

Forgetful “Sites of Memory”: Immigration Museums and the Uses of Public Memory

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Despite strong conceptual frameworks for national museums as potential “sites of memory,” practical attempts to establish such sites can prove paradoxically forgetful. The following paper considers this apparent paradox by contrasting the highly idealized theoretical motives for a national museum of immigration in France with the concrete realization of such a museum in Argentina. Grounded in a problematic opposition between New World memory and Old World amnesia of immigration, the French museum was conceived as a form of national “memory-work” that need not contend with the colonial past. This paper challenges that binary opposition through the example of Argentina, whose national museum of immigration enshrines a hegemonic memory of white European immigration that omits the history and present of an increasingly *mestizo* immigrant population. Both nations’ attempts to reconstitute public memory of immigration through inclusive “sites of memory” have, I argue, inadvertently highlighted their own national blindspots. The cases presented here point to the persistence of forgetfulness as a political feature of national memory, and to the often unintentional political uses of public memory sites.

Introduction

The paradox that “memory harbors forgetfulness” has long become a modern truism. Decades before Freud, Ernst Renan (1882) publically commented on the political necessity of collective forgetting. Nations, he noted, tend to purge themselves of those moral ambiguities and dark deeds that risk destabilizing the presiding national narrative. This was not psychoanalytic meta-phor, but political critique. Renan’s statement demystified the banal mechanisms of symbolic exclusion by which national unity is sustained, proclaiming collective oblivion as an integral feature of national continuity.

Well over a century later, the nation-state’s confidence is shaken by increasingly porous borders, with transnational migration flows reported at a new “all time high” each passing year (United Nations, 2002, 2006). Though the political problem of forgetting has persisted, its conditions and consequences have taken on new forms. Huyssen (2003, p. 11) has noted that rampant anxieties about national forgetting have fed a “voracious museal culture” of unprecedented magnitude. Beset by “twilights” of waning historical consciousness, nations and polities run amok building shiny memorials to yesterday “as though there were no tomorrow” (Huyssen, 1995, 2003, pp.15-18). As immigration escalates to the “forefront of national and international agendas,” (United Nations, 2006) so too do the number of government-sponsored testimonies to immigration. The past decade alone has seen a global upsurge in *national* museums devoted exclusively to immigration history. In 2004, an international confer-

ence in Paris convened representatives of over twenty-five such memory sites, though it characteristically neglected to consider sites beyond the North Atlantic nations, where under-studied South-to-South migration flows predominate (ADRI, 2004).

This paper suggests that despite strong conceptual frameworks for museums as potential “sites of memory” (Nora, 1996), practical attempts to establish such sites in cosmopolitan host countries of both the North and the South have often yielded paradoxically forgetful results. Based on fieldwork conducted in 2005-2006, I consider this apparent paradox by contrasting the highly idealized and theorized motives for a national museum of immigration in France with the concrete realization of such a museum in Argentina. In very different ways, each memory site was unintentionally overdetermined by national blindspots, thus highlighting the persistence of forgetfulness as a political feature of public memory.

My argument will be developed around two sections, each devoted to a national case. The first section treats the case of France, whose national museum of immigration was conceived as a naïve form of “memory-work,” and intended to foster a melting pot identity whilst simultaneously evading postcolonial realities. This problematic memory-work conception was situated in historiographical fashions of the time, and sustained through a simplistic binary between New World memory and Old World amnesia of immigration.

The oft neglected, New World case of Argentina sharply undermines this binary in the sec-

ond section of the paper. Argentina's national museum of immigration was intended as a collective site of memory and intercultural encounter, yet it in fact enshrines a hegemonic memory of white European immigration that omits the history and present of an increasingly *mestizo* im-migrant population. Drawing on the work of D. F. Sarmiento (1845/1982), I show that the melting pot myth, so romanticized in France, was historically used in Argentina to foster an immigration policy of whitening as a solution to the local barbarism problem.

Both cases highlight the paradoxical production of national blindspots within sites of memory, and the (often unintentional) uses of those sites as a means of silencing the past (Trouillot, 1995). Ricoeur (2000) has challenged the tendency in theoretical writings on memory to stage simplistic oppositions between memory and amnesia that fail to adequately capture the distinctions between different kinds of forgetting and remembrance. It is my hope that practical cases grounded in site-specific problems may help us to get beyond this simplistic opposition by allowing us to focus on the different shapes that concrete national forgetting may take. While each of these cases might be read separately, together they suggest the need for the immigration memory boom to reconsider the oversights of different national cases with greater critical attention.

I. The Immigration museum as "memory-work"

The *Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration* (CNHI) was inaugurated in Paris in 2007, nearly two decades after its initial conception. That a French immigration museum took twenty years to materialize is certainly indicative of a complex national relationship to immigration. However, rather than comment generally on that difficult relationship here, I will focus on the psycho-medical discourse with which the museum was first conceived as a tool for national "memory-work" against collective amnesia, before concluding the section with a word on the paradoxical results this project has yielded today.

The idea for a French immigration museum arose in the late 1980s, when a handful of immigration historians grew increasingly troubled by the indifference they experienced in French academia to their subject of study. This indifference, they felt, was far from innocent; rather it was symptomatic of a malaise deeply anchored in French national memory, which had "completely

repressed" its immigrant past (Noiriel, 1992, p. 67). In his 1988 bestseller *The French Melting Pot*, the prominent social historian Gérard Noiriel correlated the many difficulties faced by immigrants in France to the absence of any prestigious *lieux de mémoire* in their honor and to the overall repression of immigrant history in France. Noiriel and his colleagues soon formed the non-profit Association for a Museum of Immigration (AMI) in the hopes of achieving what they termed a "French Ellis Island"—a space in which a universal narrative of the immigrant experience in France would be collectively remembered, allowing the reality of the "French melting pot" to enter public consciousness (Blanc-Chaleard, 2005). The AMI clearly identified as a group of activists. Its members saw themselves as entrepreneurs of history, and were committed to revisiting and revising the unconscious mistakes, omissions and repressions of past narratives through a public *travail de mémoire*, or memory-work.

The notion of memory-work presupposes a view of historical narratives as necessarily partial. As Paul Ricoeur noted in *History and Truth* (1965) the archives consulted by historians bear only those traces of the past that have survived, while the survival of some facts over others is conditioned by the archival resources, epistemological conditions and narrative needs of the historian. This view endows both historians and historical monuments with the power to shape paradigms of historical reality, and with an attendant ethical responsibility to recreate the past with political and social attention.

Accordingly, the AMI members felt it was their responsibility as historians to help France face its repressed past through a public *travail de mémoire*, which required not only new narratives, but the establishment of national monuments, museums, and other public testimonies to the French melting pot. Significantly, the AMI's understanding of the melting pot reflected Noiriel's universalist approach, which downplayed controversial ethnic, racial and postcolonial differences (too easily manipulated by the right) in favor of what he saw as a more inclusive model. "Memory-work" was to transform France into a self-conscious nation of immigrants that need not harp on false distinctions between immigrants of today and yesterday, between immigrants from Europe and the third world, or indeed, between immigrants from ex-colonies and those from elsewhere. These distinctions were understood as symptoms of the very repression the AMI sought to combat through memory-work. As such, they

were distractions from the real root of the problem, and were not worth reifying through excessive scholarly attention.

In thinking about the psycho-medical terminology that accompanied the inception of this museum project, there is another context that is useful to bear in mind. In 1987, a year prior to Noiriel's publication of *The French Melting Pot*, another Parisian historian, Henry Rousso, published a seminal essay called *The Vichy Syndrome*, which quickly became an international bestseller. As the title suggests, Rousso employed a distinctly medical, psychoanalytic lexicon in analyzing France's unresolved relationship to its Vichy collaboration during World War II. Historical memory, he wrote, exhibited symptoms of "neurosis," manifested in "repressions" and "obsessions," and rooted in deep-seated "traumas" that had never been properly mourned. Rousso's diagnosis was also prescriptive: to treat its symptoms, historical memory had to work consciously with subconscious, repressed memories so as to actively revise accounts of history. Again, while historians were called upon to conjure these suppressed memories, their work had to be complemented by public commemorations, memorials and other *lieux de mémoire* in order to constitute effective "treatment."

The AMI's commitment to "memory-work" was thus inscribed in a fashionable historiographical debate of the time, stemming out of Holocaust and trauma studies. Echoing historians like Rousso, the AMI envisioned the immigration museum as a key to remembering those elements of the national fabric that had been unjustly "repressed," and this is in many ways a laudable endeavour. Nevertheless, when one takes Ricoeur's notion of the historian's partiality, and adds to it the psycho-medical terminology employed by authors like Rousso, one winds up with an ethical injunction for historians to place their nations 'on the couch' so to speak.

I want to argue that this injunction bears some problematic implications for the way in which the CNHI museum was conceived, and for the challenges faced by the emerging CNHI today. To do so, it will be helpful to look more closely at Gérard Noiriel's stance, as outlined in his 1995 article "Immigration: Memory and Amnesia." As the title makes clear, Noiriel's argument is structured around a stark opposition between "amnesia" and "memory" of immigration. While certain "nations of immigrants" have integrated the figure of the migrant into their collective memories and national myths, other nations with

very similar histories have failed to do so. The two particular nations Noiriel has in mind are France and the United States. Noiriel sees these as two sister nations in important ways: they have shared remarkably similar statistical patterns of immigration over the past two centuries, and both of their populations have long constituted cultural and ethnic melting-pots. Nevertheless, says Noiriel, they occupy radically opposite poles of the memory-amnesia axis: while France's national narrative has sublimated its immigrants into oblivion, the United States has made of its own a glorified and celebrated national myth. Noiriel's historical study is provocative, deft and rigorous on many fronts. Yet his contrast suggests a surprisingly rosy portrait of U.S. migration studies. The salubrious ease with which the U.S. appears to accept its melting-pot past and present is evidenced by the academic prestige of migration studies and the popular success of Ellis Island, while the extent of French denial is evidenced by the marginalization of immigration history in France, and that country's inability or unwillingness to build a national museum of immigration. Noiriel accordingly diagnoses France with a severe case of "collective amnesia" (Noiriel, 1995).

In developing what I will call his "repressive hypothesis" (Foucault, 1976) Noiriel draws on a distinction established by the Durkheimian sociologist Maurice Halbwachs between *l'histoire vécue*, or "lived history," and *mémoire collective*, or "collective memory" (Halbwachs, 1992). While lived history is produced at the level of individual and family recollections [*souvenirs*], collective memory is publicly inscribed and sustained through instruments of public opinion, ranging from scholarly works and textbook manuals to monuments and official ceremonies. A discrepancy in France between the narratives of these two kinds of history lies at the root of Noiriel's diagnosis. If the collective memory of immigration adds up to far less than the sum of its individual parts (lived histories), this is due to the fact that French identity formation was grounded in Revolutionary myths of origin whose republican ideology rendered the notion of a melting-pot inconceivable. Pre-Revolutionary definitions of the French nation as a fusion of peoples had been reinterpreted in ways compatible with such ideology. One was either a citizen or a foreigner, and anything in between was "suppressed" from the collective memory. Like Rousso, Noiriel points to the effects of "trauma" as an obstacle to collective memory, from the traumas that led to the Revolu-

tion, to those engendered by the Revolution, and all the way up through the interwar period when immigration to France reached its pinnacle.ⁱ The traumas of the First World War were overdetermined by "national memory" discourse on the one hand, while labor-related traumas (such as the brutal repressions of strikes) overtook "working class memory" discourse on the other. As such, no ink was left in the nation's quill for another kind of narrative, and once again, immigration was suppressed into the underside of French consciousness (Noiriel, 1992, 1995). According to Noiriel, all of these factors contrast diametrically to the U.S.'s revolutionary myth of origins, which from the start incorporated the melting-pot into its national narrative, and which subsequently met with no "syndromes" liable to interfere with the formation of a collective memory of immigration, let alone with the building of an immigration museum.

This sharp contrast reinforces Noiriel's conviction that the museum is essential: the nation must learn to contend with its past through a profusion of text and talk, the construction of sites and symbols, and through the stories and histories waiting to be unburied. It must fill the gaping abyss of immigrant memory with many words and objects, with newfangled statistics and images, prestigious national totems, political associations, doctoral formations and academic institutes. It must, above all, cease resisting the narratives of immigration offered to it by historians and accept their invitation to "memory-work" so as to liberate the immigrant, once and for all, from the dungeon of the nation's conscience.

But what does it mean to pit the building of a museum against repressive anti-immigrant state measures? And what does it mean to diagnose such measures as symptoms of a national psychoanalytic malaise, or to suggest the commemorative site as cure? It is tempting, and indeed often useful, to borrow terms from individual memory functions in discussing collective phenomena -but doing so can also lead to difficulties. This debate is neither new nor dead. Over the past hundred years, the question of whether psychoanalysis provides appropriate frameworks for interpreting collective, social and historical phenomena has been copiously addressed among researchers in the social and human sciences (e.g. Assmann, 1995; Berliner, 2005; Bloch, 1925; Connerton, 1989; Kansteiner, 2002; Kroeber, 1920, 1943; LaCapra, 1998; Mazlish, 1963; Olick, 1999; Spiegel, 2002; Todorov, 1995). In

particular, Wertsch (2002, 2008) has noted that "collective amnesia" is often used to describe the simple fact of not discussing something, bearing little in common with a patient's amnesia. As Wertsch explains, "these uses might be considered broad metaphors, but as much may be lost as gained in using such terms" (Wertsch, 2008, p. 18).

What does Noiriel's argument lose or gain in relying on such metaphors? In addressing this question, it will be useful to draw on a text that is surprisingly under-cited in controversies about national memory.ⁱⁱ Foucault (1976) has famously critiqued the uses of what he calls a "repressive hypothesis."ⁱⁱⁱ The hypothesis of collective "repression," he suggests, is tempting but misguided on several accounts. For one, it is appealing in its simplicity, since the real effects of any social phenomena are more difficult to decode than their repression. Perhaps more troubling is the way in which the "repressive hypothesis" tempts us to legitimize our discourse under the ethical pretences of a political cause. This problem is compounded by the pleasurable gratification we derive from using such terminology—an experience Foucault refers to as the *bénéfice du locuteur*: "the mere fact of speaking about...one's repression," says Foucault, "takes on the allure of deliberate transgression" (p. 14). We are all-too-tempted to equate a "yes" to whatever is repressed with a "no to power" (p. 207). But this tendency supposes a simplistic dualism which reduces power to a "binary opposition between the dominators and the dominated" (p. 123). For Foucault, power would not be powerful if things were this simple. In reality, power dynamics are far trickier than meets the eye: for example, they are exercised from "innumerable points" and their relations are "immanent" rather than exterior to other rapports (p. 124). Binaries such as speech/silence, conscious/subconscious, or in our case, memory/amnesia, facilitate our discursive operations precisely because their truth-value allows us to describe reality in a way that is meaningful, while their simplicity allows us to shirk analysis of less clear-cut power relations (a function that, in and of itself, constitutes a kind of power). Often, when we purport to "liberate" ourselves or others from the chains of repression, we are merely displacing the meaning of an injunction. The burdensome injunction to secrecy then "takes on the new meaning of an injunction to lift the inhibition [*refoulement*]," and "the new task of truth now lies in questioning the forbidden" (p. 175).

If we consider the initial motives for a French museum of immigration through the lens of Foucault's critique, we discover a number of problems in Noiriél's argument. The diametric opposition between "French amnesia" and "American memory" may be appealing, but it masks a number of complex power relations under the pretence of lifting an inhibition. Take, for example, Noiriél's choice to compare France to the U.S. The U.S. is an appealing choice for his contrast because it is the most readily visible part of the New World from a European standpoint. In the European imaginary, the "American dream" looms large—its mythology is enmeshed with a highly manufactured and distributed image of a successfully "multicultural" nation of immigrants. The triumph associated with U.S. global dominance blends into this narrative of settler success. But while this image of success may efficiently jab at French insecurities in late modernity, it also belies a facile European stereotype about the New World that bespeaks a colonial logic. Innocent, youthful and virginal, the New World is a symbolic terrain of fantasy and prosperity suspended outside History, and ripe for new and strange miscegenation of natural and cultural elements. This, of course, is the same cliché that European settlers took with them to the New World in both hemispheres—the same cliché, in fact, that fed French imperial projects in "uncivilized" lands around the globe. Noiriél's binary allows him to rely on the unspoken appeal of a colonial logic masked as progressive multiculturalism. As I will discuss in the second section of this paper through the example of Argentina, settler nations of diverse income-levels have long nurtured a mythology of melting-pot progress that rests on the eradication of the intolerable other. Noiriél's analysis invites "othered" immigrants from ex-colonies to participate in a proactive project of melting-pot nostalgia modelled after the New World nation he most admires. His insistence on the equivalence of immigrant experiences becomes materialized in the CNHI, where a narrative of inclusive republican diversity relies on the omission of the colonial legacy that has so impacted postcolonial migrants. Further, though it is presented in the guise of a counter-example to France, the U.S. is no random example, but is rather the exemplary and inevitable *point de repère* on the world stage of representations. Foucault explains that the opposition between discourse and silence can often make it difficult to distinguish "the different manners of not speaking" as well as the distributions

between "those who can speak and those who cannot" and the kinds of discourse that are authorized for some or required for others (p. 38-39). One wonders how Noiriél's analysis might have fared had he chosen a less talked about nation of immigrants for his comparison, one with a less hegemonic role in world affairs and in international academic scholarship on migration. Noiriél's example benefits from this power without needing to problematize that cliché, or to justify his choice of *this* post-revolutionary New World nation in particular. Even if we were to ignore the many hypocrisies and silences in the U.S. narrative of immigration, Noiriél's binary would pose problems formally. As it is, the binary opposition employed by Noiriél lends a distorted allure of symmetry to two nations that function under incomparable circumstances on the global stage. This false symmetry enables Noiriél to oppose his own country's status as "amnesiac" against the immigrant memory of the world's largest producer of academic discourse about itself. Noiriél is thus free to make his comparison, without having to recognize the exceptional value of that excessive production: this one's memory is displayed as though it were the inversion of that one's forgetfulness; this one's Ellis Island is the convex of that one's absence of Ellis Island.

Further, it is difficult not to notice that the repressive hypothesis flatters the political stakes of immigration history, turning its everyday practice into a risky and redemptive political struggle: "the mere fact of speaking about it...takes on the allure of deliberate transgression" (Foucault, 1976, p. 14). It then becomes easy to mistake a "yes" to the history of immigration for a "no" to power. It also becomes easy to ignore another set of power dynamics at play, which are those of the institutional Parisian intellectual scene and what Pierre Bourdieu (another one of its members and practitioners) has called its "field of power" (1996). What this masks as well is the prestige of the Sartrean "organic intellectual" in Parisian academic circles in the latter half of the twentieth century, at least somewhat inherited from the moral allure of the *résistants* as rebels against power, who are simultaneously aligned with power (e.g. the vanquishers of the Second World War). Further, one might be led to wonder whether a slippery error of reasoning has allowed the historian to confuse the "repression" of his discipline with the real subjugation encountered by his subject of study: *the immigrant*.

Finally, the neat division between what gets

said in one place and *left out* in another, obscures some of the other mechanisms of speech and silence underlying the immigration problems in France, as well as its ambition to create a French Ellis Island. The distribution of power relations in Noiriél's argument enables him to engage in a subtle and sophisticated historical analysis, while deftly eschewing some of the complex undercurrents of French immigration politics: namely the question of colonial memory. What is ironic is that this seemingly small blind spot has since come to overshadow much of the CNHI programming. The conservative French government's choice to place its national museum of immigration in the *Palais de la Porte Dorée*, has brought this tragic irony into sharp focus, as the *Palais* was originally constructed for the 1931 colonial exposition of Paris. Indeed, this burdensome memory greets one as soon as she approaches the palm-tree lined Palace gates: an art deco masterpiece of colonial fantasy is carved into a colossal fresco, replete with elephants and exotic flora, as well as exotic "natives" from various ex-colonies that just so happen to compose some of the most important countries of origin for today's immigrants to France^{iv} I cannot do justice to the details of the CNHI in the scope of this paper, and have found it more appropriate to focus here on the historiographical discourse the led to the CNHI's creation. However, I do want to stress that the CNHI is a state-funded *Musée de France* that was explicitly conceived by the government's Ministry of Culture as a vehicle for integration policy, especially following the 2005 uprisings in the Paris suburbs. Those uprisings, or riots, had brought to the fore a sense of frustration expressed along the lines of a neo-colonial fracture, as voiced by the *indigenes de la République* movement. Needless to say, such perspectives do not fit comfortably within the normative apparatus of a specifically *national* French museum.

Foucault's precaution directs us back to some of the themes raised at the beginning of this paper, concerning the impossibility of disentangling memory from forgetfulness. As Foucault suggests, a *mise en discours* does not always fill the gaps of memory; indeed, profuse discourse can generate its negative weight silence, just as memories and their memorials can conjure new kinds of sleepy forgetfulness into sudden life. This paradox, raised by Renan, Freud and so many others, becomes readily apparent in our next case study in Buenos Aires, where memory and forgetfulness merge in wholly unintended ways.

II. Forgetfulness within Memory: Argentina's *Museo Nacional de la Inmigración*

The Argentinean example illustrates the limits of the memory-amnesia model described above. There is no lack of discourse on immigration in Argentina, no apparent gaps to fill with the cure of memory-work. Immigration figures in official and unofficial discourse, in newspapers, films, children's textbooks and scholarly research. Politicians have employed its shared memory in their speeches, human rights groups have acknowledged its force, and writers and artists still find in it a fecund source of material. A hackneyed national joke announces: *somos descendientes de los barcos*, we are descendants of the ships. Moreover, the myth of the melting pot, the *crisol de razas*, is valorized with pride and romanticism. Accolades to immigration were written into the Constitution (1853, still in effect) as welcomed assets to the "progress and Industry" of Argentina (see Articles 20 & 25). Today, the legacy of immigrant workers is still upheld as those who built up the land, and who brought industry, technology and multi-cultural talents to the nation. There is even, so to speak, an Argentinean Ellis Island - a locus of national myth and immigrant memory of the kind the AMI worked so hard to establish. And yet it is precisely here in the *Museo Nacional de la Inmigración* (MNI), right in the national bastion of immigrant memory that a deep-seated silence of immigration proliferates.

This silence consists in the museum's exclusive representation of white European immigrants, to the flagrant exclusion of all other ethnic and national origins. This persistent oversight became the focus of fieldwork that I conducted in 2005-2006 in Buenos Aires. One of the most surprising omissions in the museum is that of immigrants from other Latin American countries who currently constitute the large majority of the foreign-born population. While there is some uncertainty as to the exact percentage of *inmigrantes limítrofes* (literally "border immigrants" from neighboring countries) among the immigrant population, there is consensus as to their predominance. ACTAS (2004) reported them at 60 percent and Jachimowicz (2006) at around 66 percent, however these statements are taken from figures published by the national census bureau (INDEC, 2004) based on a data gathered prior to the market crash of 2001 when Argentina still attracted a small but significant inflow of

immigrants from overseas. Experts at the *Centro de Estudios Migratorios Latino Americanos* in Buenos Aires (personal communication, 2008) claimed the current reality to exceed 90 percent, especially if clandestine immigrants are taken into account. Often misperceived as *los nuevos inmigrantes* [the new immigrants] the presence of neighboring immigrants in Argentina has in fact been documented since the first national census of 1869 and has consistently accounted for approximately three percent of the total population according to official records (ACTAS, 2004; INDEC, 2004). It is ironic that such a constant presence in national data should be so absent from this national homage in museum form.

Tucked within the *Dirección de Migraciones* (and thus dependent on the *Ministerio del Interior*) the building of this state-run museum once housed and fed boatfuls of overseas immigrants. Ironically, the museum was inaugurated in 2001, just in time for the market crash when descendants of those same immigrants flocked to the museum's database in search of proof of ancestry, desperate for a passport out. This irony takes on theatrical proportions as soon as one arrives at the museum site. The museum is just one of several municipal buildings devoted to immigration in the *Dirección*. Another is a foreigners' documentation and naturalization center—a kind of *prefectura* where immigrants from neighboring countries line up anxiously to renew work visas. Searching for the best means to traverse the foreboding freeway in front of the *Dirección* on my three visits to the museum, I would often spot other foreigners with documents in hand. "Do you know where the *Museo Nacional de la Inmigración* is?" I would ask if our paths crossed. The dozen or so people I queried near the *Dirección* had never heard of the place. To enter the *Dirección*, the tourist waits in line alongside other foreigners with documents in hand. Like a burlesque choreography, the bureaucratic apparatus performs its triage between *descendientes de los barcos* and *inmigrantes limítrofes*. Upon passing the entrance checkpoint, the shared path bifurcates. The immigrants turn left towards the documentation center, where they will continue to queue for work visas or other papers. The tourist or second generation European heads straight, crossing the vast lawn spread before this former immigrant *Hotel*.^{vi}

Henri Lefebvre (1991, p. 32) has examined the function of social space as "a locus, a medium, and a tool" for the discursive reproduction of discriminatory social relations (see also: Guano,

2004). Interestingly, the *Dirección's* spatial disposition in Buenos Aires mimics the very social divide reproduced within its gates. The *Dirección* is located in *Retiro*, a neighborhood where luxurious elegance and dire poverty are literally separated by a railroad station. Consuelo—the only Bolivian immigrant I got to know well during my stay in December 2005—lent me much insight into the lived experience of this contrast, which she traversed on a weekly basis by bus. A seamstress from a working class Bolivian neighborhood in *Bajo flores*, Consuelo said she had business contacts in *Retiro*—other Bolivian women who would supply her with materials, or with whom she would regularly collaborate. *Retiro* does not figure on official maps of the city, and at the time of my research it was impossible to locate reliable demographic data regarding its population. Some claim it is mostly Argentine, while others insist it is mostly immigrant. Consuelo was of the latter opinion.^{vii} Of the several buildings in the complex, the *Prefectura* is situated closest to the railway station and its neighboring *villa*.

Meanwhile the MNI hugs the coastline overlooking the vista of the *Río de la Plata*. This estuary that divides Buenos Aires from the Atlantic is also the life-line connecting the Argentine imaginary to Europe. The edifice is streaked with stains of age, lending it an air of melancholy. Yet somehow the waterscape over-powers the harbor in its layered memorial inscriptions. With its gaze stretching northeastward, the building itself seems to have turned its back to the Americas. Indeed, everything about this building seems to be pining for elsewhere, pointing to what is not there. One enters to find one's own steps echoed disproportionately to the size of the sparsely filled space. Enormous windows face the river, flooding the room with a natural light that somehow blends into the sounds of the footsteps. The museum's nostalgic mission statement sees this river-bent ghostliness as its charm: "luminous and hospitable as the epoch it describes" ("*Proyecto*.." 2000, p. 8). The "luminous epoch" to which the mission statement refers is that of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when Argentina counted amongst the ten wealthiest nations of the world, and when Buenos Aires, bursting with European immigrants, appeared to reflect the Enlightenment aspirations of the nation's founding fathers.

The museum's walls are assiduously lined with information panels, largely composed by the museum's late founding-director, Dr. Jorge Ochoa.

Rather than focus on the history of the building itself, these descriptions enter directly into the museum's main subject matter: the story of the nation as the story of immigrants. Peppered throughout this detailed historical description are many of the elements that the AMI had admired in Ellis Island including vociferous praise for the laborers, minors and farmers that "abandoned their homes, lands and languages" to seek unknown fates in the New World; these noble men and women that sought refuge from oppression or economic hardship, and "gave back to their generous new home" with the abundance of their industry, as well as with their fecundity; these adventurous spirits who made of Buenos Aires a luminous beacon of modernity and progress amongst the capitals of the world. A vast map of migration flows to Argentina covers another wall, with arrows pointing from various parts of Europe to Buenos Aires. Turning into the next hall, one is greeted by a dozen or so mannequin couples in the traditional dress of their national origins: several Italian, Basque and Catalan couples, an Andalusian couple and a pair of Swiss Germans, as well as a Jewish couple from Poland. The "life stories" portraits on the wall also include a Turkish businessman.

On one of its walls, the museum cites Argentina's original Constitution of 1853, which declares a new immigration policy welcoming industrious immigrants of the world to freely settle the land (Article 20). The museum does not cite the Constitution's explicit preference for "European immigrants" (Article 25) and its simultaneous policy of defense against infiltrations by neighboring foreigners, nor its decreed suspension of constitutional rights in the case of "disorder" and "commotion" by the nation's borders (Article 23). This immigration policy was first conceived by one of Argentina's most liberal founding fathers, who remains a cultural point of reference throughout Latin America to this day. Domingo F. Sarmiento (1811-1888), a multi-talented writer, thinker and politician, became the seventh President of Argentina from 1868-1874. Today, his bust adorns the many national libraries and public schools he fervently promoted, and his works are obligatory reading in many public high schools. Given the continued symbolic weight of Sarmiento's legacy and writings, their contribution to the national mythology of immigration, and their historical importance in the formation of national identity, Sarmiento's work is of sociological interest here. For our purposes, it will be useful to highlight the text that is most often read, refe-

renced, cited and assigned in Argentinean classrooms: *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism* ([1845] 1982).

Often considered the first Latin American literary essay, *Facundo* is at once a novel, political pamphlet, ethnography and travelogue. Persecuted into exile for his political opposition to the authoritarian Rosas, Sarmiento laments the destiny of his young nation with a lyrical anguish typical of the romantic style he aspired to. To Sarmiento, the entire problematic of Argentina could be summarized by the Manichean opposition between culture and nature, between civilization and barbarism. "This is the question," says Sarmiento, "to be or not to be *savage*" (p. 22).viii The problem is, to Sarmiento, a deeply political one, and his treatment of it as an identity quest might fruitfully be read along the lines proposed by Jameson (1986) as an allegory of the emerging nation.

Born shortly after Argentina's independence, Sarmiento expressed a direct identification between his own person and that of the young national "body" in many of his essays and letters. As Salessi (1995) points out, *Facundo* was the most foundational and influential of 19th century Argentine texts to have treated the nation-state in corporeal terms, as a civilized body in constant danger of unhygienic infiltrations by barbarism.

Sarmiento tends to be interpreted as a paradoxical figure. He was, on the one hand, an autodidact from the humble countryside of San Juan and a humanistic believer in universal education who defended the rights of poor (European) immigrants against the xenophobic and oligarchic repressions of his day. Yet he also spearheaded a rabid series of genocidal campaigns against indigenous peoples, and sought to eradicate any bloodlines, cultures and languages bearing traces of the non-European. Was Sarmiento a racial purist, or an enlightened, progressive, proto-multiculturalist? This apparent contradiction seems less contradictory when we consider Sarmiento's nation in corporeal terms: republican cohesion must survive elusive threats and temptations that circulate *within* the national body, endemic to its flesh. The dialectic in *Facundo* between European civilization and Ibero-American barbarism is felt by Sarmiento as a personal, corporeal struggle between the forces of his own nomadic instinct and his fervent, almost religious attraction to Enlightenment Europe. The question drives him into exile in Chile where it continues to haunt him unrelentingly, searing through his political and ethnographic analyses, traveling

with him along the way into the depths of the Pampa, where he confronts the alluring nightmare of the *gaucho* after which the book was named. This *gaucho*, Facundo, represents the menacing spirit of *mestizaje* (miscegenation) that looms darkly over Argentina's "deserted plains," almost at one with them. This miscegenation is not merely phenotypic, but also social, political, cultural and linguistic.

Sarmiento's complex relationship to the *gaucho* lends insight into the whitening project that is reflected in the displays of the MNI. Though the Ellis Islands of the New World may seem like a multicultural nod to happy integration, a closer look into national histories often shows otherwise. *Facundo* reflects a political project to purify the nation-body of its most insalubrious and *limitrophal* elements through the combined efforts of settlement, purging, forced assimilation and national mythmaking. Despite his fervent belief in the positivist and social Darwinist creeds of his day, his writings nonetheless reveal nagging doubts as to "the inevitable triumph of the whites in the worldwide struggle" (Helg, 1990, p. 40). White progress in Argentina, he feared, could be undercut by interbreeding with "uncivilizable" races like the Guaraní--a contaminated mixture that Sarmiento lamented did not lead to sterility, but rather to profuse fecundity that he believed brought out the worst in both (Helg, 1990).^{ix} Not only does the *gaucho* represent this fearsome alchemy of bloods but he is also confoundingly familiar. Like Sarmiento, he is a pure product of the countryside, a ferociously independent spirit, an errant battling his own path, and an autodidact in his domain. In 1919, Freud explained the effects of the *unheimlich* (the uncanny, or literally, unhomely) as a kind of cognitive dissonance or obsessive repulsion that arises when one is confronted by something that seems strangely familiar yet foreign at the same time (Freud, 1997). The *mestizaje* of the *gaucho* represents a perverse blend between the humanly familiar spirit of the *criollo* and the inhumanely foreign body of the indigenous South American. It is the *unheimlich* mirror into which Sarmiento peers, only to catch a startling glimpse of the future nation, straddled between the legacy of Spanish despotism and the nomadic wilderness of "savagery," between the luminous city of knowledge and the dark deserts of nature. "To be or not to be..." is for Sarmiento a question of political and personal strife, an ultimatum between life and death.

Sarmiento's anguish stems from his suspicion that within him roams a nomadic *gaucho*, an untamable rebel against the enlightened spirit to which he aspired, for which he fought, and with which he identified. Just as the book's narrative voice strays shakily and unintentionally out of the bounds of any classifiable genre, Sarmiento's battle to forge a destiny of "progress" seems constantly undercut by the menace of circular wandering. Bending the infernal circle straight will require of Sarmiento a most violent mix of imagination and force, a purification deep and bloody enough to exorcize the nation-body of the *mestizaje* spirit that will not leave him/it in peace.

As in so many other New World nations – whose cases I cannot treat within the scope of this paper – white settlement in Argentina was one face of a coin whose flipside was ethnic cleansing. But this ethnic cleansing was not primarily achieved through genocidal campaigns – as is often believed. Sarmiento's expressed ambition to "purge the land" of its indigenous "excrement" eventually became a wild obsession that massacres alone would not quell, leaving him in search of alternative methods (letter to Señora de Mann quoted in Ratier 1985, p. 22). Such alternatives are already explored in *Facundo*, decades prior to the *Conquista del desierto*. By the tail end of the book, his agitated reflections – now tormented, now euphoric – finally come upon a visionary solution: "the principal element of order and moralization that the Argentine Republic disposes of today is European immigration" (p. 307). The "barbarian" instinct endemic to the Americas could be drowned out by importing boatfuls of "civilized" citizens of all religions and creeds in through the coastline of the *Río de la Plata*. Against *mestizaje*, Sarmiento invented the most influential "whitening" meltingpot of Latin America.

Sarmiento's "melting pot" and its government-sponsored museum of remembrance compel one to rethink the French idealization of a multicultural New World memory of immigration. As we have seen, Argentina's pluralistic myth of origins and seemingly open immigration policy were part of a eugenicist national project to solve the "barbarism problem." Argentina's whitening solution was considered a wild success by Sarmiento's contemporaries, and a model that other South American and Caribbean nations attempted to emulate (Helg, 1990). By 1860, Buenos Aires was inundated with Italians, Spaniards, Basques, and a few smaller groups such as East European

Jews and so-called "Turcos" (a Europeanizing term for Muslims and Arabs in general), all of whom surpassed the number of nationals within the Capital. The number of newcomers reached 2.5 million between the first national census in 1869 and that of 1914 – leading to the construction of the *Hotel de Migrantes* in 1906. Though these portuary immigrants were not of Anglo-Saxon stock as Sarmiento, Alberdi, Bunges, Ingenieros and others might have hoped, they were for the most part European. The conformation of these diverse origins would be achieved through universal Republican education as Sarmiento had envisioned, and sustained through a Capital-centered *crizol de razas* model that symbolically effaced the presence of non-European Argentines and immigrants alike.

Yet the Argentine peripheries tell a different story. As mass European immigration progressively waned from the 1930's onward, neighboring immigrants continued entering Argentina at a steady rate from across the borders, as we have seen. Marginalized and invisibilized in the Capital-centered national imaginary, these immigrants and other non-whites, including Afro-Argentines, were successfully "excluded from the symbolic definition of the nation" (Quijada, 1998, p. 306; also see Andrews, 1980). Yet this "non-presence" was a constant reality in the provinces. Moreover, the brutal *Conquista del Desierto*, or Conquest of the Desert (1821-1899) envisioned by Sarmiento and led by the General Julio A. Roca was hardly as successful as has been imagined. Well more than half of existing indigenous peoples survived the campaigns, with only 6% directly killed in combat (Quijada, 1998, p. 323). More often than not, the famed "destruction" of these peoples was in fact achieved in ways less costly and more useful to local elites and governing bodies than full fledged massacres. Captured survivors of the Conquest were generally subject to so called "civilizing," "assimilation," and "detrribalization" policies that mainly consisted in forced domestic servitude and concubinage for women and forced military exercise for men, as well as compulsory labor in the sugar cane fields, vineyards, and other agricultural sectors lacking workforce in the provinces (Briones and Delrio, 2002; Mases, 2001). Badly in need of a labor force, these same agricultural sectors often recruited seasonal low wage laborers from across the borders in Paraguay, Bolivia and Chile, as well as Uruguay and Brazil, thereby maintaining a constant inflow of neighboring immigrants throughout Argentine history. The confluence between these two sources of

labor steadily paved the way for the creation of a *mestizo* underclass that would become increasingly manifest in urban settings over time. Thus, while the Capital saw itself and the nation as an all European *crizol de razas*, the reality of the provinces told a far more heterogeneous story—one that was not incorporated into the presiding national narrative, and that has been discreetly omitted from numerous history books, school textbooks, statistical accounts, as well as memorial monuments like the MNI. Again, thinking back to the European and North Atlantic centered presuppositions of the French debate, it is worth noting that Argentina's national forgetfulness is hardly opposed to the national remembrance of immigration. Rather, the force of this forgetfulness lies precisely in its location within the hegemonic national memory.

The silence that settles strangely into the corridors of the MNI has hardly been resolved by Sarmiento's "resolution." This historic invisibility has proved increasingly unsustainable, even within the euro-centric Capital. Over the course of the 20th century, industrial changes have generated waves of urbanization, ushering the poor of the provinces into Buenos Aires and other important city centers. Historically constructed through the aforementioned assimilation policies, a disenfranchised *mestizo* underclass later caught the attention of Juan Domingo Perón from 1943 to the mid-1950's when he rose to fame as the symbolic spearhead of the first popular mass political movement before being elected as President. The term *cabecitas negras* ("little black heads")—introduced in the mid 1940's by white elites to delegitimize the Peronists—reveals the extent to which class politics became increasingly racialized in the Capital. President Peron and his wife Eva controversially reappropriated this expression as a term of endearment for the rural *mestizos* who had been recruited to the cities for work, and who consolidated a base of working class support for his leadership. These conditions changed over the course of numerous political upheavals and military coups that I will not discuss here, suffice to mention that the *villas* were often publicly condemned and even "outlawed" during the time of the dictatorship, leading to deaths and evictions, mass displacements, and regroupings in what would eventually become new *villas* (Guano, 2004).

Had the French debate on immigration and commemorative "memory-work" considered the Argentinean case, it might have been forced to

adjust a number of its assumptions. In particular, the “trauma” and “memory” polemics that emerged in France and other North Atlantic nations over the past three decades appear to have paid too little attention to the role of material culture in the production of national silence. Paradoxically, activists defending the inclusion of those excluded from history were often susceptible to naïve historiographical beliefs that led them to underestimate the vulnerability of “memory sites” to competing political interests and warring narratives of the past. As in France, the U.S., and numerous other important host countries, the creation of a national museum in Argentina dedicated to a theme as controversial as immigration was inscribed in what Bourdieu has called the “field of power” (1996). As such, it was subject to competing interests and historically rooted legacies of power relations, even though this struggle was far less blatant than in France. Its emergence represents the silent victory of a hegemonic consensus that was forged long ago, and that continues to be shaped and sustained in the present. Thus far in this section, I have historicized the museum’s *crizol* myth through the lens of Sarmiento, and assessed the spatial features of the *Dirección* that discursively mimic and reproduce historical inequalities. In the remainder of this section, I will outline some of the more recent political and social conditions that have shaped the emergence of Argentina’s immigration museum.

Significantly, the museum was officially approved and financed during the neo-liberal regime of President Carlos Menem over the course of the 1990’s. Though considered an extended period of democratic transition following the end of a brutal military dictatorship (1976-1983), this was also a decade of rapid polarization of class differences, marked by a threefold growth in urban *villas* where first and second generation Argentine migrants from the provinces lived alongside *inmigrantes limítrofes* (Guano, 2004). Former *villa* residents that had been displaced during the dictatorship returned to Buenos Aires and other big cities in search of work, along with unemployed rural workers from recently denationalized industries. As class differences became increasingly racialized in city centers, slurs like *bolita* (pejorative for Bolivian), *negro*, and *cabecita negra* were often used interchangeably, as they are to this day (Grimson, 1999). The MNI museum arose in the context of costly urban development projects designed to revamp Buenos Aires into a shiny first world

capital, reminiscent of the “luminous and hospitable epoch” when Europeans clamored hungrily to the shores of the South American “granary of the world” (*Proyecto*, 2000, p. 8). It enshrined a modern myth of origins that had always projected hopes of progress onto the European peopling of the nation’s so-called “deserts.” The museum’s mission statement proudly declared that its “museological representation [of immigration] should link our history to that of the rest of the world” due to the distinctive “characteristics that immigration in Argentina held” (*Proyecto*, 2000, p. 6). This particular *crizol* was Argentina’s “link to the world,” its symbolic ticket out of the Americas and its face of legitimacy as a player in the “New World Order.” Sarmiento’s European *crizol* would fulfill its own destiny of progress at long last, returning Argentina to its former space of significance on the global stage. Thus, while the museum was hardly conceived as a political instrument in itself, its realization as a government project reflected the socio-economic stakes of Europeanness at that time, and the persistent denial of political legitimacy to “other” immigrants and Argentines within a radically changing urban ethnoscape (Appadurai, 1996). If the museum displays an Argentina that resonates with recent discourse of “first world progress,” the absence of non-European immigrants in the museum resonates with an old and deep national silence.

Today, this silenced history of immigration has born living traces, as manifested in various forms of exclusion and invisibility faced by the neighboring immigrants in daily life, as well as in the migrations office next door to the MNI museum. As we have seen, this invisibilization bears a long and complex legacy, which instrumentalized racist stereotypes of indigenous peoples as “silent fatalists” and treated the land they inhabited as “barren.” It is a legacy of paradoxes, by which an “empty desert” must nevertheless be conquered in bloody battle, by which a non-entity must be materially eradicated from space, and by which an already “speechless” figure is forbidden to speak its language. Today, first and second generation immigrants from regional countries like Bolivia, as well as non-immigrants that resemble them, are stereotyped as being too *callados* (silent) in the workplace or classroom. This silence is generally construed as an obstacle to knowledge, progress and efficiency by even well-intentioned colleagues and schoolteachers (Beheran, 2008). Novaro et al (2008) suggests that this silence has been reified into a

veritable social phenomena, "embodied" and "performed" by young second and third generation immigrants in the Buenos Aires public school system. This phantasmagoric perception of an embodied speechless presence has been confirmed by my own recent research.^x One public school principal in the impoverished Buenos Aires suburb of *Bajo flores* recently shared with me that speechlessness is a real obstacle in her immigrant-dense school, a problem that she claimed to be "characteristic" of the most indigenous children. One of her teachers added that teaching a child who didn't speak was a frustrating and beleaguering experience because "you wonder whether there's a person in there, whether they really exist." A speechless body that occupies the classroom poses obvious problems to assimilation practices.

Moreover, the legend of a white European Buenos Aires has led to an exaggerated perception of immigrant numbers, since any non-European appearance is thought to come from elsewhere (Guano, 2004). It is noteworthy that one of the most xenophobic periodicals to have received public attention over the past decade demonized the immigrants as a "silent invasion" (quoted from the title of an article in the rightwing magazine *La Primera*, 2000). It is as though their "invasion" were all the more invasive for the "silent" manner in which it was accomplished, a menace made menacing for its imperceptibility. Certain anthropologists have observed a discursive confusion between immigrant and Argentine populations in public spaces and events such as soccer matches. Alejandro Grimson (2006) suggests that Bolivian immigrants are socially considered "cabecitas negras" – a racialized term designating the Argentine lower classes – while Argentine citizens with Andean *altiplano* ancestry or of Bolivian parentage are socially considered as though they were Bolivians (Grimson, 2006, p. 78). In Grimson's view, this racialized confusion of migrant nationals with foreigners accounts for the widespread misperception that the percentage of neighboring immigrants has drastically increased over the past decades. This might also explain why *La Primera* portrayed the immigrants as a kind of ghostly tidal wave, a surreptitiously "silent invasion" into the Buenos Aires job market and slums. Like the indigenous peoples of the north-eastern and southern provinces, and like the "cross-bred" *gaucho* that haunted Sarmiento to violent folly, these immigrants and non-immigrants alike are experienced as phantoms of some intangible yet

repugnant sphere that has always hovered obscurely on the outskirts of the Argentine imaginary. They are a secretive and speechless non-entity *en masse*, a confoundingly imperceptible presence that is foreign and yet all-too-familiar.

This racialized familiarity was precisely the logic deployed by the administration of the MNI to justify the exclusion of Latin American immigrants from its narrative. In an interview in 2005, the late founder of the museum explained that they were not and should not be present in the museum because Argentines do not really consider them immigrants per se, since many Argentine nationals in the northern provinces looked similar [*"gualitos"*] to Bolivian or Paraguayan immigrants. Moreover, he sited their supposedly inexpressive nature as an indication of their presumed desire to remain absent from the museum's story. Finally, he pointed to their visibly non-European ancestry as the overdetermining factor in their identification: at the end of the day, they all return to their native origins: "*se vuelven indios*":

"They [inmigrantes limítrofes] are naturally discreet peoples, who don't like to reveal themselves [...] But curiously, on the day of the Fiesta de la Virgen, they play the quena [traditional Andean guitar], they put on masks and they dance. They return to being Indians [se vuelven indios!]".^{xi}

Having non-European ancestry seems to disqualify one from immigrant status, above and beyond the reglements of national borders. According to this logic, an "immigrant" is by definition European, a "citizen" of the *crizol* destined for progress. Meanwhile, any indigenous ancestry points the Latin American migrant away from symbolic citizenship, back towards the silent dead-end of the earth. The word used by the MNI director is significant here. *Volverse* means to become again, to return to a prior point, or simply to turn. Its path is not linear, but circuitous and regressive. Its movement undercuts and undoes the step taken before it suggesting the impossibility of aggregation, and a sense of time that is circular rather than historical. While the MNI director may not have laden his word-choice with such intentions, his statement reflects the frontiers of citizenship underlying the museum's choice of immigrants, and the Constitution's favoritism. In the eyes of the nation, not all immigrants are created equal. The frontier between citizen and outsider is crafted along paradoxical lines. Like

Sarmiento's nation-state, the museum must silence the Americas so as to exist as European; it must eradicate this private "non-presence" from its memory in order to publicly affirm a fragile citizenship in the world order. Today, as Buenos Aires is visually inundated by the very faces Argentinean history claims to have obliterated, Capital elites are forced to wonder why "the one who disappeared appears still to be *there*" and whether "the cadaver is perhaps not as dead, as simply dead as the conjuration tries to delude us into believing" (Derrida, 1994, p. 97). Time will tell. As the museum attempts to revisit the Republican spirit of Sarmiento, it may well end up invoking the very national ghosts Sarmiento once tried to exorcize.

Conclusion

The "memory-work" polemics that arose in France and other North Atlantic nations in the 1980's and 1990's may have neglected to sufficiently anticipate the vulnerability of such projects to competing political forces. The dramatic rise of national immigration museums does not emerge in a political vacuum, but rather feeds off mounting anxieties about porous borders and unstable national identities. If the "memory boom" at large expresses a need for permanence in a temporally dizzying age (Huyssen, 2003; Todorov, 1995, p. 53) the upsurge in national sites of immigration may express the need for symbolic control over national borders. It is therefore worth reexamining the discourses and ethical pretenses under which such museums are conceived and imagined in different parts of the globe. Here I have offered only two examples, but more cases would provide a stronger basis for comparison in future investigation.

The cases discussed here suggest that, as agents of "public memory," national museums do not necessarily subvert the mechanisms of historical silencing (as in France) and often even sustain and reinforce those mechanisms (as in Argentina). As narratives in their own right, memorials and museums are more selective than the already selective-memories they are intended to safeguard (Ricoeur, 2006). In this light, the production of national narrative might be conceived as a creative destruction of the past. Each memory we enshrine has at some point displaced another, leaving memorial debris in its wake to collect on the roadside of history's labyrinth. As narrative survivors, Argentina's museum and the national myth it glorifies are historical accounts of

that which has not been silenced. Put otherwise, they are material histories unconscious of their own "debris." In attending to the mechanisms of silencing, it is worth pointing out that although Argentina's MNI museum appears flagrantly distressing upon critical ethnographic analysis, it rarely strikes its own visitors as alarming. As Trouillot (1995) has argued, the most dangerous past is that deemed true by consumers of history and memory who do not or *cannot* consider the ideological nature of its historical production. This is what Trouillot, borrowing from Bourdieu, called the "unthinkable." While the MNI museum may represent the only possible myth of immigration that is "thinkable" in hegemonic Argentine history, the French museum indicates a failure to self-consciously attend to the mechanisms of silencing. This paradoxical failure, I have argued, accounts for the unforeseen trap that the French fell into.

As I have discussed the first section of this paper, the French historians' well-meaning intent to found a museum of immigration was problematic on several accounts. The French debate was grounded in historiographical dilemmas of the time that stemmed out of Holocaust and trauma studies, and which posited an ethical responsibility for historians to "cure" the nation's wrongs through a naïve form of "memory-work" (Rousso, 1991). Huyssen (2009) has recently commented on the vulnerability of trauma claims to competing political forces—these forces may feed off the symbolic weight of universally recognized victimhood in ways that make these claims difficult to historicize in their specificity. While the use of Vichy as a prism for the repression of immigrants may have been opportune at the time, it sorely depoliticized the postcolonial situation in which many immigrants found themselves, making their story all the more difficult to render historically. Brushed aside by historians with intellectual stakes in other paradigms of the memory struggle, this post-colonial memory was all the more destructive of their project when it ultimately came back to haunt and literally "embody" the museum. Indeed, the placement of the CNHI museum in an embarrassing national landmark to colonialism has proved an unshakable stigma. The museum currently spends as much energy evading, confronting or apologizing for the colonial building as it does developing solid exhibitions.

While this result was felt by the historians and other curators or activists involved in the project as an unforeseen and unlucky accident, I

would be inclined to disagree. Public memory might be said to operate within what Bourdieu (1996) has called "fields of power." As Bodnar (1992, p.3) has pointed out, public commemorations shape the past in ways that are controversial, often giving rise to "struggles for supremacy" between competing political actors and ideals. The academic struggle amongst these historians to control the "field" of public memory, and to garner their victory with a prestigious national landmark, left their project susceptible to abuse or cooptation by other political interests and ideological positions operating in that field. Despite their awareness of history and memory as political tools, these actors overlooked the dynamics of power that conditioned both their own playing field and that of public memory discourse at large.

I have offered one possible explanation for their oversight using Foucault's (1998) critique of the "repressive hypothesis." The historians, I argued, framed their demands for the academic recognition of their field as a struggle of resistance against repressive powers of historical authority and "collective amnesia," while downplaying the real conditions of repression experienced by the immigrants themselves. While these historians produced some of the most rigorous, pioneering and lasting contributions to the history of immigration in France, their use of fashionable "memory" frameworks led them down shakier roads of analysis. In particular, I have highlighted their stark binary between New World memory and Old World amnesia of immigration. In addition to affirming an untenably simplistic opposition between memory and amnesia, this binary makes erroneous Eurocentric assumptions about the role of immigration in the so-called "New World," using as its primary measuring stick the vast industry of immigration scholarship in the U.S. No attempt was made to examine important host countries outside the wealthiest North Atlantic nations. As I have argued in the second part of this paper, the Argentinean example forcefully demonstrates both the limits of that binary and the dangers of an unbridled faith in national "memory-work" as an antidote to the repression of immigrants. Had the creators of the French museum examined cases outside their immediate purview, they might have entered into their project with more caution.

Finally, while the two cases I have presented illustrate some contemporary political uses and abuses of diaspora memory sites, they also point to the mutually constitutive nature of mem-

ory and forgetting. If this symbiotic relationship should make us wary of "memory-work," it also leaves room for the unexpected resurgence of memory within spaces of oblivion. While the colonial question was marginalized by French immigration historians, their own silence unintentionally contributed to the accidental predominance of that question in the museum today. Likewise, a new and visible generation of regional immigrants in Buenos Aires are beginning to break the silence, demanding recognition and rights in ways that render the old myth increasingly unsustainable. As Andreas Huyssen put it, "no matter how much the museum, consciously or unconsciously, produces and affirms the symbolic order, there is always a surplus of meaning that exceeds ideological boundaries" (Huyssen, 1995, p 15.) This works both ways. If memory and oblivion are historical processes of negotiation, blindspots within spaces of memory can provide unexpected opportunities for the recreation of historical narratives along strikingly new lines.

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i By 1930, immigration flows were higher in France than in the United States. For more on this subject, see: Horowitz, D., "Immigration and Group relations in France and America", in Noiriel, G., Horowitz, D., *Immigrants in two democracies : French and American experience*, New York University Press: 1992, p.6.

ii Foucault's text may be neglected in discussions on collective memory due to its treatment of sexuality—which is seen as unrelated to memory issues, and which tends to be associated with individual rather than collective functions. However, Foucault is discussing a collective rather than an individual phenomenon. I am hardly trying to suggest a link here between sexuality and memory (though doing so is not unthinkable in principle). Rather I draw on Foucault's critique of the misguided ends to which collective notions of "repression" can be employed. It of course quite possible for historians to cogently incorporate psychoanalytic tools into their research (see for example LaCapra).

iii Foucault (1976, V.1) interrogates a widespread hypothesis according to which we have "repressed" our sexuality from Victorian times onward, rendering it unthinkable, unspeakable, and impracticable. This hypothesis, he notes, enables us to define our so-called "sexual liberation" as a "revolution" against a repressive regime (p. 47-8, my translation).

iv Noiriel and his colleagues were not consulted in the choice of this building in 2005, but neither did they think it posed any significant challenge to their project (based on my own interviews in 2005). Noiriel and seven other members of the board demissioned in May 2007, as a statement of protest against President Sarkozy's anti-immigrant policies, and possibly as well from a sense that their project had become impossible. For more on the colonial Palais, see: Jarrassé, D., "The Former Palace of the Colonies: the burden of heritage," *Museum International*, 59 (1-2), pp. 56-65.

v Significantly, the *Museo Nacional de la Inmigración* is fully dependent on the *Dirección de Migraciones*. Despite its name, the Museo bears no official status as such, but rather is considered a "program"—the "*Programa complejo museo de la inmigración*." At this time, it has no director, but rather a "coordinator" hired by the *Director de migraciones*.

vi Based on interviews with "neighboring immigrants" waiting in line at the *Dirección* over the course of three visits, as well as other immigrants throughout Buenos Aires. Also based on estimations of the museum director, Jorge Ochoa, and on unpublished statistics gathered by MNI staff Eduardo Silva (Coordinator of MNI database) and Daniel Segouia (Operator of database) concerning the number of visitors who come for documentation about their European ancestry.

vii There are currently no reliable, updated statistics confirming the exact demographic breakdown the population in Retiro's *villa*. This demographic composition is an estimate, affirmed by my immigrant and non-immigrant interviewees alike. Numerous social support systems and cultural celebrations attest to a vibrant immigrant cultural life in Retiro's *villa 31* and *31bis*. But the absence of reliable demographic statistics for Retiro's *villas* leaves open the possibility affirmed by Guano (2004) that some or many of these "immigrants" are in fact Argentine migrants from the northern interior provinces.

viii All citations of Sarmiento in this paper are my translations.

ix Sarmiento's *gaucho* is intimately wed to the savage "fatalism" of nature that was thought to mar the indigenous character. Though Sarmiento generally placed indigenous peoples at the bottom of the evolutionary scale, he considered Argentina's eastern Guaraní and southern Mapuche to be particularly close to animals, a kind of prehistoric race that was uncivilizable (Helg 1990).

x Based on interviews and participant observation conducted in various districts of Buenos Aires over the course of July and August, 2008.

xi Ochoa, J., [Director of MNI], transcribed personal interview, MNI, Buenos Aires, December 2005.