

# Historical representations and conflicts about indigenous people as national identities

Culture & Psychology

17(2) 177–195

© The Author(s) 2011

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1354067X11398311

cap.sagepub.com



**Mario Carretero**

Universidad Autónoma, Madrid and FLACSO, Argentina

**Miriam Kriger**

CONICET-FLACSO, Argentina

## Abstract

The relation between history learning processes, in and out of school, and the construction of national identities is nowadays an increasingly important topic, being studied through the appropriation of historical narratives, which are frequently based on the official history of any nation state. In this paper, college students' historical representations of their nation's origin are studied. We compared specific quantitative answers about who the first inhabitants of Argentina were with more in depth qualitative answers about their nation's political origin. In this respect, a conflict has been found in the way students present the official narrative. This conflict consists of maintaining that natives were the first national inhabitants, while most of the students think their nation was created in the 19th century. Different reactions to this are analyzed, particularly students' efforts to justify this conflict and to find coherency in historical content which has been produced by school history teaching and other sources and consumed by college students. The most common justifications include cultural tools that conceal the violence historically suffered by the natives, and at the same time an unreal conciliation between natives' rights and the interests of western founders of the national state. These tensions are considered in light of sociocultural discussions about the differences between production and consumption of historical narratives and their appropriation. We uphold that consumed historical narratives are based on an ontological and ahistorical concept of one's own nation, which prevents understanding a possible counternarrative based on natives as historical agents.

## Keywords

history learning, historical narratives, national identities

---

## Corresponding author:

Mario Carretero, Universidad Autónoma, Madrid and FLACSO, Argentina

Email: mario.carretero@mac.com

The topic addressed by this article has become increasingly important during recent years in the field of academic research as well as in debates on educational policy. We refer to the conflictive articulation between history teaching, national identity, and students' citizenship formation (Barton and Levstik, 2004; Van Sledright, 2008).

Given that history teaching arose precisely as a "cultural device" (Anderson, 1991; Valsiner, 2006) in the service of the construction of national citizenships (Boyd, 1997; Hobsbawm, 1990; Smith, 1991), the topic is not new. Along this line, it is possible to establish close links between the rise of the liberal state and the implantation of history teaching in state schools during the 19th century.

What is novel is precisely the problematic character this link has been taking on during the last decades, by virtue of the profound transformations that affect societies on a global level and impose the revision of processes whereby "the nation is invented" (Hobsbawm, 1990). Among these, we must highlight: the weakening of the national state as a realm that centralizes social practices; the crisis of political identities; and the emergence of new and old nationalisms (Kymlicka, 2001) as well as of other possible global citizens (Carretero & Kriger, 2004; Haste, 2004; Levinson, 2002).

From the perspective of sociocultural psychology, school history content has been considered as closely related to official narratives, which strongly determine subjects' representations of the past. A number of interesting theoretical issues could be considered in relation to how these narratives are appropriated by citizens. Previous research (Wertsch, 1997) has established an important distinction in order to fully understand these issues. This refers to the difference between production and consumption of historical narratives. The former is related to how history textbooks, mass media, and other sources offer official history versions (Ahonen, 1997; Luczynski, 1997); on the other hand, consumption has to do with the process of how individuals appropriate those historical narratives, even though their narratives may not necessarily be identical to those produced. In the field of history teaching and learning there are many more studies about production processes (Carretero, Jacott, & López-Manjón, 2002; Van Sledright, 2008; White, 1997) than about consumption (Penuel & Wertsch, 2000). This paper tries precisely to improve our knowledge about these issues. Particularly, we attempt to analyze in detail how coherence is maintained in the consumption of historical narratives. In other words, we have been wondering which are the new elements incorporated by college students into their consumed narratives compared with the officially produced ones, in order to face possible conflicts related to moral dilemmas between the nation's interest and more universal ethical assumptions. On the other hand, we have tried to analyze to what extent the nation is represented in these narratives as a true historiographical concept, or whether, on the contrary, college students have an ontological representation of their own nation, which prevents their understanding of a possible counternarrative based on natives as historical agents.

## From a community of destiny to an imagined community

To be sure, this problem is linked in a general way to how the 19th-century conception of the “nation” as a community of destiny (Smith, 1991) is resignified by students in contemporary contexts. So it seems necessary to study the ways in which representations of the nation’s past, present, and future are organized in official versions of the so-called “nation’s history,” to a great extent distributed by the school. This historical version carries an argumentative continuity, whence the “identitary us” is constituted: Hobsbawm (1990) defined it as “the nation’s programmatic mythology.” Inasmuch as it is often perceived as the “national history,” in rigor it is not, since historiography as a form of knowledge goes beyond the “crafting of ‘prêt à porter’ narrations on the common past” (Rosa, 2004).

Such “national history” was born to be taught. Although there are various records of the same history in different realms (to expand on this, see Carretero, 2011), the school record is one of the most important for its transmission. Indeed, school versions unite stories with different degrees of importance and hierarchy in a long narrative chain, thus linked by virtue of the role they play in the construction of what we might call the nation’s “saga.” These are usually heroic and celebratory narratives—“master narratives” (Aldridge, 2006; Straub, 2005)—that may configure *schematic narrative templates* in students’ minds. That is, deeply structuring schemes that pervade underneath, through time, as opposed to specific narratives that may change more frequently, for instance, with political regimes. This paper presents an analysis of a specific narrative—but not the foundational one—needed to explain, without contradictions, the process and expansion of a Latin American nation such as Argentina. It is important to notice that this specific narrative, related to the process of taking the natives’ lands at the end of the 19th century, is common to several nations in America, such as the United States, Canada, and others. Interestingly enough, according to history textbook analyses (Clark, 2007; Loewen, 2007; Romero, 2004) this official narrative has always been produced from the point of view of modern nations, ignoring almost totally the natives’ (Cole, 2007) perspective. That is to say, from a theoretical point of view, schematic narrative templates about the foundational process of nations would be expected to determine specific narratives, such as those related to the role of the natives’ territories and cultures in the historical process of the nation’s development. The extent to which this influence takes place not only in the production process, but in the consumption process as well, is also open to question.

Official narratives on the nation’s origin are often especially prone to form *schematic narrative templates*, inasmuch as they are “cultural tools” (Wertsch & Rozin, 2000) designed by a teleological historiography, that is, according to which destiny is already contained in the origin and knowledge of the “roots” is indispensable for knowing how to act in the future.

Along this line, as pointed out by Lorenz (2004), any “historical identity” poses the question of origins. In this sense, the study of representations generated by the nation’s birth stories is deemed especially revealing for at least

three reasons: a) because in a direct and differential way, these stories activate the connection between past, present, and “common” future; b) because they set in motion a number of psychological strategies aimed at facilitating cultural continuity (Chandler, 2000) and preserving the “us” that plays the leading role in the historic-identitary saga of national history; and c) because they are a key piece in the process of building “historical consciousness” (Seixas, 2004).

Now, in order to address this problem, we need to establish criteria that differentiate stories and nations. In our case, we have first decided to make a distinction between two types of stories of origin: those of colonizing countries and those of colonized countries.

Given the strong meaning that America’s “discovery” bears in world history, in the configuration of the “world of nations” (Hobsbawm, 1990), and in the constitution of the diverse and particular “us” (Todorov, 1999), we might wield many reasons to justify this choice. For Europeans, the “discovery” of the “New Continent” determined an amplification of the world hitherto known, which appears in symbolic terms as one of the most important triumphs of enlightened “modern reason” over medieval obscurantism. For Native American peoples, instead, that “discovery” implied the destruction of their universe’s symbolic organization and thence their material and physical extermination (Todorov, 1999). And for American nations that arose in the 19th century, the meaning of the “discovery” continues to be highly ambivalent and conflictive.

But among all the possible reasons, we have mainly chosen one that refers to our interest in knowing how the romantic theme of the “nation’s awakening”—constituent of 19th-century European national historiography—is currently adapted or resignified in students’ narratives in the American continent with regard to their own nations’ origins. This leitmotiv of “the nation’s awakening” is related to the construction of a historical identity based on romantic—more than enlightened—foundations, and linked more to particularism than to universalism (Carretero, 2011; Lorenz, 2004). It claims that the nation is pre-existent to the state and composed of “peoples’ linguistic and cultural communities, which after silently maturing for centuries, finally emerge as nations from the world of passive existence and attain self-consciousness as forces endowed with historical destiny” (Renner, cited in Hobsbawm, 1990, p. 111).

The problem we pose aims to clarify, in general terms: Who is this subject that configures itself as a primordial people (*volk*) in students’ representations (generated to a great extent by official school versions), considering both freedom from Europeans and destruction of native indigenous peoples often appear as necessary conditions for the historic foundation of American states? And also: Is there a deeper identitary substrate than the subject proposed by national myths, which is linked to the idea of encounter, like the *melting pot* (USA) or the *crucible of races* (Argentina)?

Up to this point, we have presented the problem in its full scope, without ignoring the fact that it takes on specific features in each of the American continent’s regions and countries, because their territories were conquered by different

European kingdoms, or because the domination of natives was carried out in different terms (evangelization, colonization, exploitation, etc.).

Notwithstanding, we must stress our approach consists of posing a common—"American-colonial"—problem that must always be addressed in particular contexts and with specific objectives. To this purpose, we shall now present our recent findings in a study conducted in Buenos Aires (Argentina), but probably having similarities with the historical narratives produced and consumed in other countries such as the United States or Canada.

## **Context and presentation of empirical study**

Argentinean national history has three main stories of origin. One is linked to the nation's profound origin, essentially American, represented by the arrival of Europeans in America (12 October 1492). The other two stories are linked to the foundation of the state at the beginning of the 19th century.

We intend to study students' representations in Argentina, an American country, in order to attain a greater understanding of their views regarding their nation's "deep origin." In this respect, our specific objectives are:

- To study the relation between the representations of the distant identity origin (natives) of "Argentineness" and the historic origin of Argentina as a national state.
- To inquire how students deal with the conflictive nature of Argentina's distant origin, analyzing the strategies they develop for their approach to this issue.

The study was conducted in two stages, between 2005 and 2006: the first consisted of applying a questionnaire with a sample of 364 students from the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) preparatory cycle who graduated from the school system in 2004, both male and female and aged 17–18. The second stage consisted of in-depth, on-site, semi-structured interviews with 14 subjects belonging to the original sample group. These interviews delved deeper into the more significant and problematic aspects resulting from the questionnaire's analysis. The interview drew upon national identity and history issues presented in the questionnaire and it sought to gain more in-depth knowledge of subjects' representations about these issues<sup>1</sup>.

We must bear in mind that these subjects have been highly "endowed" by the school with historical and identity tools, which are regarded as necessary to constitute them as citizens. In other words, these subjects have received at least 12 years of identity formation (historic patriotic rituals at school are mandatory) and 8 years of history instruction, given that teaching about the past in Argentina has two different types of sources and didactic devices: on the one hand, patriotic rituals (Carretero & Kriger, 2008), and on the other hand, history curricular teaching. Both of these can be considered as linked to nationalist conceptions of the past (Carretero, 2011; Romero, 2004).

## The incongruity between the nation's identity and history

Regarding the first item, linked to temporal origin, we asked participants: "Since when has Argentina existed?" and we gave them four choices: a) always; b) 12 October 1492; c) 25 May 1810; and d) 9 July 1816. The first option (a) is explicitly linked to the essentialist conception of the nation, whereas the others remit to a more historical conception, since they refer to dates instituted in the official narrative and in the school's patriotic calendar. Choice (b) remits to the deepest landmark of American origin, and the other two options, (c) and (d), to the founding landmarks of the state: the May 25th Revolution and the Declaration of Independence, respectively.

We found that only 11% of the interviewees explicitly assigned Argentina an essential origin (option a); 70% chose the official dates for the foundation of the nation state (option c, 1810, or d, 1816); 18% proposed other, non-official dates (open option); and barely 1% decided on the distant historic origin (option b, 1492). This is to say, the great majority of the interviewees located the origin of Argentina in a historical dimension.

In a second item we asked the youths: "For you, who were the first Argentines?" in order to establish the identity referent acknowledged as original. We gave them the following choices: a) indigenous people; b) Spaniards;

**Table 1.** Answers distribution to the question "Since when has Argentina existed?"

Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Always	40	11.2
Since Oct. 1492	4	1.1
Since 25 May 1810	111	31.2
Since 9 July 1816	135	37.9
Other	66	18.5
Total	364	100

**Table 2.** Answers distribution to the question "Who were the first Argentines?"

Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Indigenous people from this territory	204	56.5
Spaniards who arrived in America	11	3
Other Europeans who arrived in America	5	1.4
A mixture of American and European blood ( <i>mestizos/criollos</i> )	137	38
Other	4	1.1
Total	364	100

c) Europeans in general; and d) colonists<sup>2</sup>. As a result, we found that 56.5% of the participants chose option a) indigenous people; 38% chose d) colonists; 3% chose b) Spaniards; and 1.4% chose c) Europeans in general.

To synthesize, more than half of the youths consider the “first Argentineans” to be the territory’s original inhabitants. But most interestingly, a high percentage within this group is made up of those who had previously located Argentina’s origin in the 19th-century landmarks. That is, 66% of the students who opted for 25 May 1810 and 33% of those who opted for 9 July 1816, also consider—simultaneously—that indigenous peoples were the “first Argentineans.”

So all of these participants apparently believe the first Argentineans preceded the existence of Argentina itself. This would imply that national identity pre-exists the national state’s history, and that the nation, as a teleological category, transcends men’s consciousness and will. In a few words, for these students, Indians “would be” already essentially Argentinean, albeit they did not know it or decide it. This could imply that participants would not consider “first Argentineans” as agents of their own history, but rather as subjects of a destiny imposed upon them. This particular aspect will be specifically investigated in the interviews to be presented below.

This incongruity between the two types of origin recognized by participants reminds us to what we have elsewhere (Carretero & Kriger, 2008) considered to be constitutive ambivalence, whose goal is to avoid conflict. Let us define this as co-presence of conceptually contradictory concepts that mutually constitute each other in their difference and express themselves through strategies of denial or conciliation. In other words, we think this constitutive ambivalence is the way mediated action takes place in this type of specific task, related to the identification of subjects’ common origins. What we have found is also an expression of the deep conflict of Argentinean identity: How is it possible for indigenous people to be considered “first Argentineans” by those who believe, simultaneously, that Argentina was born in the 19th century, precisely through the foundation of a national state project that did not include them and deemed their destruction necessary?

### **The conflictive origin of the “us”: Strategies developed for its resolution or conciliation**

Let us now present the analysis of these interviews, where students explain or justify the incongruity, more oriented toward conciliation or neutralization of conflict than toward its tackling or resolution. We believe what we found were multiple formats of a common strategy: all of these formats manifest the preponderance of a normative and moral conception over a historical-political perspective in the participants’ minds. It is important to clarify that we are contrasting the notions of “moral” and “ethical,” considering the former complies with the requirements, imperatives, or mandates by established roles, while the latter—which finds the political *ethos*—focuses on the struggles and negotiations around these roles’ definition and institution.

### The case of Nora

Nora feels surprised when at the interview her two choices are placed simultaneously in the same discourse, making their incongruity evident:

Interviewer: If Argentina has existed since 1816...How is it that there were Argentines before there being Argentina?

Nora: I blew it! Now I realize... No, now I agree more with aborigines being the first inhabitants of Argentina. We'd be speaking of a time long before 1816, because Argentina always existed, but the fact that it hadn't been discovered does not mean it had not existed.

I: Did indigenous people live there, not knowing they were Argentinean?

N: Of course...

I: But this makes us think seriously: What is this, which Argentina was?

N: A territory, not a nation. It was a territory and a destiny that was already there: both things.

I: So... That territory was already Argentina and those Indians were Argentines?

N: Well no, not that much; they began a long path toward being Argentines. I don't think they "were" Argentines.

I: But are they the first Argentines?

N: Yes, but speaking of Argentina not as a nation; let's say, as a territory.

Confronted with her contradiction, the interviewee begins to justify herself; first she corrects herself and shows an inclination for the essentialist position ("a territory and a destiny that was already there"), and she then develops a strategy to reconcile both positions. She proposes to distinguish two origins: that of the "nation" from that of the "territory." The former would be linked to history, a trajectory or "long path toward being Argentines," which would culminate in the date she elected as origin of Argentina (Declaration of Independence in 1816). "The territory," instead, would be linked to essence. So, despite Nora having set the origin of Argentina on a historic date, when we delved deeper into the inquiry, we realized that her conception was essentialist and the nation was presented as a teleological rather than historical category.

Besides, for her the nation's matrix is territorial, not ethno-cultural: insofar as Indians are recognized as the first Argentines, this is due to their original relationship with the territory rather than to their ethnic or cultural heritage. While analyzing this interpretation by the interviewee, we find it composes a *sui generis* variation of the romantic motif of "the nation's awakening." In this singular version, the latent nation that awaits its awakening is in "the land," rather than in "the people's spirit."



The interviewee's argument leads us to an idea of destiny that is not opposed to history, but rather includes it. Thus, she understands "the nation," which differs from "the territory," as a (lower-case) history within the Great History configured by Destiny. And this latter is not located in time, but in the territory. While history *happens* and *becomes* in time, destiny *is* and *resides* in the territory.

### *The case of Hugo*

Hugo incorporates greater complexity in his position, but also greater difficulty in conciliating the incongruity, expressed in his interview between the terms of State (Argentina's historic dimension) and indigenous people (identitary dimension of "Argentineness")

Interviewer: Since when do you think Argentina has existed? In the questionnaire you say: since 1816. Yet when I ask you who the first Argentines were, you say: "the Indians." Do you notice a problem there?

Hugo: Yes... terrible! I guess what we call Argentina was finally formed in 1816, but they (the Indians) were the owners of the land... Let's say, not Argentines, because Argentina did not exist yet, but they were the real Argentines, they were the owners of the territory [...] It's not that the land was theirs, but they shouldn't have been expelled. Even though the state was formed afterward, all that, they were the first, although that couldn't be called Argentina...

Hugo reveals a problem he never gets to solve: how to conjugate the acknowledgment of indigenous rights and of the state's historical right over the territory. But before moving forth, it is important to mention the fact that the supposed "first Argentines" were not only victims of the Spanish conquest's historic violence, but also of a second conquest effected several centuries later by the fledgling Argentinean state. We refer to the "Conquest of the Desert," the military campaign commanded by General Roca at the end of the 19th century, which achieved the country's so-called "unification" or "consolidation" through the incorporation of indigenous lands—but without the Indians—to the Argentinean territory. This entailed the massacre and exile of original peoples, who were "effaced" from the land and from history, being stigmatized as representatives of "barbarianism" and necessary victims of "civilization" (to broaden this view, see Sarlo & Altamirano, 1983). This process can be compared to the one called "Far West" in the United States, in terms of the conquered territory and taking into consideration the elimination of cultures (Loewen, 2007).

Hugo wants to vindicate indigenous peoples, but as he advances in his argument, he becomes increasingly conscious also of the need to justify the history of the national state. The conflict is gradually expressed under the form of contrary statements, such as: "they were the owners of the territory" versus "not that the land was theirs"; or "they shouldn't have been expelled" versus "even though

the state was formed afterward.” We ought to highlight that in this formulation, the reference to a supposed expulsion of Indians significantly neutralizes the violence of historic events linked to the destruction of American indigenous peoples. Only insofar as his invention, consisting of considering as an “expulsion” what was really a massacre, fails and the shortcomings of his version become evident, Hugo may experience a cognitive conflict. This would then open the possibility for conceptual change to occur (Leinhardt & Ravi, 2008; Schnotz, Vosniadou, & Carretero, 1999), or from another perspective, for the realization of the “unnatural act” Wineburg (2001) calls “historical thinking.” But during this interview, Hugo does not manage to resolve the incongruity, and dedicates himself to generating conflict-avoidance strategies. As a last attempt, he tries to reduce the contradiction between identity and history to a simple semantic difference, saying: “*they* were the first,” although “that couldn’t be called Argentina.”

### *The case of Tomás*

Tomás does not attempt to justify the contradiction; rather, by using meta-narrative resources, he displaces the conflict from the intellectual to the moral plane, manifestly abandoning any pretense of historic truth:

Interviewer: In the questionnaire we asked you since when Argentina has existed, and you answered “since 9 July 1816,” but then we asked for you who were the first Argentines, and you said “indigenous people.”

Tomás: For a logical reason, indigenous people could not be Argentines, because an Argentinean nation did not exist at the time.

I: But you do grant them the title of Argentines. Why so?

T: Because they were people who lived in this territory, and they were given absolutely nothing and they were killed. I would like them to be somehow acknowledged.

I: Then, do you consider them as Argentines?

T: Well, it is a complicated question because they were not Argentines, since they did not belong to any nation; they belonged to tribes.

Metaphorically, Tomás does not follow the “game” induced by the interview; he changes it, placing himself outside of the historical logic. We think his representations could be interpreted as a different line of reasoning: to make use of history to repair the debts we have with the past, which he does not conceive, however, as historical debts, but rather as moral debts. It is almost a paradox that Indians ought to be given a deserved “recognition” because “they were people who lived in this territory.”

It is interesting to see how Tomás dispenses with the historic and also political dimensions, how he exposes himself when he refers to Indians using the neutral category “people,” whose rights are deemed human and universal. That is, the interviewee does not expect historical reparation or political vindication to take place, but rather to morally justify past events. To this end, he proposes a symbolic “acknowledgement” of their original relation to the territory where “Argentineness” is based. It is not about restitution of their lands to living indigenous people, whose existence the interviewee seems to ignore, but to grant the dead a title as “first Argentineans.”

### *The case of Sol*

This case clearly illustrates another position in face of the conflict. Sol tries a political vindication of Indians, yet without previously solving the historical conflict. She ends up performing what we shall call a moral “pirouette” or somersault, a movement that consists of inverting the position of departure and then returning to it. So let us go to the first step, where we could metaphorically say the interviewee stands straight in her position of departure:

Interviewer: You think the origin of the Argentinean nation is in 1816, but then you say Indians are the first Argentineans. Were there Argentineans before Argentina?

Sol: Yes, but they didn't identify themselves as Argentineans.

I: Why? Would you say Argentina was Argentina since before?

S: Yes, it's just that now it has frontiers and limits, which have been marked, and they gave it a complete name...

I: So... You wouldn't place the origin of Argentina in 1816?

S: No, truly not. Like the inhabitants who were in the territory without knowing they were Argentineans, they made up the country without knowing this was called Argentina...

Up to this point we find again an essentialist vision rooted in the territory, but with a strong nominalistic component. For Sol, the essence of Argentina is also its name, which is gradually completed in a similar way as the territory's forms are progressively defined, namely its frontiers and limits.

Inasmuch as humans carry out part of the work, they do so as producers of an essential and pre-existing destiny, not as social and political agents. In sum, although they make up the country, they are not the ones who give the nation its name; or to say it in her own words: “this was called Argentina” (before being called Argentina).

However, when Sol says, “they made up the country,” a break emerges vis-à-vis her previous discourse. Despite the fact that this action's subjects are not conscious (“they don't know” who they are or where they are), a historical record is

introduced when she says that subjects “make up” rather than “are made up,” and when what “was already called Argentina,” the essential nation, becomes “the country.”

Now, let us move forward to what we call a “moral pirouette”:

Interviewer: Imagine, for instance, that tomorrow a country called “Kamchatka” is founded here, and we are told that we were [are] the first “Kamchatkan.” Wouldn’t this be also like having a destiny imposed on us?

Sol: But neither do Indians identify themselves as Argentinesans.

I: And even then, you do identify them as Argentinesans. Why?

S: Because they remained, although there were even wars among Indians. But, they themselves remained. And their descendants, the descendants of those who remained here, are Argentinesans. Because they stayed, knowing this is Argentina they stayed and remained here . . .

What we see here are Sol’s difficulties in upholding what she had defined as her position of departure. At her departure we find a desire to recognize and vindicate indigenous people, although later on the interviewee’s argument shows her lack of understanding and historical knowledge needed to fulfill her wish. That is, she fails in her attempt, and metaphorically we say that instead of upholding her position, she “inverts” it. Why? Because insofar as she cannot acknowledge Indians as historical subjects, neither can she vindicate them as political subjects.

When we help Sol notice the imposed character of the identity assigned to indigenous people who inhabited the territory before Argentina was “made up,” putting her in place with the “Kamchatkans” example, she tries to defend her position without surrendering her essentialist beliefs. She then attempts to reconcile the idea that Indians were not conscious of their identity and the idea that they made an election *de facto*. These ideas are difficult to reconcile, because consciousness and freedom of choice are constitutive of the historical subject and political agent.

We interpret that this strategy is at the service of justifying their identification as first Argentinesans, assigning them through this identification a freedom of choice they were previously denied regarding their identity. Significantly, the interviewee never uses the term “to choose,” but instead she does assert and reassert that Indians “themselves remained” (*in themselves*, by themselves, on their own). She implicitly suggests the “first Argentinesans” freedom of choice, as though it were a *de facto* truth, which the interlocutor should *logically* infer from her formulation: “Because they stayed, knowing this is Argentina they stayed and remained here . . .”

This point we have just described constitutes what we call the “point of inversion” in the pirouette. It shows the moment when what started out as wishing for

an acknowledgement of vindication ends up becoming the opposite: the denial of historical subjects and political agents.

The effect is paradoxical: Sol attempts to imitate the lack of acknowledgment of Indians as makers of the “country,” adding the denial of the historic imposition they were subjected to. While conferring on them a freedom of choice they did not have, because they were subjugated or destroyed, the interviewee neutralizes the violence implied. She thus denies the very historical foundations of the political legitimacy of the subjects she expects to vindicate!

Let us now pass on to the last step in the pirouette, the final “somersault”:

Sol: The Indians who remained in Argentina are the descendants. They don't identify with Argentina, either: the Quechua are Quechua, they won't say they are Argentinean. Yet, when the country attains a name, it is like they are also given a belonging . . .

Interviewer: That is true, in some aspects: if they want to enter or leave the country, they will have to do it as Argentines. It is true that those Indians' descendants do have Argentinean nationality. But I think there is something stronger in your idea that they were the first Argentines . . .

S: Yes, they might have had a pre-established destiny, yes. But I don't know . . . it's like they were expelled from a place that was their own and that was later transformed into a country.

I: So they were already Argentines?

S: Yes, I believe they were, as they defended the land, their place.

Finally, Sol returns to her initial position, as well as to the contradiction whence she started out. First, she reaffirms her identity with a nominalistic argument, when she says the country's name gives a belonging to the subjects that inhabit it. She thus resumes the idea of pre-established destiny and construes a conflict: for one thing, the interviewee vindicates indigenous people's right to the land when she says “they were expelled from a place that was their own,” and for another, she acknowledges the state's right when she says it “was later transformed into a country.” Significantly, the impersonal form is used to refer to the “transformation” of “the place” into “a country,” disclosing the interviewee's dilemma: what was *theirs* was transformed into a country which is no longer theirs, which does not include them.

It is also interesting to observe how for the interviewee the link between the Indians and the land (“their place”) is confirmed by the fact they *defended* it. There she performs once again a brief “pirouette,” since such “defense” is interpreted precisely as serving the opposite cause. We are not sure to which event Sol refers, or whether she speaks of a general impression. In any case, we know that before and after the “country's configuration,” indigenous people living on this land defended it, first from/against the European conqueror and later from/against the advance of the Argentinean state's “conquest.”

## Discussion

Up to this point, we have been able to observe different formats of what we consider a multiple yet common strategy developed by youths to justify the incongruity between their representations of Argentina's temporal and identity origin. Let us highlight a fact that is more than significant: all the participants admitted their contradiction, and some of them were even surprised, as though it were a revelation for them, yet it should be quite obvious to an external observer's eye. This seems to point to an impossibility shared by youths: that of being conscious of the conflict existing in their minds between their nation's identity and history. And it is highly probable that the common space where they might have acquired such "impossibility" is the school, or more specifically history teaching (Grever & Stuurman, 2007), even though other possible sources of historical narratives, such as movies, TV, etc., and also family memoirs could also be influential in this respect (Berger, Eriksonas, & Mycock, 2008). It might be also that formal and informal history learning could share, to some degree, the same historical narratives.

We then allow ourselves to ask to what extent such practice might be responsible not only for providing competencies and capacities, but also for fostering incompetencies and incapacities. In other words, not only for transmitting genuine knowledge, but also interested biases, which re-edit the 19th century invention of the nation with contemporary keys and, as suggested by Lee (2004), in the name of a false "historical consciousness."

In the particular case of Argentina, a number of very detailed studies (Carretero, 2011; Romero, 2004) have shown that textbooks, in the past 50 years at least, have been offering versions of the national history and independence process which in general terms coincide with the ideas shown by our students. Concerning other countries, various works have shown similar analyses indicating how it is very common to consider the role of indigenous people as active agents in the process of American independence as almost irrelevant (Clark, 2007; Loewen, 2007). But interestingly enough, at least in the Argentinean case, our students have added new elements to these culturally produced narratives in order to justify the aforementioned conflicts concerning the role of natives in the development of the nation.

In this sense, we believe that although the social and epochal conditions have changed, to a great extent history learning in and out of the school continues to be—especially in the context of our study—a "cultural tool." And being so, the forces involved in its construction still play an important role in determining its use. In this way, school history is even more efficacious for identity formation than for developing a real understanding of history. And it is more prone to conciliate and contain conflict than to confront and resolve it, as we have been able to observe also in previous inquiries (Carretero & Kriger, 2004, 2008), where we found that "historic/identity" representations built through school practices are often characterized by what we have called "constitutive ambivalence" (Carretero, 2011). This is why the question posed by our study—"If Argentina

*has existed since 1810 or 1816 . . . How is it that there were Argentineans before there was Argentina?*”—triggered such an interesting process. This question disarticulated the ambivalence in the subjects’ minds by making it appear as a contradiction, pushing the previous balance into crisis, and consequently generating an evident conflict.

When the participants were asked to explain the contradiction, they were pushed to acknowledge it and then to generate arguments for its support and/or justification. An intense interaction arises thence between them as agents and common history as a cultural tool. Yet contrary to the forms of mediated action linked to conflict and resistance (Wertsch & Rozin, 2000), which are characterized by mastery in the use of a cultural tool—albeit not in its appropriation—in our case we have found high appropriation and scarce mastery of “common history” by youths. In other words: a high degree of internalization and identification with the nation, but a very low degree of authentic understanding of the past in terms of historical thinking.

The interviewees did not face up to the conflict *historically*, from a disciplinary point of view; rather, they tried to conciliate in order to justify their contradiction. To this end, they developed different explanatory “tactics,” which share the following features:

- The underpinning presence of a hard nucleus in students’ representations linked to an essential and teleological conception of the nation, though not explicitly acknowledged by the participants, who had assigned Argentina a historic origin.
- The nation’s essence and destiny are embodied in the territory, giving rise to what we may critically characterize as the misunderstanding of the country’s territorial definition.
- As a consequence of the preceding points, indigenous people are recognized as first Argentineans because they are thought of as the first inhabitants of the land that “always” was, or was “already called,” or would “by destiny” be Argentina.
- By contrast, we could not find interviewees who were able to back their choice with the argument that Indians had configured the ethno-cultural matrix of “Argentineness.” This implies that for these participants, the original subjects are constituted as such not on the basis of their recognition as historical subjects, but as bearers of an essence and a destiny imposed upon them, which later, paradoxically, excludes them.
- Lastly, participants neutralize and hide the historic violence, in order to reconcile the acknowledgement of indigenous people and of the Argentinean historical project. The moral conflict between two value-systems becomes evident: one linked to the global ethic, ruled by human rights and respect for cultural differences, and another linked to the nationalist epic and its heroic gestures.

We have analyzed four strategies founded on this common base. The first is Nora’s, consisting of including history within Destiny, like an episode in the Great History. The particularity is that “the nation” and “the territory” respectively

represent those two ambits. The second strategy is Hugo's, who tries to vindicate Indians' rights without giving up the defense of the state's right. He attempts to conciliate and reinvent history, but he fails and finally executes what we called here a "semantic escape." He tries to displace conflict from the historical plane and to reduce it to a semantic difference. The third strategy, by Tomás, locates itself outside the game from the start; it renounces historical justification and places itself on a distinctly moral plane. It does not aspire to historic reparation or to political vindication, but rather to "acknowledging" Indians as "people" who lived in the territory and were killed. In a much clearer way, the fourth strategy shows to what extent there is no political aptitude without historical understanding. Sol is an interviewee who wishes to vindicate indigenous people, and paradoxically, describing what we have called a "moral pirouette," she ends up denying them once and again as historical subjects, neutralizing the historic violence and biasing the facts that would legitimize them as political subjects.

To conclude, let us note that what our interviewees could not do was to think of the natives as agents of their own history. In such a case, instead of considering them as first Argentineans, they might have considered that Argentina was previously, firstly indigenous. And going even further, they could have considered that another country, with a different name, might have been constructed upon this territory.

But why couldn't they effect this change in perspective? Because it implies postulating "another" history, to be sure, a whole range of possible histories. This would utterly oust the nation's essentialist and ontological condition, and consequently, the idea of a Single or Unique History. In sum, it entails leaving the domain of Destiny as a belief, to enter the world of historiography as knowledge. It also entails becoming historically conscious that the territorial matrix of Argentineness they are constructing in their representations comes to occupy, in their nation's "invention," the empty place of a denied ethno-cultural matrix.

### Acknowledgments

This article presents the findings of the second author's PhD thesis, supervised by the first. Our thanks to projects SEJ-2006-15461 (Spain, DGICYT) and PICT-2005-34778 (ANPCYT, Argentina), coordinated by the first author (mario.carretero@uam.es), and to Nicolás Bermúdez, who has greatly contributed to the English version of this paper. The paper is also part of the research developed by the first author as Santander Visiting Scholar at the DRCLAS (Harvard University)

### Notes

1. A copy of the questionnaire and the interview can be obtained upon request.
2. In the original version of the questionnaire the Spanish terms presented were *mestizos* and *criollos*. These refer to the mixture of Spanish and indigenous bloods (*mestizos*), and second- or third-generation descendants of Spanish parents who immigrated and settled on American land (*criollos*). We are using here the word "colonists," even though its meaning is not exactly the same as *criollos* and *mestizos*.



## References

- Ahonen, A. (1997). A transformation of history: The official representations of history in East Germany and Estonia, 1986–1991. *Culture & Psychology, 3*(1), 41–62.
- Aldridge, D. (2006). The limits of master narratives in history textbooks: An analysis of representations of Martin Luther King, Jr. *Teachers' College Record, 108*(4), 662–686.
- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Barton, K., & Levstik, L. (2004). *History teaching for the common good*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Berger, S., Eriksonas, L. & Mycock, A. (Eds.) (2008). *Narrating the nation: Representings in history, media and the arts*. New York, NY: Berghahn Books.
- Boyd, C. P. (1997). *Historia patria: Politics, history, and national identity in Spain, 1875–1975*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Carreto, M. (2011). *Constructing patriotism: teaching History and memories in Global worlds*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Carretero, M., Jacott, L., & López-Manjón, L. (2002). Learning history through textbooks: Are Mexican and Spanish students taught the same story? *Learning and Instruction, 12*, 651–665.
- Carretero, M., & Kriger, M. (2004). ¿Forjar patriotas o educar cosmopolitas? El pasado y el presente de la historia escolar en un mundo global [Creating patriots or educating cosmopolitans? The past and the present of school history in a global world]. In M. Carretero & J. F. Voss (Eds.), *Aprender y enseñar la historia*. [Learning and thinking history]. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu.
- Carretero, M., & Kriger, M. (2008). Narrativas históricas y construcción de la identidad nacional: Representaciones de alumnos argentinos sobre el 'Descubrimiento de América' [Historical narratives and construction of national identity. Representations of Argentinian pupils on the 'Discovery of America']. *Cultura y Educación, 20*(2), 229–242.
- Chandler, M. J. (2000). Surviving time: The persistence of identity in this culture and that. *Culture & Psychology, 62*(2), 209–231.
- Clark, P. (2007). Representations of aboriginal people in English Canadian history textbooks: Towards reconciliation. In E. A. Cole (Ed.), *Teaching the violent past: History education and reconciliation* (pp. 81–120). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Cole, E. A. (Ed.) (2007). *Teaching the violent past: History education and reconciliation*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Grever, M. & Stuurman, S. (Eds.) (2007). *Beyond the canon: History for the 21st century*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Haste, H. (2004). Constructing the citizen. *Political Psychology, 25*(3), 413–440.
- Hobsbawm, E. (1990). *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kymlicka, W. (2001). *Politics in vernacular: Nationalism, multiculturalism and citizenship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lee, P. (2004). Understanding history. In P. Seixas (Ed.), *Theorizing historical consciousness* (pp. 129–164). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Leinhardt, G., & Ravi, A. M. (2008). Changing historical conceptions of history. In S. Vosniadou (Ed.), *International handbook on research on conceptual change* (pp. 328–341). London: Routledge.
- Levinson, M. (2002). *The demands of liberal education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Loewen, J. W. (2007). *Lies my teacher told me: Everything your American history textbook got wrong*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Lorenz, C. (2004). Towards a theoretical framework for comparing historiographies: Some preliminary considerations. In P. Seixas (Ed.), *Theorizing historical consciousness* (pp. 25–48). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Luczynski, J. (1997). The multivoicedness of historical representations in a changing socio-cultural context: Young polish adults' representations of World War II. *Culture & Psychology*, 3(1), 21–40.
- Penuel, W. R., & Wertsch, J. W. (2000). Historical representation as mediated action: official history as a tool. In J. F. Voss & M. Carretero (Eds.), *Learning and reasoning in history: International review of history education* (pp. 23–38). London: Routledge.
- Romero, L. A. (2004). *La Argentina en la escuela [Argentine nation represented in the school]*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI.
- Rosa, A. (2004). Memoria, historia e identidad: Una reflexión sobre el papel de la enseñanza de la historia en el desarrollo de la ciudadanía [Memory, history and identity: Reflection on the role of history in citizenship development]. In M. Carretero & J. F. Voss (Eds.), *Aprender y enseñar la historia [Learning and thinking history]* (pp. 47–69). Buenos Aires: Amorrortu.
- Sarlo, B., & Altamirano, C. (1983). *Literatura/Sociedad [Literature/Society]*. Buenos Aires: Hachette.
- Seixas, P. (Ed.) (2004). *Theorizing historical consciousness*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Schnotz, W., Vosniadou, S. & Carretero, M. (Eds.) (1999). *New perspectives on conceptual change*. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Smith, A. D. (1991). *National identity*. Reno, NE: University of Nevada Press.
- Straub, J. (Ed.) (2005). *Narration, identity, and historical consciousness*. New York, NY: Berghahn Books.
- Todorov, T. (1999). *The conquest of America: The question of the other*. New York: Harper and Collins.
- Valsiner, J. (2006). Introduction. In R. D Hess & J. V. Torney, *The development of political attitudes in children* (pp. XV–XXii). Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Van Sledright, B. (2008). Narratives of nation-state, historical knowledge, and school history. *Review of Research in Education*, 32, 109–146.
- Wertsch, J. W. (1997). Consuming nationalism. *Culture & Psychology*, 3, 461–471.
- Wertsch, J. (2004). Specific narratives and schematic narrative templates. In P. Seixas (Ed.), *Theorizing historical consciousness* (pp. 49–62). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Wertsch, J. V., & Rozin, M. (2000). The Russian revolution: Official and unofficial accounts. In J. F. Voss & M. Carretero (Eds.), *Learning and reasoning in history: International review of history education* (Vol. 2, pp. 39–60). London: Taylor & Francis.
- White, G. M. (1997). Mythic history and national memory: The Pearl Harbor anniversary. *Culture & Psychology*, 3(1), 63–88.
- Wineburg, S. (2001). *Historical thinking and other unnatural acts*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

### Author Biographies

**Mario Carretero** is Professor at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, where he has also previously been Dean of the Faculty of Psychology. He is also a Researcher at the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO, Argentina). He has done extensive research on learning history (M. Carretero & J. F. Voss, 1994 & 2000). His most recent book, *Constructing Patriotism: Teaching History and Memories in Global worlds*, has been published in Spanish, Portuguese, and English (Information Age Publishers). He has received the Guggenheim Fellowship (1997–1998) and the Santander Fellowship at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies (Harvard University) (2009–2010).

**Mirian Kriger** is Adjunct Researcher at the CONICET (National Council of Scientific and Technological Research, Argentina). She is also Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences (university of Buenos Aires). Her research interests are related to the relation between historical understanding and youth political attitudes.