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PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY IN BRAZIL

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INTRODUCTION: BRAZILIAN SOCIETY AND BRAZILIAN PUBLIC

The concept of Brazilian society is as elusive as any generalisation and most foreigners are perhaps used to a particularly blurred image of Brazil. Probably the most ubiquitous image of the country comes from Carnival and Rio de Janeiro streets, mixed with sounds of *bossa nova* Ipanema's girl (*Garota de Ipanema*) hit by Tom Jobim, whose rendering by Frank Sinatra, among others, spread Brazil's image around the world. By the way, Rio de Janeiro is still considered by many people world over to be the capital of Brazil (or Argentina, why not?) and the fact is that, even though Brazil is unknown as a country, some of its culture is widely known abroad, from such personalities as Pelé and Ayrton Senna, to its rhythms. But, what about Brazilian society? Brazilian...what? Is there a society in Brazil? It depends on the definition of society, of course, for "a system of common life" (Williams 1983: 294) is a difficult definition to apply to the Brazilian case, given the lack of subjective links between the different social strata. Perhaps a shocking news piece is enough to alert us about this lack of social commitment:

"A beggar has been burned alive in Porto Alegre. The incident happened downtown, close to the main bus station and witnesses say that there were several aggressors, some of them adolescents" (Gerchmann 1998).

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This kind of crime is so common that it goes generally unreported, although there has been a lot of publicity about arsonists since a native Brazilian was killed the same way, the 19th of April, 1997, in the capital, Brasília, just when school children were celebrating “Native Brazilian day”. The arsonists were caught by the police, and these middle class youngsters were indicted sometime later, not for murder, but for “unconsciously risking a life”. In the wake of the murder, several cases were reported in the press, as several poor people were put to death by “unconscious”, but usually not persecuted, citizens. In some quarters, it has since been “fashionable” to put fire to poor people. Who are these poor Brazilians, do they represent a tiny minority of expendable human beings? Brazil is now the tenth largest economy, with a GDP reaching some eight hundred billion United States dollars and a per capita GDP around US\$ 4700 (Latin American Monitor, May 1997: 5) but, after some sources, it is the most iniquitous country on earth, as the poorest 40% earn only 7% of the National income, whilst the richest 10% earn 51.3%, a worse imbalance than in any other American, African or Asian country (Folha de São Paulo 1996a). Just the richest 1% earn 13.9%, whilst the poorest 10% earn 1.1% (Folha de São Paulo 1996b), and in the last forty years or so the imbalance has been increasing, rather than decreasing (Dantas 1995), to the despair of economists, as Zini (1997) and writers, as Rui Mourão (1997), among others. Children still work, instead of going to school (Filho 1997; Ribeiro 1997; Sérgio & Rocha 1997) and illiteracy is rife.

The vast majority live thus with less than US\$ 60 a month (Fuentes 1996) and are, as a consequence, out of the consumer market, as emphasised sometime ago Edward J. Amadeo (1991), now minister for labour affairs, and this goes a long way in explaining the poor status of ordinary Brazilians. Two other features must though be mentioned: the patriarchal roots of Brazilian social relations and the recent history of authoritarian rule. A hierarchisable society, Brazilian society operates secularly through such institutions as the elite family and its side effects: patronage and the resulting fear of the good powerful masters (DaMatta 1991: 399). Slaves, poor people, and all non proprietors are thus not citizens, but subjects and dependants (Mota 1977: 173) and patronage (Carvalho 1998) is still pervasive today (e.g. O Estado de São Paulo 1998). This authoritarian tradition was strengthened by the military rule, between 1964 and 1985, “lots of people suffered, have been exiled, tortured and killed”, in the words of a historian who lived the experience (Iglésias 1985: 216) and after the restoration of civilian rule there has been no search for the abuses of the authorities, even though human rights activists stress that “the state of law and democracy demand that truth be revealed, if governments do not respect the law and the rights of citizens” (Pinheiro 1995; cf. Rebelo 1990). There has been no “Truth and Reconciliation Commission” in Brazil, as was the case in South Africa (Cose 1998; Mabry 1998) , and even other countries in the southern cone, like Argentina, were able to at least partially investigate the abuses of military dictators and their supporters. The result was that the discourse of power, articulated by intellectuals who are themselves power-holders, systematically deny the other (Velasco e Cruz 1997: 21-22) and dismiss the need to integrate Brazilian society beyond the huge social cleavages.

In this social context, what does it mean to “do archaeology for the public”, as put it Parker Pearson (1998)? The wider audience of archaeology in the United States and Europe include a broad spectrum of social strata and the pages of the National Geographic Magazine witness the popular appeal of archaeology for a

wide readership. The public in Brazil, on the other hand, is limited to probably less than two hundred archaeologists (Barreto 1998: 774) and to school children, newspaper readers and sometimes a mass of television viewers, as more than eighty percent of homes have television sets (Folha de São Paulo 1996c). The aim of this paper is thus to discuss the relationship between archaeologists and their different audiences and to assess the outlook for changes in the future.

BRAZILIAN ARCHAEOLOGY AND BRAZILIAN AUDIENCES

The public is usually perceived as an aggregate, non-organised community of people and this and hence it is used as a collective noun and in this sense it is too general to be used to deal with a variety of different social audiences. The narrowest audience of Brazilian archaeologists are other local archaeologists and most practitioners are not worried by the fact that they limit themselves to this very special public. Usually, archaeologists do not publish their reports, as there is no explicit and abiding rule conditioning financing research and publication of the results, as is the case in other countries, where Heritage institutions do so, as is the case in England, where funding institutions do so, as is the case with several *Stiftungen* the world over, where academic degree dissertations must be published to be recognised, as is the case in Germany. In this case, the audience of several field seasons is restricted to the volunteers who assisted the excavations. When there are unpublished reports or dissertations, the readership is restricted usually to a few people who have access to the original and/or to copies in libraries.

Increasingly though, archaeologists have been publishing their papers in local journals, enabling the readership to become wider, up to several hundred fellow archaeologists. Most archaeologists write in Portuguese and have no intention in addressing a non-Brazilian scholarly audience and few journals publish papers in foreign languages and/or are multi-lingual. Considering that there are few than two hundred archaeologists in the country, and that they deal with a variety of different subjects, if a paper is read by more than ten people it is an exception. Papers which address a much wider international archaeological audience are still rare but since the restoration of civilian rule in 1985 there has been a growing production of studies addressing a world archaeological community, as is the case of the very recent “Special section: issues in Brazilian archaeology”, published by *Antiquity* (Barreto 1998; Gaspar 1998; Gonzalez 1998; Heckneberger 1998; Kipnis 1998; Neves 1998; Noelli 1998; Wüst 1998). Still, references to wider interpretive problems which could interest archaeologists non-specialists in Brazilian subjects is very rare, even though in the case of historical archaeology Brazilian subjects and standpoints are now being discussed by archaeologists in general, not only by the narrow group of foreign experts on Brazil, as recent books witness (Orser 1996; Funari, Hall & Jones 1999). This was already the case with classical archaeology produced by Brazilians, as a much wider archaeological readership has been paying attention for quite some time to Brazilian papers (e.g. Sarian 1989) and books (e.g. Funari 1996a) published in Europe (cf. with full references, Funari 1997a), as it is easy to observe visiting the consultation ratings in virtual sites.

The world archaeological public is, however, more interested in ideas than merely recovering and describing evidence (Tilley 1998: 691) and the only way Brazilian archaeologists can address this demand is to produce informed interpretive

papers and books and the reason why the world is looking for interpretation is that archaeology must be relevant to society at large and to the human and social sciences in particular (Tilley 1998: 692). There is thus another important public, the other social sciences, whose concerns must be matched by archaeology, for there is a growing acknowledgement that archaeology is always socially engaged (Hodder 1991:22), directly linked to ideologies and political uses (Slapsak 1993: 192), and that the way we interpret the past cannot be divorced from the way we perceive the present (Nassaney 1989: 89). So much so that even the study of the prehistoric past is a political act (Hodder 1990: 278) and archaeology, as a mode of production of the past (1995: 34), assembles the past (Shanks & McGuire 1996: 82) and is a discipline inevitably linked to the public in general. In this respect, archaeologists in Europe and in the United States are increasingly more aware of the need to interact with historians, anthropologists, heritage managers, educators and their Brazilian counterparts should pay more attention to these audiences (Funari 1997b), inside and outside the country, as is beginning to be the case now (cf. Funari 1998), for the way to reach the wider public is to interact with fellow social scientists. A greater diversity of views and approaches, fostering pluralistic dialogue (Bintliff 1995: 34), enables archaeologists to be aware of the fact that there are other audiences, not strictly professional and archaeological (Funari 1996b).

Archaeologists have been confronting complex dilemmas when rulers and ruled (Ucko 1990: xx), or people excluded from power, as I would call them, compete for their services. Archaeology is the only social science that can provide access to all social groups, not only elites, but also peasants, natives, nomads, slaves, craftsmen or merchants (Saitta 1995: 385) and for this reason ordinary people could recognise themselves in what we as archaeologists offer them. For the last decades, anthropologists, historians and other social scientists have been keen to study the excluded and to address a variety of audiences. Natives have been active interlocutors and scientists have been campaigning for the rights of Indians, particularly for the demarcation of indigenous peoples' lands. Blacks are in a similar situation, and now some school textbooks mention Natives, Blacks, ordinary poor people, immigrants and other excluded strata, both in the present and the past. Environmental concerns have been also addressed by different sciences, as is the case with urbanism and vernacular architecture from a perspective of poor people. Archaeology also addressed some of these concerns, and this was so almost from its inception, in the nineteenth century, even if this was a concern of a minority, considering, as mentioned before, the difficult communication and interaction between elites and ordinary people.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, when a state museum director and practising archaeologist, Von Ihering, defended the traditional approach to Natives, proposing the genocide of ethnic groups, there was reaction, by practising archaeologists from the National Museum, in Rio de Janeiro, then the capital of the country, who reacted and defended the Indians (cf. Funari 1999, with references). In the same direction, in the first decades of the twentieth century, some books on archaeology and prehistory of Brazil have been published, whose readers were not particularly numerous, nor their approach necessarily sympathetic to the Indians, but in any case the interest in native material culture was there and there were practising archaeologists trying to understand the other. In a context of dominant groups using their power to push their own heritage to the fore (Byrne 1991: 275), as was the case,

the mere fact of looking for prehistoric artefacts was a way of challenging the dominating concerns and fashions.

Historical artefacts protected as heritage though were overwhelmingly from the elite, resulting in people's alienation and lack of interest in the preservation of historical material culture. Looting of church high style art, for instance, has always been a problem, here as elsewhere (cf. Calabresi 1998), as ordinary people are not concerned by elite heritage and the elites themselves are usually lured by the market value of these artefacts (cf. the British case in Brodie 1998). Even today, upper class archaeologists own antiquities shops, as acknowledges Tânia Andrade Lima (1995:178), dedicating an eulogising tribute to elite ceramics and "to my parents in law, Oswaldo and Marina Lima, inheritors and successors of <Antiques shop> Casa Moniz, established in the nineteenth century at Ourives street, and now at Ouvidor street". Black material culture was as a consequence for long time absent from archaeological discourse or displays, as was any humble artefacts, what Mediterranean archaeologists call the *instrumentum domesticum*, ordinary pottery, post holes, remains of suffering, not of joy by rich aristocrats and their fine pottery. The 30th October 1998, at historic colonial town of Ouro Preto, in Minas Gerais State, a Oratory Museum has been open with "artefacts expressing the religious variety of our people. Rich and poor had a place of honour, in their homes, to shelter a domestic shrine", in the words of the Archbishop Luciano Mendes de Almeida (1998), of Mariana, a human rights activist who took part in the fight against oppression in the last decades.

The main public concern by archaeologists has always been in considering that our heritage is a world heritage (cf. Khan 1998: 1), that humble remains are as important as learned European ones, that the excluded are also part of the public. It is symptomatic that archaeologists engaged in human rights, in a very broad sense of the expression, have been those who addressed a wide audience and fought for the future generations in their right to an enlightening look for their roots (Hudson 1994: 55). Paulo Duarte, an intellectual who fought a dictatorship in the 1930s and early 1940s, returned to Brazil after World War II and struggled to publicise the importance of shell middens, as a common heritage of all Brazilians, considering the remains of Indians worth of preservation and study (cf. Funari 1995). Thanks to his efforts, legislation was passed in the Congress to protect archaeological heritage in the early 1960, just before a military clamp down, whose consequences are still felt, almost fifteen years after the restoration of civilian rule, in 1985. While official Brazilian archaeology was reinvented by the training of a new generation of Brazilian practitioners, under the guide of Betty Meggers and Clifford Evans, the worries with the wider public naturally faded. However, even in those dark years (1964-1985), several archaeologists were concerned with the public and with heritage, some of them in line with the French inspired humanism of Paulo Duarte, as was the case with the study of rock art by André Prous, Niede Guidon, among others, or the continued study of shell middens. African and/or African-Brazilian heritage was also a concern of Mariano Carneiro da Cunha.

Only with the restoration of civilian rule, tough, Brazilian archaeologists would more directly address wider audiences. The first manuals on archaeology were published (Funari 1988; Prous 1991), historical archaeology has begun by paying attention to excluded people, Indians in Missions (Kern 1989),

Blacks in runaway settlements (Funari 1996c), and for the first time Brazilian prehistory was introduced for millions of school children as a search for Natives' culture (Guarinello 1994). The increasing resonance of the World Archaeological Congress ideals in Brazil, as attested in a recent international conference held in Brazil (Funari 1998), shows the growing social awareness within the archaeological community. Overall, and in the context of a Brazilian society so marked by cleavages, as mentioned in the beginning of this paper, there has been an active engagement of several archaeologists with broader social strata and issues, from Indian and Black rights for their lands to a less unbalanced picture of excluded people in museum exhibitions (Tamanini 1994). Processes and products (Merriman 1996: 382) of archaeological activities are directly linked to the public and Brazilian archaeologists are now rescuing an enduring humanist approach, felt since the inception of the discipline in the country, whose concerns for the people are central to the archaeologists' practice. Indians, blacks, ordinary people are being reintroduced in archaeological discourse and public archaeology is beginning to be felt as an essential aspect of the discipline, in Brazil, as it already is, world over.

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