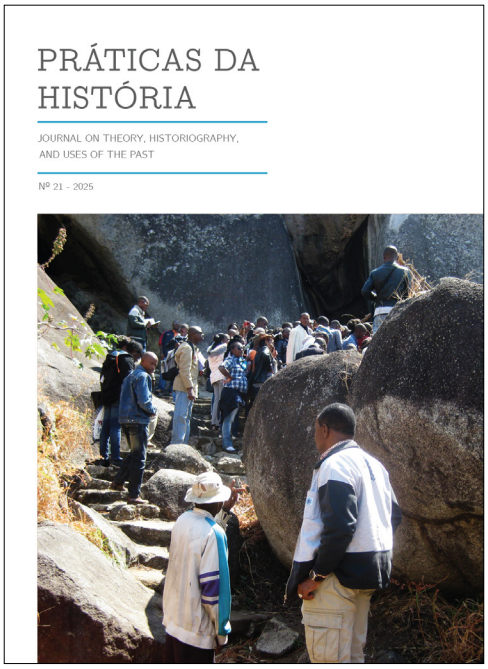


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Editorial
History and memory: an epistemological reinterpretation of Africa's past in a postcolonial context

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The challenge posed to this edition of *Práticas da História* was to discuss, once again, the stimulating yet problematic relationship between Memory and History, but focusing on how knowledge of African history is transmitted in African societies and academic institutions.

As mentioned in the call for papers, the extraordinary advances in historiography *on* Africa and *in* Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, running parallel to the contestation and end of colonial empires, were not accompanied by an equivalent pace of transformation in the teaching of history in African countries in terms of theories, methods, and the organization of content to be transmitted. There was a concern to reclaim the African historical past that had been silenced during colonization, a role assumed by researchers such as Cheick Anta Diop, Djibril Tamsir Nyane, Amadou Hampâté Bâ, Théophile Obenga, and many others. One of the ways to achieve this goal was to value the national history of each new independent

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state, a challenging undertaking that served as a symbol of identity affirmation and a vehicle for the long-awaited national unity.[1]

African historiography continued to advance in the following years, as academic research and teaching centres multiplied on the continent itself and in European and American (and later Asian) universities, placing African history side by side with that of other regions of the world, gradually removing it from the peripheral and exotic place that had long been attributed to it.

Several decades later, however, there remains a gap between the somewhat successful "decolonizing" effort in historiographical production and the way history is taught to young Africans, which still reflects a Eurocentric view of human history, both in terms of periodization and the selection of the most relevant themes. In general, the history of Africa continues to be studied in a fragmented way, with little emphasis on its connections with world history, in which it only appears fully integrated as a result of European expansion and subsequent colonization. Despite the now classic reference to the continent as the "cradle of humanity", narratives that do not take into account the temporal depth of African history, its millennial relationship with other spaces, and the diversity of historical situations before, during, and after European colonial exploitation are still common. Inadequate and Eurocentric periodisations also prevail, both for world history (the much-criticized division into four "ages") and for the history of Africa: we perceive the problem when, in teaching materials (and elsewhere), everything revolves around the "colonial," contrasting a "colonial period" (lasting only a few decades in most of the continent) with a "pre-colonial period" corresponding to millennia of history. UNESCO's commendable efforts have been important but insufficient to overcome Africa's dependence on the outside world (especially the former colonizing countries) for the production of teaching content and history teaching materials, from basic to university level.[2]

1 Ibrahima Baba Kaké, *Combats pour l'histoire africaine* (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1982), 25–34.

2 For example, UNESCO implemented the projects *General History of Africa* (1964-1999), *Slave Route* (1994), and *Pedagogical Use of the General History of Africa* (2009). It also held the conference *Integrating the General History of Africa into School Curriculum* (2021), among many others.

In a context of great linguistic diversity and academic traditions, it is difficult to make broader observations. However, it is important to gain a better understanding of what is happening in different African countries at an academic level, as well as in other spaces where social memory and history intersect, and of the ways in which political, ideological, economic and linguistic factors influence this reality. In the case of the former Portuguese colonies, which celebrated 50 years of independence in 2023 and 2025 respectively, additional factors come into play. These include the late end of colonial rule and the lack of a strong historiographical tradition dedicated to Africa in Portuguese-speaking countries such as Portugal and Brazil, a situation which has only recently begun to change. Despite current progress, most of the fundamental bibliography for the study of world history, and of the African continent in particular, remains unavailable in Portuguese.

This special issue of *Práticas da História* brings together contributions relating to colonial and post-colonial African contexts that explore, question, and/or reflect on aspects of the relationship between the historical discourse validated by scientific institutions and other forms of social and collective memory, which are generally ignored in educational institutions despite their social importance. The extent to which an epistemological revolution capable of encompassing different forms of historical knowledge, whether endogenous or incorporated into African societies from various influences, without renouncing the essential methodological foundations of historiography, will be successful is a question that only the future will answer.

In the approach taken here by the various authors, covering different areas of the continent (western, eastern, and southern), there is also discussion of how memory, history, and the contemporary policies of African nation states intersect in spaces of debate and knowledge production, both on the continent and beyond. It also reflects on the penetration and impact of digital humanities on historiography and the possibilities and difficulties, in the African context, of linking the teaching of history with the world of digital information. The texts allow us to analyse the place and contribution of historiography and the

teaching of history in the construction of memory in Africa, considering the multiple relationships between the constructions of historiographical discourses, public spaces, and the public sphere. The importance of policies for the construction of archives, public libraries, and other infrastructures, as well as the constitution, dissemination, and access to funds and collections, is understood as a condition for the democratic nature of the processes of constructing public memories, with an impact on the affirmation of citizenship rights and human rights in general. Finally, it is a matter of recognizing the use of the past (known, imagined, manipulated) by different social actors (political parties, unions, churches, social groups and movements, individuals and collectives of citizens, or others) as a place of confrontation, contradiction, and legitimation.

The article entitled "Cyber griot: From Oral Tradition to Digital Reconstruction", co-authored by Gourab Chatterjee and Mukulika Dattagupta, is the first in a series of five texts. It presents the *Griot* computer program, a name inspired by the keepers of the oral tradition of West African communities, which incorporates artificial intelligence to create literary texts based on oral history. The program, as a digital tool, was used in the *Living Liberia Fabric* project to produce narratives for the collective memory of the Liberian civil war. Aware of the ambiguities of using AI, the authors question whether experiences like this are effective in preserving history or whether they end up reinforcing dominant points of view.

In the second article, "Chinua Achebe: between pre-colonial Nigeria and reimaginings of the Igbo past", Luiz Henrique Costa de Santana and Imara Bemfica Mineiro show us how literary narrative is used to question and reformulate the way in which that community's past is presented in terms of social organization, community ethical values, and spirituality. Based on two classic works by the renowned Nigerian writer and methodologically supported by the proposals of Edward Said, Valentim Mudimbe, and Achille Mbembe, the article shows how African literature is an important element for the preservation and enhancement of the collective memory of communities, in the particular case of the Igbo, for

the construction of the continent's historical knowledge with the aim of giving visibility and voice to the invisible and silenced.

"Between the colonial gaze and humanist discourse: the visual representation of Ethiopians through Western lenses", by Henrique Germano Etges, presents a recurring issue in visual historiography on Africa: the construction of the African man (the image of the African person in general) through the eyes of the colonizer. The author compares photographs taken in Ethiopia in the 19th century within the scope of the so-called "colonial gaze" with those taken in the 21st century, which he refers to as humanist discourse, seeking to differentiate the two models in the way they narrate the Ethiopian people, through theoretical and epistemological constructions on the subject. The case study is Ethiopia, but the theme is perfectly applicable to any colonized area of Africa, where the African subject is always presented in a subalternised way. The consequences of this form of representation are still present in many practices today, which the author calls the "persistence of dynamics of exoticization and the construction of a timeless otherness, geared towards Western consumption."

The text by Victor Evangelista Santos and Evander Ruthieri Saturno da Silva, entitled "Revisiting the colonial past and its margins: memory and escrevivencias (writing-as-living) in Tsitsi Dangarembga", analyses how the literary and essayistic work of the Zimbabwean writer functions as an instrument for reformulating the view of African history, questioning the dominant narrative, and presenting other and new protagonists, especially women. Anchored in the binomial of History and Literature, in documentary criticism, and in the theoretical contributions of various scholars, the text incorporates concepts of "underground memories" and "writings" and shows how Tsiti Dangarembga's literary and academic writing reinterprets the colonial past, questions nationalist and postcolonial postulates, and mobilizes new ways of looking at the construction of historical knowledge in Zimbabwe.

In the fifth text, "The power of the voice: towards an ethnography of repairing Guinea's colonial past", Ana Temudo enters the debate on the restitution of African cultural property illegally taken during the

colonial period, using the case of Guinea-Bissau and Portugal as an example. The text is the result of research carried out in information units in Guinea-Bissau, presenting the contents of the collections and the difficulties in terms of infrastructure and human resources that these units face in preserving and promoting the country's cultural heritage. It presents a survey conducted on the interviewees' perception of the importance of those institutions and about the return of cultural illegally removed during the period of Portuguese colonization. While not conclusive, the text raises questions about the "Africanist perspective" in the debate on the return of property and proposes "alternatives that accept the plurality of voices and contexts."

In the last text, "Aline Sitoé Diatta: the struggles for memory in the construction of the Senegalese heroine", Paul Diedhiou, Mariana Bracks Fonseca, and Papis Comakha Fall explain the issue of political dispute in Senegal over the character and memory of the priestess from the Casamance region, on the part of local authorities and local independence forces. Consecrated as a heroine by both for her role in the anti-colonial struggle against France, Aline Sitoé is a clear example of how, in the post-colonial era in Africa, narratives about many historical figures have become a "battleground" in the context of contemporary political struggles, mainly as a symbol of ideological legitimation. The case of Aline Sitoé also shows that the post-colonial debate on repatriation is not limited to cultural heritage but also extends to the remains of African resistance figures who were victims of the colonial authorities' policy of exile.

Finally, a few words about the cover image and its relationship to the theme of this magazine. The photo was taken on the rocks of Kandumbu on July 30, 2013, during a study visit to historical sites in Huambo, a region in central Angola, about 600 kilometres from Luanda. The trip, organized by the Department of History of the Faculty of Social Sciences (Agostinho Neto University, Luanda), aimed to provide direct contact with traces of the colonial past (20th century, in the case of that region) and also of the period before it. Kandumbu is an emblematic site of resistance to colonial conquest, which ended there

with the fighting on September 18 and 19, 1902, part of the military campaign that, under the pretext of repressing the "Bailundo revolt," conquered regions of the plateau that were still autonomous. A natural fortress, reinforced with strong palisades and benefiting from the proximity of a watercourse, it provided refuge for combatants and the population of neighbouring villages. Its strategic position dominated the surrounding plateau, making any enemy attack difficult. In the mid-20th century, Portuguese settlers from Huambo celebrated "their" victory over one of the most difficult strongholds of African resistance there every year. A stone column, evocative of the Portuguese victory, remains at the top of the rocks, next to a plaque placed there in more recent years, marking the place as a centre of anti-colonial resistance. However, Kandumbu is little mentioned in post-independence celebrations and historiography. Shortly after independence, in the wave of Africanization of institutional names, Ndala Kandumbu (the African chief killed in 1902) was the name given to an important secondary school in Huambo, replacing the colonial name. But shortly afterwards, the school was given another name, following post-independence political events. The relative "erasure" of Kandumbu from the most common narratives about the Portuguese campaign of 1902 reflects circumstances in the history of independent Angola. On the one hand, during the post-independence wars, the militarization of the site, due to its unique strategic position, made it inaccessible to visitors and celebrations; on the other hand, the centrality currently given to Mbalundu/Bailundo in everything related to the history of the Huambo region, in a convergence of interests between the traditional leaders of Bailundo and the political institutions of the state, hinders and relegates to a subordinate position the knowledge/recognition of other former political entities and their historical sites. We are thus faced with a situation, which is not unusual in African countries, in which a place of undeniable value for the memory of anti-colonial resistance ends up being better known from the records left by the colonizer than on the basis of the work of memory recovery (institutional or private) by the heirs of the colonized. Study visits by students and teachers, when they

do not give in to "sightseeing," stimulate discussion of this and other related issues, associating the emotional impact of being in a place steeped in history with an awareness of the need to review one's own history (written or narrated).

We hope that this magazine will pave the way for further reflection on all these issues.

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