



Religious instruction to child prisoners 1879. Archivo General de la Nación.



Mauricio Rugendas, The Kidnapping of the captive, 1845.



Military campaigns in north patagonia 1878/1879. Archivo General de la Nación.

The “Conquest of the desert” refers to the military campaigns (1878-1885) of occupation of northern Patagonia and the subjugation of its indigenous peoples to Argentina’s nation-state-territory. As a result, Argentina emerged as a successful modern country different to every other country in Latin America as it presumed to be a savage-free land. Since then, the Argentineans considered themselves “descendants of the ships”. The Conquest in itself was repeatedly celebrated and taught as an epic event while the indigenous survivors were silenced and denied.

The indigenous organizations of the 1980s denounced the “Conquest of the desert” as genocide. Since then, historical studies have shown the development of the campaigns from the indigenous viewpoint.

WE ANALYZE THIS EVENT AS **GENOCIDE** AND PERIODIZE IT IN THREE MOMENTS:

1) **MANUFACTURING OF AN INTERNAL OTHER** (1870-1878).

During this period the historical relations between indigenous groups as sovereigns and the states (national and provincial) that were characterized by a long list of pacts, treaties and agreements were betrayed by the nation state. The indigenous peoples were portrayed as savages of the desert.

2) **THE MILITARY OCCUPATION AND MASSIVE VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS PEOPLE** (1878-1888).

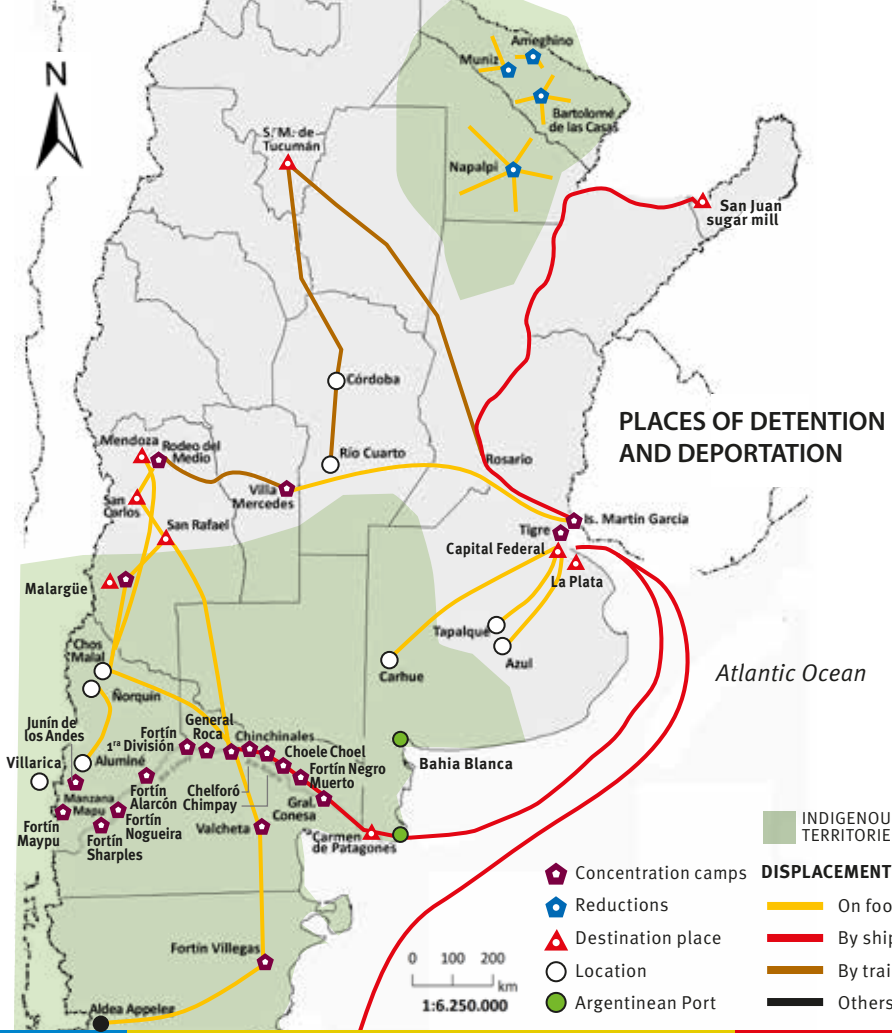
For a decade the army settled concentration camps from where they deported at least 10.000 persons. They were distributed according to gender, age and

on demand towards different economic poles of the country. Families were dismembered and many lost their names and identities. Once the survivors were released within Patagonia, they became intruders in their own territories.

3) **SILENCING THE PAST** (1888-1983).

Genocide succeeded in its main purpose to deny entity, identity and agency to indigenous survivors. As well as in the construction of a white, European like society.





Surrender of Chief Millaman 11/28/1882. Archivo General de la Nación.

After the “Conquest of the desert” Patagonia was incorporated to the national state. The lands were distributed among Land Companies and (European) immigrant settlers. The indigenous survivors started long term fights and demands to receive land. Struggles that still continue. In general, Argentina’s society considers them a fraud, foreign or a minority. The internal borders of the national state ended after the military campaigns but the menace of the desert -as a metaphor of the savage’s territory- still haunts the nation’s constituency.



THE DESERT WITHIN

INDIGENOUS GENOCIDE AS A STRUCTURING EVENT IN ARGENTINA

Walter Delrio • Pilar Perez

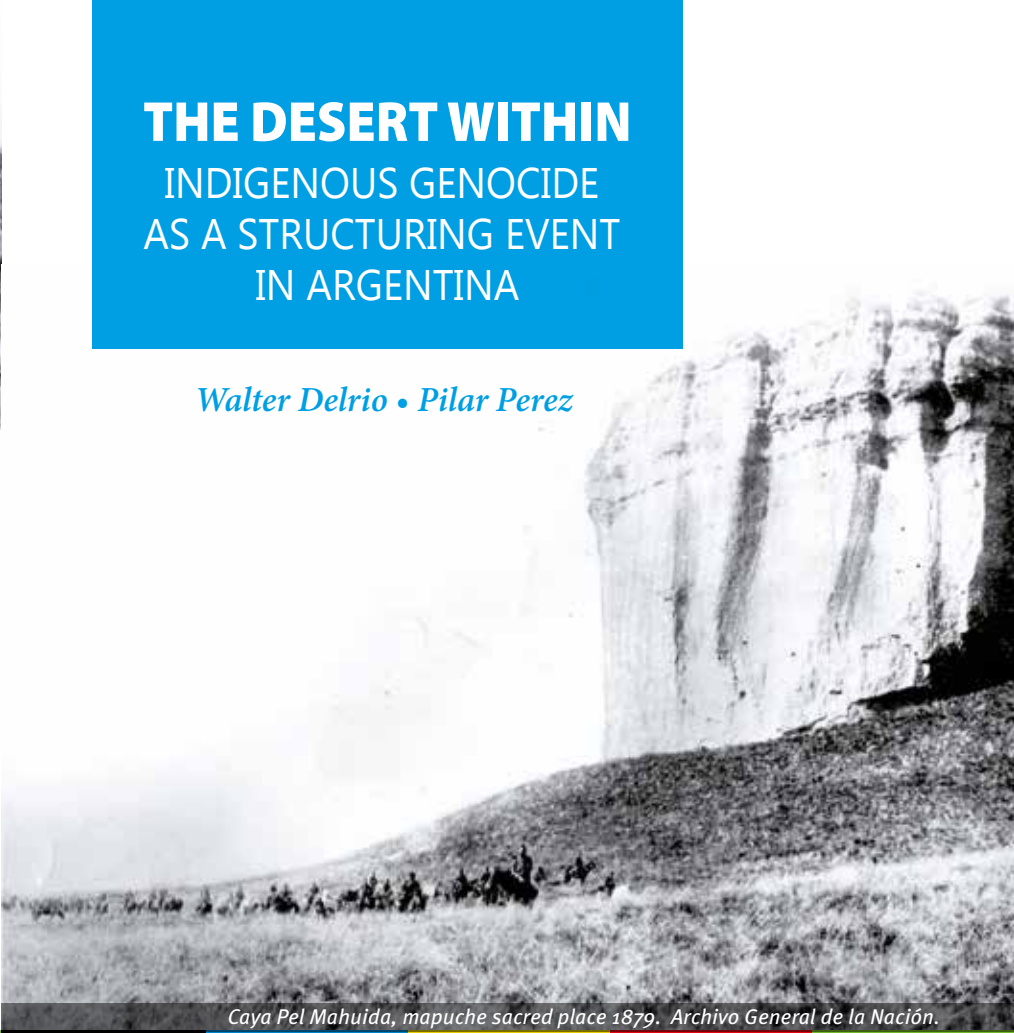


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Caya Pel Mahuida, mapuche sacred place 1879. Archivo General de la Nación.