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Editorial
Radical Histories, Distorted Pasts: The Far Right and the Political Instrumentalization of History in the Twenty-First Century

Felipe Brandi, Pedro Martins, Miguel S. Palmeira, Daniel Pereira, Margarida Rendeiro and Lidiane Soares Rodrigues*

Academic historiography today finds itself on the frontline of the culture war that contemporary far-right movements are waging as part of their projects to seize and retain power. If historical research and the teaching of history are among the targets of this offensive, it is because history plays a strategic role in the far right's political imagination. For these movements, the past is not merely an object of symbolic appropriation; it is also a resource for legitimising the order they seek to build or restore. At stake are not only competing interpretations of the past, but also the authority of those who, by virtue of their training and the institutions they represent, are recognised as competent to

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produce and validate them. The contest over the past and memory is therefore, for the far right, far more than a cultural or identity-based issue: the production of historical narratives capable of legitimising hierarchies, national identities, restoration projects and forms of exclusion is a relevant aspect of its political action.

The instrumentalization of the past is not unique to our times, but it is now reinforced by a systematic campaign to delegitimise professional historians. Viewing them as an obstacle to their political objectives, the contemporary far right is orchestrating a vast offensive, amplified by social media and digital platforms, that aims both to discredit the knowledge produced by academic historiography and to undermine the public credibility of historians. This struggle has taken on a transnational dimension and continues to expand. In contexts as different as North America, Latin America, Asia and Europe, far-right movements have sought to erode public trust in the institutions and professionals capable of challenging them. Three features make the phenomenon particularly disturbing: (1) a pronounced anti-intellectualism, which combines biased reinterpretations of the past with direct attacks on academic historiography; (2) a twofold attempt to relativise historical crimes and undermine democratic principles, thereby legitimising authoritarian and exclusionary discourses; and (3) an intensive communication strategy built on social media and digital technologies.

As media spaces governed by algorithmic logic, characterised by high reactivity and an overabundance of information, social media stand out as an infrastructure that is both political and communicational. They are powerful narrative-making machines engaged in constant production of meaning – through which interpretations of the past circulate that are incompatible with the validation protocols of academic historiography. As Benjamin Moffitt observes in *The Global Rise of Populism* (2016), these digital structures enable populist leaders to reduce their dependence on traditional media and to perform politically with fewer of the constraints that those media impose in terms

of geographical reach and representational requirements.[1] Social media are thus not merely channels of communication but central components of a broader discursive ecosystem that is reshaping the circulation and reception of scientific knowledge. They alter the conditions that previously prevailed for producing, mediating and legitimising historical knowledge, since it is also within this ecosystem that much of contemporary historical sensibility is contested and shaped.

Since their expansion in the 2010s, social media have fostered the proliferation and normalisation of extremist discourses, helped to gather radicalised audiences and given greater visibility to political positions whose circulation had previously been very limited. The speed and scale at which this content spreads make it extremely difficult to verify its reliability and to correct false or misleading information in good time. A video denying the Holocaust or downplaying colonial violence can reach millions of views without its falsity, or its lack of documentary evidence, being countered at equal speed by any mechanism of correction. The strength of the offensive waged by the new far right is fuelled not only by a more general crisis of epistemic authority – which challenges traditional ways of producing, validating and transmitting historical knowledge – but also by a new "post-truth" regime, in which factuality, causality and reflexivity are devalued, nuance and complexity are disregarded, and doubt is dismissed as weakness.

The far right is, moreover, making undeniable inroads on the international stage, racking up victories and gaining ever more ground, which makes the current scenario all the more worrying. The examples are numerous and well known. They range from Narendra Modi's India to the MAGA (Make America Great Again) agenda in the United States; from the shift towards extremism that has swept South America over the past decade, during which aspiring autocrats have achieved significant electoral successes, to the increasingly prominent presence of this political family in the European Parliament; and, more recently, to the

1 Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism. Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 94.

alarming string of victories that the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) has just secured in Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. We can thus endorse Ayhan Kaya and Chiara De Cesari's assertion that the rise of the far right is undoubtedly the most visible political phenomenon of the past fifteen years.[2]

This global democratic regression has been a cause for concern among historians and has given rise to a growing number of publications. Building on this growing body of scholarship, *Práticas da História* has decided, this year, to devote a double special issue to a very specific yet particularly relevant dimension of this troubling phenomenon: the contest over the legitimate interpretation of the past. We examine it from two perspectives that we consider inseparable: (a) the strategic role that the political appropriation/instrumentalization of history is playing in the political ideology of contemporary far-right movements, and (b) the implications of this dispute for the conditions under which historians fulfil their social role. We hope in this way to contribute to a debate of undeniable contemporary relevance that engages an ever-more number of researchers. This issue and the forthcoming one, due next semester, thus aim to offer a snapshot of an unfolding process, taking into consideration that we work on the immediate present and that any attempt to grasp a rapidly changing political reality is necessarily provisional.

The theme to which we have chosen to dedicate the two issues of *Práticas da História* in 2026 poses enormous challenges for historians. Perhaps foremost among them is the choice of the term itself. Our decision to use the expression "far right" – in a deliberately plural sense – is far from universally accepted.[3] Can we really, without resorting to oversimplification or conflation, use a single term to encompass such

2 Ayhan Kaya and Chiara De Cesari, "Introduction", in *European Memory in Populism. Representations of Self and Order*, ed. Ayhan Kaya and Chiara De Cesari (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2020).

3 And it has been the subject of extensive debate; amongst many others, *cf.* in particular Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019); Andrea L. P. Pirro, "Far Right: The Significance of an Umbrella Concept", *Nations and Nationalism* 29, n.º 1 (2023): 101–112, https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12860.

diverse political realities? Here lies, probably, one of the main obstacles to any reflection on our subject. We are dealing with a political family in constant transformation, within which divergent and even antagonistic currents coexist, and whose heterogeneity is reflected in a vast and varied terminology. The breadth of this political universe is evident in the extraordinary variety of terms used to define, demarcate or subdivide it.[4] Among many other expressions, one finds references to the "illiberal camp", the "radical right", the "far right", "ultranationalism", "national-populism", "populist ultra-conservatism", the "alt-right", the "identity-based right", the "revolutionary right", "neo-reactionaries", "neo-fascism", "post-fascism"[5] and, in a broader sense, a "reactionary international". These designations are vague in their contours, and many of them are polysemous in themselves. Far from being equivalent or interchangeable, they frequently overlap and combine, and their meaning varies according to national and linguistic contexts, or even from one author to another.[6]

Faced with this terminological plurality and instability, we have chosen to favour the term "far right" in these opening pages of an issue that brings together distinct contributions on a wide variety of cases and contexts. One advantage of this choice is its relative clarity for a wider audience, since the political sphere to which we refer is immediately recognisable. The term certainly has a long and tumultuous history. It first appeared in France in the 1820s to refer to the ultra-royalist faction that advocated a return to absolute monarchy; later, through

4 See, notably, Cas Mudde's now-classic article, "The War of Words Defining the Extreme Right Party Family", *West European Politics* 19, n.º 2 (1996), as well as *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), and *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).

5 On this term, see Enzo Traverso, "Post-Fascism: Fascism as a Trans-Historical Concept", *Crisis & Critique* 11, n.º 1 (2024): 160–173.

6 *Cf.* notably René Monzat, "Une nouvelle extrême-droite?" (interview with Sarah Al-Matary), *La Vie des idées*, 19 April 2022 (https://laviedesidees.fr/ Une-nouvelle-extreme-droite), and Stéphane François, "Territoires de l'extrême-droite française", *La Vie des idées*, 1 March 2022 (https://laviedesidees.fr/Territoires-de-l-extreme-droite-francaise).

the writings of the historian and journalist Paul Thureau-Dangin,[7] it became a political category distinct from the conservative camp. In the 20th century, it came to be closely associated with fascism and Nazism, as well as with the movements and parties that, after the Second World War, aspired to their return. Today, "far right" is frequently rejected as stigmatising by the very actors to whom it is applied, who often seek to conceal or downplay their links to the right-wing dictatorial regimes of the interwar period or the second half of the 20th century. Despite these attempts to distance themselves from the label – undoubtedly part of a strategy of presenting themselves as legitimate players in the political arena – the usefulness of "far right" lies, it seems to us, both in its immediate intelligibility and in its capacity to encompass a heterogeneous and shifting political spectrum without presupposing that its various groups share the same doctrine or political programme.

The generic notion of the "far right" also has the advantage, in our view, of highlighting a set of recurring features common to these different groups. Very briefly, these include an unmistakable authoritarian bent, a conservative conception of social order that prizes hierarchy, and a deep mistrust of pluralism and of the diverse forms and expressions of social emancipation. Associated with this attitude are anti-intellectualism, open hostility towards universities and science – particularly when science conflicts with the beliefs and values the far right upholds – an exaggerated cult of the nation, and attachment to a vision of the social world that tends to be closed and exclusionary. In this view, society is divided by a profound, structuring opposition between "us" and "them", the latter invariably perceived as a threat. Hence the repeated appeal to the rhetoric of the "crusade"[8] and the

7 Paul Thureau-Dangin, *Royalistes et républicains. Essais historiques sur des questions de politique contemporaine* (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit et Cie, 1874).

8 *Cf.* Florian Besson, "La croisade reinventée. Un fantasme des masculinistes et islamophobes du web", *La Vie des idées*, 29 April 2025 (https://laviedesidees.fr/La-croisade-reinventee); Andrew B. R. Elliott, *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media. Appropriating the Middle Ages in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017), 132–182; Charlotte Gauthier (ed.), *The Crusades and the Far-Right in the Twenty-First Century: Engaging the Crusades*, vol. 9 (Abingdon: Routledge, 2025).

recurring figure of the "internal enemy", whose identity varies from one context to another but is often embodied in all-too-familiar figures: Jews, immigrants, Muslims and other ethnic and religious minorities, feminists, communists, LGBTQIAPN+ movements and all those generally identified as agents or symptoms of a supposed civilisational decline. The far right sees adversaries on all sides. Opposing minority rights, its adherents rail against demands for gender and sexual equality and vehemently condemn physical or cultural intermixing, fearing an imagined genetic degradation or demographic replacement. Believing themselves invested with a restorative and salvific mission, as bearers of the promise of social regeneration, they like to present themselves as forces of rupture destined to reverse the course of a history they deem decadent. This explains the recurrence of narratives of national rebirth, reconquest and the restoration of a social and moral order supposedly corrupted or lost.

Taken in isolation, none of these characteristics would suffice to identify a political movement as far right. What defines it as such is the way in which they are repeatedly mobilised and combined within a particular vision of society and political action. It is these convergences – as the articles in this issue admirably demonstrate through different cases and contexts – that ultimately give this mosaic of movements a clearly recognisable political identity. As a broad category, "far right" does not obscure this diversity; on the contrary, it helps to make it intelligible.

Identifying this set of recurring traits, and keeping their commonalities in mind, is essential if we are to contextualise and understand our subject. The attack on historians is inseparable from a broader culture war directed against universities, and its current resurgence is part of the climate of democratic decline described above. Almost everywhere, academics are increasingly on the defensive, cornered by a sustained offensive that ranges from financial strangulation and political interference to challenges to what is taught and accusations that universities are hotbeds of ideological indoctrination. The examples are, once again, well known and need no detailed rehearsal. One need

only recall the spirit of revenge and score-settling evident in the harsh budgetary controls and the intimidation that the governments of Jair Bolsonaro, Javier Milei and Donald Trump have directed against universities, research funding bodies and the social sciences and humanities – commonly viewed as bastions of identity politics and equality, as breeding grounds for progressive ideologies and as vehicles of indoctrination by a supposed "left-wing" hegemony.

Within this context, the situation facing historians, history teachers and the discipline of history itself is particularly worrying. The attack is not confined to the budgetary stranglehold on the institutions where they work, or to their portrayal as "indoctrinators" and accomplices of decadent cultural elites. The culture war being waged against them also targets the very subject matter of their work and the *raison d'être* of their profession: the interpretation of the past. Because that interpretation lies at the heart of a heated ideological dispute – one that the far right has no intention of relinquishing – the authority of historians is now widely contested. It is not the first time it has been challenged. Yet perhaps never before have historians and history teachers been so compelled to step down from their pedestal and acknowledge, reluctantly, that their traditional mechanisms for validating historical knowledge have lost their legitimising power in the eyes of ever-larger sections of society. The conflict over interpretations is no longer confined within academic walls; it is now waged outside the campus, in the public arena, and involves a range of other actors: journalists, opinion-makers, politicians, publicists, legislators and digital influencers.

Only in the past year 2025-2026, a series of recent events has confirmed just how intense the global struggle for control over historical narratives has become. Notable examples include the executive order "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History", signed by Donald Trump just two months into his second term to determine which narratives of national history are acceptable and which should be corrected or rejected, and the exploitation of the recent celebrations of the 250th anniversary of American independence, transformed into a triumphal-

ist display of a conservative, Christian, divisive and racially exclusionary view of US history. The same is true of Portugal, where the Chega party has sought to commemorate the events of 25 November 1975 in order to portray the left, rather than Salazarist authoritarianism, as the main antagonist of the democracy born of the April 1974 revolution. It is also true of the tensions surrounding the equally recent commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the 1976 military coup in Argentina, a country now undergoing an authoritarian drift under a government whose president, Javier Milei, advances his own interpretation of the past and contemptuously disputes the number of victims of the dictatorship.

This kind of political use of the past takes many forms and is not restricted to the appropriation of a national date or the control of an official narrative. It is at work in the "memory war" tearing Spanish society apart, where the *Plan de Concordia* promoted by the PP and Vox seeks to prevent any reference to the coup d'état of July 1936 and to stop the Franco regime from being designated a "dictatorship", and in doing so obstructs a wide range of excavations, exhumations, and educational and cultural initiatives stemming from the *Ley de Memoria Histórica*. We see it, too, following years of criminal denialism on Jair Bolsonaro's part,[9] in the censorship imposed in August 2026 by Brazil's Chamber of Deputies on a book about the Bicentenary of Brazilian Independence, including the removal of the phrase "military dictatorship". And we see it in Jordan Bardella's abject attempt to appropriate Marc Bloch: like other leaders of the Rassemblement National before him, he quotes a passage from *L'Étrange défaite* out of context in order to question the Minister of the Interior about the number of undocumented migrants in France.

These are analogous forms of insidious manipulation of history – if not outright, brazen falsification – which we also find behind Vox's exploitation of the Covadonga site and the concept of the "Reconquista",

9 *Cf.* Patrícia Valim, Alexandre de Sá Avelar and Berber Bevernage, "Negacionismo: história, historiografia e perspectivas de pesquisa", *Revista Brasileira de História* 41, n.º 87, 2021.

as well as Éric Zemmour's controversial statements in favour of Pétain. Such selective uses of the past are, however, often accompanied by concrete attempts to stifle historical research. This is evident in Dmitry Medvedev's establishment in 2009 of the "Presidential Commission to Combat Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests", and in the conviction of the historian Yury Dmitriev, who, at the age of seventy, was imprisoned in a high-security penal colony in Mordovia for his investigations into Stalin's crimes. It is evident, too, in the recurring use of the great Soviet victory over Nazism as a geopolitical weapon to legitimise Russia's current invasion of Ukraine.

But what, ultimately, is at stake? Why is the contemporary far right so concerned with controlling narratives about the past? What role does history, as a field of symbolic and ideological contestation, play in its strategy for seizing or maintaining power? What technologies and means of communication underpin this offensive against historians? And how has control over representations of what was become an instrument of power over what is – and over what may yet be? The current political climate poses unprecedented problems, to which we do not yet have adequate answers. Even the question of continuities and ruptures remains open: how do the ways in which the current far right uses the past compare with those of its 20th-century forerunners and of other political camps, notably the conservative right or so-called "centre-right"? We must also ask to what extent this contest over the past should be understood in light of phenomena such as postmodern historical culture, the so-called "memory boom", the "history wars" or "postcolonial nostalgia".[10] It is conceivable that this manipulation of the past is a reaction to globalisation or to the so-called "politics of repent-

10 Louie Dean Valencia-García, "Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History", in *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History: Alt/Histories,* ed. Louie Dean Valencia-Garcia (New York: Routledge, 2021), 9-11; Pierre Nora, "L'ère de la commémoration", em *Lieux de mémoire*, t. 3, Les France (Paris: Gallimard, 1993); Jay Winter, "The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the «Memory Boom» in Contemporary Historical Studies", *Canadian Military History* 10, n.º 3 (2001): 57-66; Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (Nova Iorque, NI: Columbia University Press, 2005); Aleida Assmann, "Transformations between History and Memory", *Social Research* 75, n.º 1 (2008): 49-72.

ance" – the set of memory processes through which various democratic states have been encouraged to confront the atrocities and acts of violence committed in their history in order to gain or maintain political legitimacy.[11] And to what extent might it form part of the "coloniality of power", the concept formulated by Aníbal Quijano at the turn of the century to describe the persistence, in contexts such as Latin America, of forms of political, social and racial hierarchy imposed by European colonialism?[12]

When ultra-nationalist movements and authoritarian regimes strive to control narratives about the past, it is not on a whim but because they recognise that control over historical interpretation is a powerful instrument for seizing power and achieving political legitimacy. It is no coincidence that the rhetoric of controlling the past so often intersects with that of "national salvation": those who present themselves as the ones who will "save" the country also seek to define which country is meant, which past should be preserved or recovered, and which future should be envisaged. Those who narrate the past write the future in advance. And those who rewrite history can erase guilt, silence victims and shape subjectivities at will, instilling a sense of immaculate continuity between a glorious past, a threatened present and a redemptive future. In the current context of a resurgent far right, more is at stake than erasing or rewriting the history of slavery, colonial genocides, the crimes of fascist regimes or military dictatorships. The far right has understood – or senses – what even historians and history teachers are sometimes reluctant to admit publicly: that history has always been, and continues to be, a battleground, constantly susceptible to ideological manipulation.

If these all-too-frequent political uses of the past unsettle historians, is it not because they themselves are the first to recognise

11 Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret. On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2007).

12 Aníbal Quijano, "Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina", in *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas latinoamericanas*, ed. Edgardo Lander (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 1993), 201–246.

that history has, since its inception, been ceaselessly invoked to justify territorial conquests, forge national identities, construct origin myths, fuel collective resentments and stir up latent xenophobia?[13] Given this recognition, we must ask: by what means can academic historiography, as a critical discipline, convince the rest of society of the vast gulf that nevertheless separates it from the spurious assertions and the sententious, presumptuous and yet hollow rhetoric so common among the apostles of the far right? The so-called "historical interpretations" that these apostles take pleasure in concocting are, as Pierre Vidal-Naquet never tired of demonstrating, a pastiche-like inversion of the historian's craft. They emulate the modes of presentation of academic historiography – quotations, footnotes, bibliographies, technical jargon – but place them at the service of a purely performative logic. Rather than proceeding from the sources towards an interpretation, they proceed from a preliminary ideological conclusion towards the manipulation of the sources. They seek not so much to understand the past as to impose a narrative useful to political struggle in the present. In their discourses on the past, all contradiction is banished and doubts are silenced, while the sources are continually distorted, if not fabricated outright. They do not seek to elucidate, explain or inform; they aim to mobilise, inflame and recruit. It is therefore up to academic historiography to find the means to reaffirm the full distance that separates it from this profusion of dogmatic, pamphleteering discourse.

Professional historiography is not neutral, but it is responsible. It recognises that it is implicated, in the sense that Michael Rothberg gives the term.[14] It therefore assumes its place in society, acknowledging the limits imposed by its epistemological fragility, but also its commitment to the pursuit of truth. Historians today are compelled to step out of the comfort of debate among peers and position themselves as public actors, conscious of their intellectual, social and ethical responsibility. Called to a new front, they are fully aware that combating historical

13 Georges Duby, *Le Dimanche de Bouvines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).

14 Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject. Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 1.

disinformation requires innovative communication strategies. Keen to make their presence felt in the public sphere, they participate actively on digital platforms, where they seek to refute fraudulent narratives, debunk fabrications and promote well-founded debate. They also invest in educational campaigns that strengthen critical thinking and historical literacy among the general public, making it less vulnerable to ideological discourse and to attempts to manipulate history. In doing so, they are reinventing ways to widen their audience without compromising their critical standards. Across the globe, organisations and networks of historians have emerged to defend democratic memory and public history; they monitor denialist distortions in order to refute them and produce critical, accessible content through publications, documentaries, podcasts and exhibitions. More than a defensive reaction, this new presence in public debate is a proactive endeavour that reaffirms academic history as a democratic, pluralistic and ethical practice.

The current climate – marked by the threat of delegitimization of the historian's profession, the outbreak of an epistemic crisis, the viral spread of anti-intellectual fervour and a pronounced democratic regression – is challenging in many respects and demands a historiographical response equal to the task. Going beyond the specific contexts and cases of instrumentalization of the past analysed by our authors, this double special issue therefore aims to invite historians to reflect collectively on the defence of history as an act of intellectual freedom, on its place as an object of political and ideological dispute, and, finally, on the transformations that the historian's craft may undergo in so adverse a context. To this end, it is necessary not only to describe the mechanisms by which the past is manipulated but also to understand their deep-rooted causes, lasting effects, and epistemological, deontological and political implications. We must unmask the mechanisms of falsehood and map the ways in which fake news and orchestrated lies circulate, so as to understand the sentiments that fuel the erosion of democratic values and the concomitant resurgence of reactionary agendas.

After the numerous turns (linguistic, critical, cultural, postcolonial, digital) that historiography has undergone over the last fifty

years, we may now have reached a *demystifying turn*, marked by the progressive erosion of the boundary that once separated, in the public sphere, academic historiography from the most diverse forms of social production of the past – including propagandistic discourses that selectively appropriate the past and claim the status of history for themselves. What defines this new turn, which focuses on the diverse forms of appropriation, use and instrumentalisation of history, is the recognition of the public status of the past, of the open competition over its meanings, and of the contested definition of what can or should be remembered. It reflects a transition from history understood as the study of the past to history as a science of its uses.

Since the 2010s, historians have become increasingly aware that the knowledge they produce – as in any other science – does not exist in a vacuum, immune to social pressures and appropriations, and that their task does not end with the publication of their research findings but inevitably extends into the public sphere: that is where they must actively assert the integrity and value of their craft in the face of political manipulation, fabrication and recurrent attempts to hijack the past in the service of a project of power. Therefore, we speak of a new historiographical turn for two reasons: first, recognising that the historian's sphere of intervention extends far beyond the university has become a condition for practising historical research in the current climate; second, this recognition transforms – and not merely superficially – the way historians perceive themselves and understand their social mission.

This current historiographical turn compels historiography to acknowledge the necessary interconnection between intellectual and social practice. The historian's craft is no longer defined merely as a form of knowledge production or as a reflection on its foundations and conditions of possibility; it now unfolds as a commitment to defending the status, legitimacy and seriousness of that knowledge within a symbolic battlefield in which the past becomes an instrument in a struggle for domination. Aware that the public sphere in which they operate is permeated by competing interpretations, historians committed to dem-

ocratic values now ground their work, in the early decades of the 21st century, on the union of reflection and action.

This first volume of our double special issue brings together nine original articles that span three world regions – Europe, Asia and the Americas – and nine countries: France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, South Korea, India, Canada, the United States of America and Argentina. We do not aim to provide an exhaustive overview of the phenomenon on a global scale. Rather, we wish to show how many of the mechanisms for manipulating history described above can both shape and be mimicked by other cultural realities. The articles address topics such as historical revisionism, the revival of grand national narratives, the contestation and reformulation of memory policies, and the role of education, visual culture and new media in the dissemination and manipulation of historical knowledge. This multiplicity of contexts and themes shows that the far right's uses of the past cannot be understood solely at a national level but must be approached in a transnational and transdisciplinary manner, given the multiple variants and forms they take.

Faced with the various forms of falsification of the past, denialism and instrumentalization of history, historians today must collectively develop forms of vigilance, critique and intervention capable of countering efforts to reduce history to an instrument of political legitimisation. To this end, it is essential, first of all, to defend the freedom of research; then to draw upon the reflexivity and critical spirit that are inherent in, and indispensable to, historical practice; and finally, to preserve the methodical exercise of doubt. Above all, historians must not fall into the trap into which far-right parties, digital influencers and denialist authors hope to lead them. How? Fundamentally, by acknowledging the infinite complexity of their subject matter – particularly in the face of those who claim a monopoly on truth and refuse to subject their assertions to discussion; by accepting the uncertainties and epistemological limits of their discipline; and by recognising the subjective, incomplete and provisional nature of the knowledge they produce. Subjectivity and arbitrariness may overlap, but they are far from equivalent.

Even though we recognise the power that dogmatism and categorical assertions exert over ever-wider sections of society, we must not give in. On the contrary, historians should embrace, without embarrassment, a greater modesty in the face of the limits, areas of uncertainty and contingencies of their profession. It is precisely because their opponents persist in presenting doubt as a sign of weakness that historians must claim it as a constitutive requirement of their work. Defending history means defending not merely a particular interpretation of the past but the intellectual and institutional conditions that make it possible to interrogate it with critical rigour and integrity. It is therefore incumbent on us to ask not only what kind of historical practice we wish to defend, but also what place we want historical knowledge to occupy in the public sphere and what forms of intervention we are prepared to develop to protect it.

Before concluding, we would like to thank *Práticas da História* for so warmly welcoming this special issue. Our sincere thanks also go to the authors, who responded enthusiastically to our call for papers and devoted their time and effort to preparing their contributions and enriching this collective project.

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