the museum labels prominently discuss the indigenous contribution that was involved in selecting photos to display. There is even a television in the corner used to showcase interviews in which indigenous people came in and discussed which photographs should be displayed. The section labeled “Una mirada propia,” or “Own look,” displays photographs taken by an indigenous photographer. These, unlike the other photographs, are in color and show indigenous people wearing Western clothing working on tasks such as construction in the

**Fig. 5: Images from the photographic collection in El Museo Ethnográfico**

**Fig. 6: Images from the “Una mirada propia” display**
village. However, upon speaking with the guides and other employees about this display, it was clear that indigenous involvement was a one time thing, that happened decades ago, and is not in any way a consistent factor in museum decisions. Additionally, the guides made it clear that they do not seek indigenous feedback in other areas of the museum, and that they do not have much collaboration or connection with indigenous populations.

If the point of embracing indigenous heritage is to give Argentine creoles a proud history to fall back on, where does that leave Argentines of European descent? The museums in Buenos Aires seem to be relying on pushing indigeneity to the past, instead giving Argentines the Spanish to look to as their heritage. Regional museums are more likely to focus on indigenous cultures and traditions, but in a way that is catering to the creoles rather than the indigenous groups themselves. So where does that leave them?

Even in El Centro Cultural Leopoldo Marechal in Resistencia, a cultural center designed for indigenous people, the racialized other viewpoint doesn't seem to go away. Indigenous people use this cultural center to claim a connection to a proud heritage, but one that has its bulk in its roots, focused on the past rather than the future.

Racialization and othering can happen even with the consent of the group in question. As shown in the work of Comaroff and Comaroff (2009), a marginalized population sometimes chooses to invest in racialized ideas as a survival strategy. Claiming identities that are often contested, such as that of indigeneity, often involves a struggle to declare exactly what it means to be of that identity. In cases in which the marginalized group is fighting for state recognition, the process of gaining rights from the
state tends to involve participating in the very act type of essentialization that led to the marginalization in the first place.

In contrast to neighboring nations, Argentina does not hold many indigenous leaders up as historical figures or national heroes. Instead, even the important figures in Argentina's indigenous history remain anonymous, footnotes in a narrative that doesn't even care to remember their names. A good example of this is the Museo Ichoalay in Resistencia. In this museum, I counted eleven specific names of Spanish military leaders involved with indigenous conquests, and none of the indigenous leaders in these events were mentioned by name. While this was not the case in every museum I visited, there was a common thread of museums focusing on Spanish generals and leaders, but indigenous names were left in a very specific place – such as the list of indigenous people leading resistance movements in Museo de Hombre Chaqueño – rather than being put as a corresponding presence to the Spanish forces they were opposing. Similarly, in Museo Histórico in Buenos Aires, indigenous people are mentioned by name in the section of the museum that is reserved for displays of indigeneity, but not throughout the museum. By contrast, much of the rest of the museum focuses heavily on specific Spanish descendents, Juan Manuel de Rosas and José de San Martin, without often mentioning the specific indigenous people which they were interacting with.

Although indigenous people clearly have a place in Argentine museums, that place is not exactly parallel to the place non-indigenous actors hold. This is something that was set as a precedence by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, who made it clear that native stories had no place in Argentinian history. After introducing a quote in which
Sarmiento expresses desire to remove indigenous people from all social conversation, Ray says “The Indians were an anathema to Sarmiento and what 'we' – the 'civilized' – stand for. They lie outside of 'our' history and should be excluded from it, as has indeed happened” (Kefala, 2011, 149).

History between indigenous and non-indigenous Argentines is not seen as shared, but rather contested, if acknowledged at all. Ray was told by a tourism office that indigenous communities in southern Argentina “do not take kindly to visits by tourists,” but after finding that statement to be untrue, now speculates that “Those who control tourism do not take kindly to fair competition, would be closer to the truth” (Kefala 2011, 153). Open exchange of information between indigenous groups and non-indigenous tourists could lead to discoveries and that could threaten the relationship between the tourism industry and the people who support them.

As a solution to Argentina's problems, Ray overheard a radio broadcast suggest that 'modern politicians' turn to Europe rather than Formosa – one of Argentina's poorest provinces, located in the northeast of the country. Ray's argument is compelling: “In my view in Argentina the problem is that for three centuries 'modern politicians' have looked too much to Europe, and Formosa and the rest of Argentina's provinces have paid the price” (Kefala, 2011, 157).

Though Ray concludes her article with this weighted statement, I would like to take it as a jumping off point to go further into these ideas. It seems that it's not just Argentinian politicians who have their eyes on Europe, but rather the nation as a whole. If national identity is constructed as something that can only be solidified in connections
with a continent across the ocean, at the expense of acknowledging and understanding crucially divergent lifestyles within one's own country, the discrepancy is clear. If schools, museums, and literature do not point Argentinians toward Formosa, and the other provinces which are suffering, but rather focus their eyes on Europe, how are politicians going to gain power that want to do something to remedy the injustices taking place in those neglected provinces? Without popular knowledge there can be no popular support, and without popular support the nation is held in a standstill. Action is impossible without understanding, and understanding is impossible without education, and education happens (among other places) in the museum.

For indigenous people groups, marking themselves as indigenous is a key way to resist Argentina's settler colonialist framework. Unlike colonialism, the demand of settler colonialism is that the indigenous people disappear. As stated by Lorenzo Veracini (2011), “If the demand ... is to go away, it is indigenous persistence and survival that become crucial. Resistance and survival are thus the weapons of the colonized and the settler colonized; it is resistance and survival that make certain that colonialism and settler colonialism are never ultimately triumphant” (3-4). Through resistance, regardless of the outcome, indigenous people are able to argue their very existence, which can be enough to prevent Argentina (and other countries with similar situations) from claiming full rights to becoming a settler colonial society.

Museums run by indigenous people, such as the Centro Cultural Leopoldo Marechal, do just that. By its very existence, this cultural center is defying Western settler colonial expectations. This is something that can be done in other museums as well, by
showcasing aspects of indigenous life that bring modern day involvement in society to the forefront. This is not a common feature of Argentine museums, however, and museums that do show modern indigenous life, including the Centro Cultural Leopoldo Marechal, do so in such limited ways that rather than being able to interpret them as moving toward indigenous inclusion or empowerment, it is easier to see them as participating in painful processes of discrimination and oppression.

Proving indigenous existence is important, but it is not enough. The viewpoints present in the museums are more significant than just the fact that they exist; they confirm or deny narratives of erasure as well as devaluation. Settler colonialism has the goal of elimination, but when elimination is impossible, oppression and discrimination take place. This can pave the way for further elimination, either by actual physical death through lack of resources or by keeping indigenous bodies out of the majority of settler colonial lands through intense racism that makes migrating undesirable.

Territoriality and race play important roles in settler colonial elimination politics. In discussing Georgia's forced removal of the Cherokee, Wolfe (2006) highlights the aspect of Cherokee life that frightened white Americans with a desire to expand – the idea of permanence. He writes, “The first thing the rabble did, let us remember, was burn their houses” (396). The next step was to force indigenous people off of their land and, effectively, out of Euro-American lives. But even that wasn't a completely uniform process. Wolfe describes the difference between the indigenous Americans who were forcibly removed and those who were permitted to stay.
The ones who stayed had lighter skin, wealth connected to individual ownership rather than tribal, and, “for all practical purposes they were no longer Indians” (Wolfe, 2006, 397). This survival mechanism, Wolfe argues, is not survival at all: “Have our settler world, but lose your Indigenous soul. Beyond any doubt, this is a kind of death” (397). Although this example come from North America, they can be applied, with added sensitivity to differences inherit in Latin American politics and history, to South America as well. Argentina's history has plenty of stories of both physical and cultural genocide, as seen in the accounts of scholars such as Rock (1987), Miller (2001), and Stepan (1991). If the goal of settler colonialism is to eliminate the native in order to build up a new nation, repopulated largely by immigration from the home country (or continent), it seems as if Argentina fits the bill. Scholars who discuss indigeneity in Argentina, such as Gordillo and Hirsch (2003), Earle (2007), and Delrio et al. (2010), show the lack of acknowledgment of indigenous people groups, not only as valuable members of society, but as presences in society at all. Although Argentina's placement and history separates it from many other settler colonial societies, there are some similarities that are impossible to deny.

Argentina's claim to settler colonial legacies is controversial partially because much of Latin America does not quite fit the description, and Argentina is a solid part of Latin America. However, despite similarities that unite this large region together, there are enough differences that Argentina warrants focused attention. Earle (2007), Gott (2007), and Stepan (1991) emphasize the unique qualities that apply to Argentina (and sometimes neighboring countries) while also discussing the issues present in other parts.
of Latin America. While Argentina is clearly part of Latin America's rich cultural history and traditions, it is also distinct in its connections to European immigration and desire to project a white image to the rest of the world, as well as within its own borders.

One website declares that Argentina's ethnic makeup in 2014 was 97% white, with only 3% remaining for “mestizo, Amerindian, or other non-white groups” (Argentina Demographics, 2015). This same percentage is reported elsewhere (Ethnic Groups, 2016). However, Argentina's 2010 census found 955,032 individuals who identified as indigenous, out of 13,835,751 surveyed, putting indigenous people at around 6.9% of the population. (Censo, 2010). This number, which is more than double the online reported demographic, only represents people who were surveyed who identify as indigenous – the three percent mentioned above is supposed to include Argentines who are of mixed white and indigenous descent as well, not to mention Argentines with Asian, African, and other non-white origins. The 2010 census, in fact, was the first census in over a century to include Afro-descendent as a category (Valente, 2010) – a small victory in a long struggle against the invisibilization of non-white people groups in the nation.

Fabian (1983) describes the cultural notion that certain ideas are unknown to most members, which he writes “is already expressive of a political praxis where true knowledge about the workings of society is the privilege of an elite” (52). Ethnographies and museums tend to take a removed perspective, assuming deeper knowledge about the subjects than the subjects have about themselves. By presenting these collections of perceived knowledge, anthropologists, educators, and museum workers can gain the trust and attentiveness of an audience ready to be told about a group of people, from the
mouths of accepted authority figures rather than the people themselves. In this way, “The
Other, as object of knowledge, must be separate, distinct, and preferably distant from the
knower” (121).

In a sense, Fabian's discussion of the knower and the object of knowledge applies
directly to the situation of museum presentations. In the museums I visited, indigenous
groups were on display, sometimes labeled as their individual group (such as in various
displays in El Museo Nacional del Hombre in Buenos Aires) and others were simply
labeled with the many terms used for indigenous people, such as in most displays in El
Museo Histórico, also in Buenos Aires. Some museums, such as El Museo Etnográfico
Juan B. Ambrosetti (Buenos Aires), focused primarily on displaying indigenous history
and culture, while others, such as El Museo Ichoalay (Resistencia) showed other
componenets of Argentina's development after a brief look at indigenous groups. In any
case, all of these museums show indigenous people as objects of knowledge, labeled as
such in order to keep the distinction, in a way that is distinctly different than how non-
indigenous groups are presented in the same museums. The visitor is presented with
information collected, in most cases, by people who are not themselves a part of any
indigenous group (the exception to this in this particular study is El Centro Cultural
Leopoldo Marechal in Resistencia, which is run by members of the Toba/Qom
community) and have not, in many cases, collaborated with indigenous groups in the
collection of artifacts or design of exhibits.

The many words used for indigenous people, often used interchangeably
throughout each museum, show a glimpse of the linguistic anxiety that surrounds
production of knowledge concerning indigenous groups. Each museum has its own pattern for these references, as is elaborated upon in my Methods/Results section, but the use of varying terms for indigenous people stays fairly constant across the spectrum of museums. In addition to names of specific indigenous groups (such as “Qom,” “Wichi,” and “Guarani”), museums use terms such as “indígenas,” “pueblos originarios,” “aborígenes,” “indios,” and “nativos,” just to name a few. The chronically shifting means of reference show a chronically unsettled mindset, an uncertainty when it comes to appropriate reference.

The visitor is exposed, not only to the confused language surrounding indigenous groups, but also to a certain type of display which seems to be fairly consistent in form and structure from one museum to the other. This can be applied to Fabian (1983)'s discussion of visualization and spatialization, in which he looks at display in terms of aesthetic and layout rather than just in terms of information. In this view, the way information is presented can mean more than the content of the information itself. He writes “... early ethnological practices established seldom articulated but firm convictions that presentations of knowledge through visual and spatial images, maps, diagrams, trees, and tables are particularly well suited to the description of primitive cultures which, as everyone knows, are supremely 'synchronic' objects for visual-esthetic perception (121).

This analysis rings true for the museums I visited in Argentina, where indigenous representation is seen with maps and tables, which is often the only place that indigenous groups are acknowledged, while non-indigenous people are assumed as default and are not given the same type of visual and spatial treatment. In particular, El Museo Histórico
in Buenos Aires, El Museo Ichoalay in Resistencia, and El Museo de Hombre Chaqueño in Resistencia feature lists of indigenous leaders, but have no such neat lists for non-indigenous military generals, who are mentioned in more detailed, along with their personal uniforms and artifacts, in different parts of the museum. Similarly, the maps in both of these museums, while acknowledging the existence of indigenous groups, contribute to the connection of indigenous groups with space and territory, separating that space from modern time by the indigenous distinction, rather than portraying the complications that come with the overlap of time.

While Museo Ichoalay does have a timeline that spans various subjects, divided into sections based on the Chaco's relationship to Argentina, most other visual presentations are not laid out so simply, with the exception of indigenous area maps. Most of the lengthy text on the walls is referring to wars, settlement activities, or colonial movements, while indigenous history is left mostly with the artifacts at the beginning of the pathway at the museum. This form of othering, as Fabian describes, falls into the category of over simplification. Instead of portraying the deep and complex issues involved with indigenous groups, charts and maps show the territory markers and lists of names and movements, without having to elaborate too much on any of it. It's fast, easy, and simple – exactly what indigenous histories are not.

Fabian (1983) connects this with an adolescent understanding. He writes, “It is commonly believed that the visual-spatial is more germane to the infantile and adolescent mind than to mature intelligence” (121). It is possible, it seems, that the way indigenous groups are portrayed, not only as far as content goes, but in design and layout as well, can
have a direct effect on how these groups are treated socially and politically. Whether or not these decisions are intentional, or even effective in this manner, is to be determined, but the potential is not something that should be ignored.

Bringing indigenous identity to light is not only an action that goes against settler colonialist goals, but also against imperialism as a broader issue. The control of discourse surrounding indigenous people is a means of domination by colonizing forces. Shome (1996) argues, “Whereas in the past, imperialism was about controlling the 'native' by colonizing her or him territorially, now imperialism is more about subjugating the 'native' by colonizing her or him discursively” (42). While Shome's claim in regards to how much territorial control is a factor in imperialist movements today can (and perhaps should) be debated, the point that discursive control is a major player in imperialist motives cannot be denied.

The way that indigenous groups are discussed – in academic journals, in literature, in school textbooks, in the museum, in the media – bears tremendous weight on how they are viewed by the general public, and thus how they interact with society as a whole. When these sources are dismissive about indigenous issues, the general public will be dismissive as well. When these sources push for deeper understandings and sensitivity to indigenous issues, the general public is more likely to be interested in participating in movements to support them. The issue of museum representation is not a trivial one. It is part of the broader conversation on literature (Hanway 2003), school textbooks (Gordillo and Hirsch 2003), media (Ko 2014), among others.
Museum representation is an area of potential empowerment and social change. As a location that is generally viewed as credible, even to a fault, museums hold a place of trust and structure in an ever changing society. The authority that is given to the museum, whether or not it is wanted or warranted, puts the responsibility of fair representation into the hands of the people working there. By stepping into a museum, visitors place themselves into a position of openness, ready to be educated and to engage with the information presented to them. Whether or not this will change their long term attitudes and behaviors is dependent on the individual, but the opportunity is there, and the museum is in a position of power in those people's lives and minds, even if just for the day. Because of that, the way museums display indigenous groups can have an enormous effect on societal reception and interaction with those groups.

The experience in a museum is often racialized as well as temporalized, which can be seen in the way data is presented. For example, in many of the museums I visited, photographs were only present in the case of indigenous people. This gives a visualization of race that is not present in dialogue concerning non-indigenous people in the same sorts of displays. This visualization goes further than the images, maps, and timelines present in the museums. Titles of exhibits often feature close ups of indigenous faces, faces that are anonymous except for their racial component.

An example of this is the beginning exhibit in El Museo Ichoalay. The words “Naciones Originarios” are accompanied by large black and white close ups of two elderly indigenous men. There is no indication of who these men are or even what group they are affiliated with, though three distinct indigenous ethnic groups are listed in the
panel below the photographs, including Guaycurúes, Mataco-Mataguayos, and Lules-Vilelas. Though this same museum does use photographs in other contexts, such as a photograph of the first immigrants to the Chaco, there are significant differences between the way photographs are used. The photograph of the immigrant family lists the people by name, and goes on to explain who they are and why their photograph is important. It is in black and white because it was taken in a time when black and white photographs were the only option available due to technological availability.

Fig. 7: The photographs accompanying the “Naciones Originarios” component of Museo Ichoalay

Similarly, in El Museo Histórico, there are photographs of indigenous people, both in black and white and in color, throughout the display of indigenous history. In contrast, there are little to no photographs of non-indigenous social actors, though there
are plenty of paintings and drawings to provide visual reference. This could be a result of historical time period – much of the focus of El Museo Histórico outside of the indigenous displays are very specifically set in the time of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1793-1877) and José de San Martín (1778-1850), which would be before cameras and photographs were invented. In contrast, the indigenous display spans a much broader time span, from prehistoric foundations to current educational issues.

Although the differing time lines might explain the discrepancy in photographic displays, they also show an element of temporality that is far more associated with indigenous groups than with the general public. While the rest of the history museum, barring temporary exhibits, focuses on a specific time period and the empowered individuals that were influential in that time period, the display on indigenous people spans tens of thousands of years, attempting to summarize the processes and lifestyles involved in various indigenous groups throughout that entire time frame, without deeply focusing on any individuals in particular.
Modern Indigenous Markers in Argentine Museums

Although there are many different aspects of indigenous identity that could be addressed in a museum setting, the exhibits on indigeneity in Argentina's museums are nearly uniform in their structure, chronology, and presentation of artifacts. Despite some variation based on region and focus of the museum, indigeneity is often associated with handmade artifacts, a timeline that stops after European conquest, and black and white photographs even from the present day. In contrast, non-indigenous history is represented with mass produced artifacts, a timeline that continues into the present, and few, if any, photographs. When indigenous existence in the present is acknowledged, it is generally done through traditional culture being spilled over into Argentine narrative, showing indigeneity as a category separate and removed from the Argentine identity, which can be seen through brief representations of traditional culture that exist alongside the cultural norms that are seen as being more prevalent in Argentina.

Buenos Aires Museums

The indigenous display in El Museo Histórico does address current issues; however, the way it does so leaves out a good bit of crucial information, such as how the laws on display are (or, more accurately, are not) being enforced and how the changes in education affect (or don't affect) the rest of Argentinian society. The title “Situación Actual,” which implies an understanding of the current situation, is misleading due to the limited perspective seen in the museum. Although the caption does state that there is more to be done, the photographs of cheering people and colorful posters for bilingual
education are likely to leave the visitor with a feeling that contradicts the reality. The text under the words “Situación Actual” reads as follows:

“A pesar de los avances en materia legislativa, falta aún recorrer mucho camino para que los pueblos originarios accedan el pleno ejercicio de sus derechos, en materia de salud, educación, vivienda, participación, y regularización de su situación territorial.”

This translates to:

“Despite progress in legislation, there is still a long way to go for indigenous peoples to access and fully exercise their rights, in terms of health, education, housing, participation and regularization of their territorial situation.”

Though the words seem to be addressing the controversy surrounding indigenous rights, the pictures that go along with them, both through the drawing of children playing on an indigenous language textbook and through the poster of indigenous leaders fighting for their rights and looking quite satisfied with the results.
This is a common feature in museums bringing indigenous experience into the present – often an oversimplified, not entirely accurate, statement about indigenous rights that implies there is nothing left to be done, or that everything that needs to be done is being appropriately handled by either the government or the members of the group.

In El Museo Etnográfico, we see a similar trend, in which a lot of attention is given to pre-conquest era indigeneity, but the interactions from conquest onward are summed up with an overly simplistic statement, which, in the case of the “De la Puma al
Chaco” exhibit, is overly hopeless rather than giving false hope. The English version of the text reads:

“During the eighteenth century, the natives who were not killed in the rebellions were banished and condemned to lose their liberty forever.”

This is how the booklet describing the exhibit ends – with a notion that indigenous groups are either nonexistent, far away, or enslaved. There is no mention of modern indigenous movements or society, and the artifacts that go with the text are all that of European settlers rather than those that represent indigenous lifestyles during this time period (which previous exhibits have shown.) However, this is not the only exhibit in El Museo Etnográfico that deals with this subject. In the photo exhibit, which features photographs of indigenous people, all in black and white, all doing activities that can be viewed as traditional, there is a section labeled “Una Mirada Propia,” which translates in the English booklet as “Own View.”

Unlike the other photographs, which were selected by but not produced by indigenous people, the photographs under the heading “Una Mirada Propia” were taken by a member of the Wichi group in his home in the province of Salta. Also unlike the other photographs, these photographs are in color and feature indigenous people wearing modern clothing. Though the structures in the photographs are simple, they are more solid than the structures in the other photos, and one of the pictures shows a group of schoolchildren, in white uniforms, in front of their schoolhouse.

The “Own View” is quite different than the view of the photographer and anthropologist that was put on display. In addition, there is a section entitled “Apuntes de
Actualidad,” which in the English book is called “The Indigenous Peoples Today.” This is a brief display on the wall and in the booklet, but it is important because it is what claims to present the most accurate account of modern indigeneity. Unlike the other segments of this exhibit, the sign is unadorned with other pieces of information or photographs, and the text is plain and very small. While the Spanish version on the wall is broken into three paragraphs, the English translation in the guidebook is all one long paragraph. In English, the first part reads (translation theirs):

Contrary to the stated, the Indigenous Peoples have not disappeared. They are constantly trying to make themselves visible and doing an important effort to gain the respect that they deserve in order to keep developing themselves as societies different from those of the west. In doing so is that they achieved, in 2007, the Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by the United Nations (forty three Member States voted in favour, eleven abstained, and four – Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States – voted against the text).

This text is a bit problematic, because it isn't clear what is doing the stating. Is it contrary to the evidence elsewhere in the museum? In school textbooks? In media and public opinion? There isn't much context to be able to clarify what this introduction means, though the safest assumption might be to correlate it with general opinions in Argentinian society as a whole. It is interesting that the museum hurriedly acknowledges the need for indigenous people to be visible while this information appears in a display that is admittedly indigenous, but also not very integrated with indigenous people's wants and needs past the selection of the photographs. Although this particular section of the exhibit does show more concern for portraying real issues, it is such a small and relatively under presented part of the museum, and even of this exhibit.
It is also interesting to note the account of how the United Nations voted on the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Spanish text on the wall did not include the breakdown seen in the English translation. There are a few points about that translation that seem relevant to mention. First of all, the breakdown reports that forty-three member states voted in favor. This may be a calculation error or a translation issue, because in reality, there were one hundred and forty-four states in favor.

(“Declaration,” n.d.) The other interesting point here is that Argentina was one of the nations that voted in favor, which seems like something that the museum would mention and be proud of, but isn't mentioned at all in either the Spanish or the English text. (UN Voting Record, n.d.) Instead, the English text mentions the four states that voted against – all of which are English speaking nations. This is not mentioned in the Spanish part, perhaps because Spanish speakers would not be as personally affected by this information as English speakers, who are more likely to have come from one of those four countries.

The next section goes on to describe the 1994 Constitutional amendment, something that is displayed in most of the museums I visited. The translation book not only describes the amendment, but quotes it in full:

In Argentina the Indigenous Peoples achieved their legal recognition of its identity with the amendment of the Constitution in 1994 and the incorporation of the 75th, 17th paragraph, Correspond to the National Congress: “To recognize the ethnic and cultural pre-existence of the Argentinian indigenous peoples. To guarantee the respect at its identity and the right to a bilingual and intercultural education; to recognize the legal recognition of its communities, the property and community possession of the lands traditionally occupied by them; to regulate the delivery of other suitable and sufficient land for human development; non of them shall be commandeered, transmittable or subject to liens or embargo; ensure their
participation in the management of their natural resources and any other interests that affect them. The provinces may jointly exercise these powers.”

The most interesting part about this amendment is that it is very clearly not being followed by the Argentinian state in many cases. In fact, I asked a museum employee about this, and his answer was simple: “Es mentira.” – “it's a lie.” The law which many museums flaunt so proudly, including El Museo Histórico and El Museo Nacional del Hombre, the other two museums I visited extensively in Buenos Aires, is “a lie,” at least in the words of one of the museum curators. The law promises bilingual education: a service that is available in some places, but not many. It promises land rights and natural resources – the very thing the protestors on Avenida 9 de Julio and Avenida de Mayo were fighting for. In fact, the protestors directly, through their signs and petition, demand compliance with both the Constitutional amendment and the UN's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. One banner called out the president directly with the words “Sra. Presidenta: Cumpla lo que ud. afirmado el 13 de Sept. 2007 Declaracion de Naciones Unidas sobre los derechos de los pueblos indigenas.” Which translates to, “Madame President: Comply with what you agreed to on the 13th of September 2007 Declaration of the United Nations on the Rights of Indigenous People.”

The laws have been put into place, both nationally and internationally, for state recognition, bilingual education, land rights, and more. However, as these protests show, the story does not end there. In fact, it seems as if in many ways, the fight has just begun. This is an element of indigenous existence that is not present in the museum – there might be acknowledgment of these laws, but it usually ends there, showing a kind of
victory. Some places, including this one, have a brief statement to show that the struggle continues, but it is not often a focus of attention.

The sign in El Museo Etnográfico continues (English translation from the guide book):

Despite this legal recognitions, its effective implementation is still pending. The main obstacle that the Indigenous Peoples faces in Argentina is the lack of property of ancestral territories. This is a serious problem because the invasion of their land and the appropriation of their natural resources increase day by day without them being able to defend their rights. The law 26160 Emergency in Matters to Property and Possession of the Indigenous Lands suspends the court evictions and orders to do a technical, legal and land registry survey, at a national level, of the lands “traditionally occupied” by the indigenous communities. However, since the law does not include the giving of land titles, the effective legal recognition remains suspended.

Land titles are a significant issue when it comes to compliance with laws protecting indigenous peoples' rights to ancestral land. In fact, Amnesty International has gotten involved with these issues, stating, “Over the last few years state and private interests, especially those of the agribusiness and extractive industries, have built up enormous barriers between Argentina’s native population and their rights to their traditional lands. The UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples has criticized the lack of consultation with the communities that may be affected by development projects and exploitation of natural resources.” (“Indigenous Peoples,” 2013). The article goes on to describe violent situations that have resulted in injuries and even deaths of indigenous people attempting to claim land rights, and then states that land tenure is the source of many of these conflicts.
The law listed in the museum is mentioned by Amnesty International as well, but even years after it passed there is little evidence that government officials are complying with the stipulations. The article states:

Argentina’s Constitution and the international human rights law already recognize the right of indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands. Further, in 2006, the National Congress passed a law that ordered the suspension of evictions of all indigenous peoples until the ancestral lands had been mapped through a survey, but it did not define an appropriate delivery of community property titles to Indigenous People.

Unfortunately, almost eight years on, the evictions continue to take place. The mapping surveys are, in most, cases delayed ("Indigenous Peoples," 2013).

The issues listed here are the same ones that can be seen in the text of the museum listed above, but with an important distinction – this article not only lists what laws have been passed and what they consist of, but also criticizes the ineffectiveness of the laws. The museum acknowledges that the laws are suspended, but the article goes on to show what this means for indigenous people (often violence, death, lack of resources) and how international organizations (such as the inter-American Commission of Human Rights) have gotten further involved.

Another aspect of the museum that keeps El Museo Etnográfico tied to current issues of indigenous peoples is the binder in the middle of this same exhibit room, which is divided between news articles about the museum and news articles concerning Argentinian indigenous groups. The binder is not labelled, and it is left unceremoniously on a large table in the middle of the exhibit, without any sort of visual draw to it. Inside, there are articles printed out from online news sources, copied from local newspapers, or discovered elsewhere, that are put in sheet protectors and stuffed in the binder, which is large and difficult to use. This was the only museum that had something like that,
although many visitors walked by without realizing that the binder was part of an exhibit or even available to be looked through.

The other museum in Buenos Aires that mentions current situations of indigenous people does so in a very similar way as El Museo Histórico. El Museo Nacional del Hombre mostly focuses on indigenous handicrafts and traditions, both in the past and in the present, in a way that seems to imply the present is quite close in style to the past. There is a strange mixture of past and present tense in this museum, which often seems not to be separated chronologically as much as the others. There is a room with a very clear timeline, including years and arrows, but after that the times are more ambiguous. Because of that, mentions of indigenous people in modern settings are scattered throughout the museum rather than collected on one sign or display in particular. Most of these mentions involve the handicrafts themselves, such as a section entitled “Comercialización” (Commercialization). This section, the bottom half of a banner discussing chaguar crafts, describes the increased demand and market for indigenous merchandise after the coming of democracy in 1983. It discusses marketing strategies and relationships between craftspeople.

At the entrance to the museum, there is a banner labeled “Pueblos originarios: Pasado y Presente” (Indigenous peoples: Past and Present). It is only in the entryway that the issues of indigenous peoples today are seen in depth, through this banner, a model of indigenous language, and a copy of Amendment 75 without anything more to it. The banner has two sections: the first one falling under the overall title, and the second one labeled “Las comunidades hoy” (The communities today). It is important to note that this
is the only part of the museum that has an accompanying English translation, in the form of a laminated poster that can be removed and carried around the museum, but has a sign insisting it is returned to its holder afterward.

The start of the banner describes the history of indigenous people in Argentina very briefly, stating “la historia no empezó con Cólon” (history did not begin with Columbus). It also does not gloss over the horrors of the colonization period, with phrases like: “La conquista destruyó a su paso las civilizacions que durante miles de años habían construyido los pueblos americanos” (The conquest destroyed in its path the civilizations that the American peoples spent thousands of years constructing) and “Muchas vidas y culturas enteras se perdieron este violento contacto entre ambos grupos. En solo 150 años la población de América se redujo de alrededor de 100 miliones de habitantes a tan sólo 10 miliones” (Many lives and entire cultures were lost in this violent contact between both groups. In only 150 years, the population of America was reduced from around 100 million people to only 10 million).

The next paragraph reads: “Sin embargo, hubo quienes pudieron sobrevivir a través de diferentes estrategías, muchas veces cambiando su lengua y sus costumbres por las del dominador, otras manteniendo algunos rasgos propios y siempre en el marco de una relación desigual.” Translated, this says “However, there were some who were able to survive using various strategies, often changing their language and customs for those of the dominator, others maintaining some of their own, and always in the mark of an unequal relationship.”
The acknowledgment of strategies to survive horrific genocidal practices is unique to this museum. While other museums largely ignored or covered very briefly indigenous conquest, often through the lens of glorifying the conquerors, this paragraph goes into detail about the ramifications for both those who suffered the violence and those who survived. The racism and inequality, which is hinted at in other museums, is openly brought to the surface here. The next section is a bit more similar to what can be found in other museums. There are some demographics – the 2010 census lists indigenous groups as around 1,000,000 people, as parts of 34 ethnic groups and 14 distinct languages. The sign continues to explain migration and living situations, showing how some indigenous people are leaving their ancestral lands to live in bigger towns and cities. Then, like the other museums, there is a small segment on Article 75 passed in 1994 and the rights that are allotted to indigenous people through that.

Unlike the other museums in Buenos Aires, however, there is nothing to imply that the law is not being followed in full or that there are still struggles indigenous people need to overcome. The law is introduced at the end, as a sort of completion point to the poster, leaving visitors feeling satisfied that the injustices of the past have been amended and they can go on to enjoy the museum without worrying about cultural appropriation or discrimination. The rest of the museum presents a picture of indigeneity that is at time confusing, mixing not only tenses in language, but also showing temporally confusing images, such as photographs taken decades ago with present tense captions, and traditional handicrafts captioned with how they are made, but without much to explain.
what, if anything, has changed in the past few centuries with new technologies and cultural frameworks.

Resistencia Museums

The style of museums in Resistencia were a little bit different, due to the smaller population of the city and less tourist traffic. The museums I visited extensively were smaller, and one of the them was labeled as a cultural center rather than specifically as a museum. There is also more direct influence of indigenous populations in the north, where Resistencia is located, which is especially reflected in the cultural center, which is run by indigenous people.

El Centro Cultural Leopodo Marechal is different from the other museums for those reasons, and therefore its representation of modern indigeneity is a little bit different. In addition to its displays of handicrafts and signs concerning indigenous spiritual beliefs, this museum focused on a group known as Coro Qom. Qom is the group also known as Toba, a group prominent in the northeast of Argentina. This museum includes photographs of individual members, along with their legal and Qom names, including a translation. The members vary in age and gender, but all are members of the ethnic group Qom and participate in the chorus. There are also many trophies and awards on display in the same section as the photographs.
Fig. 9: Samples of the Coro Qom display in El Centro Cultural

Although the photographs are recent and many of the awards have recent dates etched into them, a stronger marker of indigenous interactions at present is the banner at the entrance of the museum. This banner introduces the Coro Qom, created in 1962, saying that they are "llevando la música y danza indígena al mundo," which translates to “bringing indigenous dance and music to the world.” This statement isn't an exaggeration – there is a map included on the banner that shows countries where the Coro Qom has performed, and it includes Mexico, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and, of course, Argentina. There is a larger map that shows the provinces of Argentina, and has a list of which ones the coro has performed in, which is twenty of the twenty-three.
There is a mission statement, sandwiched between a color photograph of the coro and a strip of older, black and white photographs, which says: “Recibimos de los sabios ancestros los sonidos sagrados de nuestro pueblo, que sembramos y compartimos en cada lugar que vamos,” and translates to “We receive from our wise ancestors the sacred sounds of our people, which we sow and share everywhere that we go.” The aspect of indigeneity that this museum is presenting is not legal battles for recognition, land tenure, and education. Instead, this banner demonstrates a desire to show ancient indigenous traditions to the rest of the country and the world. Although other museums I visited do show indigenous culture and traditions in some ways, none of the other museums show
individuals who are working on cultural transmission projects, and none of the mention cultural performance as a type of indigenous vitality movement. This difference may be connected to the structure of this cultural center, which is situated in the province where the coro was started, but it is also important to note that the rest of the museum showcases handmade artifacts not unlike the artifacts found in most of the other museums, and has statements about traditional beliefs and attitudes that are similar to those found in El Museo de Hombre Chaqueño.

El Museo de Hombre Chaqueño, like El Centro Cultural, has information about spiritual beliefs common to indigenous groups, including some text on the shaman, entitled “La Verdad Sobre El Shaman” (The Truth About the Shaman) and an account of the mythic creation of women, who came down from the sky to join men on Earth. There are maps that show where indigenous groups live. Like El Centro Cultural, there is also a desire to show cultural influence in the present day, something that was not featured prominently in any of the museums in Buenos Aires. In this museum, that means looking at types of religion, medicine, and material culture and how they influence the rest of Argentine society.

A small segment of the museum includes display cases filled with religious figurines, herbs used in traditional medicine, and decorative statues. There is text both inside and next to the display cases explaining the importance of these types of ideas in dominant culture. Several of these are quotes attributed to the founder of the museum, Professor Ertivio Acosta. For example: “La tradición popular, es la única poseedora y constructora de la cultura de un pueblo, es el cable conductor de costumbres ancestrales,
que dan características a nuestra forma de vida,” which means “Popular tradition is the only possessor and constructor of the culture of a people, it is the cable conductor of ancestral customs, that give characteristics to our way of life.” With this quote, the museum is showing how the popular beliefs and figures represented in the display case connect Argentine history to Argentine present, helping to craft the way of life of the “people.” This is problematic, though, because it assumes a single national identity that can be formed by taking aspects of indigenous and Spanish history and tradition and melding them together into one thing, which is what it means to be Argentinian. This narrative has little regard for the situation of indigenous people apart from what cultural traditions have been gained from them.

Instead of looking at how specific indigenous groups share their culture, like in the Centro Cultural, or at how legal changes affect indigenous groups, like in the museums in Buenos Aires, El Museo de Hombre Chaqueño presents a complicated picture of modern popular culture in the Chaco, a picture that absorbs certain aspects of indigenous culture while ignoring the struggles indigenous people still face. Additionally, the indigenous people mentioned in this segment are often left incredibly vague, such as when the section labelled “Hierbas Medicinales” (Medical Herbs) claims ancient knowledge from “nuestros abuelos indígenas” (our indigenous grandparents) without giving credit to any specific indigenous groups or individuals.

In addition to the generic “abuelos indígenas” being claimed, this label also paints a very idealistic picture of indigenous life, all formatted in the past tense, saying that these mysterious indigenous grandparents “en su contacto y comunión constante con la
naturaleza, encontraron en las plantas, una alternativa eficaz para aliviar dolencias y curar enfermidades” (in their constant contact and communion with nature, they found an effective alternative in plants to cure diseases and relieve pain). The problem with this text is that it produces an image of wise, old indigenous grandmothers and grandfathers, sharing their knowledge that comes from their benevolent communion with nature, implying that other ways of life and types of medicine were always accessible alternatives. It also claims kinship to an audience that is not necessarily indigenous in any way; in fact, the majority of the population of the country has no biological relationship to indigenous people at all. And these things are done without any sort of commitment to learning from, collaborating with, or supporting any of the many indigenous groups that are present in Argentina.
The appropriation of indigenous ideas into a vague tie of national cultural heritage is something addressed by Earle (2007), who writes of similar representations, “The indigenous contribution to Argentina was thus confined wholly to the past. At the same time, indigenous artistic sensibilities formed part of national culture” (209). In the case of El Museo de Hombre Chaqueño, indigenous people are not completely ignored. There are photographs at the front of the museum, black and white photographs that show indigenous people in very traditional settings, much like the photo exhibit in El Museo Etnográfico in Buenos Aires. The handicrafts are ambiguous in time, much like the crafts on display in most of the other museums I visited. The one aspect of the museum that
seems to be set unquestioningly in the present is this segment on popular culture, and the
only aspect of indigeneity that comes through in that is the notion of “abuelos indígenas,”
being integrated and appropriated into Argentine society without any real recognition.
The influence on indigenous past on national culture in the present is acknowledged, but
in a way that confines vague indigenous influence to a distant past, idealized in order to
bring in the most desirable aspects of it into modern national identity, which is built
through these various influences and is exclusive of the groups from which the influence
supposedly came.

In addition to the creation of a national identity narrative, which can be taken in
by Argentines without any sort of indigenous relationships, the desire to claim indigenous
roots has a lot to do with the creole presence in Resistencia. The museums in Buenos
Aires represented, in one way or another, the legal side of things. This may be because, as
the capital of Argentina and the seat of the majority of political decisions, Buenos Aires is
an important place to discuss governmental issues. The fact that indigenous people come
all the way to Buenos Aires from their various provinces in order to camp out and protest
noncompliance is an indicator of the magnitude of Buenos Aires’ influence on the rest of
the country, especially concerning indigenous rights and recognition.

The Chaco, on the other hand, is where many of those protestors actually came
from. As a province with a larger population of both indigenous people and creoles, the
type of discussion involving indigeneity is different than the type of discussion had in
Buenos Aires. Resistencia museums are for the creoles as well as the Euro-descendents,
and the uncertainty of creole identity as neither white nor indigenous may have a part to
play in how Argentine culture is discussed in the museums. Earle (2007) writes, “Elite understandings of the nation were bound up in the creole search for their own past, which sought to integrate the conflicting heritages bequeathed by preconquest, colonial, and republican history” (211). Although creoles do not comprise the ethnic majority in Argentina, they are a group that in some ways represents what Argentina is as a nation. And they are a group that is not generally represented in any sort of direct manner, at least not that I have encountered.

However, creole interests tend to align with white European interests, which both conflict strongly with indigenous interests. The creole search for identity has more to do with association with modern notions of Argentinian nationalism and less to do with discovering indigenous heritage, but building Argentinian nationalism by referencing nonspecific indigenous actors in the past appeases both white and creole Argentinians while alienating the very indigenous people that these groups are attempting to claim. Many creole Argentinians do not associate with any specific indigenous group, or recognize themselves as indigenous. In my experience at a school that catered to both creole and indigenous children, mostly of the group Wichi, (the only white children were the children of faculty members), the creole children were considered to have more social potential and were encouraged more in their studies, simply because they were creole rather than Wichi. Although racist discourse and ideology surely exists in Argentina, and the majority of promoted cultural images are of people with white rather than mixed ancestry, there does not seem to be a separate cultural category for creoles to separate them from white Argentinians.
In El Museo Histórico Regional Ichoalay, the way modern indigenous groups are portrayed is almost not an issue at all. The display of indigenous artifacts at the beginning is temporally ambiguous, like many of the major displays at all of these museums are, but there isn't a follow-up that connects indigenous groups directly to the present in any way. After the section on indigenous artifacts, there is a segment on conquest, colonialization, immigration, and then the museum takes off into the lives of the immigrants and their descendents. The timeline at the front of the museum only goes to 1958, and is more concerned with the official status of the Chaco region than with any specific people group. The closest thing to modern indigeneity can be seen in the final segment, which discusses art. However, the art is also from the early to mid 20th century, as the scope of the museum seems to end where the timeline does.

The art featured in this museum is interesting because, as a regional history museum, there is not a strong artistic focus. None of the other museums I visited have a similar display of art. For Museo Ichoalay, the art displayed is part of the history of the Chaco, and is located near the sections on sports, medicine, and education – all of which represent how culture developed from impoverished immigrants to the flourishing area that it is being shown as today. However, while the aforementioned sections are silent on the issue of indigenous participation, the art section features paintings, books, and sculptures based on indigenous models. Examples of these are paintings with titles such as “Tobita” (Little Toba Girl) and “Toba Maternidad” (Toba Motherhood), and a set of sculptures of indigenous men, one of which is shirtless with a loincloth and the other is wearing a poncho and hat.
Although these indigenous representations seem somewhat fetishized, the guide at the museum informed me that the sculptor, Juan de Dios Mena, was actually an indigenous man himself, which is information that cannot be found anywhere on the display. None of the other artists, according to the guide, were indigenous. This museum's lack of current situation of indigenous people has to be considered with the context, which does not include current situations at all.

*Indigenous Artifacts in the Museum*

As was mentioned earlier, one thing that almost every museum has in common is the type of artifacts on display as part of indigenous exhibits. These artifacts are generally handmade craft items, including baskets, clothing accessories, clay pots and jars, and bows and arrows. Some museums (including El Centro Cultural) have these for sale, some have labels explaining what they are (and at times, such as in Museo Ichoalay and Museo del Hombre Chaqueño, what group they belong to), and some just have them
sitting in the section that discusses indigeneity. But each museum has them, and they are always featured prominently. El Museo Histórico has the least prominent focus on artifacts, but still includes them in glass cases on the wall amid text concerning indigenous people. El Museo del Hombre and El Museo Etnográfico both have more interactive handicrafts, including chaguar fabric toys that can be picked up and played with in El Museo del Hombre and crafts set up on mannequins as display objects in El Museo Etnográfico.

Some of these museums, including El Museo Etnográfico and El Museo Histórico, only have these artifacts on display in regards to the past, while others, especially Centro Cultural and El Museo del Hombre, make it clear that these are still part of indigenous work in one way or another. Though El Museo Ichoalay and El Museo de Hombre Chaqueño do not have a clear timeline for the handicrafts, their use of specific indigenous group and more detailed descriptions of the objects provide more information to be interpreted than the other museums do.

The labels in El Museo Ichoalay make a point to show distinctions between groups. Much of the display is either Qom or Wichi, as these are two most populous groups in the northeastern region of Argentina. While some parts of the display, such as the boledoras and macana (simple bludgoning weapons), are described in past tense, the rest is written in a neutral, atemporal way that simply describes what the artifact is and how it’s made rather than how it’s used. For example, the label on the macana reads thus: “La MACANA era un garrote o maza de madera dura y pesada. Resultaba un arma terrible en el combate cuerpo a cuerpo y generalmente se utilizaba para rematar a las
victimas, hombres o animales,” which translates to: “The MACANA was a club or mace made of hard and heavy wood. It was a terrible weapon in melee combat and was generally used to finish off the victims, people or animals.”

From this label, the implication is that this weapon is no longer used in the indigenous groups, and that the artifact on display is historical rather than a marker of present day customs. However, some labels are not as clear on that front. For example, trenzas. “ADORNOS CON TRENZAS. 390 – Diademas realizadas con lana o hilado de chaguar tejida en forma de cordón, teñida con tintes naturales, el rojo o colorado lo obtienen de la cochinilla. Se encuentran decoradas con cuentas de concha y plumas o pequeñas cuentas perforadas. Grupo Wichi.” This says: “DECORATIONS WITH BRAIDS. 390 – Diadems made with wool or chaguar thread woven as lace, dyed with natural dyes, red or color obtained from a cochineal (an insect known for its ability to produce a reddish dye). They can be found decorated with beads made of shells and feathers or small perforated beads. Wichi Group.” The descriptive tone carefully avoids using active voice or any other indicator of time, leaving the visitor unsure about the implications of the artifacts.
Similarly, El Museo de Hombre Chaqueño uses terminology that leaves the time frame of the objects ambiguous, but this museum also puts forth more detail and has more present day implications than Museo Ichoalay, with labels that say things like: “La artesana Qom, elegirá colores vibrantes y la pieza tendrá figuras zoomorfas y antropormorfas, tejen mantas, ponchos, tapices, bolsos, fajas, y alfombras hechas en un telar simple, que es un bastidor hecho con cuatro ramas, son diseños que responden en su totalidad a manifestaciones tradicionales, de gran riqueza estetica.” This translates to: “The Qom artisan will choose vibrant colors and the piece will have animal and human figures, woven blankets, ponchos, tapestries, handbags, belts, and carpets made in a
simple loom, which is a frame made with four branches, they are designs that match in their entire being traditional manifestations, of great aesthetic richness.”

Fig. 14: One of the craft displays in El Museo del Hombre Chaqueño

With this label, the implication is a little bit more forward-looking, especially with the use of future tense rather than past or present. However, there is not much to contextualize these crafts, and some of the surrounding signs and labels do not use active verbs at all. Additionally, there are quotes on the walls nearby, but they come from sources such as “Historia de los aborigines Qom (Toba), del Gran Chaco” (History of the indigenous group Qom (Toba) of the Gran Chaco) and “Historia del Mapic o Algarrobo” (History of the Mapic or Algarrobo) which implies that they are related to the past, as well.
The emphasis on history goes with the themes of Museo Histórico and Museo Ethnográfico, both of which show a stronger relationship between the handicrafts and the past than of the present. This can be seen especially in Museo Histórico, which only has artifacts in glass inserts in an otherwise solid wall base. These artifacts are only in the parts of the wall before the post conquest era is brought up, so they are fairly clearly associated with the past. In Museo Ethnográfico, there are more recent artifacts, but focus shifts to the colonizer’s point of view, showing scientific instruments such as eye and hair color charts, typewriters, measuring tape, and cameras. Indigenous handicrafts are only displayed until conquest is addressed.

El Centro Cultural stands in direct contrast with these two. The fact that indigenous people still make the handicrafts cannot be disputed at El Centro Cultural, because they sell them there and also are prepared to talk about who makes them, and whether or not they will be around anytime soon. (Unfortunately, when I was in Resistencia, most of the regular workers at El Centro Cultural were gone for summer vacations, so I did not get to meet the people who make the handicrafts). Other objects scattered throughout the museum are not labeled, so it is hard to say whether they are meant to represent the past or present, which is similar to how things are displayed in El Museo del Hombre. In El Museo del Hombre, objects are sometimes labeled, but they are left out in the open, in some cases enough so that visitors can pick them up and interact with them. The temporality of some of the objects is confusing, but this is the only one of the museums that mentions selling these goods in the modern market, which is clearly a marker of present day.
The types of handicrafts displayed in the museums were fairly consistent. Bags, scarves, jars, weapons, and figurines are common. Handicrafts give a museum the opportunity to exhibit something three dimensional, which visitors can see either in glass display cases or on tables and shelves. While these objects are important for fleshing out the displays of indigeneity, they can contribute to the essentialization that takes place by not including other types of representative objects. Much like the photographs in the museums, which show mainly impoverished and/or traditional lifestyles, these handicrafts demonstrate an association with antiquated or simplistic manners of living and imply a lack of connection with modern day Argentina.

Fig 15: Handicraft displays at El Centro Cultural
Conclusion

Walking into each museum I visited was an experience in itself. From Museo Nacional del Hombre, which was tucked away in a quaint Buenos Aires neighborhood, to Museo Histórico Nacional, where a slew of security guards greeted me on every visit, I was able to experience what visiting a museum in Argentina is like, at least for someone in my position as a Spanish-speaking American. Many of the museum workers, such as the kind and informative staff at Museo Etnográfico Juan B. Ambrosetti and Museo Histórico Regional Ichoalay, were intrigued by my inquisitive presence, and enthusiastically provided me with background information about each museum. And, despite logistical concerns, such as construction and staff being gone for vacations, Museo del Hombre Chaqueño and Centro Cultural y Artesanal Leopoldo Marechal provided me with service and attentiveness.

Speaking to people outside of the museums, however, was a different story. Most of my connections in Argentina knew very little about these museums, even in Resistencia, which is a considerably smaller city than Buenos Aires. In Buenos Aires, I had trouble finding the supposedly well known museum of Museo Etnográfico Juan B. Ambrosetti, even after asking people who work on the nearby streets and at the affiliated university. A community of people living right down the street from Museo Histórico Regional Ichoalay in Resistencia knew very little about it, and even professionals and staff at these museums were not able to provide me information about similar museums in their geographic area.
Each of these museums presents a similar picture of indigeneity, but in different ways. The ones in Buenos Aires have a broader range, discussing indigenous groups throughout the country (and, at times, beyond), while those in Resistencia tend to be more regionally focused. Most of the museums have at least a partial overview of indigeneous history as well as a hinting at issues facing them today, though the primary focus is typically cultural artifacts that can not be concretely located in time or space.

The fact that each of these six museums presents indigenous groups as social and historical actors is a feat in itself, considering the legacy of indigenous denial and erasure present in the nation of Argentina. However, the lack of individual attention on indigenous leaders and the grouping together of indigenous cultures can lead to a stilted view of what it means to be indigenous in Argentina, especially since the cultural displays were so similar from one museum to another, for the most part, and because it was often difficult to distinguish between past and present.

The museums that I visited in both Buenos Aires and Resistencia show a connection with a sometimes idealized, sometimes marginalized, but always distant past, as evidenced by handmade artifacts and black and white photographs. Although it is important to acknowledge this past, in the museums it is often left vague, with techniques such as using general terms for indigeneity rather than specific group names, and lacking detailed information on individuals that are part of indigenous groups. In contrast, non-indigenous displays involve a wider variety of artifacts, more detailed information about specific individuals, and language that implied continuation and growth rather than extermination and disappearance.
Most of these museums do incorporate present day indigenous issues, even if only by mentioning Article 75, the amendment to the constitution that allows for indigenous rights. This is a positive step toward holistic inclusion, but without acknowledging the complications and difficulties of these issues, indigenous struggles are being ignored at best and portrayed as unnecessary at worst. Present tense issues are generally highlighted in a short and overly optimistic way, which could be expanded by showing discrepancies between public policy and actual follow through, as well as by detailing the struggles that indigenous people went through to get to that level of national recognition, and what they still face when fighting for enforcement of these laws.

As each museum is sponsored in some way by government forces, there are limitations in what can be displayed and how it is presented. These complications vary from museum to museum. In El Museo Ethnográfico, for example, I was told that there were very rarely check ups to see what’s being done as far as higher levels of authority were concerned. In contrast, El Museo Histórico is not only sponsored by the government, but is also run by government employees, so the material tends to be more reflective of state interests. Similarly, while the Chaco's Instituto del Cultura led to the region having more museums and cultural events, there are also more limitations on what each of those museums can put in their exhibits. However, even in the Chaco province, there is a certain amount of authority that the staff of each museum has in making their decisions, and the level of influence from outside systems varies with each museum.

Argentina's museums have the opportunity to use this role as educational institutions to combat the injustices and racisms that have taken place against native
people groups in the country. Visitors to museums are exposed to different frameworks that influence how they interact with the world, including their perceptions of indigenous groups. Argentina's erasure of native histories is a factor in major political decisions, including how indigenous relations are handled. This issue can be exacerbated by museum representation, which can confirm a centuries-long fiction about the role of indigenous people groups in the Argentine nation. However, this can also be changed. Museum representation can be used as a tool to combat these narratives, taking advantage of their influence to enact societal change.

The interactions I had with people outside of the museums I visited unveiled a certain ignorance in the general population as far as knowledge of indigenous groups is concerned. Despite the presence of indigenous people in the cities, residents had little knowledge of their existence. Though museums do show indigenous groups, they are not shown as active members of modern Argentine society, but rather as either people left behind in history or people who need to be helped and/or pitied, but not regarded as citizens on the same plane as non-indigenous Argentines. These interpretations of museum displays are based on my own personal experiences, but are also continuations of what has been discussed concerning Argentina's relationship with its indigenous people and what is portrayed in the media and literature.

The relationship between museums and these general cultural misunderstandings, which are constructed and continued through various mediums, including political platforms and mass media as well as education, is symbiotic. Indigenous erasure leads to stilted views of indigeneity in the museums, and these incomplete pictures of indigeneity
lead to cultural misunderstandings that contribute to government policies and a lack of knowledge in the general public concerning indigenous groups. This lack of knowledge is enforced and continued through incomplete depictions of indigeneity in the museums, as well as media and literature. The cycle continues, while many people in Argentina have no idea that this is happening.

This phenomenon is not limited to Argentina, or even the Americas. All settler colonial societies must decide how (or whether) to acknowledge indigenous populations past and present. Museums play a big part in this, as do influences ranging from public school curriculums to fashion magazines. The fact that many Argentinian museums receive support from the state means that they are somewhat limited in the content they can have, because the state has motives to keep certain types of histories and perspectives out of the public eye. However, even with this in mind, there are ways that indigeneity can be further acknowledged and explored in ethnographic and historical museums, especially when concerned with how indigenous people interact with the country as a whole in the present day.

Despite efforts toward inclusivity, indigenous individuals are still displayed as "other," not leaving room to explore their subjectivity, but rather looking at indigenous groups as a distanced whole. Said's discourse on separating "us" from "them" can be used when looking at Argentina's relationship with indigenous and non-indigenous groups. Museums label indigenous groups as such, separating them not only physically, but also cognitively, from the rest of the museum. This compounds on the separation that is evident in Argentine society, from the neighborhoods labelled "Barrio Toba" (Toba
Neighborhood) that non-Toba people (both Argentinians and foreigners, such as myself) are told not to go into unescorted, to the indigenous populations of the country that are not represented in the national imagery as Argentine citizens. This othering leads to power discrepancy, with the "us" rhetoric controlling not only how the groups seen as "them" are viewed, but also having influence on the legislation and access to resources that affect the groups. By placing indigenous people on display under a label that marks them as "other," Argentina as a nation is able to marginalize and legislate them with a sense of responsibility and authority.

As subject, indigenous groups are tied to the state. Instead of developing and promoting their own identities, they are limited by state authority, both in the staffing and the funding of the museums. Even El Centro Cultural, which is run by indigenous people, is part of the Chaco's Instituto del Cultura, which has a stake in how the groups are represented. Without the ability to form their own subject identities, indigenous groups are subject to the state. Because of this, they fall into the same category in the museums as they do in education and media – the category of either distanced temporally, distanced culturally, or distanced geographically. The type and extent of distance varies with each exhibit, but the message of distancing is clear. Indigenous people are far from non-indigenous minds, not because they don't exist, but because they are displayed as far from non-indigenous lifestyles and mentalities, which allows for a continuation of the processes of separation, oppression, and disenfranchisement.

Museums, education, and literature in Argentina show indigenous people as being in the past. Culturally, they are shown as groups that are far from modern society.
Geographically, they are shown as being in the far-off regions, which are themselves othered from the country of Argentina as a whole. These distances already exist in the mentalities of Argentinians, and are confirmed in the way indigenous people are portrayed in the museums. The opportunity to shift conceptions of indigeneity and provide a more complete portrayal of Argentina's original occupants is there, and the museums are already on a path toward it. The path just needs to be expanded, and the museums need to keep working to further it.
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