

Dear seminar participants at WISER: This article comes out of my project “The Writing of Colonial Time”, and is destined for the journal History and Theory (hence the American spelling ...). Given that it is being processed by the journal, please don’t quote it quite yet. Some sections may seem to be stating the obvious, but this has partly to do with the fact that I am engaging with a diverse audience. It has also been my ambition not to take standard answers about multiple temporalities for granted.

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Radicalizing Temporal Difference: Postcolonial Theory, Cultural Relativism and Literary Time

ABSTRACT: This article is an attempt to address at a theoretical level an antinomy in postcolonial approaches to the question of temporal difference. Current scholarship tends both to denounce the way in which the others of the Western self are placed notionally in another time than the West *and* not only analytically affirm but indeed valorize multiple temporalities. I elaborate on the two problematic temporal frameworks--unilinear developmentalism and cultural relativism--that belong to a colonial legacy and generate the antinomy in question, and then proceed to discuss possible alternatives provided by a Koselleck-inspired approach to historical time as inherently plural. I thereby make two central claims: (1) postcolonial conceptions of multiple temporalities typically, if tacitly, associate time with culture, and hence risk reproducing the aporias of cultural relativism; (2) postcolonial metahistorical critique is commonly premised on a simplified and even monolithic understanding of Western modernity as an ideology of “linear progress.” Ultimately, I suggest that the solution lies in radicalizing, not discarding, the notion of multiple temporalities. Drawing on the Brazilian classic *Os sertões* as my key example, I also maintain that literary writing exhibits a unique “heterochronic” (in analogy with “heteroglossic”) potential, enabling a more refined understanding of temporal difference.

Keywords: temporal difference, multiple temporalities, postcolonial theory, cultural relativism, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Euclides da Cunha, Johannes Fabian, Reinhart Koselleck

The argument in this article deals with the question of time and history in postcolonial studies. If we trace a disciplinary genealogy that will include Gayatri Spivak and Dipesh Chakrabarty--both of them associated with the Subaltern Studies group that emerged in the 1970s--as well as Johannes Fabian, Homi Bhabha, Benita Parry, Achille Mbembe and David Attwell, among others, it is fair to say that problems of historical time have long been a central concern of postcolonial scholarship.¹ The current intensity in discussions concerning temporality, exemplified by the recent volume *Breaking up Time* or the 2012 virtual issue of *History and Theory*, may therefore appear to postcolonial scholars like a shock of the old.² But not only. Taken together, the debates relating to Reinhart Koselleck's legacy, the burgeoning field of cultural memory studies, and the daunting intellectual challenges posed by the concept of the anthropocene all prompt us to reconsider a central antinomy in postcolonial approaches to temporal difference.³

¹ Just to mention a few of the more important contributions to the debate on temporality within the postcolonial field, broadly conceived, many of which will be discussed in this chapter: Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia UP, 2002 [1983]); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000); Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Fredric Jameson, "The End of Temporality," *Critical Inquiry* 29. 4 (2003): 695-718; Harry Harootunian, "Some Thoughts on Comparability and the Space-Time Problem," *Boundary 2* 32.2 (2005): 23-52; David Attwell, *Rewriting Modernity* (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press, 2005); Prathama Bannerjee, *Politics of Time: "Primitives" and History-Writing in a Colonial Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006); Jennifer Wenzel, *Bulletproof: Afterlives of Anticolonial Prophecy in South Africa and Beyond* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2009); Benita Parry, "Aspects of Peripheral Modernisms," *Ariel* 40.1 (2009), 27-55.

² Berber Bevernage and Chris Lorenz (eds.), *Breaking up Time: Negotiating the Borders between Present, Past and Future* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013). "The New Metaphysics of Time," virtual special issue of *History and Theory*.

³ For a bracing discussion of the anthropocene and historical temporality, see Ian Baucom, "History 4°: Postcolonial Method and Anthropocene Time," *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 1.1 (2014), 123-142. Baucom takes as his point of departure Dipesh Chakrabarty's already classic article "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009), 197-222.

To state the antinomy in the starkest terms possible, one could say that postcolonial scholars *both* denounce the way in which the others of the West are placed notionally in another time than the West *and* not only analytically affirm but indeed valorize multiple temporalities. While temporal difference, on the one hand, is “bad” because it is not so much a reality as an expression of power under the regime of colonial modernity, temporal difference is on the other hand “good” either because it challenges the unitary time of Western modernity or because it simply provides a conceptually more accurate account of the historical complexity of the postcolony. Note here the contrasting ethical charge of the two claims. This contrast serves to mask the fundamental contradiction at hand, namely that the favorable version of multiple temporalities, which is understood to be real, grows out of the conditions that created the deplorable version, which is assumed to be false. For argument’s sake, we might call the favorable version the Chakrabarty option, and the deplorable version the Fabian option. This is with reference to Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Difference* and Fabian’s *Time and Other*, both of them seminal works but with different takes on time. Sharply abbreviated: if Fabian’s critique was directed *against* thinking in terms of different times, Chakrabarty actively advocated it.

It is my intention in this article first to elaborate on this antinomy, and then to sketch out a possible way to move beyond it. I will be making two central claims: (1) postcolonial conceptions of multiple temporalities typically, if tacitly, associate time with culture, and hence risk reproducing the aporias of cultural relativism; (2) postcolonial metahistorical critique is premised on a simplified and even monolithic understanding of Western modernity as an ideology of “linear progress,” the consequence of which is a binary conception of time. Both of these claims will lead me to dwell on how temporal difference can be approached anew with a literary-critical method. There is by now a long tradition of regarding narrative--especially literary narrative--as the very means by which the human experience of time is articulated.⁴ Added to this, if by literature we mean a mode of writing that opens itself to the contingency of the everyday and allows for idiosyncratic combinations of discursive and generic registers, and if narrative is “one of the many forms of time itself,” as Russell West-Pavlov puts it, then I would argue that it provides a uniquely variegated source material for

⁴ Ricoeur provides the locus classicus of this claim: “[...] le temps devient humain dans la mesure où il est articulé sur un mode narratif, et [...] le récit atteint sa signification plénière quand il devient une condition de l’existence temporelle”: Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, vol. 1 (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1983), 105. See also Mark Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

investigating the question of plural time.⁵ In analogy with Mikhail Bakhtin's claim that the genre of the novel allows different social registers of language ("heteroglossia") to resonate within a single discursive frame, I argue therefore that literary writing broadly conceived--not only narrative, and not only fiction!--has a "heterochronic" potential unparalleled in other types of discourses.⁶ Such "heterochronicity" can trump, moreover, explicit ideologies of time. My key exhibit in this regard will be Euclides da Cunha's famous Brazilian war documentary *Os sertões* (1902; translated as *Backlands*). There will also be some mention of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The selection of these two works which stem from the same period--*Heart of Darkness* was also first published in book form in 1902--is highly deliberate. Both engage closely with colonial/postcolonial conflicts, and both rehearse nineteenth-century European discourses on time, particularly social Darwinism. What my closer discussion of *Os sertões* shows, however, is precisely how these discourses fail to contain its heterochronicity. I will in other words be suggesting that a way beyond the antinomy sketched out above lies in radicalizing, not discarding, the notion of multiple temporalities.

THE SPATIALIZATION OF TIME

These days, the Chakrabarty option has gained the upper hand in postcolonial accounts of historical time. We see this when David Attwell speaks of "modernity's multiple and alternative forms," or when Jennifer Wenzel reads millennial Xhosa prophecy in the nineteenth-century Cape Colony in terms of competing temporalities ("a recursive vision of renewal as compared with a unidirectional, linear vision of progress"), or when Achille Mbembe declares that "the postcolony encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias," or when Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo--with reference to Chakrabarty--speaks of the "heterotemporality" of Comanche history on the US-Mexican border.⁷ Yet, such claims are mostly presented in an affirmative rather than a skeptical mode, or otherwise

⁵ Russell West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* (London: Routledge, 2013), 99.

⁶ See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). The term heterochronicity, which has been used previously by the art critic Nicolas Bourriaud, should be clearly distinguished from Bakhtin's own notion of the "chronotope," which doesn't have to do with multiple temporalities but with the fashioning of a specific space-time in narrative. As for reading *Os sertões* as literature, I must point out that I am in good company. Although it is not explicitly a fiction, and although Cunha saw himself as contributing to historiography, the stylistic range and epic sweep of has always attracted literary readings.

⁷ Attwell, 22; Wenzel, 41; Mbembe, 14; Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, "'No Country for Old Mexicans': The Collision of Empires on the Texas Frontier," *Interventions* 13.1 (2011), 70.

combined with the Fabian option, as though there were no risk of contradiction. One of the first critics to intuit that there might be a deeper problem at hand was Simon Gikandi, even if he didn't take his observation very far. In *Maps of Englishness*, he asked:

How do we read the relationship between metropole and colony as conjunctive when our ideological desire is the inscription of their uneven temporality and their inherent heterologies? How can we advocate a diachronic approach to, let's say, English and Indian cultures, and at the same time argue that the imperial experience that created these cultures in the modern period was a synchronic event?⁸

While agreeing with the premise that time can be thought of in the plural (and note the association of time with culture), Gikandi opened up one significant avenue of critique, namely the theoretical conflict between local specificity and the homogenizing force of modernity which creates the conditions for global comparison. Put differently, the historical time of each distinct place--what Gikandi calls diachrony--would appear to be cancelled by the spatial expansion of capitalist modernity, forcing what is different and separate together, synchronically. This is precisely the dilemma that Chakrabarty confronts at length in *Provincializing Europe* where he attempts to combine "analytical" approaches (which reads history as the universal expansion of capital) with "hermeneutic" or "affective" ones (which are attentive to local life-worlds).

It is the expansion of capitalism, arguably, that led in the late twentieth century to what Foucault was early to observe as a privileging of space as a theoretical category.⁹ Indeed, if we accept the arguments of materialist thinkers such as Fredric Jameson, Harry Harootunian and others, the shift from modernity to postmodernity or late modernity has made contemporary global capitalism an untranscendable horizon, a "moment" that can only expand spatially but not be thought of--and hence relativized--in terms of time and change.¹⁰

For Marxist critics in particular, the way in which capital overrides the local creates a fundamental dilemma for their theorization of time: even as they intend to critique capitalist modernity at the deepest level, the ultimate and totalizing retrieval of the notion of historical progress can lead either to self-contradiction or to a denial of the legitimacy of other temporal

⁸ Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 7.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, vol. 4 (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 752.

¹⁰ Jameson; Harootunian.

modes. Understood as the critical shadow-self of capitalism, and hence produced by the very conditions that have created capitalism, Marxism risks being caught in an intellectual double-bind. Neil Lazarus's *The Postcolonial Unconscious* provides an interesting case in point. In a revisionist discussion of Jameson's "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," Lazarus moves ambiguously between two understandings of time, even though (or precisely because) this is not the main focus of his chapter. He begins by relating how Jameson's article was accused by Rosemary Marangoly George, among others, of placing the Third World notionally in another time-frame than the West, construing it as backward, or "behind the times." Lazarus does not go along with this reading of Jameson, but he does seem to agree on a *theoretical* level that differential and uneven temporalities per se are simply a Western construction in the service of colonial power.¹¹ Lazarus invokes here the Fabian option, that is to say Fabian's critique of how anthropology

presents other people, who are in fact contemporaries of the anthropologists who write about them, as though they are living in another time, specifically in the past. [...] The anthropologist's encounter with them is therefore an encounter not merely of different social and cultural orders but of different, and of course differently *valued*, temporalities.¹²

With this reading of Fabian as his support, it seems as though Lazarus condemns not only the hierarchization of different temporalities, but also the ascription of temporal difference as such. Further down in the chapter, however, he approvingly summarises Jameson's account of modernism as arising out of the synchronicity of the non-synchronous (drawing on Ernst Bloch's influential term *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*), the simultaneity of, say, rural peasantry and Krupp factories.¹³ "Within the space/time of capitalist modernity," Lazarus concludes, "emergent features, including those rising to dominance, exist alongside other features [...] of earlier historical provenance."¹⁴ The appearance under postmodernism that

¹¹ Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 98.

¹² Lazarus, 98.

¹³ Ernst Bloch, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1962 [1935]), 111-126. I am aware that the term *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* these days is associated primarily with Koselleck, but it has a longer German genealogy. Bloch used it to explain the historical "anomaly" of Nazism, and it had previously been coined by the art historian Wilhelm Pinder. I wish to thank Helge Jordheim for pointing out Pinder's contribution to me.

¹⁴ Lazarus, 109. See also Parry.

such temporal difference has been evened out and made redundant is for Lazarus a mere ideological illusion, particularly when one takes the non-West into account: “everything has *not* in fact reached the same hour on the great clock of development or rationalisation.”¹⁵ Lest this be read too readily in spatial terms, he adds that the “West” names “not a geographical location, but an episteme or line of vision.”¹⁶ Such is Lazarus’s attempt to critique the spatial paradigm, and to provide a theoretical escape route from the intellectual closure of capitalism. It leads to the conclusion that heterogeneous time for Lazarus is on the one hand a mere ideological construction, and on the other a deep historical reality. In both cases ultimately a product of capitalist modernity.

Rather than dismissing this as a failure of thought, however, it is important to elaborate on just why the combination of temporality and geography becomes a problem. It is well established that nineteenth-century European discourses of modernity posited not only a hierarchy of successive human development but also a concomitant spatialization of time. We need not look far to substantiate this. The social Darwinist notion of progress presupposed, to put it in the crudest terms, that certain peoples (white and European) were further advanced than others (dark-skinned Asians, Africans, Orientals, Oceanians, etc.). This difference, conceived in metaphorical and spatial terms to begin with (“progress,” “advancement”), was frequently made readable through a conflation of time and spatial distance. Geographical remoteness, as in the paradigmatic example of the river Congo in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, became a sign of temporal distance, and hence of the belatedness, barbarism or savagery of the “other.” “Going up that river,” Conrad’s narrator Marlow tells us in a famous passage, “was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world.”¹⁷ Later he states that “[w]e were wanderers on *prehistoric* earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet.”¹⁸ (Emphasis added.) In connection with the arguably racist depiction of Congolese forest-dwellers that prompted the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe’s well-known attack on Conrad, we then read: “The *prehistoric* man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us--who could tell?”¹⁹ (Emphasis added.) Conrad scholars will often point to the withdrawal of meaning and hermeneutic blankness evoked here: “We were cut off from

¹⁵ Lazarus, 109.

¹⁶ Lazarus, 109-110.

¹⁷ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 1985 [1902]), 33.

¹⁸ Conrad, 35.

¹⁹ Conrad, 35. Chinua Achebe, “An Image of Africa,” *The Massachusetts Review* 18.4 (1977), 782-794.

comprehension of our surroundings.”²⁰ Even so, there is no withdrawal of meaning or cutting off of comprehension in the unambiguous designation of the Africans as “prehistoric.” Their language and intentions may be obscure to Marlow, but their subordinate position in the Great Chain of Being is clear as day. Conrad, of course, is not being original here. He is merely repeating, through Marlow, one of the standard tropes of his time and place, established in the nexus of nineteenth-century imperial expansion and the rise of evolutionist ethnography, as characterised by Ernest Gellner: “Systematic study of ‘primitive’ tribes began first in the hope of utilizing them as a kind of time-machine, as a peep into our own historic past, as providing closer evidence about the early links in the great Series.”²¹

The Brazilian war documentary that I mentioned in the introduction excels at this type of spatio-temporal hierarchization. The military engineer Euclides da Cunha’s magnum opus, translated by Elizabeth Lowe as *Backlands*, is a foundational text in the Brazilian national canon.²² As such it defies description: part epic, part reportage, part geological and ethnographic essay, *Os sertões* ultimately amounts to an indictment of war crimes committed in the 1890s by the Brazilian republic against the rebellious and heretic community of Canudos in the north-eastern hinterland. This community could be described as a sect, led by the charismatic leader Antônio Conselheiro who nurtured a messianic and apocalyptic view of time. For various reasons, most of them misunderstandings, Conselheiro and his followers came to be perceived first by the Bahia state authorities and then the federal government in Rio as a threat to the still rosy-cheeked republic (proclaimed in 1889). The Canudos community, on their part, quite accurately perceived the troops that were sent out to “pacify” them as a threat to their existence and fought valiantly to defend their autonomy. It would take four attempts before the government finally succeeded in suppressing, that is annihilating, Canudos and its roughly 25 000 inhabitants--although surviving women and children were spared. A scattering of male combatants also managed to survive.

²⁰ Conrad, 35. See also J. Hillis Miller, “Should We Read *Heart of Darkness?*,” in *Conrad in Africa*, ed. Gail Fincham et al. (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 2002), 21-40.

²¹ Quoted in Fabian, *Time*, 39.

²² Euclides da Cunha, *Os sertões* (Rio de Janeiro: Lacerda, 2005). I will be quoting mainly from the new English translation: Euclides da Cunha, *Backlands: The Canudos Campaign*, trans. Elizabeth Lowe (New York: Penguin, 2010). Among the numerous studies of *Os sertões* and Canudos I could mention Olímpio de Souza Andrade, *História e interpretação de Os sertões*, 4th ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Academia Brasileira de Letras, 2002), Walnice Nogueira Galvão, *Euclidiana: ensaios sobre Euclides da Cunha* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2009) and Robert M. Levine, *Vale of Tears: Revisiting the Canudos Massacre in Northeastern Brazil, 1893-1897* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1992).

What Cunha saw during this fourth campaign shook him so profoundly that he set out to write not only the full history of the Canudos war, as far as he was able, but an all-embracing, quasi-scientific analysis of the Brazilian nation and the broader national significance of the war. By establishing a dichotomy between the “modern” cities of southern Brazil which he essentially sees as outposts of contemporary Europe and the “retrograde” *sertanejos* of the inland, Cunha insistently--but not consistently--tries to make sense of his own confused experience of Brazil by casting it as a nation of multiple temporalities manifested through racial difference. “We must insist on this truth,” he writes. “The war of Canudos was a regression in our history. What we had before us was the unsolicited armed insurgence of an old, dead society, brought back to life by a madman.”²³ By the same token, he states that “three entire centuries” separate the backlanders from the modern inhabitants of Brazil’s southern coast.²⁴ But history, in Cunha’s view, moves in one direction only and takes no prisoners: “Either we progress or we become extinct.”²⁵ Given the de facto extinction of the Canudos community, this can be read, chillingly, as a *descriptive* statement and an assessment of modernity as a *pharmakon* in Derrida’s sense, both cure and poison, promise and threat.²⁶ In Cunha’s preface, the threat is explicit:

The laggards of today will be completely gone tomorrow. Civilization will advance across the backlands, driven by that implacable “motive force of history” that Gumplowicz, much wiser than Hobbes, foretold in a flash of genius: the inevitable crushing of the weak races by the strong. [...] The campaign looked at here was a regression to the past.²⁷

This is genocidal thinking, roughly contemporaneous with the Herero genocide in German Namibia, and deeply disturbing as such. It is by no means the sum total of Cunha’s approach to time, as I will show further down, but we must remain alert here to the metaphoricity as

²³ Cunha, *Backlands*, 168. “Insistamos sobre esta verdade: a guerra de Canudos foi um refluxo em nossa história. Tivemos, inopinadamente, resurreta e em armas em nossa frente, uma sociedade morta, galvanizada por um doido.”: Cunha, *Os sertões*, 172.

²⁴ Cunha, *Backlands*, 168.

²⁵ Cunha, *Backlands*, 62. “Ou progredimos, ou desaperacemos”: Cunha, *Os sertões*, 77.

²⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone, 1981).

²⁷ Cunha, *Backlands*, 1-2. “Retardatários hoje, amanhã se extinguirão de todo. A civilização avançará nos sertões impelida por essa implacável ‘força motriz da História’ que Gumplowicz, maior do que Hobbes, lobrigou, num lance genial, no esmagamento inevitável das raças fracas pelas raças fortes.”: Cunha, *Os sertões*, 27.

well as the aggressiveness of thinking about history in terms of a given *direction*, which is the underlying premise for the spatialization of time.

Colonial discourse analysis will typically insist, of course, that metaphoricity is all there is to it. Spatio-temporal distance of the kind we encounter in Conrad as well as Cunha is not to be read at face value, as an “actual” difference, but as an ideologically driven construction of the colonial subject as different, serving to buttress the Europeans’ understanding of themselves as modern and advanced. Or to put it in slightly different terms, we find here a racial conception of temporal difference that succeeded both in placing a premium on modernity as a universal value and earmarking modernity as a properly European and Western invention. Indeed, while it is true that *Heart of Darkness* also develops a critique of modernity by exposing the emptiness and hypocrisy of the civilizing mission, this critique is nonetheless premised on temporal distancing. The sublime “horror” of the novel, which supposedly targets the very heart of lofty European ideals of global progress, depends for its ironic effect on the primary othering of the Africans.

We are faced here, even in moments of ambiguity, with general patterns of thought that shaped a dominant discourse of modernity before and after 1900, and which undergirds the historicist “transition narrative” targeted by Chakrabarty: the notion that the history of the third world is known in advance, since the West has arrived at the grand central station of modernity before the Rest.²⁸ The very fact that the same figural language supports affirmative as well as critical articulations of modernity--and I do see both *Heart of Darkness* and *Os sertões* as critical of their times--shows just how durable this conception of time’s arrow is. As Conrad’s term “prehistoric” shows, *history* was enlisted as a necessary if not sufficient property of a modern or modernizable society. Following on Hegel, whose state-based philosophy of world history flatly excluded Africa south of the Sahara, Australasia and pre-Columbian America from the circle of human history, this would continue to bedevil all attempts at writing these parts of the world “into” history.²⁹ Either the Hegelian schema remained intact, as when Cunha declared that the Amazon was “land without history,”³⁰ or it would be appropriated with the purpose of showing that the supposedly non-historical peoples did indeed possess history, as in numerous early African novels such as Thomas Mofolo’s *Chaka* or Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. Through all of this, we can sense the

²⁸ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 30-34.

²⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Essential Writings* (New York: Harper, 1974), 283-313.

³⁰ Euclides da Cunha, *The Amazon: Land Without History*, trans. Ronald Sousa (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006).

persistent projection not only of temporal difference but of a *hierarchy* of time that Lazarus cautions against. Time may be a universal condition of human existence; certain pasts and certain presents are however better than others.

These examples confirm that much of the difficulty in theorizing temporality--a difficulty not restricted to Marxist theory--derives from the history of Western colonialism and the epistemic manoeuvres of colonial discourse. It is the superimposition of temporal difference onto cultural difference, or, to be even more precise, the conflation of temporal, cultural and spatial difference that Lazarus is trying diligently to avoid and yet reintroduces through the binary of the West and non-West which, precisely *as* an episteme, will always retain a spatial logic. It seems then that Lazarus (siding with Jameson and Bloch, and reminiscent of Mbembe) accepts the notion of the *Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen* within a given society or system, if we accept that capitalism functions as one, global system. However, when temporal difference is located *outside* of the knowing, Western subject, in more or less distant societies, Lazarus chooses to mobilize Fabian's critique of temporal distantiation. This is clearly a contradiction, even if it need not be overstated and is not necessarily irresolvable. It is more important to recognize its underlying motivation: a deep-seated suspicion both of universalizing the West as a transcendental knowing subject, and of the paradoxical counterpart to this universalizing manoeuvre, cultural relativism.

CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Johann Gottfried Herder was the first in Europe to posit with philosophical authority the intrinsic and discrete value of different cultures--in the spirit of a "pluralistic cosmopolitanism."³¹ It was in this Herderian lineage that Franz Boas later championed cultural relativism as a disciplinary method within anthropology, in explicit resistance against the racist, evolutionist ordering of humanity along a temporal scale of development.³² However, while relativism did away with the hierarchy of cultures, it continued to insist that cultures were separate. This understanding of separateness--which it was the privilege of the anthropologist-as-transcendental-subject to articulate and refine into scientific knowledge--could then easily be translated into a conception of separate temporalities to which each cultural community belonged but which were sealed off from each other, in analogy with

³¹ Michael Forster, "Johann Gottfried von Herder," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2009), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), 48. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/herder/>

³² Franz Boas, *Anthropology and Modern Life* (New York: Norton & Co., 1928).

Sapir's and Whorf's theory of linguistic relativity.³³ This was different from social Darwinism's placing of different groups along a *single* temporal scale, but as long as fundamental questions about uneven power relations under the regime of modernity failed to be asked, relativism could just as well serve to camouflage inequities under the guise of respect for difference. It was not by chance that state apartheid in South Africa in the 1960s was officially designated as "separate development," *aparte ontwikkeling* in Afrikaans, on the grounds that--as the South African government's Tomlinson Commission of 1956 phrased it--there was "little hope of evolutionary development" towards a common society.³⁴ Cultural relativism was, one could say, wrenched from the anthropological seminar room by the apartheid ideologues and put to direct political, repressive use. This would have horrified Franz Boas, yet it does point to a fundamental problem with cultural relativism (and, by implication, present-day multiculturalism).³⁵

In a reflection on the state of anthropology in the heyday of decolonization in the 1960s, Claude Lévi-Strauss provided a strong articulation of this problem. Given the accelerated pace of change and the increased absorption of "the so-called primitive peoples" into the modern world, it seemed to Lévi-Strauss that anthropology faced a crisis. Firstly, in accordance with a disciplinary self-understanding that was still current at the time, Lévi-Strauss maintained that anthropology should not concern itself with the West. Secondly, "the mere fact of being subjected to ethnographic investigation seems distasteful to these peoples."³⁶ This led, in Lévi-Strauss's understanding, to a paradoxical situation, for

it is out of a deep respect for cultures other than our own that the doctrine of cultural relativism evolved; and it now appears that this doctrine is deemed unacceptable by the very people on whose behalf it was upheld, while those ethnologists who favour unilinear evolutionism find unexpected support from peoples who desire nothing more than to share

³³ Edward Sapir, *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1921); Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality* (New York: MIT Press, 1956).

³⁴ Quoted in T. R. H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 340.

³⁵ And I am of course not the first to point this out. In *Provincializing Europe* Chakrabarty is at pains to distance himself from cultural relativism, precisely because of its compromising implications for his own emphasis on historical difference.

³⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Anthropology: Its Achievements and Future," *Current Anthropology* 7.2 (1966): 125. See also Gaurav Desai's discussion of Lévi-Strauss in *Subject to Colonialism: African Self-fashioning and the Colonial Library* (Durham: Duke UP, 2001).

in the benefits of industrialization, and who prefer to look at themselves as *temporarily backward* rather than *permanently different*.³⁷ (Emphasis added.)

Lévi-Strauss, speaking as a Westerner to other Westerners from within the untranscendable horizon of his own moment--industrial modernization--enables us to see the precise logic of apartheid ideology's co-optation of cultural relativism: if one were forced to choose between two modes of inequality, "unilinear evolutionism" (ruled out by the Tomlinson report) would have been the more progressive option in South Africa in the 1960s. Cultural relativism could in other words be rephrased as a *denial of modernity* to those at the receiving end of colonial power; at the same time, modernity amounts to a de facto *denial of cultural relativism*, at least in its strong sense. Precisely because of what Gikandi called the synchronic incursion of modernity, the separateness of cultures postulated by cultural relativism is neither absolute nor static, and less and less so. The historical process that makes this evident by forcing cultures upon each other in a vortex of uneven and rapid change may be ugly, but it cannot be denied. Hence, Lévi-Strauss admits that anthropology itself is "the outcome of an historical process which has made the larger part of mankind subservient to the other," and has been committed to studying and preserving that which its condition of possibility eradicates.³⁸ In this particular article, he tries however to argue both sides of the case, caught between the realization that valuing difference can never be innocent, and a continued insistence on the tragic necessity to attend to differences that soon will be lost for ever. While he--without really problematizing the epistemological (as distinct from political) position from which he speaks--maintains that anthropology remains necessary in the service of our collective knowledge of humanity, cultural relativism can be seen as complicit with the denial of progress to the "non-West."

Time figures in Lévi-Strauss's discussion as an implicit and notoriously unresolved problem. He appears to grant no more than two theoretical possibilities, both of which he dismisses: either temporal difference--separateness--or the single scale of developmental, modern time. Already in 1952, in the UNESCO-commissioned essay *Race et histoire*, Lévi-Strauss rejected the single temporality of what he called "false evolutionism" and emphasized instead the dynamics of separateness and contact as the driving force of cultural change.³⁹

³⁷ Lévi-Strauss, "Anthropology," 125.

³⁸ Lévi-Strauss, "Anthropology," 125.

³⁹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race et histoire* (Paris: Gonthier, 1961 [1952]), 23.

There is an opening here, in the notion of “contact,” towards another view of time, but not yet a solution. The question remains therefore: if evolutionism, Marxism, cultural relativism and the modernist, unitary conception of time all give us unsatisfactory answers, how should temporal difference be conceptualized?

MULTIPLYING THE CONCEPTIONS OF TIME

We should perhaps return to Herder, this time to seek his guidance. Besides standing as the precursor of cultural relativism, he also provided an original take on time. In his metacritique of Kant, Herder insisted that “every changing thing has the measure of its own time within itself,” meaning that there are “at any one time in the universe innumerable many times.”⁴⁰ Let us consider this statement together with Reinhart Koselleck’s understanding that modernity opens up new “horizons of expectations” that are no longer limited to the “space of experience” of earlier societies. Koselleck explains it as follows:

It was not just the horizon of expectation that gained a historically new quality which was itself constantly subject to being overlaid with utopian conceptions. The space of experience also had increasingly altered its form. The concept “progress” was first minted toward the end of the eighteenth century at the time when a wide variety of experiences from the previous three centuries were being drawn together. The solitary and universal concept of progress drew on numerous individual experiences, which entered ever more deeply into everyday life, as well as on sectoral progress that had never before existed in this way. Examples are the Copernican revolution, the slowly developing new technology, the discovery of the globe and its people living at various levels of advancement, and the dissolution of the society of orders through the impact of industry and capital. All such instances are indicative of the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous, or perhaps, rather, of the nonsimultaneous occurring simultaneously. In the words of Friedrich Schlegel, who sought to capture the *Neuzeitliche* in terms of history in the progressive mode: “The real problem of history is the inequality of progress in the various elements of human development [*Bildung*]; in particular, the great divergence in the degree of intellectual and ethical development.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ Quoted in Koselleck, 237.

⁴¹ Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia UP, 2004), 266.

The Eurocentrism of Kosselleck's account is a problem of its own that I must leave to one side at the moment.⁴² It is the *accelerating unevenness* of change--I am deliberately not using the words "progress" or "development"--and how this acceleration changes the very meaning of change that is the key point here. I suspect that this, combined with Herder's postulation of *innumerable* times, may provide an enabling alternative to the stalemate between unified and multiple time that I sketched out previously, if only because it may relieve us from the inherent colonial risk of equating "one" culture with one temporality, or a given place with one time. It also enables us to evade the ultimately ideological projection of modernity as a single, monolithic temporality. If we accept that there are innumerable times, but also that the phenomenological meaning of these times are relationally constituted, then it is not difficult to imagine that a given individual or community may move through/enact/experience several times simultaneously.

In what could be read as a postcolonial refinement of Herder's point we find Gayatri Spivak returning us to the baseline of such multifarious but also inarticulate temporal experience that risks being appropriated on behalf of authoritative (read historical, national, colonial) versions of time:

⁴² By speaking of the Copernican revolution and, even more pointedly, of the "discovery" of the globe, Koselleck is guilty of universalizing a particular, European experience of modernity. Nor does he consider the possibility that the admittedly globe-girdling process of modernity may have produced in the nineteenth century experiences--as in Brazil or South Africa--that were *not* nonsimultaneous with the European experience, but nonetheless marked by a profound ambivalence towards the expectational horizon of "progress," for example, which (as in the case of Cunha) could entail death and extinction as well as social advancement. This point has been borne out by Peter Osborne, who argues that the space of the colony was in fact an intrinsic element of the historical consciousness of modernity:

the category of modernity was constituted in the course of the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment through a dual process of the transcoding of immanently European temporal differences ("revolution") and colonial spatial differences ("the colonies"), to produce a geopolitical spatialisation of temporal differences and a temporalisation of spatialised colonial differences. (Peter Osborne, "Global Modernity and the Contemporary: Two Categories of the Philosophy of Historical Time" in Lorenz and Bevernage [eds.], 75)

These remarks, which speak directly to my earlier discussion of the spatialization of time, indicate a necessary revision of Koselleck's Eurocentric framework, without which his legacy will remain damagingly parochial.

“Time” is a word to which we give flesh in various ways. The Kant that philosophized the relationship between theoretical and practical reason taught the European that he could not be or think or act without this first gesture. Freud unhooked this lesson from its easy reading--the primacy of real lived time as giving us life itself--by suggesting that “real lived time” is produced by the machinery of the mental theater. One common way of grasping life and ground-level history as events happening to and around many lives is by fleshing out “time” as sequential process. Let us call this “timing.” This feeling for life and history is often disqualified, in a dominant interest, in the name of the real laws of motion of “time,” or rather, “Time.”⁴³

Of interest to my argument is Spivak’s emphasis on time as never being simply present as lived experience or as a pure category of perception, but psychically, linguistically and socially mediated. And when mediated, this occurs not just on the level of “culture.” To think of “timing” as standing in an uneasy, subordinate position relative to capitalized “Time” provides a more flexible, non-culturalist point of entry to the question of theorizing temporal difference under conditions of inequality. It comes close to Henri Lefebvre’s emphasis on “everydayness” as an experiential category that is never exclusively shaped by hegemonic versions of time but accommodates different rhythms that may stand in a conflictual relationship to one another.⁴⁴

Time, then, needs to be conceived of as *radically* multiple, or polyrhythmic, in ways that far exceed the evolutionist, colonial and culturalist paradigms. Radical polytemporality would go further than Braudel’s *durées* and acknowledge all the different modes of time--domestic, national, personal, political, spiritual, geological, technological, agricultural, etc.--that continuously give shape and meaning to human life, and that are impossible to reduce wholesale to concepts such as “culture” or “capitalism.” In that sense, radical polytemporality will ultimately elude the representational capacity of language. While remaining *in* language, however, literature (and the practice of literary reading) allows us to intimate the simultaneity of times, within and beyond the human realm. I will provide some further examples from Cunha’s work to demonstrate this.

SYSTEMIC OVERLAP AND NATIONAL TIME

⁴³ Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999), 37-38.

⁴⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, trans. Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore (London: Continuum, 2004).

Os sertões consists of three, successively longer parts called “The land,” “Man,” and “The battle.” They correspond, roughly, to four temporal registers: geological time, anthropological and historical time, and the time of the event. Conflict is what makes these temporalities coincide. If the key point in Fabian’s critique of temporal distantiation was that the person-to-person encounter in fieldwork consisted in the *sharing* of time, then conflict becomes a mode of timing that allows for a violent “sharing” of differential temporalities. We have already seen examples of how Cunha conforms ideologically with social Darwinist time. What I want to show in this concluding section is how his rambling and polyphonic narrative resists ideological reduction. Insofar as racist temporal distantiation shapes his thinking initially, the narrative of conflict collapses distance. And insofar as conflict functions as a mode of timing, it is in *Os sertões* not restricted to the human realm. A *leitmotif* in part one, for example, is “the age-old martyrdom of the land.” In the closing paragraph we read: “The martyrdom of man in those parts is but a reflection of a greater torture, one more widespread and one that takes in the whole economy of life. It is the age-old martyrdom of the land ...”⁴⁵ (In Cunha’s original, both “life” and “land” are capitalized.) This summarises a consistent tendency in Cunha’s description of the *sertão*, which is peppered with phrases such as “the brutal environment,” “this tormented nature,” or “[t]he time of torture returns.”⁴⁶ The guiding metaphor is that of enmity: lichens “attack” stones; there are climatological forces that “attack” the land “with no letup in their destructive action”; the contrasts of the land are “in permanent conflict”; there is a consistent “struggle for life” in which the “sun is the enemy who must be avoided, deceived, or fought against”.⁴⁷ This is how the anthropomorphism of “the martyrdom of the land” is sustained in the spirit not only of Spencerian evolutionism (“the survival of the fittest”) but more importantly of *Os sertões* as such, insofar as it prefigures the monumental narrative of the actual Canudos conflict in all of its stark brutality.

In temporal terms, the anthropomorphizing tropes of conflict and suffering serve to cross discrete geological, botanical, human, meteorological and diurnal rhythms so as to combine them in a phenomenological “now” of pain and torture that admits no mental escape from the present. Interestingly, however, this anthropomorphizing temporality of conflict is also

⁴⁵ Cunha, *Backlands*, 55. “O martírio do homem, ali, é o reflexo de tortura maior, mais ampla, abrangendo a economia geral da Vida. Nasce do martírio secular da Terra ...”: Cunha, *Sertões*, 71.

⁴⁶ Cunha, *Backlands*, 20, 46.

⁴⁷ Cunha, *Backlands*, 22, 18, 27, 36.

inverted. In one passage, called “Some unique hygrometers”, Cunha provides a memorable illustration of the aridity of the region:

The setting sun has cast the broad shadow of the foliage across the ground, and under its protection, arms akimbo, his face turned to the sky, a soldier is resting.

He has been resting for ... three months.

He died during the attack of July 18. The butt of his Mannlicher rifle had been cracked, his cartridge belt and cap tossed to one side, and his uniform was in tatters. All this pointed to the fact that he had died in hand-to-hand combat against a powerful adversary. [...] He was intact. He had only withered. He was mummified, his facial features preserved in such a way as to suggest a weary warrior getting his strength back with a bit of sleep in the shade of that beneficent tree. No worm, that most common of tragic analysts, had damaged his tissues. He was being returned to life's whirl without any repugnant decomposition, imperceptibly flushed out. He was a sort of apparatus that was showing in an absolute but suggestive way the extreme dryness of the air.

The horses that had been killed on that day had the appearance of stuffed museum specimens: their necks a bit longer and thinner, their legs desiccated, and their skeletons showing, shriveled and hard.⁴⁸

Here, both human and animal are deprived of their conventional attributes of “life” and transformed into objects that have passed into completely different temporal rhythms altogether. Cunha establishes in this way a temporal ecology of life, land and climate in which antagonism is rife but without impermeable boundaries between them. Instead, the

⁴⁸ Cunha, *Backlands*, 28-29. “O sol poente desatava, longa, a sua sombra pelo chão, e protegido por ela--braços largamente abertos, face volvida para os céus,--um soldado descansava.

Descansava ... havia três meses.

Morrera no assalto de 18 de julho. A coronha da *mannlicher* estrondada, o cinturão e o boné jogados a uma banda, e a farda em tiras, diziam que sucumbira em luta corpo-a-corpo com adversário possante. [...] E estava intacto. Murchara apenas. Mumificara conservando os traços fisionómicos, de modo a incutir a ilusão exata de um lutador cansado, retemperando-se em tranqüilo sono, à sombra daquela árvore benfazeja. Nem um verme--o mais vulgar dos trágicos analistas da matéria--lhe maculara os tecidos. Volvia ao turbilhão da vida sem decomposição repugnante, numa exaustão imperceptível, Era um aparelho revelando de modo absoluto, mas sugestivo, a secura extrema dos ares.

Os cavalos mortos naquele mesmo dia, semelhavam espécimes empalhados, de museus. O pescoço apenas mais alongado e fino, as pernas ressequidas e o arcabouço engelhado e duro.”: Cunha, *Sertões*, 48.

living, through death, become part of the land; humans and animals become equally effective “hygrometers;” and the land in turn is the precondition for the forms of life that, despite everything, prevail in the *sertão*. This is an exemplary instance of what West-Pavlov calls “systemic overlap” in temporality, whereby “embedded systems and sub-systems which overlap with each other and evolve temporally into other systems.”⁴⁹ In a purely stylistic sense, it must be noted how Cunha achieves this effect by superimposing the temporality of the first impression (soldier resting) on top of the temporality of the second impression (decomposed corpse) that involves both the slower rhythm of drought and seasonal change, and the deduction of the hyper-rapid rhythm of battle that immediately preceded the soldier’s death.

In part two of *Os sertões*, in which (as we saw earlier) Cunha makes use of a racializing vocabulary, the trope of conflict is transferred to the historical creation of a Brazilian national community. This is where Cunha presents the key tenets of his ideology of progress, as well as provides a detailed portrayal of Canudos, its inhabitants and its leader, Antônio Conselheiro. Central to Cunha’s national vision (and in outright contradiction of his statements about the racial degeneration of the mestizo) is the role of the male backlander, the *sertanejo*, as a timeless repository of cultural authenticity, “the bedrock” of the Brazilian nation. Accordingly, in the sections that describe the life of “the” *sertanejo*, Cunha uses an iterative present tense. Even the most singular details are transposed, in that characteristic ethnographic fashion discussed by Fabian, to a level of endless repetition: “The drought does not terrify him; it merely marks his tormented existence in dramatic episodes;” “[h]e chops up the boughs of the *juazeiros* and *mandacarús* to slake his thirst and nourish the starving herd;” “[h]e continues on foot now to the pastures, because it breaks his heart to look at his horse.”⁵⁰

To say that part two shifts from geological to anthropological and historical time indicates however only a general tendency. As soon as one looks more closely, time diversifies. Cunha mobilizes at least four temporal modes to make his point: the temporality of “racial” evolution; the timeless present of ethnography; the temporality of progress; domestic time, or the time of the everyday. To this could be added a fifth: his vivid accounts of the spiritual temporality of Antônio Conselheiro and his followers, with their apocalyptic horizon of expectation. These temporalities are articulated in various discursive modes, notably polemic,

⁴⁹ West-Pavlov, 51.

⁵⁰ Cunha, *Backlands*, 111, 114, 115.

ethnography, and novelistic narration. Cunha's use of "race" becomes particularly contorted: what is of interest here is how Cunha argues *against* many of the claims that he apparently endorses. That is to say, he accepts the phantasm of "race" as a legitimate means of organizing anthropological knowledge, yet comes to disagree with many of its conclusions. As soon as he contemplates the implications of biological racism, therefore, the complications multiply like Ptolemaeon epicycles:

We soon observe that the result of of the union of two races does not produce a third race in which the characteristics of each in this binary union are evenly distributed. On the contrary, the inevitable ternary combination results in at least three other binary ones. The original racial elements are not aggregated nor are they blended. Rather, they reproduce themselves, dividing into an equal number of subforms that then take their place and produce a confused mix of races, the most characteristic results of which are the mulatto, the *mameluco* or *curiboca*, and the *cafuzo*.⁵¹

Accordingly, "[t]he Brazilian, as an abstract type that we seek to define, can only be viewed as a human type in progress, the result of an extraordinarily complex mixing of races."⁵² Cunha disagrees with claims that dominant features of a given "race" will gradually erase the traces of other races and states that "[t]here is no such thing as a Brazilian anthropological type."⁵³ Instead, and this is the interesting point, he chooses to dismiss biologism, invoking the burden of a shared national destiny under conditions of internal difference: "The environment imprints its own characteristics on the human organism, which is undergoing a process of fusion of different types."⁵⁴ In light of this, his advocacy of progress takes on a different tone (and here we return to that earlier quote):

⁵¹ Cunha, *Backlands*, 60. "Vemos, de pronto, que, mesmo nesta hipótese favorável, deles não resulta o produto único imanente às combinações binárias, numa fusão imediata em que justaponham ou se resumam os seus caracteres, unificados e convergentes num tipo intermediário. Ao contrário, a combinação ternária inevitável, determina, no caso mais simples, três outras, binárias. Os elementos iniciais não se resumem, não se unificam; desdobram-se; originam número igual de subformações--substituindo-se pelos derivados, sem redução alguma, em uma mestiçagem embaralhada onde se destacam como produtos mais característicos o *mulato*, o *mamaluco* ou *curiboca*, e o *cafuz*." : Cunha, *Sertões*, 75.

⁵² Cunha, *Backlands*, 60. "O brasileiro, tipo abstrato que se procura, mesmo no caso favorável acima firmado, só pode surgir de um entrelaçamento consideravelmente complexo." : Cunha, *Sertões*, 75.

⁵³ Cunha, *Backlands*, 75. "Não há um tipo antropológico brasileiro." : Cunha, *Sertões*, 89.

⁵⁴ Cunha, *Backlands*, 75.

We are predestined to create a historic race, providing that our nation remains autonomous long enough to produce it. In this regard we are inverting the natural order: Our biological evolution depends on social progress.

We are condemned to civilization. Either we progress or we will become extinct. That much is certain.

It is not just the heterogeneity of our ancestral heritage that suggests this. Other equally important conditions reinforce it--the vast and diverse physical environment of our country combined with a continuous flux of historical situations, which are in large part shaped by the environment.⁵⁵

Cunha's faith in the temporality of progress is in other words more layered than it first seems. The emphasis of the passage shifts from the single timeline of progress, to the diachronic, entangled establishment of a national community, a proleptically invoked "we." Historical and social time trumps biology, and in the "remote future" (a temporal qualification absent from the translation) this will result in a "historic race" that is supposedly not homogeneous but unified as a national "we" by the forces of modernization. It is *time*, notably *secular* time, that will define the national we.

To this we should add a final overlapping temporal rhythm: Cunha's remarkably detailed and dense narrative of Conselheiro, the spiritual leader, and his followers. Cunha's writing, it seems, is always at odds with itself: while explicitly denouncing Conselheiro and his followers as primitive lunatics, the imaginative care with which he forges their narrative says something very different. Performatively, *Os sertões* accommodates the Canudos community's spiritual outlook of time. This is all the more striking, as I discuss elsewhere,

⁵⁵ Cunha, *Backlands*, 61-62. "Predestinamo-nos à formação de uma raça histórica em futuro remoto, se o permitir dilatado tempo de vida nacional autônoma. Invertamos, sob este aspecto, a ordem natural dos fatos. As nossa evolução biológica reclama a garantia da evolução social.

Estamos condenados à civilização.

Ou progredimos, ou desaparecemos.

A afirmativa é segura.

Não a sugere, apenas essa heterogeneidade de elementos ancestrais. Reforça-a outro elemento igualmente ponderável: um meio físico amplíssimo e variável, completado pelo variar de situações históricas, que dele em grande parte decorreram." Cunha, *Sertões*, 77-78.

considering that Cunha himself only ever saw Canudos once it had been reduced to rubble.⁵⁶ He therefore represents Canudos in a novelistic and fictional mode, portraying individuals, describing the rhythms of their daily lives and their religious rites, and reporting (on the basis of a documentary source) the apocalyptic prophecies of Antônio Conselheiro, a few of which read as follows:

In 1896 a thousand herds will run from the coast to the backlands; then the backlands will become the coast and the coast will become the backlands.

[...]

In 1899 the waters will turn to blood and the planet will appear in the east at sunrise and the bough will find itself on the earth and the earth will find itself in the heavens.

In 1900 the light will go out of the sky. There shall be a great rain of stars and that will mark the end of the world.⁵⁷

It is worth noting--and this, finally, will serve to tie this article together--how such heterochronicity in *Os sertões* reflects back on Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other*. What we have here is not a denial but a de facto affirmation of coevalness. Conselheiro's horizon of expectation is alien; the numbering of the years coincides with Cunha's own calendar. Even without the mention of the years, we find here that Cunha admits the temporal horizon of Conselheiro into his work.

This can be productively compared with the opening of *Time and the Other* where Fabian discusses the Western shift from sacred to secular temporalities. This begins in the Enlightenment and is completed by evolutionism's "naturalization" of time. The break between sacred and secular "was from a conception of time/space in terms of a history of salvation to one that ultimately resulted in the secularization of Time as natural history."⁵⁸ The interesting point in relation to Cunha (and Conrad) is that Fabian ties this development to a changing conception of the other. If the pagan, under the medieval Christian regime, "was always

⁵⁶ Stefan Helgesson, "Unsettling Fictions: Generic Instability and Colonial Time," in Anders Cullhed and Lena Rydholm (eds.), *True Lies Worldwide: Fiction in Global Contexts* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), forthcoming.

⁵⁷ Cunha, *Backlands*, 142.

⁵⁸ Fabian, *Time*, 26.

already marked for salvation,” then the savage other of the imperial self “is *not yet* ready for civilization.”⁵⁹ The implication is that secular time produces a greater distance between self and other, as well as changes the terms of conversion from appealing to the grace of God, which is immediate in its effect, to shouldering the White Man’s Burden in order slowly, tortuously, to reshape the other in the image of the European.

In its migration between sacred and secular world-views, and by dint of its combined focalization of difference and change through time, conversion may in fact be a useful concept to dwell on. Different modalities of conversion, both of the individual and society, are after all at stake in the colonial zone. As the example of Cunha shows, conversion need not just be a spiritual matter. Instead, he recodes conversion and salvation in national-secular terms: the retrograde backlanders must change their ways and adapt to progress, or face extinction. At the same time, the drama of Canudos was largely enabled because Antônio Conselheiro *converted* backlanders to his apocalyptic cause, and refused to acknowledge the authority of the state. Fabian becomes therefore guilty of a denial of coevalness of his own by producing a linear narrative of the shift from sacred to secular time. In doing so, he fails to consider precisely the coevalness of secular and sacred notions of time all through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This was--has been, is still--particularly the case in the colonial and post-colonial arena with its combination of mission enterprises, capitalism, secular nationalism and a range of indigenous and syncretic forms of spirituality.

Insofar as conversion, which contrary to theological doctrine can neither be assumed to be stable nor unidirectional, is a marker of diachronic time and of the individual subject’s difference from her- or himself, it might be of help to consider writing itself as a form of conversion. This may seem counter-intuitive, but let us at least for a moment entertain the notion that the labour of writing, which starts in one “place” but ends in another, a “work” that is subsequently recast as the finished, printed text which the reader confronts, could be understood as a temporal conversion of complex experiences of time. Working backwards, this may entail a hermeneutic strategy that reads the finished text not as a *representation* but a *refashioning* (a conversion) of prior and disjunctive temporal experiences--Spivak’s “primacy of real lived time”--into narrative form, and hence into the forms that are recognized within established literary cultures and discourse networks. This immense labor of refashioning, and the way it grapples with contradictions in the postcolony of Brazil, is what makes Euclides da Cunha’s *Os sertões* such a rewarding object lesson in heterochronicity.

⁵⁹ Fabian, *Time*, 26.

