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Contested Aboriginal Heritage in Southern South America: Quilmes—Indigenous Identity, Stolen Heritage

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Abstract

Contested rights over traditional lands are a significant area of heritage conflict. The case of Quilmes, an archaeological site in northwestern Argentina, illustrates the complex relationship between Indigenous rights, identities, law, and social and economic power. Historically viewed by the Argentine government as an archaeological site ripe for tourism and economic development, Quilmes is also the traditional, ancestral land of a local Indigenous population that has been largely written out of the historical narrative. Their efforts to assert rights to this land have led to serious conflict with other stakeholders. This case study recognizes that places are defined as culturally significant through a process of negotiation. They can become flashpoints for political struggle as ruling elites fight to maintain control over resources in the face of competing claims.

Introduction

This paper presents a case study of contested heritage, illustrating at the local scale a conflict that also takes place at the national and international scale. The case is about Indigenous people claiming rights to traditional lands and archaeological sites that they perceive as their cultural heritage places. These claims have extensive historical background, beginning in the sixteenth century, when early contact between the Americas and expanding Europe occurred, and have developed over time in a complex and controversial way.

The Indigenous claims concerning lands and rights on archaeological sites overlap with the interests of other social, economic, and political groups who are usually from more empowered sectors of society. These overlapping interests result in a fight for access to and control over these places. This struggle is about not only the actual possession of land but also the possibility of gaining control over which notion of heritage will be sustained and passed on through management of each heritage place.

The notion of heritage is critical because, in accordance with different ideological and political backgrounds, it can lead to open confrontation between different social interest groups. Therefore the core of the disagreement is revealed according to which heritage notion is adopted by whom (social actors in conflict) and why (sustaining which interest).

Heritage Significance

The notion of heritage is itself controversial, and many scholars have dedicated a great amount of research to this particular topic. There is ongoing debate over the validity of the traditional notion being used worldwide and represented in the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO 1972), which has been heavily questioned since the 1980s and represented in the amendments made since the 1990s (UNESCO 1994, 2001, 2003). This controversy is also taking place within the academic community in the social science disciplines, where there are supporters of the traditional notion and opponents who criticize and confront it.

The traditional notion was established in the nineteenth century, during the rise of capitalism and nation-states at a global scale. It sustains a universal validity (*essentialist*) about what cultural heritage is and relates it only to Western views, values, and ideas, specifically those set up by ruling elites. The critical position holds that this notion not only was driven by a hegemonic sector of the society but also was directed from a dominant culture to dominated cultures, as this occurs mainly in colonial and postcolonial historical contexts, where this notion was imposed (Smith 2006).

In opposition, a notion is proposed that considers cultural heritage as a process of social construction (*constructivist*) (Benavides 2001; López Aguilar 2002; Mehrotra 2004). This notion also emphasizes that cultural heritage has the potential to manipulate the representation of past and present events in favor of different interest groups (Criado Boado 2001). Further, heritage is conceived as a kind of cultural capital (in the sense of Bourdieu 1989) with an active role in the material and symbolic struggle among classes, ethnic groups, and other sectors of society (García Canclini 1999).

Heritage Significance as Symbolic Struggle

This paper considers heritage as a process of social construction (*constructivism*). Within this perspective, cultural significance is considered the foundation of the "heritage process"; through it, different social values are assigned to specific things, events, or practices by particular groups of people within a society (Pearson and Sullivan 1999).

The process of defining significance always includes a negotiation between the social sectors involved and is influenced by power positions. This is the core of the symbolic struggle among different groups within a society; the validation of heritage significance is an effective way to gain control of the social memory in order to legitimize power positions. The prevailing party decides which discourse will sustain the heritage status of selected things and what sort of values will validate it (Prats 2005).

Cases occurring in colonial and postcolonial historical contexts are illustrative of these situations. In addition to political and economic domination, the imposing powers need to set up a symbolic system with the capacity to justify their domination over land and people for their own benefit.

The Struggle of the Indigenous in Argentina

In Argentina, as in other countries (for the Australian case, see Byrne 1991, 1996), this symbolic struggle focuses on the authenticity of the Indigenous people, their continuation in the present, and their right to relate to tangible and intangible legacies of their past ("archaeological heritage"). This issue is relevant because it goes

beyond the heritage dispute itself and involves the actual and legal recognition of the pre-existence of Indigenous people in Argentina.

The struggle, not only in the combat field but also in the symbolic field, began in the sixteenth century, when the territories now under the political dominion of Argentina were conquered by Europeans and continued when the population and settlement of their descendants expanded dramatically at the start of the nineteenth century. The physical resistance of the Indigenous people was met by armed forces, while their symbolic resistance was countered by proscribing traditional practices, by attempts to acculturate them religiously and culturally, and by denying their previous and present existence.

The denial of existence of the Indigenous people was, and still is, a strong argument used to disqualify their claims to legal, land, and cultural rights. This argument is based on the smaller scale of the Indigenous societies that lived in Argentina before the conquest rather than on other Indigenous societies in the Americas, some of which left behind extensive material culture of their past (such as pyramids, temples, and urban centers). The lack of such impressive and highly visible archaeological remains facilitated the attempt to deny the existence of the Indigenous people of Argentina (Hernandez Llosas 2003).

This is a symbolic strategy that sustains the notion that even if there were Indigenous people at the time of Spanish conquest, they were fewer and less "civilized" (i.e., "closer to Nature") than others found in the Americas, and most of them died of exotic illnesses. It also sustains that the few survivors interbred with the initial European population, resulting in a racial and cultural social group called mestizo. If it is taken for granted that no genuine Indigenous people remain living, then the material remains of the Indigenous past are considered significant only for the information they can bring about the human past, leaving them to the realm of science.

The strategy of excluding any trace of the people who preceded the Spanish conquerors in Argentina from the social memory gives support to the colonial and postcolonial powers, identifying only places, buildings, objects, past events, and beliefs related to colonial and republican times as the unique, existing cultural heritage. In doing so, the European past, traditions, and beliefs have been promoted as the national heritage in accordance with the interests and identity of the ruling elite.

This perception of cultural heritage and the promotion of values attached to it is an efficient symbolic system to justify the primacy of the ruling group and helps not only to keep Indigenous people out of sight but also to cast doubts on their identity. It is a notion that is still dominant and underlies the struggle over who owns the remains of the past Indigenous people and which values have to be taken into account to consider them "heritage." Following this perception, the only heritage significance officially recognized has been their scientific value.

Indigenous people, for their part, are trying to reverse this social, generalized perception by continuing to fight in the symbolic arena to neutralize the dominant discourse that has been denying their existence for so long. It is critical for them to regain some control over collective social memory concerning the Indigenous past and the events that led to their present situation. For them, the symbolic struggle aims to recover social recognition, cultural rights over heritage, and legal rights over ancestral lands.

Archaeological places play a key role in this symbolic struggle because they are the material proof of their past existence and help to tell the story about what

happened to Indigenous people during the resistance against the European conquest. To recover these places symbolically and materially would be a suitable way to promote the notion of heritage as a process of social construction, one in which the Indigenous people have been prevented from participating. Sustaining this notion, the heritage significance of archaeological sites is scientific as well as social and cultural for Indigenous descendants who bring cultural continuation to those places.

Taking these different positions into account, one expects that the perception of the heritage significance of a place will change radically according to which of these conceptions prevails. This is the decisive factor that will define the significance to be assigned to heritage places.

FIGURE 1
Map of Argentina, showing the location of the Quilmes site.

The Quilmes Community in Argentina

Quilmes is a case study that is the result of a long historical process involving the struggle among several social groups, with overlapping interests, who have been trying to impose upon or defend from others using different means, including the use of physical and symbolical strategies and access and control over the lands and the archaeological site in dispute.

Politically, Quilmes is located in northwestern Argentina, within Tucumán Province. Geographically, it is located within the southern end of the south-central Andes, in the eastern ranges, which form a geological and ecological border between highlands and lowlands (fig. 1).

The physical setting is a mountain valley that is a branch of the Calchaquíes Valleys. The valleys are named after one of the most important Indigenous leaders, Don Juan Calchaquí, who formed the largest alliance to resist the Spanish invasion during the seventeenth century (fig. 2).

FIGURE 2
Aerial view of the environment of the Quilmes site. The mountains of the Calchaquíes Valleys appear in the background. Modern infrastructure is visible at left of center.

Photo: Cayuqueo, 2008. Courtesy Wikimedia Commons, licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported.

History and Cultural Context

The southern end of the south-central Andes was first populated about ten thousand years ago, first by small-scale societies of hunter-gatherers and later by subsistence farmers. Around 900 CE, the Indigenous societies started a process of economic and technological intensification with an increase in political and social complexity. This process ended up in middle-scale societies (*polities*), with political centralization, marked territoriality, and distinctive social and cultural identities. The people of the Calchaquíes Valleys, named Diaguita by the Incas, composed one of these societies.

FIGURE 3
Map showing (1) the location of the original Quilmes Indigenous settlement; the route they were forced to walk by the Spanish conquistadors; and (2) the location of the village founded as a "reduction" near Buenos Aires.
Image: Lic. Jorge Sosa, by permission.

The Quilmes people were one fraction of the Diaguita people. Their sociopolitical complexity and population density positioned them among the most noteworthy indigenous societies in Argentina's precolonial era. Close to 1200 CE, they were occupying the entire valley and some of their settlements were highly populated in the form of dense and complex villages. The Inca Empire incorporated them into their domain in about 1470 CE. Nevertheless, their identity as a single people, linked with that specific land, remained strong.

The Spanish conquistadors invaded the area in about 1535, and the Diaguita fought them with determination over the next 130 years. The Diaguita carried out three major rebellion episodes for which they were violently punished. They were defeated in 1666. To prevent further resistance, the Spanish decided to disarticulate the Quilmes by removing them from their lands. They were forcibly removed to a location approximately 1,500 kilometers away and completely different from the environment they used to know (fig. 3). The new location, near Buenos Aires, was a "reduction" (an Indigenous settlement established by Spanish colonizers with the purpose of assimilating residents into Spanish culture and religion) that developed over time and is still named Quilmes today.

On the forced march to the new location, some Quilmes died, others stopped along the way, and a few escaped, returning to join those who stayed in the Calchaquíes Valleys area. However, they could barely reconstruct themselves as a community. The colonial administration gave this Indigenous community over to new, Spanish private landowners under the Spanish *encomienda* system, as servants who had to work for them on the vast ranches started by the Spanish in the Calchaquíes Valleys.

This Indigenous community requested the Spanish Crown's acknowledgment of their rights to 120,000 hectares of land, within which is located the former central village of Quilmes. The Crown recognized these rights in 1716, but the recognition was only on paper and in fact they never again had access to that land.

During Republican times, the Indigenous community again requested from the new political authorities the recognition of their rights to the land, basing the claim on the document from the previous colonial power. This recognition was never received. In 1853 the colonial-era document was recognized by the new government but, again, the land was not returned to the Indigenous people. They could effectively continue to occupy only a small portion of the land claimed while 70,000 hectares were taken over by white landowners who inscribed it "legally" as their property.

Since then the Indigenous Community of Quilmes (CIQ) have continued fighting for their rights over their ancestral land, based on the two legal decisions cited above. They are also seeking control over the archaeological site, which before the conquest was Quilmes's central village, and which today they perceive to be their heritage. Both claims are still not completed.

After the forced abandonment of the central village during colonial times, the place remained uninhabited. According to the different notions of heritage, on the one hand it became an archaeological site and was named the "Ruins of Quilmes." On the other hand, it became a symbol of the rebellion of a brave people who fought their invaders to the end, and is dubbed the "Sacred City of Quilmes."

History of Site Interventions

The site entered the archaeological sphere in 1888, when one of the first scholars of archaeology encountered it, and it was the subject of two studies at the end of the nineteenth century. These early researchers provide the bulk of detailed information, recounting the large extension and importance of the site for archaeological studies (Ambrosetti 1897; Bruch 1911; Lafone Quevedo 1888; Schreiter 1919, 1928). This information, available to the general public at the end of the nineteenth century, enabled private collectors (Zavaleta 1906) to loot the site, negatively affecting several important structures (Sosa 2007).

Even though the archaeological relevance of the site was widely known since the beginning of the twentieth century, there were no scientific studies or interventions until the 1970s, when interventions for tourist development began (fig. 4).

Intervention: 1978–80

During the military dictatorship government of the late 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, extensive interventions were implemented at the site with the specific aim of attracting tourists and providing tourism infrastructure. To do this, the government needed professional support and contacted academics from the University of Buenos Aires (Pelissero and Difrieri 1981, 2008) who were supporters of the regime. Even though they were university professors and professionals (archaeologists and geographers), they did not follow scientific methods, they did not document their work, and they caused heavy damage to the historic fabric of the site.

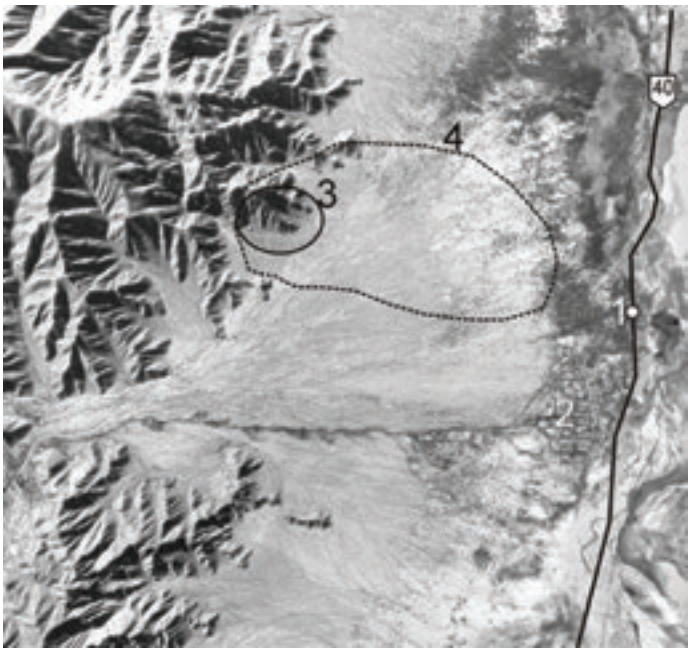

FIGURE 4
Aerial photograph of Quilmes archaeological site area, ca. 1966, showing minimal evidence of intervention: (1) beginnings of a dirt road to access the main part of the site; (2) site of the present Quilmes village; (3) area with more density and greater amount of archaeological remains; (4) dispersion area of known archaeological sites.
Photo: Lic. Jorge Sosa, by permission.

FIGURE 5
View of the main part of the site, showing evidence of reconstruction of a wall and a sign with directions to the hotel entrance.
Photo: Lic. Jorge Sosa, by permission.

One reason for these deficiencies was to save time in accordance with the short-term goal of creating a tourist attraction. They used soldiers and heavy equipment provided by the regime to excavate and accomplished a "free reconstruction" of the main part of the site, which was completely conjectural and not based on archaeological evidence (fig. 5). In addition, they built a museum and parking area within the reconstructed area in the main part of the site to house the archaeological materials recovered (fig. 6). However, most of the archaeological materials were removed from the site and entered the illegal market (Sosa 2007).

FIGURE 6
Artifacts found at the site, exhibited inside the museum that is attached to the tourist hotel.
Photo: Lic. Jorge Sosa, by permission.

FIGURE 7
Comparative sequence of the interventions done to the site under a private developer: (*top*) ca. 1968, before interventions; (*center*) ca. 1980, first intervention, outlined in white; (*bottom*) ca. 2000, second intervention, outlined in black.
Image: Lic. Jorge Sosa, by permission.

These actions impacted approximately 112,000 square meters of the site. In addition to the damage done through nonscientific procedures under government custody, persons involved in the projects with access to archaeological pieces sold them on the black market. The site also was ineffectively guarded against looters.

By the beginning of the 1980s, the military government was losing power, and with that the tourist project faded quickly. As a consequence, the site and the facilities for tourism were almost abandoned but remained under the sphere of the provincial administration.

Intervention: 1992–2007

With the replacement of the military government by a new liberal democratic government that favored privatization, additional interventions were carried out at the site during the period from 1992 to 2007. The new government's aim, like the prior one, was still the improvement of the facilities for tourism attraction. In this case, no academic was contacted or involved at all. Instead, in 1992 the provincial government leased the land, with the site and its facilities, to a local entrepreneur for ten years (1992–2002). In addition, the provincial government loaned money to the private entrepreneur to develop the business venture. The developer enlarged the existing tourist facilities and built new structures, including a hotel and restaurant, all within the bounds of the archaeological site, impacting over 90,000 square meters at the very core of the site (fig. 7).

After the lease expired, it was automatically extended to 2007 without review. During those years, the exploitation of the complex provided income from entrance tickets, the hotel and restaurant, and a handicraft shop. The average number of visitors was about 60,000 per year (Sosa 2007).

Recent Confrontations

Since the national constitution was amended in 1994 to more fully recognize Indigenous rights, the Quilmes community has been more active in sustaining claims within courts of law about the site, the land where the site is located, and land beyond the site that they perceive as theirs. They have been aided in this endeavor by NGOs, one of which, ANDHES (Abogados y Abogadas del Noroeste Argentino en Derechos Humanos y Estudios Sociales), is devoted to legal assistance for the promotion of human rights in northwestern Argentina (see www.andhes.org.ar for information about the legal dispute).

These claims, together with the Indigenous community's more active attitude, led to confrontations with locally empowered groups who have leased the site and hold interests in its land and resources (fig. 8). The confrontations have occurred in different forms, ranging from verbal harassment to acts of physical violence. One of the most extreme cases occurred in 2000, when a member of the Indigenous community was intentionally burned to death by a member of the family who holds the lease. Another occurred in October 2009, when an Indigenous leader was murdered and other members of the community were injured by former police officers who were trying to remove them illegally from their land. In November 2009, ANDHES,

FIGURE 8
Members of the Indigenous community of Quilmes meet to set a strategy for claiming their rights over the site.
Photo: Lic. Jorge Sosa, by permission.

on behalf of the Indigenous community, presented a petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH) asking the Argentinean government to guarantee Indigenous rights and physical protection of Indigenous inhabitants.

Regarding the Quilmes site itself, members of the Indigenous community had to ask permission from the provincial government and from the leaseholders just to enter the site. However, tourists were freely able to enter upon paying the entrance fee.

On 9 January 2008, the Indigenous community of Quilmes occupied the site by force. Since then, the community has maintained physical and legal resistance to keep the place. This has included legal negotiations between the Indigenous community of Quilmes, with the help of ANDHES, and the Tucumán provincial government, together with different civil means in which Indigenous leaders have worked to create dialogue between these two parties.

As of early 2011, the Indigenous community of Quilmes is still in custody of the site and now offers guided tours to visitors. These tours give the community the opportunity to tell their side of history, together with sharing their vision and cultural values (Bidaseca and Ruggero 2009a).

Significance of the Place

The site is considered important for different social actors who hold different values and different visions. By consequence, the significance of the site varies according to the conceptions adopted by each of the social actors involved.

The main values argued by different groups are (1) archaeological–scientific, (2) tourist–economic, and (3) social and cultural.

Archaeological–Scientific Values

The early archaeological exploration of the site (see above) has shown that it has great potential to provide information about the social processes that occurred in the area from 1000 to 1500 CE. The historical documentary information about the Inca domination, the Spanish invasion, and the subsequent Indigenous resistance indicates the importance of the site to the social and political processes that were taking place from 1500 to 1700 CE. Therefore, the site is considered valuable as a firsthand source of archaeological and historical information for scientists researching social and political sciences.

Tourist–Economic Values

Since the nineteenth century, archaeological remains with high visibility in different parts of the world have been considered valuable as tourist attractions. Examples include the Egyptian pyramids, the Greek Parthenon, and the Maya temples. Such archaeological remains are perceived as admirable relics that attract tourists interested in culture. They are commonly perceived as remnants of past cultures uncovered through scientific research. Similarly, smaller-scale archaeological structures have been envisioned as potential resources for tourism. This is the case with Quilmes, where interventions have been carried out since 1978 to "enhance" its potential as a tourist attraction, considering it as a ruin of past people, already gone, with historical value that should come from scientific research. The visibility of the remains themselves, plus the information obtained by research, exhibited in site museums and other types of interpretation for the public, should be the "cultural attraction." This attraction could be used to produce income. Therefore, the site is considered valuable as an economic resource for private investors and government authorities.

Social and Cultural Values

The Indigenous community of Quilmes recognizes the site as the former village of Quilmes, which their ancestors were forced to abandon at the beginning of the Spanish colonial era. For them the site is a sensitive cultural place, a place of remembrance, a place of memory. They value the site as material evidence of their ancestors' lives and their struggle against the European invasion. They consider the site as their material and symbolic inheritance, based on historical and cultural rights. In this regard, the site is perceived not only as a cultural heritage place that specifically belongs to their community but also as a material place from which the story of their people can be told, a story that has been concealed through four hundred years of colonial and postcolonial domination. They also recognize the possibilities the site gives to their community in rebuilding their wounded identity and reconnecting, in different ways, with at least some of their cultural traditions. These traditions include the cult to Pachamama and performing memorial practices in honor of the last Indigenous people who resisted the European invasion.

Disagreement over Significance

These three values are not only sustained by different social actors with specific interests in the site but also based in completely different approaches to the conception of what cultural heritage is about. Taking this into account, one can expect that the perception of heritage significance transmitted to visitors and through all management practices will change radically according to which of these conceptions is adopted.

Management Context

In Argentina, by law, all pre-Hispanic archaeological sites belong to the state and are considered scientific heritage. In theory, the provincial states have to grant permission to those who want to conduct research at and/or intervene in archaeological sites. However, this does not always happen, since there is no state register of sites, and most are included in private lands. In the case of Quilmes, Tucumán Province owns the land where the site is located.

FIGURE 9
Detail from the second intervention, ca. 2000. A large rock, which the Indigenous community considered a *waka* (sacred place)—a reverential spot in the middle of the original site—was incorporated into a modern wall of the hotel complex.
Photo: Lic. Jorge Sosa, by permission.

The government of Tucumán Province gained interest in the site during the dictatorship regime in the 1970s. It aimed to increase the tourist industry in the province and planned to create an attraction based on the site's archaeological (scientific) values. This led to the 1978–80 intervention, followed by the 1992–2007 intervention. Throughout those years, management of the site focused on increasing use of the place for economic purposes. This was done directly by state agencies during the first period of interventions. During the second period, this was carried out by leasing the site to private investors, related to local elites and authorities, who have largely controlled the site until 2007 (fig. 9).

The occupation of the site by the Quilmes Indigenous community in 2008 was prompted, in large part, by the emergence and increase of Indigenous rights in national legislation and policies. This process started in 1985, when a national law granted community members certain rights over communal property that they were occupying, though the property belonged to the national state. In 1994 the amendment of the national constitution recognized for the first time the pre-existence of the Indigenous people and gave them the ability to claim rights on lands. In 2001 Argentina ratified the International Labour Organisation's (1989) *Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries* (Convention 169), which also supports their claims.

These landmark 1985, 1994, and 2001 laws and agreements are the only legal tools the Indigenous people have to sustain their claims. In practice, little has changed; even the constitutional mandate to return land to the Indigenous communities has been ineffective. Since 1994 there has been much discussion on governmental levels about how to put this into practice, but more than fifteen years later, no official actions have been approved to facilitate this.

On top of this, and in open contradiction with the 1994 amendment of the National Constitution, a new federal law on the "Protection of Paleontological and Archaeological Heritage" (25.743/03) was approved in 2003 (Argentina 2003). This law, as its name clearly shows, still links the indigenous past with natural history, denying its status as cultural history and its link with contemporary Indigenous people.

This contradictory legislation, together with the lack of agreement at the national government level over strategies to achieve rights granted Indigenous people under the 1994 constitution, triggered processes that led to the confrontation of the parties involved. Local and federal governments keep their interest in maintaining the status quo, including the control of land. The private sector intends to maintain its primacy and control over land and resources, even by using force and harassment against the Indigenous community. Indigenous communities try to

achieve some of their rights. In a few cases, this complex scenario also includes disputes over archaeological sites; Quilmes is the most significant of those.

The Argentinean archaeological community has had little involvement, even though the site has been appreciated mainly for its archaeological and scientific values. This could have been the result of the unethical intervention in 1978 by professional scientists during the dictatorship regime and a reluctance to speak out against the military regime. Even though the site is considered valuable as a first-hand source of archaeological and historical information for scientific research, due to the pseudoscientific circumstances within which the first intervention was done, plus the political conditions surrounding the second intervention, the site has been mostly avoided by archaeologists.

Regarding the heritage significance of the site, many archaeologists today still sustain only its scientific values. Recently, other social scientists started to research the social, historical, and cultural values related to the Indigenous people (Bidaseca and Ruggero 2009a, 2009b; Isla 2002, 2003; Lorandi and Rodriguez 2005; Sosa 2007).

The Current Situation

At present, the Indigenous community of Quilmes is physically occupying the site and different negotiations and confrontations are taking place. The contradictions in the national legislation have opened avenues for local authorities and empowered elites to influence the provincial justice system to favor their interests against the many appeals filed by attorneys who represent the Indigenous position (ANDHES n.d.).

During the course of the negotiations, the provincial government position has been going back and forth; the conditions asked of the CIQ are contradictory, such as the complete devolution of the site or payment to buy the facilities, including a hotel, site museum, and parking spaces, as a prerequisite to negotiate restitution of the site.

Another requirement of provincial authorities is the involvement of local archaeologists from the University of Tucumán Institute of Archaeology. The CIQ requested their participation in the negotiations to help provide technical support. In response, the authorities of the institute issued a written letter offering technical advice if necessary, requiring the explicit agreement of the provincial government, and specifying that they recognize the site and will approach it as an archaeological remain, calling it "Ruins of Quilmes," a position in clear opposition to the CIQ.

Issues and Processes

The key issues in this case can be summarized in three main struggles, differentiated by scale and/or kind.

Issue 1: The Struggle over Authority and Rights (national scale)

The broadest issue is the national-level conflict between the interests of federal and/or provincial governments and their allies in maintaining their authority and primacy, versus the Indigenous community's goal of reclaiming their identity and rights. This conflict varies according to different provincial governments and sec-

tors of national government. Some of these actors sustain a more sympathetic position to the cause of Indigenous peoples, while others are openly opposed.

National Indigenous NGOs have given the heritage topic, specifically, a lower priority to more urgent Indigenous problems such as land rights needed to live and survive, or access to basic sanitary facilities. The main national agencies dealing with Indigenous claims have had little interaction with national authorities involved in heritage protection, and similar situations have occurred in provincial contexts.

This situation, together with the generalized notion of heritage imposed since the nineteenth century by the hegemonic discourse of dominant elites, has created a scenario in which most people do not question what cultural heritage is, including the remains of past Indigenous people, which they unknowingly associate with archaeology and scientific values. Under these circumstances, the government has retained the law that relegates Indigenous heritage places to a status of relics of the past. This position is supported by other social actors, including members of the Argentinean archaeological community, and is used as one of several means to maintain their authority and/or primacy over lands historically taken from Indigenous peoples. This policy, by extension, has prescribed that such sites be used only for scientific research and tourism. The social actors involved have different theoretical and ideological positions about heritage significance, which leads to the second issue.

Issue 2: The Struggle over Heritage Significance Sustained by Stakeholders (national scale)

The key actors hold conflicting views of an archaeological site's heritage significance. These views are tied to different theoretical and ideological positions, which deal with authenticity, continuity, and the existence of Indigenous people in the present.

The traditional notions of heritage mentioned earlier prevent recognition of Indigenous rights over archaeological sites and sustain the primacy of experts over other social actors. This is linked to issue 1 because the government and other allied social groups sustain the traditional notion in order to empower their positions of authority and maintain the status quo with respect to control over lands taken from Indigenous peoples against their claims. They perceive the touristic use of archaeological sites as an extension of their scientific values, because they hold that the attraction for tourists is the scientific importance of the sites in showing the way of life of past people, which is understood through archaeological research. This denies the existence of Indigenous groups and implies that the site of Quilmes is associated only with the past as a ruin, a relic of people who no longer exist.

Issue 3: The Struggle for Control of Quilmes (site itself/local scale)

As described above, the provincial government has sought to gain and maintain control of the site since the military dictatorship regime in the late 1970s.

During the 1990s, when democracy had already been established, the provincial government regained interest in exploiting the site as a tourist attraction, this time by leasing it to the private sector. In doing so, an empowered local group started to use the site for commercial purposes, harassing the Indigenous community in its attempts to regain access to and use the site. These local empowered groups have been supported by government and therefore are an extension of government authority. The harassment is evident in judicial statements against the CIQ that are in response to CIQ's legal demands, and in threats and acts of physical violence against members of the Indigenous community.

Meanwhile, members of the Indigenous community of Quilmes have taken several actions to recover the site, culminating in the occupation of it by force in 2008. The most important aim of this action has been to take charge of its interpretation to reconstruct their social memory. By doing this, they have the opportunity to tell visitors their side of history, which was concealed by the hegemonic discourse sustaining the traditional vision of heritage. The Indigenous community's aims tie into renaming the site the "Sacred City of Quilmes" over "Ruins of Quilmes."

Indigenous leaders and their legal representatives have presented their claims to provincial political and judicial authorities. These authorities have not yet given a final resolution; instead several steps backward and forward have been taken.

The Indigenous community has specifically requested the following:

- That the government act in accordance with laws that support Indigenous rights at the international (International Labour Organisation 1989), national (1994 Amendment of the Constitution), and provincial (Law 7484) levels, and international conventions and charters that support the preservation of cultural heritage in harmony with local communities and the natural environment (UNESCO 1994; International Council on Monuments and Sites 1999)
- Removal of the word "ruins" to refer to Quilmes on every reference to the place (including textbooks and tourist brochures), using instead the name "Sacred City of Quilmes"
- Formal repatriation of the land to the Indigenous community of Quilmes
- Performance of a public reparation event, including formal return of the site and related lands to the Indigenous community of Quilmes and recognizing the community's legal possession

Archaeologists, as the other key actor in this dispute, have not taken any collective position on the conflict. None of the few existing Argentinean nongovernmental institutions related to archaeological practice (e.g., the Association of Professional Archaeologists of Argentina, the Argentinean Society of Anthropology) has made any public declaration about the Quilmes situation.

Looking Ahead: Potential Approaches

This review of the Quilmes conflict demonstrates that when fundamental differences arise over how places should be treated as heritage—particularly when strongly held stakeholder identities and perceived rights are at play—the circumstances can lead to heated conflicts that can turn violent if not mediated.

The conflict over Quilmes possesses a strong component of ideological confrontation. On the one hand, the political establishment sustains the perception of archaeological heritage as "ruins" and/or "remains of past dead people" that can be converted into "museums" in order to commercialize them. On the other hand, Indigenous people sustain the perception of archaeological heritage as a cultural legacy of their ancestors, which can help to recuperate their cultural memory by positioning it as "a place of memory."

Cultural heritage is related to history and is mainly concerned with the social memory of past events. The reconstruction of social memory is a collective process, which the traditional notion of heritage does not take into account if it leaves out many of the main social actors, including minorities and other, lower-level

actors who have a different view of heritage than the official one. The actions taken by the Indigenous community of Quilmes represent, among other things, an attempt to gain a voice and a place in the reconstruction of the social memory, uniting physical and symbolic struggles.

In reconstructing social memory, it is necessary to combine efforts to recover data through different means such as archaeological excavations, archival research, interviews with key actors, and listening to elders. This information, together with local and Indigenous knowledge (UNESCO 2001), could be applied to collectively reconstruct part of the lost social memory. This approach could help mediate the Quilmes conflict, as the confrontation arises partly from lack of accurate information, which barely reaches the areas of society that are out of the archaeological, anthropological, and social science spheres, and prevents the construction of dialogue about the contested parts of the dispute.

A first step in a consensus building process, then, could be to provide all parties with the full range of existing, legitimate archaeological and historical information, which may include the characteristics of Argentina's Indigenous people and the nature of the historical battles against them. Also, it is important to emphasize the potential of cultural heritage place significance to be manipulated and used to support specific group interests (Isla 2003), as has been pointed out in the case of Quilmes by several scholars (Bidaseca and Ruggero 2009a, 2009b; Rodríguez 2004). Social scientists can help mediate conflict by sharing the information recovered from the scientific work and the knowledge gained from it in a way that can be applied in the process of collective reconstruction of social memory.

Some social scientists have developed innovative theoretical perspectives to analyze situations under which different indigenous peoples and other subaltern groups are being dominated and their rights violated, leaving them far removed from participating in constructing a collective social memory (Guha 2002; Quijano 2003; Racero, Requejo, and Segura 2004). However, most of these studies focus more on deeply analyzing such situations than on proposing actions to improve or prevent them. Some institutions such as museums and universities that have been involved in archaeological research are now encouraging a process of repatriation or restitution of cultural objects and/or human remains that were taken in past studies; this approach usually does not generate further connections with the Indigenous groups involved, beyond the restitutions themselves (Fforde 2002; Galla 1997).

These current trends are encouraging and give some direction on how to mediate the Quilmes conflict. Nevertheless, there are several ways to reinforce these trends that have not been adequately explored. One notable missing link is to combine efforts to reconstruct social memory, involving all the parties, in order to find a common ground where all voices can be heard. If such an enterprise were possible, the positions of politicians and bureaucrats, together with those of Indigenous groups and social scientists, would be exposed. By bringing to the table all specific knowledge, the parties involved could jointly work toward building social memory as a collective work.

This endeavor envisions new forms of restitution, beyond places, human remains, and objects, and adds useful knowledge in order to recover the intervened memory and provide a place where scientific and Indigenous narratives can coexist. Through this, it aims to help bring back collective memory, to return Indigenous people to social sight, and to help reclaim their human rights. Heritage topics, heritage professionals, and heritage institutions are in a unique position to trigger that process.

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Commentary

This case study demonstrates the challenges of contested identities as a primary concern in a heritage place dispute. At a fundamental level, members of the Quilmes Indigenous community seek official recognition of their identity as connected to the history of the site and recognition of legal claims to the site. Based on these claims, the Quilmes community seeks access to and use of the site, protection of the ancient remains, and a role in its management, including influence in defining its interpretation and tourism policies, among other interests. The refusal of the Tucumán provincial government to recognize the identity of the Quilmes Indigenous people and their legitimacy as a stakeholder in decisions about the Quilmes site poses a major challenge. Equally challenging is the strong sense of grievance and the rights-based claims for control of the Quilmes site and decisions related to it that representatives of the Quilmes Indigenous community bring to any potential dialogue.

Fully resolving the dispute over the management of the Quilmes site would require a potential for acknowledgment (if not legal recognition) by the Tucumán government of the Quilmes community and their historical and cultural links to the site, and acceptance of legitimate national interests by the community. On this basis of mutual understanding and mutual recognition, it would be possible to develop a collaborative approach to site management that reflects the underlying values and identities of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of Argentina. However, given the historical trend and far-reaching impacts that would result, such a mutual recognition seems unlikely in the short term.

The ongoing dispute over the Quilmes site is but one of the consequences of a national policy that rejects Indigenous identity and claims to natural, cultural, and physical resources. A recent analysis of outcomes of Indigenous land and resource claims suggests several preconditions that appear to facilitate successful resolutions. These include internal agreement and capacity within the community, international allies with national leverage, support within the domestic dominant culture, and opportunities for direct engagement of the Indigenous people to develop acceptable solutions (Susskind and Anguelovski 2008, 47–51). Given this, the Quilmes people might seek to develop international and domestic alliances that will increase the likelihood that their concerns will be heard by the Tucumán government.

In the absence of an acknowledgment of legitimacy, is there any potential for improvements to the situation? Though we generally advocate addressing core underlying concerns in a successful negotiation process, there may still be an opportunity for an interest-based negotiation around some subset of issues that might reduce the level of conflict. A valuable first step for exploring this potential may be a well-implemented situation assessment of the site to clarify the range of site-specific issues, such as preservation, occupation and control, management, and interpretation, and the interests of all parties on those issues. Such an assessment could provide a neutral account to educate all parties about one another's perspectives and identify issues with potential for trade-offs or mutual gain.

For example, there may be common interests and values that the Quilmes community may share with the government, such as the goal of protecting the existing ancient remains from further damage (even though the parties may disagree on reconstruction interventions). Perhaps there is a potential package agreement that all stakeholders could accept, at least for the short term, that removes "ruins" from

the site's name, includes in the site's interpretation and presentation some recognition of cultural and social values (not necessarily linked to the modern Quilmes people) along with currently recognized scientific values, provides access rights for Indigenous cultural practices, and gives the Quilmes community some shared benefits from, and/or role in, tourism. In return, Indigenous occupation of the site would end, all without addressing the authenticity of the Indigenous lineage. This is just one possibility, which likely falls far short of the desirable outcome for both the government and the Quilmes community.

A key ingredient missing so far in the progression of events at Quilmes, however, is one or more actors able to act as a neutral convener to launch an exploration or process of bringing parties together around either limited issues or a larger dialogue. Given that international intragovernmental bodies concerned about heritage protection, such as UNESCO, engage with countries only with approval of individual country governments, it is hard to see such an actor as a viable convener in this context. We wonder whether there might be a political, academic, or nongovernmental organization—domestic, regional, or international—that might step in to play the role of a neutral convener.