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Narrative, Memory and Social Representations: A Conversation Between History and Social Psychology

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Abstract This paper explores relations between narrative, memory and social representations by examining how social representations express the ways in which communities deal with the historical past. Drawing on a case study of social representations of the Brazilian public sphere, it shows how a specific narrative of origins re-invents history as a useful mythological resource for defending identity, building inter-group solidarity and maintaining social cohesion. Produced by a time-travelling dialogue between multiple sources, this historical narrative is functional both to transform, to stabilise and give resilience to specific social representations of public life. The Brazilian case shows that historical narratives, which tend to be considered as part of the stable core of representational fields, are neither homogenous nor consensual but open polyphasic platforms for the construction of alternative, often contradictory, representations. These representations do not go away because they are ever changing and situated, recruit multiple ways of thinking and fulfil functions of identity, inter-group solidarity and social cohesion. In the disjunction between historiography and the past as social representation are the challenges and opportunities for the dialogue between historians and social psychologists.

Keywords Social representations · Cognitive polyphasia · Collective remembering · Narrative · Social psychology and history · Brazilian public sphere

Introduction

Apprehending time in its lived and experiential dimension is a long standing psychological problem, one which has been central to the scholarly debates linking psychology and history. Putting emphasis on time underscores the historical character of all psychological processes and the manner through which the past holds its

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ground in our present and future lives. For psychologists of a socio-cultural orientation the problem of time is the problem of historical development, of which the development of the human child is only one instance. Vygotsky (1997) showed that the development of higher mental functions is a historical process and inability to see it as such would explain 'the one-sidedness and erroneousness of [psychology's] traditional views". Paying attention to genesis and transformation is essential to avoid the fragmentation of psychological structures and capture their contextual and time-dependent nature (Duveen and Lloyd 1990; Cole 1995). History is a central method to understand the individual and collective mind as it is to appreciate why the discipline of psychology has been itself reluctant to take the historical dimension into account (Farr 1996). As Marková notes (2012) treating phenomena as dynamic, situated and historical implies a relational epistemology that threatens psychology's aspirations to be a positive science.

The historical approach places time at the core of human experience and seeks to render intelligible the social and cultural processes that constitute our psychological makeup in past and present public spheres. It teaches the psychologist to 'feel with' distant others, to imagine what it was like to be a person living in different times and lifeworlds and to turn the disjunctions between the lives of predecessors and contemporaries into sources of understanding. It calls into question the idea and practice of essential psychological truths (Knights 2012) and brings historical context back into the explanatory framework of psychology. It substantiates the view of social psychology as a form of history (Gergen 1973), whose findings can themselves be seen as a form of historical record of how people think, feel and behave at particular times and places. This is particularly clear in the work of narratives and social representations which express how common sense elaborates history and remembers the past. For the past, as well as that which we feel, perceive, think and talk about in the present, can only come into being through the stories we chose to remember and the manner in which we tell them.

It is the humanity of the historical record that any psychology worth its name would seek to emphasise in a dialogue with historians; the fact that history has a subject and that in the apparently ordinary and inconsequential everyday experience of ordinary men and women are the modalities of thinking, the behaviours and imaginations that also make and define history. Communities create history through the ways in which they remember the past, a process regulated by social psychological processes such as identity, belonging, inter-group relations and social cohesion. Listening, systematizing and understanding the human stories of history is the aim of social psychologists while connecting the large narrative of history and the stories of life each day the challenge driving the conversation between historians and social psychologists.

In this paper I would like to extend this conversation, with particular attention to how the narrative architecture of social representations articulates the ways in which communities deal with the historical past. I use a case study of social representations of the Brazilian public sphere to show how a specific narrative of origins re-invents history as a useful mythological resource for defending identity, building inter-group solidarity and maintaining social cohesion. My aim is to show that historical narratives, which tend to be considered as part of the stable core of representational fields, are neither homogenous nor consensual but open platforms for the construction of

alternative, often contradictory, representations. Historical narratives fix meaning in the central core of social representations, are resistant to change and endure over time but they are neither frozen nor stable: it is their very flexibility and imaginative characteristics that give them resilience. The Brazilian case shows that the historical past loads the central core of social representations and makes them into recalcitrant symbolic systems precisely because of its polysemic and polyphasic nature. Produced by a time-travelling dialogue between multiple sources, this historical narrative is functional not only to transform but also to stabilise and give resilience to specific social representations of public life. It is remembered because it is ever changing and situated, recruits multiple ways of thinking and fulfils functions of identity, inter-group solidarity and social cohesion.

As historians demonstrate in this Special Issue, history is a contested and polyphasic field with power both to open and close socio-cognitive systems. To conceive of it as purely stabilising and/or unifying cognitive systems is a frequent, yet misleading assumption in social psychological research. In drawing attention to history as a driving force in the internal organisation of social representations my intention is to probe the problem of stability and change in representational fields and question the idea of a central core as consensual and stable.

Narrative, Social Representations and Cognitive Polyphasia

Bartlett was the first psychologist to suggest that narratives do not rely on the individual story-teller alone but are the product of social and historical life (Bartlett 1923; see also Sammut et al. 2012). They develop and grow in “the open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and villages, of social groups, generations and epochs” (Bakhtin 1981: 259). They convey, and by the same token produce and reproduce, the traditions, the practices, the mythologies and the accumulated wisdom of human communities. They live in our collective memory and in the institutionalised rituals we draw upon to reproduce our social and cultural lives. They can differ in content and in how they are told, but they are an ever-present human activity and the first form of complex cultural discourse that young children learn and enjoy. As Barthes (1993) noted “there is not, and there has never been, a people without stories, they are just there, like life itself”.

The idea of narrative as a cognitive instrument and cultural tool has been extensively discussed by socio-cultural psychologists (Bruner 2004, 1990, 1986; László 2008; Wertsch 1998) and with some contention captured by a historian (Mink 2001). Stories allow us to retain and understand information (László 2008), to deal with time (Ricoeur 1990; Carr 1991), and give us at least the illusion of a stable identity (Arendt 1958). Narration is essential for our sense of self and our cultural history.

Bruner (1990, 1986) has argued that human thought is organised and patterned by story-telling: the organisation of experience in terms of a plot shapes the very structure of our thinking and our sense of reality. From the late eighties onwards he pioneered work that uses narrative theory and practice to rethink mind, psychology and the very nature of knowledge and truth. His main effort has been to show that our reality, the source and parameter of what we call truth and knowledge, has its properties defined by narrative principles. Narrativity both reveals and explicates the socially constructed nature of reality and knowledge because it brings to the fore

the disjunction between story-telling and life. Narrative seeks beginnings, middles and ends but real life does not have such a structure, it just flows. As happenings in the real world, events can only give off 'scrambled messages' (Barthes 1993). They only acquire sense and structure through the process of being told and articulated through a plot (Ricoeur 1990), which is an act of mind in society. All narration is produced *a posteriori* and in various degrees plays with events, characters and chronology. To disentangle happenings from the flow of real life and put them into a story by necessity reconstructs what for the here and now is now a past. Story-tellers actively construct past and present life, a life only known and understood when it is remembered, represented and narrated.

In this disjunction between narrative and life we can fully observe the formidable set of operations engaged by the human mind to construct, make sense and narrate the world. This is probably what Jameson (1981) referred to when he called narrativity the 'central function or instance of the human mind' and that is why social psychologists pursue narrative as a central inroad for the study of situated psychological phenomena. László's (2008) psychology of stories retrieves the process of story-telling as central to the making of social representations and social life. Wertsch (1998, 2002) suggests that narratives are cultural tools that shape thought and belief about the past while enabling collective remembering. Elsewhere I have drawn extensively on narrative theory to explore the transformation of social representations in the public sphere and more particular to show how narratives close down meaning in representational fields (Jovchelovitch 2002). Common to this work is the idea of narrative as a medium of cognition that conveys and structures the diversity of emotional, social and cultural logics embedded in both social representations and public spheres. From this perspective, narratives constitute the very architecture of human thinking as a modality of thought, a mode of operation of mind and a constructive collective tool for remembering and defining reality.

As the essential medium of social representations, narratives articulate what Millstone (2012) calls social cognition in motion. Stories are always told by someone to someone else in a practice that involves an intersubjective context where self and other engage in communicative action (Habermas 1989, 1991). Story-tellers are intersubjectively bound to a community of tellers, to a shared set of values and representations and to a specific vision of the world (Liu and Lászlo 2007; Liu and Hilton 2005). The intrinsic dialogicality that makes social representations commands a site of analysis that is located at the intersection between agents and socio-cultural contexts, at the point of which socio-cognitive systems relate to the complexity of inter-group relations, social divisions and relations of power that make up the reality of a given society and historical time.

The plurality of social life creates and sustains the diversity of logics, registers and ways of thinking that characterise representational processes. Juxtaposing a social representation to a public is neither direct nor straightforward; there are complex mediations between different publics and their social representations, with new forms constantly emerging in-between (Wagner 2007). Exchange and dialogue between representational fields produce new forms of social representation which combine views, logics, behaviours and emotions of different publics in plural, at times fractured and divided, public spheres. Exchanges between alternative representations mingle science, religion, common sense, street knowledge, art, amongst other

modalities of representation. These combinations push back into parenting knowledge systems and generate states of cognitive polyphasia.

The hypothesis of cognitive polyphasia was proposed by Moscovici (2008) in his study on the reception of psychoanalysis in France. Defined as the 'dynamic coexistence—interference and specialisation—of distinct modalities of knowledge that correspond to definite relations between man and his environment' (Moscovici 2008: 190), states of cognitive polyphasia explain the relational, plural and plastic nature of social thinking. The concept opens the way to conceptualising cognitive systems as continuously developing systems. It captures how the dynamics of social interactions and cultural contexts is intertwined with processes of social knowledge and shifts the emphasis from equilibrium to process, from knowledge as given to knowing as social encounter: an emerging and flexible form responsive to the diverse sociocultural situations that characterise human experience. In this sense cognitive polyphasia is an asset of human cognition, a tool that enables adaption to context, the expression of multiple identities, the forging of cognitive solidarities and importantly, communication between cognitive systems as the motor that adjusts, corrects and transforms knowledge.

Narratives of the historical past exemplify well the socio-cognitive heterogeneity of representational fields and the multiple voices and cultural logics linked to the processes of knowledge construction that make history. Social psychologists have tended to see the historical past as a source of cohesion and homogeneity, a consensual and finished account of events that stabilises cognitive systems. This critique, which I accept, can be levelled at my own work (Jovchelovitch 2007). Part of what a dialogue with historians allows is a more precise understanding of the contested, polyphasic nature of the historical past (Knights 2012; Kane 2012). Multiple voices and registers, modalities of knowledge and sources have always co-existed in the historical past, well before what we now call modernity (or what some would call post-modernity).

The polyphasia of the historical past materialises in cultural artefacts, history books, folktales, institutional practices and rituals of everyday life, which are selectively brought forward and appropriated, discarded or emphasised through logics that responds to different needs and fulfil different functions. History is itself made of a combination of careful historiography and social representations of the past; these distinct, at times oppositional, modalities of knowledge coexist and communicate in social life. There is a struggle of sorts between formal and lay histories, which far from being a negative conflict is a necessary reminder of the faulty line that entangles the historical record to narrative, memory and social representations.

This is a point Tileagă (2012) compellingly makes when discussing how Romanian society deals with its communist past. Social representations of history interact imperfectly with the reliability of sources or the important and ethical need to construct an accurate historical record. Made of social memory and regulated by identities, belonging and community cohesion, they offer to historians the 'human, too human' legacy of life as lived: the sorrows, denials, distortions and deceptions that inhabit the human condition and thus all human cognition (Arendt 1958). "He cannot escape from his compulsion to repeat; and in the end we understand that this is his way of remembering" noted Freud (1914:.50) when discussing the dynamics of remembering and forgetting. The allegiance of historians to capture the past as 'truth'

can only be an aspiration, but remains a necessary and ethical one as it offers to social representations a source of reflexivity and critique.

Collective Memory and the Narrative Core of Social Representations

Historical periods are not made of bare facts and events but also of outlooks and cosmovisions, modalities of thinking and behaving that together configure the social representations of an epoch. Once constituted and established these social representations become frameworks for defining what is accepted, valued, rejected or forbidden, systems of thought and action that guide communication and institute historically the background horizon defining what becomes possible and real for a group of people at a particular time. They offer a framework for the behaviour, the attitudes and the values of historical agents as well as for the identity of individual and collective actors (Condor 2006). This historical experience results in the formation of a societal ethos and outlook (Bar-Tal 2000) that is transmitted by narrative templates (Wertsch 1998; Wertsch and Batiashvili 2011) and lived as historical charters (Liu and Hilton 2005).

Halbwachs (1992) noted that all social beliefs have a double character. They are collective traditions or recollections, but they are the ideas and conventions of the present: social thought is essentially a memory and its content is made of recollections and remembrances, but the memories that subsist (and insist) are only those that a society, working from the perspective of its present, can reconstruct. The co-existence of past and present in social beliefs expresses the way in which multiple dimensions of time coexist in social thinking and introduces a temporal dimension to the polyphasic nature of socio-cognitive systems. Communities make choices about how they carry or discard what once was. Collective remembering is selective in carrying representations that are important for the identity of a social group, for legitimising specific arrangements and for dealing with situations in the present. As a cognitive and cultural tool (Wertsch 2002), memory is not a system for processing information that freezes what once was; as all psychological operations, it is intertwined with its socio-historical grounding so that, in remembering from the perspective of the present, we reconstruct or at least have the possibility of reconstructing the past.

This is clear in the way specific narratives shape the internal organisation of social representations and define the continuity of stories in public spheres. The stories that survive are the ones communities chose to remember, a charged and selective process determined by disparate interests (Lira 1997), identity (Leone and Mastrovito 2010; Liu and László 2007), and intense collective emotions such as guilt and shame (Klein et al. 2011; Licata and Klein 2010). The work of narrative and memory makes the organisation of representations fields contested and unresolved battles, where competing versions of the past clash for providing the account that becomes recognised as the legitimate and true one (Brockmeier 2002; Jovchelovitch 2002). Social memory selects and disposes, picks and discards, enables and disables the multiple voices and the manifold events that will make up the plot and the way stories are told.

An important question for social representations researchers is how specific stories can be effective in making some representations survive while others disappear. The stickiness of stories over time relates to the internal architecture of social

representations and to how specific patterns of signification are arranged for mobilising commitment to imaginations, projects and courses of action (Bauer and Gaskell 1999; Sammut et al. 2012). Abric (2001) has proposed that social representations are organised through the relations between a central core and a peripheral system that express contradictory features: stable and dynamic, consensual and yet marked by strong inter-group and inter-individual differences. In this double system, the central core expresses deep-seated, difficult to change, historically-laden ideas while the peripheral components refer to a more mobile, flexible and adaptive set of meanings. The peripheral system responds to situational needs and links the central core to the present.

As much as this work has proved useful, it has also been criticised for its overemphasis on statistical methods and the rigidity of its framework, which cannot capture the dynamic of representations (Parales 2005). It considers the core of social representations as a historical given that can be extracted statistically from a field of propositions. Its reliance on a methodological route obfuscates the dynamics of history making it into a mere stabiliser of cognitive systems, a source of homogeneity and stability to the core of social representations. A historical approach debunks history as a source of immobility. While historical ideas are deep-seated and difficult to change, they are neither immobile nor inflexible. Indeed I suggest that it is precisely the contested and polyphasic nature of their narrative architecture that enables resilience and continuity in representational fields.

Stories organise representational fields (László 1997). In the same way that narratives contain a plot that organises events and semantically connect disparate elements of a story, the narrative form provides a core structure to a representational field, bringing together and investing with meaning the various notions, values and practices it contains. Stories plot representational fields and here I want to suggest that the plotting of the historical past is driven by the semiotic and normative force of themata (Moscovici and Vignaux 2000) and the institutional regulations of a meta-system (Doise 1990, 1985). Both concepts describe phenomena that intersect with the internal organisation of social representations illuminating in particular how historical forces and socio-institutional arrangements play out in representational fields. Themata have been defined as "all those modes of thought which everyday life sustains and which are historically maintained over more or less long durées" (Moscovici and Vignaux 2000:159). Via the selective repetition of meanings that strongly resist change and occupy the centre of a semantic field, the narrative core of representations plots themes, categories, characters and events into a bounded whole that has power to subsume under its symbolic and practical sphere all other signs and meanings interacting in a representational field. In doing so, the core operates as a metasystem that fulfils normative functions and regulates social thinking, enforcing rules, prescriptions and moral codes.

Structured as narrative, drawing on the semiotic content of themata and functioning through the normative power of a metasystem, the central core of social representations consolidates plots and stories that stick and do not go away, that remain in our systems of thinking and acting, making up the present and our contemporary experience. However, this should not mislead us into thinking that this historical central core of representations is rigid, homogenous or consensual. As discussed previously narratives are dialogical and polyphasic structures. Themata, as Marková

Table 1 A historical approach to the central core of social representations

	Dimensions	Structures	Social Psychological Functions
Central Core	Carrier	Narratives	Collective remembering
	Architecture	Plot and stories	Stickiness
	Process	Dialogical	Communication
	Property	Cognitive polyphasia	Empathy; Solidarity; Endurance
	Semiotic Content	Themata	Signification
	Institutional Regulation	Metasystem	Normative

(2003) has shown, are constituted dialogically through sets of fundamental oppositions that guide the meaning of representations throughout history. And the regulatory power of a symbolic system, expressed in the metasystem, relies in the microgenetic processes of everyday interaction that scale up the roles and institutions that guarantee the authority and legitimacy of propositions. This model is shown in Table 1.

Narratives not only list events but plot them into a meaningful architecture that gives shape to social thinking, inscribes itself in cultural artefacts and rituals of community life. These are divided, contested processes, whose representational counterpart is *per force* polyphasic and oppositional. They provide anchors and socio-discursive cohesion for capturing new social thinking and at the same time fulfil functions of identity protection, social cohesion and social differentiation (László 2003; Liu and László 2007; Bruner 1990). The alternative representations (Gillespie 2008) that co-exist in the narratives of the central core make it stable and fluid at once. Its solidity, I argue, is given precisely by its flexibility, by being able to mobilise different languages, registers and propositions that resonate across a wide range of identities, social groups and interests creating empathy and solidarity.

As Kane notes (2012) 'social representations possess dense histories with few 'events' generating entirely novel and oppositional discourses.' This, as I demonstrate below in representations of the Brazilian public sphere, allows representations to travel across time and establish a wide network of cognitive solidarity across different niches, groups and individuals. The shift from a categorical and mainly cognitive, to a narrative model of the central core reinstates the communicative and dialogical nature of social representations as well as the historicity of the processes whereby they are constituted.

Social Representations as Myth

In his study about representations of psychoanalysis Moscovici (2008) made clear that the study of myths provides a heuristic programme to study the genesis of social representations. Myths thrive in foundational materials and usually deal with origins and 'whys' that explain and comfort, reassure and provide continuity for what is familiar to us (Kalampalakis 2002). They bind human groups, build nations and establish identity. They are essential components of the patchwork of knowledges that

makes representational fields in the contemporary world. The functionality of myth is related to social cohesion, to identity, to the social emotions of society and to the endurance of invented traditions (Hobsbawn 1983). Drenched in emotional content, mythologies familiarise the unfamiliar and give social groups confidence to deal with innovation and change. They resist empirical verification because they draw on the world-making properties of symbolic action and are at the service of powerful psychological, social and political needs.

Elsewhere (Jovchelovitch 2007) I have suggested that we consider myth through a model that recognises variability in knowledge systems: knowledge is plural because there are different ways of representing the world, which fulfil different functions and respond to different needs. This is clear in the case of science and common sense (Moscovici 1992; Jovchelovitch 2008) as it is in the case of mythologies and history. The point here is to recognise with Blumemberg that 'myth itself is one of the modes of accomplishment of logos' (p.27). Rather than treat myth as distortion the question one asks is 'what is the type of logos that myth entails'? Myth is knowledge of a certain kind and as with all knowledge it proposes a modality of representation of the world that fulfils specific functions and needs. Paying virtually no attention to the literal, myth belongs to a register where accuracy in cognition is not required and where the 'world-making' symbolic function of representations is operating at its maximum power. Myths tend to distort and disregard what is the case, which rather than diminish their force constitutes one of the main sources of their power.

Historical narratives that make the core of social representations showcase these characteristics of myth exemplary. They play with characters, actions and perspectives to imagine communities (Anderson 1983) out of time and produce the legitimising stories that guide the moral ground in which individual behaviour, inter-group contact and socio-political action occur. They travel across time and reappear without reference to events (Blumemberg 1985) repeating themselves continuously and deceptively because they continuously use new and polyphasic languages, ideas and practices. They command authoritative power to inculcate values and norms working as a metasystem that embraces and absorbs novelty just to transform it and pull it into the themata of its basic narrative template. Myth combines and mixes sources, times and genres to repeat the same story and sustain its invariance. They are an excellent example of how states of cognitive polyphasia can produce resilience and continuity in representational process.

Representations of the public sphere in Brazil illustrate well the polyphasia and functionality of myth as knowledge of the world. Everyday thinking about the Brazilian public sphere suggests that a mythical narrative of origins operates as a normative metasystem that draws on a wide variety of sources to carry forward deep-seated themata of Brazilian history and cultural identity. Through an intense conversation between historiography, science, art and social theory, common sense creates a foundational myth whose purposes and effects continue to be functional to the Brazilian public sphere today.

Miscegenation in the Tropics: The Brazilian Public Sphere

Studies of lay thinking of the Brazilian public sphere show a semantic field dominated by co-existing contradictory notions and unified by the core idea that

'corruption in blood' explains corruption in social life (Jovchelovitch 2000). The long-standing troubles of the Brazilian public sphere are explained by the central notion of the 'Brazilian self', its being and its identity: the Brazilian is a type 'essentially corrupt', 'impure', plagued by a 'lack of unity' and characterised as 'lazy'. Corruption, the major reality in politics 'mirrors the streets' and, paradoxically, despite attempts to keep politics separate from the people, their unit is re-established by propositions such as 'we get what we deserve' or 'every people has the government it deserves: 'we mirror each other'. Recent developments in Brazilian political life and its repositioning as a global player might suggest that there is no place left to this type of social thinking in Brazil. But corruption, as practice and representation, continues to be strong in Brazilian society (Filgueiras 2009; da Matta 1991).

Dominated by a long standing narrative of racial formation, where mixture and miscegenation under a tropical sun provide the main signifiers for understanding and explaining corruption and all other 'evils of origin' that plague Brazilian public life, these representations are far from being circumscribed to lay discourses. Throughout its relatively short history Brazilian scholarly self-interpretation and historiography struggled to make sense of what made Brazil a nation and how to understand its people (Bosi 1992; Castro Santos 2003; Ribeiro 1970). Notions of mixture and impurity, which were at the heart of European theories of degeneration throughout the colonial period, were powerfully projected into the experience and self-interpretation of colonial peoples. Authors such as Le Bon and Gobineau found avid readers in Brazil and gave direction to Brazilian elite thinking in the nineteenth century. For example, Gobineau (1990), who was the French Minister in Rio from 1869–1871 (and was said to detest both the city and the country) wrote: "no Brazilian is of pure blood; the marriage combinations between whites, Indians and blacks, multiply to such an extent that the nuances of flesh are too many, and all that produces, in the lower as well as in the upper classes, a degeneration of the most sad nature". Biological and medical theories were linked to social and political ones to suggest that laziness, corruption and failure in sustaining a healthy social 'body' were caused by the racial degeneration produced by mixture (Borges 1993).

Whereas early theories of racial degeneration penetrated deeply into common sense and the science of the day, they did not go unchallenged. Alternative representations (Gillespie 2008) have been articulated in social thought, science and the arts. Central sources have been the novel '*O Guarani*', by José de Alencar (1982), the Modernist Manifestos of the 1920 (see Andrade, Year 375 of the Deglutition of Bishop Sardinha/2005), the publication of Gilberto Freyre's (1987) *Casa Grande e Senzala* (Masters and Slaves) in 1933 and Buarque de Holland *Raizes do Brazil* (The Roots of Brazil) in 1947. Combined these texts have been foundational for defining '*brasilidade*' or Brazilianess. They all tackle the issue of racial mixture by emphasising the novelty and potential of the new world and the emerging peoples of Brazil.

Two books in particular travelled far beyond their locus of production: the novel *O Guarani*, written as a historical novel about a forbidden love affair between an Aimoré Indian and a Portuguese white girl in 17th century Brazil and *Casa Grande e Senzala* (Masters and Slaves), an anthropological and sociological study of the Brazilian manor house and its manifolds relations and crossings. One is a novel with historical intentions; the other is a foundational text of the Brazilian social sciences. The *Guaran*i dealt with the encounter between the European and the Tupi-Guarani

(Brazilian indigenous people); *Casa Grande e Senzala*, with the encounter between the European and the vast contingent of Black peoples who were transported to Brazil as slaves. *O Guarani* placed Brazil in a state of original purity at the beginning of all times, with its large rivers and dense tropical forests as the background for an inter-racial love story. *Casa Grande e Senzala* explored the social, psychological and cultural dynamic of the patriarchal house as mirror of the nation, presented as protective, varied and multifaced. The house, as the nation, contained a multitude of relations characterised by disparity and closeness, intimacy and distance, master and slave, black and white, ritual dance and mass, food and gossip.

Both books jumped into everyday life and deeply penetrated common sense. They were metamorphosed into film, opera, novels, 'cordel' popular literature, soap operas, *bossa nova*, history books, the *Tropicalia* movement, newspapers, children's books and even samba schools. They engaged the knowledge of historians and the cultural production of musicians, film-makers, poets and the mass media, Navigating through historical time these two books embraced representations that where forged at the time of the conquest, travelled and settled throughout the colonial past and spread through the various arenas of communication and interaction between Brazilian historiography, artistic and cultural production, scholarly social thought and lay everyday thinking (Viana 1999; Ortiz 1986).

These stories became widespread and multiform because its social and psychological properties give to the nation self-knowledge and the promise of an ego ideal, the elements for defending identity and building social cohesion for an imagined community. The love story between Peri and Cecilia in *O Guarani* made possible the construction of an honourable past: it invented an inter-racial couple that engendered the nation (Volpe 2002) and idealistically erased the decimation of indigenous peoples in Brazil. *Casa Grande e Senzala* put emphasis on the influence of black Africa in Brazil and all things Brazilian. It caused a formidable shock at the time of its publication because it ended the country's illusions with racial purity. But gave Brazil the myth (and dream) of racial democracy. In the same way that *O Guarani* travelled across time through a multitude of media, *Masters and Slaves* triggered a string of 'responses' from a wide range of constituencies that included not only social scientists and historians but also poets, writers and musicians. Its reception was a major event in the emerging Brazilian public sphere and shook the nation's self-understanding by throwing in the face of the elite that liked to think of itself as 'white', the ineradicable and deep presence of blackness in all things Brazilian.

Comprising stories told by both the coloniser and the colonised, involving myths of origin and the powerful blend of fear, anxiety and desire that characterised the contact between the constituting peoples of Brazil, these sources contributed to organise the central core of representations about the public sphere through a mythology of origins that recruits a foundational themata for Brazilians and indeed for Latin America as a whole: the clash between purity and impurity, the mixture of self and other, the desire for fusion and the fear of mixture that mark the development of identities and societies in the continent (Quijano 1993; Canclini 1995).

Caught in the anguish and ambivalence of miscegenation, Brazilian history, Brazilian cultural production and Brazilian lay thinking interacted and mingled to construct a foundational myth related to the origins and subsequent development of Brazilian society, its people and its public life. Utopian and out of time, this

mythological space is enclosed by the narrative core of representations of the public sphere, which transform mixture into both corruption and creative potential space for the self and for the nation. It contains a story of origins that both repeats and redefines the deteriorated identity projected by the colonial encounter, juxtaposing notions of corruption in blood and politics with notions of conviviality and closeness. It becomes the origin and semiotic drive of a representational field that makes the Brazilian public sphere a contested site, where biological metaphors that connect public life to corruption and impurity in blood coexist with a pleasurable sociality where the fusion of different peoples unleashes the creative potential of mixture.

At this point it is pertinent to ask how different voices and social groups, holding different interests and powers have featured in these narratives and shaped this mythological core. Social representations are clearly shaped by representational projects (Bauer and Gaskell 1999), identities (Duveen 2001) and powers (Howarth 2006), which constitute the motion of social cognition (Millstone 2012). The devastation of indigenous populations in Brazil is well-documented and colour continues to be a marker of social exclusion. In this context, a unified mythological narrative may indeed be a dream in a country where clashes between different representational projects express not only the plurality of public spheres but the darker fractures of deep social division and inequality.

Yet, the polyphasic and oppositional nature of this foundational mythology enables identification across different social spheres because recruits different projects; its mythological nature provides an imaginative promise that protects identity, unifies the community and creates social cohesion. Its circulation in the Brazilian public sphere has taken place through a diverse and contradictory range of knowledge systems, sources, logics and systems of thinking. Its cognitive polyphasia builds a wide cognitive solidarity through what Liu and László (2007) called narrative empathy: it reaches a great variety of individuals, social groups and contexts because everywhere, everyone recognises and takes something from it. This wide tapestry of knowledge systems provides anchoring to different social niches, different interests and group projects, showing that polyphasia in cognition grants malleability and communicative flexibility to a representational field and by the same token guarantees its spread and breath, solidity and tendency to endure. Under its many guises and lenses the different and contradictory representations congealed in the mythological core of representations about the public sphere deal with the same problem and do not let it go away: desire and fear of mixture, the immemorial and timeless problem of the relationship between Self and the Other (Todorov 1992).

The polyphasia and communicative flexibility displayed by the historical core of these representations protects identity and enables inter-group solidarity and social cohesion. The many narratives that in 20th century Brazil responded to the view of miscegenation as degeneration set into motion a huge effort to formulate mixture as a positive force for what a civilisation in the tropics could be. Out of this effort the country emerged as the embodiment of the new: a celebration of all that is incomplete and unfinished, a visionary ethnic laboratory for mixing cultures and bodies. In this process, the myth of a noble origin entangled with racial democracy has been highly functional for re-working identity and for producing national cohesiveness—Brazil's

Table 2 The central core as mythology of origins in social representations of the Brazilian Public Sphere

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Dimensions and Structures</th><th>The Brazilian Case</th><th>SocPsyc Functions</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="6">Central Core as Myth in SR of the Public Sphere in Brazil</td><td>Carrier (narratives)</td><td>Books, film, opera, novels, soap operas, bossa nova, history books, Tropicalia, samba schools, amongst others</td><td>Collective Remembering</td></tr>
<tr><td>Architecture (plots and stories)</td><td>Plot: mixture
Stories of racial coexistence: love, friendship, conviviality</td><td>Stickiness</td></tr>
<tr><td>Process (dialogical)</td><td>Multiple systems: media, art, education, everyday conversation</td><td>Communication</td></tr>
<tr><td>Property (cognitive polyphasia)</td><td>Coexistence of Negative and Positive Solutions</td><td>Empathy, solidarity, endurance</td></tr>
<tr><td>Semiotic Content (themata)</td><td>Self/Other; Purity/Impurity</td><td>Signification</td></tr>
<tr><td>Institutional Regulation (metasystem)</td><td>Racial Democracy/Ego Ideal</td><td>Normative</td></tr>
</table>

territory is vast and its unity in culture and language continues to puzzle and fascinate. It gave Brazilians a great deal: a narrative of origins that integrates its different peoples, redeems the experience of mixture and emphasises the vibrancy and novelty of a new civilization in the tropics. It allowed an imaginary defence against the anxiety of tensions and conflicts and used the imagination to give comfort and reassurance about mixture and racial development (Table 2).

The Brazilian case shows that myth goes beyond distortion as a system for knowing the world; it uses the imagination as a vast resource for the projection of ideals and to subvert what is the case. The 'myth of racial democracy', which indeed is an idea without solid ground in Brazilian history and present day, is nevertheless important and of value in what expresses about the country's imagination. There is something positive in this imagination, something that constitutes what Bauer and Gaskell (1999) called a representational project that reworks the past and transforms memory to open up a future that is considered better and desired as reality. Myth is a contradictory story that can both reveal and deny reality while setting an aspiration to make it better.

Despite negative representations that anchor mixture in corruption and impure blood, the Brazilian public sphere remains contradictory. Recent research in Rio's favelas shows that grassroots organisations and excluded social actors use Brazilian identity and mixture as a positive resource to redraw urban frontiers, produce social regeneration from below and redefine the public sphere (Jovchelovitch and Priego-Hernandez 2013). These groups use the same mythological narratives to emphasise the positivity of otherness, to retrieve playfulness and the intrinsic sociality of everyday relations, to remain hopeful and to put forward a fragile element of truth in the complex ethnic landscape that characterises Brazil.

Conclusion

Narrative principles drive and organise social representations by plotting themes, characters, languages, times and events into a coherent core that carries the force of

deep-seated oppositional themata and operates as a normative metasystem in representational fields. The presence of the past in common sense thinking is polyphasic and oppositional; stories mobilise different languages and systems of thinking which establish wide cognitive solidarities and recruit multiple sources in order to fulfil needs of identity, belonging and social cohesion. Collective remembering links the past, the present and the future in a dialogue between temporal perspectives that adds time to states of cognitive polyphasia.

The central core of social representations can take a mythological function by obstructing temporal difference and producing a narrative of origins that travels through time and context in a variety of forms and guises. Representations of the public sphere in Brazil show that contradictions embedded in the idea of mixture have congealed in a mythological core that recruits a variety of sources to repeat central themata of Brazilian history and cultural identity. The power of these representations rests on their narrative empathy and polyphasic nature, which enable cognitive solidarity across disparate elements of a foundational myth that is ultimately functional to Brazilian society. Through its multiple sources they open space for an understanding of miscegenation that is positive and negative, that closes down new meaning and at the same time opens stories to new imaginations.

The social psychological processes at work in the construction of social representations offer to the historian materials to think with and against everyday thinking. The focus on how communities connect the past and the present, remember and collectively work through their trajectory and sense of identity requires both understanding and critique, a capacity to elaborate history and confront the deceptions and distortions that are involved in its construction. As a system of ideas, practices and values collectively produced, social representations are the social psychological expression of history, a history that holds its ground, insisting and inscribing itself in our subjective and social lives. The burden of a past that will not pass remains one of the most challenging psychological aspects of our historical condition; and the struggle between remembering and forgetting, of working through the past to let it go, so that today can be understood and the future can be open, remains a *sine qua non* condition for moving on, for forgiveness, for renewing identities and ways of life. In this space and in this challenge will develop the dialogue between history and social psychology.

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