

Uncivilised Civilisations: Reflections on Brazil and Comparative History

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Abstract: Drawing on archaeological findings about individuals of the archaic Brazilian ‘hunter-gatherer’ societies and on the life and work of a contemporary Brazilian artist, Paulo Nazareth, this paper argues for the use of a *timeless history* in which chronological historical time will be less important in sociological comparative analyses. There are processes that belong to a significant past which still inform how societies imagine themselves and which cannot be understood from the established perspective of a divided human and natural history. These processes can only be interpreted by overcoming disciplinary constraints and by assuming that history goes beyond the systematic organisation of the facts and historical evidence. There are aspects of American archaic history that are not only completely unknown to us, but they also inform societal practices and imaginary significations of the past, present and future in many New World societies. The paper critically discusses historical-sociological literature on Brazil. Based on a number of perspectives developed in the fields of philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and archaeology, it will be argued that the division of the world into ‘civilisation’ and ‘other simplistic social-historical-economical-cultural groups’ is incompatible with a comparative historical sociology that does not aim to hierarchise different societal forms.

Key Words: Brazil — Civilisations — History — Archaeology — Comparative Sociology — Imaginary Significations

Preamble: Introducing Luzia, Burial 26, and Paulo Nazareth

In this preamble I would like to introduce three ‘individuals’ that have inspired the paper: Luzia, Burial 26, and Paulo Nazareth. The first is a woman who was probably 20 years old when she died around 11,500 years BP; the second, a ‘young adult male’ who became known as Burial 26 and has come to

be regarded as the oldest case of decapitation in the New World (Strauss et al. 2015); and the third is also a young man who is an artist very much alive and active. They are all beings from what became known as Brazil.

Luzia was found in 1975 in Lapa Vermelha (Lagoa Santa, Minas Gerais). Luzia has impacted on the archaeological world not only because she is amongst the oldest human beings found in America, but because of her physical characteristics. The application of craniometric measurements has shown that Luzia did not share the same characteristics as other mongoloid Amerindian 'pre-historical' individuals found in America. She is probably a descendant of the first *Homo sapiens* that left Africa and possibly took two different routes: one in the direction of Australia and other in the direction of America (Prouss 2006). Luzia was part of an 'Australoid' or 'Negroid' ancestry that migrated to the area where she was found around 15,000 years BP, at the end of the Palaeolithic. In the last few decades seventeen younger individuals of the earlier Holocene period sharing similar characteristics with Luzia were found in the same area of Brazil.

In 2007, Burial 26 was found in the same part of Brazil where they found Luzia, but in a different archaeological site called *Lapa do Santo*. He lived around 9,000 BP. He was found among what was supposed to be a very simple, primitive group, but his death was probably part of a set of 'mortuary rituals involving a strong component of manipulation of the body' (Strauss et al. 2015, p. 25). Archaeologists have described Burial 26 and what this find represents in the following way:

Cut marks with a v-shaped profile were observed in the mandible and sixth cervical vertebra. The right hand was amputated and laid over the left side of the face with distal phalanges pointing to the chin and the left hand was amputated and laid over the right side of the face with distal phalanges pointing to the forehead. Strontium analysis comparing Burial 26's isotopic signature to other specimens from Lapa do Santo suggests this was a local member of the group. Therefore, we suggest a ritualized decapitation instead of trophy-taking, testifying for the sophistication of mortuary rituals among hunter-gatherers in the Americas during the early Archaic period. In the apparent absence of wealth goods or elaborated architecture, Lapa do Santo's inhabitants seemed to use the human body to express their cosmological principles regarding death (Strauss et al. 2015, p. 1).

Burial 26 challenges many assumed ideas. It shows that ritual decapitation was probably developed earlier in Mesoamerica than in Andean Amerindian civilisations. It shows too that there are reasons to believe that other early Holocene forms of decapitation also existed among indigenous groups outside Mesoamerica. The fact that Burial 26 shared the same characteristics as other individuals found in the same area has led archaeologists to challenge

what they regard as the 'Eurocentric' assumption that decapitation needs to be understood in the context of inter-group violence (Strauss et al. 2015, p. 22).

The third person, Paulo Nazareth, is a contemporary Brazilian artist. He is very much alive, both physically and in the artworks he continues to produce. Nazareth uses his own body and image to express his views about the world. As is the case with many Brazilians, he has indigenous, African, and European ancestors in his family. He says that he knows everything about the Italian roots of the family but has got no information about the indigenous and African ones, apart from the fact that there was a 'very black man' in his father's family, and his mother's mother was from a *Krenak* indigenous 'tribe' and was sent to a sanatorium because she did not have the 'appropriate behaviour to live in society' (Nazareth 2012). As part of his recently finished walking project, *News from America*, he has developed a subproject called *Cara de Índio* (indigenous face) in which he aimed to travel through America—from the South to the North—taking pictures of himself side by side with 'urban indigenous individuals' in order to compare his face with those he encountered and to see what they share in common. Since 2013 Paulo Nazareth has been developing a five-year project called *Notes from Africa*. This too is a walking project, in which he walks from the south to the north of Africa inquiring about shared histories and pursuing clues that could help him to look back at his own past. He wants to find his home in Africa and find Africa in his home. As I see it, in both projects Paulo Nazareth tries to find his place in the world by seeking, through artistic means, what could be a *timeless historical* search for himself/others, including many other bodies that belong to the archaeological world.

Introduction

This essay is concerned with modern Brazilian societal self-understanding and what we can take from it for discussion about historical-comparative approaches. It departs from the assumption that most of the historical-sociological interpretations about Brazil are valid only if those three subjects introduced in the preamble are ignored. It will be argued that it is not possible to understand the dilemmas of the Brazilian trajectory of modernity without taking them in account. In more general terms, Luzia, Burial 26, and Paulo Nazareth challenge current historical approaches by demanding a different conception of human history. The question that they pose to us can be formulated as follows: why does historical sociology based on large-scale processes still work with histories that 'we know', using these to establish the main parameters with which to comparatively analyse histories that we 'don't know' almost anything about? This question is a way to address the issue of the possibility of a comparative interpretation that does not construct analytical hierarchies derived from the chronological sequences built into established historical narratives. In this essay, I would like to suggest that a historical-comparative

approach that aims to address on equal terms what Luzia, Burial 26, and Paulo Nazareth represent something that the modern Brazilian self-understanding needs to remind itself all the time. Firstly, that a grand narrative based on large historical processes can be only partially rescued from the 'abyss of time' in which different kinds of history are merged together (Rossi 1984). Secondly, that there are histories that we do not know anything about and that cannot be grasped by traditional means that still inform the way that human beings imagine how they lived and how they want to live in the present.

The central discussions about time in modernity have their own long histories (e.g. Wagner 2012; Dlamini 2015). I develop the question of time in modernity, but through the idea of *timeless layers and forms of history*, and explore its consequences for the interpretation of different social imaginaries. This social imaginary is taken as a 'trans-objective'/'trans-subjective horizon' (Adams et al. 2015, p. 17) marked by the concatenation of 'known' historical processes and also of things that belong to a past that can only be imagined and created by accepting the challenge of working with a 'fragile' empirical concatenation of evidence. I argue that the impossibility of a systematic organisation of historical social processes does not constitute a barrier for the social imaginary signification of how a society has been making itself and for its absence in a broader comparative approach. The way to accept the challenge and work with it in this essay is by scrutinising interpretations from different fields—such as archaeology, anthropology, sociology, history, and literature. Overcoming disciplinary constraints is a basic step towards a new interpretation of a latent present past.

The Portuguese Jesuit priest António Vieira, who spent most of his life in Brazil in the seventeenth century, constructed the metaphor of societies as either 'marble' or 'myrtle' statues to think about how stable a social structure could be. Guided by a Christian reading of history and the birth of Old World civilisations, he wanted to create parameters for looking at the New World and to establish the role of Christians in the process of spreading civilisation. He saw Brazil and its inhabitants—above all the Tupinambás groups found in the coastal area—as composing a society made of 'myrtle'; as such, it needed to have a 'gardener' to give it a recognisable and constant form. Castro (2011) works with this distinction, highlighting the fact that a marble society, once it is shaped, is complete; it is very continuous because of the natural tenacity of its composition. In contrast, societies that resemble myrtle statues need to be constantly maintained from outside to keep them as they should be. Otherwise they lose their ideal shape and become something completely different from what they were supposed to be. As we will see, this image developed in the seventeenth century, which aimed to compare a society found in America with older civilisations, is still somehow implicit in modern comparative-historical sociology. This paper will reach its aim if in the end this way of comparing different societal processes is challenged.

In the following section of the essay a sketch of some interpretations of the Brazilian trajectory of modernity along with the historical assumptions accompanying them will be offered. In the second section, an alternative perspective for a comparative analysis will be developed. The reader is free to read this section as a small contribution to the probably exhausted discussion about how to compare people with history and people without history. However, I would like to make the claim that this is not the main point that this section addresses. This section aims to show the advantages of a *timeless historical* perspective that challenges the place of chronological time for historical-sociological comparison and at the same time makes a claim for the incorporation of different forms of knowledge for the interpretation of the past that we don't know. The adjective *timeless* means, in this paper, a strong historical perspective that is less concerned about the chronological dimension of past time and more concerned about the interpretation that human beings give to events of the past at specific points in history. This timeless perspective does not necessarily go against Le Goff's (2015) position on the usefulness of periodisation in history if we are able to work within a framework in which different periodisations could be present. This essay is an attempt to offer clues to find a way out for the problem of how to compare what 'we know'—the Judeo-Christian and secularised versions of the history of the Old World civilisations that can be compared with other 'marble' societies—with what we don't know, that is, the history of uncivilised civilisations that still informs our modern self-understanding.

Interpretations of Brazil

The literature that brings social science and history together to offer interpretations about modern Brazil can be sketched as follows. There are studies that highlight the fragmentary aspect of Brazilian development, which is widely found in political science and also in some modernisation theories (Ianni 1984; Weffort 1978; O'Donnell 1972). According to the most optimistic interpretations in this field, Brazilian institutions have improved in some fields but need to be truly reconstructed to reach an ideal point in a future that was already reached somewhere else. More recently, some studies that highlight the development of new forms of democratic life have emerged. These important works show exemplary institutional innovations found in the country (e.g. Avritzer 2009; Abbers and Keck 2013) and how they have challenged the way that democracy needs to be conceived. It has been convincingly shown that new institutional designs based on a strong conception of popular participation can improve democratic institutions and public administration. Nonetheless, even in this more sociologically nuanced reading, there is no place for an interpretation of how historical entanglements could have had a positive institutional impact and be seen as a manifestation of an always-present history.

According to a somewhat deterministic approach that emerged with the proclamation of the Republic of Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century, there is a Brazilian cultural tradition of Ibero-European origin that shapes the tropical encounters through which modern and non-modern ways of life are connected (Romero 1878, 1901; Nabuco 1999). In its later development, in the middle of the twentieth century, the main concepts underpinning this explanation are: the notion of a 'racial democracy' in which the racial frontiers between groups became very porous (Freyre 1946); the 'cordiality' of the Portuguese as the main factor that explains the ability of Brazilians to compose a new societal structure (Holanda 1995); the idea of 'patrimonialism' as developed by Faoro (1958) to designate a structure for the organization of political and economic power in Portugal and its implementation in Brazil. Morse's (1982) work on the 'Thomistic' roots of Medieval Europe and its adoption in the Ibero-imperial world has played an important role in promoting an understanding of Brazil and Latin America in accordance with its main cultural heritage. The mixture of cultures and popular ways of negotiation and solving problems without the use of legal-rational means as it appears later in DaMatta's (1991) approach should also be put into this group. Very recently, and much influenced by some post-colonial approaches, the issue has been revitalised in studies of racial inequalities and their epistemic origins/consequences (e.g. Costa 2006). The main focus of those studies is directed at the interpretation of racial inequalities in Brazil as a non-racial democratic society. The colonial past is the main historical causal variable that explains the development of modern forms of exclusion in the country.

Another perspective works with the idea of modernity as something floating above Brazilian heads. This perspective normally asserts that Brazil and other countries of Latin America and the Caribbean are modern societies and became so at the same time that modernity emerged in Europe. However, compared to an idealised Europe, in this part of the world modern development has never been able to build strong states; the system of domination never became legitimate; economic growth was not accompanied by developmental innovation; society is not cohesive enough; patterns of freedom, solidarity and equality were never fully attained to allow individuals to enjoy true modern liberty (e.g. Mann 2006; Domingues 2009; Centeno 2002). The position that better describes the region is that of an 'enclave' economy/polity that occupies the periphery or semi-periphery of modernity (Cardoso and Faletto 1979; Domingues 2009). Sousa (2000, p. 157) calls this perspective the 'sociology of inauthenticity' in which 'western development is not only inaccurately perceived in many of its fundamental dimensions, but also seen as unique, absolute, and free of contractual principles'. This perspective fails, firstly, because it subsumes all the societal epistemic problems into the 'political' and 'economic' *problématiques* of modernity' (Wager 2012), and, secondly, because it does not offer room for the analysis of the historical nuances

of the formation of a societal self-understanding that goes beyond the mainstream division of society between masses and ruling elites or classes; between ways of 'being modern' and 'not being modern'; between so called 'centres' and 'peripheries' of the world. Those interpretations lack an understanding of the process that constituted modernity. By locating this process in an isolated Europe, they deny agency to other parts of the world (Mota 2015).

A final perspective is offered by Darcy Ribeiro in his systematic study that appears in the form of a book series called *Studies of the Anthropology of Civilisation*, which was developed over the second half of the twentieth century in five volumes. As he put it, this approach is based on the study of world civilisations and other 'social-historical-economic-cultural' formations found in different parts of the world (Ribeiro 1988, 1975). He aimed to offer a historically-informed critical contribution that would make it possible to understand and to 'solve' problems found in 'underdeveloped' countries. Ribeiro develops his analysis by trying to show how 'fragile' societal formations that were dominated by European powers have experienced dilemmas that come from the historical transformations of western civilisation. In his book *The Brazilian People: The Formation and the Meaning of Brazil*, Ribeiro tries to develop what he himself described as his most difficult and challenging task: to answer, through a revision of the Brazilian past, the question 'why hadn't Brazil turned out right yet?' (Ribeiro 2000, p. xiv). The past that he finds is composed of a 'myriad of indigenous groups' that became connected with a European civilisational matrix and with other 'myriad tribal black groups'—in Ribeiro's terms. In his view, the dilemma confronting those uncountable small groups is: become civilised or die (Ribeiro 1975, 2000, 2014).¹

Ribeiro's approach is the only available trans-disciplinary study that offers a comparative perspective on Brazil and other civilisations in the world. However, his perspective does not offer a reasonable interpretative framework in which it would be possible to insert the problems that Luzia, Burial 26, and Paulo Nazareth represent. The limitation of his analysis goes beyond the problem of trying to understand civilisation, too much tied to a Marxian dialectical reading of history as the motor of the civilisational process, an approach that is the opposite to Eisenstadt's Weberian civilisational understanding. The main problem of the framework is that it relies too much on the idea that history begins elsewhere in Europe and would probably end in the same place too. As with the other three perspectives presented above, in Ribeiro's cultural and civilisational approach, Luzia and Burial 26 are part of the history of the earth or natural history, which means a history that does not belong to contemporary human affairs; and against everything that he is trying to express, Paulo Nazareth would be positively seen as the ideal type of what the Brazilian people are, a people assumed to be equally formed by different trans-subjective historical backgrounds. I see enough reason to not regard any of those possible pictures as good ones. Luzia and Burial 26 problematise the

main narrative about the history of human life in America by showing the limitation of failing to attribute 'complexity' to indigenous groups that inhabited the region long before 1492. Paulo Nazareth shows through aesthetic means, how *Luzia* and *Burial 26* belong not only to natural history; they are trans-subjective subjects whose composition and ways of entanglement cannot be accounted for by historical sociology as it has been developed.

The general background discussion that guides the argument developed in this paper is the 'civilisational analysis' and 'multiple modernities' approaches as developed by S. N. Eisenstadt. These approaches have a strong conceptual articulation and well-grounded empirical support that comes from a singular interpretation of Asian and European civilisational history, with some clues about what has happened in America (Eisenstadt 2002; Smith 2010). In my view, however, employing this perspective to understand America leads us firstly into a discussion about how to categorise the different societal formations found in the area. This elementary step could be seen as an example of what Latour (2013, pp. 49-54) calls an epistemological mistake or a mistake of first degree. Those mistakes belong to the definition of a category of knowledge. It predisposes those entering into a discussion of the categorisation of a historical societal formation to neglect to identify how such formations have come into being and how they are perceived. Thus, though the civilisational perspective offers the possibility of developing critical perspectives in relation to what we 'know' about modernity by addressing it in terms of its plurality, it has got some limitations when one faces the problem of how to analyse a history that cannot be systematised in the same way as Asian and European history. The more general problems of this perspective have already been well discussed (see Wagner 2011; Mota and Delanty 2015; for a detailed account, see Delanty in this volume). In addition, concerning the core argument of this paper, there is a need to be more emphatic about the chronological problems of any civilisational approach, and of Eisenstadt's in particular. It is so because in civilisational history the point of departure for a societal group to be regarded as a civilisation is when it becomes somehow stable and continuous. However, there were civilisations that probably have never taken that form. That is why it is a particular problem to understand the place of America in those analyses. There is little purpose in pursuing arguments about how many Americas actually exist in the New World as this has been discussed in articles by Eisenstadt (2002) and Smith (2010).² By inserting *Luzia*, '*Burial 26*', and Paulo Nazareth into this framework some points regarding not only the interpretation of the Brazilian trajectory of modernity, but also a sociological imaginary signification of modernity composed by multiple forms of civilisation, can be made. I would like to claim that this signification goes beyond what can be attained by the systematic organisation of historical evidence within a completely alien chronology.

A Way to Historicise What We do Not Know

Historical and sociological thought did not have much problem in abandoning the idea that history is made by a concatenation of necessary events and that the formula *historia magistra vitae* could be followed as a way to solve societal problems (Koselleck 2004). Abandoning the Judeo-Christian chronological time frame as guiding principle for human history has not proceeded with similar ease at all. Smail (2008) makes a strong case for the junction of what he calls the ‘recent past’—which stretches out to no more than 6,000 years ago, but with the emphasis on the last 3,000 years—and the ‘deep past’—in which everything that does not traditionally belong to the idea of human pre-history would be put in the frame. In my view, what he proposes is in a sense similar to the timeless historical frame developed in this essay. Smail is a historian very much interested in finding the ‘beginning of everything’ concerning man in a historical perspective that is not based on the historicisation of the ‘Christian Eden’. He says that his ‘purpose is served if we can acknowledge that the short chronology is indeed a contrivance, that history need not be so limited in its span, and that something we can and should call “history” begins a long time ago in Africa’ (Smail 2008, p. 15). Without sharing the search for ‘the beginning’ of human history—or for the beginning of any historical understanding—I support Smail’s appeal for the renunciation of the idea that history needs to concern only the Judeo-Christian temporality of time past, present, and future.³ It implies questioning the chronological perspective taken for granted in the analysis of modern history.

Chakrabarty (2009, 2014) has been developing an analysis of the conjunction in the Anthropocene of the previous epistemic separation between ‘Natural History’ and ‘Human History’ (for more about the Anthropocene debate see Straume in this volume). Departing from the proposition that human beings have become a geological force and have as a consequence erased the distinction between natural and human history, Chakrabarty (2009, p. 201) wants to work with the question of ‘how does the crisis of climate change appeal to our sense of human universals while challenging at the same time our capacity for historical understanding?’ The feeling of a ‘catastrophe’ that is made collectively by humans as a species acting as a geological historical force brought about this sense of universals. For the purposes of this paper, Chakrabarty’s contribution should be seen as one that tries to show, from a different perspective, how different layers of human history that have been largely ignored can be brought together to think about transformations of the present and of the future. Conventional ways of telling history need to be challenged because of a new interpretation of an important transformation that came along with the modern breakthroughs—the Anthropocene. As he shows, climate change debates have deeply transformed the sense of historical time. I believe there is a need to expand the implications of the transformation of historical time to think about a comparative sociology that can accommodate *timeless* layers and forms of history that still inform how specific societal self-understandings

are interpreted. The historical time that human beings are immersed in is *timeless* because it cannot be fully grasped in any available systematic narrative of human history. A history in which all histories become merged together in an abysmal time frame that can only be touched by the meaning that human beings give to it in specific scenarios. It is *time-without-time*.⁴

It seems that archaeologists have found a solution for the problem of how to work with the passage of time in a less chronological manner. It is an interesting example to help me illustrate the point. In the late 1940's and 1950's the chemist Willard Frank Libby started to publicise his discoveries about the possibility of dating organic materials by the use of radio carbon.⁵ To create a universal parameter for this new dating system, it was determined that the year 1950 would be regarded as 'the Present' and the date of materials would be expressed by how many years 'Before the Present' (BP) they can be traced back. For some, radio carbon dating was expected to have much the same impact on modern cosmology as the Copernican revolution (Taylor 1987). However, aside from its impact on archaeology, there was no broader impact, no revolution had happened. For those whom expected it, this frustrated the proposal that the use of the radiocarbon as a dating system would create a new meaning for historical finds by the use of a secular timescale. Without making a case for the expansion of the radio carbon dating system, by this example I would like to suggest that the adoption of a less chronological time frame for historical comparison would probably also lead us to more secular interpretations of the passage of time. Following Smail's and Chakrabarty's arguments, it could also be a way to conceptually unify natural and human history by erasing the idea of a chronological history.

With these previous remarks in mind, I would like to go back to what it represents for an interpretation of Brazil and for historical-comparative analysis. There were civilisations that existed and are still somewhat alive in this world that cannot be understood by the use of traditional historical sociological means. If the appearance of Luzia and Burial 26 mean something to history—not only to Brazilian cultural heritage—it is because the fact of our not knowing their past formation and ways of societal integration is not an impediment for their development and memory in the present. Paulo Nazareth and his search for a still-remembered past that is still alive shows the importance of these 'bodies' for the modern Brazilian societal self-understanding. To be able to say something about it we need to accept the challenge of talking about what we will never be sure of. Sociological comparative analysis needs to accept that the imaginary constitution of any society goes much beyond what can be proven by a systematic organisation of historical facts.

It is worth going back to the distinction introduced at the beginning of the article between marble and myrtle societies to understand the point. The first Jesuit missionaries saw the Tupinambás, found in Brazil when the Europeans arrived, as a very inconstant group, especially when it came to religious beliefs.

For them, people could forget God's laws with the same facility that they have accepted and swore under oath before. Based on historical research about the interpretation that the missionaries constructed about the Tupinambás and on an ethnographic study made at the end of the twentieth century among the *Araweté*,⁶ the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro tries to understand what could be the 'constancy' of the 'inconstant savage soul' (Castro 2011). He discusses how the image of culture and society that is predominant in modern western thought has set the terms for our way of understanding what this apparent inconstancy means. He says

we believe that the being of a society is its perseverance: memory and tradition are the identitarian marble out of which culture is made. [...] But, perhaps, for societies whose foundation (or lack thereof) is the relationship to others, and not self-identity, none of this makes the least sense (Castro 2011, p. 17).

Castro gives a new direction to Fernandes's 1951 thesis concerning the function of war among the Tupinambás (Fernandes 2006). In Fernandes's approach, the war among the Tupinambás, which is understood as a social fact, accomplished the function of perpetuating a strong social system of integration. Thus the apparent inconstancy or the lack of historical memory of those societies is in fact part of a structured way of relating themselves to the constantly changing world.

More than the affirmation of a fixed identity, these uncivilised civilisations were constantly altering themselves and by doing so moving and transforming historically through time and space. This aspect should be seen as a characteristic, not only of the Tupinambás, but of many indigenous groups that existed and still exist in America. The documented presence of cannibalism, for example, as a form *per excellence* of societal structuration marks many pre-European American civilisations. Assuming different forms, and understood in a literal and a metaphorical sense, cannibalism is still a very important part of many American societies' ways of thought, as the Colombian philosopher Adolfo Chaparro Amaya shows (Chaparro Amaya 2013). This is a practice that connects different spatialities with the past, the present and the future of many of these civilisations. It is part of the 'essential ontological incompleteness' of these civilisations that they saw their relationship toward the other as the way through which they construct themselves. Here the other is not a mirror; rather, they recognise themselves in the other and the other in themselves. 'Constancy and inconstancy, openness and obstinacy, were two faces of a single truth: the absolute necessity of an exterior relation, in other words, the unthinkable of a world without Others' (Castro 2011, p. 72-73).

To understand the point we need to see how war, revenge, and cannibalism constituted a key aspect of 'pre-European' social integration and a way to compose their history. Among the Tupinambás, the captive of a war that would be killed and eaten by members of an enemy group needed to be

integrated among them through certain rituals before his death. One of those rituals featured a long dialogue between the killer and the victim. In these dialogues it seemed like the *victim* was the *killer* and the *killer* the *victim*. Missionaries and writers that recorded this fact could not understand this channel of communication because it escaped the Europeans that this dialogue is the way that past and present are connected in a meaningful scheme (Castro 2011; Chaparro Amaya 2013). '[T]he present is the time of justification, that is, of vengeance—of the affirmation of time' (Castro 2011, pp. 68-69). The dialogues were about memory, history, and about how to think their world. As becomes evident from reading Ribeiro's (2014) *Maira*, indigenous groups have found a way to build their history through the constant organisation of facts whose meaning is not structured by any form of chronological account.

Comparative approaches that deal with the world as we find it today but want to look back to the past, need to face the fact that the uses of traditional historical chronology are very limited when it comes to comparing different past trajectories that still inform how societies see themselves. We cannot understand the way that the Tupinambás and other extinguished indigenous American societies lived and how they remain important if the only legitimate narrative is the one based on the chronological systematic organisation of well-connected historical facts. For those societies, new archaeological discoveries linked with historical-sociological and philosophical interpretations constitute a way of making them comparable in a broader sense.

In the scope of interpretative historical comparison, the fact that the Portuguese arrived in Brazil in 1500 (the Tupinambás certainly did not know that that was the time when they arrived) is less important than knowing what kind of relation between different world interpretations became possible through that event. It is possible to do this by interpretatively reconstructing a meaningful past that is based on archaeological materials, on literary narratives, and on present ethnological studies that reveal how history has been told and how it has consolidated itself over generations. Going back to the background discussion of the study of societies according to their civilisational paths, a possibly fruitful way to make civilisational analyses able to say something about those societies is to leave behind the western assumption that an understanding of 'culture' can best be reached through the observation of long-lasting institutions. Burial 26 opens up the discussion of the existence of forms of solidarity that could enhance more complex forms of communitarian cohesion among the so called American 'hunter-gatherer tribes'. I do not see any reason to disregard the hypothesis that Burial 26 is evidence of an earlier form of cannibal ritualistic death among American civilisations.

Concluding Remarks

As a product of the first archaeological research carried out at the end of the nineteenth century in Brazil, some 'beautiful' pottery and stone sculptures

were found in a part of the Amazon area. Those artefacts were not accepted as human work done by natives. They were regarded as too primitive to produce anything like that. The explanation given at that moment was that Phoenician or Greek civilizations had come to this area long before the Portuguese and brought those works (Prous 2006). This allegory, which sounds comical to most of us, can help me in making some concluding observations.

Human sciences, including history and archaeology, normally work with hypotheses about how the past looks in order to find clues for resolving a problem/dilemma of the present. For modern minds the mostly plausible explanation for a past event are the ones based on a very systematic organisation of historical bodies of evidence. In general, there are three basic conditions for the construction of a scientifically plausible argument: it cannot be anachronistic, which means that a causal fact always needs to happen before that which is in need of explanation; a reliable source for the empirical material needs to sustain the argument; and the context needs to be well covered, with a systematic use of all the information available about it. In this paper, there was no intention of challenging the first two of those basic conditions, but I tried to strongly challenge the last one. Archaeological and other forms of 'unsystematic sources' that reveal aspects of the deep history of human beings should impact on current historical interpretations and on the interpretation/ imagination of the past. It is legitimate to recreate an extinct mode of societal articulation based on a 'weak' concatenation of empirical sources as long as by doing so it remains part of the present. It is what puts Paulo Nazareth very close to Luzia and Burial 26. Brazilian civilisational history started long before the Europeans arrived in the sixteenth century and its legacy was so strong that it remains part of present dilemmas. Those three subjects are part of a timeless human history that is composed of different layers of history, each with its own time.

It is not a problem for historical comparison to immerse itself in the timeless abyss of the past if it is done as a way of creating new conceptual frameworks to imagine how still-significant aspects of a societal self-understanding have come into being. Learning from some examples that enable us to describe the Brazilian societal self-understanding as one that is not based on an original self-contained cultural formation, this paper aimed to problematize some assumptions of current comparative historical analysis by making them more open to different historical experiences. In this sense, for civilisational approaches to become a more nuanced paradigm that can account for more processes of this type along with similar ones occurring in Europe and Asia it needs to reflect upon itself and its assumptions. I believe Luzia, Burial 26, and Paulo Nazareth can help us to show how societal processes that we don't know anything about still have this power in the Brazilian social imaginary. This is why they cannot be neglected by comparative historical approaches.

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Notes

- 1 In his novel *Matira*, Ribeiro (2014) [1976] develops what he sees as the dilemma much better than in most scientific accounts. In this book he brings together his personal experience of living with different indigenous groups in Brazil to construct a fictional narrative in which a variety of cosmologies informs the author.
- 2 Smith (2010) complements and revises Eisenstadt's (2002) approach by showing that the archetype of 'two' Americas should be changed for a perspective based on 'four' or maybe 'five' Americas: Canada, United States, Caribbean, Latin America, and the Andean pre-Colombian civilisations.
- 3 As Le Goff (2015: 9) points out, it was not until the eighth century that the division of human history into two periods—before and after the birth of Christ—started to be imposed as a way of understanding the passing of time.
- 4 The second instance of the word time in the expression *time-without-time* refers to the Western chronological perspective. I am taking this expression from Alfredo Bosi, a Brazilian historian and literary critic, who uses it to refer to the time of the Western civilisations as a finite time and the time of a fictional indigenous group that is lived through life and death experiences. He develops this idea in a text called '*Morte, onde está a tua vitória?*' (in Ribeiro, 2014).
- 5 The ^{14}C is found in any organic creature as any other type of Carbon. However, ^{14}C is unstable, that is its presence in the organic body starts to decrease as soon as the corpus dies. The carbon-12 (^{12}C), for instance, remains in the same quantity in the living body as in the dead one. It is the analysis of unstable property of the ^{14}C that make possible to date by counting back is quantitative presence in the body in combination with other physical-chemical- contextual information. Since the end of 1960's with subsequent improvements in the last decades, it has become the main archaeological method for dating its finds (Taylor, 1987).
- 6 They belong to a Tupi-Guarani matrix. At the present they live in the eastern part of Amazon in Brazil in the State of Pará.