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Editorial
História em disputa: a extrema-direita e a instrumentalização política do passado no século XXI

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

A historiografia universitária encontra-se hoje na linha de frente da guerra cultural que as extremas-direitas contemporâneas têm vindo a travar no contexto dos seus respetivos projetos de conquista e conservação do poder. Se a investigação histórica e o ensino da história figuram entre os alvos desta ofensiva é porque a história desempenha uma função estratégica no imaginário político das extremas-direitas. Para estas, o passado não é apenas um objeto de apropriação simbólica; é também um recurso de legitimação da ordem que pretendem construir ou restaurar. Não estão aqui em causa apenas as interpretações concorrentes do passado, mas também a autoridade daqueles que, por força da sua formação e das instituições que representam, são reconhecidos

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como competentes para as produzir e validar. É por isso que a disputa pelo passado e pela memória não constitui, para as extremas-direitas, uma questão meramente cultural ou identitária. A produção de narrativas históricas capazes de legitimar hierarquias, identidades nacionais, projetos de restauração e formas de exclusão é uma dimensão relevante da sua ação política.

A instrumentalização do passado não é apanágio de nossos tempos, mas aparece atualmente reforçada por uma campanha sistemática de deslegitimação dos historiadores profissionais. Encarando-os como obstáculo à consecução dos seus objetivos políticos, a extrema-direita contemporânea orquestra hoje uma vasta ofensiva, amplamente apoiada nas redes sociais e nas plataformas digitais, com o objetivo de desacreditar o conhecimento produzido pela historiografia académica, pondo simultaneamente em causa a credibilidade pública dos historiadores. A escala desse combate assume hoje uma dimensão transnacional e encontra-se em expansão. Em diferentes contextos políticos e culturais – da América do Norte à América Latina, da Ásia à Europa –, movimentos de extrema-direita têm procurado minar a confiança pública nas instituições e nos profissionais capazes de os contestar. Três traços tornam este um fenómeno especialmente inquietante: 1) um anti-intelectualismo acentuado, que combina reinterpretações tendenciosas do passado com ataques diretos à historiografia académica; 2) a tentativa combinada de relativizar crimes históricos e fragilizar princípios democráticos, legitimando discursos autoritários e excludentes; 3) uma estratégia comunicacional intensiva baseada no uso das redes sociais e das tecnologias digitais.

Enquanto espaços mediáticos regidos pela lógica algorítmica, caracterizados pela elevada reatividade e pela sobreabundância de informação, as redes sociais destacam-se como uma infraestrutura simultaneamente política e comunicacional, verdadeiras máquinas narrativas em permanente produção de sentido, nas quais circulam interpretações do passado incompatíveis com os protocolos de validação próprios da historiografia académica. Como observa Benjamin Moffitt em *The Global Rise of Populism* (2016), estas estruturas digitais permitem aos líderes populistas reduzir a sua dependência dos meios de comunicação tradicio-

nais e tornam as suas performances políticas menos condicionadas pelos limites geográficos e pelos requisitos de representatividade próprios desses meios[1]. As redes sociais não são, assim, meros canais de comunicação, mas componentes centrais de um ecossistema discursivo mais amplo que vem reconfigurando a circulação e a receção do conhecimento científico. Elas alteram as condições até há pouco vigentes de produção, mediação e legitimação do conhecimento histórico, uma vez que é também no interior deste ecossistema mais amplo que se disputa e se molda uma parte significativa da sensibilidade histórica contemporânea.

Desde a sua expansão na década de 2010, as redes sociais têm favorecido a proliferação e a normalização de discursos extremistas, facilitando a agregação de públicos radicalizados e dando maior visibilidade a posições políticas cuja circulação era até então muito limitada. A difusão rápida e em larga escala destes conteúdos através das redes sociais torna extremamente difícil a verificação da sua fiabilidade e a correção atempada de informações falsas e enganosas. Um vídeo que negue o Holocausto ou relativize a violência colonial pode alcançar milhões de visualizações sem que a sua falsidade ou fragilidade documental seja necessariamente acompanhada, com igual velocidade, por mecanismos de retificação. Na realidade, a força demonstrada por esta ofensiva empreendida pela nova extrema-direita alimenta-se não apenas de uma crise mais geral de autoridade epistémica – que contesta os modos tradicionais de produção, validação e transmissão do conhecimento histórico –, mas também de um novo regime de "pós-verdade", dentro do qual a factualidade, a causalidade e a reflexividade são desvalorizadas, a nuance e a complexidade são desprezadas e a dúvida é insultada como fraqueza.

Este cenário atual tem-se tornado ainda mais preocupante pelo facto de a extrema-direita estar a registar um inegável avanço no plano internacional, acumulando vitórias e conquistando cada vez mais territórios. Os exemplos são diversos e bem conhecidos. Estendem-se

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

da Índia de Narendra Modi à agenda MAGA (*Make America Great Again*) nos Estados Unidos. Observam-se na viragem extremista que tem assolado a América do Sul nesta última década – durante a qual aspirantes a autocratas têm conseguido obter sucessos eleitorais expressivos –, na presença cada vez mais marcante dos representantes desta família política no Parlamento Europeu, ou ainda nas alarmantes vitórias seguidas que a AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*) acaba de obter na Saxónia-Anhalt e em Mecklemburgo-Pomerânia Ocidental. Deste modo, podemos fazer nossa a afirmação de Ayhan Kaya e Chiara De Cesari segundo a qual a ascensão das extremas-direitas representa seguramente o fenómeno político mais visível dos últimos quinze anos[2].

Este fenómeno global de retrocesso democrático tem preocupado os historiadores, suscitando um número crescente de publicações. É na sequência destas que se inscreve a iniciativa da *Práticas da História* de dedicar, este ano, um duplo número temático a uma dimensão muito específica, mas particularmente relevante, deste inquietante fenómeno dos nossos tempos: a disputa pela interpretação legítima do passado é aqui contemplada a partir de dois ângulos que nos parecem indissociáveis: a) o papel estratégico que a apropriação da história desempenha no ideário político das extremas-direitas contemporâneas; e b) as implicações dessa disputa para as condições de exercício da função social dos historiadores. O nosso objetivo é o de contribuir, desse modo, para um debate de inegável atualidade, que vem mobilizando cada vez mais investigadores, como testemunha a crescente produção bibliográfica sobre o tema. O presente número temático e o que se seguirá no próximo semestre pretendem, assim, oferecer um instantâneo de um processo em movimento, conscientes de estarmos a operar no ultracontemporâneo e do carácter necessariamente provisório de qualquer tentativa de se apreender uma realidade política em rápida transformação.

O tema a que escolhemos dedicar os dois números da *Práticas da História* de 2026 levanta desafios enormes aos historiadores. Entre eles

2 Ayhan Kaya e Chiara De Cesari, "Introduction", in *European Memory in Populism. Representations of Self and Order*, ed. Ayhan Kaya e Chiara De Cesari (Londres e Nova Iorque, NI: Routledge, 2020).

conta-se, possivelmente em primeiro lugar, a própria escolha da designação. A opção que aqui fazemos pela expressão "extrema-direita", que empregamos no plural, está longe de ser consensual[3]. Estamos certos de poder, sem incorrer em simplificações e amálgamas, servir-nos desta única designação para realidades políticas tão diversas? Aqui reside, provavelmente, um dos principais obstáculos de qualquer reflexão sobre o nosso objeto. Na realidade, estamos perante um agrupamento político em permanente transformação, no interior do qual coexistem correntes divergentes e até antagónicas, e cuja heterogeneidade se traduz também no plano terminológico, abrangendo um campo semântico vasto e diversificado. A extensão deste universo político manifesta-se claramente na extraordinária variedade das designações que vêm sendo mobilizadas para o circunscrever, demarcar ou subdividir[4]. Fala-se, entre outras tantas expressões, de "campo iliberal", de "direita radical", "direitas extremas", "ultranacionalismo", "nacional-populismo", "ultraconservadorismo populista", "*alt-right*", "direita identitária", "direita revolucionária", mas também de "neorreacionários", de "neofascismo", "pós-fascismo"[5], ou ainda, com uma intenção mais abrangente, de uma "internacional reacionária". Estas designações têm, evidentemente, contornos imprecisos, e muitas delas são, elas próprias, polissémicas. Longe de serem equivalentes ou perfeitamente intercambiáveis, sobrepõem-se e combinam-se frequentemente, e o seu significado varia de acordo com os contextos nacionais e linguísticos, ou mesmo de um autor para o outro[6].

3 E tem sido objeto de um amplo debate. Entre tantos outros, *cf.* nomeadamente 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.

4 *Cf.*, nomeadamente, o artigo já clássico de Cas Mudde, "The War of Words Defining the Extreme Right Party Family", *West European Politics* 19, n.º 2 (1996), assim como *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), e *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).

5 Sobre esta designação, ver Enzo Traverso, "Post-Fascism: Fascism as Trans-Historical Concept", *Crisis & Critique* 11, n.º 1 (2024): 160-173.

6 *Cf.* nomeadamente René Monzat, "Une nouvelle extrême-droite?" (entrevista com Sarah Al-Matary), *La Vie des idées*, 19 de abril de 2022 (https://laviedesidees.fr/Une-nouvelle-extreme-droite), e Stéphane François, "Territoires de l'extrême-droite française", *La Vie des idées*, 1 de março de 2022 (https://laviedesidees.fr/Territoires-de-l-extreme-droite-francaise).

Frente a este quadro de pluralidade e instabilidade terminológica, a nossa opção foi a de privilegiar a designação "extrema-direita" nestas páginas de abertura de um número temático que reúne contribuições distintas sobre casos e contextos muito diversos. Acreditamos que entre as vantagens desta escolha está a sua relativa clareza para um público mais abrangente, permitindo reconhecer imediatamente o campo político a que nos referimos. A expressão "extrema-direita" tem, é certo, uma longa e tumultuosa história atrás de si. Surgida na década de 1820 em França para se referir à fação ultrarrealista que defendia um retorno à monarquia absoluta, torna-se, através dos escritos do historiador e jornalista Paul Thureau-Dangin[7], uma categoria política à parte do campo conservador. Em pleno século XX, o termo é intimamente associado ao fascismo e ao nazismo, assim como aos movimentos e partidos que, depois da Segunda Guerra Mundial, aspiraram ao seu regresso. Hoje, "extrema-direita" é uma expressão frequentemente recusada, porque estigmatizante, pelos próprios atores a que é aplicada, os quais procuram frequentemente ocultar ou atenuar os laços que os ligam aos regimes ditatoriais de direita do período entre guerras ou da segunda metade do século XX. Apesar destas tentativas de dissociação da etiqueta, ligadas sem dúvida a uma estratégia para se apresentarem como atores legítimos do jogo político, a utilidade da expressão "extrema-direita" reside, parece-nos, tanto na sua inteligibilidade mais imediata como na sua capacidade de abranger um campo político heterogéneo e movediço, sem pressupor que as diferentes formações que nele se inscrevem partilhem uma mesma doutrina ou um programa político comum.

Com efeito, a noção genérica de "extrema-direita" oferece, no nosso entendimento, a vantagem de tornar visível todo um conjunto de traços recorrentes, constantes, comuns a estas diferentes formações. Entre estas convergências podemos destacar, muito sumariamente, um inequívoco pendor autoritário, uma conceção conservadora da ordem social assente na valorização da hierarquia e numa profunda desconfiança em relação ao pluralismo e às formas e expressões diversas de

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

emancipação social. A essa atitude associa-se o anti-intelectualismo, a hostilidade declarada às universidades e à ciência, sobretudo quando esta entra em conflito com as crenças e os valores que defendem, assim como o culto exacerbado da nação e o apego a uma visão tendencialmente fechada e exclusivista do mundo social. Nesta visão, a sociedade é cindida por uma oposição profunda, estruturante, entre "nós" e "os outros", necessariamente entendidos como uma ameaça. Daí o reiterado apelo à retórica da "cruzada"[8] e à figura recorrente do "inimigo interior", cuja identidade varia de um contexto para o outro, mas que frequentemente encarna em algumas figuras tristemente familiares: judeus, imigrantes, muçulmanos e outras minorias étnicas e religiosas, feministas, comunistas, movimentos LGBTQIAPN+ e todos aqueles que podem ser identificados, de forma geral, como agentes ou sintomas de uma suposta decadência civilizacional. As extremas-direitas veem adversários por todos os lados. Ao mesmo tempo que se opõem aos direitos das minorias, insurgem-se contra as reivindicações de igualdade de género e orientação sexual e condenam veementemente a mestiçagem física ou cultural, receosas de uma fantasiosa degradação genética ou substituição demográfica. Crendo-se investidas de uma missão restauradora e salvífica, portadoras da promessa de uma regeneração da sociedade, adoram apresentar-se como forças de rutura, destinadas a inverter o curso de uma história que julgam decadente. Daí a recorrência de imaginários de renascimento nacional, de reconquista e de restauração de uma ordem social e moral supostamente corrompida ou perdida.

Isoladamente, nenhum dos traços acima descritos seria suficiente para definir uma formação política como pertencente à extrema-direita. O que a define como tal é o modo como estes diferentes traços, mobilizados e combinados de forma recorrente, se articulam numa determinada visão da sociedade e da ação política. São estas convergên-

8 Cf. Florian Besson, "La croisade reinventée. Un fantasme des masculinistes et islamophobes du web", La Vie des idées, 29 de abril de 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).

cias – como os artigos reunidos neste número temático demonstram admiravelmente a partir de diferentes casos e contextos – que conferem, em última análise, a esse mosaico das extremas-direitas uma identidade política nitidamente reconhecível. Categoria abrangente, "extrema-direita" não apaga esta diversidade, mas ajuda a torná-la, pelo contrário, ainda mais facilmente inteligível.

Identificar este conjunto de traços recorrentes e ter as suas convergências atuais em mente é, no nosso entendimento, imprescindível para que possamos melhor contextualizar e compreender o tema que nos ocupa. Com efeito, o combate contra os historiadores é indissociável de uma guerra cultural mais ampla dirigida contra as universidades, e o seu atual recrudescimento inscreve-se nesta conjuntura de recessão democrática, já referida mais acima. Um pouco por toda a parte, vemos os académicos cada vez mais na defensiva, encurralados perante esta ofensiva continuada contra as universidades, que se estende desde o estrangulamento financeiro e a ingerência política até à contestação dos conteúdos nelas ensinados e à acusação de serem redutos de doutrinação ideológica. Os exemplos são numerosos e bem conhecidos, não sendo necessário entrar em detalhes. Basta lembrar o espírito de revanchismo, de acerto de contas tão acentuado nas severas políticas de controlo orçamental e nas intimidações que os governos de Jair Bolsonaro, Javier Milei e Donald Trump desferiram contra as universidades, as agências de apoio à investigação e as ciências sociais e humanas, comummente encaradas como bastiões de políticas de identidade e de igualdade, como viveiros de ideologias progressistas e como redutos de doutrinamento de uma suposta hegemonia "de esquerda".

Nesta conjuntura, a situação dos historiadores, dos professores de história e da disciplina histórica tem-se revelado particularmente preocupante. O ataque de que são alvo não se restringe ao estrangulamento orçamental das instituições onde trabalham ou à sua caricatura como "doutrinadores" e como cúmplices de elites culturais decadentes. A batalha cultural que está a ser travada contra eles estende-se também à sua própria matéria de trabalho e à razão de ser do seu ofício: a interpretação do passado. Objeto central de uma acesa disputa ideológica, da qual a

extrema-direita não tenciona abrir mão, a autoridade dos historiadores encontra-se hoje amplamente contestada. Não é, evidentemente, a primeira vez que ela é refutada ou questionada. Porém, talvez nunca os historiadores e os professores de história, de uma forma geral, se tenham visto de tal forma forçados a descer do seu pedestal e a reconhecer, a contragosto, que os seus mecanismos tradicionais de validação do conhecimento histórico perderam a sua força de legitimação aos olhos de segmentos cada vez maiores da sociedade. Para eles, o conflito das interpretações já não se encontra encerrado intramuros, mas doravante travar-se-á fora do *campus*, na praça pública, envolvendo diversos outros atores: jornalistas, formadores de opinião, políticos, publicistas, legisladores, influenciadores digitais. Apenas no último ano de 2025-2026, uma série de episódios confirma o quão palpitante é, pelo mundo fora, a disputa pelo controlo das narrativas históricas. São nomeadamente os casos da ordem executiva "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History", assinada por Donald Trump apenas dois meses após o início do seu segundo mandato e destinada a determinar que narrativas da história nacional são consideradas aceitáveis e quais as que devem ser retificadas ou rejeitadas, ou da instrumentalização das recentes celebrações do 250.º aniversário da independência americana, transformadas em exibição triunfalista de uma visão conservadora, cristã, divisiva e racialmente excludente da história dos Estados Unidos. Este é igualmente o caso, em Portugal, dos esforços do partido Chega para memorializar os acontecimentos do 25 de Novembro de 1975 com o intuito de fazer da esquerda, em vez do autoritarismo salazarista, o principal antagonista da democracia nascida na revolução de Abril de 1974, ou ainda o das tensões em torno da também recente celebração dos 50 anos do golpe militar na Argentina, num contexto em que o país atravessa uma deriva autoritária sob um governo cujo presidente, Javier Milei, reivindica uma interpretação própria do passado e contesta desdenhosamente o número de vítimas da ditadura.

Na realidade, este tipo de usos políticos do passado assume múltiplas formas, e não se restringe à apropriação de uma data nacional ou ao controlo de uma narrativa oficial. Vemo-lo em ação, por exemplo,

na guerra de memória que dilacera a sociedade espanhola, onde o *Plan de Concordia* impulsionado pelo PP e pelo Vox, que visa impedir que sejam feitas referências ao golpe de Estado de julho de 1936 e que o regime franquista seja designado como "ditadura", atravanca as mais diversas ações – escavações, exumações, ações pedagógicas e culturais – provenientes da *Ley de Memoria Histórica*. Vemo-lo também, após anos de negacionismo criminoso por parte de Jair Bolsonaro[9], na censura e na retirada da expressão "ditadura militar" impostas, em agosto de 2026, pela Câmara dos Deputados no Brasil, a um livro acerca do Bicentenário da Independência do Brasil. Vemo-lo ainda na abjeta tentativa de apropriação de Marc Bloch por Jordan Bardella, que, à semelhança de outros dirigentes do Rassemblement National antes dele, cita uma passagem de *L'Étrange défaite* fora de contexto a fim de questionar o ministro do Interior sobre o número de estrangeiros em situação irregular em França.

São formas análogas de manipulação insidiosa da história, quando não de pura falsificação descarada, que encontramos também por detrás da instrumentalização do sítio de Covadonga e do conceito de "Reconquista" pelo Vox e das controversas declarações de Éric Zemmour favoráveis a Pétain. Estas formas de apropriação seletiva do passado vêm, no entanto, amiúde acompanhadas de tentativas concretas de constranger a investigação histórica. É o que podemos ver por trás da criação, por Dmitry Medvedev, da "Comissão Presidencial para Combater as Tentativas de Falsificação da História em Prejuízo dos Interesses da Rússia" (2009), assim como da condenação do historiador Yury Dmitriev, encarcerado aos 70 anos numa colónia penal de alta segurança na Mordóvia pelas suas investigações sobre os crimes de Estaline. Vemo-las igualmente, enfim, no recorrente uso da grande vitória soviética sobre o nazismo como arma geopolítica de legitimação da atual invasão da Ucrânia pela Rússia.

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

Mas, afinal, o que está em jogo? Porque é que a extrema-direita contemporânea se preocupa tanto com o controlo das narrativas sobre o passado? Que papel desempenha a história, enquanto campo de disputa simbólica e ideológica, na sua estratégia de conquista ou de manutenção do poder? Que tecnologias e meios comunicacionais sustentam essa ofensiva que move contra os historiadores? E de que modo o domínio sobre as representações do que foi se transforma num instrumento de poder sobre o que é – e sobre o que poderá vir a ser? A conjuntura política atual coloca problemas inéditos, para os quais ainda não possuímos as devidas respostas. De facto, permanece em aberto a própria questão das continuidades e ruturas entre os modos como a extrema-direita atual, as suas encarnações prévias no século xx e outros campos políticos (nomeadamente a direita conservadora ou o chamado "centro-direita") tendem a utilizar o passado. Do mesmo modo, é importante interrogarmo-nos sobre em que medida esta disputa pelo passado deve ser entendida à luz de fenómenos como a cultura histórica pós-moderna, o denominado "boom da memória", as "guerras da história" ou a "nostalgia pós-colonial"[10]. Não é impossível pensar neste fenómeno de manipulação do passado como uma reação à globalização ou à chamada "política do arrependimento", esta última entendida como um conjunto de processos memoriais através dos quais vários Estados democráticos têm sido encorajados a confrontar as atrocidades e violências cometidas na sua história de forma a obterem ou a manterem a sua legitimidade política.[11] E até que ponto não fará ela parte da "colonialidade do poder", conceito formulado por Anibal Quijano no princípio deste século e que descreve a persistência de formas de hierarquia política, social e

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.

11 Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret. On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (Nova Iorque, NI e Londres: Routledge, 2007).

racial impostas pelo colonialismo europeu em contextos como a América Latina[12]?

Não é por capricho que movimentos ultranacionalistas e regimes autoritários se empenham em controlar narrativas sobre o passado, mas porque reconhecem que o controlo das interpretações históricas é um vigoroso instrumento de conquista do poder e de legitimação política. Não por acaso, a retórica do controlo do passado encontra frequentemente a retórica da "salvação nacional": quem se apresenta como aquele que irá "salvar" o país procura também definir de que país se fala, que passado deve ser preservado ou recuperado e que futuro deve ser vislumbrado. Quem narra o passado escreve antecipadamente o futuro. E quem reescreve a história pode, a seu bel-prazer, apagar culpas, silenciar vítimas e moldar subjetividades, incutindo o sentimento de uma continuidade imaculada entre um passado glorioso, um presente ameaçado e um futuro redentor. No contexto atual de uma nova extrema-direita em ascensão, não se trata apenas de apagar ou de reescrever a história da escravatura, dos genocídios coloniais, dos crimes dos regimes fascistas ou das ditaduras militares. A extrema-direita compreendeu – ou pressente – aquilo que, por vezes, até os próprios historiadores e os professores de história têm relutância em admitir publicamente: que a história sempre foi e continua a ser um território de conflito, constantemente suscetível à manipulação ideológica.

Se essas utilizações políticas tão frequentes do passado preocupam os historiadores, os incomodam e os deixam desconfortáveis, não será porque são eles próprios os primeiros a reconhecer que a história, desde o seu surgimento, tem sido incessantemente convocada para justificar conquistas territoriais, forjar identidades nacionais, construir mitologias de origem, nutrir ressentimentos coletivos, despertar latentes xenofobias[13]? A despeito do reconhecimento desta natureza profunda da história, cabe questionarmo-nos aqui: através de que meios pode a historiografia aca-

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

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

démica, enquanto disciplina crítica, convencer a restante sociedade da enorme distância que, no entanto, a separa das afirmações contrafeitas e da retórica sentenciosa, presunçosa e, ao mesmo tempo, oca que é tão comum entre os apóstolos da extrema-direita? Com efeito, as pretensas "interpretações históricas" que estes últimos se comprazem em urdir constituem, como Pierre Vidal-Naquet não se cansou de demonstrar, uma inversão *pastichada* do método do historiador. Emulam reiteradamente os modos de apresentação da historiografia académica, com citações, notas de rodapé, bibliografia, jargão técnico. Tudo ali se encontra, só que posto ao serviço de uma lógica puramente performativa. Ao invés de partirem das fontes rumo à interpretação, partem da conclusão ideológica preliminar rumo ao ajuste das fontes. O que buscam é menos a compreensão do passado do que a imposição de uma narrativa útil ao combate político no presente. Nos seus discursos sobre o passado, toda a contradição é banida. As dúvidas, silenciadas. E as fontes, continuamente ajustadas, distorcidas, quando não diretamente inventadas. Não pretendem elucidar, explicar, informar. Ambicionam mobilizar, inflamar, recrutar. Cabe, portanto, à historiografia académica encontrar os meios para reafirmar toda a distância que a separa dessa profusão de discursos erguidos sobre dogmatismo e lógica panfletária.

A historiografia profissional não é neutra, mas é responsável. Reconhece-se implicada, nos termos descritos por Michael Rothberg[14]. Assim, assume o seu lugar na sociedade, as limitações impostas pela sua fragilidade epistemológica, mas também o seu compromisso com uma intenção de verdade. Por conseguinte, os historiadores são hoje levados a sair do conforto do debate *interpares* e a colocarem-se como atores públicos conscientes da sua responsabilidade intelectual, social e ética. Chamados a uma nova frente de batalha, mostram-se plenamente conscientes de que o combate à desinformação histórica exige estratégias comunicativas inovadoras. Preocupados em marcar a sua presença no espaço público, participam ativamente em plataformas digitais onde procuram desmentir narrativas fraudulentas, desmontar falsificações e

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

promover debates fundamentados, e investem em campanhas educativas, com o objetivo de fortalecer o espírito crítico e a literacia histórica entre o grande público, de modo a torná-lo menos vulnerável aos discursos ideológicos e às tentativas diversas de manipulação da história. Para tanto, reinventam formas de expandir a sua audiência, sem, contudo, sacrificar a exigência crítica. Em diversas latitudes, tem-se observado a criação de organizações e de redes de historiadores comprometidos com a defesa da memória democrática e da história pública, que monitorizam as deturpações negacionistas a fim de as refutar e de produzir conteúdos críticos e acessíveis através de publicações, documentários, *podcasts* e exposições. Mais do que uma reação defensiva, esta nova presença dos historiadores no debate público representa um exercício proativo que reafirma a história académica como uma prática democrática, plural e ética.

A conjuntura atual – atravessada pela ameaça de deslegitimação do ofício do historiador, pela deflagração de uma crise epistémica, pela propagação viral de um elã anti-intelectual e por uma marcada regressão democrática – é desafiadora sob vários aspetos e exige uma resposta historiográfica à altura. Procurando ir além dos contextos e dos casos particulares de instrumentalização do passado analisados pelos autores aqui reunidos, o objetivo do nosso duplo número temático é, assim, o de convidar historiadores e historiadoras a refletirem, em conjunto, sobre a defesa da história como ato de liberdade intelectual, sobre o seu lugar enquanto objeto de disputa político-ideológica e, por fim, sobre as transformações a que está eventualmente sujeito o ofício do historiador, à luz dessa conjuntura presente que se lhe apresenta tão adversa. Para esse efeito, é preciso não apenas descrever os mecanismos de manipulação do passado, mas também compreendê-los nas suas raízes profundas, nos seus efeitos duradouros, nas suas implicações epistemológicas, deontológicas e políticas. É preciso desmascarar os dispositivos do falso, cartografar os modos de circulação das falsas notícias e da mentira programada, de modo a entender os afetos que alimentam o desgaste dos valores democráticos e o concomitante retorno de pautas reacionárias.

Depois de numerosas viragens (*linguística*, *crítica*, *cultural*, *pós-colonial*, *digital*) atravessadas pela historiografia nos últimos cinquenta anos, talvez tenhamos chegado hoje à *viragem desmistificadora* do campo da história, marcada pela progressiva erosão da fronteira que outrora separava, na esfera pública, a historiografia académica e as mais diversas formas de produção social do passado, incluindo os discursos panfletários que se apropriam seletivamente do passado e se arrogam o estatuto de história. O que define esta nova viragem da historiografia – cujo foco são as formas diversas de apropriação, utilização e instrumentalização da história – é o reconhecimento do estatuto público do passado, da concorrência assumida em torno dos seus significados e da definição daquilo que pode ou deve ser lembrado. Esta *viragem desmistificadora* que a história hoje atravessa traduz, portanto, a passagem de uma história entendida como estudo do passado para uma história-ciência dos seus usos. Ao longo da segunda década do século xxi, com efeito, os historiadores tomaram consciência, de forma cada vez mais clara, de que o conhecimento que produzem – como em qualquer outra ciência – não existe num vácuo imune às pressões e apropriações sociais e que a sua tarefa não se esgota na publicação dos resultados da sua investigação, mas se estende inevitavelmente à esfera pública, à afirmação ativa da integridade e do valor do seu ofício perante as manipulações políticas, as falsificações e as tentativas recorrentes de capturar o passado para o pôr ao serviço de um projeto de poder. Se estamos a identificar aí uma nova viragem historiográfica é porque o reconhecimento de que a esfera de intervenção dos historiadores se estende para muito além dos muros da academia é algo que agora se tornou uma condição necessária e imperativa para o exercício concreto da investigação histórica perante a conjuntura atual; uma nova viragem, portanto, uma vez que o reconhecimento desta ampliação da esfera de intervenção dos historiadores acarreta, inelutavelmente, uma nova maneira de os historiadores olharem para si próprios e entenderem o seu respetivo papel social. Em suma e glosando, a ideia é bastante simples: por que vemos aí o advento de uma nova viragem historiográfica? Porque o facto de os historiadores reconhecerem coletivamente que a

sua esfera de intervenção se estende para muito além da universidade é agora condição imperativa para que, no cenário atual, consigam exercer o seu ofício, mas é também uma nova viragem porque o facto de os historiadores reconhecerem esta ampliação acaba por transformar (e não superficialmente) o modo como se percebem, se enxergam e como entendem qual seria a sua missão social. Uma mudança de paradigma, que força a historiografia a reconhecer a necessária articulação entre prática intelectual e prática social. O ofício do historiador já não se define apenas como uma forma de produção de conhecimento, como reflexão sobre os seus fundamentos e as suas condições de possibilidade; desdobra-se agora num compromisso em defesa do estatuto, da legitimidade e da seriedade desse mesmo conhecimento no interior de um campo de batalha simbólico no qual o passado se converte em instrumento de uma disputa onde o que está em jogo é a dominação. Consciente de que o espaço público onde ela se move está atravessado por interpretações concorrentes, a produção historiográfica comprometida com os valores democráticos funda-se, neste jovem século XXI, na união entre reflexão e ação.

Este primeiro volume do nosso duplo número temático reúne nove artigos originais cujo foco abrange um conjunto de geografias que abarca três continentes – a Europa, a Ásia e a América – e nove países – França, Alemanha, Espanha, Portugal, Coreia do Sul, Índia, Canadá, Estados Unidos da América e Argentina. Não pretendemos fazer um apanhado exaustivo da cobertura do fenómeno a nível mundial. Em vez disso, queremos demonstrar como muitos dos mecanismos de manipulação da história acima descritos são capazes de influenciar outras realidades culturais e, por outro lado, de serem mimetizados por essas mesmas realidades. Os artigos abrangem temas como o revisionismo histórico, a recuperação de grandes narrativas nacionais, a contestação e reformulação das políticas de memória, bem como o papel da educação, da cultura visual e dos novos *media* na disseminação e manipulação do conhecimento histórico. Esta multiplicidade de geografias e temas mostra-nos como o fenómeno dos usos do passado pela extrema-direita não pode ser entendido à escala nacional, mas sim de forma

transnacional e transdisciplinar, atendendo às múltiplas variantes e formas que ele assume.

Perante as modalidades diversas de falsificação do passado, de negacionismo e de instrumentalização da história, o desafio que hoje se coloca aos historiadores é, em última análise, o de construir, coletivamente, formas de vigilância, de crítica e de intervenção capazes de contrariar os esforços que procuram reduzir a história a um instrumento de legitimação política. Para tanto, é imprescindível, em primeiro lugar, reivindicar a liberdade de investigação, valer-se da reflexividade e do espírito crítico inerentes e indispensáveis à sua prática intelectual, e preservar, enfim, o exercício metódico da dúvida. Acima de tudo, é preciso que os historiadores não se deixem cair na armadilha para a qual os partidos de extrema-direita, os influenciadores digitais e os autores negacionistas esperam conduzi-los. Como? Fundamentalmente, admitindo – sobretudo perante aqueles que se arrogam o monopólio da verdade e recusam submeter as suas afirmações à discussão – a infinita complexidade do seu objeto; assumindo as incertezas e os limites epistemológicos da sua ciência; reconhecendo a natureza subjetiva, lacunar e provisória do conhecimento que produzem. Subjetividade e arbitrariedade podem vir a sobrepor-se, mas estão muito longe de ser equivalentes.

Ainda que saibamos reconhecer o poder que o dogmatismo e as asserções categóricas exercem sobre parcelas cada vez mais amplas da sociedade, importa, antes de mais, não ceder – isto é, avançar na direção contrária e assumir, sem constrangimento, uma maior modéstia perante os limites, as zonas de incerteza e as contingências do nosso ofício. É precisamente porque os seus adversários se obstinam em apresentar a dúvida como sinal de fraqueza que os historiadores devem reivindicá-la como exigência constitutiva do seu trabalho. Defender a história não significa apenas defender uma determinada interpretação do passado, mas sim as condições intelectuais e institucionais que tornam possível interrogá-lo com exigência crítica e probidade. Cabe-nos, portanto, não apenas perguntar que tipo de prática histórica desejamos defender, mas também que lugar queremos que o conhecimento histó-

rico ocupe no espaço público e que formas de intervenção estaremos dispostos a construir para o proteger.

Gostaríamos, antes de concluir, de agradecer à *Práticas da História* por acolher favoravelmente o presente número temático. Os nossos mais vivos agradecimentos estendem-se aos autores que responderam com entusiasmo à nossa chamada e dedicaram tempo e trabalho à preparação das suas contribuições e ao enriquecimento deste projeto coletivo.

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

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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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Berber Bevernage

Populist Historical Reason on the French Far-Right: The Case of Éric Zemmour and *Reconquête*

This article examines the significance of history in the political strategy of French far-right populist Éric Zemmour and his party, *Reconquête*. It argues that Zemmour's discourse is a textbook example of "populist historical reason". A media-pundit turned politician, Zemmour's notoriety largely stems from radical historical revisionism spanning antiquity to the contemporary era. He narrates French history in grim terms as a story of original greatness followed by decline and betrayal. As a proponent of the Great Replacement theory, he accuses (Muslim) migrants and politically correct elites of conspiring to destroy the French people. Zemmour's self-declared "war of history" prioritizes a polarizing philosophy of history over factual accuracy and plays a crucial role in his authoritarian agenda. The article shows that Zemmour mobilizes history to incite fear and paranoia, redefine and restrict popular sovereignty, showcase his patriotism, cast himself as a providential leader capable of saving the nation, and ultimately undermine democratic norms and the rule of law.
Keywords: populism; far-right; Éric Zemmour.

A razão histórica populista na extrema-direita francesa: o caso de Éric Zemmour e do *Reconquête*

Este artigo examina o significado da história na estratégia política do populista de extrema-direita francês Éric Zemmour e do seu partido, o *Reconquête*. Defende que o discurso de Zemmour é um exemplo clássico de "razão histórica populista". Ex-comentarista mediático que se tornou político, a notoriedade de Zemmour deriva em grande parte de um revisionismo histórico radical que abrange desde a Antiguidade até à era contemporânea. Ele narra a história francesa em termos sombrios, como uma história de grandeza original seguida de declínio e traição. Como defensor da teoria da Grande Substituição, acusa os migrantes (muçulmanos) e as elites do "politicamente correto" de conspirarem para destruir o povo francês. A autoproclamada "guerra da história" de Zemmour privilegia uma filosofia polarizadora da história em detrimento da exatidão factual e desempenha um papel crucial na sua agenda autoritária. O artigo

mostra que Zemmour mobiliza a história para incitar o medo e a paranoia, redefinir e restringir a soberania popular, exibir o seu patriotismo, apresentar-se como um líder providencial capaz de salvar a nação e, em última análise, minar as normas democráticas e o Estado de direito.
Palavras-chave: populismo; extrema-direita; Éric Zemmour.

Populist Historical Reason on the French Far-Right: The Case of Éric Zemmour and *Reconquête*

Berber Bevernage*

Introduction

Populist parties worldwide show a strong interest in history as a political resource. In a recent edited volume Eline Mestdagh, Walderez Ramalho, Marie-Gabrielle Verbergt and I argued that this interest, despite thematic divergences, follows a common logic that we termed "populist historical reason".[1] Examining a large number of case studies of left- and right-wing populisms – from Bolsonaro to Islamic populism in Tanzania, Podemos in Spain, and Modi's BJP in India –, we identified typical features of how populists engage with the past. We highlighted recurring elements such as vagueness and decontextualization of historical references, a logic of equivalence linking diverse events and actors, moralized antagonisms, strong affective investments, and a rejection of pluralism in historical representation. Partly because we

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1 Berber Bevernage, Eline Mestdagh, Walderez Ramalho and Marie-Gabrielle Verbergt (eds.), *Claiming the People's Past: Populist Politics of History in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024). I would like to thank these colleagues and friends for the discussions that helped form this article. I am responsible for all translations in this article.

focussed on commonalities between right- and left-wing populisms, we could not elaborate profoundly on the question of *why* populists focus history as a political strategy. What role does history play in their broader strategy for power?

In this article, I address this question by focussing on far-right populist Éric Zemmour and his political party *Reconquête ["Reconquer"]. A well-known media figure in France, Zemmour gained international attention when he entered the presidential race of 2022 with an aggressive campaign that simultaneously had to help him outcompete Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National on its right flank and position him as the candidate for a "united right". Zemmour combined culturally conservative rhetorics with* a neoliberal yet anti-globalist economic program. He profiled himself around ultra-nationalistic, identitarian, anti-feminist & LBGTQ+ and extreme anti-migration and Islamophobic rhetorics and loudly proclaimed the "great replacement" thesis, arguing that "invading" migrants are replacing the original French population through reverse colonisation.

Zemmour promised to "save" France from its allegedly "suicidal" historical course set by cosmopolitan elites, by returning power to the French people to resist "Islamisation" and protect their heritage. His party attracted the support of influential radical right-wing figures including Philippe De Villiers, former presidential candidate and founder of the historical theme park *Puy du Fou*; Marion Maréchal, granddaughter of Jean-Marie Le Pen; and Patrick Buisson, a former Sarkozy spin doctor, polemicist, and amateur historian. Zemmour secured substantial media visibility, most notably through the network of media mogul Vincent Bolloré.

Zemmour's strategy for the 2022 elections arguably failed since he stranded at 7% of the votes,[2] despite jumping over Le Pen in pre-elec-

2 Franck Johannès, "2022 Presidential Election Results: The Failed Bet of Eric Zemmour," *Le Monde*, 13 April 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2022/04/11/2022-presidential-election-results-the-failed-bet-of-eric-zemmour-who-missed-a-campaign-in-which-he-imposed-his-topics_5980284_5.html.

tion polls.[3] Since then, *Reconquête* has had mixed and overall limited electoral success. The party claims to have over 100.000 members.[4] In the 2024 European Parliament elections, it won five MEP seats, but internal tensions soon led to the expulsion of four of them, including Marion Maréchal.[5] In the subsequent 2024 snap elections for the National Assembly Zemmour's party in shambles failed to win any seats.[6] Since then Zemmour and his party are trying to form local alliances ahead of the 2026 municipal elections, and positioning themselves for the presidential elections of 2027.

These relatively low electoral results should, however, not obscure the fact that Zemmour has been very successful at creating "a new political brand that will remain on the French ideological market."[7] As Cecile Alduy argues, Zemmour's discourse seems contagious: "It structures debates, permeates conversations, determines what is said and what is believable, and spreads across an unprecedented media and political landscape."[8] In Zemmour's own words, his party cannot lose because it is waging a war for ideas rather than merely trying to win elections.[9] Importantly, Zemmour identifies his key contribution as the reintroduction of France's history and its historical destiny into political discourse. He deliberately engages in a "war of history"[10] which

3 Reuters, "Zemmour Widens Gap over Le Pen in Race for French Presidential Runoff Vote – Poll," 9 November 2021, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/zemmour-widens-gap-over-le-pen-race-french-presidential-runoff-vote-poll-2021-11-09/.

4 https://www.parti-reconquete.fr/ (accessed 5/1/2026).

5 Théophane Hartmann, "Political Future of Expelled Newly Elected Reconquête! MEPs in Question," *Euractiv*, 13 June 2024, https://www.euractiv.com/news/political-future-of-expelled-newly-elected-reconquete-meps-in-question/.

6 Raphaëlle Aubert, Pierre Breteau, Maxime Ferrer, and Manon Romain, "La carte des résultats des législatives 2024 au second tour," *Le Monde*, 9 July 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2024/07/08/la-carte-des-resultats-des-legislatives-2024-au-second-tour-la-composition-de-l-assemblee-et-le-depute-elu-dans-votre-circonscription_6247510_4355771.html.

7 Périne Schir and Marlène Laruelle, "Eric Zemmour, The New Face of the French Far Right: Media-Sponsored, Neoliberal, and Reactionary," *Journal of Illiberalism Studies* 2, no. 2 (2022): 2.

8 Cécile Alduy, *La Langue de Zemmour: Une arme de destruction sémantique* (Paris: Seuil, 2022), 12.

9 Thomas Beker, "Législatives 2024: 0,7 % des voix pour Reconquête," *Le Figaro*, 15 July 2024, https://www.lefigaro.fr/elections/legislatives/legislatives-2024-0-7-des-voix-pour-reconquete-20240701.

10 Éric Zemmour, *Je n'ai pas dit mon dernier mot* (Paris: Rubempré, 2023), 215.

he views as a vital element of a civilizational war already unfolding in France and Europe.

This article examines this war of history and its place within Zemmour's broader political, or as he terms it, "metapolitical," strategy. It analyses how Zemmour has portrayed and instrumentalized history throughout his career. This includes his roles as journalist and polemicist, most notably at *Le Figaro*, as television commentator,[11] and as self-proclaimed *connoisseur* of history. Besides analysing Zemmour's political speeches, online videos and electoral programs, I focus on his best-selling history books – including *Mélancolie française* [French Melancholia] (2010), *Le suicide français* [French Suicide] (2014) and *Destin français* [French Destiny] (2018). I also look at his most recent political campaign books *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot* [France Has Not Had Its Last Word] (2021), *Je nai pas dit mon dernier mot* [I Haven't Had My Last Word] (2023) and *La messe nest pas dite: Pour un sursaut judéo-chrétien* [The Mass Is Not Yet Said: For a Judeo-Christian Revival] (2025).

Examining Zemmour's discourse is important, not because it is original, but precisely because it is not. It serves as a prominent example of a broader far-right trend that normalizes historical revisionism across media platforms. I use Zemmour's case as a lens to explore the diverse techniques and logics employed in far-right populist historical reason, showing how history is instrumentalised to obtain political power. Zemmour's use of history underpins an authoritarian ideology that rejects democratic norms of deliberation, representation, and accountability. His discourse prioritizes a polarising and hyperbolic philosophy of history over concerns with factual accuracy, using history as a tool to mobilize emotions and ultimately to incite hatred and violence.

11 Zemmour was a regular guest in the talk show "*Face à l'info*" on CNews where his provocative style boosted the show's audience, attracting between 800.000 to 1 million viewers at peak moments. Schir and Laruelle, "Eric Zemmour," 5.

I. Zemmour and populist historical reason

I.1. History in Zemmour's discourse

History is omnipresent in Zemmour's discourse. His notoriety largely stems from radical historical revisionism which has drawn strong criticism from historians.[12] Zemmour's oeuvre is extensive but also highly repetitive. Central to his discourse is a vision of French history as a continuous cycle of original greatness followed by decline and betrayal, wherein the French nation is undermined by external enemies as well as by its own elites. His revisionist histories span from antiquity to modern times, emphasizing France's glorious origins, while portraying modern France as a nation in crisis due to multiculturalism, immigration, and erosion of traditional values.

According to Zemmour, France was built from Roman Gaul, which provided its language, law, and centralized state tradition, and from Catholic Christianity, which unified the population culturally. He believes the nation was forged by a succession of great men who strengthened the State and assimilated diverse peoples into a single and homogenous cultural identity. In this narrative, France's destiny has always been to revive the grandeur of the Roman Empire, acting as the unifying force of Europe and as the civilizer of the world. For a thousand years, France was the "beating heart" of the history of Europe and "thus" the world.[13] France, according to Zemmour, "invented" everything that matters – the nation-state, feudality, the monastery, the enlightenment, democracy, secularism and even the individual[14] – and defended Europe against "Islamization" by gloriously leading the crusades.

12 See for example: Alya Aglan, Florian Besson, Jean-Luc Chappey, e.a. *Zemmour contre l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2022); Laurent Joly, *La falsification de l'histoire: Éric Zemmour, l'extrême droite, Vichy et les juifs* (Paris: Éditions Grasset, 2022); and Gérard Noiriel, *Le venin dans la plume: Édouard Drumont, Éric Zemmour, et la part sombre de la République* (La Découverte, 2021).

13 Éric Zemmour, *Destin français* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2018), 31.

14 For example, "Discours d'Éric Zemmour à Bruxelles (National Conservatism Conference)," accessed 13 January 2025, https://www.ericzemmour.fr/discours_d_eric_zemmour_bruxelles_national_conservatism_conference.

Modern France created its own downfall, however, by abandoning this historical mission. Zemmour argues that France's decline began toward the end of the 18th century when it started losing its imperial and colonial dominance and culminated in Napoleon's defeat, signifying a loss of influence in Europe. Another turning point, for Zemmour, is May 1968, when traditional authority and national cohesion allegedly began to erode, and immigration and multiculturalism accelerated civilizational decline.

Zemmour claims that Islam has taken advantage of the void left by the "nihilist individualism" and "woke ideology" of politically correct elites to impose its own rule on French soil. Zemmour posits a reverse "colonization," whereby the original French population is gradually supplanted. This dynamic is depicted as the pinnacle of a millennial civilizational conflict threatening the survival of the French people.[15]

I.2. Alignment with features of populist historical reason

While populism as a concept has sparked extensive debate,[16] describing Eric Zemmour as a populist is uncontroversial. Scholars have identified many populist elements in Zemmour's rhetoric.[17] Furthermore, the term does not necessarily have a negative connotation in French politics. Prominent politicians, including Jean-Luc Mélenchon and even Emmanuel Macron, have embraced it as a badge of honor, as has Zemmour.[18]

I focus less on the extent to which Zemmour's politics are populist or how they intertwine with conservative and authoritarian traits.

15 Especially: Éric Zemmour, *La messe n'est pas dite: Pour un sursaut judéo-chrétien* (Paris: Fayard, 2025).

16 For an overview: Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul A. Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

17 Lorella Sini, "Qu'est-ce qu'un discours populiste? Le cas du discours de déclaration de candidature d'Éric Zemmour," *Espaces Linguistiques* 7 (2024): 10-22; Nora Gattiglia, "La fabrication du «peuple» dans le discours de campagne présidentielle sur Twitter d'Éric Zemmour," *Espaces Linguistiques* 7 (2024): 23-41.

18 Sini, "Qu'est-ce qu'un discours populiste?," 14.

Zemmour clearly merges these. The main point is that Zemmour's politics exemplify a textbook case of populist historical reason, as outlined in our volume *Claiming the People's Past*. Building on Ernesto Laclau's theory that "populist reason" is a distinct political logic rather than a fixed set of ideas, we argued that populist historical reason should be understood not by the specific historical contents populists reference, but by the way they weave together these contents and the dimensions of the past, present, and future.

Populist historical reason typically features vague, decontextualized invocations of the past, connecting heterogenous and often chronologically distant historical phenomena around empty signifiers such as "greatness," "liberty," or "foreignness". Closely related, it is antagonistic, presenting binaries between "us" and "them" while rejecting academic historiography as serving anti-patriotic interests. Furthermore, we argued it is typically characterized by strong affective overtones invoking feelings such as hatred, pride, fear, and nostalgia. Finally, it tends to reject representational pluralism by insisting on a single "true" history, dismissing other representations not because they are factually incorrect, but primarily because they conflict with populists moral and affective connection to the past. Zemmour's discourse exemplifies all these characteristics.

Vagueness and decontextualisation

Although Zemmour has written several book-length essays on history, his historical accounts remain vague and decontextualized. He contrasts a glorious past with a present marked by decline and crisis, yet offers few arguments to substantiate these claims. Historical figures, such as Charles Martel, Joan of Arc or Roland the protagonist of *La Chanson de Roland* are detached from their contexts and transformed into symbolic caricatures of heroism and resistance. His work amasses historical references without explaining coherent relations and is often anachronistic, with stories leaping across time periods spanning over a thousand years. Zemmour blends historical figures with fictional characters from films or literature. This is illustrated in his 2021 presiden-

tial campaign video which combined archival WWII footage with cinematic depictions of medieval battles and iconic shots from 1960s fiction films. After copyright issues forced the removal of the original video, the reworked version maintained the same voiceover, equally mixing historical figures with references to Hugo's stories and La Fontaine's fables to construct a nostalgic vision of a threatened France.[19]

Chains of equivalence, analogies and typological imagination

Zemmour frequently employs a logic of equivalence to resort diverse social issues such as immigration, crime, cultural change under a common denominator of decline or invasion. He presents these as elements of a "war of civilisations,"[20] portraying petty crime (including cell phone theft), drug dealing and demographic changes as strategies for the "great replacement."[21]

Central to Zemmour's discourse is a typological approach to history, where he draws analogies between historically and contextually disparate phenomena simplifying complex realities into stark, emotionally charged narratives. He calls Islam "the Germany of our generation," drawing parallels between the allegedly "germanophile" elites of the past and the "islamophile" ones of today.[22] The contemporary French "judicial machine" is branded as a new "holy inquisition".[23] Similarly, he typifies the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, which established the European Union, as the "anti-1789," a direct negation of the French Revolution's principle of national and popular sovereignty.[24] Through these analogies and chains of equivalences, Zemmour creates an easily legible vision of history.

19 Éric Zemmour, "Annonce de candidature," 30 November 2021. Video 10 min., 11 sec. The original video was removed from You Tube, but can still be retrieve4 here: https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x85z02o.

20 Zemmour, *La messe,* 119.

21 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot,* 339-340.

22 Zemmour, *Destin français*, 359 and 408.

23 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 204.

24 Zemmour, Éric. *Le suicide français* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2014), 359.

Antagonism

If antagonism is crucial to populism's logic, it is equally central to populist historical reason. Zemmour's historical imagery centres on oppositions and conflict. As Cecile Alduy notes, "war" is one of the most frequent words in Zemmour's history books.[25] A red thread in world history, according to Zemmour, is the perennial civilisational war between "east" and "west". This confrontation allegedly began with Alexander the Great's conquests and later became a war with Islam, which embodies "an Orient perpetually seeking revenge against the West."[26] Another key antagonism, in typical populist vein, is that of cosmopolitan elites against the French people. The notion of French elites betraying the people by conspiring with foreign powers is central to Zemmour's histories. In *Destin français* he projects back this storyline to the medieval "jacqueries" or popular rebellions which he interprets as rebellions against "predatory elites" in defence of the nation and sovereignty.[27] In *Le suicide français*, Zemmour claims post-May'68 elites have killed the French nation by "deconstructing" its history and dismantling state power, destroying in forty years what took a millennium to build. To cite Zemmour:

> France is dying, France is dead. Our political, economic, administrative, media, intellectual, and artistic elites spit on its grave and trample its still-smouldering corpse.[28]

Antagonisms are projected not only onto the past itself but also onto contemporary relations with the past. Populists often claim to protect history from being corrupted by academic historians. Zemmour exemplifies this through his vendetta against American historian Robert Paxton whose work on the Vichy regime's role in the Shoah he

25 Alduy, *La langue*.

26 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 82

27 Zemmour, *Destin français*, 107-108.

28 Zemmour, *Le suicide*, 526.

presents as anti-French ideology. Zemmour extends a similar criticism to the entire "mafia-like" community of academic historians whom, according to him, hold the levers of power and try to "euthanise" France by destroying national identity and blaming "white, heterosexual and catholic men" for all the sins of history.[29]

Affective overtones

Zemmour frequently invokes polarized emotions of fear, loss, abjection, pride and love. *Destin français* opens with Zemmour visiting the Berezina river in Rusia, weeping over Napoleon army's defeat.[30] After the Notre Dame cathedral fire, Zemmour describes how he struggled to hold back tears.[31] In speeches he empathically talks about the "immense suffering" of young people robbed of their (Christian) heritage by the "68 generation."[32] Above all, Zemmour emphasizes French people's anxieties, claiming they face multiple enemies. He labels migrants and politically correct elites as "extremely dangerous" and Islam as "objectively everything that French society abhors." Yet, Zemmour promises that "fear [will] change sides" under his leadership.[33] While acknowledging his tough stances, Zemmour attributes these to his deep love for France. He often expresses exalted love for the French nation and territory, calling French and European "civilization" the most brilliant, beautiful and admirable of all times and chanting "glory to us".[34] This dual emotional appeal combines a narrative of French victimhood with a proud and chauvinistic celebration of past glories.

29 Zemmour, *Destin français*, 37-41.

30 Zemmour, *Destin français*, 12.

31 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 287.

32 Zemmour, *La messe*, 118.

33 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 339.

34 For example: "Le discours de lancement de campagne des Européennes, au Dôme de Paris – Palais des Sports", accessed 13 January 2025, https://www.ericzemmour.fr/discours-europeennes-paris.

The dismissal of representational pluralism

According to Jan-Werner Müller, anti-pluralism is a defining feature of populism, as populists generally claim to be the only legitimate representatives of the people and their interests.[35] This extends to how populists treat history. They typically oppose pluralist historical narratives and insist on a singular version that aligns with their agenda. Following this trend, Zemmour challenges the legitimacy of alternative historical interpretations, particularly those that highlight the diversity of French heritage. If competing histories are allowed in the public sphere, this according to Zemmour, can lead to a civil war:

> There cannot be, on the same soil, within the same nation and the same people, different histories competing, rivalling, and clashing with one another. Gradually, this war of histories solidifies into a war of memories, which can, sooner or later, turn into a civil war.[36]

The survival of the country, according to Zemmour, can only be safeguarded if the French people accept and pass on a singular and unifying historical narrative.

I.3. Zemmour and the French intellectual tradition

While Zemmour is a textbook populist, akin to many other far-right populists globally, there is something distinctively French about his style. Unlike populists elsewhere who often adopt an anti-intellectualist style, Zemmour presents himself as a serious intellectual. His writings are wrapped in a veneer of intellectual gravitas. This aligns with the French tradition where intellectual, cultural and political discussions often intertwine.[37] As Périne Schir and Marlène Laruelle argue, Zem-

35 Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 20.

36 Zemmour, *Je n'ai pas*, 216.

37 Alain Duhamel, "L'intellectualisme et la politique française," *Commentaire* 155, no. 3 (2016):

mour's career exemplifies the resurgence of the figure of the *intellectuel engagé*, traditionally associated with the political left but now claimed by the (far) right.[38]

Rather than providing new insights Zemmour often assembles and repurposes existing ideas from the French far-right intellectual tradition. He selectively draws on themes of national decline, demographic replacement, and identity preservation, combining elements from the *Nouvelle Droite*, ultra-nationalist monarchism, and contemporary far-right thinking to craft narratives that resonate with broad audiences.

This ideological bricolage is most evident in Zemmour's frequent mobilization of concepts from Charles Maurras (1868-1952), the ultra-nationalist and openly antisemitic leader of the monarchist *Action française*, and from Maurice Barrès (1862-1923), the equally nationalistic and antisemitic French writer, politician and theorists of "rootedness" (*enracination*). Zemmour also often cites 18th, 19th and early 20th century nationalist historians such as François René de Chateaubriand, Jules Michelet and Jacques Bainville, an anti-democratic intellectual who idealized French monarchy.

Zemmour's discourse also reflects the influence of the *Nouvelle Droite* ["New Right"] of the 1970s and 1980s, although his relationship with this movement is selective and pragmatic. Echoes of Alain de Benoist and his far-right think tank GRECE are evident in Zemmour's rejection of egalitarianism and liberal universalism as threats to national cohesion. Another similarity is the emphasis on the dual threat of Islamization and Americanization, both framed as colonization. Like the *Nouvelle Droite* ideologues, Zemmour uses a civilizational discourse that denies being racist by arguing that it simply defends the right of France and Europe to be different and to maintain their identity. Though he frequently speaks of race, Zemmour claims he is xenophobic but not racist, as he defends an assimilationist France.[39] A key differ-

569-578.

38 Schir and Laruelle, "Eric Zemmour," 16.

39 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 185.

ence from de Benoist's early *Nouvelle Droite* ideology is that while de Benoist celebrated neo-paganism and viewed Christianity as a colonizing force.[40] Zemmour advocates for a Judeo-Christian tradition against an alleged Islamic colonisation of Europe.

This stance puts Zemmour closer to the former *Nouvelle Droite* but now dissident theorist Guillaume Faye, one of the most outspoken proponents of the reverse colonisation theory.[41] Zemmour's conservative historical interpretations and emphasis on catholic monarchic French identity furthermore connect him to revisionist (amateur) historians like Lorent Deutsch, Jean Sévillia, Dimitri Casali and his ally Philippe de Villiers.[42]

Finally, Zemmour is clearly influenced by a series of contemporary right-wing intellectuals. His theory of civilisational war is intellectually indebted to Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilisations."[43] The terminology of a "Great Replacement" is borrowed from the French political commentator Renaud Camus who claims that "native" French and more generally European populations are deliberately replaced by immigrants.[44]

II. History as a strategy for power

Having illustrated how Zemmour's discourse exemplifies key features of populist historical reason and having situated him in the broader far-right tradition, let us focus on the instrumental role history plays within his authoritarian political project.

40 Lou Mousset, "«Reverse Colonization»: Early Narratives of Decline in the French New Right", in *The Politics of Replacement: Demographic Fears, Conspiracy Theories, and Race Wars*, ed. Sarah Bracke and Luis Manuel Hernández Aguilar (Abingdon, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 2023).

41 Guillaume Faye, *La colonisation de l'Europe: discours vrai sur l'immigration et l'Islam* (Paris: L'Æncre, 2000).

42 For an analysis of this network see: William Blanc, Christophe Naudin and Aurore Chery, *Les Historiens de garde: De Lorant Deutsch à Patrick Buisson, la résurgence du roman national* (Paris: Libertalia, 2018). And: William Blanc, "Spectres de Charles Maurras: comment le néomaurrassisme fabrique le «roman national» contemporain," *La Revue du Crieur* 6, no. 1 (2017): 144-159.

43 Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22-49.

44 Renaud Camus, *Le grand remplacement* (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Reinharc, 2011).

II.1 Feeding the paranoic mind: prophesying imminent catastrophe

Zemmour uses historical narratives as both a way to create a sense crisis and threat, identify the enemies of the people, provide purported evidence for the malice of these enemies, and posit their historical motives. Importantly, history is mobilized here not merely to describe past events or to make the present comprehensible, but also in a prophetic style to warn against the catastrophic fate awaiting the French people if they do not act now, or rather, choose a visionary leader to act on their behalf.

This use of history connects with a Manichean worldview dividing the world into good and evil forces, presenting French history as "*toujours entre la grandeur et l'abîme*"[45] [always between greatness and abyss]. Zemmour uses historical narratives to identify perennial enemies who are demonized as existential threats. As mentioned, the primary enemy of the French people are allegedly Islam and Islamic migrants. To stoke neo-malthusian fears of demographic replacement, Zemmour warns that the extent of the present crisis can only be understood if one knows how to interpret history. In a campaign speech in October 2022, for example, he asserts that occurrences of Islamist violence – such as the brutal murder of history teacher Samuel Patty – should not be seen as isolated or exceptional events but as part of a historical "continuum of violence" that has "very deep roots" and that he calls "francocide".[46]

To persuade those dismissing the idea of a collective violent takeover as a conspiracy theory, Zemmour claims his thesis is confirmed by numerous historical precedents in North Africa and the Byzantine Empire where Islamisation of Christian lands started with peaceful pretences but revealed its true violent face once demographic force permitted.[47] To authorise his views, he refers to Henri Pirenne (1862-

45 Zemmour, *Destin français*, 40.

46 Éric Zemmour, "Le discours contre l'offensive islamique à l'école," accessed 13 January 2025, https://www.ericzemmour.fr/discours-samuelpaty.

47 Zemmour, *Destin français*, 71.

1935) who in his *Mohamed and Charlemagne* allegedly already "said and understood it all": that Islamic and Western "civilisations" are "irreducibly antagonistic" and Islam is a religion of total "submission" that is "inassimilable".[48] For Zemmour, history shows that between Christianity and Islam there can only be conflict: "Who does not unite, divides; who does not attack, retreats; who retreats no more, conquers. Who conquers no more is conquered."[49]

Zemmour celebrates the medieval crusades as saving "the west" from Arabic invaders. However, he warns that France is destined to "relive this history" if it fails to learn its lessons and recognize that history is an "endless vengeance" ["*une sempiternelle revanche*"].[50] Historical vengeance, according to Zemmour, drives the Great Replacement and mass migration in general. It allegedly not only explains the Islamist terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015 but also the seemingly innocuous "*sans papiers*" who "invoke our past invasion of their territory to absolve and conceal their present invasion of our territory."[51]

Besides being threatened by external enemies, France is imperilled by an internal enemy and a centuries old tragic historical process. Influenced by developments dating back as far as the Italian renaissance, German Protestantism, and especially since May '68, Zemmour claims that cosmopolitan elites have deliberately steered France onto a suicidal course by promoting an "uprooted" individualism and dechristianisation, which have destroyed social cohesion and traditional values.[52] This internal decay was exploited by Islamic migrants to impose their own "archaic notions of family, clan and religion."[53]

Adopting a fully-fledged prophetic and apocalyptic tone, Zemmour claims that historical precedents reveal the bleak future awaiting France. He frequently evokes the history of Kosovo as prefiguring the

48 Zemmour, *Destin français*, 59.
49 Zemmour, *Destin français*, 69.
50 Zemmour, *La messe*, 74-75.
51 Zemmour, *Le suicide*, 416.
52 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 12.
53 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 70.

Islamised future of France. His other favourite analogies to prophesize doom are the fall of the Roman Empire and the terror of the French Revolution. Zemmour, for instance, combines both analogies in a reflection on the 2012 terrorist attack by Mohammed Merah, turning it into a historiosophical reflection on the causes of violent clashes between civilisations:

> There is massacre when there is a mismatch [*décalage*]. A mismatch of temporality, a mismatch of ferocity, a mismatch of civilization. When Roman citizens, softened by the refinements of the *Pax Romana* and Christianity, no longer want to fight in the Empire's army, the Barbarians take their place and eventually despoil and slaughter them. Hippolyte Taine, in *The Origins of Contemporary France*, is astonished by the passivity of the aristocrats, arrested and guillotined by tyrannical and bloodthirsty Jacobins; the descendants of the old feudal lords had become courtiers, more inclined to wield the epigram than the sword. We are the Romans of the decline or the aristocrats of the Revolution, and [Islamist terrorists] are the Barbarians and the *sans-culottes* of our time.[54]

To sum up, history, in Zemmour's discourse becomes a prophetic narrative that feeds paranoia by presenting war and vengeance as the historical norm while portraying ideals of dialogue, pacifism and reconciliation as naïve and dangerous historical aberrations.[55] By portraying Islam as an archaic religion and Muslims as a "counter-people,"[56] he marks then as barbaric, and fundamentally incompatible with French civilization, reinforcing their status as eternal ennemies.

54 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 152.

55 As Cécile Alduy notes this use of a prophetic tone is a broader characteristic of far-right's uses of history. Cécile Alduy, "Guerre des histoires, guerre des mémoires," *Socio* 19 (2024): 81-98.

56 Zemmour, *Destin français*, 566.

II.2 Power to (some of) the people: making popular sovereignty conditional

Besides using history to feed paranoia, Zemmour employs it to define who legitimately belongs to "the people" and to limit popular sovereignty. He portrays national identity as rooted in an essentially static and homogenic past, excluding those who do not fit within this imagined historical continuity as not authentically French. This justifies a restricted definition of "the people," making popular sovereignty contingent on adherence to selective historical criteria. Zemmour often cites a quote allegedly from De Gaulle, stating that "[the French] are above all a people of the white race, of the Christian religion, and of Greco-Roman culture."[57] While Zemmour rhetorically stresses that "there exists no stronger legitimacy than that of the people,"[58] his historical narratives rarely feature real people of flesh and blood, instead focusing on idealized, and often caricaturized heroes or "great men."[59] Women hardly appear in Zemmour's histories except to warn against "feminisation," "tolerance" and "pacifism". Similarly, while Zemmour loudly champions popular sovereignty and promises to return power to the people,[60] his interpretation of this power is notably restrictive. He essentially confines it to continuing the nation's historical mission and identity.

Although Zemmour constantly invokes treacherous elites betraying the people, he is not anti-elitist in general. In fact, he celebrates aristocratic values, venerates kings and knights and emphasizes the necessity of social hierarchy. Zemmour often laments that the ideology of egalitarianism and the "myth of social mobility" have turned contemporary society into an "assemblage of equal and rival atoms." He contrasts this with an idealized past of social harmony and clear hierarchies:

57 Zemmour, *Je n'ai pas*, 214. Although this quote circulates widely in far-right circles its veracity is controversial. For a discussion see Mathilde Damgé and Samuel Laurent, "Les «races», Morano et De Gaulle: pour clore la polémique," *Le Monde*, 1 October 2015, https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2015/10/01/les-races-morano-et-de-gaulle-pour-clore-la-polemique_4780347_4355770.html.

58 Zemmour, *Je n'ai pas*, 203.

59 This absence has been remarked by several commentators. For example Alduy, *La langue*, 11.

60 Zemmour, "Annonce de candidature".

> Men used to remain in their social condition. People did not look upward with regret and envy. They were content in their own world. Souls were less troubled and less tense. The French followed their kind and sociable instincts, which so charmed foreign visitors. Everyone noted the national habit of singing cheerful, good-natured songs at the end of meals.[61]

The proper role of the elites and the state, according to Zemmour, is not merely to defend the people, but more profoundly to constitute and preserve them as a people by creating cultural homogeneity. Historically, Zemmour claims, the French people were created by the State and he is fond of citing monarchist saying that the France was built "by forty kings," only to be inherited by the republic.[62] The French state had a unique tradition to ensure that over generations no "foreign population" would form outside of the "national body": namely through assimilation.[63] The tragedy, however, according to Zemmour, is that the State has stopped assimilating and producing Frenchmen unified around a single dominant culture.

When Zemmour talks about restoring popular sovereignty, he primarily means returning power to the central state so that it can resume its historical mission of creating a homogeneous people. These etatist views are particularly evident when Zemmour pleads for a referendum as the sole "weapon" against demographic replacement and to restore power "to the state, and thus to the French people" and take it away from migrants, ethnic minorities and their "armed wing," the legal system.[64] To cite Zemmour:

> Demography is destiny. Let us now give France and its people the means to take control of their own destiny once again.

61 Zemmour, *Destin français*, 309.

62 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 73.

63 Éric Zemmour, *Mélancolie française: L'histoire de France racontée* (Paris: Fayard, 2010), 219.

64 Zemmour, *Je n'ai pas*, 205.

> Our people, through a referendum, must decide on their composition and their future.[65]

To understand why Zemmour sees no contradiction in asking the people to decide by referendum who are the people, we must explore his perception of peoplehood and of "historical France". It is often noted that both left- and right-wing populists frequently speak about the people but that they envision these differently as respectively "demos" and "ethnos."[66] Zemmour clearly views "the people" in the latter terms. He goes further, however, and makes the "recognition" and defence of heritage and tradition key factors in determining who belongs to "the people," and thus who can exercise popular sovereignty.

As Lorella Sini argues, Zemmour perceives the legitimate French people as patriots in the literal sense of those defending the territory of their fathers.[67] This military imagination helps explain how he can combine anti-elite and pro-people rhetoric with a celebration of aristocratic, authoritarian and overtly anti-egalitarian values. Zemmour's strategic semantic ambivalence becomes clear when he refers to the people as "*la base*," which in a vertical imagination can denote society's foundation to depict opponents as out-of-touch elites, but can also include the wealthy and even aristocrats when invoking a horizontal territorial-military imagination of a stronghold from which France's "reconquering" will be organized. To quote Zemmour:

> This Judeo-Christian people, anxious and clear-sighted, will be the base from which we can defend, protect, and one day, reclaim a France that longs to remain French and stay faithful to the European civilization that has shaped it for over a thousand years.[68]

65 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 339.

66 Pierre-André Taguieff, *L'illusion populiste* (Paris: Éditions Berg, 2002).

67 Sini, "Qu'est-ce qu'un discours," 14.

68 Zemmour, *Je n'ai pas*, 115.

In the prophetic-historical mode, Zemmour envisions the people as those who will soon heed their leader's call to reconquer. Although past and present suffering and victimhood play an important role in Zemmour's rhetorics, it is ultimately the prophetically anticipated future of apocalyptic trials and ferocious defence that truly defines a people and grants them legitimacy. As Zemmour put it during a rally in March 2024:

> [The] peril of Islamization is the major challenge posed by the coming century. Let us never forget this law: only a free people can make a great nation! A people subjected to a foreign religion is no longer free. A people who lower their eyes before a religion called "submission" is no longer the French people.[69]

At the "national conservatism conference" in Brussels in April 2024, Zemmour applies a similar logic to define who is truly European:

> Europe is not a country, Europe is not a people nor a nation, but it is indeed a single and unified civilization, forged by Judeo-Christianity and the Greco-Roman spirit. [...] Those who recognize themselves in this heritage, who embrace it and wish to perpetuate it, are Europeans. All those who do not identify with it belong to another civilization.[70]

To sum up, "the people" are deemed legitimate only as long as they stay faithful to their alleged origins and traditions. Similarly, popular sovereignty is conceived as a general will ("*volonté générale*") that is legitimate only if it serves to continue the historical nation. "*Le peuple français*" is only made tangible through what is said to threaten it: it seems to exist solely in relation to its enemies or by virtue of being

69 Zemmour, "Le discours de lancement".

70 Zemmour, "Discours d'Éric Zemmour à Bruxelles".

betrayed by the elites. Zemmour constructs a helpless people which can only be safe if led by and submissive to a providential leader.[71] Zemmour is not against submission, but it must be the right kind.

II.3. A love supreme... Historical revisionism as display and test of love, loyalty and courage

For Zemmour, history is not just something to study and understand, but also something to take sides on. He uses historical revisionism to showcase his patriotic love and unwavering loyalty to France, while simultaneously casting doubt on that of others. By challenging what he frames as politically correct historical interpretations, Zemmour affirms his devotion to the nation and performatively asserts his courage to break "taboos". Those who oppose his historical revisionism are labelled disloyal to France. Perceived attachment to History becomes a means to distinguish true patriots from others.

Zemmour's use of history as a strategy of power hinges less on the specific content of his claims than on the intensity of emotions (love, loyalty, hatred and fear) as well as the demonstrations of courage and transgression they enable him to evoke and enact. As mentioned, he portrays history in stark, grim terms, highlighting violence, vengeance, and betrayal. Simultaneously, he frequently speaks in exalted terms about patriotic love, sublime beauty, and heroic sacrifice, framing his own connection to French history as a passionate love story. Being fully French, according to Zemmour, is either inherited or earned through assimilation by proving devotion to France and by adopting its History.[72] As stated in *Reconquête*'s program: "Assimilation is that proof of love through which one receives France as one's heritage."[73]

Zemmour warns, however, that adopting France's history as one's own must be sincere and unconditional, often requiring the sacrifice

71 Gattiglia, "La fabrication," 30.

72 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 336.

73 Éric Zemmour, "Pour que la France reste la France: Mon programme," accessed 6 January 2025. https://programme.ericzemmour.fr/.

of previous attachments and loyalties. Becoming a "son" of France "by spirit," if one is not "by flesh" involves "retrospectively" choosing France's side even if it subjugated or colonized one's biological ancestors.[74] Throughout his oeuvre Zemmour employs history to assert his identity as a Frenchman by spiritual adoption. He frequently cites his own (idealised) biography as a model for all migrants.[75] As a self-defined assimilated Jew, born to Algerian immigrant parents, Zemmour stresses how, from a young age, he developed a profound love for French history and its heroes:

> The history of France flowed in my veins, filled the air I breathed, forged my childhood dreams... I still had the Gauls as my ancestors.[76]

Zemmour often presents himself as having embraced French identity by adopting the phrase "*nos ancêtres les Gaulois*" ("our ancestors the Gauls") as personal motto. By invoking this controversial expression with strong colonial overtones, he signals his alignment with France's foundational myths and positions himself in an alleged French historical continuum.

Similarly, although raised in the Judaic tradition and stressing that he does not believe in core Christian doctrines, Zemmour pleads for a revival of "Judeo-Christianism" for reasons of "national interest".[77] He embraces it not as a faith but as a "matrix of identity". He claims one cannot be truly French without being profoundly "impregnated" by Catholicism.[78] Yet, he rejects the values of tolerance, universalism and especially repentance, which he associates with "ori-

74 Zemmour, *Destin français*, 19.

75 On the use of ego-history in Zemmour's discourse on history, see: Silvia Modena, "La mobilisation de l'Histoire dans le discours politique d'Éric Zemmour," *Espaces Linguistiques* 7 (2024): 42-60.

76 Zemmour, *Destin français*, 15.

77 Zemmour, *La messe*, 5 and 15.

78 Zemmour, *Destin français*, 28, and Zemmour, *La messe*, 5.

ental Christianity," sees as weaknesses and contrasts with the "virility" of Western Christianity.[79]

Zemmour employs other provocative techniques to prove his loyalty to France. During a television appearance in 2019, he defended French general Bugeaud, notorious for brutal violence during the colonial conquest of Algeria. Acknowledging that Bugeaud massacred Muslims and "even some Jews," Zemmour stated that "today, [he] stand[s] with General Bugeaud. That's what it means to be French."[80] He similarly stoked controversy by claiming on television and in his books that Marshal Pétain, the leader of the WWII collaborationist Vichy regime, "saved" French (naturalised) Jews by sacrificing "foreign" ones, insinuating this was a patriotic deed.[81] This thesis was heavily criticized by historians as blatantly falsifying history,[82] and it earned Zemmour a conviction for "contestation of a crime against humanity" in April 2025, following a lengthy legal procedure.[83]

Another infamous figure whom Zemmour defends is French collaborator Maurice Papon, responsible for the mass deportation of Jews from Bordeaux. In his characteristic reversal of victim and perpetrator roles, Zemmour claims Papon was the victim of an "ideological trial" designed to "inculpate France."[84] Only "sincere and steadfast patriots," could see that the trial was "a trap" set by "militant, far-left historians" and other "internal enemies" to scapegoat France.[85] Papon's trial allegedly was the culmination of a broader "ideology of repentance" and an "authentically metapolitical" war of history that is waged by the

79 Zemmour, *La messe*, 74.

80 Sandrine Cassini and Mouna El Mokhtari, "CNews, la télé du clash permanent," *Le Monde*, 26 October 2019, https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2019/10/26/cnews-la-tele-du-clash-permanent_6016977_3234.html. Also see Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 336, and Zemmour, *Je n'ai pas*, 216.

81 Zemmour, *Le suicide*, 90.

82 Joly, *La falsification*.

83 Justine Audollent, "Pétain 'sauveur' de juifs français : Zemmour condamné à 10.000 euros d'amende," *www.rtl.fr*. 2 April 2025. https://www.rtl.fr/actu/politique/petain-sauveur-de-juifs-francais-zemmour-condamne-a-10-000-euros-d-amende-7900489976.

84 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 54.

85 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 59.

enemies of the French people to destroy its memory or even its "soul".[86] Anybody who is critical of aspects of French history, especially slavery, colonialism and WWII collaboration, is accused of promoting "self-hatred" ["*haine de soi*"]. To cite Zemmour:

> [...] every day, our country engages in the relentless hatred of its own history, in the systematic criminalization of its heroes. Schools, universities, media outlets, even the President of the Republic, all the institutions spit on France and the generations that built it.[87]

Zemmour frequently targets people with a migration background and especially Muslim youths whom he accuses of refusing to identify with French history and especially the holocaust and crusades.[88] Paradoxically he also criticizes French presidents such as Chirac, Hollande and Macron for turning holocaust commemoration into an "official religion," which he claims inevitably leads to "victimhood competition."[89] However, these criticisms do not keep Zemmour from instrumentalizing the memory of suffering and victimhood when it serves his agenda. As Cecile Alduy observes, Zemmour, like many on the far-right, actively participates in the very competition of victimhood he accuses others of.[90] For instance he asserts that Christians are the most victimized religious group on the planet.[91] During his presidential campaign in 2021, Zemmour also made a highly mediatised visit to the genocide memorial in Armenia, portraying the country as a land of martyrs in the war against Islam.[92] Similarly Zemmour supports the controversial thesis

86 Zemmour, *Je n'ai pas*, 210.

87 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 337.

88 Zemmour, *Destin français*, 18.

89 Zemmour, *Le suicide*, 383.

90 Alduy, "Guerre des histoires," 81-98.

91 Zemmour, *Le messe*, 19.

92 V. M, "Présidentielle 2022: Éric Zemmour en Arménie, «une nation chrétienne au milieu d'un océan islamique»", *TF1 Info*, 12 December 2021, https://www.tf1info.fr/politique/presidentielle-2022-eric-zemmour-candidat-de-reconquete-en-armenie-avec-philippe-de-villiers-

of a "genocide" perpetrated by the French revolutionary government against the population of the Vendée region. This thesis is also advocated by his political ally Philippe de Villiers, who was also present during the Armenia visit. To argue that commemorating these events, although involving violence among French people, is not a politics of repentance akin to "cancel culture" Zemmour emphasizes that it does not aim to "smear France and make the French feel guilty, but to denounce the ravages of Jacobin tyranny [...]."[93]

II.4 Redemptive history: promising rehabilitation and national regeneration

Despite his constant warnings of doom, Zemmour, in his political performances, also presents history as a source of hope and aspiration, casting himself as a redeemer of history. He promises to redeem history in three senses. As discussed above, he aims to redeem history in the sense of rehabilitating or mitigating it, for instance by emphasising the redeeming features of controversial figures. In another sense, Zemmour presents history as containing a value or promise that can and must be redeemed as if one would redeem a cheque.[94] Finally, in a thoroughly religious sense, Zemmour offers a redemptive narrative, claiming that he alone can save or deliver France from its fatal historical course.

Zemmour asserts that "the future is written in the past," emphasizing the importance of learning from history. He contends that French elites propagate false histories to manipulate the populace, making them passive toward the "Islamic invasion." Zemmour positions himself as a defender of the authentic memory of the French people, accusing "politically correct" historians of erasing collective memory, what Philippe de Villiers calls "memoricide."[95] Zemmour's project is framed

une-nation-chretienne-au-milieu-d-un-ocean-islamique-2204376.html.

93 Zemmour, *Je n'ai pas dit*, 165.

94 I would like to thank Kate Temoney for pointing out the different meanings of this word to me.

95 Philippe de Villiers, *Mémoricide* (Paris: Fayard, 2024).

as a rescue mission to protect France's "true" history from malicious academic revisionism.

Recognizing that an aspirational message is necessary to gain popular traction, Zemmour in his political speeches and writings frequently emphasizes that despite the grave threats of annihilation, there remains hope if his warnings are heeded. To counterbalance the extreme historical fatalism of his earlier writings, particularly *Le Suicide français*, where France was declared dead,[96] all of Zemmour's publications since the onset of his political career convey the notion that French history has not yet run its course. This is evident in their titles: *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, *Je n'ai pas dit mon dernier mot*, *La messe n'est pas dite*.

In his typical blend of personal and national history, Zemmour confesses that he too faced moments of despair, but that he found renewed hope by reading history. He asserts that, just like individuals, nations experience phases of discouragement that precede a "rebirth". History reveals that France is currently "reliving a moment that [it] regularly experience[d] in [its] history, when the people no longer recognize themselves in their elites". Yet, history also teaches that France has repeatedly "stared death in the face" and that each time it found among its own people "a providential figure who takes up the sword and rallies energies in the name of the nation's survival."[97] He names Joan of Arc, Napoleon, and de Gaulle as such figures, though these examples clearly serve to prefigure his own arrival on the politico-historical scene.

Zemmour's self-presentation as a historical saviour features prominently in his political speeches and campaign communications. In his announcement video in 2021, Zemmour stated that he entered politics to "take the fate of France into his hands." Whereas other politicians merely try to reform France, he will "save" it.[98] Expanding his campaign

96 Zemmour, *Le suicide*, 527.

97 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 335-336.

98 Zemmour, "Annonce de candidature".

to the European level he similarly claims he is fighting to "save the fate of the most beautiful civilisation of all time".[99]

In line with the tradition of revolutionary conservatism and fascism where the past is seen as containing a promise of national regeneration or "palingenesis",[100] Zemmour presents history as a "renewable" source of "vital energy".[101] According to Zemmour, France's "glorious past pleads for [its] future".[102] France stands at a historical "crossroads," but under his leadership a "rebirth" [*renaissance*] is withing reach. He pleads for a "rupture" with the present situation and the recent past yet does so in the name of deeper historical continuity. One of his key slogans is "we will continue France."[103] By reconnecting with its history, the nation can rejuvenate itself and realise utopian ideals such as virility, glory, cultural homogeneity and even solidarity. As stated in his presidential program of 2022:

> With me, the France of tomorrow will be a France with more solidarity, because it will have reconnected with the thread of its History and will value its civilizational achievements, without which no solidarity is possible.[104]

History itself, its renewal, restoration or continuation, becomes a battle cry. It serves as the ultimate empty signifier through which Zemmour evokes the people's fears, worries and pride: it is what France allegedly once had and made, then lost and should now regain.[105] According to Zemmour, France is in decline because it "withdrew from

99 Zemmour, "Discours d'Éric Zemmour à Bruxelles".

100 For a discussion see: Robbert-Jan Adriaansen, "Beyond Historicism: Utopian Thought in the «Conservative Revolution»," *GHI Bulletin* 14 (2019): 57-71.

101 Zemmour, *Destin français*, 42.

102 Zemmour, "Annonce de candidature".

103 Zemmour, "Annonce de candidature".

104 Zemmour, "Pour que la France".

105 Zemmour, *Destin français*, 31. I would like to thank Walderez Ramalho for point this out to me.

History".[106] He promise change, however. Zemmour asks his supporters to "destroy the fatalism within [themselves]" and claims his goal is to "win [the elections] to change the course of History."[107] On Twitter, he urges the electorate to "choose our history... chose our future."[108] After his 2022 electoral defeat, he relaunches his party with the slogan "*Ecrivez la suite de l'histoire*" [write the remainder of the story/history].[109]

II.5 Invoking the majesty of History, futilizing politics, belittling the rule of law

Finally, Zemmour strategically uses historical narratives, analogies and imagery to undermine the legitimacy of democratic procedures, question the rule of law and promote authoritarian policies. By invoking the grandeur and supposed inevitability of historical laws and destinies, he positions History (systematically written with a capital) as an authority that eclipses democratic deliberation and electoral legitimacy. This approach not only belittles the role of ballots and institutional checks but also fosters a political culture in which extraordinary measures and authoritarian impulses are justified in the name of preserving the nation's historical continuity. Zemmour cultivates a permanent sense of emergency, promoting the suspension of legal and democratic norms and even the use of violence under the guise of defending an overarching historical mission.

In one of his characteristically provocative speeches, at *Reconquête*'s "summer university" of 2024 Zemmour condemns political parties as a threat to the nation, declares that "politics has become the enemy of the people," and calls for an "anti-political revolutio."[110] Al-

106 Zemmour, *Destin français*, 31.

107 "Le discours du meeting anniversaire Reconquête au Palais des Sports," accessed 6 January 2025, https://www.ericzemmour.fr/discours-meeting-anniversaire-reconquete.

108 Gattiglia, "La fabrication," 28.

109 "Éric Zemmour repart en meeting, objectif 2027," *TP1+*, accessed 6 January 2026. https://www.tf1.fr/fr-be/tmc/quotidien-avec-yann-barthes/videos/eric-zemmour-repart-en-meeting-objectif-2027-85859326.html.

110 Éric Zemmour, "Discours de l'Université d'été 2024 à Orange," accessed 12 January 2026, https://www.ericzemmour.fr/discours-udt-2024.

though these claims might seem contradictory coming from a man who founded his own political party, they align with the tendency of populists to distinguish themselves from "ordinary" politicians and with the far-right's preference for a "metapolitical" struggle for cultural hegemony over "conventional" politics. Zemmour's rejection of democratic politics, as well as the rule of law, is also a logical outcome of, and legitimized by, his own historical diagnosis and self-declared philosophy of history.

During his 2021-2022 presidential campaign Zemmour declared that, unlike other politicians who focus on the electorate, he is committed to the entire French people, encompassing not only the present, but also future and past generations. Speaking in the name of this larger transgenerational community authorizes Zemmour to posit heavy responsibilities and enduring duties that should guide and restrict the choices of contemporary voters. To quote Zemmour:

> This struggle [to save French "civilization"] is bigger than all of us, and the future of our children and grandchildren depends on it. It also concerns those who came before us, who forged the France we have inherited, the beautiful France we love and that the whole world admires, those ancestors to whom we owe gratitude and respect, even as we continually subject them to insults and reproach, those ancestors to whom we are indebted to preserve France as they passed it on to us. We are here to continue the history of France.[111]

Claiming to answer to a higher transgenerational collective also enables Zemmour to dismiss contemporary democratic accountability, as past and future generations can no longer or not yet cast their vote. This discourse allows him to depict the democratic system and the Republic as temporary constructs, legitimate only insofar as they

111 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 342.

uphold the legacy of "historical France." It is telling that Zemmour does not conclude his campaign speeches with the customary "*vive la Republique*," but typically with the words "*Vive la Republique, mais surtout, vive la France*" ["Long live the republic, but above all, long live France"].[112] After losing the 2022 elections, Zemmour similarly asserts that history will ultimately vindicate him and his supporters.[113]

Zemmour further undermines democratic, particularly deliberative, politics by portraying it as too slow and indecisive. Given the alleged historical urgency of the existential threats facing France, there is "no time and no choice" left for political deliberation or even for "compassion" or "humanism".[114] Moreover the nature of the threats, often labelled as "imminently historical" or even "anthropological," render ordinary democratic means futile. Since France is allegedly confronted with a demographic-civilisational conflict with deep historical roots that threatens the survival of the nation and the "perenniality"[115] [*pérennité*] of its cultural identity, only extraordinary historic measures can avert the danger. According to Zemmour, compromise and dialogue are impossible because history shows that Islamic and Judaeo-Christian "civilisations" are inherently incompatible and different peoples remain determined by their origins and cannot fundamentally change.

Those who complain about police violence or discrimination against migrants fail to grasp the broader historical context, according to Zemmour. Otherwise, he argues, they would give the police the presumption of legitimate self-defense.[116] In his programs and essays, Zemmour offers some indications of what is needed to restore "peace" and "security". He advocates measures to remove "invasive predators" and restore the demographic "balance of forces," such as state-led assimilation programs ("voluntarily or forced"), the "systematic expulsion" of

112 For example: Éric Zemmour, "Le discours des Sables d'Olonne," accessed 12 January 2026, https://www.ericzemmour.fr/discours-sables-dolonne..

113 Zemmour, *Je n'ai pas*, 115.

114 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 340.

115 Zemmour, *La messe*, 106.

116 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 339.

foreigners convicted of crimes, or more broadly the remigration of Muslim migrants to their countries of origin.[117] Zemmour moreover argues that because migrants are allegedly exploiting the protections of individual liberties, human rights, and the rule of law, the French people must be prepared to sacrifice these principles. France can allegedly only survive if it restores "authority and hierarchy," rejects the "anarchising sacralisation of the individual" and reevaluates the "sacrosanct rule of law" ["*État de droit*"].[118]

What is ultimately required to save France, however, according to Zemmour, is a profound historical insight into the "deeper meaning of the violence we [the French people] are subjected to".[119] All of Zemmour's essays promise this deeper historical insight and he deploys a great array of historical analogies to maximize the legibility of history. Yet, his analyses and proposed solutions always follow the same pattern: the French people are portrayed as victims of a ruthless enemy, betrayed by an elite that preaches universal love while sowing internal division, and can only be protected by a strong leader who must restore order and unity by any means necessary, including violence. An insightful passage appears in *Destin français*, where Zemmour draws a parallel between contemporary France and the religious wars of the 16th and 17th century, with a focus on the persecution of French Protestants during the St. Bartholomew's Night massacre and the infamous siege of the rebellious city of La Rochelle. In his characteristic revisionist style, Zemmour argues that these historical events should not be seen as lessons about the importance of religious tolerance, but rather the opposite, as lessons about the division that tolerance sows, and the draconian yet, according to Zemmour, legitimate measures that courageous French leaders had to take. In La Rochelle, Zemmour argues, a state within the state arose, dividing the French nation, and this had to be eradicated at any costs. During the siege and subjugation of the last Protestant stronghold in La Rochelle, historians estimate 20,000

117 See: Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 340. And Zemmour, "Pour que la France".
118 Zemmour, *La messe*, 106-107.
119 Zemmour, *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot*, 339.

people died, including women and children. For those who might still miss the intended historical lesson, Zemmour renders the analogy even more explicit in another book: Muslim migrants are an "internal enemy," forming an "Islamic La Rochelle".[120] Both attuned and less attuned readers must understand the violence Zemmour is instigating.

Conclusion

In this article I have argued that Éric Zemmour's political project represents a textbook example of populist historical reason, demonstrating how the far right mobilises the past as an instrument of power. Through a historical imaginary marked by vagueness, decontextualisation, chains of equivalence, intense antagonism, powerful affective appeals and a rejection of representational pluralism, Zemmour weaponises history to simultaneously stoke paranoia, restrict popular sovereignty, performatively display or question loyalty and promise national redemption. His discourse constantly prophesies a catastrophic civilisational war while casting himself as the providential leader uniquely capable of saving France. In doing so, he systematically undermines democratic deliberation, the rule of law and the very possibility of a pluralist public sphere, invoking history to justify extraordinary measures.

Zemmour's case illuminates broader dynamics of far-right populist historical reason that extend well beyond France. His ability to mainstream radical revisionism across media platforms, despite limited electoral success, exemplifies how a metapolitical "war of history" can reshape public discourse, normalise exclusionary definitions of peoplehood and cultivate an affective environment ripe for authoritarian solutions.

120 Zemmour, *Le suicide*, 526.

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Thomas Serrier

German Cultural Memory at Stake. On the Shift to the Right of the "Never Again" Discourse and the November 2024 Bundestag Resolution on Antisemitism

This article focuses on how Germany's memory culture currently shifts from a paradigmatic model of coming to terms with the German past to a more dogmatic and repressive one, well before the post-October 7 context. The argument put forward here is that this development is linked to the exceptional symbolic significance of the Jewish presence in Post-Holocaust Germany and of the German-Israeli relations on one hand, and to the challenges facing a multicultural, post-migration society on the other. All this is clearly reflected in the 2024 Bundestag resolution "Nie wieder ist jetzt" (Never again is now). The (highly problematic) identification of certain social groups as being more susceptible than others to contemporary forms of 'new anti-Semitism' and the repressive measures aimed at combating it show how anti-antisemitism discourses can be misused in a restrictive manner.
Keywords: Germany; memory culture; minorities; migration; antisemitism.

A memória cultural alemã em jogo. Sobre a viragem à direita do discurso do "nunca mais" e a resolução do Bundestag de novembro de 2024 sobre o antissemitismo

Este artigo centra-se na forma como a cultura da memória na Alemanha tem passado de um modelo paradigmático de reconciliação com o passado alemão para um modelo mais dogmático e repressivo, muito antes do contexto pós-7 de outubro. O argumento aqui apresentado é que esta evolução está ligada, por um lado, ao significado simbólico excecional da presença judaica na Alemanha pós-Holocausto e das relações germano-israelitas e, por outro, aos desafios que uma sociedade multicultural e pós-migratória enfrenta. Tudo isto reflete-se claramente na resolução do Bundestag de 2024 intitulada "Nie wieder ist jetzt" (Nunca mais é agora). A identificação (altamente problemática) de certos grupos sociais como sendo mais suscetíveis do que outros às formas contemporâneas de "novo antissemitismo" e as medidas repressivas destinadas a comba-

tê-lo mostram como os discursos anti-antissemitismo podem ser utilizados de forma abusiva e restritiva.
Palavras-chave: Alemanha; cultura da memória; minorias; migração; antissemitismo.

German Cultural Memory at Stake. On the Shift to the Right of the "Never Again" Discourse and the November 2024 Bundestag Resolution on Antisemitism

Thomas Serrier*

Something is not working properly in German memory culture those days.[1] To write this in 2026 certainly remains a highly provocative statement, yet it is being made by a growing number of intellectuals and scholars who are closely following the German debates on memory. There is no question about the fact that Germany has long been internationally recognised as a role model when it comes to "coming to terms" with its Nazi past. One could indeed go back to the period – primarily the 1950s and 1960s – when the term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* dominated the debates. This rather strange neologism apparently coined by the historian Hermann Heimpel and popularised by the President of West Germany Theo Heuss in notable speeches already gave rise to a huge body of comments.[2] One could also suggest

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1 This article expands on an analysis that I have previously presented as "Malaise dans la culture mémorielle allemande", *AOC*, December 5, 2024, https://aoc.media/analyse/2024/12/04/malaise-dans-la-culture-memorielle-allemande/ [Last view 28 September 2025].

2 Peter Dudek, "Vergangenheitsbewältigung. Zur Problematik eines umstrittenen Begriffs," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 1-2 (1992): 44.

going back to the 1980s and to what has been called the "memory boom".[3] Since then, it sometimes seems that memory is everywhere in German social and political discourses, and that "all paths lead to memory, like all roads lead to Rome", as German famous memory expert Aleida Assmann wrote.[4] Regardless of this tentative chronology and these conceptual considerations, in fact, hardly any other country invests so many resources in dealing with the most painful times in its own history, reminding people of the crimes of National Socialism and commemorating the victims. However, critics have long warned that the established, institutionalised culture of remembrance has failed in its current form despite its apparent success. Some scholars, such as Y. Michal Bodemann, have highlighted the long political use of the Holocaust memory and the revival of German-Jewish life in post-war Germany. In his analysis there is an element of a real-political manoeuvre inherent in German memory, in particular in the moral support given to the re-establishment of a Jewish community in Germany after 1945 in order to signal to its Western partners the break with the Nazi past.[5] According to another author, Daniel Marwecki, German "raison d'état" – a concept that plays a central role in the current context – and Germany's special relationship with the State of Israel are intended to absolve Germany of its past and secure absolution for Nazi crimes.[6]

This article focuses on how Germany's position may have shifted from a paradigmatic model of memory culture to a more problematic one. The argument put forward here is that this development is linked, on the one hand, to the exceptional symbolic significance of the Jewish presence in Post-Holocaust Germany and, on the other, to the chal-

3 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. With a focus on Germany: Aleida Assmann and Ute Frevert, *Geschichtsversessenheit. Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1999).

4 Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2003), 27.

5 Y. Michal Bodemann, *Gedächtnistheater. Die jüdische Gemeinschaft und ihre deutsche Erfindung* (Hamburg: Rotbuch, 1996).

6 Daniel Marwecki, *Absolution? Israel und die deutsche Staatsräson* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2024).

lenges facing a multicultural, post-migration society. These challenges are reflected most clearly in a Bundestag resolution, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Indeed, this article spotlights a specific moment and a specific text, namely the resolution "*Nie wieder ist jetzt*" (Never again is now) passed by the Bundestag in November 2024. It aims to show how anti-antisemitism discourses that have emerged in public debates can be used in a restrictive manner and how they are in fact present in the Bundestag resolution. The content of the Bundestag resolution itself can be summarised in three points: the solemn reminder of the fundamental importance of the revival of Jewish 'life' (*Jüdisches Leben*) in Germany since 1945 and 1989; the (highly problematic) identification of certain social groups as being more susceptible than others to contemporary forms of 'new anti-Semitism'; and a list of repressive measures aimed at combating it.

One thing is certain: times are changing, and German society is changing. In parallel, its relationship to the past and traditional perspectives on history are also changing. On one side, due to migration and globalisation, Germany is much more diverse today than it was in the 1980s or 1990s. This has led some specialists in German history to believe that a purely institutionalised form of remembrance that placed the Holocaust at its centre is no longer self-evident, and that the German memory culture should indeed undergo a reorientation towards a pluralistic, more diverse form that includes all parts of its postmigration society, taking into account particular origins and memories.

At the same time, the rise of the far right, undeniable at the latest since 2017 and the electoral successes of the AfD [Alternative für Deutschland], has been accompanied by a massive offensive against the "official" memory. The AfD openly and directly attacked the fundamental values of the German *Erinnerungskultur* for diametrically opposed reasons. For a brief but crucial moment, the main target of the attacks by the far right was the "culture of repentance" – what one of the party's most radical figures, Björn Höcke, has once called the "culture of shame" ["*Kultur der Schande*"] allegedly cultivated by Germany, and

symbolized by the Holocaust Memorial inaugurated in the centre of Berlin in May 2005.[7]

The following article is based on the worrying observation that a new political shift might already be underway. This seems clearly evident in the Bundestag resolution entitled "Never again is now. Protecting, preserving, and strengthening Jewish life in Germany", also known as the Bundestag resolution on antisemitism of November 2024. The thesis defended here is that this ongoing evolution is characterized by an anti-immigrant radicalization of that pillar of German political identity that is the fight against anti-Semitism and the discourse of "Never again." For several decades now, the culture of remembrance had increasingly become a means of political self-assurance. In a powerful paradox and one of those reversals of meaning that are so common at the moment, the rhetoric of "Never again," the traditional slogan of the anti-fascist struggle, anti-totalitarian vigilance, and post-war pacifism in Germany, seems now compatible with the security, anti-migration and islamophobic obsessions of the far right. It seems that the democratic tradition of the "Never again" discourse can now be suitable for the interests of the AfD, provided that the main target of German memory culture, once despised as a form of self-hatred, is now people from immigrant backgrounds. In the context of post-October 7, 2023, this shift, which is reminiscent of the European far right's recent and overwhelming support for Israel in its war of destruction against Gaza, takes place at the cost of a blatant distortion of the past and the forgetting of the historical anti-Semitism of the far right. All this did not prevent the strange political convergence ranging from the Greens to the AfD that took place on the occasion of the Bundestag resolution of November 2024. This was only possible thanks to the political use (or misuse) of the positive label of the *Erinnerungskultur* and the hazardous instrumentalization of the fight against anti-Semitism. In other

7 Volker Weiß, *Das Deutsche Demokratische Reich: Wie die extreme Rechte Geschichte und Demokratie zerstört* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2025); Sophie Schmalenberger, "Vom 'Vogelschiss', Bismarck und deutschen Opfern: Die Neue Rechte und der Kampf um die deutsche Erinnerungskultur," in *Erinnerungskämpfe. Neues deutsches Geschichtsbewusstsein*, ed. Jürgen Zimmerer (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2023), 276-293.

words, and this is the second thesis of the current article, radical history and dogmatic distortion of the past can not only be observed in radical parties but are also promoted more or less consciously by the traditional parties, and what Germans often refer to as the "centre of society", so-called "Mitte der Gesellschaft". The following article therefore makes three methodological choices: 1) to focus less on parties usually classified as "populist" or "radical" and more on an overall dynamic encompassing all political forces; 2) to examine the shift in German memory culture from an instrument for the formation of a democratic culture to a divisive, prescriptive, and dogmatic tool; 3) finally, to present a dense discourse analysis devoted to the text of the "Never Again is now" resolution itself.

"Never again": an increasingly distorted and disconnected discourse

The discomfort with the recent shifts in German memory culture is deep enough that a researcher as emblematic of the international openness of intellectual life in today's Germany as the American philosopher Susan Neiman, director of the Einstein Forum in Potsdam, recently stated: "Today, in Germany, Hannah Arendt would no longer be allowed to speak."[8] This is pure speculation, of course, as Arendt died in New York in 1975, but imagining this icon of 20th-century philosophy, who was persecuted by the Nazis, once again condemned to silence, is enough to make one's head spin.

An expert on the Enlightenment, a figure of the American liberal Left, and author of essays at the intersection of moral philosophy and political analysis, including the recent *Left Is Not Woke* (2024), Neiman, like many other essayists of Jewish origin before her, not long ago was one of those who graciously held up a flattering mirror to the Germans, which of course the German political sphere and civil society are fond of.

8 See: Massive Kritik an Antisemitismus-Resolution des Bundestages | Komplette PK 6 November 2024 - Jung & Naiv – Podcast, https://jung-naiv.podigee.io/1026-massive-kritik-an-antisemitismus-resolution-des-bundestages-komplette-pk-6-november-2024 [Last view 26 September 2025].

In her *Learning from the Germans* (2019), she examined the efforts made across the Rhine to atone for Nazism, giving top marks to the political, educational, and symbolic measures that for long contributed to the development of an open democratic culture based explicitly or implicitly on the "negative memory" (Reinhart Koselleck) of the Shoah.[9]

Neiman went so far as to present what is known as *Erinnerungskultur* as a model for Americans, given their own country's history of slavery.[10] The German memory culture, or culture of remembrance, exemplified an overall successful effort to critically confront the past, regardless of the terms, which are all unsatisfactory, that have been used since Theodor W. Adorno's pioneering essays on the subject: struggle of "overcoming the past", "coming to terms" with the past, "coping with the past", "working through the past", etc.[11]

Indeed, all these catch phrases may be rejected as misleading, if it means believing that the work of remembrance can ever be completed.[12] However imperfect it may be, the German memory work could be considered a sincere attempt to meet the challenge of unmeasurable guilt, at least since the 1970s and 1980s and the growing awareness of the Holocaust. Pointing to what they call the "theater of reconciliation" critical voices like Y. Michal Bodemann, Eike Geisel or Max Czollek have certainly continued to warn of the gap between a "feel-good" rhetoric of memory and the practices actually implemented. They emphasized the illusion of believing that every past can be fixed and that everything

9 Reinhart Koselleck, "Formen und Traditionen des negativen Gedächtnisses," in *Verbrechen erinnern. Die Auseinandersetzung mit Holocaust und Völkermord*, ed. Volkhard Knigge and Norbert Frei (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2002), 21-32; English version: Reinhart Koselleck, "Forms and Traditions of Negative Memory," in *Sediments of Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 239sqq.

10 The concept was coined in the 1990s following Christoph Cornelissen and, even more so, the influential writings of Aleida and Jan Assmann. See Christoph Cornelißen, "Was heißt Erinnerungskultur? Begriff, Methoden, Perspektiven," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 54 (2003): 548-563.

11 Theodor W. Adorno, "The Meaning of Working through the Past" (1963), published in *German History in Documents and Images*, https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/two-germanies-1961-1989/ghdi:document-5059 [Last view 28 September 2025].

12 Susan Neiman, *Left Is Not Woke* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023); Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

will be fine again someday.[13] But Susan Neiman was certainly not the only one, nor the most famous, to praise the effort and the changes in German society that the work of remembrance actually brought about. Author of *Fatelessness* and *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*, winner of the 2002 Nobel Prize in Literature, Auschwitz survivor who became a Berliner at heart after 1989, Hungarian writer Imre Kertész repeatedly expressed his confidence in the "strength and maturity" of German democracy, as on German Unity Day on October 3, 2003.[14]

What has happened to cause this widely shared satisfaction to give way to concern today? Even though Germany's particular responsibilities due to the history of national-socialism, the Second World War and the Shoah continue to be invoked ritually as a foundation of German democracy, one can feel a growing "unease in the memory culture", as Aleida Assmann wrote.[15] The unease goes far beyond the simple observation of a loss of illusions concerning the efficiency and success of a democratization through memory, illustrated by the rise of the AfD and the increasing anti-Semitic and xenophobic violence in Germany in the last decade: certainly, the naive hope that "negative memory" would somehow be automatically performative is no longer an illusion; and at the same time, the dream of a peaceful future without the far right seems far off.

But the problem goes deeper than simply counting anti-Semitic and xenophobic crimes and offenses and the electoral successes of extremist parties (such as in the regional elections last fall in Thuringia, Saxony, and Brandenburg, where the AfD came in first or second with more than 30% of the vote). At least since the Israeli assault on Gaza in response to 7 October 2023, there has been a clear disconnect between

13 Max Czollek, *Versöhnungstheater* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2023); Max Czollek and Hadija Haruna-Oelker, *Alles auf Anfang. Auf der Suche nach einer neuen Erinnerungskultur* (Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag, 2025). Eike Geisel coined the ironic concept of *Wiedergutwerdung* [Being fine again] imitated from the well-known German word for reparation: *Wiedergutmachung*. Eike Geisel, *Die Wiedergutwerdung der Deutschen. Essays und Polemiken* (Berlin: Fuego, 2015).

14 https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/imre-kertesz-duennes-eis-deutsches-wasser-1129795.html [Last view 21 November 2024].

15 Aleida Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur. Eine Intervention* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2013).

the official German discourse (which continues to emphasize the rule of law and Germany's "special historical responsibility") and the harsh reality of Berlin's geopolitical *Realpolitik* and *raison d'état*, especially regarding to the de facto unconditional support for the Netanyahu government's policy. This positioning is deeply contradictory with Germany's traditional identity as a pillar of international law, to say the least, especially since the Israeli Prime Minister is officially the subject of an ICC arrest warrant for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

All of this invites to ask a more fundamental question, for these German geopolitical choices are based on – or trapped by – well-established elements of German memory culture, developed over the long postwar period.

As inevitable as a general reset may be, the crisis in the German memory culture will be painful, given that this political and cognitive model seemed to have reached a certain degree of perfection and exemplarity – roughly speaking during the 1990s and 2000s, at a time when, despite of a thousand heated controversies, the successive inaugurations of the Jewish Museum and the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin (in 2001 and 2005) nonetheless enjoyed international unanimity.

It is worth noting here that certain respected voices like Reinhart Koselleck spoke out early on against the false assumptions underlying this consensus. During the heated public debates that took place in the 1990s concerning the memorials that were to be erected in Berlin in remembrance of the atrocities of the 20th century and German guilt, Koselleck, as the most influential maverick in his field, bravely took a stance against an exclusive memorial for the Jewish people. In 1999 he wrote, to no avail, in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*:

> As Germans, that is, as the nation that brought forth the perpetrators, can we limit ourselves to commemorating only the murdered Jews, excluding all others who were also murdered by us? The danger of having fulfilled all our obligations of mourning and completed all our mourning work with a Holocaust memo-

> rial cannot be overlooked. But what will then remain? We will have an anti-anti-Semitic memorial, but the question will remain: where are our other murder victims in our memorial space – the millions of people who were also gassed, beaten to death, shot or killed in other ways – are they to be omitted from the then officially sanctioned national mourning? [...] As the perpetrator nation, we have a duty to remember everyone if there is to be a national memorial in Berlin.[16]

Some of these observations seem rather prophetic today. Faced with the return of historical tragedy, the glaring discrepancy between the acute geopolitical crises of the moment (Ukraine, Israel, Palestine, etc.) and the German entrenchment in old certainties, asserted in an increasingly dogmatic and unrealistic manner, appears even clearer – against the backdrop of very real arms deliveries to Israel, the volume of which increased tenfold between 2022 and 2023. The proclaimed virtue of the culture of remembrance seems to be undermined by the inability to name what a growing number of international institutions, NGOs, and specialists in mass crimes consider to be an ongoing genocide in Gaza.

Misuse of a dogma: the case study of the Bundestag resolution on antisemitism of November 2024

Evidence of this disconnect, or worse, a sign of the blatant instrumentalization of memories, is the resolution "Never again is now! Protecting, preserving, and strengthening Jewish life in Germany" [*Nie wieder ist jetzt: jüdisches Leben in Deutschland schützen, bewahren und stärken*], adopted by the Bundestag on 7 November 2024. It is this resolution, albeit cloaked in the best of intentions, that has led Susan Neiman and renowned intellectuals, to express concern about illiberal

16 Reinhart Koselleck, "Die Widmung. Es geht um die Totalität des Terrors," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3 March 1999.

tendencies at work – even imagining the censorship of Hannah Arendt mentioned in the introduction.

Amidst the turmoil caused the day before by Donald Trump's second election in the United States and the collapse of the coalition government in Germany following the withdrawal of Finance Minister and member or the Liberal Party Christian Lindner the same day, the adoption of this resolution by the Bundestag on November 7, two days before the commemoration of the anti-Semitic pogrom of *Kristallnacht* on November 9, 1938, would have gone almost unnoticed. However, the resolution "Never again is now!", commonly referred to as the "resolution against anti-Semitism" was soon criticized by several defenders of rights. It "risks in fact limiting fundamental rights and human rights": that was the warning issued by a number of well-established NGOs: Amnesty International, the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, Weltfriedensdienst [International Peace Service], the Association of Democratic Lawyers, Pax Christi, Medico International, etc.[17]. It is therefore worth taking a closer look at its provisions, behind the consensual and unassailable facade of its stated objective: the "anti-anti-Semitic" fight.[18]

Several provisions pose serious problems, starting with the explicit listing of social groups designated as prime vectors of anti-Semitism. "The situation since October 7, the Bundestag resolution says, has been marked by a rise in anti-Semitism, which is expressed in an increasingly open and violent manner and which stems both from far-right and Islamist circles and from tendencies to relativize and question Israel, which are characteristic of the anti-imperialist left." The original German sentence, which is catch-all and clearly the result of successive additions, is very confusing here. Above all, what does "*israelbezogen*" really mean, simply "relating to" Israel or "implicating" Israel? Next,

17 Julia Duchrow *et al.*, "Deutschland: Geplante Antisemitismus-Resolution gefährdet Grundrechte," Amnesty International, 18 October 2024, https://www.amnesty.de/aktuell/deutschland-antisemitismus-resolution-gefaehrdet-grundrechte [last view 18 November 2024].

18 See Elad Lapidot, *Jews Out of the Question: A Critique of Anti-Anti-Semitism* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 2020).

even though the passage casts a wide net and takes care to make subtle distinctions, the prime suspect ultimately emerges clearly. For only one type of anti-Semitism is mentioned several times, namely anti-Semitism stemming "from immigration from North Africa and the Near and Middle East, countries where anti-Semitism and hatred of Israel are widespread, due in particular to Islamic and anti-Israeli indoctrination by the state [sic]."[19]

This conflation and premature condemnation in a declaratory text with legal implications is surprising. It amounts to drawing up and formalizing a list of suspects in advance. Anyway, these divisive and stigmatizing categorizations based on ethnic origin played a crucial role in the Bundestag resolution. A belated view, and an isolated voice, Green Party member of the Bundestag Lamya Kaddor, an Islamologist born to Syrian parents, was undoubtedly right when she admitted, in hindsight, that "it would probably have been better, in our fight against anti-Semitism, to pay more attention to our postmigration society. Lasting protection of Jewish life will only succeed if we involve all populations in the discussion [...], including and especially Muslim immigrant communities, who must be involved in this work and mobilized, based on the fact that they too are victims of marginalization."[20]

The Bundestag resolution of November 2024, initiated in the wake of October 7, 2023, was the result of a cross-party closed-door process involving the Grüne, the Social Democrats, Liberals, and Christian Democrats, rather than transparent public debate, and was ultimately supported by a large majority. Interestingly, an older idea had already been floated by the far-right AfD a few years ago. On 7 November, 2024, only the Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance, a radical party founded at the beginning of the year following a split from Die Linke, and eyeing

19 Deutscher Bundestag, "Antrag der Fraktionen SPD, CDU/CSU, BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN und FDP. Nie wieder ist jetzt – Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland schützen, bewahren und stärken," Drucksache 20/13627, 5 November 2024, https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/136/2013627.pdf [Last view 20 November 2024].

20 rbb24, "'Schutz jüdischen Lebens'. Bundestag beschließt Resolution gegen Antisemitismus," rbb24, 7 November 2024, https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/regional/berlin/rbb-schutz-juedischen-lebens-bundestag-beschliesst-resolution-gegen-antisemitismus-100.html [Last view 20 November 2024].

the AfD's electorate, voted against it. The left-wing party Die Linke abstained. This motley "anti-anti-Semitic alliance" thus included the far-right AfD, which was only too happy to grant itself carte blanche for philosemitism after ten years of inflammatory statements by its main leaders, starting with Björn Höcke and Alexander Gauland, the man who had once minimized the twelve years of Nazism by comparing them to "bird droppings."[21]

The thesis that there is a direct link between immigration and rising anti-Semitism has been a favourite topic of the far right for years. "With their migration policy, they [the governing parties, notably Chancellor Merkel's CDU, which was in power during the 'migration crisis' of fall 2015, T.S.] have imported hatred of Jews from the Middle East to Germany," Beatrix von Storch (AfD) insinuated in 2021.[22] While the Bundestag resolution advocates tougher immigration and asylum policies, it also takes care to name the very groups suspected of spreading evil. Neither the Greens, nor the Liberals, nor the Social Democrats avoided the trap.

Anti-antisemitism, maccarthyism, illiberalism

Equally problematic is another provision that describes the scope of application of the Bundestag resolution. To put it cautiously, it is impossible to completely rule out the risk of arbitrary administrative practices, which would be all the more irrefutable as they would be taken in the name of combating anti-Semitism. It is not surprisingly against this provision, which more directly concerns freedom of science, freedom of art, and freedom of opinion, that a timid mobilization

21 Like other far right parties in Europe ranging from Hungary's PM Orbán to the French RN leaders Marine Le Pen and Jordan Bardella, the AfD under Alice Weidel's leadership is at the same time "pro-Israel and pro-Jewish, and characterized by latent or explicit antisemitism". See Armin Pfahl-Traughber, "Die AfD und der Antisemitismus," *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, 10 October 2017, https://www.bpb.de/themen/rechtsextremismus/dossier-rechtsextremismus/257899/die-afd-und-der-antisemitismus/ [Last view 20 November 2024].

22 Andreas Maus and Lara Straatmann, "Antisemitismus der Anderen: Die rechte Kampagne vom 'importierten Judenhass'," *Das Erste*, 27 May 2021, https://www1.wdr.de/daserste/monitor/sendungen/antisemitismus-126.html [Last view 21 November 2024]. On this subject, see Zygmunt Bauman, *Strangers at Our Door* (New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons, 2016).

of intellectuals has emerged. Verbatim: the Bundestag "reaffirms its firm commitment to ensuring that no organization or project receives funding if it contributes to spreading anti-Semitism, questions Israel's right to exist, calls for a boycott of Israel, or actively supports the BDS movement."

Further on: "Freedom of opinion and freedom of art and science are precious assets guaranteed and protected by our Constitution. However, there can be no place for anti-Semitism in the arts, culture, and the media."[23] The tone at the very end becomes more threatening: "The causes and background of the major scandals linked to anti-Semitism that have tainted these fields in recent years, particularly at 'documenta fifteen' and during the Berlinale in February 2024, must be thoroughly investigated; consequences must be drawn."

There is certainly need to recall the "scandal" of the 2024 Berlinale, since the documentary film in question, "No Other Land", was released in most Western countries to critical acclaim. But in the eyes of German political and cultural leaders, something was obviously objectionable about this movie, which was named Best Documentary and won the Panorama Audience Award at the Berlin Film Festival. It used the concept of "apartheid" to describe the discrimination of the Palestinians in the West Bank. This word alone seems to have become sufficient evidence of anti-Semitism in today's Germany, even though the main director, alongside Palestinian Basel Adra, is Israeli Yuval Abraham. Abraham must have undoubtedly been subject to "Jewish self-hatred," which German officials are obviously best placed to identify. Indeed, if there is a scandal, it is the somewhat reckless use of the particularly defamatory accusation of anti-Semitism by German officials – without considering the serious consequences for Abraham and his family in the Israel led by PM Netanyahu, Ben Gvir, and Smotrich.

23 Article 5 of the German Basic Law states that "every person has the right freely to express and disseminate their opinions in speech, writing, and pictures" and that "freedom of the press and freedom of reporting by means of broadcasts and films shall be guaranteed, with no censorship".

Instead of learning from this grotesque reversal that had taken place only a few months before, the signatories of the Bundestag resolution, ranging from the Greens to the AfD, seem determined to stand their ground. Thus the "Berlinale scandal," and the "Documenta scandal," before, far from being unique, point to a strong trend toward closing political debates in the cultural field.

If only one more example were needed, we could cite the repeated setbacks encountered since at least 2009 by the critical Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, a specialist in the Nakba, during his visits as a lecturer in Germany, or, more recently and in the post-7 October context, the lectures cancelled by the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich and the Free University of Berlin of the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 Francesca Albanese in February 2025, following pressure of the Berlin governing mayor Kai Wegner, a politician of the conservative Christian Democratic Union.[24]

It should be noted that the so-called "Berlinale scandal," and the "Documenta scandal," are the only two concrete examples of anti-Semitism cited in the "Never Again is now" resolution, and that both of them are two completely non-violent cases, in other words crimes of opinion. The deadly attack on the synagogue in Halle in 2019, perpetrated on Yom Kippur day by a right-wing extremist and resulting in the deaths of two people, which was the most serious anti-Semitic act in recent years in Germany, is not even mentioned.

With this kind of bias, the door is wide open to thought policing, especially since the "Never Again is now" resolution recommends the definition of antisemitism adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance in 2016, which was severely criticized even at the time for its vagueness by both lawyers and internationally renowned

24 See Bernd Kastner, "Krieg in Nahost. Berechtigte Kritik oder Antisemitismus?," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 27 November 2023, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/muenchen-vortrag-israel-palaestina-pappe-kuendigung-1.6310208; Bernhard Hübner, "Historiker-Eklat in München Israelkritiker ausgeladen," *taz*, 30 October 2009, https://taz.de/Historiker-Eklat-in-Muenchen/!5153448/ [Last view 21 November 2024].

social scientists. One particular issue was its "inflationary use of the category of 'anti-Semitism relating to Israel' [*israelbezogen*]," as pointed out by Israeli historian Moshe Zimmermann. This would pave the way for "McCarthyism prohibiting any criticism of Israel," according to the well-known Jewish-German essayist Micha Brumlik.[25] Several hundred intellectuals (including Zimmermann, Brumlik, Neiman, Aleida Assmann, Carlo Ginzburg, Philippe Sands, Omer Bartov, and Michael Stolleis) then initiated the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, a counterproposal that was more precise and concrete than the IHRA definition.

There is therefore a fundamental ambiguity surrounding the definition of anti-Semitism in the Bundestag resolution of November 2024; mirroring this, there is also uncertainty surrounding the far too vague definition of the "Jewish life in Germany" that the text promises to "protect, preserve, and strengthen." What exactly does "*jüdisches Leben*" mean? Reading and rereading the text, one searches in vain for clarification. Does it simply refer to "Jewish presence," in other words, Jewish fellow citizens and Jewish residents from other countries, a presence that was thought "impossible" after the Holocaust, and yet is still there eighty years later?[26] In this case, no one will dispute that there is reason to "be grateful," as the Bundestag resolution states. But the systematic use of the singular without an article also gives "*jüdisches Leben*" a raw, absolute character: is it that of "bare life," as understood by thinkers of "biopolitics"? This is a strong hypothesis that needs further investigation. In any case, this brings to mind the reflections of French-Israeli philosopher Elad Lapidot on "anti-anti-Semitism." Anti-anti-Semitism, he writes, has "a propensity to speak about the Jews it seeks to protect. The denial of essentialism is therefore not a pure denial; on the contrary, it presupposes a certain form of collective existence, of Jewishness. It even produces it. But the essence of this collec-

25 Klaus Holz, "Definitionen von Antisemitismus," *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, 25 October 2024, https://www.bpb.de/themen/antisemitismus/dossier-antisemitismus/555654/definitionen-von-antisemitismus/ [Last view 21 November 2024].

26 Lynn Rapaport, *Jews in Germany after the Holocaust: Memory, Identity, and Jewish-German Relations* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

tive existence is precisely that it has no essence. [...] Anti-anti-Semitism is a discourse of legitimization that legitimizes the negative political epistemology of Jewishness".[27]

This subtle philosophical dialectic highlights that a minimum of conceptual precision would have been much needed in a text designed for political implementation. Unfortunately, the resolution adopted by German members of parliament to "defend, preserve, and strengthen Jewish life" simply 'recommends' the use of the IHRA definition – which is not binding – and presents itself as a simple "resolution" – which has no legal force. Precisely, will the semantic vagueness, added to the legal vagueness of an infra-legislative text, not have the effect of promoting administrative arbitrariness, preventive practices, and ultimately censorship and self-censorship, particularly with regard to cultural and scientific subsidies?

However, the text of the Bundestag resolution explicitly calls for the uninhibited use of financial leverage, that wonderful tool for guiding and influencing the research agenda. Quote: "The Länder, the federal government, and the municipalities are required, if they have not already done so, to develop legally binding rules, particularly in the area of budgeting, to ensure that no program or project with anti-Semitic objectives or content receives subsidies."

It is easy to speculate on how these injunctions will now be implemented. The most pessimistic may wonder whether the damage has already been done. There is indeed already a precedent, in the form of the Bundestag resolution "Firmly oppose the BDS movement – Fight anti-Semitism," passed by a Grüne-SPD-FDP-CDU alliance in May 2019 with focus on activities of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement that a large number of German parties considered to be antisemitic in 2019. The resolution "Never Again is now" refers to this previous resolution, explicitly placing itself in line with it. However, experience since 2019 sheds light on the restrictive mindset with which

27 Elad Lapidot, *Anti-Anti-Semitismus. Eine philosophische Kritik* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2021), 9.

the relevant administrations apply this type of text. The Initiative for Openness to the World [*Initiative Weltoffenheit*] had already warned of possible abuses. These abuses have indeed occurred, according to Wolfgang Kaleck, Secretary General of the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, who lists around 100 cultural events, planned by institutions as diverse as the Protestant Academy Bad Boll, the University of Bayreuth, and the famous Volksbühne in Berlin, that have been obstructed or outright banned with explicit reference to the anti-BDS resolution. The list is growing long of international thinkers who have been at the centre of exhausting controversies, from the awarding of the 2023 Hannah Arendt Prize to Masha Gessen to the contested invitation of Achille Mbembe to the Ruhrtriennale (2020). A more recent example is the abrupt cancellation, on the day itself (November 29, 2024), of a debate with Vincent Lemire, a renowned French scholar and former director of the French CNRS-led Centre de recherches français de Jerusalem, who had come to present his popular illustrated *History of Jerusalem*, by the Urania theatre in Berlin. This was only a further step in censorship or self-censorship, on the dubious pretext that the co-debater, Volker Beck (Die Grünen), president of the German-Israeli Society, had suddenly withdrawn.

Meanwhile, it is clear for all but the German authorities that the hasty assimilation of any criticism of Israeli policy with anti-Semitism leads to a serious withdrawal into oneself, since acclaimed scholars in genocide studies like Israeli historians Raz Segal, Amos Goldberg, Omer Bartov, use the word genocide for Gaza, which is still taboo in German official discourse. Protected by her fame, Nan Goldin, an international star of photography, spoke out loudly at the opening of the retrospective of her work, entitled "This Will Not End Well" [sic], at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin on November 23: "Are you listening, Germany? [...] What have you learned, Germany? [Shouts from the audience: Nothing, nothing!...] – Never again means never again for everyone".[28]

28 The scene was filmed live. See DawnNews English, "Nan Goldin Opens Exhibition In Berlin with Fiery Speech against Israel," *YouTube* [video], 24 November 2024, https://www.youtube.

This situation is not only grotesque but tragic in view of the uninterrupted German arms deliveries to Israel in the midst of the ongoing genocide in Gaza. With a touch of sarcasm, a historian in modern history and the director of the Berlin Wissenschaftskolleg (Berlin Institute of Advanced Study) Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger expressed her surprise at the reversal of roles as soon as November 2024, while commenting the Bundestag resolution on antisemitism:

> Here we have ethnic Germans arrogating to themselves the right to accuse Israeli "leftists" critical of their government, or international researchers, often Jewish, from different countries around the world of being serious anti-Semites who are unaware of their own prejudices, she noticed! She concluded: "When we ask ourselves, as Germans, what should follow from German responsibility and guilt, I don't think the conclusion should be to support Israeli policy unconditionally and in all circumstances; the only conclusion we should come to is to defend human rights unconditionally and in all circumstances.

It must be said that, so far, these wise words do not seem to be shared by the German authorities.[29]

Conclusion

Noticing a "malaise in German memory culture" is nothing new. Memories are by definition plural and subject to debate, so it could hardly be otherwise. *Unease in the Memory Culture* is the title of a book by Aleida Assmann, the leading figure in German memory studies, which dates back to 2013. It might even be better to translate it as *Memory Culture and Its Discontents* because the original German title is a transparent reference to Freud's work *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

com/watch?v=kLfeJhtrqlw&t=435s [Last view 24 November 2024].

29 Massive Kritik an Antisemitismus-Resolution des Bundestages.

For a long time, however, at least as far as the Holocaust is concerned, the diagnosis had focused mainly on the inauthenticity of empty formulas of remembrance – that unpleasant dose of "pathos" and "kitsch" tainting the memory of Auschwitz, to use two terms frequently employed by the writer and former deportee Ruth Klüger (1931-2020). In fact, the most grandiloquent speeches on Auschwitz or Buchenwald can always mask a certain routine, or false theatralization; commemorative practices, increasingly ritualized, become autonomous; detached from their tragic referent, they do not immunize anymore against incomprehension, rejection, or indifference.

These nagging questions are as old as the endless debates on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past) in the 1950s and 1960s. But the new discomfort with memory culture as practiced in today's Germany is of a different nature. It stems from a fatal convergence of two different phenomena. Firstly, there is a clear tendency towards a dogmatic use of what the Australian historian and specialist in genocide studies Dirk Moses provocatively called the 'German catechism', which overlooks necessary doubts and revisions, coupled with a complacent immobility inherited from decades of alleged excellence.[30] Germans are often considered the "world champions of commemoration, after having been world champions of mass crimes," as Götz Aly, one of the most innovative historians of Nazism in recent decades who is never shy of sarcasm, once said.[31]

Nothing illustrates this dogmatic process better, regarding to the complex entanglement of historical guilt, present German-Israeli relationship, and the fear of being accused of antisemitism, than the increasingly frequent and authoritarian, and moreover truncated, use of Chancellor Merkel's famous phrase from her speech to the Knesset in 2008: "Germany's historical responsibility is part [ist Teil] of my

30 A. Dirk Moses, "The German Catechism," in *The New Fascism Syllabus*, 23 May 2021, https://newfascismsyllabus.com/opinions/the-catechism-debate/the-german-catechism/ [Retrieved 19 February 2025].

31 Götz Aly, *Unser Nationalsozialismus. Reden in der deutschen Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2023).

country's raison d'état. This means that for me, as German Chancellor, Israel's security will never be negotiable." This passage was already problematic at the time, because a great democracy cannot fundamentally claim "reason of state," reserved for exceptional situations, when it comes to sacrificing the rights of an individual to safeguard the 'higher' interest of the state, which is by its very nature contrary to the democratic "rule of law"? Even more problematic is the reduction, over time, of this passage from Merkel's speech to a kind of simplistic axiom with quasi-legal force, amounting to saying (or thinking): "Because of Auschwitz, Israel's security is and will always remain Germany's raison d'état." In light of the ongoing massacres in Gaza and the ICJ arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against, a return to more complex thinking is urgently needed.

Secondly, if a dogmatic use of memory culture is no longer appropriate, it is because the world is indeed changing before our eyes. Established haphazardly in the 1980s for the "old" FRG, and after the fall of the Wall for reunified Germany as a whole, the "classic" German memory culture, due to its inadequacy in relation to reality and repeated major discrepancies between principles and practices, is now "threatened with exhaustion." This is a quotation by Karl Schlögel, one of the most renowned specialists in Eastern European history, who received the prestigious Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 2025. In his "Short guide to organizing your thoughts in the face of world disorder," the last chapter of *Ukraine : A Nation on the Borderland*, the Ukraine specialist starts with "the obsolescence of models and patterns of thought":

> Inexorably, the images we know best, our icons of barbarism and destruction, are currently being overwritten by new images, while our visual and rhetorical vocabulary inherited from history is being overwritten by a lexical layer that refers directly to the present day. [...] It is not possible to simply return to our cultures of memory while ignoring this experience of the present.

> The great rearrangement of the topography of crimes and resistance in Europe that we are currently experiencing will affect all our old concepts to a greater or lesser extent.[32]

This does not mean that Germany should suddenly abandon all its fundamental principles, particularly those relating to overcoming deadly ideologies. The negative memory of the Holocaust, on which post-war German democratic culture was built and which is the focus of this article, rightly remains central. Moreover, it is far from being the only area at the intersection of politics, geopolitics, and memory where there is now a glaring discrepancy between the institutional and financial power of German educational and memorial structures and the obvious weakness of their responses to current challenges. Another example is the disconnect between the field of research on Central and Eastern Europe, which has been remarkably dynamic, innovative, and diverse since the 1990s, and the inertia of a privileged dialogue with Russia, pursued at all costs by German leaders throughout the 2000s and 2010s, until Putin's large-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. These contradictions and missteps call for an urgent critical re-examination of the current triad of memory culture, domestic politics, and geopolitics. Currently, even after the recognition of an independent State of Palestine by 10 Western countries including Portugal, Great Britain, and France at the UN general assembly in September 2025, Germany seems still willing to stick to outdated geopolitical priority partnerships. As its isolation appears even clearer, there are more and more voices who point out that this disastrous choice takes place at the risk of being prosecuted before international justice for complicity in international crimes. The leaders of Germany, including a large part of its political class, as can be seen around the Bundestag resolution, play a fatal role in this situation. But a certain comfort in memory culture, a routine of most cultural, and educational actors, is no longer appropriate either – that of the guardians of memory, humming their lessons and

32 Karl Schlögel, *Ukraine: A Nation on the Borderland* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018).

perpetuating their positions and programs, without questioning the relevance of their sanitized knowledge in the face of ongoing disasters. "It is relatively easy to place oneself on the right side of history when one has not participated in it and has the privilege of belonging to a later generation," writes Schlögel, "it is much more difficult and risky to choose which side to take today." Whether the German culture of remembrance in its current form is up to date and what a memory culture of tomorrow might look like, the future will show. While coming to terms with Nazi crimes is firmly anchored in the culture of remembrance, other historical traumas remain far less present like the reassessment of colonial crimes[33], (post-)migrant voices, and far right violences in post-Reunification Germany.[34] One can already guess that today's tragic impasses of German foreign policy and the distorsions in German memory culture will also be subject to a painful reappraisal tomorrow.

33 Jürgen Zimmerer, ed., *Kein Platz an der Sonne. Erinnerungsorte der deutschen Kolonialgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2013).

34 Efsun Kisilay, "Mölln, NSU, Halle, Hanau – Rechtsterror, Kontinuität und deutsche (Nicht-) Erinnerung," in *Erinnerungskämpfe*, 495-512; Asal Ardan, *Traumaland. Eine Spurensuche in deutscher Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main: Rowohlt, 2025).

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Mintae Hwang

New Revisionism: The Politics of Predecessor Selection in the 'Socialist Origins' of Nazism

This article examines the socialist-origin narrative of Nazism as a renewed form of historical revisionism that has re-entered the conservative and far-right discursive spaces amid the heightened political antagonism of the twenty-first century. Rather than treating the narrative as a historiographic controversy to be settled through factual adjudication, the study approaches it as a sociological phenomenon whose recurrence and political utility require explanation. Acknowledging the complex historiographic debates concerning fascism's relationship to socialism, anti-liberalism, and revolutionary politics, this article examines the contemporary polemical reduction of that entanglement. Drawing on Charles Camic's reputational model of predecessor selection and Patrick Baert's positioning theory, this article analyses how the lineage that binds socialism, Nazism and the collective left wing of the present day can be constructed despite substantial ideological discontinuities. It argues that this manoeuvre constitutes an inverted form of predecessor selection, whereby actors designate the predecessors of their opponents not through doctrinal affinity, but through the negative moral reputation attached to Nazism in postwar political memory. Finally, the article also situates this narrative within discourses linking the collective left, Islamism, and Nazism, highlighting its function as a metapolitical instrument of coalition-building under polarised political conditions.
Keywords: metapolitics; sociology of ideas; far-right discourse; historical revisionism.

Neorrevisionismo: a política de seleção de antecessores nas "origens socialistas" do nazismo

Este artigo analisa a narrativa das supostas "origens socialistas" do nazismo como uma forma renovada de revisionismo histórico que voltou a entrar nos espaços discursivos conservadores e de extrema-direita no início do século xxi, num contexto marcado por um acentuado antagonismo político. Em vez de tratar a narrativa como uma controvérsia historiográfica a ser resolvida através da factualidade, o estudo aborda-a como um fenómeno sociológico cuja recorrência e utilidade política exi-

gem explicação. Partindo dos complexos debates historiográficos relativos à relação entre fascismo, socialismo, antiliberalismo e política revolucionária, este artigo examina a forma como essa relação é polemicamente reduzida. Com base no modelo reputacional de seleção de antecessores de Charles Camic e na teoria do posicionamento de Patrick Baert, o artigo analisa o modo como a suposta "linhagem" que une o socialismo, o nazismo e a ala coletivista da esquerda atual pode ser construída, apesar das substanciais descontinuidades ideológicas entre estes campos políticos. O artigo defende que esta manobra constitui uma forma invertida de seleção de antecessores, na qual os atores designam os antecessores dos seus oponentes não por afinidade doutrinária, mas por via da reputação moral negativa associada ao nazismo na memória política do pós-guerra. Por fim, o artigo também situa esta narrativa no âmbito dos discursos que ligam a esquerda coletivista, o islamismo e o nazismo, destacando a sua função como instrumento metapolítico de formação de coligações em condições políticas polarizadas.
Palavras-chave: metapolítica; sociologia das ideias; discurso da extrema-direita; revisionismo histórico

New Revisionism: The Politics of Predecessor Selection in the 'Socialist Origins' of Nazism

Mintae Hwang*

On January 10, 2025, Alice Weidel of the AfD attracted attention for her remarks on Germany's Nazi past during her conversation with Elon Musk. The AfD has repeatedly been associated with controversies concerning Germany's Nazi past, particularly concerning the legacy of National Socialism[1][2]. At the same time, what was noticeable in Weidel's comment was its deviation from the traditional form of post-war revisionism. According to her, Hitler and his party were, in fact, 'left-wing socialists'; "(it is an error to label Adolf Hitler as right and conservative) He wasn't a conservative. He was a communist, socialist guy... Adolf Hitler was a leftist"[3].

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1 Patrice Taddonio, "Why an Influential Figure in Germany's Far-Right AfD Party Is Accused of 'Whitewashing' Nazi Crimes," *PBS*, July 30, 2024, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/germany-afd-bjorn-hocke-far-right-thuringia-election.

2 Jessica Parker, "German far-right AfD in disarray after Nazi remark," *BBC*, May 22, 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx88nwy934go.

3 Deutsche Welle, "Fact Check: AfD Head Called Hitler Communist. He Was Not," *DW*, January 11, 2025. https://www.dw.com/en/fact-check-afd-head-called-hitler-communist-he-was-not/a-71274756; Jessica Parker, "Musk interviews German far-right frontwoman," BBC, January 10, 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cr7errxp5jmo.

The claim itself was widely rejected by fact-checkers, historians and commentators[4][5]. However, Weidel's statement was neither unprecedented nor isolated, making it one recent instance of a broader pattern that points toward a new form of postwar revisionism. For instance, on June 23, 2021, Éric Zemmour made a similar claim on his Twitter/X account that the "fascist movement is of left-wing by origin"[6]; a few years earlier, in 2019, then-president Jair Bolsonaro also made a similar remark during his visit to Jerusalem[7]. The recurrence of this historical narrative across particular national contexts hints at a transnational phenomenon that circulates across conservative and far-right discursive spaces in different national contexts, and points to a renewed and increasingly visible form of historical revisionism that distances itself from conventional Holocaust denial within postwar political sensibilities. This article refers to this pattern as new revisionism.

Despite its apparent breadth suggested by the prefix "new", the term is defined in a restricted sense. It does not set to explain every attempt to reinvigorate or normalise the history of Nazism, nor is it meant as another name for postwar repertoire of Holocaust denialism, minimisation or relativisation. Compared with those now familiar forms of revisionist intervention, the narrative examined in this article works in a more oblique manner. In most cases, it does not contest the criminality of National Socialism. On the contrary, it often depends on the continuing force of that criminality as a moral stigma. Its operation consists, rather, in confining that stigma to one section of the ideological spectrum. By recoding Nazism as exclusively left-wing, it redirects the moral and political burden attached to the Third Reich toward socialism, leftism, or the broader family of the contemporary political

4 Deutsche Welle, "Fact Check".

5 Thomas Vorreyer, "The AfD Leader's Fawning over Elon Musk Should Sink Her Party. Instead, It Will Boost It," *The Guardian*, January 10, 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/jan/10/afd-leader-elon-musk-livestream-chat-alice-weidel.

6 Agence France-Presse, "Non, le nazisme n'était pas un mouvement de gauche," *AFP Factuel*, May 25, 2023, https://factuel.afp.com/doc.afp.com.9D62N3.

7 valeursactuelles.com, "Bolsonaro: 'Le nazisme, sans aucun doute, un mouvement de gauche,'" *Valeurs actuelles*, April 8, 2019, https://www.valeursactuelles.com/monde/bolsonaro-le-nazisme-sans-aucun-doute-un-mouvement-de-gauche.

left. What is revised is not primarily the fact of Nazi criminality, but the ideological genealogy through which that same criminality is made to attach to actors in the present-day political debate.

This restricted use of the term also clarifies the scope of the article. The argument does not attempt to settle the wider historiographic question surrounding fascism's relationship to a wide range of anti-liberal, revolutionary strands of political thought. As the following section briefly shows, this relationship is historically entangled and multilayered, and any serious account of it has to move through a series of ambiguities that a polemical narrative can afford to flatten. The object of analysis is, therefore, narrowed from the full history of those ideological entanglements to their contemporary conversion into a compressed moral genealogy in which Nazism, socialism and the collective left of the present political field are made to appear as parts of a singular line of descent. The central question is not whether this genealogy can withstand historical scrutiny in the form advanced by its proponents, but how, despite the historical and conceptual qualifications it requires, it acquires political utility.

To address this question, the article proceeds in four steps. The first section distinguishes the historiographic complexity of fascism's relationship to socialism from the polemical reduction examined here. The second section develops the concept of inverted predecessor selection to show how Nazism can be assigned as a compromised predecessor to the political left. The third section turns to positioning, examining how this reassignment allows conservative and far-right actors to distance themselves from the fascist burden while claiming anti-totalitarian credentials. The final section situates this narrative within broader discourses linking the left, Islamism, and Nazism, demonstrating how it can function as a metapolitical resource for coalition-building under conditions of sharp political polarisation.

Content and effect: From historiographic complexity to polemical reduction

Having defined new revisionism in this restricted sense, this section clarifies the difference between the historiographic complexity of fascism and the polemical reduction through which Nazism is recoded as exclusively left-wing or socialist. At the level of historiography, the socialist-origin narrative touches on broader debates concerning fascism's deep-running affinities with anti-liberal currents of socialist, syndicalist and revolutionary traditions. Yet, the article's concern is not with those wider debates as such, but with the contemporary form in which this complexity is compressed and reduced into a politico-historical lineage linking Nazism to the collective left of the present. For illustrative purposes, two recurring forms of this narrative can be identified.

The first relies on the term 'National Socialism' itself. In this version, the inclusion of 'socialism' in the official name of the party is treated as sufficient evidence that Nazism was socialist in origin. Dennis Prager, founder of the conservative media platform PragerU, argues in a video published on January 16, 2024, that "Hitler was left-wing in that he believed in socialism. Remember, Nazism is national socialism."[8] Dinesh D'Souza, who was interviewed by the channel the following year, reiterated that "the original fascism was a phenomenon of the political left. It was anti-capitalist, it was explicitly socialist, and hence the name Nazi...national socialism"[9]. Although D'Souza provides further detail this time to support the claim of left-wing origins of Nazism, the argument remains highly compressed. In his account, "this wasn't just Hitler using the term", because it is centred around "state control"[10], thereby treating state intervention and authoritarian control as sufficient indicators of socialism. This form of narrative, which rests

8 Dennis Prager, "Was Hitler far-right or far-left?", YouTube video, 00:18 – 00:26, posted January 16, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beKk6kNIJXE.

9 Dinesh D'Souza, "Dinesh D'Souza on How the Left Rebranded Fascism as 'Right Wing' | Real Talk | PragerU", YouTube video, 00:11 – 00:27, posted September 4, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1783nxCCYCU.

10 D'Souza, "Dinesh D'Souza on How the Left Rebranded Fascism as 'Right Wing' | Real Talk | PragerU", 00:29 – 00:54.

on a series of reductive equations between state control and socialism, and between socialism and National Socialism, is more prevalent in video format on online platforms, which corresponds to the brevity of the formulation and the politically charged keywords involved.

Compared with this emphasis on terminology, the second, more elaborate version of the argument draws on the language of political theory and intellectual history. Often articulated in libertarian or free-market US think-tanks such as the Foundation for Economic Education or the American Institute for Economic Research, this version invokes Friedrich Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (1944)[11] as the theoretical framework for linking socialism, central planning, and authoritarian politics. Here, the argument gains intellectual authority by drawing on a canonical figure in the history of ideas. Yet in its polemical redeployment, Hayek's critique of central planning is frequently translated into a simplified, broader critique of the political left as such. The result is not simply an argument about the dangers of a centralised economic model, but a compressed genealogy in which socialism, fascism, Nazism and contemporary left-wing politics are placed on a single continuum.

This distinction is necessary. As already mentioned, fascism, socialism and anti-liberalism are intertwined in a way that defies reduction to a simple opposition between academic debate and polemical distortion. A substantial body of academic literature has indeed treated fascism as an ideological formation produced not by the mere continuation of conservative reaction, but also by the incorporation of elements drawn from rivaling ideological traditions. In his analysis of the fascist tradition in France, Zeev Sternhell emphasised "the conjunction of elements of the nationalist, antiliberal, and antibourgeois right on the one hand and the anti-democratic and anti-Marxist socialist and quasi-socialist left on the other", while also highlighting the importance of the "continuous revision of Marxism" in making such a synthesis pos-

11 See *Hayek on the Socialist Roots of Nazism* by Byron Chiado (https://fee.org/articles/hayek-on-the-socialist-roots-of-nazism/) and *Why Hayek was Right about Nazis Being Socialist* by Richard M. Ebeling (https://thedailyeconomy.org/article/why-hayek-was-right-about-nazis-being-socialists/) for further details.

sible[12]. From this perspective, the point is not that fascism was simply socialism under another label, or still less, that Nazism can be folded into the socialist tradition without any qualification. Rather, the point is that certain socialist or socialist-adjacent currents, once detached from Marxist materialism, parliamentary democracy, class internationalism, and liberal pluralism, could enter into new combinations with nationalism, anti-liberalism, and admiration for the authoritarian state. Sternhell's own formulation is useful precisely because it marks this conditionality; "a revision of Marxism does not in itself necessarily entail a shift to the radical right", but when accompanied by "a deep 'antimaterialism,' an appeal to irrational values, an antiliberalism, and an appeal, beyond class interests, to national unity, the fascist equation was always possible."[13]

Similar complications can also be observed in the works of A. James Gregor and Roger Griffin, even though they arrive at the diagnosis through different routes. Gregor's insistence that the revolutionary traditions of the twentieth century cannot be neatly contained within the inherited left-right dichotomy leads him to argue that "Fascist concepts were neither of the Left nor the Right", but belonged instead to "a more complex conception of the nature of revolution in the twentieth century."[14] Griffin's intervention is particularly worth considering here, because it directly undermines any simple identification of fascism with conservative reaction. In his formulation, "fascism is best defined as a revolutionary form of nationalism," one that seeks "a political, social and ethical revolution"[15] in which tactical alliances with illiberal conservative forces against common enemies are possible. What is important in Griffin's argument is that it does not relocate Nazism to the left, but

12 Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), xvii–xviii.

13 Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left*, 41.

14 A. James Gregor, *The Faces of Janus: Marxism and Fascism in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 17.

15 Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993): xi.

treats it as "an outstanding specimen of generic fascism" when analysed through the myth of national rebirth[16].

Taken together, these works do not settle the question by placing fascism securely on the left. They show instead why the question is historically serious in the first place; fascism emerged from a set of political-social conditions in which socialism, anti-Marxism, nationalism, anti-liberalism and revolutionary fever overlapped without becoming identical. This, however, is not the level at which the present article intervenes. Its object is the contemporary transformation of this complexity into a simplified political narrative, which is precisely what the scholarship above helps to dispel. In this sense, what is "new" about new revisionism is not the existence of the question itself, nor the recognition that fascism had complex and sometimes left-derived genealogical components, but the political function and contemporary circulation of its polemical form.

Once the object is specified in this way, the central question shifts. If the polemical version of the claim remains historically and analytically contested, how can its recurrence as a broader pattern be explained? What sustains its circulation despite its distance from mainstream historical scholarship? Factual correction is necessary, but an exclusive focus on historical accuracy is insufficient to explain the narrative's renewed prominence in contemporary political discourse. In the analysis of ideas, content alone does not fully account for circulation and political utility. The question, therefore, is not whether fascism's ideological formation involved complex relations with socialism or revolutionary anti-liberalism; it did. The question is how a simplified version of that complexity is mobilised by the actors invoking it, and the concrete political effects it produces.

This mechanism is not exclusive to the political right. Comparable forms of polemical uses of history appear elsewhere in the contemporary political terrain marked by sharp antagonism, particularly in the use of Nazi and Holocaust analogies in debates surrounding the

16 Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, xii.

Israel-Palestine conflict. In the context of the British Labour Party, the Chakrabarti Inquiry raised concerns about antisemitism within the party, articulated through the use of metaphors of "Hitler, Nazi and Holocaust"[17]. Indeed, antisemitic rhetoric is increasingly gaining traction among certain left-leaning circles "under the guise of 'criticism of Zionism'"[18]. A notable example that draws a parallel between Nazism and Zionism is the term "Zio-Nazi", which has been described as an "offensive slur" rather than a sober criticism[19]. Such examples matter because they show that the degradation of historical specificity is not confined to one ideological family. Across different political contexts, Nazism can be detached from its historical location and redeployed as a condensed marker of political and moral illegitimacy, with variation only in the direction of the analogy, the actors mobilising it, and the adversary to whom the stigma of Nazism is assigned. The present article therefore does not suggest that right-wing and far-right discourse is uniquely prone to such polemical use of history, but focuses on one particular case of a broader recurrent pattern.

On this basis, the article suggests shifting the focus from the 'truth-content' of the claim to the political effects produced by its circulation. Rather than treating the narrative primarily as a historiographic proposition to be verified or falsified, the article examines the dynamics in the field of ideas that make such an intervention possible. This shift does not require a definitive account of the narrative's truthfulness or of the actors' underlying intentions. As Patrick Baert notes, grounding the analysis in presumed intentions is often counterproductive[20]. An approach informed by the sociology of ideas instead makes it possible to identify the mechanisms through which this polemical

17 House of Commons Home Affairs Committee. "*Oral Evidence: Antisemitism, HC 136*," UK Parliament, July 4, 2016, p.11, Q271.

18 Fiamma Nirenstein. "Jews and the Left," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 31, n.º 1-2 (2020): 265.

19 Tali Feinberg, ""Hit back hard," Holocaust scholar says of "Zio-Nazi" slur", *Jewish Report*, November 11, 2021, https://www.sajr.co.za/hit-back-hard-holocaust-scholar-says-of-zio-nazi-slur/.

20 Patrick Baert, "Positioning Theory and Intellectual Interventions", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 42, n.º 3 (2012): 318.

recoding of Nazism acquires political utility despite its historical and analytic limitations.

To this end, the analysis develops the argument through three concepts, each used for a specific purpose. Charles Camic's notion of predecessor selection explains how historical lineages can be constructed regardless of contested substantive ideological continuity; Patrick Baert's positioning theory clarifies how assigning such lineage to opponents simultaneously repositions the speaker and their adversary. Lastly, Randall Collins's account of intellectual conflict provides a broader background for understanding how ideas circulate through relations of opposition and coalition[21]. These concepts provide a compact vocabulary for analysing the contemporary form of revisionist narrative as a political use of history, rather than as a fully developed historiographic argument.

A brief clarification is necessary regarding the term 'intellectual'. The actors examined here are not treated as intellectuals because they are academics. While academics are among the major representatives of the intellectual class, they occupy only one portion of the vast array of professions that together constitute the intellectuals as a social group. As Régis Debray remarked, the "social and geographical density"[22] of the center of knowledge production has been decreasing with the advent of mass media, which makes it impossible to study contemporary knowledge production within the walls of university[23]. Today, various forms of non-academic 'intellectual workers' such as media commentators, authors, and journalists play a major part in the production, circulation and public contestation of ideas, making them key actors in shaping political discourse beyond the formal confines of scholarly institutions, as this study also highlights.

21 Randall Collins, *Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 7.

22 Régis Debray, *Le pouvoir intellectuel en France* (Paris: Folio, 1986), 122.

23 Thomas Osborne, "On Mediators: Intellectuals and the Ideas Trade in the Knowledge Society," *Economy and Society* 33, n.º 4 (2004): 436.

Compromised Origins: Predecessor Selection and the Politics of Ancestry

Seen from this perspective, the socialist-origin narrative is not merely a disputed description of Nazism's ideological formation, but an operation on political ancestry. In the form examined here, new revisionism functions to delegitimise the moral authority of the broader political left by retrospectively compromising its historical genealogy. Drawing on the case study of Parsons, Camic demonstrates that intellectual lineages are not constructed solely through substantive similarity between two bodies of thought. Rather, predecessor selection is an active process that includes both the selection of figures to be included and the omission of others, and directly reflects the specific interests of the actors[24][25]. In this model, what matters is not only doctrinal proximity, but also the reputation that chosen figures enjoy within the context in which the actor operates[26].

Camic develops this reputational model to explain Parsons's selection of European social thinkers as his intellectual predecessors over American institutionalists, despite the latter's closer substantive similarity to his work. The logic at work in the contemporary socialist-origin narrative is comparable, but inverted. Whereas Camic's theorisation of predecessor selection explains how actors choose their own intellectual predecessor, the actors examined here designate the predecessors of their ideological opponents; namely, the collective left-wing ideological tradition. Beyond the shift in standpoint, the more decisive inversion concerns the kind of reputation that drives the selection. In the case of new revisionism, the selection of predecessors is not based on the positive reputation of the selected predecessors as in Camic's study, but on the negative moral charge attached to Nazism in twenty-first century political memory.

24 Osborne, "On Mediators", 424

25 Charles Camic, "Reputation and Predecessor Selection: Parsons and the Institutionalists," *American Sociological Review* 57, n.º 4 (Aug. 1992): 421-445.

26 Camic, "Reputation and Predecessor Selection", 435-436.

This is also a key point that distinguishes the new revisionist narrative from its conventional forms. In the decades following the end of the Second World War in Europe, postwar far-right and neo-fascist engagements with the legacy of the Third Reich often took the form of denial, minimisation, relativisation, or normalisation. Figures such as David Irving and Robert Faurisson among other fringe-right movements and figures, sought, in different ways, to challenge the moral and historical consensus surrounding Nazi Germany and its crimes. It would be difficult to argue that these defences took on a singular identical form. For instance, the historical revisionism of Ernst Nolte, whose clash with Jürgen Habermas in the 1980s caused major controversy[27], belonged to a more scholarly and comparative register, which cannot be said of Le Pen's provocation and minimisation on the subject[28]. Even when accounting for this internal plurality of positions, however, these interventions shared a tendency to contest, relativise, or diminish the moral burden attached to Nazi Germany, rather than fully displacing that burden onto an opposing ideological tradition.

Compared with these conventional forms of postwar far-right and neo-fascist engagement with Nazi history, the new revisionist narrative adopts a different approach centred on an open recognition and explicit condemnation of the crimes of Nazi Germany. Returning to the right-wing and conservative media figures discussed above, Prager, even before his video on the alleged left-wing origins of Nazism, described the Holocaust as "a system of genocide" and emphasised its distinctiveness[29]. Likewise, in his PragerU interview with Marissa Streit, D'Souza also emphasised the criminality of the Nazi regime and its ideology[30]. In the

27 Jürgen Habermas and Jeremy Leaman, "Concerning the Public Use of History", *New German Critique* 44, Special Issue on the Historikerstreit (Spring-Summer 1988): 40-50.

28 Marc Daou, "Le Pen repeats slur that Nazi gas chambers were a 'detail'", France24, March 25, 2009, https://www.france24.com/en/20090325-le-pen-repeats-slur-nazi-gas-chambers-were-detail-; Agence France-Presse, "France: Le Pen fined over Holocaust remarks", BBC, April 6, 2016, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35979522.

29 Dennis Prager, "Why Isn't Communism as Hated as Nazism? | 5 Minute Video", YouTube video, 1:42 – 1:49, posted May 1, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUGkKKAogDs.

30 D'Souza, "Dinesh D'Souza on How the Left Rebranded Fascism as 'Right Wing' | Real Talk | PragerU", 1:29 – 1:39.

altered historical trajectory of new revisionism, the criminal nature of Nazism is fully acknowledged, while responsibility for it is now symbolically transferred to the political left.

As suggested above, the polemical version of this narrative does not operate primarily through historiographic precision. To illustrate, D'Souza's book, *The Big Lie: Exposing the Nazi Roots of the American Left* (2024), relies on categorical slippage and a selective genealogy of state interventionism, while Prager rejects the accusation of racism against the contemporary right by stating that "(while Nazism is based on a racist view of the world) not one person I know (from the right-wing milieu) is a racist"[31]. For the purposes of this narrative, however, such weaknesses do not necessarily prevent its circulation. An academic analysis is constrained by disciplinary norms of evidence, methodology, and peer evaluation in its explanation of a given phenomenon. Such norms and procedures do not guarantee neutrality, but they do impose standards of substantiation and qualification. The renewed form of revisionism examined here, by contrast, circulates largely through polemical and media-oriented formats in which the constraints of scholarly validation are weaker. This does not render non-academic discourses analytically irrelevant. On the contrary, it is precisely in such formats that complex historiographic problems can be translated into simplified moral genealogies capable of wider circulation. The relative freedom afforded by these formats allows polemical essays to function as an effective vehicle for political commentators who, while being deeply involved in the production and circulation of ideas, remain outside the academic community; examples are plentiful in various forms, ranging from professional commentators such as Ben Shapiro or D'Souza to former academics such as Bernard Lugan[32].

31 Prager, "Was Hitler far-right or far-left?", 1:43.

32 Bernard Lugan is a historian specialising on Africa. Although he has numerous works on Africa, he is practically shunned from the academic community due to his ethno-reductionist (or 'racialist') views. Hence, he mainly operates in the far-right ecosystem; he is a major contributor/co-founder of the Institut Iliade, features frequently in far-right media platforms, and during the presidential campaign of 2022, he was appointed as an advisor to Éric Zemmour.

In this sense, rather than a primarily historiographic account, the polemical recoding of Nazism functions to weaken the moral authority of the contemporary left. It is therefore often mobilised less as a sustained historical argument than as a frame for evaluating the present, invoking history as the context for the alleged moral inadequacy of the contemporary left; the implied logic is that if the Nazis were socialists, contemporary socialists and progressives inherit part of that moral burden; as D'Souza states in his comparison between Nazis and the progressive left, "(the Nazis had a campaign platform based on state control)...does this sound more like Donald Trump or does it sound more like, let's say Elizabeth Warren or Bernie Sanders?"[33]. Even though it presents itself as a historical analysis, the temporal gaze of new revisionism is fixed on the present, making it a metapolitical manoeuvre to diminish the moral legitimacy of the carriers of an idea and, by extension, weaken the appeal of the ideas they represent[34].

Taken together, the operational mechanism of the contemporary revisionist narrative can be understood as an aggressive inversion of Camic's reputational model of predecessor selection. Instead of selecting their own predecessors on the basis of a positive reputation, it allows actors in conservative and far-right discursive spaces to designate the intellectual origins of their opponents through a figure carrying a strong negative moral reputation, thereby compromising their moral credibility. Under this optic, the first key political effect of new revisionism is revealed, which is the shift from minimisation and denial, to the reassignment of moral responsibility for the crimes of the Nazi regime; not a denial of the existence of the crime, but the displacement of its authorship.

33 D'Souza, "Dinesh D'Souza on How the Left Rebranded Fascism as 'Right Wing' | Real Talk | PragerU", 00:57 – 1:03.

34 Patrick Baert, *The Existentialist Moment: The Rise of Sartre as a Public Intellectual* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 17.

Reassigning the Fascist Burden: Positioning and Moral Legitimacy

The reassignment of ancestry also has a second, relational consequence. Once Nazism is relocated within the genealogy of the left, the position of the speaker is altered as well. In his work on positioning theory, Baert describes the act of positioning as "the process by which certain characteristics are attributed to an individual or a group or some other entity[35]". An intellectual product, he argues, locates the speaker within an intellectual or politico-social arena while also situating others "as allies...or alternatively as intellectual opponents"[36]. Positioning is therefore a relational, dual movement; to define an adversary is also to define one's own position in relation to them.

Under Baert's account of positioning in the field of ideas, the second implication of new revisionism becomes clearer. When actors in right-wing and far-right ecosystems relocate Nazism within the historical lineage of the collective left, they also work to decouple the contemporary right from the position of inheritor of the twentieth-century fascism, thereby strengthening their self-positioning as the 'true' bulwark against fascism. To be sure, this is not the first attempt to reposition right-wing or far-right traditions by placing them in opposition to Nazism. One well-known project of this kind is Armin Mohler's notion of the German Conservative Revolution. Originally conceived as his doctoral thesis under Karl Jaspers, Mohler's exhaustive work can be understood as an attempt to craft a new position for interwar radical-conservative and fascist-adjacent currents. Rather than presenting these currents as mere variants of fascism, Mohler repositioned them as ideological opponents of Nazism, thereby offering them a form of postwar intellectual legitimacy in the aftermath of the Second World War. Although Mohler himself was a little-known figure at the time of the publication of his book, the work served, in Griffin's term, as a "surviv-

35 Baert, "Positioning Theory and Intellectual Interventions," 310.

36 Baert, "Positioning Theory and Intellectual Interventions," 311.

alist manual"[37] for those seeking to preserve elements of these ideological bearings in an anti-fascist era, and eventually found an audience. Once Alain de Benoist became thoroughly fascinated by Mohler's magnum opus[38], *The Conservative Revolution* – both its key figures and its anti-Nazi positioning – quickly became a core reference for Nouvelle Droite, and soon, of postwar far-right intellectual movements across Europe seeking forms of ideological continuity that could operate under postwar anti-fascist constraints.

The comparison is not to suggest that Mohler's project and the form of revisionism analysed here belong to the same intellectual register. Yet it does reveal a shared positional logic. In both cases, the relation to Nazism is reworked so that the far-right and neo-fascist milieus may distance themselves from the political burden of National Socialism under postwar anti-fascist conditions. The main difference lies in the form and audience of the intervention; Mohler's project operated through historical reconstruction and metapolitical patience, whereas new revisionist narrative circulates through more direct polemical and media-oriented forms.

Compared with Mohler's work and its subsequent canonisation within European far-right intellectual circles, new revisionism operates with a different level of conceptual elaboration. Although Mohler did not remain in academic life after his doctoral research, he did undergo academic training; while most of his fellow travellers such as de Benoist were not career academics, they were nonetheless deeply invested in theoretical works and debates[39]. In comparison, few actors associated

37 Roger Griffin, "Between Metapolitics and Apoliteia: The Nouvelle Droite's Strategy for Conserving the Fascist Vision in the 'Interregnum'," *Modern & Contemporary France* 8, n.º 1 (2000), 39.

38 In his epilogue of the English translation of *The Conservative Revolution in Germany*, de Benoist described his excitement as follows; "His book was a revelation...I saw a new landscape spreading out before me...I entered into that universe as if into an apartment that had been furnished in advance according to my tastes". Alain de Benoist, "Afterword to the English edition," in Armin Mohler, *The Conservative Revolution in Germany* (Augusta: Washington Summit Publishers, 2018), 235.

39 The key animators of Nouvelle Droite show, in general, great commitment towards intellectual work, regardless of their trade. The examples are as numerous as the number of people who have consistently contributed to the movement; to name a couple, Alain de Benoist and

with the socialist-origin narrative are trained academics, nor are they primarily engaged in the construction of systematic theoretical world-views through sustained theoretical production. Yet it represents a considerably more expansive political manoeuvre. In the case of Mohler and his allies, the political climate that was overwhelmingly hostile to overt fascist references prevented them from envisaging any immediate and direct impact on political reality, and encouraged a metapolitical strategy oriented toward long-term cultural and intellectual influence[40].

Unlike Mohler's metapolitical project, the contemporary revisionist narrative operates in a more favourable political environment. Rather than relying primarily on subtle rehabilitation or gradual normalisation, it seeks a more direct repositioning of the political field. It presents the broader family of the political right as occupying the morally legitimate side of the struggle for hegemony in a decades-long political and ideological struggle, while casting its opponents as morally compromised participants in public discursive space. The line that divides right-wing and far-right actors from their adversaries is, in this positioning, not political, but moral, rendered so by the left's supposed historical affiliation with the crimes of Hitler's Germany. Within this narrative, the collective left-wing is associated not only with communism, a familiar term of anti-left, anti-progressive denunciation, but also with Nazism; figures such as Hitler and Mussolini are thus added to an already familiar repertoire of anti-left historical accusation centred on Stalinism and Maoism. As memories of concentration camps and the Gulag are symbolically condensed into a singular image of systematic oppression and human suffering, the narrative draws a moral fault line between the collective right and the collective left that places

Guillaume Faye have both written numerous books that has since been canonised within far-right circles, with the former being awarded with the prestigious *Prix de l'essai* from *Académie française* in 1978 for his magnum opus *Vu de droite* (1977).

40 Metapolitics refers to a particular form of political engagement whose focus lies beyond immediate electoral results. Mainly consisting of collective intellectual works, it aims to act upon the general cultural and ideological landscape in the long term. Theorised primarily by Alain de Benoist, it was largely inspired by the Gramscian notion of cultural hegemony, which evolved into right-wing Gramscianism. For more, see Pierre-André Taguieff, *Sur la Nouvelle Droite* (Paris: Descartes & Cie, 1994).

the two sides towards the opposite sides of history; the right towards the 'right-side' of history, and the left under the moral burden of predecessors assigned to it by its opponents.

This positioning depends on the political flexibility of Nazism as a historical signifier. According to Federico Brandmayr, an idea is considered 'politically flexible' in its use when it can be deployed in various political contexts and purposes. Such flexibility relies on properties both internal to ideas such as generality or neutrality, and external conditions such as political and epistemological cultures[41]. In this sense, intensified political polarisation contributes to the flexibility of Nazism as a polemical category, allowing its conventional association with the far-right to be contested and recoded through the language of socialism, leftism and totalitarian ethos.

Indeed, the ethos of victimhood of new revisionism resonates with the narrative of 'left-wing liberal tyranny' of the public institutions prevalent in right-wing and far-right media spaces[42]. In the cases of D'Souza and Prager, the alleged dominance of left-wing intellectuals in academia and universities across the US and Europe is put forward as the cause of the 'original misclassification' of Nazism as a right-wing ideology[43]. As expressed by another revisionist YouTuber (TIKhistory), "no historian agrees with me...(academia is) heavily funded by the state, and thus biased (towards the left)".[44] In such usage, 'Nazi' functions less as a precise historical category than as a condensed term of moral

41 Federico Brandmayr, "Are Theories Politically Flexible?," *Sociological Theory* 39, n.º 2 (2021): 111-118.

42 The supposed 'resistance against the liberal censorship' has been one of the rallying cries of actors leaning towards the far-right, particularly since the debates surrounding the emergence of 'cancel culture'; see Patrick M. Garry, "The Left's Reversal on Free Speech," *Law & Liberty*, November 18, 2024, https://lawliberty.org/the-lefts-reversal-on-free-speech/; Jeet Heer, "The New McCarthyism Was Started by Liberals," *The Nation*, April 9, 2025, https://www.thenation.com/article/society/liberals-new-mccarthyism-dissent/; Liana Graham, "In the Wake of Charlie Kirk's Murder, Canadians Should Reject Liberal Censorship," *The Heritage Foundation*, October 3, 2025, https://www.heritage.org/progressivism/commentary/the-wake-charlie-kirks-murder-canadians-should-reject-liberal-censorship.

43 D'Souza, "Dinesh D'Souza on How the Left Rebranded Fascism as 'Right Wing' | Real Talk | PragerU", 1:43 – 1:49.

44 TIKhistory, "Hitler's Socialism: The Evidence is Overwhelming" YouTube video, 40:07 – 40:40, posted February 13, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLHG4IfYE1w.

accusation. While no underlying intention can be definitively established, what can be said with relative certainty is that it functions, at least for its audiences, to weaken the moral standing of the progressive left-wing ideas and actors. A decade of proximity to the Soviet Union was enough to critically endanger the moral legitimacy of the left-wing intellectuals that dominated the postwar French intellectual field of the 1950s and 1960s[45]; association with both communism and Nazism, once the narrative settles, suffices to render a position morally suspect in the public sphere.

Overall, new revisionism, in the restricted sense formulated here, marks a significant development of postwar right-wing and far-right engagements with fascist history. In the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Third Reich, some far-right and neo-fascist actors maintained explicit ideological continuity with fascist or Nazi regimes. Where such continuity was maintained with historical fascist regimes of the 1930s and 1940s (akin to the "nostalgic fascism" in Griffin's classification[46]), their political success was weighed down by the stigma attached to fascism beyond narrow extremist milieus. The contemporary revisionist narrative, by contrast, opens up a vastly different approach. Instead of clinging to an inheritance that functions more as a liability than an asset in the postwar political climate, it allows actors in right-wing and far-right discursive spaces to claim moral credibility by conforming to postwar political sensibilities. In doing so, the narrative does not merely loosen the political burden associated with fascist predecessors, but also transfers it to their adversaries across the ideological divide. In this renewed revisionist narrative, National Socialism and its crimes are no longer primarily denied; the crimes against humanity are acknowledged, and responsibility for them is symbolically reassigned to left-wing socialism, on the basis of an alleged shared root in socialism.

45 Daniel Lindenberg, "Controverse: Les intellectuels français vus d'outre-Atlantique (A propos d'«Un passé imparfait» de Tony Judt)," *Esprit* 191, n.º 5 (May 1993): 167; Daniel Brewer, "The French Intellectual, History, and the Reproduction of Culture", *L'Esprit Créateur* 37, n.º 2 (Summer 1997): 23; Emile Chabal, "French Political Culture in the 1970s: Liberalism, Identity Politics and the Modest State", *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 42 (April- June 2016): 247.

46 Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 163.

Shifting targets and new coalitions

The political work performed by new revisionism becomes still more visible once it is placed within the broader realignments of contemporary conservative and far-right discourse. In his sociological inquiry into intellectual history, Collins emphasises that the conflicts that take place in the intellectual sphere are not, contrary to the heroic images of intellectual life, exploits of exceptional individuals[47]. Rather, it is a collective venture that is sustained through coalitions among different camps, which sometimes results in unexpected alignments. One example of this ideological syncretism is the case of the Nouvelle Droite, which, whilst navigating through the fragmentation and stagnation of the French intellectual field of the 1970s, managed to create opportunities for partial coalition with anti-liberal strands of the left-wing position. This cooperation should not, of course, be overstated. Despite their self-proclaimed aim to transcend the classic left-right division, Nouvelle Droite rarely involved sustained engagement with left-wing thinkers[48]; in reality, their interest in left-wing ideas generally extended only insofar as they overlapped with their own brand of anti-liberalism. Even so, the particular set of circumstances encouraged tactical proximity to otherwise opposed positions, however partial and superficial it may have been. The broader point is that intellectual conflict can generate temporary alignments among actors who remain divided on other grounds.

In a similar manner, a convergence of political conditions has opened space for alignments among otherwise unlikely actors, and this provides one context in which the contemporary revisionist narrative operates within the political rivalries of the twenty-first century in Western democracies. On the one hand, as we have discussed, the political landscape of the postwar era and its sensibilities placed positions associated with Nazism and its crimes on the outermost fringes of political legitima-

47 Collins, *Sociology of Philosophies*, 15.

48 For instance, despite its sympathy towards Marxism, it never did show deep-running intellectual commitment towards the question of labor and exploitation. When the theme of labor (or of other notions from the progressive left) is tackled, it is done so in a way that seamlessly supports its core thesis on anti-liberalism.

cy. There have, of course, been and still are actors who were unapologetic in their defence of the historical fascist regimes, with concerns on their rehabilitation and normalisation on the rise[49]. At the same time, however, the taboo around Nazism has not lost its strength, and this stigma is precisely what gives the contemporary revisionist narrative its political force. On the other hand, the figure constructed as an internal source of civilisational crisis in Western democracies has partially shifted. Whereas some twentieth-century far-right movements relied heavily on antisemitic conspiracy narratives, contemporary far-right populist discourse has increasingly directed its hostility toward Muslim populations in Europe and North America[50]. In particular, a series of events such as 9/11 and the 2015 Bataclan attacks, as well as the anxieties over the growth of Muslim immigrant communities in Europe made Islamophobia a recurrent element of far-right populist mobilisation[51].

The convergence of these two conditions – the moral stigma of Nazi association and the construction of Muslims as a civilisational threat – enabled parts of the far-right to reconfigure their relationship with certain Jewish actors and institutions around a shared opposition to Islamism or Muslim immigration. As the report on the recent development of the relationship between Jewish communities and far-right politics shows, this strategic philosemitism among parts of the far-right has attracted support from certain strands of Jewish voices, incorporating them as a 'wing' of a broader far-right coalition[52]. An important caveat here is that this partial cooperation marks neither the disappearance of

49 Aurelian Mondon's works are particularly insightful in understanding the mainstreaming of far-right worldviews in Western democracies; see Aurelian Mondon and Aaron Winter, *Reactionary Democracy: How Racism and the Populist Far Right Became Mainstream* (London: Verso Books, 2020).

50 For the shifting target of European far-rights, see Matti Bunzl, *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Hatreds Old and New in Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) or José Pedro Zúquete, "The European Extreme-Right and Islam: New Directions?", *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, n.º 3 (2008): 321-344.

51 Lacin Idil Oztig, Turkan Ayda Gurkan, and Kenan Aydin, "The Strategic Logic of Islamophobic Populism," *Government and Opposition* 56, n.º 3 (July 2021): 446-464; Lacin Idil Oztig, "Islamophobic Discourse of European Right-Wing Parties: A Narrative Policy Analysis", *Social Currents* 10, n.º 3 (June 2023): 225-244.

52 Hannah Rose, *The New Philosemitism: Exploring a Changing Relationship Between Jews and the Far-Right* (London: ICSR, 2020), II.

antisemitism within far-right milieus, nor mass Jewish support for far-right populism; as illustrated by controversies surrounding figures such as Caroline Parmentier of RN or Matthias Moosdorf and Roger Beckamp of the AfD, antisemitism is a component that remains recurrent within far-right milieus in Western democracies[53]. In Hannah Rose's report, it is also stressed that rather than necessarily indicating a substantive reckoning with the history of Jewish persecution, philosemitism among parts of the far-right often relies on an image of Jewish communities filtered through far-right political priorities[54]. As studies by Shani Burke, Parisa Diba and Georgios Antonopoulos (2020) or Matti Bunzl (2007) point out, it is imperative to recognise that antisemitism and Islamophobia are two separate projects of exclusion, wherein hostility against one does not translate to an acceptance of the other[55].

While it is important to remind ourselves that the far-right milieu can be both antisemitic and Islamophobic at the same time without self-contradiction, some Jewish and far-right actors may nevertheless enter into selective tactical alignments around opposition to Islamism, Muslim immigration, or pro-Palestinian left-wing politics. In this configuration, new revisionism functions as one possible link that increases the apparent compatibility between otherwise uneasy partners that may otherwise endanger the stability of the coalition. This is achieved in two major ways. First, as we have so far discussed, the narrative assists in the repositioning of right-wing and far-right actors by providing a political alibi that allows them to further dilute their ideological proximity to Nazism. In Western Europe, the political memory of the Holocaust made the accusation of antisemitism the Achilles' heel of far-right parties

53 Nicholas Potter, "German AfD politicians meet militant neo-Nazis in Switzerland", *The Jerusalem Post*, December 31, 2024, https://www.jpost.com/international/article-835554; Fabrice Arfi and Antton Rouget, "Quand la deputée RN Caroline Parmentier célébrait le nazi Léon Degrelle", *Mediapart*, June 25, 2025, https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/politique/250625/quand-la-deputee-rn-caroline-parmentier-celebrait-le-nazi-leon-degrelle; Agence France-Presse in Berlin, "Member of far-right AfD party charged with making Nazi salute at Reichstag", *The Guardian*, December 15, 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/dec/15/member-far-right-afd-party-charged-nazi-salute-reichstag-germany.

54 Rose, *The New Philosemitism*, 12-13.

55 Bunzl, *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia*; Shani Burke, Parisa Diba and Georgios A. Antonopoulos, "'You Sick, Twisted Messes'," *Discourse & Society* 31, n.º 4 (July 2020): 374-389.

and constrained their entry to mainstream legitimacy[56]. The philosemitic reconfiguration of relations between parts of the far-right and Jewish communities, however, allows them to position themselves in a new role that helps deflect such accusations, which is that of the protector of Jewish communities from the antisemitism of the others[57]; namely, Muslim extremism and the collective left, as constructed in this discourse, now homogenised as a singular antisemitic force within their discourse[58].

This juxtaposition is visible in several examples. In her streamed interview with Musk, Weidel positioned her party as "the only protector of the Jewish people" in Germany by linking the Nazi Party to contemporary pro-Palestinian left-wing political groups[59]. Similarly, in D'Souza's PragerU interview, his claim about the left-wing origins of Nazism is immediately followed by a discussion of left-wing antisemitism[60]. Another notable figure in this arena is Melanie Phillips. As with the case of Weidel and D'Souza, her commentary frequently frames Muslim presence in Western societies as a political and civilisational problem, which has become a recurring theme in her work as a journalist, and then as a political commentator. In her discourse on Islamism, the political left is presented as a circumstantial ally of Islamism; "even though the society they (the left and the Islamist) want to have...are polar opposites" she remarked in an interview with John Anderson "they are bound by the common aim of destroying the West and hatred of Jews and Israel"[61]. Here again, Islamism is connected to Nazism and the memory of the Holocaust, as Phillips draws a parallel between the two based on their 'antisemitic genocide'[62]. The specific manner in

56 Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 81 and 281.

57 Rose, *The New Philosemitism*, 31.

58 Rose, *The New Philosemitism*, 38.

59 David Gilbert, "Elon Musk and Far-Right German Leader Agree 'Hitler Was a Communist'," *Wired*, January 9, 2025, https://www.wired.com/story/elon-musk-far-right-german-leader-weidel-hitler-communist.

60 D'Souza, "Dinesh D'Souza on How the Left Rebranded Fascism as 'Right Wing' | Real Talk | PragerU", 4:32.

61 Melanie Phillips, "The Bizarre Union of Woke and Jihad | Melanie Phillips", YouTube video, 00:23 – 00:35, posted March 12, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Oi_ytuGoUI.

62 Melanie Phillips, "The Truth of Hamas's Genocidal Terrorism | Melanie Phillips", You-

which the narrative is articulated differs across contexts and milieus. But these cases nonetheless converge in a shared positioning of conservative, right-wing and far-right actors as a self-positioned moderate force, aligned with anti-totalitarian and anti-violence norms, and as defenders of Jewish communities against renewed persecution.

Secondly and perhaps more importantly for the present argument, this recoding of Nazism opens up a discursive space in which Islamism, the collective left, socialism, and Nazism can be brought into a single chain of association. This amalgamation does not result in a coherent genealogy in the historiographic sense, but an adversarial bloc in which distinct objects of hostility are configured for mutual reinforcement. The most substantial development that demonstrates this convergence is the emergence of the notion of Islamofascism, which entered wide circulation primarily after 9/11[63]. Initially circulated in journalistic, policy, conservative, and far-right milieus, it functioned as a comparative framework that casts Islamist movements as ideological analogues of fascist movements, emphasising a set of common features such as totalising worldviews, political violence and above all, antisemitism[6465]. As with the debates surrounding the socialist origins of Nazism, the logical and historiographical validity of the notion has also been called into question in academic discussions[66]. Despite these reservations, Islamofascism can be understood, following Hibbard, less as an analytic category than as an ideological discourse[67]; it enables actors to perform a political manoeuvre, namely, the delegitimation of ideological opponents in public debate.

In the Francophone context, *islamo-gauchisme* – a neologism of Islam and *gauchisme* ('leftism') – has also drawn considerable attention

Tube video, 3:37 – 3:41, posted October 8, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyUB_yD0zCE.

63 Tamir Bar-On, "'Islamofascism': Four Competing Discourses on the Islamism-Fascism Comparison," *Fascism* 7 (2018): 243.

64 Bar-On, "'Islamofascism'," 241-244.

65 Alexander Flores, "The Arabs as Nazis? Some Reflections on "Islamofascism" and Arab Anti-Semitism," *Die Welt des Islams* 52, n.º 3-4 (2012): 452-456.

66 Stefan Wild, ""Islamofascism"? Introduction," *Die Welt des Islams* 52, n.º 3-4 (2012): 225-241.

67 Scott Hibbard, ""Islamo-Fascism" as an ideological discourse," *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture* 12 (2010): 10-23.

in the public sphere in recent years. Although it is not identical to Islamofascism, it operates through a structurally comparable association. What is notable here is the degree of symbolic legitimacy attached to the notion. Compared with more overtly polemical uses of Islamofascism or the narrative of the socialist origin of Nazism, *islamo-gauchisme* is a more concerted effort to theorise an alleged affiliation between the contemporary left-wing and Islamism, through actors exercising greater intellectual or institutional authority. Although the term's precise genealogy is debated within reactionary, conservative and right-wing intellectual contexts[68], the elaboration of its contemporary form is often associated with Pierre-André Taguieff[69], a CNRS researcher known for his research on the far-right, racism and antisemitism. If Taguieff is one of the key figures in the term's formulation, Pierre-Henri Tavoillot, a philosopher at Sorbonne University, contributed to the popularisation of the notion in the French political debate. Compared with Taguieff's relatively less media-centred profile, Tavoillot maintains an active presence in the discursive space through public engagement, contributions to outlets such as *Le Figaro* and participation in public events. The key function of the intellectual intervention of the actors producing and circulating concepts such as islamofascism and Islamo-gauchisme, is particularly well demonstrated in one of his presentations in the Patronage Laïque Jules Vallès on the subject of secularism[70]; whatever their level of conceptual elaboration, these notions can function as discursive tools for reactionary, conservative, and right-wing self-positioning as defenders of 'moderate Western secularism' against the 'oppressive' religious fanaticism attributed to Islamists, allegedly enabled by the contemporary left.

In this configuration, the association among Islamism, the political left, socialism and Nazism should not be read as an attempt to articulate a coherent historical or ideological argument. It functions in-

68 Notably, see Michel Onfray, *L'autre collaboration: Les origines françaises de l'islamo-gauchisme* (Paris: Plon, 2025) or *Revue des Deux Mondes* (October 2018).

69 Jacques Juillard, "Islamo-gauchisme, c'est la haine de l'identité française," *Revue des Deux Mondes* (October 2018): 10.

70 Pierre-Henri Tavoillot, "Quel est le contraire de la laïcité | Pierre-Henri Tavoillot", YouTube video, posted September 10, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYJVg0V9XPg.

stead as a form of discursive condensation, one that flattens the moral topology of contemporary political conflict by merging figures endowed with heavy normative charge into a singular adversarial bloc. Through this manoeuvre, new revisionism allows actors in right-wing and far-right discursive spaces to shape and occupy their own moral position that condenses multiple norms of contemporary political grammar; as anti-fascist, as philosemitic, and as defenders of a civilisational space portrayed as being under threat. Their opponents, by contrast, are placed in a position of historical and moral continuity with totalitarian violence, regardless of the substantive heterogeneity of the actors and traditions thus amalgamated.

From this perspective, attempts to engage notions such as Islamofascism or *islamo-gauchisme* primarily on the basis of their validity as analytic categories, valuable as such efforts certainly are, encounter clear limits. These notions operate less as explanatory frameworks than as symbolic shortcuts, whose function includes stabilising emergent coalitions and redrawing the boundaries of legitimate political belonging. The significance of the contemporary revisionist narrative therefore extends beyond the reassignment of historical responsibility alone. It operates as a metapolitical resource through which ideological realignments are rendered possible under conditions of intensified polarisation, enabling otherwise heterogeneous actors to converge around a shared figure of enmity, even as deeper and unresolved antagonisms remain intact.

Conclusion

Through Camic's notion of predecessor selection, the article has shown how the reformulation of Nazism's ideological genealogy constructs a historical continuity between socialism and Nazism that does not depend on substantive ideological continuity. The operation rests instead on the reputational weight attached to Nazism in postwar political memory, allowing actors within conservative and far-right discursive spaces to designate the predecessors of their ideological opponents and, in doing so, to retrospectively compromise the moral standing of the

political left. Baert's positioning theory further clarifies the relational effects of this manoeuvre. By relocating Nazism within the political genealogy of the left, actors in right-wing and far-right discursive spaces do not merely displace historical responsibility. They also loosen the association between their own political position and the fascist past, while repositioning themselves as bearers of anti-totalitarian, and more importantly, anti-fascist credentials. In its contemporary polemical form, new revisionism thus operates less as an alternative reading of fascist history than as a redistribution of symbolic burden.

Seen from this perspective, the persistence of the contemporary socialist-origins narrative cannot be explained by historiographic plausibility alone. Its effectiveness lies in its capacity to function within a polarised discursive space in which historical references are mobilised as condensed moral signifiers rather than as objects of analytic scrutiny. As such, content-based refutations, while necessary, remain structurally limited in their reach. What is at stake is not only the reconstruction of the past, but the metapolitical struggle over moral legitimacy in the present; over who may speak from the "right side" of history, and whose position can be marked as morally compromised.

In this sense, new revisionism exemplifies a broader transformation in the political uses of history. When detached from the constraints of scholarly validation, historical categories become flexible instruments through which alliances are stabilised, adversaries are delegitimised, and the boundaries of acceptable political belonging are redrawn. The question raised by the contemporary revisionist narrative is therefore not only whether Nazism can meaningfully be described as socialist – in the simplified sense advanced by the actors examined here – but how such an assertion can nonetheless operate as an effective political resource in contemporary ideological conflict, precisely by displacing historical inquiry with moral adjudication.

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Sérgio Neto, Clara Isabel Serrano, Ander Delgado e Amaia Lamikiz Jauregiondo

Disputing the Past, Remaking the Present. The Radical Right and the Battlefield of History Education in Spain and Portugal (2019-2025)

The article explores how the radical right in Spain (Vox) and Portugal (Chega) has instrumentalised history and history education between 2019 and 2025 to promote nationalist narratives and challenge democratic historical discourse. It shows how both parties seek to reconstruct a glorified national past while downplaying episodes of colonial violence, dictatorship, and civil conflict. By accusing the educational system of spreading "leftist" or "woke" ideologies, they advocate for a more "patriotic" reinterpretation rooted in traditional and religious values. Vox frames Spanish history through events such as the *Reconquista* and the Spanish Empire to reinforce unity. In contrast, Chega invokes nostalgia for the *Estado Novo* [New State] and the colonial empire to support exclusionary identity politics. Both parties reject professional historiography, promoting a populist freedom to reinterpret history, often through digital media. The article concludes that history has become a battleground where emotionally charged, politically motivated narratives challenge factual analysis. While curricular changes remain limited, the symbolic influence of these parties is growing, posing an epistemic threat to the integrity of history education and democratic pluralism.
Keywords: uses of history; history teaching; history education; radical right; Iberian countries.

Contestando o passado, reinventando o presente. A direita radical e o campo de batalha do ensino da história em Espanha e Portugal (2019-2025)

O artigo explora como a direita radical em Espanha (Vox) e em Portugal (Chega) instrumentalizou a história e o ensino da história entre 2019 e 2025 para promover narrativas nacionalistas e desafiar o discurso histórico democrático. Mostra como ambos os partidos procuram reconstruir um passado nacional

glorificado, minimizando episódios de violência colonial, de ditadura e de guerra civil. Ao acusarem o sistema educativo de disseminar ideologias "esquerdistas" ou "woke", defendem uma reinterpretação mais "patriótica", enraizada em valores tradicionais e religiosos. O Vox enquadra a história espanhola por meio de eventos como a *Reconquista* e o Império Espanhol para reforçar a unidade, enquanto o Chega invoca a nostalgia pelo Estado Novo e pelo império colonial para apoiar políticas identitárias excludentes. Ambos os partidos rejeitam a historiografia profissional, promovendo uma liberdade populista para reinterpretar a história, muitas vezes através dos meios digitais. O artigo conclui que a história se tornou um campo de batalha em que a análise factual é desafiada por narrativas carregadas de emoção e de motivação política. Embora as mudanças curriculares continuem limitadas, a influência simbólica destes partidos está a crescer, representando uma ameaça epistémica à integridade do ensino da história e ao pluralismo democrático.
Palavras-chave: usos da história; ensino da história; educação histórica; direita radical; países ibéricos.

Disputing the Past, Remaking the Present. The Radical Right and the Battlefield of History Education in Spain and Portugal (2019-2025)

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Introduction

In recent years, the radical right[1] in Spain and Portugal has actively sought to reframe national narratives across institutional, media, and

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1 There is a debate in the social sciences regarding how to label the political forces that have emerged to the right of traditional conservative parties since the late 20th century. Without attempting a detailed analysis of this debate, some scholars prefer to refer to them as the "far right", as Beatriz Acha, *Analizar el auge de la ultraderecha. Surgimiento, ideología y ascenso de los nuevos partidos de ultraderecha* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2021), 57-58, or "extreme right 2.0" – Steven Forti, *Extrema derecha 2.0. Qué es y cómo combartirla* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2021), 83-86 – given their complex relationship with democracy. Cas Mudde also accepts this definition of the far right for this political sphere, although he distinguishes between the extreme right and the radical right within it, based on their hostility toward democracy: the former being anti-system, while the latter accepts the essence of democracy, albeit questioning some of its essential elements – Cas Mudde, *La ultraderecha hoy* (Barcelona: Paidos, 2021), 24-25. This text does not aim to take sides in this important debate, nor does it seek to downplay its implications for democracy, but in order to distinguish the two parties analysed from other extreme right or neo-Nazi organizations existing in both countries, the term "radical right" has been chosen.

educational spheres, attempting to reconfigure interpretations of national history. In this way, history and history education have become a strategic battleground for political, symbolic, and identity-based disputes. This article presents an analysis of how the new radical right in both Iberian countries has instrumentalised history between 2019 and 2025, with particular attention to controversies surrounding school and the public role of cultural actors in shaping citizens' historical consciousness.[2] In Spain, the analysis centres on Vox's role in legislative debates on education and historical memory, as well as its broader online and cultural discourse. In Portugal, the focus lies on Chega's [Enough] use of parliamentary discourse and media interventions to legitimise a revisionist agenda concerning the national past.

Despite differences in national contexts, several shared features can be identified in the radical right's engagement with the past. In both cases, these actors construct what can be described as a parallel past composed of great *tableaux*: an alternative historical narrative that selectively reorders temporal hierarchies, silences structural violence, and privileges episodes deemed compatible with contemporary nationalist projects.[3] These revisionist strategies include glorifying selected periods, while relativising or omitting the violence of colonialism, dictatorship, and civil conflict.[4] The narratives often draw on long-standing imperial imaginaries, such as *Hispanidad* and *Quinto Império* [Fifth Empire], which are selectively reframed to legitimise contemporary nationalist projects and claims of cultural singularity. In a word, both parties, mirroring the somewhat parallel Iberian historical processes, and according to an essentialist approach, tend to stress: 1) the "beginnings" or the so-called *Reconquista*; 2) the apex of the "Age of Discoveries"; and 3) the more or less accomplished "redemptions" of the recent past embodied

2 Jörn Rüsen, *Historical Consciousness: Narrative Structure, Moral Function, and Ontogenetic Development* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004).

3 Paula Giménez, "La historia como excusa," *Anfibia Podcast*, 19 September 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vperijlJyM.

4 Julián Casanova Ruiz, "Vox y la historia de la Guerra Civil y de la dictadura de Franco," in *Vox frente a la historia*, ed. Jesús María Casquete Badallo (Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 2023), 121-128.

in the 20th century dictatorships – all nostalgic of 1) and 2) against a backdrop of perceived national decline. According to the historian Roger Griffin, it was this "palingenetic myth" of rise, fall, and rebirth that nurtured both classic fascism and the new radical right.[5]

Furthermore, both parties accuse the education system of promoting "leftist" or "woke" interpretations that emphasise negative representations of their respective national pasts and erode positive forms of identification with the nation. Instead, they propose a somewhat more "positive" and "patriotic" reinterpretation rooted in nationalist and culturally conservative values. In this sense, they actively criticise analyses of the so-called "difficult pasts", such as slavery and colonial rule, to whitewash the imperial past. These attempts to reclaim control over historical narratives reflect not only political ambitions but also a broader epistemological crisis. The invocation of a supposed "freedom to reinterpret history", often grounded in subjective experience, affective identification, or family memory, directly challenges the epistemic authority of professional historiography.[6] In doing so, it undermines the foundations of historical knowledge as a critical and evidence-based field, posing a significant threat to democratic principles of pluralism and critical historical thinking.[7]

Methodologically, the analysis draws on a corpus consisting of party programmes (2019-2025), selected parliamentary debates in Spain and Portugal concerning education and historical memory, and digital materials disseminated through party websites and social media accounts. These sources were examined using discourse-oriented content analysis, which identified recurring narrative frames, symbolic repertoires, and temporal markers. The selection privileged documents and interventions explicitly referring to history, memory, national identity,

5 Roger Griffin, *Fascism. An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 40-43.

6 Samuel Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

7 Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Jörn Rüsen, *Evidence and Meaning: A Theory of Historical Studies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017).

or the school curriculum. Given the volatility and uneven preservation of online content, the analysis acknowledges the inherent limitations of capturing a dynamic, constantly shifting digital environment. Rather than aiming for exhaustive coverage, the approach seeks to identify dominant patterns that shape the radical right's mobilisation in the past in both countries.

The article is structured as follows. First, it situates the emergence of radical right discourses on history and education within broader historiographical and didactic debates. The analysis then shifts to the characterisation of the two political parties, Vox and Chega. Subsequently, the article discusses their visions of the national past and critiques of history and history education.

History education and the uses of the past (by the radical right)

The aims of history education and the definition of the past taught in classrooms have sparked intense debates in numerous countries, including Spain and Portugal. Underlying these controversies is the close relationship between history education and the construction of national identities: within the school context, young people often encounter, sometimes for the first time, structured narratives about their country's past, making educational legislation in this field a particularly contested terrain. Classical studies on nationalism have already explained the role of history as one of the foundations of national identity: the history of the nation and its mythical origins, its victories and defeats, constitute essential milestones in justifying the nationhood of a given territory and its inhabitants.[8]

8 The 1980s witnessed the publication of groundbreaking work on the emergence of nation-building processes and the development of nationalism in the 19th century that stressed the constructedness of national identities and underlined the fundamental role played by history in such processes. Examples of this concern the groundbreaking and influential concepts of "invented traditions" or "imagined communities". See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NI: Cornell University Press, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*

Since the 19th century, educational systems have played a central role in shaping national communities by socialising students into a shared language, culture, and historical narrative. School history, in particular, has functioned as a privileged space for the construction and consolidation of national self-images. As Marko Demantowsky argues, school history has been the arena in which a dominant national narrative has been established and legitimised, often at the expense of alternative or marginalised interpretations.[9] This interpretation is strongly supported by more recent research in the field of history didactics. Studies have consistently shown that history education plays a crucial role in processes of identity formation and collective memory construction.[10] In this light, "the study of history education in schools provides a great deal of information regarding identity formation in contemporary societies",[11] and, despite curricular reforms and historiographical updates, "the teaching of history is still intimately related to the construction of individual identity and the transmission of collective memory".[12] In this sense, debates over history education are never merely pedagogical but are deeply embedded in broader struggles over national identity, memory, and political legitimacy.

Past views about history teaching – reminiscent of dictatorial times – stressed the reception and memorisation of chronologically organised information about memorable events and protagonists often presented as heroes and models of values to follow. The identification of knowing history with memorising facts, concepts, and dates remains

(New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

9 Marko Demantowsky, "What Is Public History," in *Public History and School: International Perspectives*, ed. Marko Demantowsky (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 3-38.

10 Sirkka Ahonen, "The Lure of Grand Narratives: A Dilemma for History Teachers," in *International Perspectives on Teaching Rival Histories: Pedagogical Responses to Contested Narratives and the History Wars*, ed. Henrik Åström Elmersjö, Anna Clark and Monika Vinterek (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 41-62, https://doi.org/ 10.1057/978-1-137-55432-1_3; Maria Grever and Tina Van der Vlies, "Why National Narratives Are Perpetuated: A Literature Review on New Insights from History Textbook Research," *London Review of Education* 15, n.º 2 (2017): 286-301, https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.15.2.11.

11 Mario Carretero, Mikel Asensio and María Rodríguez-Moneo (ed.), *History Education and the Construction of National Identities* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2012), 3.

12 Ibid., 1

widespread in Spain. Such a view of history stems from the romantic history education predominant during the 19th century and a substantial part of the 20th, which was characterised by a politically biased and uncritical interpretation of the past, guided by linguistic and religious unity and a civilising and Christianising mission. Consequently, for a long time, history education has shown little concern for promoting a school history grounded in disciplinary knowledge.[13]

The Portuguese dictatorship of the *Estado Novo* [New State] (1933-1974) followed a similar pattern,[14] building on the nationalist approach developed during the later years of the Constitutional Monarchy and the First Republic (1911-1926). That is to say, a history of kings, heroes, and saints, emphasising women predominantly as symbols or as mothers. The model of rise (Middle Ages and "Age of Discoveries") and fall (17th and 18th centuries) was actively taught, with the *Estado Novo* adding a dimension of paroxysmal decline in relation to historical liberalism (19th and early 20th centuries).[15] Despite all the differences, the three Portuguese political regimes embraced the colonial "sacred inheritance myth", with the school promoting a sacrificial "white men's burden" and a "civilising mission". The intention was clear: to connect the early modern period of navigators with the so-called "pacification campaigns" in Africa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

However, this nationalist understanding of history education gradually gave way to a more disciplinary conception of history teaching, aimed at educating critical citizens.[16] History taught in the classroom today seeks to promote a deeper understanding of the past and the competencies needed to build students' own representations of it,

13 Cosme Jesús Gómez Carrasco and Raimundo A. Rodríguez Pérez, "La historia como materia formativa. Reflexiones epistemológicas e historiográficas," *Revista de Historiografía* 27 (2017): 265-286, https://doi.org/10.20318/revhisto.2017.3974.

14 Joaquim Pintassilgo, "O Estado Novo e a educação: entre a doutrinação e a escolarização dos portugueses," in *Políticas Educacionais e Regimes Autoritários: Intelectuais, Projetos e Instituições*, org. Leandro Pereira Gonçalves and Maurício Parada (Porto Alegre: Autografia, 2017), 116-144.

15 Sérgio Campos Matos, "Heróis e anti-heróis de uma memória histórica. Para a caracterização dos paradigmas de heroísmo nos manuais escolares (1895-1939)," *Clio. Revista do Centro de História da Universidade de Lisboa* 6 (1987-1988): 39-77.

16 Carretero, Asensio and Rodríguez-Moneo, *History Education*.

always in accordance with the discipline's scientific criteria.[17] Critical thinking and multiperspectivity are central to these conceptions, as they help students confront univocal national narratives and patriotic histories and move toward more plural understandings of history.

Everyday uses – and abuses – of history, to quote Friedrich Nietzsche among others,[18] tend to forget that history as a science is characterised by regulated and institutionalised practices targeted to the production of declarative knowledge, expressed in standardised discursive forms and with procedures for its verification.[19] Thus, no account of the past has historiographical validity unless the minimum requirements of rigour are met. This is something that history education should convey to learners, together with basic knowledge of the procedures historians follow to construct their interpretations of the past, so that learners acquire the knowledge needed to counter historical manipulation and disinformation.

Nevertheless, after analysing history textbooks from the last year of compulsory secondary education in Spain, some authors argue that these educational media are gradually introducing activities to train learners in historical thinking skills and to promote historical consciousness through reflection on the past's influence on contemporary society. This knowledge should equip them with the tools to evaluate and counter disinformation about history critically.[20] Likewise, in Portugal, over the last 15 years, particular attention has been paid to the content of history textbooks, particularly their treatment of slavery, the Colonial War (1961-1974), and perceptions of the "other". These changes closely followed the public debate on colonial memories, the

17 Peter Lee, "Putting Principles into Practice: Understanding History," in *How Students Learn: History in the Classroom*, ed. M. Suzanne Donovan and John D. Bransford (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2005), 31-78.

18 See also Margaret Macmillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History* (Toronto: Penguin, 2008).

19 Alberto Rosa Rivero, "Memoria, historia e identidad: una reflexión sobre el papel de la enseñanza de la historia en el desarrollo de la ciudadanía," in *Aprender y pensar la historia*, coord. Mario Carretero and James F. Voss (Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, 2004), 51-52.

20 Amaia Lamikiz Jauregiondo and Ander Delgado Cendagortagalarza, "Memoria democrática y lugares de memoria en la enseñanza de la historia. Análisis de los libros de texto de 4.º de la ESO en la comunidad autónoma del País Vasco," *Clío* 50 (2024): 62-82, https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_clio/clio.20245010820.

fight against structural racism, EU recommendations, and several studies regarding textbooks.[21]

As we have seen, the views articulated by the radical right suggest that history is fundamental to promoting national identity and that school history constitutes a primary vehicle for transmitting historical knowledge oriented towards this purpose. From this perspective, a form of school history that does not serve such aims is frequently framed as anti-national indoctrination. From the standpoint of history education, however, these assumptions are approached quite differently.

First, it should be clarified that history education, as a scholarly and pedagogical field, is not itself a participant in the debate provoked by the radical right claims about school history. Moreover, radical right discourse is often perceived as undermining the aims of history as a curricular subject. The underlying question here seems to be: what is the purpose of the school history – is it to promote national identities, or to educate future citizens? History education specialists and proponents of radical right discourse approach this issue from markedly different positions. While the former are professionals specialised in history education, the latter speak from the perspective of non-specialists and resort to the long-standing strategy of mobilising history for ideological purposes. From the standpoint of specialists, this debate would lack substantive justification were it not for the tangible threat it poses to teachers' everyday classroom practices.[22]

It is within this context that the term "history wars" has been coined to describe disputes over who has the authority to define and control narratives of the past, highlighting the intensity and politicisation of these debates.[23] Disagreements over specific historical content

21 Marta Araújo and Silvia Maeso, "History Textbooks, Racism and the Critique of Eurocentrism: Beyond Rectification or Compensation," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35 (2012): 1266-1286, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.600767.

22 Diana E. Hess, *Controversy in the Classroom. The Democratic Power of Discussion* (London: Routledge, 2009).

23 Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004); Tony Taylor and Robert Guyver (eds.), *History Wars and the Classroom: Global Perspectives* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2012).

have thus evolved into broader "culture wars" over the teaching of history in schools.[24] Tensions become particularly visible when specific socio-political actors perceive that their vision of the national past is not adequately represented in school curricula, or when certain groups promote a fixed and exclusive conception of what history education should be, rejecting alternative or plural approaches.[25]

At all the events, this trend is embedded in a broader transnational dynamic, drawing on discourses circulated by international radical right movements, such as "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) in the United States, and Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség [Hungarian Civic Alliance] in Hungary, that rely on emotionally charged simplifications of the past and on disinformation practices, amplified by algorithmic digital platforms.[26] While heterogeneous in their ideological profiles, all radical right parties share a strong emphasis on the nation as a central frame of reference and articulate their programmes around the perceived consequences of rapid social and economic transformations, including globalisation, migration, and the erosion of traditional values. As we will discuss in the subsequent sections, in both Spain and Portugal, education is becoming a privileged arena for the radical right's symbolic struggle, targeting not only historical narratives but also broader conceptions of citizenship, identity, and national belonging.

Vox and "historiographical populism"

Vox is the party representing the radical right wing in Spain. Since its creation in 2013, Vox has become the country's third political party. In the 2023 general election, it won 12.4% of the vote and secured 33

24 Carretero, Asensio, and Rodríguez-Moneo, *History Education*; Taylor and Guyver, *History Wars*; Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

25 Mateo Ballester Rodríguez, "Vox y el uso de la historia: el relato del pasado remoto de España como instrumento político," *Política y Sociedad* 58, n.º 2 (2021): 1-14, https://doi.org/10.5209/poso.69692. For a more general context, see Enzo Traverso, *El pasado, instrucciones de uso. Historia, memoria, política* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2007).

26 Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: NYU Press, 2018).

of 350 seats in the Congress of Deputies. Recent polls indicate a rise in its voting intention, reaching the 18%.[27] This party managed to bring together people from different political backgrounds. There was a core group of activists from the conservative Partido Popular (PP) who were dissatisfied, among other issues, with the party's decisions regarding how to manage the end of ETA terrorism and, particularly relevant later, with its approach to addressing the demands of Catalan nationalism. From its foundation onwards, it succeeded in attracting individuals who had previously belonged to other extreme-right organisations, but above all, social sectors concerned about what they perceived as a crisis affecting Spain because of the Catalan independentist *procés*, which became especially evident in the events of 2017.[28] In December 2018, Vox achieved its first electoral success, securing representation in the Andalusian autonomous parliament. Since then, it has had representatives in city councils, autonomous community parliaments, and the Spanish parliament.

Since its emergence, Vox has focused attention on praising specific periods of Spanish history to demonstrate the country's "greatness" and foster Spanish national identity, as a means of countering the perceived threats to Spain's homogeneity posed by an increasingly multicultural and heterogeneous society. The emergence of Vox in Spanish politics has brought to light a traditional view of Spanish history, setting aside the reluctance other conservative groups may have felt to express their opinions on the past. This trend was accompanied by a national-Catholic revisionist historiography that insists on defending a traditional view of Spain: the struggle of Spaniards in defence of their nation and against their adversaries, both internal and external, by presenting the

27 Natalia Junquera, "Vox se dispara al 18% y eleva a 13 puntos la ventaja del bloque de la derecha sobre la izquierda," *El País*, 12 January 2026, https://elpais.com/espana/2026-01-12/vox-se-dispara-al-18-y-eleva-a-13-puntos-la-ventaja-del-bloque-de-la-derecha-sobre-la-izquierda.html.

28 Xabier Casals i Meseguer, "De Fuerza Nueva a Vox: de la vieja a la nueva ultraderecha española (1975-2019)," *Ayer. Revista de Historia Contemporánea* 118, n.º 2 (2020): 365-380, https://doi.org/10.55509/ayer/118-2020-14. Steven Forti, "De «PP auténtico» a extrema derecha *tout court*. Historia, ideología y organización de Vox," *Historia del Presente* 42 (2023): 9-28, https://doi.org/10.5944/hdp.42.2023.40268. Xabier Rius Sant, *Vox. El retorno de los ultras que nunca se fueron* (Madrid: Akal, 2023).

events that they consider foster the feeling of Spanish national identity, and the unity of the nation is emphasised.[29] The most relevant events supporting this view are the *Reconquista* and the struggle against Islam, the "discovery of America", the countering of the *Leyenda Negra* [Black Legend] regarding the Spanish colonial empire, and, finally, the Civil War (1936-1939) and Franco's regime. Examples include how to confront a progressive government labelled as "social-communist" or how to counter the rise of peripheral nationalisms. According to this perspective, it is also possible to draw lessons and valid insights from the past to help address the perceived crisis.[30]

This party's interest in a version of Spanish history that would reinforce identification with the Spanish nation can be traced back to its very beginnings, as evidenced by some of its political manifestos. The founding manifesto already emphasised the importance of Spanish unity and how history had demonstrated the country's tenacity in facing the difficult situations it had been forced to endure. In the current situation, which they viewed as a crisis, they intended to do the same. "Spain is a great nation that has always known how to overcome the difficult periods of its history thanks to the courage, determination, and sacrifice of its people. There must be no room for pessimism or discouragement during the difficult times we are facing."[31] In the party's 2018 policy document, titled "100 medidas para la España Viva [100 Measures for a Vibrant Spain"], the eighth point proposed the establishment of a "Comprehensive Plan for the understanding, dissemination, and protection of national identity and Spain's contribution to

29 Gilberto Aranda Bustamante and Rodrigo Escribano, "Las múltiples hibridaciones del posfranquismo populista de Vox," *Desafíos* 34, n.º 2 (2022): 1-36, https://doi.org/10.12804/revistas.urosario.edu.co/desafios/a.11063.

30 David Barreira, "Los 10 episodios favoritos de Vox en la Historia de España: así sucedieron de verdad," *El Español*, 23 January 2019, https://www.elespanol.com/cultura/historia/20190123/episodios-favoritos-vox-historia-espana-sucedieron-verdad/370464067_0.html and David Barreira, "Limpiar la Leyenda Negra y reescribir la Guerra Civil: otros cinco 'hits' históricos de Vox," *El Español*, 24 January 2019, https://www.elespanol.com/cultura/historia/20190123/episodios-favoritos-vox-historia-espana-sucedieron-verdad/370464067_0.html; Miguel Urban, *La emergencia de Vox. Apuntes para combatir a la extrema derecha española* (Barcelona: Crítica & Alternativa, 2019), 149-155.

31 Vox, *Manifiesto Fundacional*.

civilization and world history, with special attention to the deeds and exploits of our national heroes". To achieve this objective, the following point stated that "no parliament has the authority to define our past, much less to exclude Spaniards who differ from its definitions. The past cannot be used to divide us; on the contrary, we must jointly honour all those who, from different historical perspectives, fought for Spain."[32]

Over the years, Vox has organised a series of political events under the title "Viva", which have been attended by numerous international leaders from this political sphere. At the event held in October of 2022, the history of Spain played a central role in it. As noted on Vox's website, this political event and cultural festival was "dedicated to the history of Spain through 52 prominent figures who, through performances [...] trace[d] the different historical periods". Furthermore, during the event, attendees had "the opportunity to learn about the writers, scientists, warriors, kings... who shaped Spain, under the slogan «The History We Made Together» [La Historia que hicimos juntos]."[33] As the leader of this party noted in a post on the social media platform X announcing this event, "We will never allow anyone to manipulate, fabricate, or erase the HISTORY of Spain. At #VIVA22, we will keep in mind the Spaniards who forged our nation."[34] In 2021, as part of the Viva 21 events, they released their manifesto titled "Agenda España", which once again highlighted the role of Spanish history in fostering national unity. Therefore, among its numerous measures, it proposed "promoting and protecting national identity and Spain's contribution to civilisation and universal history, with special attention to the deeds and feats of our national heroes both within and beyond our borders."[35]

32 Vox, *100 medidas para la España Viva.* https://www.voxespana.es/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/100medidasngal_101319181010040327.pdf.

33 https://www.voxespana.es/actualidad/vox-prepara-viva-22-historia-espana-como-protagonista-20220803. A critical view of this event in Ana Isabel Carrasco, "Los Reyes Católicos en la propaganda de Vox: entre neofalangismo y glorias de cartón piedra," in *Vox frente a la historia*, ed. Jesús Casquete (Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 2023), 35-43.

34 Message reproduced in Natalia Cristobal, "«La historia que hicimos juntos»: las claves de VIVA 22 el acto que Vox celebrará este octubre", *El Debate*, 11 September 2022 [Consulted the 20.04.2026 in https://www.eldebate.com/espana/20220911/historia-hicimos-juntos-claves-viva-22-acto-vox-prepara-este-octubre_57960.html].

35 Consulted the 20.04.2026 in https://www.voxespana.es/agenda-espana.

The term "historiographical populism" was coined to define this approach to History, characterised by the propagation of biased explanations of the past based on populist resources that clash with academic research, which they tend to despise and even discredit in public.[36] According to this approach, educational research is accused of manipulation and treason against the nation, and it has become common to question historians' work or even to disqualify them personally.[37] In contrast to previous periods, these views have had a broader social and political impact in recent years. In fact, such patriotic discourse among conservative sectors has demonstrated considerable adaptability to the new political context that began with the *Transición* [transition]. This "historiographical populism", however, has been widely criticised by academic historians.[38]

Chega as radical right: identity, nostalgia, and populist moralism

In Portugal, the party Chega became the second-largest parliamentary force after the 2025 legislative elections (it won 22,76% of the vote and 60 seats out of a total of 230).[39] The rise of the radical right has unfolded within a distinctive historical and mnemonic framework marked by two intertwined legacies: the *Estado Novo* regime and the colonial empire, whose demise coincided with the Carnation Revolution of

36 Edgar Straehle-Porras, "El populismo historiográfico como problema y síntoma del presente," *CTXT. Contexto y Acción*, 6 October 2021, https://ctxt.es/es/20211001/Firmas/37438/populismo-histo-riografico-; Edgar Straehle-Porras, "Reflexiones sobre el populismo historiográfico en España. Un ejercicio de historiografía del presente," *Revista Stultifera de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales* 8, n.º 1 (2025): 29-58.

37 Javier Tebar, "Los populismos historiográficos en el nacionalismo español: usos del pasado y problemas de la historia en el siglo xxi," *Revista de Historiografía* 39 (2024): 425, https://doi.org/10.20318/revhisto.2024.7977.

38 See the works of Jesús Casquete (ed.), *Vox frente a la historia* (Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 2023) and Steven Forti (ed.), *Mitos y cuentos de la extrema derecha* (Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata, 2023). Or the already mentioned articles by Mateo Ballester Rodríguez, "Vox y el uso de la historia."

39 For recent synthesis, see: *Chega. The New Portuguese Far Right*, ed. João Carvalho (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2026). Although the different chapters do not directly address the issue of (political) education, it is worth examining the party's presence in traditional and digital media, as well as its electoral geography and electoral growth.

1974-1975.[40] Chega, founded in 2019, has made both legacies central to its political identity and to its ongoing attempt to rewrite the national past. As the journalist Miguel Carvalho notes in his recently published book, the party emerged as a movement that "feeds on democratic degradation and the discredit of politics,"[41] presenting itself as a patriotic force of redemption against the alleged leftist corruption of the system (and the elites) born from the Carnation Revolution.

Nevertheless, while Salazar's *Estado Novo* exalted Portugal's civilising mission and its so-called lusotropicalist exceptionality in dealing with the "other"[42] – even if only rhetorically –, Chega, most of the time, re-signifies this imperial mythology within an openly nativist and exclusionary discourse grounded in a Christian-Western identity framework. The slogan "Portugal for the Portuguese", recurrent in the party rallies and online performances, echoes the ethnocultural logic of European and American radical right movements, where the nation is portrayed as besieged by immigrants, "welfare parasites", and cosmopolitan elites. As was demonstrated, the anti-immigration rhetoric has become the cornerstone of Chega's ideological construction, blending cultural racism with the defence of an imagined "moral majority."[43] This classification is underscored by a report from the Global Project against Hate and Extremism (GPAHE), which explicitly profiles Chega among Portugal's radical right and hate-oriented organisations.[44] In the same way, political scientist Vicente Valentim placed the party on the radical right, arguing

40 Riccardo Marchi, *A Nova Direita Anti-Sistema. O caso do Chega* (Lisboa: Edições 70, 2020); Diogo Noivo, "Chega y el fin de la inmunidad lusa," *Historia del Tempo Presente* 42 (2023): 29-42.

41 Miguel Carvalho, *Por Dentro do Chega: A Face Oculta da Extrema-Direita em Portugal* (Lisbon: Contraponto, 2025), 14.

42 Cláudia Castelo, *O Modo Português de Estar no Mundo. O Luso-Tropicalismo e a Ideologia Colonial Portuguesa (1933-1961)* (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 1999), 14-15.

43 Rafael Calado Saturnini, "A Extrema-Direita e a Imigração em Portugal: Discursos e Representações no Contexto Pós-Crise" (master's diss., Instituto Universitário de Lisboa [ISCTE-IUL], 2022), 8, https://repositorio.iscte-iul.pt/handle/10071/27042.

44 Global Project against Hate and Extremism, "Novo relatório do GPAHE identifica grupos de ódio e de extrema-direita radicais em Portugal; inclui o Chega!", *Global Extremism Database*, 26 June 2023, https://globalextremism.org/post/novo-relatorio-do-projeto-global-contra-o-odio-e-o-extremismo-identifica-grupos-de-odio-e-de-extrema-direita-radicais-em-portugal-inclui-o-chega/.

that the relationship between its rhetoric and its voter base has followed the same pattern of normalisation through three stages observed in other countries: latency, activation and revelation.[45]

Electoral campaigns, especially since 2023, have made this discourse visible in public space, through posters and social media advertisements targeting Roma communities and immigrants from Bangladesh, transforming prejudice into spectacle. These visual devices, often framed as "defence of national identity", translate nativist ideology into a pedagogy of fear, producing what Miguel Carvalho calls "a moral panic aesthetic"[46] that blurs the line between civic debate and hate speech. The narrative of a lost greatness, rooted in the "Age of Discoveries" and the colonial empire, is mobilised to counter the perceived humiliation of decolonisation. Chega's speeches contrast "the heroic empire" with the "chaos" of democracy, systematically downplaying the violence of the colonial wars and reframing the process of independence as a betrayal of the so-called *retornados* [returnees and former colonists who left the empire in the wake of African independence].[47] This *saudade* [longing] operates as what Svetlana Boym terms "restorative nostalgia": a longing not for the past itself but for the hierarchies that sustained it.[48]

Nevertheless, it is not only the radical right that expresses *saudade* for the colonial empire. Portuguese society as a whole continues to show signs of imperial nostalgia. As demonstrated by a recent study scientifically coordinated by António Costa Pinto, one in three Portuguese respondents stated that they would prefer Portugal to remain a colonial empire. However, the study also reveals a more critical dimension: more than 40% of those surveyed recognise that the Portuguese empire was racist.[49]

45 Vicente Valentim, *O Fim da Vergonha. Como a Direita Radical se Normalizou* (Lisbon: Gradiva, 2024).

46 Miguel Carvalho, *Por Dentro do Chega*, 60.

47 On this conceptualisation and historical process, see: Elsa Peralta, ed., *The Retornados from the Portuguese Colonies in Africa. Memory, Narrative, and History* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2021).

48 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

49 André Rodrigues, "Um terço dos portugueses sente nostalgia colonial. Os impérios deixam uma grande marca," *Renascença*, 19 December 2025, https://rr.pt/noticia/pais/2025/12/19/

Building on the long-term evolution of the Portuguese radical right, Chega appears less a rupture than the latest expression of a continuum connecting authoritarian nationalism, colonial nostalgia, and post-1974 populism.[50] More recent analyses underline how the party capitalises on the exhaustion of representative politics to re-legitimise narratives of order, obedience, and providential leadership.[51] In this light, the leader's charisma is interpreted as a form of political messianism embedded in a long Portuguese tradition of Sebastianism [the lost king], in which salvation is projected onto a single leader who promises to restore the nation's moral unity. This self-styled providential leadership with historical content was particularly evident in André Ventura's 2025 presidential campaign, when, in a televised interview with SIC, he declared that "the country is so rotten with corruption, impunity and banditry that we would need three Salazars to set it straight."[52] While insisting that he is "a democrat by nature", the invocation of Salazar as a moral solution to the regime's alleged decay illustrates the normalisation of authoritarian memory through the language of moral regeneration. By intertwining the promise of a "Fourth Republic" with the figure of the dictator who inherited the ashes of the First, Chega seems to reframe authoritarian nostalgia as patriotic common sense, sometimes even using the Salazarist motto of "Deus, Pátria, Família" [God, Fatherland, and Family] for propaganda purposes.

Vox's vision of history: turning the negative into positive

The last education law approved in Spain in 2020 and the Law of Democratic Memory of 2022 have sparked controversy, affecting education

um-terco-dos-portugueses-sente-nostalgia-colonial-os-imperios-deixam-uma-grande-marca/452322/.

50 Bruno Madeira, "A intervenção cultural como estratégia de assalto ao poder das direitas radicais portuguesas (1976-2019)," in *Novas e Velhas Extrema-Direitas*, coord. Cecília Honório and João Mineiro (Lisbon: Edições Parsifal, 2021), 153-156.

51 Alexandre R. Malhado, *Dias de Raiva. Os Segredos da Ascensão de André Ventura* (Lisbon: Objectiva, 2023).

52 Miguel Pereira Santos, "Ventura diz que 'eram precisos três Salazares para pôr Portugal na ordem'," *Observador*, 24 October 2025, https://observador.pt/2025/10/24/ventura-diz-que-eram-precisos-tres-salazares-para-por-portugal-na-ordem/.

and provoking accusations that they indoctrinate Spanish students by promoting a negative view of Spanish history, undermining their national pride.[53] To counter this, some sectors of Spanish society propose reframing the negative and promoting an interpretation of Spanish national history that enables Spaniards to be "proud" of their past. For this purpose, history education should emphasise the lives and deeds of the significant figures who defended Spain.[54] As stated in their 2018 programme, Vox proposed an integral plan to protect national identity and to promote and disseminate knowledge of Spain's contributions to civilisation and universal history, with particular attention to the deeds of national heroes.

Turning the negative into positive means promoting national identity by defending national history. One of the fundamental milestones in this positive national history is the *Reconquista* and the fight against Islam, which are often connected to anti-immigration discourses. The *Reconquista* is widely regarded as both the expulsion of Muslim invaders from Spain and the subsequent unification of the nation, linking it to national, traditional, and Catholic values.[55] This discourse has also been present in other conservative spheres,[56] but Vox has stood out

53 A key feature of the Spanish government is its decentralisation and the division of powers between the central government and the various autonomous communities, which have the authority to enact regulations regarding certain general laws of the central government within their geographical jurisdiction. This is the education case, in which some autonomous communities, governed by the PP with support from Vox, have sought to limit the impact – considered negative – of central government legislation. Something similar has also occurred in the realm of historical memory: in some autonomous communities governed by the aforementioned parties, corresponding legislation –known as "Laws of Concord" – has been passed, seeking to limit the effects of the Law on Democratic Memory approved by the Spanish government. This was the case, for example, in the autonomous communities of Castile-León, Aragon, Cantabria, Extremadura, Murcia, and Valencia. Due to space constraints, only state-level legislation is analysed here, although it is necessary to note this limitation to illustrate the complexity and heterogeneity of the subject under study.

54 A broader account of the historical events highlighted by the positive meant promoting national identity through this party can be found in David Barreira, "Los 10 episodios favoritos de Vox" and "Limpiar la Leyenda Negra".

55 Marcos García Rey, "Vox y la Reconquista en las elecciones: «Don Pelayo era un tío con dos huevos»," *El Confidencial*, 12 April 2019, https://www.elconfidencial.com/cultura/2019-04-12/vox-reconquista-andalus-historia-desproposito_1938810/.

56 Alejandro García-Sanjuan, "Rejecting al-Andalus, exalting the Reconquista: historical memory in contemporary Spain," *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 10, n.º 1 (2018): 127-145; and Alejandro García-Sanjuan, "Weaponising historical knowledge. The notion of Reconquista in Spanish nationalism," *Imago Temporis: Medium Aevum*, XIV (2020): 133-162.

most in its use to justify the defence of Spanish unity and its rejection of Islam. Some of the historical events that this party has chosen to defend its patriotic historical discourse are the Battle of Covadonga (722), the Battle of Navas de Tolosa (1212), and the surrender of Granada (1492).[57]

This "narrative of greatness" continued with the promotion of an imperial mythology based on the civilising and Christianising mission of the Spanish empire, and with the emergence of the idea of *Hispanidad*, created to counter the humiliation of colonial loss and to unite the people of Spain and Spanish-speaking Latin American countries. It is also an attempt to counter the "Black Legend" regarding the Spanish colonial empire. In this context, the historical figure of the Basque military Blas de Lezo has acquired a special relevance for Vox, for whom this figure represents all the values of *Hispanidad*; Blas de Lezo's personal sacrifice for the defence of the Spanish empire and against the Catalans in the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714) were seen as specially relevant in 2017, when Catalonia seemed to situate itself against Spain.[58] In a symbolic gesture, Vox launched its 2019 general election campaign precisely at the statue dedicated to Blas de Lezo in Madrid. Again, a journalistic chronicle of this event noted that every detail that serves to valorise Spain's history is being overseen to "rethink the history of Spain and turn into positive what for centuries has been presented as negative".[59]

Finally, the War of Independence against France, fought between 1808 and 1814, constitutes another milestone in Spanish history, particularly for its emphasis on the Spanish people's participation. This

57 David Barreira, "Los 10 episodios favoritos de Vox" and "Limpiar la Leyenda Negra."

58 Gonzalo Ugidos, "Blas de Lezo: el héroe español del que Vox quiere hacer una película," *El Mundo*, 3 February 2019, https://www.elmundo.es/cronica/2019/02/03/5c56cf9821efa0370b8b4622.html.

59 Gregoria Caro, "De Lezo a Covadonga: las gestas heroicas que marcan la campaña de Vox," *ABC*, 13 April 2019, https://www.abc.es/elecciones/elecciones-generales/abci-elecciones-generales-2019-lezo-covadonga-gestas-heroicas-marcan-campana-201904130224_noticia.html?ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.abc.es%2Felecciones%2Felecciones-generales%2Fabci-elecciones-generales-2019-lezo-covadonga-gestas-heroicas-marcan-campana-201904130224_noticia.html.

war is seen as an occasion to unite Spaniards against the foreign enemy, and the role of the Spanish people and their demands is admired in contrast to the attitudes of Spanish rulers, military commanders, or even the Crown, which, in many cases, was perceived as shameful. This interpretation of events promotes a populist message that Vox extends to the current Spanish political situation.

Another example of this trend, aimed at restoring a more positive view of the Spanish past, is the tendency to whitewash the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) by offering a more favourable interpretation. According to this view, people did not live as badly under the dictatorship, and not everything was so negative. The often-repeated slogan "people lived better under Franco" exemplifies this reinterpretation of the recent Spanish past. Moreover, the outbreak of the Civil War is presented as a consequence of the radicalisation of the republican government, which compelled specific political sectors to adopt measures to prevent Spain's revolutionary drift. According to this view, the massacres committed by republican forces in different parts of Spain, as in Madrid in 1936, constituted the clearest example of the radicalisation of the republicans.[60]

The above-mentioned view of Spanish history is reminiscent of that promoted by the Franco regime during the dictatorship. It suggests that the stigma that has characterised Francoist interpretations of history since the Transition to democracy is disappearing.[61] There is now less hesitation about recovering the view of Spanish history that connects with *nacionalcatolicismo* [national Catholicism]. An analysis of parliamentary debates since 2020 clearly reveals Vox's views on Spanish history: the Spanish nation and its history are placed at the forefront of current political debates, where a critical view of contem-

60 Ander Delgado, "Sobre la enseñanza del pasado democrático en España. Alumnado, polarización y redes sociales," *REIDICS. Revista de Investigación en Didáctica de las Ciencias Sociales* 14, n.º 1 (2024): 102-118, https://doi.org/10.17398/2531-0968.14.06.

61 Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas, S*uspiros de España. El nacionalismo español, 1808-2018* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2018), 91.

porary history education, perceived as opposed to the interests of the Spanish nation, prevails.

First, they argue that, in some autonomous communities, history is manipulated to undermine Spanish identity among youth. Conservative thinking regards the lack of a common history education for all Spanish students as a serious threat to Spanish unity, and, in regions of Spain with alternative national identities, the history taught in classrooms, according to this view, is falsified and constitutes a menace to the development of a common identity. For them, specific autonomous communities "indoctrinate students with separatist aims, offering a biased and incomplete view of history, which implies an unacceptable lack of rigour"; moreover, history teaching in those communities would be using education as a weapon for secession and to break Spain, they allege.[62]

Secondly, even if this accusation of indoctrination was initially directed at autonomous communities where alternative national identities existed, both Vox and PP extended it to the entire Spanish educational system after the 2022 Law of Democratic Memory was approved by the PSOE-led government. They denounced that this legislation served the indoctrination of Spaniards, to manipulate their opinions about the democratic past of the country and to defend the political interests of the government, which was accused of using and manipulating history to protect their own leftist ideology against right-wing political forces. The government was accused of imposing a manipulated "official" interpretation of history on all Spanish citizens, selecting those parts of history that best served its aims and concealing those that did not. Furthermore, they accused the government of manipulating school history, promoting a manichean and sectarian view of the past to indoctrinate youth through public education ideologically.

Members of Vox affirmed that "the purpose of this propaganda is to inculcate in the minds of the Spanish people the equation according

62 Congreso de los Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados. Pleno y Diputación Permanente*, 17 June 2020, 49; and Congreso de los Diputados, *Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales. Congreso de los Diputados*, 20 October 2020, 8.

to which «left» equals and will always equate to democracy and freedom, and «right» to fascism and repression".[63] For them, this implied that Spanish fundamental liberties were endangered by the imposition of an official history described as totalitarian, intended to attack the freedom of thought of the Spanish people.

Along these lines, Vox's discourse argued one last point: against this manipulated historical narrative that did not present all the truth about the different periods of the Spanish past, they defended the freedom of citizens to establish their own view of the past, hence bringing up the "truth" against a partial and manipulated "official history". One of the freedoms that was being limited with these educational and legislative decisions was the freedom of expression and thought, the freedom to have their own view about history, different from the "official" narrative imposed by the government.

In the case of the Law of Democratic Memory, Vox members denounced the legislation for limiting freedom of thought that allows citizens to "come to their own conclusions about history, based on their own research and their own readings".[64] This idea of the freedom to establish one's own version of history is repeated in several of Vox's speeches, suggesting that it is part of the political arguments used by the party's parliamentary representatives. As a representative of this party pointed out in the amendments to the Law of Democratic Memory, "this law is totalitarian because it imposes an official view of history, an extraordinarily sectarian view. This is typical of totalitarian regimes. In free countries, the government allows citizens to reach their own conclusions about history, based on their own research and

63 Congreso de los Diputados, *Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales. Congreso de los Diputados*, 14 December 2021, 15. See also Congreso de los Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados. Comisiones*, 4 July 2022, 13.

64 Congreso de los Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados. Comisiones*, 4 July 2022, 13. The leader of Vox, Santiago Abascal, already mentioned this idea in a book of interviews with party leaders published in 2019. There, he pointed out that "Vox does not have a position on the Civil War and Franco's regime, but it does have a position on freedom: we Spaniards have the right to interpret our past as we please, without the Left having to come and tell us all how to interpret it." See Mateo Ballester Rodríguez, "Vox y el uso de la historia," 7.

readings. Therefore, the very concept of democratic memory is an oxymoron; it is contradictory". An idea that is defined more clearly later on: "To establish, by decree, a partisan interpretation of history and to impose it on society using the state's coercive instruments is typical of despots. In free countries, political power does not arrogate to itself historical omniscience but allows citizens to reach their own conclusions about historical issues through their own readings, experiences, and conversations."[65] To sum up, this last argument reveals a misconception of freedom and a complete ignorance of historical discipline. Moreover, it implies a challenge to the epistemic authority of professional historiography.

A fatherland of heroes and a land of saints?

Public debates surrounding education, historical memory, and national identity have become a recurring feature of Chega's political discourse. In the absence of major legislative reforms comparable to those adopted in Spain, Chega has nevertheless consistently framed the Portuguese educational system as a central site of ideological imposition. As stated in the programme presented for the legislative elections of 18 May 2025, *Saving Portugal* argues that "schools and universities should become genuine spaces of freedom and learning, rather than factories of indoctrination." Furthermore, "it is imperative that education be freed from any ideological burden, and that both school and academic environments cease to function as strongholds of «woke» excesses and left-wing agendas."[66]

Through parliamentary interventions, media appearances, and digital communication, the party portrays schools and teachers as decisive agents. In 2019, the political programme advocated the "aboli-

65 Congreso de los Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados. Comisiones*, 4 July 2022, 13. See also Congreso de los Diputados, *Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados. Pleno y Diputación Permanente*, 14 October 2021, 62.

66 Chega, *Programa Eleitoral 2025: Salvar Portugal* (Lisbon: Chega, 2025), 20, https://pub-acfa34005415427bb560174ca37a9c6f.r2.dev/Programa%20Eleitoral%20CHEGA%20-%202025.pdf.

tion of the Ministry of Education", and that the "state would retain an arbitral, regulatory, and inspection function, exercised by a body under the authority of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers" in a system of school vouchers under municipal supervision.[67] In this sense, according to identical radical right views from other foreign parties, it also proposed "an educational system accessible to all, oriented toward the consolidation of Judeo-Christian cultural and civilizational values, without interference from currents aligned with so-called «gender ideology» or the so-called «cultural Marxism»."[68]

In later documents from 2021 and 2024, the "gender ideology" and "woke" mantras were intertwined with literary and historical assumptions: "With rare exceptions, nothing is being taught, since a culture of easygoingness prevails. There is no desire to traumatise children with the *Iliad* or with the history of Europe and the European nations to which we belong."[69] Furthermore, to capitalise on long-standing professional discontent within the teaching profession, inherited from trade union struggles of the last decades (including the years of Troika Intervention of 2011 to 2015 in the wake of the sovereign debt crisis), Chega denounces the "facilitism in public schools" of "unruly and parasitic students"[70] and extols the ideas of "respect and hierarchy" clearly echoing the (dictatorship) past.

At all the events, the previously mentioned document, *Saving Portugal*, is more explicit, with no fewer than 107 occurrences of the word "teaching" and 29 of the word "history". Thus, targeting immigration, this official document advocates amending the nationality law, emphasising that applicants should "know the history of our country

67 Chega, *Programa Político 2019: Legislativas de 2019* (Lisbon: Chega, 2019), 30, https://raquelcardeiravarela.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/programa_polc38dtico_2019_chega-2.pdf.

68 Chega, *Programa Político 2019*, 43.

69 José António Ribeiro de Carvalho, "Moção temática: pela meritocracia e pelo fim da ideologia no ensino: construir uma escola de qualidade", VI Convenção Nacional do Partido Chega, Viana do Castelo, 12-14 January 2024, 4, https://partidochega.pt/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Partido-Chega_20240110_172341_m10.pdf.

70 Chega, *Reforma do Ensino Básico e Secundário. Seis Princípios Fundamentais 2021 (approved at the VII National Council)*. Sagres, 2021.

and identify themselves with Portuguese culture and traditions." That is to say, the knowledge of "a nation nearly 900 years old, [that] has a history written with honour, loyalty and sacrifice by its military personnel."[71] The document also emphasises the current and growing dispute over memory[72] when it states the need for "develop national programmes to celebrate the founding dates of the nation and other important events and figures, always with the involvement of historians who will participate in defining cultural events." A second idea comes from the suggestion of promoting "travelling exhibitions and educational materials for schools" could "reinforce knowledge of Portuguese history among new generations."[73]

These trends are crucial in the party's *Weltanschauung*. It is well known that, from time to time, specific right-wing sectors attempt to re-signify the 5 October (1910) national holiday of the "Implantation of the Republic" as 5 October (1143), the day of the Treaty of Zamora, one of the key moments in the process toward Portuguese Independence.[74]

Other feuds centred on 10 June, "Portugal, Camões, and Portuguese Communities Day", which, during the *Estado Novo*, was symbolically celebrated as the "Day of the Race". For instance, in 2025 in Lagos, during an official speech, the writer Lídia Jorge sought to balance imperial nostalgia with a renewed awareness of Portuguese involvement in the slave trade. In her words: "Lagos exposes the memory of this remorse. It shows how, on a scorching hot day in August 1444, 235 individuals captured off the coast of Mauritania landed here

71 Chega, *Programa Eleitoral 2025: Salvar Portugal*, 20, 109.

72 Miguel Cardina, *O Atrito da Memória. Colonialismo, Guerra e Descolonização no Portugal Contemporâneo* (Lisbon: Tinta-da-china, 2023).

73 Chega, *Programa Eleitoral 2025: Salvar Portugal*, 256. It also stressed the need to "strengthen public funding for national cinema, directing resources towards national film productions that value Portuguese identity and history, encouraging the development of national cinema and ensuring thematic pluralism."

74 "1143" is also the name of a Portuguese ultranationalist and neo-Nazi organisation associated with hate speech, xenophobic activism, and extremist violence. See Global Project against Hate and Extremism, "Grupo 1143: A Far Right Football Club Revived as Anti-Muslim Activists," *Global Extremism*, 30 January 2024, https://globalextremism.org/post/grupo-1143-far-right-football-club-revived-as-anti-muslim-activists/.

and how they were divided up and by whom."[75] This speech sparked a strong reaction by the leader of Chega, who retorted that "we [the Portuguese] cannot go down the dangerous path of saying that we are to blame for the slavery that existed in the world."[76] He extended this criticism to contemporary debates on reparations: "Any government that tries to make Portugal revise its history, blaming itself or seeking to return anything to the former colonies, whatever it may be, will fall in Parliament the very next day."[77]

This public confrontation over the memory of slavery is directly connected to current debates about how slavery and the Atlantic slave trade are addressed in schools and textbooks. In the last 15 years, research by scholars and analyses in the press underline that Portuguese curricula still tend to present slavery in fragmented or euphemistic ways, emphasising maritime expansion or commercial networks while minimising racialised violence and the systemic nature of enslavement.[78] The Lagos episode thus exposes the political dimensions of history and the expanding space for ideological and educational debates, showing how disputes over national identity and responsibility shape what is taught, or omitted, in classrooms. Note that in a parliamentary intervention in 2023, the then MP from Chega and history teacher Gabriel Mithá Ribeiro stated that "social thinking is poisoned by prejudices and falsehoods about slavery, racism, or «colonialism»".[79] Almost the same could be deduced from an article published in the party's official

75 Lídia Jorge, *Discurso de Lídia Jorge nas Comemorações de 10 de Junho em 2025 em Lagos*. Cátedra Lídia Jorge, https://www.unige.ch/catedra-lidia-jorge/index.php/eventos/passados/discurso-de-lidia-jorge-nas-comemoracoes-do-10-de-junho-de-2025-em-lagos.

76 "André Ventura critica discurso de Lídia Jorge no 10 de Junho," *SIC Notícias*, 10 June 2025, https://sicnoticias.pt/pais/2025-06-10-video-andre-ventura-critica-discurso-de-lidia-jorge-no-10-de-junho-55fc8a0b.

77 "André Ventura critica discurso de Lídia Jorge no 10 de Junho", *SIC Notícias*.

78 Rosa Cabecinhas, "A memória da nação na era planetária: passados e futuros em debate," *Análise Social* 58, n.º 4 (2023): 766-788, https://doi.org/10.31447/as00032573.2023249.07. The Ministry of Education centrally defines the Portuguese national curriculum and is guided by the *Aprendizagens Essenciais* [Essential Learnings], homologated in 2018. This document did not introduce a radical revision of historical content.

79 Gabriel Mithá Ribeiro, "Intervention in Plenary Session of the Assembly of the Republic (Portugal) – 13 January 2023," *Diário da Assembleia da República*, XV Legislature, 1st Legislative Session, 14 January 2023, 8.

newspaper, which used a "whataboutism" argument about other enslavers around the world across different historical eras.[80]

In any case, the most significant disputes regarding national holidays occurred during the 50th anniversary of the Carnation Revolution. Whether emulating or opposing, the truth is that the right-wing sectors presented another 25th (November 1975) as a return to the "purity" of 25 April 1974, celebrating a military uprising that is still the subject of intense debate among historians.[81] In fact, 25 November 1975 remains clouded by notorious ambiguities, largely due to divergent military testimony. The conflict did not pit civilians against soldiers, but rather rival factions within the Armed Forces. In this sense, historian Irene Pimentel rejects the political attempt, especially on the right, to equate 25 November with 25 April, viewing this as a strategy to relativise the Revolution's foundational meaning, namely, the overthrow of a right-wing dictatorship. Textbooks have increasingly highlighted this issue.[82] In recent editions, they even introduced the final phase of the revolution by asking (the students), "why was 25 November 1975 important?[83]"

Chega also (re)evaluated other aspects of late colonialism. For instance, "school textbooks encourage children to discuss racism while omitting that white people were expelled from Africa and killed for being white."[84] These views, as might be expected, are echoed in both the official newspaper and in the parliamentary debates. In this way, a 2023 debate revolved around the Wiriyamu Massacre committed by the colonial army in Mozambique in 1972, with a Chega MP remembering other massacres committed by African liberation movements that "far

80 Rudolfo Ventura, "Portugal e a escravatura. Parte I," *Folha Nacional*, 18 May 2024, https://folhanacional.pt/2024/05/18/portugal-e-a-escravatura-parte-1/.

81 Maria Inácia Rezola, *Revolução. A Construção da Democracia Portuguesa* (Alfragide: D. Quixote, 2025), 13-18.

82 Sérgio Neto and Clara Isabel Serrano, "Reconstruir-se dos escombros do fascismo. A Revolução dos Cravos nos manuais portugueses de história do 9.º ano (1975-2023)", *European Public & Social Innovation Review* 10 (2025):1-21, https://doi.org/10.31637/epsir-2025-1181.

83 Cláudia Amaral, Bárbara Alves, Tiago Tadeu and Olanda Vilaça, *História sob Investigação – 9.º Ano* (Porto: Porto Editora, 2023), 177.

84 Miguel Carvalho, *Por Dentro do Chega*, 493.

exceed, in number and brutality, that of Wiriyamu".[85] Or, based on the claim that the Minister of Culture "will return heritage to the former Portuguese colonies", a dramatic and all-catch argument by the party leader followed: "I would like to express here, sincerely and from the bottom of my heart, this appeal to the millions of *retornados*, to the ex-combatants and to those who today, reading this news, thought «how betrayed my family and I have been»: we are still here and we will be your voice".[86]

Regarding other "crucial" historical periods, such as the Middle Ages, the party has cultivated a mythographic repertoire in which religious, monarchical, and imperial symbols are merged through deliberate anachronisms and hybrid visual codes.[87] These gestures have been theatrically staged, most visibly during the 2021 and 2024 political campaigns, when the leader André Ventura knelt in prayer before the tomb of the first Portuguese king, Afonso Henriques, in Coimbra's Santa Cruz monastery, a ritual of political sacralisation broadcast by national media.

Several cartoons were widely circulated on social media. For instance, one compares the two leaders with a map of Portugal superimposing the *Reconquista* and recent Chega electoral results, with the following caption: "What sets these men apart? Afonso conquered the country from north to south; André is conquering the country from south to north." The other cartoon shows King Afonso Henriques rising from his tomb in shock upon seeing contemporary multicultural Portugal, and thereby invoking a mythologised, ethnically homogeneous Middle Ages to frame diversity as a threat to national identity, a strate-

85 Pedro Pessanha, "Intervention in Plenary Session of the Assembly of the Republic (Portugal) – 13 January 2023," *Diário da Assembleia da República*, XV Legislature, 1st Legislative Session, 27 January 2023, 19-20.

86 André Ventura "Intervention in Plenary Session of the Assembly of the Republic (Portugal) – 13 January 2023," *Diário da Assembleia da República*, XV Legislature, 1st Legislative Session, 26 November 2022, 136.

87 Afonso Silva, "El legado revolucionario y su reinterpretación por la nueva extrema derecha nacionalista en Portugal," *Millars Espai i Història* 59 (2025): 107-135, https://doi.org/10.6035/Millars.2025.59.5.

gy widely documented in studies of medievalism and the radical right.[88] Against the backdrop of a stylised church topped by the (republican) national flag, the king, known as "the conqueror", regrets: "This can't be happening." Essentially, this design mirrored the process already carried out in France by the radical right, which, departing from the Battle of Tours (732), tried to associate the past and the present to attack immigration.

In light of these accounts and elements, it is possible to conclude that Portuguese history is subject to a clear revisionist approach, even when official educational documents or textbooks remain somewhat immune to such overt radicalism. On the one hand, the party did not come to power, despite its growing parliamentary representation. As stated by the above-quoted Mithá Ribeiro: "Programs cannot be changed overnight, but there is a lack of open academic debate, even about the very idea of the *Estado Novo*. There is a tendency to erase the positive and overemphasise the negative."[89] On the other hand, as we have seen, many Portuguese people still look back on the imperial past with pride, which means that the radical right can easily engage with them in a non-formal "educational" approach, so to speak. Directing its arguments towards the "shadows" that might obscure or challenge the "good" memory, Chega is following the trend of *Estado Novo* regime when recounting a "story" of a "fatherland of heroes and a land of saints".[90]

Moreover, when the mentioned journalist Miguel Carvalho referred in an interview that "I am concerned about the resolve with which Chega's narrative is already entering schools,"[91] dedicating the

88 Daniel Wollenberg, *Medieval Imagery in Today's Politics*, Past Imperfect series (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2018), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvg251d4; Pedro Martins and Alicia Miguelez Cavero, "Os usos da Idade Média no discurso político atual," *Público*, 4 February 2021, https://www.publico.pt/2021/02/04/opiniao/noticia/usos-idade-media-discurso-politico-atual-1948960.

89 Miguel Carvalho, *Por Dentro do Chega*, 493.

90 António Severo and Francisco Marinho, *Heróis de Portugal. 3.ª Classe* (Porto: Livraria Figueirinhas, 1964), 44.

91 Miguel Carvalho, "Preocupa-me a força com que a narrativa do Chega já entra nas escolas," *TSF – A Escuta do Mundo*, 22 December 2025, https://www.tsf.pt/cultura/artigo/miguel-carvalho-preocupa-me-que-a-narrativa-do-chega-ja-entre-nas-escolas/18032758.

last chapter of his book to "today's and tomorrow's voters" – meaning younger people –, we can perceive that the radicalisation is more a matter of social media, where a genuine digital "counter-magisterium" operates. In a word, a decentralised assemblage of influencers, memes, TikTok clips and partisan platforms that reframe history through emotional immediacy rather than analytical depth.[92] In this ecosystem, Chega's message circulates far more rapidly than any curricular reform, shaping the imaginaries of younger audiences in ways that formal education can hardly counterbalance, while simultaneously fostering a sense of cultural grievance that resonates strongly with emerging generations of voters.[93]

Even without formal curriculum changes, teachers and researchers alike are already reporting a growing circulation of radical right narratives in secondary-school classrooms.[94] In some contexts, students openly endorse imperial nostalgia, question the legitimacy of decolonisation, or frame democracy as a fragile and excessive system. Even when inquiry-based pedagogies are used, teachers frequently observe a selective approach to evidence, with some students validating only the sources that confirm their preferred version of the past.[95]

Conclusions

The analysis of Vox and Chega presented in this article demonstrates that the contemporary radical right in Spain and Portugal has transformed the past into a privileged arena of political and epistemic struggle. While the direct impact of these narratives on curricula and class-

92 Alice Marwick and Rebecca Lewis, *Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online* (New York: Data & Society Research Institute, 2017); Whitney Phillips, *The Oxygen of Amplification: Better Practices for Reporting on Extremists, Antagonists, and Manipulators Online* (New York: Data & Society Research Institute, 2018).

93 Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015).

94 Ricardo Soares, Pedro Ferreira and Carla Malafaia, "Pode a educação atenuar o crescimento do populismo e da extrema-direita? O papel da escolaridade e das experiências educacionais na construção da democracia," *Educação, Sociedade e Cultura* 69 (2024): 1-20, https://doi.org/10.24840/esc.vi69.1127.

95 Miguel Carvalho, *Por Dentro do Chega*, 712.

room practices has so far remained limited, their growing visibility in political, media, and digital spheres reveals an ongoing contest over the social meaning of history and its role in democratic societies. The construction of affectively charged alternative historical imaginaries, most of them grounded on the historical essentialist views of the two Iberian dictatorships, has enabled both parties in a quest to mobilise segments of the population who perceive themselves as culturally displaced or politically unrepresented. In this sense, history is less a field of factual knowledge than a symbolic reservoir through which anxieties about identity, sovereignty, and belonging are expressed and politically instrumentalised.

Despite their different trajectories and institutional contexts, Vox and Chega share a broad set of mnemonic strategies that can be understood as the (re)creation of selected "parallel pasts" designed to legitimise "parallel presents". Both movements recover episodes central to traditional nationalist canons – the medieval *Reconquista*, the imperial expansions of the early modern period, and a somewhat benign authoritarian 20th century – while downplaying episodes of civil conflict, dictatorship and colonial violence, and systemic racism. These selective chronologies produce simplified temporal hierarchies in which the nation is depicted as historically endangered and perpetually in need of redemption, following the thesis of the "palingenetic myth". They also share repertoires across the global radical right, in which historical nostalgia functions as a cultural template for constructing narratives of rise and fall, and decline and regeneration, targeting the external "other" or the internal "woke".

The mechanism does not differ significantly between the two Iberian cases. In Spain, the struggle over the past is essentially institutionalised. Legislative debates over education laws and memory policies, parliamentary interventions, and judicial disputes regarding the Law of Democratic Memory place the state at the centre of the conflict. Vox situates itself as the defender of a threatened national unity, framing school curricula as contaminated by separatist agendas or by left-wing interpretations that, in its view, distort the Franco period, the Civil

War, and the imperial legacy. If it is indeed true that Chega has not primarily operated through legislative reform but through symbolic and mediatised arenas, focusing on parliamentary rhetoric, televised interventions, electoral performances, and digital platforms, the same can be said of Vox. It is worth remembering Santiago Abascal's 2019 video on horseback, highlighting the *Reconquista*. In any case, the main difference lies in Spain's decentralised educational system, which allows autonomous communities with greater Vox influence to exercise greater control over education.

In both national contexts, the radical right portrays history (education) as an ideological tool manipulated by elites (teachers, academics, and cultural institutions), and accuses it of promoting narratives of shame, weakening patriotism, and eroding national cohesion. This discourse rarely engages with concrete curricular frameworks or with historiographical debates. Instead, it mobilises broad moral generalisations: young people are allegedly being indoctrinated; schools are said to humiliate the nation; the democratic period is portrayed as one of decay and cultural relativism. In both countries, the radical right asserts a "freedom to interpret history" that frames expert knowledge as bias and personal or emotional truth as authenticity. This stance reflects not only a political project but also an epistemic posture aligned with broader contemporary trends: the erosion of trust in scientific authority, observable also in climate-change denial, anti-vaccination movements, and other forms of scientific negationism.

Going back to our initial reflections on uses of the past and history education, from a disciplinary standpoint, the Iberian cases confirm that the study of history in school cannot be isolated from the epistemological foundations of academic history. Research in history education points to a growing awareness of the need to promote a history teaching that introduces epistemological conceptions and the methods of the historian in the classroom.[96] As the examples of uses and manip-

96 For more information on Spanish research on history education, see: Gómez Carrasco and Rodríguez Pérez, *La historia como materia formativa*. See also: Jesús Domínguez Castillo, *Pensamiento histórico y evaluación de competencias* (Barcelona: Graó, 2015), and Jorge Sáiz

ulation of history presented in previous pages show, there is a need to reinforce the dialogue between historiographical research and classroom practice, ensuring that students are not only familiar with core content but also with the methods through which historians construct, debate, and revise interpretations. History is not a free exercise in imaginative reconstruction, nor is it a repository of comforting myths. It is a scientific discipline governed by standards of evidence, argumentation, and critique. When public actors claim that all interpretations are equally valid, or that history is merely a matter of opinion, they undermine the very conditions that make historical understanding possible. In this respect, the challenge posed by Vox and Chega is not only political but epistemic. The contrast between the methodological rigour of historical research and the speculative claims made by media commentators, political influencers, or television pundits becomes increasingly stark, as much of the public discourse on the past is shaped by non-experts whose authority derives from visibility rather than methodological expertise.

In this sense, against a backdrop of historical acceleration and increasing presence of AI, this study tried to demonstrate how history, history education, and history teachers may, to some extent, involuntarily find themselves at the centre of a political and ideological struggle. Although they teach history in compliance with national and European guidelines, such as the Reference Framework of Competences for a Democratic Culture,[97] adopting an approach that seeks to move beyond the nationalist essentialism of the 19th and 20th centuries, the reality is that they are facing a resurgence of the old, exclusionary founding myths.

Addressing these questions requires interdisciplinary collaboration among historians, educators, sociologists, political scientists, and

and Ramón López-Facal, "Competencias y narrativas históricas: el pensamiento histórico de estudiantes y futuros profesores españoles de educación secundaria," *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, 1, n.º 52 (2015): 87-101.

97 Council of Europe, *Reference Framework of Competences for a Democratic Culture* (Paris: Council of Europe Publishing, 2018).

digital media scholars. It also demands comparative frameworks beyond Iberia to examine how radical right movements across Europe and the Americas mobilise similar repertoires of historical symbolism and memory politics. The analysis offered here lays the groundwork for a broader research agenda, including classroom ethnographies, textbook studies, and comparative analyses of student reception, which may illuminate how young people navigate competing visions of the past in an increasingly polarised public sphere.

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Kwangmin Pyo

Changing History towards Crisis Narrative – On Far Right's Historical Revisionism in South Korea

This article investigates the December 2024 South Korean martial law crisis to elucidate how far-right forces weaponize historical revisionism to construct a "crisis narrative". Against South Korea's democratization, the far-right intellectual "New Right" movement emerged to counter liberal and progressive paradigms by justifying past authoritarian dictatorships and framing the liberalization of society as an existential threat to the nation. Through a discourse analysis of primary sources, specifically far-right historical writings, publications, and manifestos, this study demonstrates how this historical revisionism operates not merely as a distortion of historical facts, but as a political project fabricating an illusion of impending national ruin. This narrative systematically stigmatizes democratic institutions and civil society as internal enemies, instigating a de facto civil war mindset, which perceives liberal parties, labor unions, feminists, LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, immigrants, and refugees, etc. as enemies threatening the nation, thereby justifying violence against them. Furthermore, by examining primary sources directly related to the 2024 crisis, including President Yoon Suk-yeol's martial law decrees, public addresses, and extreme-right agitators' speeches, this article reveals how this exact crisis narrative actively functioned to legitimize the unconstitutional suspension of the rule of law and incite violent riots.
Keywords: far right; historical revisionism; crisis narrative; 2024 South Korean martial law crisis.

Transformando a história numa narrativa de crise – sobre o revisionismo histórico da extrema-direita na Coreia do Sul

Este artigo investiga a crise provocada pela imposição da lei marcial na Coreia do Sul em dezembro de 2024 para elucidar as formas como as forças de extrema-direita usam o revisionismo histórico como arma para construir uma "narrativa de crise". Em contraposição à democratização da Coreia do Sul, o movimento intelectual de extrema-direita "Nova Direita" emergiu para combater paradigmas liberais e progressistas, justificando as ditaduras do passado e enquadrando a liberalização da so-

ciedade como uma ameaça existencial à nação. Através de uma análise de discurso de fontes primárias, especificamente discursos historiográficos, publicações e manifestos de extrema-direita, este estudo demonstra como esse revisionismo histórico opera não apenas como uma mera distorção dos factos históricos, mas também como um projeto político que fabrica a ilusão de uma ruína nacional iminente. Esta narrativa estigmatiza sistematicamente as instituições democráticas e a sociedade civil como inimigos internos, instigando uma mentalidade de guerra civil de facto, que entende partidos liberais, sindicatos, feministas, a comunidade LGBTQ+, pessoas com deficiência, imigrantes, refugiados, etc., como inimigos que ameaçam a nação, justificando assim a violência contra estes. Além disso, ao examinar fontes primárias diretamente relacionadas com a crise de 2024, incluindo os decretos de lei marcial do Presidente Yoon Suk-yeol, pronunciamentos públicos e discursos de agitadores de extrema-direita, este artigo revela o modo como essa exata narrativa de crise funcionou ativamente para legitimar a suspensão inconstitucional do Estado de direito e incitar revoltas violentas.
Palavras-chave: extrema-direita; revisionismo histórico; narrativa de crise; crise da lei marcial sul-coreana de 2024.

Changing History towards Crisis Narrative – On Far Right's Historical Revisionism in South Korea

Kwangmin Pyo*

1. Theme and Methodology

At 23:00 on December 3, 2024, martial law was abruptly declared in Seoul, South Korea—a nation hitherto recognized as a stable, consolidated democracy. The martial law was issued in the absence of any exigencies; there were no North Korean incursions, no terrorist attacks, and no other symptoms of disorder, such as civil war, civil unrest, or riot. South Korea was not in a state that necessitated an extraordinary suspension of the legal order. The then-President, Yoon Suk-yeol, deployed specialized military units and police apparatuses through this illegal martial decree, aiming to seize and neutralize the National Assembly. However, spearheaded by opposition lawmakers, the legislature successfully rescinded the decree within two and a half hours. Ten days thereafter, the National Assembly passed an impeachment motion against Yoon; the threat to democracy posed by the exec-

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utive appeared to have reached a conclusion. Yet, grave developments continued to unfold: the mobilization of far-right forces dedicated to shielding the impeached President and subverting the legislative body. Tens of thousands gathered weekly in Seoul and other major cities, condemning the impeachment, vilifying the opposition, and demanding the restoration of the executive. In the early hours of January 19, 2025, approximately 300 pro-Yoon partisans stormed a local district court, culminating in a violent riot and assaults on law enforcement officers. In a country with a successfully established democracy, we were forced to witness this violent surge of far-right forces.

Through the case of South Korea, this article contends that far-right historical revisionism goes beyond the mere distortion of individual historical facts, attempting instead to instigate a *de facto* civil war through the formation of a "crisis narrative." The re-election of Donald Trump and the ascendancy of far-right factions in Europe made evident the global resurgence of far-right politics. In the South Korean context, the peril posed by far-right actors has historically been perceived as marginal, owing to the inability of these forces to secure a stable foothold within institutionalized party systems. Nevertheless, the exigencies following President Yoon Suk-yeol's martial law declaration on December 3, 2024 attest to the necessity of acknowledging the critical threat posed by far-right actors in South Korea. While South Korea has often been viewed as a benchmark for democratic consolidation, successfully navigating the transition from economic development to political democratization, the violent eruptions of far-right activities reveal the instability of the democratic transition. Accordingly, this article seeks to fundamentally elucidate these violent activities, which have emerged as a profound threat to South Korean democracy, by interrogating them through the crisis narrative based on the far-right's historical revisionism.

The task of clearly defining the political entity of the "far-right" remains a highly contentious challenge due to its conceptual indeterminacy.[1] The meanings and specific behaviors embodied by the far-right

1 Not only is there an absence of a general definition for the far right, but the very terminology

manifest in vastly different ways depending on the historical context and social conditions of each country. Therefore, this study does not undertake the grand discursive task of universally defining the identity of global far-right forces. Rather, the analytical scope of this research is confined to examining how far-right actors instrumentalize history to form a specific crisis narrative, thereby justifying the escalation of extreme political polarization into a *de facto* civil war. Despite such diverse characteristics and aspects manifested across different countries and contexts, global far-right forces generally exhibit a distinct tendency to rely entirely on historical revisionism to present their own alternative historical narratives.[2] While the specific historical periods and events targeted by far-right factions in various countries are highly diverse, the underlying structural logic remains remarkably consistent. It functions as an instrument of anti-pluralism, aiming to deprive minorities of their rights, enforce an oppressive cultural homogeneity, and ultimately erode the democratic order based on pluralism. For South Korean far-right forces as well, historical revisionism serves as a crucial source of legitimacy, through which they perceive themselves as the sole guardians of national identity.

To empirically elucidate how historical revisionism confers legitimacy upon far-right measures, this research adopts a discourse analysis methodology based on concrete primary sources, such as writings and speeches. Through this approach, it examines how South Korean far-right actors established a crisis narrative via historical revisionism. This article is grounded in the perspective that the historical revision-

is also being interchangeably used in diverse ways. For example, in the German-speaking world, terms such as right-wing radicalism (*Rechtsradikalismus*), right-wing fundamentalism (*Rechtsfundamentalismus*), neo-Nazism (*Neo-Nazismus*), neo-Fascism (*Neo-Faschismus*), right-wing and national populism (*Rechts- und Nationalpopulismus*), and national conservatism (*Nationalkonservatismus*) are being utilized as terms to designate far-right forces. In this paper, the common term 'far-right' is used to refer to them. Cf. Wolfgang Kowalsky and Wolfgang Schroeder, "Rechtsextremismus – Begriff, Methode, Analyse," in *Rechtsextremismus. Einfuhrung und Forschungsbilanz*, ed. Wolfgang Kowalsky and Wolfgang Schroeder (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1994), 9.

2 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-García (New York: Routledge, 2021), 7-9.

ism of South Korean far-right forces goes beyond the mere distortion or manipulation of individual historical facts, constituting instead a powerful crisis narrative. As Paul Ricoeur posited that memories of the past are "incorporated into the formation of identity"[3] through the medium of narrative, the historical narratives of the far-right function as a political evaluation of the past, molding the identity of specific groups. The core driving force propelling the crisis narrative they have constructed follows the logic of the "state of exception (*Ausnahmezustand*)." For Schmitt, the state of exception signifies an "extreme state of emergency" and a situation "endangering the existence of the state," upon which the very survival of the nation hinges.[4] This article adopts the view that historical revisionism utilizes this concept of the state of exception to construct a crisis narrative wherein the state is threatened by internal and external enemies. Methodologically, therefore, this study employs a bipartite approach. First, it analyzes historical revisionist primary sources to examine how they construct a crisis narrative, deriving the macro-structure of far-right cognition through micro-textual analysis. Utilizing this narrative as an analytical lens, it then investigates primary sources documenting the martial law crisis to elucidate its inherent violent realities. Ultimately, this empirically reveals how weaponized historical memories and exclusionary politics subvert the constitutional order.

2. Literature Review: Historical Revisionism of the Far Right

As the ascendancy of far-right parties in contemporary global politics has become increasingly pronounced, scholarly inquiry into far-right formations has proliferated; accordingly, diverse analyses regarding the perception, distortion, and instrumentalization of history by far-right forces have been put forward. Research on far-right historical discourses has primarily been concerned with the critique of the denial

3 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 84-85.

4 Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie: Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2009), 13-14.

and distortion of historical facts concerning World War II – specifically, so-called "Holocaust denial."[5] Most far-right parties established in post-war Europe maintained direct or indirect lineages with the fascist regimes of the early twentieth century, and their constituencies were similarly characterized by a nostalgic yearning for the totalitarian regimes. Consequently, their historical revisionism manifested as an apologia for Nazi Germany and fascism, as well as the negation of war crimes such as the genocide of Jews; their primary strategy involved an attempt to reinterpret historical records by enumerating counter-examples. Accordingly, research regarding far-right historical discourse has predominantly focused on elucidating historical facts and truths through empirical source materials or re-establishing a critical historical discourse against totalitarianism.[6]

As the strategies of far-right forces subsequently shifted from direct historical negation toward appealing to the ethno-national sentiments of the masses, research on far-right historical revisionism has increasingly focused on the *weaponization of history*. This phenomenon is understood as both a political strategy and a method of mass mobilization designed to garner public support. Notably, Ruth Wodak, who developed the "Discourse-Historical Approach" for analyzing far-right parties, demonstrated through the analysis of their speeches that these groups claim to defend a homogeneous national identity and a (non-existent) mythical homeland.[7] Furthermore, studies examining the memory politics of the far-right critique their strategy of downplaying the oppressive elements of past fascist or imperialist eras while selectively

5 Roger Eatwell, "Holocaust Denial: A Study in Propaganda Technique," in *Neo-Fascism in Europe*, ed. Luciano Cheles, Ronnie Ferguson and Michalina Vaughan (London: Longman, 1991); Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: The Free Press, 1993).

6 Richard J. Evans, *Lying About Hitler: History, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Robert Jan van Pelt, *The Case for Auschwitz: Evidence from the Irving Trial* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

7 Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism* (London: Routledge, 2001); Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, "The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)," in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (London: Sage, 2009); Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015).

highlighting administrative achievements, such as the maintenance of public order.[8] Additionally, other research has critically explored how the far right establishes an exclusive national identity through historical distortion—a political strategy utilized to frame themselves as the true inheritors of the nation's traditional values and national identity.[9]

Due to the distinct historical context of its formation, the historical revisionism of the South Korean far-right diverges from its Western counterparts, which primarily focus on discourses of racism and imperialism. Studies examining far-right historical revisionism in South Korea tend to focus on its role as a core mechanism that triggers the so-called "history wars," thereby severely exacerbating the ideological polarization of South Korean politics.[10] Consequently, South Korean scholarship generally characterizes the far right's historical revisionism not merely as a matter of academic divergence in interpreting the past, but rather as a deliberate political project aimed at acquiring power and securing political hegemony. Exemplifying this perspective are studies that trace the origins of far-right historical revisionism to the "New Right" movement. Emerging in the early 2000s, this movement represented an attempt to construct a new ideological foundation for political victory amidst the conservative bloc's successive electoral defeats and mounting sense of political crisis.[11] Recent empirical studies have further demonstrated that historical revisionism functions as a

8 Stefan Couperus and Pier Domenico Tortola, "Right-wing populism's (ab)use of the past in Italy and the Netherlands," *Debats. Revista de Cultura, Poder i Societat* 4, n.º 2 (2019): 105–118, https://doi.org/10.28939/iam.debats-en.2019-9.

9 Hans-Georg Betz and Carol Johnson, "Against the Current – Stemming the Tide: The Nostalgic Ideology of the Contemporary Radical Populist Right," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, n.º 3 (2004): 311–327, https://doi.org/10.1080/1356931042000263546; Stefan Couperus, Pier Domenico Tortola and Lars Rensmann, "Memory Politics of the Far Right in Europe," *European Politics and Society* 24, n.º 4 (2023): 435–444, https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2022.2058757.

10 Jeongin Kim, *The History Wars: The Battle to Interpret the Past* [in Korean] (Chaegsesang, 2016); Seuk-ryule Hong, "Rethinking History Wars in South Korea" [in Korean], *Critical Review of History* 128 (2019): 302–325, http://dx.doi.org/10.38080/crh.2019.08.128.302.

11 Hyug Baeg Im, "Korea's New Right: Background and Prospects" [in Korean], *Kwanhoon Journal* 93 (2004): 157–169; Jaeho Jeon, "A Study on the Ideological Character of Korean Conservatism in the 2000s: With a Focus on the New Right" [in Korean], *Journal of Contemporary Politics* 7, n.º 1 (2014): 165–193; Ji Yun Lee, "Changes in Korean Conservatism since the 2000s: Focusing on the Historical Narrative of Edmund Burke and Korean New Right" [in Korean], *The Korean Review of Political Thought* 25, n.º 1 (2019): 95–124, http://dx.doi.org/10.37248/krpt.2019.05.25.1.95.

potent mechanism for political mobilization, capable of inciting the masses and precipitating far-right collective action.[12] Furthermore, it has also been noted that the vanguard of this political project is occupied by right-wing intellectuals—including conservative academics and journalists.[13]

While previous studies have largely confined their focus to how far-right forces utilize historical revisionism as a mere expansionary strategy, this article delves deeper into the crisis narrative constructed by such revisionism. In other words, it is this crisis narrative that breathes life into far-right historical revisionism, endowing it with the political efficacy required to actively mobilize the masses. Furthermore, this research analyzes the South Korean far-right as an empirical case study to demonstrate how this crisis narrative is utilized to justify violent mobilization. The far-right strategy of garnering public support by disseminating the perception that the homeland is imperiled by internal and external threats has been widely discussed through the lens of Carl Schmitt's concept of the state of exception.[14] Drawing on these studies, the current article argues that far-right forces have adopted the proliferation of a crisis narrative—provided by historical revisionism—as the primary conduit for spreading the perception that the nation is in a state of exception and under existential threat.

12 In-Jeong Hwang, "Support Bases of the Far-Right in South Korea and Their Political Implications" [in Korean], *The Journal of Political Science & Communication* 27, n.º 2 (2024): 127–162, http://dx.doi.org/10.15617/psc.2024.6.30.2.127; Myunghee Lee, "Protectors of Liberal Democracy or Defenders of Past Authoritarianism?: Authoritarian Legacies, Collective Identity, and the Far-right Protest in South Korea," *Democratization* 31, n.º 3 (2024): 638–658, https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2023.2301330.

13 Myungji Yang, "The Specter of the Past: Reconstructing Conservative Historical Memory in South Korea," *Politics & Society* 49, n.º 3 (2021): 337–362, https://doi.org/10.1177/00323292211033082; Myungji Yang, "Camouflaged Extremism: Authoritarian Legacies and the Far Right in South Korea," *Critical Asian Studies* 57, n.º 3 (2025): 392–412, https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2025.2525507.

14 Salomi Boukala, "Far-right Discourse as Legitimacy? Analysing Political Rhetoric on the "Migration Issue" in Greece," *Studies in Communication Sciences* 21, n.º 2 (2021): 1–13, https://doi.org/10.24434/j.scoms.2021.02.014; Valur Ingimundarson and Sveinn Jóhannesson (eds.), *Liberal Disorder, States of Exception, and Populist Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021); Oliver Schmidtke, "The 'Will of the People': The Populist Challenge to Democracy in the Name of Popular Sovereignty," *Social & Legal Studies* 32, n.º 6 (2023): 911–929, https://doi.org/10.1177/09646639231153124; Roberta A. Adams, *Trumpism, Carl Schmitt and the Threat of Anti-liberalism in the United States: The Political Thought of Donald Trump and Trumpism* (Lanham and London: Lexington Books, 2024).

3. Path to Democratization in South Korea: A Historical Sketch

Since an understanding of South Korean politics is essential for grasping the origins and structure of far-right historical revisionism, this article first provides an overview of the trajectory of modern South Korean contemporary politics. The ruling regimes and major political events since the foundation of the Republic are as follows:

< South Korean Presidents and Administrations >

Year	President	Ruling Party	Regime Attribute
1948 - 1960	Syngman Rhee	Liberal Party	Authoritarian
1960	April 19 Revolution		
1960 - 1961 (Parliamentary System)	John Myeon Jang (Prime Minister)	Democratic Party	Liberal
1961	May 16th Coup d'État		
1963 - 1979	Park Chung-hee	Democratic Republican Party	Authoritarian
1980 - 1988	Chun Doo-hwan	Democratic Justice Party	Authoritarian
1987	June Democracy Movement		
1988 - 1993	Roh Tae-woo	Democratic Liberal Party	Conservative
1993 - 1998	Kim Young-sam	Democratic Liberal Party → New Korea Party	Conservative
1998 - 2003	Kim Dae-jung	National Congress for New Politics → Millennium Democratic Party	Liberal
2003 - 2008	Roh Moo-hyun	Millennium Democratic Party → Open Our Party	Liberal
2008 - 2013	Lee Myung-bak	Grand National Party → Saenuri Party	Conservative
2013 - 2017	Park Geun-hye	Saenuri Party	Conservative
2017	Impeachment of President Park Geun-hye		
2017 - 2022	Moon Jae-in	Democratic Party of Korea	Liberal

2022 - 2025	Yoon Suk-yeol	People Power Party	Conservative
2025	Impeachment of President Yoon Suk-yeol		
2025 -	Lee Jae-myung	Democratic Party of Korea	Liberal

South Korea's modern political history was forged through a turbulent process of colonial subjugation, war, and ensuing long-term dictatorships. Although independent political systems had persisted on the Korean Peninsula for about five millennia, the Joseon Dynasty, the final kingdom, failed in its modernization and was relegated to a colony by Japan in 1910. With Japan's defeat in the Pacific War in 1945, the peninsula achieved independence, yet it was immediately bifurcated into North and South due to the onset of the Cold War. Within the global Cold War confrontation, the division between North and South precipitated the Korean War in 1950; this large-scale conflict, a crystallization of Cold War hostilities, did not merely devastate the peninsula during its three-year duration but also functioned to legitimize the subsequent dictatorial regimes. The horrific experience of the war inscribed an existential dread and a potent "Red Complex"[15] within South Korean society.[16] Syngman Rhee and his inner circle of former pro-Japanese collaborators defined communism as an "absolute evil," purging his political adversaries by labeling them as "pro-communist" and establishing an authoritarian system by suppressing civic resistance.

Although the Rhee government was ousted by a civil revolution in 1960, a year later in 1961, military personnel led by Park Chung-hee staged a coup d'état under the banner of anti-communism to establish a military dictatorial regime. Following Park Chung-hee's assassination in 1979, the military regime of Chun Doo-hwan, which emerged through another coup, similarly foregrounded anti-communism to stigmatize democratic demands as anti-state activities, thoroughly crushing the

15 South Korean expression for the extreme fear and disgust of communism.

16 Dong-choon Kim, *War and Society – What Did the Korean War Mean to Us?* [in Korean] (Seoul: Dolbegae, 2006), 74–75.

fundamental rights of citizens. Thus, South Korean authoritarian governments branded those critical of the administration as communists or leftists intent on destroying society, persecuting them in the name of national security and liberal democracy.[17] Anti-communism became a substantive norm of dominance that presided over the constitution, serving as a powerful justification for dictatorship and human rights violations. Under the pretext of protecting the state from North Korean threats, authoritarian regimes suppressed fundamental democratic rights. Anti-communism, over decades, thus established the fundamental ontological foundation of South Korean politics.

South Korea's democratization established a macro-narrative of instituting democracy through civic resistance, thereby overcoming the anti-communist dictatorship. The trajectory of South Korean democratization stands as one of the most dynamic manifestations of Samuel Huntington's third wave of democratization. As Huntington posited, the emergence of a middle class facilitated by economic development catalyzed escalating demands for democracy, culminating in a process of gradual democratization mediated by compromise between pro-democracy contingencies and the military dictatorial apparatus.[18] Consequently, the 1987 constitutional revision and the inauguration of direct presidential elections propelled the democratic advance, and in the 1992 presidential election, Kim Young-sam, a civilian, not from the military, was elected president. In 1997, with the election of Kim Dae-jung—a long-time leader of the pro-democracy movement—as president, the culture of military dictatorship weakened throughout society, and democratic lifestyles began to spread. This democratization process enabled a reinterpretation of modern Korean politics as a realization of democracy authored by the citizenry. The democratization process is concentrated and articulated within the Preamble of the Constitution, which was revised in 1987 following mass civic demonstrations:

17 Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 82.

18 Samuel P. Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," *The Journal of Democracy* 2, n.º 2 (1991): 33–34.

> We, the people of Korea ... upholding the cause of the Provisional Republic of Korea Government born of the March 1st Independence Movement of 1919 and the democratic ideals of the April 19th Uprising of 1960 against injustice...[19]

The March 1st Movement of 1919, a mass mobilization for independence from colonial rule, holds profound significance as the first modern civic movement wherein Koreans declared themselves the sovereigns of the nation. The "democratic ideals of the April 19th Uprising" signifies the spirit of the revolution that terminated the Syngman Rhee dictatorship through civic resistance; notably, this constitution recognizes a right of resistance in the Lockean sense. Ultimately, this Preamble situates South Korea's national identity within a genealogy of resistance against imperialism and the struggle against dictatorship, grounding the post-1987 political order in a historical narrative wherein citizens, as sovereign agents, founded the state and have continuously propelled the development of democracy.

The democratic narrative inaugurated the problematic of transitional justice—the rectification of past transgressions during the authoritarian regimes. The South Korean democratic narrative officially validated the constitutive significance of civic resistance movements, encompassing not only the March 1st Movement and the April 19th Revolution enshrined in the Constitution but also the Jeju 4.3 Incident (1947–1948) and the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, as pivotal junctures in democratization. Concurrently, this narrative problematized the authoritarian regimes, which had subjugated the citizenry under the pretext of anti-communism, positioning them as a structural impediment to democratization. Such a perception led to transitional justice for liquidating the legacies of the former dictatorship through legal and political procedures. The first civilian government, led by Kim Young-sam, promoted a "Correcting History" policy that facilitated the dismantling

19 "Constitution of the Republic of Korea," Korea Legislation Research Institute, accessed May 21, 2026, https://elaw.klri.re.kr/kor_service/lawView.do?hseq=1&lang=KOR.

of colonial vestiges and the eradication of *Hanahoe*, the clandestine military faction responsible for previous coups; furthermore, by enacting special legislation regarding the Gwangju Democratization Movement, it effectuated the legal prosecution of the two former presidents, Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo, who had seized power through coup d'état. His successor, Kim Dae-jung, the preeminent pro-democracy leader often hailed as "South Korea's Mandela", established an institution to interrogate human rights violations of the dictatorial era and inaugurated the *National Human Rights Commission* to erode authoritarian legacies and advance the human rights paradigm. The subsequent Roh Moo-hyun administration further entrenched the transitional justice policy by establishing the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in 2005, which investigated civilian massacres spanning from the Japanese colonial era through the Korean War, as well as the fabrication of espionage charges and human rights transgressions perpetrated by the authoritarian regimes.[20] These policies of transitional justice served as a mechanism for unmasking the realities of sovereign violence obscured beneath the anti-communist state apparatus. By subverting the legitimacy of the dictatorial system predicated on anti-communism, these policies functioned as a project of dismantling the very foundation of the authoritarian anti-communist state.

However, the legacy of the authoritarian regime—which persisted for roughly four decades from the foundation of the Republic of Korea in 1948 to the democratization in 1987—has imprinted a profound path dependency on the South Korean political landscape. Anti-communism and the state-led developmental dictatorship forged during this era functioned as the core ideologies defining South Korean society. More-

20 For specific details on South Korea's policies for reckoning with the past, refer to the following works. Jong-Chul Ahn, "Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations' human rights and past history settlement policies" [in Korean], *Naeil-eul yeoneun yeogsa* 37 (2009): 39–59; Byung-ook Ahn, "The present conditions and tasks of past settlement in Korea" [in Korean], *Critical Review of History* 93 (2010): 32–60. Chan-Ho Eom, "Settlement of Past History and Healing of History" [in Korean], *Studies in Humanities* 33 (2012): 263–290; Thomas Cornelis Adriaenssens, "'Settling the Past' in South Korea: The Legacy of Authoritarianism, Compensation Law, and a Hierarchy of Victimhood," *Korea Legislation Research Institute Journal of Law and Legislation* 14, n.º 1 (2024): 191–243.

over, the democratization catalyzed by civil society's resistance in 1987 did not entail the complete collapse of the old regime or a revolutionary upheaval; rather, it was a transition achieved through compromise between the old authoritarian elite and the pro-democracy forces. This "pacted" democratization provided the authoritarian forces with an institutional space for survival, allowing them to evade political purges and persist as legitimate political parties. Under these circumstances, the former authoritarian forces did not remain a monolithic bloc in the post-democratization era, but rather fragmented across a diverse political spectrum. Mainstream conservatives partially acknowledged the historical errors of the past authoritarian regime and embraced procedural democracy as the new rules of the game. By distancing themselves both ideologically and organizationally from the far right, they transformed into moderate conservatives championing the free-market economy and the ROK-U.S. alliance. Consequently, they successfully secured power by winning voter mandates within the democratic electoral framework. Although these conservative forces originated as the successors of the military dictatorship, they acquired democratic legitimacy as institutional parties by recurrently winning the presidency through democratic procedures. As the mainstream conservatives achieved success within the institutional establishment, certain extremist factions that rejected democratic pluralism and clung to past ideologies were marginalized into minor splinter groups within the conservative bloc, ultimately consolidating into the contemporary far-right forces.

4. Crisis Narrative of South Korean Far-Right Historical Revisionism

It was amidst this historical transition, characterized by democratization and the fragmentation of conservative forces, that far-right historical revisionism emerged. Certain factions of the conservative right perceived the proliferation of the democratic historical narrative as an existential crisis of the state; some radical conservative actors identified the liberal forces exercising socio-political hegemony as 'enemies' who must be removed for the sake of national security. In the 2000s,

conservative right-wing intellectuals formed the New Right movement, contending that the democratization process had precipitated a crisis of national identity.[21] They established far-right publishing houses, inaugurated new academic journals, and engineered networks with civic organizations to fortify their ideological position. Through these maneuvers, they introduced a retrogressive historical perspective that repudiated the democratic narrative of contemporary history. The New Right perceives South Korean society as existing in a state of perpetual civil war against communist forces; within this imaginary, they delineate not only external North Korea but also internal actors—the Democratic Party (liberals), labor unions, leftist intellectuals, journalists, etc.—as "enemies" to be eradicated. Thus, maintaining an unyielding anti-communist posture even after democratization, they endeavored to inject citizens with the fear of North Korea, communism, and potential war, claiming that the left might subvert the liberal democratic order of South Korea.[22] The New Right concentrated their critique on the historical field to stigmatize democratization as an existential threat to national identity, thereby constructing the bedrock for subsequent far-right historical revisionism. This assault on the democratic historical narrative intensified during the successive conservative administrations of Lee Myung-bak (2008) and Park Geun-hye (2013), precipitating what has been termed the history wars, which exacerbated the ideological polarization of South Korean politics.[23]

The New Right's offensive strategy against democratization focused on heightening a sense of crisis, propagating the narrative that "the nation is heading in the wrong direction." While emphasizing that past dictatorial regimes contributed to South Korea's development by

21 Haegu Chŏng, "A Critical Evaluation of New Right's Perceptions of the Realities" [in Korean], *Critical Review of History* 76 (2006): 219–220; Sungik Yang, "An Old Right in New Bottles: State without Nation in South Korean New Right Historiography," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 80, n.º 4 (2021): 897–898, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911821001443.

22 Myungji Yang, "Camouflaged Extremism," 398–399.

23 Kim, *The History Wars*, 17–19; Hong, "Rethinking History Wars in South Korea," 302–303; Jeongin Kim, "History as a Political Weapon, and Five Phases of the So-called "History War"" [in Korean], *The Paek-San Hakpo*, 117 (2020): 13–18, http://dx.doi.org/10.52557/tpsh.2020.117.5; Jong-Pil Yoon, "Recent history wars in South Korea," *Paedagogica Historica* 56, n.º 4 (2020): 562–563, https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2019.1590425.

achieving the milestones of state-building and economic growth, the New Right advanced the logic that the democratization process itself was driving the nation into a crisis. The crystallization of this crisis narrative into a popular political slogan produced the term "Lost Decade." Originally coined in Japan to denote prolonged economic stagnation, this expression was thoroughly repurposed into a political framework upon its introduction to South Korea. The then-opposition Grand National Party (GNP) and the conservative media stigmatized the decade of Democratic Party's rule from 1998 to 2008—spanning the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations—as a 'failed decade.' In doing so, they propagated the perception that these liberal governments had mismanaged state affairs, thereby plunging the nation into a comprehensive crisis.

The following column, authored in 2007 by a far-right journalist, explicitly demonstrates this perspective, which disparages the post-democratization political landscape as a state of crisis:

> ... For South Korea as well, the past ten years have been a lost era. ... Passing through the Kim Dae-jung era, which was marred by excessive handouts to North Korea and rampant power corruption, and the Roh Moo-hyun era, which squandered four years on balance and equality while turning a blind eye to growth, every sector of our society has remained at a standstill. The brunt of this damage was borne by the socially vulnerable, including powerless ordinary citizens and recent graduates. Meanwhile, the very cliques who pay lip service to reform and innovation are busy throwing exclusive banquets for themselves. ... China is in hot pursuit, and Japan has reignited its engine. How will we survive sandwiched between nations that are several times larger than South Korea? We must turn the tide of this lost decade. Just as a person cannot grow taller if they miss their crucial growth spurt, the same holds true for a nation. The next ten years represent South Korea's final oppor-

> tunity. If we squander this time, we will inevitably be relegated to a third-rate nation...[24]

Armed with this political framing, the conservative party achieved an unprecedented streak of electoral victories, beginning with the 4th Local Elections in 2006 and extending through the 17th Presidential Election in 2007 and the 18th General Election in 2008. They successfully recaptured power by securing an overwhelming margin in vote share against the incumbent Democratic Party.

Alongside their critique of the Democratic Party's tenure, New Right intellectuals devoted themselves to a full-scale historical revisionist project aimed at justifying the former dictatorial system. The dictatorship of President Syngman Rhee, which was toppled by the democratic revolution in 1960, was rationalized as an unavoidable choice in the process of defending the state against communist threats. Under the banner of anti-communism, Rhee severely abused state violence throughout his presidency by executing not only communists but also his political opponents. *A New Understanding of Pre- and Post-Liberation History* (2006), published by New Right intellectuals, justified such civilian massacres and human rights violations as inevitable measures for state-building, as follows:

> ... Syngman Rhee certainly engaged in dictatorship and corruption. Events like the National Defense Corps Incident [25] are inexcusable. I am not trying to deny that, and I think we can simply leave that particular yardstick as it is. However, there are many other important yardsticks as well. My point is that we should acknowledge these other yardsticks and adopt a broad-

24 Chang-geuk Moon, "The Lost 10 Years" [in Korean], *JoongAng Ilbo*, May 28, 2007, https://www.joongang.co.kr/article/2742063. The author was nominated for prime minister by President Park Geun-hye in 2014, but withdrew his nomination following public controversy over his historical revisionist views.

25 Amidst the Korean War (December 1950 - February 1951), an estimated 50,000 to 120,000 conscripts succumbed to malnutrition and frostbite as a direct consequence of systemic corruption.

> er perspective. ... I hope we can examine various factors from a broad, comparative historical perspective: how other places around the world striving to build a nation at that time went about it, how other countries that underwent war dealt with it, and just how inherently violent the very process of nation-building really is. ...[26]

The argument that the state violence perpetrated by the Syngman Rhee administration should be condoned—given that such violence inherently operates during the nation-building process—and that Rhee's monumental contribution to founding the republic must be acknowledged, constitutes one of the New Right's core strategies for justifying dictatorship. Likewise, another dictator, Park Chung-hee, is considered the "father of modernization" who spearheaded industrialization. In *The Origins and Future of Korean Democracy: Conservatives Lead the Way* (2011), published by other New Right intellectuals, the following logic is presented:

> ... This study pointed out that for a considerable period following the foundation of the state, the conservative industrialization forces maintained an authoritarian regime that suppressed human rights and opposition forces. At the same time, however, it also emphasized that these conservative industrialization forces, acting as the leading actors of state affairs, successfully established the republic and cultivated South Korea into a community with a distinct identity. Furthermore, through the fortification of the national security system and the successful execution of an industrial revolution, they laid the indispensable

26 Jihyang Park, Cheol Kim, Ilyoung Kim and Younghoon Yi, "Dialogue: New Horizons in Pre- and Post-Liberation History" [in Korean], in *A New Understanding of Pre- and Post-Liberation History*, vol. 2, ed. Jihyang Park, Cheol Kim, Ilyoung Kim and Younghoon Yi (Chaeksesang, 2006), 673–674.

> foundation and framework necessary for South Korea to develop into a mature modern nation-state. ... [27]

Thus, far-right historical revisionism asserts that the Republic of Korea was founded upon the leader's grand decision to rescue the nation rather than upon civic resistance, thereby validating the power abuse of authoritarian regimes as an inevitable and legitimate ruling act for the foundation and defense of the state. Through these maneuvers, they repudiate the democratic consensus, human rights paradigms, and pluralistic principles, seeking a regression toward an authoritarian state anchored in anti-communism.

The New Right's ideological framework for legitimizing past dictatorships does not remain confined to the past; rather, it extends into a contemporary crisis narrative positing that the existential survival of South Korea is menaced by adversaries both internal and external to the system. A quintessential text that explicitly illustrates this ideological baseline is *Liberal Democracy in South Korea and Its Enemies* (2018), co-authored by Jai-bong Ro (former Prime Minister under a conservative administration) and other far-right intellectuals. The core logic permeating this volume rests on a radical dichotomy: the premise that South Korean liberal democracy is threatened not merely by external forces but faces a perpetual threat of subversion by insidious elements operating clandestinely within the nation's constitutional order to overthrow the system. The volume also includes the 2017 founding manifesto of the "Korea Freedom Congress," a New Right organization established by the co-authors, the main tenets of which are as follows:

> Based on the historical judgment that South Korea's endeavor to secure modernity began with the political revolution of state-building, advanced through the industrial revolution of

27 Sae-jung Kim, "Conflict and Interdependence in Nation-building, Industrialization, and Democratization: Toward a Unified Historical Perception" [in Korean], in *The Origins and Future of Korean Democracy: Conservatives Lead the Way*, ed. Byeong-jik An (Sidaejeongsin, 2011), 133.

> modernization, and will ultimately be consummated through unification under liberal democracy, we hereby declare as follows:
>
> 1, As responsible intellectuals accountable to the South Korean people, we declare that we will devote all our passion and effort to advancing and fortifying the ideology of liberal democracy. We stand resolutely against the totalitarian subversive forces that – by adhering to the North Korean regime's strategy—seek to destroy our national legitimacy by misleading the political consciousness of the public through propaganda and agitation built on falsehoods.
>
> ...
>
> 6. We once again reaffirm that the liberal democratic system protects freedom by institutionalizing the ideal of national sovereignty – a process grounded in competition based on the principle of constitutional legitimacy and the representative system derived from it. Furthermore, we resolutely condemn the vulgar mindset and actions of the entire political establishment. Bereft of the civic literacy necessary to understand this foundation, the political class has abdicated its representative function; by pandering to mass political rallies orchestrated by anti-Republic of Korea forces, it is now, consciously or unconsciously, colluding in a conspiracy to subvert the system.[28]

Building upon this crisis narrative, the New Right labels critical civil society and the broader progressive bloc as 'enemies' of liberal democracy. Even prior to the 2024 martial law crisis, the far-right and New Right camps had consistently stigmatized the pan-liberal and progressive coalition—encompassing liberal parties, labor unions, civic activists, and feminists—as 'anti-state forces' or 'enemies' that repudiate the legitimacy of the state. Rather than acknowledging their political adversaries

28 Jai-bong Ro, "Declaration of the Korea Freedom Congress" [in Korean], in *Liberal Democracy in South Korea and Its Enemies*, ed. Jai-bong Ro (Book and People, 2018), 19–21.

as partners in governance or a legitimate opposition, they have framed them as a malicious faction intent on destroying the nation.

The historical revisionism and crisis narratives of the New Right, which had been taking shape since the mid-2000s, began to gain mass traction in the mid-2010s. Specifically, the catalyst for the mass proliferation of far-right historical revisionism was the mobilization against the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye (2016–2017). Weekly demonstrations involving hundreds of thousands of conservative citizens, primarily the elderly, occurred in the heart of Seoul for nearly six months to voice their opposition to the impeachment.[29] Following Park's impeachment in 2017 and the subsequent establishment of another Democratic Party administration with the election of President Moon Jae-in, two former conservative presidents, Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye, were successively imprisoned. The political downfall of these two leaders instilled an unprecedented, profound sense of existential crisis across the entire South Korean conservative bloc. This sense of political defeat, coupled with the rapid social changes spearheaded by the liberal administration at the time, further amplified the anxiety and alienation of the conservative public.[30] The liberal government and civil society promoted policies enhancing multicultural values, such as gender equality, alongside the acceptance of refugees and immigrants, and the protection of LGBTQ+ rights, and these policies provoked a strong backlash from young men.[31] For the conservative public, accus-

29 These demonstrations were referred to as "Taegeukgi rallies" (*Taegeukgi Jiphoe*), so named because participants attended while carrying the *Taegeukgi*, the national flag of South Korea. Cf. JangSoo Chae, "The Ideology of 'Taegeukgi Rally'" [in Korean], *Marxism* 15, n.º 4 (2018): 109–111, https://doi.org/10.26587/marx.15.4.201811.005; Hyunchool Lee, "Silver Generation's Counter-Movement in the Information Age: Korea's Pro-Park Rallies," *Korea Observer* 49, n.º 3 (2018): 469–471, https://doi.org/10.29152/KOIKS.2018.49.3.465; Gil-Soo Han, "Nostalgic Nationalists in South Korea: The Flag-Carriers' Struggles," in *Calculated Nationalism in Contemporary South Korea: Movements for Political and Economic Democratization in the 21st Century*, ed. Gil-Soo Han (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023), 216–217.

30 Myungji Yang, "Defending "Liberal Democracy"? Why Older South Koreans Took to the Streets against the 2016–2017 Candlelight Protests," *Mobilization: An International Journal* 25, n.º 3 (2020): 378–379, https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671X-25-3-365.

31 Mandy Mun Yee Chan, "Unveiling Gender Polarization: The Rise of Right-Wing Populism and Anti-Feminism Sentiments among Idaenam," *Korea Journal* 63, n.º 4 (2023): 230–231, https://doi.org/10.25024/kj.2023.63.4.226; Gi-Woo Roh and Hee-Joon Kim, "The Rise of the South Korean Alt-Right: The 'Silent Counter-Revolution' of Young Men," *Journal of Youth*

tomed to traditional values and a collectivist view of the state, these drastic socio-cultural shifts were perceived as the wholesale collapse of the national identity and moral foundation they had long defended. Driven to the precipice by the dual loss of political power and cultural hegemony, the conservative masses resisting these pluralistic changes were drawn into the far-right historical revisionist paradigm forged by New Right intellectuals.

The historical revisionism of the New Right framed the progressive trend of embracing diversity not merely as a policy difference, but as a threat posed by internal enemies seeking to subvert the state system. Simultaneously, it provided a rationale that glorified the era of authoritarian rule as a monumental decision for national survival and a heroic age of industrialization. For the conservative public, this ideology served as an ideological sanctuary that justified their sense of deprivation and anger. Co-opted by the New Right's historical revisionism and crisis narratives, the far-right-leaning public came to define themselves as the last patriotic warriors taking to the streets to rescue a collapsing nation, thereby forming a mass far-right bloc. Indeed, even in opinion polls conducted in 2025, after the martial law crisis had been resolved, the population classified as far-right reached 13 to 21 percent. Furthermore, it was revealed that 40 percent of conservative party supporters harbored far-right leanings.[32]

5. Legitimacy of Civil War, provided by Far Right's Crisis Narrative

The crisis narrative did not remain confined to a vague sense of anxiety; rather, it acquired persuasiveness by designating concrete and actual enemies, consequently exacerbating the political polarization of South

Studies (2025): 10, https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2025.2518949.

32 Young-jun Choi and Ji-eun Hwang, "The Far Right Rises to the Surface – Current State of the Far Right in Korean Society," *Korea Research*, published May 28, 2025, accessed May 26, 2026, https://hrcopinion.co.kr/archives/32972; Se-young Lee, "4 out of 10 People Power Party Supporters Show 'Far-Right' Leanings... 1.8 Times Higher Than the Democratic Party" [in Korean], *Hankyoreh*, September 17, 2025, https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/politics_general/1219116.html.

Korean society into a *de facto* civil war. In this context, China was perceived as an external enemy, while the Democratic Party and other progressive groups were identified as internal enemies threatening the nation. This perception amplified an aversion toward the Democratic Party and parliamentary politics as a whole, predominantly among young men in their twenties and thirties, serving as a driving force that contributed to the election of the conservative presidential candidate Yoon Suk-yeol in 2022. Furthermore, it functioned as the decisive backdrop for the far-right public to mobilize and form a massive bloc even after the 2024-2025 martial law crisis. This demonstrates that the crisis narrative did not merely remain at the level of theoretical discourse but exerted substantive political power to mobilize mass action; the crisis narrative culminated in the logic that the existing democratic system alone was inadequate to defeat the enemies threatening the state; therefore, national security and survival had to be secured foremost, even if it necessitated a suspension of the democratic order.

While anti-communism in the past was primarily directed at North Korea, as South Korea's national power came to overwhelmingly surpass the North in the twenty-first century, the fear of North Korea gradually lost its popular persuasiveness. This void was subsequently filled by China. In particular, following Xi Jinping's ascent to power, as China conspicuously pursued aggressive foreign policies—including the expansionist projection of influence through the Belt and Road Initiative, the repressive governance of Hong Kong and the Xinjiang Uyghur region, and demonstrations of military force around Taiwan and the South China Sea—the crisis narrative posited by far-right forces began to gain traction. South Korean citizens, too, experienced a massive economic blow due to the 2016 THAAD deployment and the ensuing *Han-han-ryeong*.[33] Furthermore, through a succession of events—in-

33 The 2016 THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) deployment in South Korea, designed to deter North Korean missiles, elicited severe diplomatic conflict with China. Perceiving its radar as a security threat, Beijing imposed *Han-han-ryeong* (Ban on Korean Culture)—unofficial but systematic economic sanctions strictly restricting South Korean cultural exports and tourism.

cluding the 'Northeast Project' concerning the history of Manchuria,[34] China's cultural policies attempting to subsume Kimchi and Hanbok as its subcultures, the daily damages caused by fine dust blowing from China, and the COVID-19 pandemic originating in China—public dissatisfaction and animosity toward China accumulated. Compounded by an economic sense of crisis that China was usurping South Korean technologies in core industries such as semiconductors and batteries, thereby threatening jobs, anti-China sentiment came to be regarded as a legitimate response to defend South Korean identity.[35] Far-right forces actively appropriated this public aversion and sense of crisis toward China as an instrument for expanding their political influence. Specifically, far-right YouTubers incited blind public hostility through Sinophobic content riddled with fake news and conspiracy theories. They maximized fear of China by propounding the so-called 'fraudulent election theory,' alleging that China was unofficially intervening in South Korea's cyberspace to manipulate public opinion, or mobilizing units of digital hackers to meddle in South Korean elections and rig voting results.[36] Through this process, anti-China discourse expanded beyond mere cultural aversion or economic friction into a political-level security consciousness, claiming that China—an authoritarian and communist regime—poses a direct threat to South Korea's democracy and its very national security.

Internally, animosity toward the Democratic Party and progressive forces provided the fertile ground for the growth of far-right forces. While superficially extolling American-style democracy and advocating

34 China's historiographical project (2002-2007) attempting to incorporate *Goguryeo* and *Balhae* – ancient Korean kingdoms that ruled Manchuria and the northern part of Korean peninsula – into Chinese provincial history. This provoked severe diplomatic friction with South Korea, which views these states as foundational to its national identity.

35 Jongseok Yoon, "Changing South Korean Perceptions of China since the 1992 Normalization of Diplomatic Relations: Complex Patterns of Expectation, Disillusionment, and Hostility" [in Korean], *Critical Review of History* 155 (2026): 180–183, http://dx.doi.org/10.38080/crh.2026.05.155.160.

36 Jang-Hyo Park, "A Study on the Spread of 'Xenophobia' on YouTube for Chinese" [in Korean], *The Journal of the Korea Contents Association* 23, n.º 2 (2023): 288, https://doi.org/10.5392/JKCA.2023.23.02.280; Youngdo Yun, "Conditions of Anti-China Sentiment and the Dynamics of Affect: Focusing on Post-Globalization and YouTube" [in Korean], *The Journal of Modern Chinese Literature* 110 (2025): 181–183, https://doi.org/10.46487/jmcl.2025..110.153.

the defense of liberal democracy against communism, far-right forces exhibit paradoxical behavior by harboring a strong aversion to the parliamentary system, the very foundation of democracy. This paradox stems from the fact that the 'liberal democracy' they advocate is not anchored in procedural representation or parliamentarism but rather places its emphasis on justifying the powerful leadership and sovereign decisions of a strong leader. Within their distorted cognitive framework, the legislature—dominated by the liberal and progressive Democratic Party—is stigmatized as the chief culprit driving the nation into crisis. The political correctness and feminism policies of the progressive bloc under the banner of protecting minorities and the vulnerable were perceived as a severe disadvantage and reverse discrimination by young men, who already suffered the double burden of competing with both older generations and women. Compounded by soaring real estate prices, the incompetence and hypocrisy of the Democratic administration—exposed through the Cho Kuk scandal[37] and the Incheon International Airport Corporation Crisis[38]—were viewed as having deprived them of opportunities for wealth accumulation and betrayed the core value of fairness.[39] Ultimately, the intense disillusionment and animosity toward the parliamentary politics led by the Democratic Party coalesced with the far-right's framing, which categorized the entire liberal and progressive bloc as an 'internal enemy' ruining the nation. Consequently, a regressive phenomenon emerged wherein a substantial segment of the public abandoned liberal values and procedural democracy, instead yearning for a dictatorial leadership in which power is heavily concentrated in the presidency.[40] The far-right forces gained the support of a

37 Political controversy in 2019, involving allegations of academic admissions fraud and financial irregularities by the family of Justice Minister Cho Kuk under the *Moon Jae-in* administration. It undermined the Democratic Party's moral legitimacy by exposing a perceived hypocrisy between its progressive rhetoric on equity and entrenched elite privileges.

38 Socio-political dispute triggered by the abrupt conversion of subcontracted security guards to regular status in 2020. This policy provoked fierce backlash from younger generations, highlighting deep societal tensions over meritocracy and procedural fairness.

39 Gui Young Han, "Discussion on the Conservatization of Men in Their 20s, Their History and Implications" [in Korean], *Politics & Public Opinion* 29 (2021): 194–195, https://doi.org/10.23356/ppo.2021.29..005.

40 Jin-Wook Shin, "Diagnosis and Prospects of Korean Democracy after Martial Law and

substantial portion of the public with a paradoxical claim: to defend liberal democracy, democracy itself must in practice be rejected.

Former President Yoon Suk-yeol's declaration of emergency martial law on December 3, 2024, must therefore be analyzed as more than a mere attempt to suspend the constitutional order; rather, it represents the physical explosion of the crisis narrative at the very pinnacle of state power. The inauguration of the Yoon administration (2022-2025) itself was rooted in this soil of historical revisionism. Former President Yoon captured power by stimulating regressive anti-communism and xenophobic animosity toward China, and by skillfully channeling the *ressentiment* of young men against liberal parties and labor unions into political support. Throughout its three years in power, the Yoon administration stripped the liberal bloc, including the main opposition party, of its political legitimacy by defining them as "anti-state forces," and stigmatized labor unions and civic organizations as "interest cartels." Furthermore, it thoroughly disregarded democratic and pluralistic values by maintaining a hostile stance toward the advancement of gender equality and the protection of rights for LGBTQ+ individuals, refugees, and immigrants.[41] This was, in essence, a process of constantly reproducing and reinforcing the crisis narrative that the Republic of Korea was being dismantled by the 'internal enemies' of pluralism and progressive values.

Guided by this ideological framework, the Yoon Suk-yeol administration attempted to suspend democratic constitutional procedures and establish a powerful repressive regime centered on the president. The declaration of emergency martial law executed on December 3, 2024 was the inevitable outcome of a crisis narrative that framed the normal democratic activities of the opposition bloc and civil society as

Impeachment: Focusing on Power Elites, the Far-Right Organizational Ecology, and the Party Systems" [in Korean], *Economy and Society* 147 (2025): 188, http://dx.doi.org/10.18207/criso.2025..147.164.

41 Byong-kuen Jhee, "Korea 2023: Deepening Political Conflict and the Retreat of Parliamentary Politics" [in Korean], *The Journal of Asiatic Studies* 67, n.º 1 (2024): 37–38, https://doi.org/10.31930/JAS.2024.03.67.1.9; WooJin Kang, "Reexamining the Theory of Backsliding and Crisis of the Korean Democracy – The Case of the Yoon Seok-yeol Government" [in Korean], *Economy and Society* 142 (2024): 370–372, http://dx.doi.org/10.18207/criso.2024..142.355.

a threat to national security. The martial law proclamation announced at the time reads as follows:

> Martial Law Command proclaims the following as of 11 p.m. on December 3, 2024, in order to protect liberal democracy from anti-state forces active within the free Republic of Korea and their threats to subvert the state, and to ensure public safety.
>
> 1. All political activities, including activities of the National Assembly, local councils, political parties, and political association, rallies and demonstrations, are prohibited.
>
> 2. All acts that deny or attempt to overthrow the free democratic system are prohibited. The dissemination of fake news, manipulation of public opinion, and false propaganda are prohibited....[42]

As such, this proclamation clearly reveals the far right's crisis narrative that 'anti-state forces' are operating clandestinely within the nation, making extralegal martial law inevitable to eradicate them. Following the martial law declaration, this crisis narrative repeatedly appeared in the five public addresses delivered by Yoon Suk-yeol to the nation. Notably, the key contents of his address given on December 12, 2024 are as follows:

> ... The National Assembly, dominated by the giant opposition party, has become not the bedrock of liberal democracy, but a monster that destroys the liberal democratic constitutional order. ... As such, the Republic of Korea is now in a state where national affairs are paralyzed and social order is disrupted by the parliamentary dictatorship and tyranny of the giant opposition party, rendering the normal functioning of the executive and judicial branches impossible. ... Will it not become a coun-

42 "Full text of martial law decree," *Yonhap News Agency*, accessed May 28, 2026, https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20241204001100320.

> try where spies run rampant, drugs ruin our future generations, and organized crime syndicates run amok? At all costs, we must prevent the very forces and criminal groups that have thus far spearheaded the paralysis of state affairs and the subversion of the constitutional order from seizing control of the government and threatening the future of the Republic of Korea. I will fight to the very end. ... [43]

Yoon's address urgently asserts that South Korea faces an existential crisis orchestrated by enemies both internal and external. Naturally, because the actual situation in South Korea during the winter of 2024 was stable, the vast majority of citizens did not subscribe to this crisis narrative. Consequently, the National Assembly was able to pass the impeachment against President Yoon (Dec. 14, 2024). Nevertheless, the far right's crisis narrative did not dissipate. Far-right politicians, intellectuals, and their sympathizers did not view the martial law declaration, a blatant violation of the Constitution, as an illegal act; rather, they actively supported it, perceiving it as an inevitable and sovereign decision to restore national identity.

The crisis narrative forged by historical revisionism was amplified by far-right agitators known as the 'asphalt right-wing,' culminating in a riot on January 19, 2025, when far-right supporters, enraged by the issuance of an arrest warrant for former President Yoon Suk-yeol, stormed the Seoul Western District Court. In South Korean politics, the term asphalt right-wing refers to a faction of conservative activists who prioritize street protests, public rallies, and mass demonstrations over traditional legislative or parliamentary politics. This movement is most prominently associated with Pastor Jeon Kwang-hoon, the head of the Sarang Jeil Church. For over two decades, Jeon has been the leading figure of this faction, effectively mobilizing his supporters onto the streets of Seoul. Opposing Yoon's impeachment, Pastor Jeon has

43 Suk-yeol Yoon, "Address to the Nation" [in Korean], spoken December 12, 2024, https://www.korea.kr/briefing/speechView.do?newsId=132037302, accessed May 28, 2026.

relentlessly incited the masses through online and offline rallies, ceaselessly invoking the "national right of resistance." The right of resistance is the ultimate right of citizens to employ all available means, including physical force, to defend their rights and freedoms when state authority infringes upon or dismantles the fundamental democratic order. Echoing the far right's crisis narrative, the argument posits that because the Republic of Korea is besieged by internal and external crises, this right of resistance must be invoked to restore national security. The core arguments he advanced while proclaiming the right of resistance immediately following Yoon's impeachment are as follows:

> First, ... we declare the impeachment of President Yoon Suk-yeol fundamentally null and void.
>
> Second, invoking the national right of resistance, an authority transcending the Constitution, we declare the immediate reinstatement of President Yoon Suk-yeol, the Prime Minister, and the Cabinet.
>
> ...
>
> Fourth, we declare the dismantling of the National Election Commission for orchestrating fraudulent elections, the dissolution of the National Assembly elected through illegal elections, and the holding of new elections within three months.
>
> ...
>
> Seventh, we declare the complete eradication of the Jusapa (pro-North Korean communist) forces, including the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions and the National Union of Media Workers, which have been hijacked by spies.
>
> ...
>
> Ninth, we declare that the Yoon administration must immediately dismiss the incompetent and those who resisted martial law, replacing them with individuals faithful to the founding spirit of President Syngman Rhee, who established the Repub-

> lic of Korea, and the industrialization spirit of President Park Chung-hee. ... [44]

As such, the far right's claim to invoke the right of resistance aimed to justify martial law in accordance with their crisis narrative, and to legitimize violence against opposing forces. Indeed, this agitation materialized into an unprecedented act of terrorism on January 19, 2025, when ca. 300 far-right supporters occupied the Seoul Western District Court for three hours.[45] The rioters, shouting the "right of resistance" instilled in them by Pastor Jeon, vandalized court property and assaulted police officers. Subsequent police investigations into the approximately 150 individuals arrested revealed that Pastor Jeon's remarks on the right of resistance served as the core criminal motive and catalyst for their actions. Consequently, this crisis led to Pastor Jeon's arrest on charges of inciting rebellion and orchestrating the riot. Although he stood trial, he has not ceased his incitement of civil war, continuing to insist that "only the right of resistance can set the country right."[46] For the far-right forces, consumed by a fabricated fear that the liberal bloc, including labor unions and civic groups, is colluding with the Chinese Communist Party to sell out the country, the attack on the judiciary was not a mere protest, but a 'holy war for national salvation' and a 'civil war' requiring them to do whatever it takes to rescue the state. Based on the historical legitimacy conferred by the crisis narrative of the New Right's historical revisionism, the agitation for the right of resistance led by Pastor Jeon and far-right YouTubers attempted to instigate an illusory crisis and drive the public into a violent state of civil war.

44 Kwang-won Lee, "Jeon Kwang-hoon, Chairman of the National Revolution: 'The 12-Point Gwanghwamun Declaration on National Resistance'" [in Korean], *News A*, December 28, 2024, https://www.newsa.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=323614.

45 Go-eun Park and Tae-woo Park, "'Find the Judge!': Yoon Supporters Armed with Bludgeons Storm Court in Night of Terror," *Hankyoreh*, January 20, 2025, https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/1178883.html.

46 Newsdesk, "The 'Right of National Resistance' Spreading Like a Virus... 'A Grave Crime Inciting Rebellion'" [in Korean], *MBC*, January 19, 2026, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MX7O5cf5K4o.

6. Conclusion: Beyond the Politics of Crisis Narrative

President Yoon Suk-yeol's declaration of martial law is a political event that demonstrates how the crisis narrative, based on far-right historical revisionism, can subvert the constitutional order and violently abuse state power for the illusion of restoring an anti-communist national identity. From this perspective, this article argued that the historical revisionism of the South Korean far right is not merely an academic reinterpretation of the past or the distortion of isolated facts; rather, it is a destructive political project aimed at fomenting a *de facto* civil war and intentionally derailing the democratic rule of law. Within the crisis narrative forged by these far-right forces, liberal policies, such as the advancement of democratization and the guarantee of human rights for marginalized groups like workers, LGBTQ+ individuals, and persons with disabilities, are transformed into threats that dismantle the state system. Conversely, far-right rioters destroying the constitutional order are elevated to the status of 'martyrs' and 'patriotic citizens' fighting against a national crisis. The civil war mindset, the belief that the nation will perish unless the opposition is defeated, ultimately resulted in glorifying even anti-constitutional acts of violence, such as illegal martial law declaration and the Western District Court riot, as the legitimate right of resistance exercised by patriotic citizens to rescue the system. Their paradoxical declaration to protect South Korea's liberal democracy from its enemies has, instead, spawned a fascistic rampage and a politics of hatred that threatens the very existence of democracy.

However, amid the global rise of far-right forces and the widespread threats to democracy, the South Korean case demonstrates that the collective action of citizens seeking to defend constitutional values and the democratic order can still offer hope. Immediately following the declaration of martial law, over 4,000 citizens poured out to the main gates of the National Assembly in the dead of night, halting the unconstitutional martial law troops with their bare hands. Furthermore, during the four months of rallies and protests leading up to the Constitutional Court's decision to impeach Yoon Suk-yeol, millions of citizens participated, demonstrating a resolute will to defend the

Constitution. The process of overcoming the martial law crisis, led by South Korean civil society, confirmed the democratic resilience of South Korean politics in thwarting the far right's attempts to subvert the constitutional order. The martial law crisis also proved the political capacity and agency of the citizens acting as the "*Minjung*" ('common people' in Korean). In the course of South Korea's democratization, citizens have embodied the unique subjective character of the *Minjung*, sharing a collective experience of resistance against prolonged oppression. Throughout modern and contemporary South Korean history, the *Minjung* has been the grassroots masses and the leading protagonists of progressive civil society, consistently resisting the authoritarianism and state violence of the ruling elites.[47] Through active civic participation, citizens dismantled the crisis narrative constructed by the far right to justify their violence, thereby discovering a new democratic hope against oppression. The civic solidarity that emerged during the process of overcoming the December 3 martial law crisis was not driven by the mobilization mechanisms of a specific ideological group. Rather, it was a collective action voluntarily formed by a heterogeneous majority transcending demographic backgrounds, such as generation, gender, and occupation, with the shared goal of defending the democratic constitutional order. This orientation of the *Minjung*, which seeks to embrace diversity, restore the rights of marginalized groups, and rebuild the public sphere, can serve as a crucial mechanism to dismantle the political momentum of the far right's crisis narrative, which reduces the world to a strict dichotomy of insiders as *us* and outsiders as *enemies*.

47 For the meaning and history of the concept of Minjung in South Korean politics, see Lee, *The Making of Minjung*.

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Sahil Kureshi

Cinematic Pasts, Political Presents: The Politics of Hindi Historical Films after 2014

Following the National Democratic Alliance coalition government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) coming to power in 2014, and particularly since January 2019, there has been a significant uptick in the production of historical films of a kind that can be distinguished from others. These Hindi-language feature films, 'Hindutva Historicals,' draw on historical narratives or construct politically charged visions of the past and present aligned with the ideology of the Sangh Parivar – a conglomerate of Hindu Nationalist organisations which include the BJP and is led by the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh. These films actively intervene in the construction of historical narratives by misrepresenting ideological opponents, glorifying Hindu heroes, and promoting a vision of Indian history rooted in Hindutva ideology. The article seeks to place these films within the broader historical and political context of the Sangh Parivar's project of writing Hindutva histories.
Keywords: historical film; India; Hindutva; RSS; right-wing film; film and history.

Passados cinematográficos, presentes políticos: a política dos filmes históricos em língua hindi após 2014

Na sequência da chegada ao poder, em 2014, do governo de coligação da Aliança Nacional Democrática (NDA), liderado pelo Partido Bharatiya Janata (BJP), e em particular desde janeiro de 2019, tem-se verificado um aumento significativo da produção de filmes históricos. Estas longas-metragens em língua hindi, os "Hindutva Historicals", baseiam-se em narrativas históricas ou constroem visões politicamente carregadas do passado e do presente alinhadas com a ideologia do Sangh Parivar – um conglomerado de organizações nacionalistas hindus que inclui o BJP e é liderado pelo Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh. Estes filmes intervêm ativamente na construção de narrativas históricas, deturpando os opositores ideológicos, glorificando heróis hindus e promovendo uma visão da história indiana enraizada na ideologia Hindutva. O artigo procura situar estes filmes no contexto histórico e político mais amplo do projeto do Sangh Parivar de escrever histórias Hindutva.

Palavras-chave: filme histórico; Índia; Hindutva; RSS; cinema de direita; cinema e história.

Cinematic Pasts, Political Presents: The Politics of Hindi Historical Films after 2014

Sahil Kureshi*

Introduction

Less than three years after the Lumière brothers held their Paris screenings, Georges Méliès exhibited a series of eleven short films on the recently concluded Dreyfus Affair in 1899. The production of historical films, thus, closely followed the advent of cinema. As Rosenstone notes, within the first two decades of the existence of motion pictures, films set in the past and based on historical events and characters were already a 'regular part of screen fare.'[1] Following the advent of sound, in the 1930s and 1940s, cinema, not only in Hollywood but also in the UK, France, and Italy, witnessed the widespread production of historical films, including 'biographical' and 'costume drama' subgenres. While the period immediately following the World War II is generally considered to be one of decline for historical films, from the late 1970s onwards, at least in Hollywood, historical films once again became

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1 Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, Third (London: Routledge, 2018), 11.

'popular and profitable.'[2] Similarly, in India, along with the 'mythological' and the 'devotional,' scholars have noted the 'historical' as one of the oldest genres, already significant by the early 1920s.[3] Early historicals like Manilal Joshi's *Prithvi Vallabh* (1924), V. Shantaram's *Netaji Palkar* (1927) and *Udaykaal* (1930) employed the historical genre to put forth anti-colonial or anti-communal messages.[4] The communally charged years of late colonialism witnessed the production of Rajput and Maratha historicals that were a 'heady mix of myth and history' which 'ended up reinforcing communal self-perceptions and colonial stereotypes' such as the 'myth of the martial races' and 'Muslim perfidy.'[5] Dwyer notes that there were, however, a significant number of historicals that promoted 'national integration of minorities, notably Muslims, mostly through presenting images of syncretic Mughal culture' like *Pukar* (1939), *Taj Mahal* (1941), and *Humayun* (1945).[6] This trend continued into the post-independence period with historicals of the Nehru years (1947-64) turning to the Mughal past as the discovery of the 'pre-colonial, secular, pan-Indian nation-state.'[7] These historicals were based on the Nehruvian ideas of Indian history and secularism, 'unity in diversity.'[8] While there was a sharp decline in the number of historicals produced from the late 1960s onwards, there has been a resurgence of such films since the early 2000s with films like *Asoka* (2001), *Lagaan* (2001), and *Mangal Pandey: The Rising* (2001).

Following the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition government led by the right-wing *Bharatiya Janata Party* [Indian People's

2 Marcia Landy, ed., *The Historical Film* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

3 Rachel Dwyer, *Filming the Gods: Religion and Indian Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2006), 113; Raita Merivirta, "Historical Film and Hindu-Muslim Relations in Post-Hindutva India: The Case of Jodhaa Akbar," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 33, n.º 5 (2016): 459.

4 Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen, *Islamicate Cultures of Bombay Cinema* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2009). Here 'communalism' is taken to mean an attempt at constructing religious identities and inciting ill will amongst different religious 'communities.'

5 Anirudh Deshpande, *Class, Power, and Consciousness in Indian Cinema and Television* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2009), 81.

6 Dwyer, *Filming the Gods*, 116.

7 Deshpande, *Class, Power, and Consciousness in Indian Cinema and Television*, 87.

8 Bhaskar and Allen, *Islamicate Cultures of Bombay Cinema.*

Party] (BJP) coming to power in 2014, and particularly since January 2019, there has been a significant uptick in the production of historical films of a kind that can be distinguished from others. These films, referred to here as Hindutva Historicals, either deal with historical subjects or are engaged in constructing a history of the present from the point of view of the *Sangh Parivar* [Family of Organisations] (Sangh) – a conglomerate of Hindu Nationalist organisations which include the BJP and is led by the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh [National Volunteer Corps] (RSS).

The 'critical role' of the history produced and taught by the Sangh has been noted by Tanika Sarkar who argues that the Hindu Right has been pursuing this project for over ninety years. Sarkar effectively describes the many means through which Hindutva history is created and disseminated – schools, textbooks, journals, front-organisations etc.[9] This article seeks to add Hindutva historicals to that list. The article is an attempt to inquire into the relationship of Hindutva Historicals with history and delineate their various significant textual and extra-textual elements. The article seeks to place these films within the broader historical and political context of the Sangh Parivar's project of writing Hindutva histories. The study attempts to demonstrate that these films serve as significant sites where history, cinematic form, state power, and ideological narrative converge to advance a Hindu nationalist vision of India's past and present. It must be noted, however, that while Hindutva Historicals are not limited in terms of language or platform, here the subject of study are Hindi language feature films. Thus, while the conclusions of this study might well be true for them, films made in other languages or Hindi language series released on Over-the-Top platforms do not form a part of the analysis. Finally, in attempting to establish the connections of the films with the Sangh, extra-textual elements have been utilised including *Organiser*, the organ

9 Tanika Sarkar, "How the Sangh Parivar Writes and Teaches History," in *Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism Is Changing India*, ed. Angana P. Chatterji *et al.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 151-174.

of the RSS in English, news reports, engagements with the media such as interviews, press conferences, and posts on social media.

Finally, the method followed here has been that of choosing for analysis certain more prominent and representative films that best aid in understanding different elements and politics of Hindutva Historicals. Given that it was not possible, due to the sheer volume of productions, to include an exhaustive account or analysis of all Hindi language Hindutva Historicals that have been released since 2014 in the space of this article, the author had to develop a method. The process followed by the author was to create what according to the author was an exhaustive list of Hindutva Historicals released between May 2014 and January 2025 and critically view a significant majority of those films. From these viewings the author was able to delineate the recurrent themes, conspiracies, and linkages of Hindutva Historicals and Hindutva politics that form the core of this article. It was thought prudent to pick, for analyses, two or three big budget productions and/or commercially successful films related to each historical period and sub-genre of Hindutva Historicals discussed below.

Section I: Proto-Hindutva Cinema

The Sangh Parivar

The RSS, an all-male, Hindu Nationalist group with the eventual aim of establishing a *Hindu Rashtra* (Hindu nation) was formed in 1925. According to the RSS's chief ideologue, M.S. Golwalkar, the Hindu nation was said to have always existed, the task was to revive and revitalise it.[10] This was to be done through the development of a unified Hindu identity based on the myth of a shared culture, language, and history of all Hindus while preserving caste hierarchies and the simultaneous exclusion of the Hindu Nation's 'others' – Muslims, Christians, Communists etc.[11] While many different terms have been assigned to

10 Shamsul Islam, ed., *Golwalkar's We or Our Nationhood Defined* (New Delhi: Pharos, 2017).

11 Pralay Kanungo, *RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan* (Delhi: Manohar, 2017), 127.

it, each with its distinct flavour, for the purpose of this article the political-ideological project of the Sangh is referred to as Hindutva.

Prior to independence, there existed only the RSS and an organisation of women supervised by it. The RSS was banned on 4 February 1948, five days after Gandhi's assassination. The ban was withdrawn on 12 July 1949 only after the RSS adopted a written constitution, agreed to function 'openly,' and stay limited to the 'cultural' field. Despite this agreement with the Indian government, the RSS found a way to remain present in Indian politics through the establishment of front organisations, all 'drawing their legitimacy' from the RSS,[12] collectively referred to as the *Sangh Parivar*.[13] Although 'Sangh' and 'RSS' are often used interchangeably, for the purpose of this article, when the term Sangh is used, it must be taken to mean, not only the RSS but the entire collection of organisations of which the RSS is the central authority. The Sangh has since 1951 included an electoral front – the *Bharatiya Jana Sangh* [All-India People's Union] (BJS) [1951-1977] and the BJP [1980 onwards].

Proto-Hindutva Cinema

In the immediate aftermath of the communal strife that accompanied partition and independence, the Sangh's electoral front, with its associations to communalism, remained a marginal force. While the political legitimisation of the Sangh and its electoral front can be traced to the 1970s and its participation in the JP Movement and the Janata Party experiment,[14] which included the dissolution of the BJS, it was in the

12 For a list of Sangh affiliates, see 'Annexure One: List of Organisations Created by the RSS' in Shamsul Islam, *Hindu Nationalism and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (New Delhi: Media House, 2017).

13 Walter Andersen and Shridhar Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism* (Boulder, Co.: Westview, 1987), 143.

14 The JP Movement was a political movement initiated by Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) in the mid-1970s in India. The movement was a significant factor leading to the imposition of the Emergency. In its aftermath, the **Janata Party**, formed from uniting various anti-Congress parties including the BJS, formed the central government in 1977. However, internal ideological rifts led to its disintegration by 1979. For more see Bipan Chandra, *In the Name of Democracy: JP Movement and the Emergency* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2003).

mid-1980s that the electoral rise of the Sangh truly began. Following the failure of the Janata Party, a new electoral front of the Sangh, in the form of the BJP, was established in 1980. Although it won only two seats in the 1985 Lok Sabha elections, large-scale communal mobilisations through various Sangh affiliates, especially the VHP and Bajrang Dal, particularly on the Shah Bano case, involving a Supreme Court ruling on Muslim personal law, and the *Ramjanmabhoomi* movement advocating for a temple at the site of *Babri Masjid* in Ayodhya, yielded massive electoral returns for the BJP.[15] The party won 85 seats in the 1989 elections and in the elections that followed the demolition of the Babri Masjid by mobs of Sangh supporters, the BJP won 161 seats and was able to briefly form the government. The party eventually came to power as the leader of the NDA coalition in 1999, remaining at the helm for the entire five year term.

Reflecting the shift in the polity in the late 1980s and 1990s, a similar shift has been noted by various scholars in popular cinema of the time with the production of pro-Hindutva films. Dwyer argues that it would have been 'surprising' if Hindi films 'did not manifest Hindutva ideology, just as nationalist and Nehruvian ideologies dominated earlier films.'[16] Similarly, Viswanath notes that the '90s film narratives run parallel to the changing political and social environment in India, generated by the growth and consolidation of right wing parties.'[17] *Roja*, one of the first successful films, with a different kind of villain, who could be specifically identified as Kashmiri and Muslim was contemporaneously noted as marking a shift towards Hindutva.[18] In line with this development, there was a proliferation of action-terrorism films in

15 For more see Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Shah Bano Controversy* (Bombay: Orient, 1987); A. G. Noorani, ed., *Destruction of the Babri Masjid – A National Dishonour* (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2015).

16 Rachel Dwyer, "The Saffron Screen? Hindu Nationalism and the Hindi Film," in *Religion, Media, and The Public Sphere*, ed. Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 274.

17 Gauri Viswanath, "Saffronizing the Silver Screen: The Right-Winged Nineties Films," in *Films and Feminism: Essays in Indian Cinema*, ed. Jasbir Jain and Sudha Rai (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2002), 50.

18 Rustom Bharucha, "On the Border of Fascism: Manufacture of Consent in Roja," *Economic and Political Weekly* 29, n.º 23 (1994): 1389–1395.

the 90s which had largely Hindu characters with Muslims appearing as enemies, usually to depict terrorism aided by Pakistan.[19] The promotion and representation of Hindutva ideals was not limited to the action-terrorism genre of films and can also be observed in the other popular genre of the time – the "family drama". Vishwanath views the "family drama" films of the period like *Hum Aap Ke Hai Kaun*, *Pardes*, *Aa Ab Laut Chale* etc. as carriers of right-wing ideology. In a context of globalisation and corporatisation, noted below, these films tackled the 'insidious enemy that appear[ed] in the form of cultural invasion' espousing and promoting the Sangh's worldview and claims to Hindu/ Indian cultural superiority through, what Viswanath refers to as, "romantic nativism".[20]

Along with the rapid rise of Hindutva politics, the early 1990s also witnessed large scale economic liberalisation that had impacted film production. Following on the heels of liberalisation in various sectors in the early 1990s, in 1998, the BJP-led government granted 'industry status' to film production. This made the film industry eligible for state support as well as foreign funding and financing. Ganti sees, in the granting of 'industry status,' the vested interest of the BJP as the party's support base was 'petty traders and small businessmen' who comprised the 'vast distribution, exhibition, and finance apparatus for Hindi filmmaking.'[21] Bose argues that the implications of this on the film industry were a shift towards corporatisation and the re-invention of the film industry as a global player for diasporic consumption and investment.[22] Alongside this, there were also attempts by the BJP to actively influence Hindi cinema during the 1990s. Bose notes that 'frequent meetings were held, charter of demands presented and delegations sent by the BJP' in an attempt to 'influence and sometimes coerce the industry into adopting its Hindutva agenda.' There was a

19 Viswanath, "Saffronizing the Silver Screen," 42.

20 Viswanath, "Saffronizing the Silver Screen," 42–43.

21 Tejaswini Ganti, *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 51.

22 Nandana Bose, "Between the Godfather and the Mafia: Situating Right-Wing Interventions in the Bombay Film Industry (1992-2002)," *Studies in South Asian Film and Media* 1, n.º 1 (2009): 23-43.

'secret deal' struck between the BJP and a 'Film Makers Combine' in which filmmakers accepted the demands that in films there would be 'no ridiculing Hindu sentiments' and that there would be no criticism of those involved in the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement. A delegation from the BJP 'Film Cell' is also supposed to have met the Chairperson of the film censor board with similar demands.[23] These attempts, however, met with only limited success.

Vishwanath is of the opinion that, in the 1990s, 'political compulsions may have forced... the BJP to put its hard-core issues on the backburner' but its 'hidden agenda' was 'cleverly hijacked by Bollywood filmmakers' and the 90s films could be 'read as cinematic translations of the rhetoric of the Hindu Right.'[24] This cinema that emerged during the 1990s was, however, still only proto-Hindutva cinema. It must be distinguished from the full-blown Hindutva cinema of the period under study which is unmediated and explicit in its embrace of the tenets of Hindutva and, as discussed below, has clear links with the Sangh and is frequently supported by the state. It must be emphasised that this paper does not focus on Hindutva cinema as a whole but on one of its most significant subsets – Hindutva Historicals.

Hindutva Historicals

The genesis of the Hindutva Historical can be traced to a film titled '*Buddha in a Traffic Jam*' (2016) [*Buddha*]. The film propagated a conspiracy theory of university campuses being infiltrated by a cabal of ultra-left revolutionaries it called 'Urban Naxals.'[25] Made in 2012, it remained unreleased in theatres and was initially screened in just a few campuses and film festivals. It was in the midst of student protests led by Left and Ambedkarite student groups and a government crackdown at University of Hyderabad and Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi,

23 Nandana Bose, "Between the Godfather and the Mafia," 34-35.

24 Viswanath, "Saffronizing the Silver Screen," 50.

25 It is a controversial term popularised in the 2010s. It has vague and politicised usage and is utilised to defame political opponents irrespective of their political or ideological inclinations.

in early 2016, that the film gained prominence. It was screened by the student front of the RSS that was opposing the student protesters, often with the director present, in a number of university campuses. The film was eventually released in theatres in May 2016. Following this, other films echoing the Sangh's worldview or laudatory accounts of government programmes like, *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha* (2017) [*Toilet*], *Indu Sarkar* (2017), and *Sui Dhaga* (2018), were released between 2016 and 2018. It was, however, 2019, that witnessed a slew of such films being released. Beginning with *Uri: The Surgical Strike* (2019) [*Uri*], a film lauding the military success of the government, this has continued unabated.

Hindutva Historicals cover a wide range of subjects across a period of many hundreds of years ranging, roughly, from the 11th century to the present. They include, but are not limited to, films set in the pre-colonial past, such as, *Samrat Prithviraj* (2022) [*Prithviraj*] and *Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior* (2020) [*Tanhaji*]. Films which further conspiracy theories such as *Buddha*; *The Kashmir Files* (2022) and *Article 370* (2024) – the 'genocide' in Kashmir; *The Tashkent Files – Who Killed Shastri?* (2019) [*The Tashkent Files*] – Lal Bahadur Shastri's death as well as other conspiracies; *The Kerala Story* (2023) – 'love jihad'[26]. There are biographical films such as *The Accidental Prime Minister* (2019) on Manmohan Singh [*Accidental* PM], *PM Narendra Modi (2019), Swatantrya Veer Savarkar* (2024) [*Savarkar*], *Main Atal Hoon* (2024) [*Atal*] on Atal Bihari Vajpayee, *Emergency* (2025) on Indira Gandhi, and *Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi* (2019) [*Manikarnika*]. Finally, films which attempt to write the history of the present like *Toilet* (2017), *Mission Mangal* (2019), *The Vaccine War* (2023), *The Sabarmati Report (2024), Accident or Conspiracy: Godhra* (2024) [*Godhra*], and *Uri* (2019).

26 A contested term used to allege that Muslim men deliberately seduce Hindu women to convert them to Islam.

Section II: 'History' and the Hindutva Historical

Tanika Sarkar, while referring to Hindutva history propagated through other means notes that this history is driven by 'political needs, popular beliefs and myths and construction of memory work' and an assertion of their 'privileges against investigative history' such that the 'question of academic evaluation and cross checking, of ascertaining validity of narrative claims, methods and purposes, do not arise.'[27] In much the same manner, Hindutva Historicals are alternate histories based on questionable sources and evidence which in their existence are implicit challenges to any form of historiography, whether written or visual, that is based on the examination and analysis of legitimate sources following well defined and verifiable methods. This challenge is made explicit in some films, either within or outside of the film. For instance, towards the end of *The Tashkent Files* the lead character after posing a series of questions regarding the 'official' explanation for Shastri's death, based on dubious sources, lashes out, using a mix of Hindi and English:

> Nobody knows this because *koi yeh sab history me likhta hi nahi hai... pichle 50 saalo se yeh saare intellectuals ye saare historians ne humse jo jhooth kaha jo sach jo facts dabaye woh maine... unhpe sawaal uthaye...* (nobody knows this because no one bothers to write this history... I have questioned the lies and cover ups of all these intellectuals and historians have indulged in for the past 50 years...).

Similarly, a character in *The Kashmir Files*, a retired senior police officer, exclaims '*news hi fake hai to socho history kya hogi* (if the news is fake, imagine what history will be...).' In posing a challenge to conventional historiography outside the film, Akshay Kumar during promotions for *Prithviraj*, attacked history textbooks for only mentioning 'invaders' [read Muslims] and saying, 'hardly anything' about 'our culture.'[28]

27 Sarkar, "How the Sangh Parivar Writes and Teaches History," 172.

28 Aman Wadhwa, "Akshay Kumar Brutally Trolled for His 'History Textbooks' Remark,

While challenging conventional history, Hindutva Historicals utilise various methods to provide some form of historical credibility to their own narratives. The most common method, not unique to Hindutva Historicals, is through cutting documentary footage into the film to create the illusion of historical authenticity. One can find this in almost all Hindutva Historicals that are set in the colonial or post-independence periods with the use of such clips being particularly heavy in *Accidental PM*, *The Kashmir Files*, *The Tashkent Files*, *Buddha*, *Uri*, *The Kerala Story*, and *Emergency*. Another way in which historical legitimacy is sought to be established is through reference to the sources on which the films are based. In this, disclaimers, prologues, and epilogues play a key role. For instance, the disclaimer in *Savarkar* claims that the film is '...based on research, writings, various reports, articles, etc.' It also provides the names of multiple books as well as that of the 'consultant' and other authors that had 'verified' the facts. Similarly, films like *Manikarnika* and *The Tashkent Files* also provide the names of the so-called experts consulted. In attempting to garner historical credibility, *Accidental PM, Emergency,* and *The Vaccine War* emphasise on their being based on books written by people in the know. While the names of people or books are not always provided, there may be references to 'consultants' (*Atal*), and 'eminent historians' (*Tanhaji*). Alternately, films such as *The Kashmir Files* and *The Kerala Story* claim to be based on the 'video-recorded testimonials of the victims and their families.' Some films also reference their sources either through dialogue, montage or mis-en-scene. An illustrative example of this is *The Tashkent Files* in which, towards the end, highlighted portions of books and files are shown, while the lead character reads from a book as evidence to assert that Shastri's death was a conspiracy, that the KGB's influence in India was all pervasive, and that India was 'colonised' within ten years of his death.

Netizens Ask Him to Read NCERT Books," *DNA*, 1 June 2022, https://www.dnaindia.com/bollywood/report-akshay-kumar-brutally-trolled-for-his-history-textbooks-remark-netizens-ask-him-to-read-ncert-books-2957198.

However, while pulling no stops in their attempts to come across as credible sources of historical knowledge, Hindutva Historicals baulk from explicitly making this claim. Instead, given the unreliability of their sources, they make sure to leave ample room for plausible deniability. Thus, usually in the same disclaimers or prologues noted earlier, in which the sources are listed, care is taken to emphasise that the film 'does not claim accurateness or factuality of historic events' (*The Kashmir Files)*, 'does not warrant, represent or claim to be historically accurate' (*Tanhaji)*, or 'does not assert the truth of any of these narratives' (*The Kerala Story*).[29] It is highly unlikely that one would find any Hindutva Historical that does not attempt to shield itself from inquiry into what it goes great lengths to portray as fact and history. Armed in this manner, with seals of approval from consultants and historians, evidence gathered from mysterious files and records, and the unverifiable testimonies of tearful victims on one hand and having absolved themselves of the responsibility of providing historical evidence on the other, Hindutva Historicals go about concocting, obscuring, and fabricating saffronised histories.

To give probably the most conspicuous examples of this, *The Kerala Story* has a character make an emotional plea for victims of 'love jihad,' providing numbers that are presented in the film as facts. '30,000 girls are missing,' she says, a claim which at the very end is revealed to be one that 'cannot be verified.' *The Tashkent Files* in its 'historical' epilogue makes similar absurd claims, that appear in text, against Indira Gandhi and the Indian National Congress (Requisition) [Congress (R)],[30] including her receiving money from the KGB, that secret gifts for the Congress (R) from the Soviet Union's Politburo, that some Congress (R) candidates in the 1971 elections were KGB agents, and that 'million rupees' were sent by the Soviets to a 'newspaper supporting her.' All this appears on the centre of the screen while at the

29 It may be tangentially noted that a number of these films also claim to have been made 'in the larger interest of humanity and justice.'

30 The Congress split into two parties in 1969, one led by Indira Gandhi known as the Congress (Requisition) and the other, which included a number of powerful older regional leaders, called the Congress (Organisation).

bottom there appears 'Source: Mithrokin Archive.' After this long list of accusations and allegations ends, we are told that 'the Authenticity of claims made in this report is not proven.' Similarly, *The Kashmir Files*, having cleared itself from having to provide any evidence, trots out numbers and figures as facts, 4000 killed and 500,000 displaced, to establish the 'genocide' of Kashmiri Pandits in 1991. While estimates of those killed or displaced during the 1990s in Kashmir vary depending on the source, none of the even partially reliable ones provide figures that are close to those brandished as fact in the film. Thus, although referred to here as 'historicals,' these films exhibit a brazen disregard for historically established facts and have a penchant for conspiracies. They are what Parenti calls 'make-believe history.'[31]

Section III: Politics of Hindutva Historicals

In dealing with the past, Hindutva Historicals are closely aligned with the worldview of the Sangh. In them, we find the construction of narratives to suit the Sangh's version of history and its political exigencies. Sangh icons are glorified, while simultaneously those considered to be opponents or enemies are demonised and/or caricatured.

Muslims in Hindutva Historicals

Indian Muslims have long been considered by Hindutva ideologues to not be an authentic part of the Indian nation. Both Savarkar and Golwalkar strongly advocated the idea of Indian Muslims as outsiders, with Golwalkar including them in his list of the enemies of the nation.[32] After partition and independence, Sangh ideologues questioned the national loyalties of Indian Muslims and called for their 'Indianisation.'[33] Since, the mid-1980s, the Sangh has doubled down on perpetuating these ideas

31 Michael Parenti, *Make-Believe Media: The Politics of Entertainment* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

32 Islam, *Golwalkar's We or Our Nationhood Defined*; Jyotirmay Sharma, *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2011).

33 Balraj Madhok, *Indianisation?: What, Why and How. By Balraj Madhok, S. Chand, Delhi. 1970* (Delhi: S. Chand, 1970).

which have reached their zenith under the present regime. Hindutva Historicals, resonate this understanding and reduce the pre-colonial past to simple binaries of Hindu versus Muslim, with Muslims being invaders, evil, savage, cruel, barbaric and sometimes moronic.

For instance, in *Prithviraj,* a Muslim marauder (Md. Ghori) faces off against a Hindu Rajput (Prithviraj) who is a protector of his motherland. In the film, Ghori himself tells us this in as many words. The Muslim is also shown as cruel and savage, established by the first scene where Prithviraj's eyes have been gouged out. In comparison, Prithviraj is merciful – he sets the vanquished and captured Md. Ghori free without doing him harm. The binary is reinforced throughout the film with Hindus shown in bright saffron and white, usually in sunlight and Muslims in darker shades and dim light. The epilogue hammers home the idea of a clash of civilizations claiming that Prithviraj's death ended the 'Hindu Empire' in Northern India. It locates the beginnings of Indian nationalism in the 'martyrdom' of the 'great Hindu Emperor,' claiming 'India' fought against 'foreign invaders and rulers' for 755 years before 'Delhi once again belonged to Mother India.' Furthermore, film promotions invited audiences to 'Come Celebrate India's Last Hindu Samrat.'[34] That Prithviraj was neither a 'Hindu nationalist,' having waged wars against Hindu Kingdoms in Gujarat and Bundelkhand, nor by any stretch the last Hindu king, many 'Hindu' dynasties existed for centuries after his death is of little concern.

In *Tanhaji*, it is a Maratha Hindu, Tanhaji, a commander for Shivaji, who faces Udaybhan, a lackey of the evil Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb's savagery is established in a sequence where he is shown playing 'human chess' with the Shah of Iran, incidentally also a Muslim. While Udaybhan is not a Muslim he is made to look and act like the archetypical Muslim – dressed in black, eyes darkened with kohl, he dances like the Muslims for his wedding festivities and eats partially roasted crocodile meat with a dagger. At the same time, the

34 Sidharth Bhatia, "Akshay Kumar's Hindu Samrat Goes Where No Other Bollywood Film Has Gone Before," *The Wire*, 2 June 2022, https://thewire.in/film/akshay-kumars-hindu-samrat-goes-where-no-other-bollywood-films-have-gone-before.

token good-Muslim on the Maratha side is portrayed as moronic and is a subject of ridicule. A film like *Manikarnika*, in which the primary antagonists are the British, and which could have been an opportunity to show Hindus and Muslims unitedly resisting the colonial oppressor, does not embrace the theme wholeheartedly. Instead, it exposes its ideological underpinnings by churning out the trope of the good and bad Muslim. While one of Manikarnika's main commander's is a Muslim, one of the 'traitors' who betrays Manikarnika's forces to the British is also a Muslim. The latter is sermonised to by the former on how those who betray the nation go to hell, establishing the good (nationalist)-bad (anti-national) Muslim dichotomy.

The representation of Muslims is much the same in films that deal with the more recent past. The most garish example being that of *The Kashmir Files*, a film about the alleged genocide of Kashmiri Pandits in the early 1990s. One of the lead characters, early on in the film, goes on a rant about the history of Kashmir and how Hindus were converted to Islam through atrocities and fear. There are scenes of barbaric terrorists forcing the widow of a Hindu man they have just killed to eat rice soaked in her dead husband's blood, a predatory maulvi who lusts after a Hindu woman, and a climax in which terrorists execute Hindu men, women, and children as the Muslim residents of a Kashmiri village look on in complicit approval. The film, in ostensibly portraying the gruesome acts of the terrorists, erases all distinctions – among different separatist groups, among violent separatist groups and parliamentary parties in Kashmir, between terrorist and Kashmiri, and terrorist and Muslim, leaving one with the simple conclusion that all Muslims are terrorists. Similarly, *The Kerala Story* explicitly and directly perpetuates and solidifies the image of Muslims as cruel, violent, terrorists, who indulge in 'love jihad.' In *Uri*, the only Muslims that we see are either in the army, the good Muslim, or are Pakistani or terrorists, the bad Muslim, the latter far out numbering the former. *Savarkar* has multiple sequences which portray the brutality of Muslim jailers in service of the British while also suggesting that there were forced conversions of Hindu prisoners. A primary character in *The Tashkent*

Files unleashes a tirade against Muslims which is allowed to continue to such a point that when the rebuttal comes it seems weak and hollow. The tirade is soon forgotten, the character retains credibility, and in its final hypothesis the film echoes the accusations made. In *Atal*, men in skull caps with beards, that is Muslims, are shown to be preparing to riot on the eve of independence, while RSS men go around the city trying to ensure peace.

Hindutva Historicals in this manner both promote a historical understanding that is espoused by the Sangh as well as aid in the contemporary demonisation of Muslims.

Glorifying, Caricaturising, and Concealing

Furthermore, Hindutva Historicals create straw versions of the Sangh's opponents and compare them with hyperbolic versions of Hindutva protagonists. Thus, in *Savarkar,* a visual and ideological caricature of Gandhi whose ideas of non-violence are criticised and frequently ridiculed is placed against Savarkar. The film goes about omitting, distorting, and inventing facts to portray Savarkar as a sort of father-figure for the non-Gandhian revolutionary movement. There is a heavy-handed emphasis, including a fictional meeting between Savarkar and Bhagat Singh, on how armed revolutionaries from Khudiram Bose and the Ghadarites to Bhagat Singh, and Subhash Chandra Bose were strongly influenced by Savarkar. Further, alongside *Savarkar*, films like *Atal*, *The Tashkent Files*, and *Emergency* portray Jawaharlal Nehru as power hungry, but also, using the war with China as an example, as incompetent, particularly in terms of foreign policy and military action.

Perhaps the most reviled figure in Hindutva Historicals of the post-independence period is Indira Gandhi. The biographical film on her vacillates between portraying her as weak and indecisive, especially in face of the crisis in Bangladesh, while at others as calculating and sinister. Conveniently brushing aside the facts that the BJS was not the major opposition party and that there were many other more important opposition leaders at the time, the film chooses to contrast a

flawed and incompetent Indira Gandhi in order to present Vajpayee as decisive, courageous and the tallest opposition leader of the early 1970s. In *The Tashkent Files*, a significantly more conspiratorial portrait is painted with Indira being accused of being on the payroll of the KGB, having engineered a 'coup' through the Emergency, and having turned India into a 'colony.' In *Atal*, the falling apart of the Janata Party within two years of its formation is explicitly blamed entirely on Indira's cunning interference.

In reference to more contemporary politics, while also caricaturising Manmohan Singh and presenting him as a pathetic and inept Prime Minister, the real villains of *Accidental PM* are clearly, the almost cartoonishly scheming, Sonia, Priyanka, and Rahul Gandhi. The Congress, in all its forms, both before and after independence, is also painted in the poorest light. The prologue text to *Savarkar* tells us that the Congress was a 'liaison body' formed 'between the educated natives and the imperialists' to keep in check the armed revolutionary movement started by Vasudev Phadke. For the period after independence, Hindutva Historicals like *The Tashkent Files* and *The Kashmir Files* blame the Congress for having covered up Shastri's 'murder,' having people who were KGB agents contest elections and become ministers, and for the 'Pandit genocide' in Kashmir.

While indulging in these uncharitable comparisons, uncomfortable truths related to the Sangh are either underplayed or simply swept under the carpet. This can be seen most clearly in the biographical films on Savarkar, one of the founding fathers of Hindutva, and Vajpayee, the most significant leader of the Sangh's electoral fronts before Modi. In *Savarkar*, there is no reference to his first aligning with the British government to counter the Muslim League and then later of the Hindu Mahasabha, under his leadership, running coalition governments with the Muslim League. The mercy petitions, written while he was imprisoned are explained away as tactical compromises. Instead, a myth, being propagated by the current government, about Gandhi having a role in writing the petitions is sought to be furthered. Similarly, *Atal*, through significant acts of omission, presents a sanitised life story side

stepping difficult issues. There is no mention of his opponents within the Sangh, like Balraj Madhok. In attempting to avoid any difficult issues, the film concludes in 1999, even before the beginning of Vajpayee's full term as PM. Thus, avoiding delving into inglorious episodes like the IC-814 hijacking,[35] the Parliament attacks,[36] and the 2002 Gujarat riots.

Similarly, that the Sangh or Savarkar had anything to do with Gandhi's assassination, despite Godse having been a member of both the RSS and the Savarkar's Hindu Mahasabha, is flatly denied. In *Savarkar*, the eponymous character is portrayed as a victim, arrested without proof of involvement in the plot to assassinate Gandhi. In *Atal*, the RSS, is presented as having nothing to do with the assassination and yet being a hapless victim of violent reprisals. Related to this, a very different version of the formation of the BJS, in which the RSS is lauded for its commitment to staying away from politics, is presented in *Atal*. It is made to seem as if the RSS voluntarily chose to be a cultural organisation and the formation of the BJS something unrelated to the restrictions placed on it after independence. This, as noted earlier, is far from the truth as the RSS, was in fact, forced into confining itself formally to the 'cultural sphere,' after it was banned for its involvement in Gandhi's assassination. The formation of the BJS was a way to maintain its presence in the sphere of electoral politics.

While the period of the Emergency is used in films like *The Tashkent Files, Atal, Emergency,* and *Indu Sarkar* to attack Indira and the INC and to simultaneously project the Sangh as having courageously opposed it, certain important details are glossed over. With the RSS banned and many of its leaders detained, the organisation sought to ingratiate itself to the government. Most prominently, the Sarsanghchalak, Balasaheb Deoras, wrote to Indira Gandhi from jail, a fact not

35 An Indian Airlines flight from Kathmandu to Delhi was hijacked in December 1999. It posed a major political challenge for the Vajpayee-led NDA government with the hijacking ending with the release of jailed terrorists.

36 In what was considered a major security and intelligence failure, on 13 December 2001, armed militants were able to attack the Indian Parliament.

denied by the RSS,[37] promising her that the RSS would be available for 'national uplift' if the ban were revoked.[38] Regarding the behaviour of the Sangh during the Emergency, Goyal notes, 'the RSS men did not turn out to be all that heroic and steadfast... quite a few scurried around to buy protection.'[39] This side of the Emergency story does not make it to the Hindutva Historicals.

Histories of the present

There are Hindutva Historicals, with their contemporary subject matter, which perform the task of writing a history of the present. In them one finds laudatory accounts of different actions, projects, and achievements of the government. Thus, *Toilet*, is relentless in its edification of the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan* (Clean India Campaign), launched by the government in 2014. *Mission Mangal*, supposedly a dramatized retelling of India's Mars Orbiter Mission, is in fact a thinly veiled attempt at attributing the success of a mission launched under the previous government to Modi. *Uri* is not only a celebration of the armed forces but more significantly of the government. Modi and the Defence Minister at the time Manohar Parrikar, unnamed but identifiable, are portrayed as sombre and level-headed strategists. Similarly, *Article 370*, presents a justification for the abrogation of the article granting special status to Jammu and Kashmir in which Modi and Amit Shah, again identifiably portrayed, are the strategic masterminds because of whom Kashmir is now 'paradise regained.' These are in addition to two films that tell the story of the 2002 Gujarat riots through a Hindutva lens – *Sabarmati Report* and *Godhra*.

Moreover, Hindutva Historicals based in the somewhat distant past link themselves to contemporary Hindutva through exhibiting or

37 The petitions that Deoras wrote are justified as being in 'the spirit of dialogue' that have been 'misinterpreted by Marxists'. Shaan Kashyap, "RSS Stood between the Dictatorship and Democracy," *Organiser*, 1 July 2018, 14–15.

38 D.R. Goyal, *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (New Delhi: Radha Krishna Prakashan, 1979), 217–227.

39 Goyal, *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*, 120–121.

referencing its symbols and iconography. The most obvious are the visual and dialogue references to *bhagva* and *bhagva jhanda* (saffron colour and saffron flag). The colour and flag have been appropriated by the Sangh and dissociated from any of their religious or political meanings. Linked successfully to Sangh identity and Hindutva they are used in Hindutva Historicals to indicate the 'good' side, and references to them cannot but be read as addresses to the present. In *Tanhaji*, Shivaji's mother, after looking at a treaty in which numerous forts have been handed over to the Mughals, declares moral victory by pointing out that the cloth that the treaty had been written on was *bhagva*. The film is replete with references to and celebrations of the *bhagva* – the colour and the flag. The saffron flag is also conspicuously present in scenography of *Manikarnika*. In *Prithviraj*, an early sequence, with an out of context celebration of Holi does the job of filling the screen with saffron. What follows is a study in saffron with hardly a scene in which there are Hindu men present, that saffron is not. From the flags to the headgear that the men never seem to take off, the film is bathed in saffron.

There are other examples of political addresses to the present. Significant amongst these is the peculiar reference made by Prithviraj to the demolition of the Somnath temple by Md. Ghazni more than 150 years prior. Somnath has historically been utilised to gain political mileage most effectively by the Sangh. One of the VHP's *Ekatmata Yatra*s (Unity Processions) for 'Hindu Unity,' in 1983, began in West Bengal and ended at Somnath. Most prominently, it was a focal point for the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement with L.K. Advani beginning his Rathyatra, that whipped up communal frenzy wherever it travelled in the country, from Somnath in 1990. In another reference to the contemporary, *Manikarnika* has a ruler who prefers to do '*seva*' (serve) rather than rule; similar to the claims of Modi of being the *Pradhan Sevak* (Server in Chief) rather than the Prime Minister. While the question of the cow has long been a mobilisational issue for Hindu Nationalists, lynchings led by cow protecting vigilante mobs, carried out with impunity and explicit or implicit support of the Sangh, have

been rife since the 2014. In this context of 'cow protection,' the titular character in *Manikarnika* is shown to be protecting a calf from the beef eating foreigner by declaring it the property of her kingdom, further aligning the film to contemporary Hindutva politics.

Sangh connections

In addition to the themes, narratives, and treatment of issues, one can locate extra-textual connections with the Sangh in Hindutva Historicals, such as ones through the personnel associated with the films, endorsement by the Sangh as well as state recognition and support. In terms of personnel, there are the examples of director and producer of *Buddha*, *The Kashmir Files*, *The Tashkent Files*, and *The Vaccine War,* Vivek Agnihotri, who describes himself as a Modi supporter and is close to the RSS.[40] Actor Anupam Kher, who has featured in Hindutva Historicals like *The Kashmir Files*, *Buddha*, and *Accidental PM*, has for a long time been a supporter of the Sangh. Having stalled the release of a documentary in 2004 on Modi and the 2002 Gujarat riots, he has referred to Modi as a 'rockstar,'[41] and has said that he did not mind being called Modi's 'chamcha' (stooge).[42] Ajay Devgn, the lead actor and producer of *Tanhaji*, is another old BJP and Modi supporter who routinely campaigns for the BJP. A part of *Uri* and *Article 370*, Yami Gautam, is an outspoken Modi supporter, describing herself as a 'fan.'[43] The actor and director of *Manikarnika* and *Emergency*, Kan-

40 #IAmBuddha Team, "'The Tashkent Files': Authentic, Accurate and Vital Indian Document; Says RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat," *I am Buddha Foundation*, 26 April 2019, https://iambuddha.net/2019/04/26/the-tashkent-files-authentic-accurate-and-vital-indian-document-says-rss-chief-mohan-bhagwat/; etimes.in, "Vivek Agnihotri at Times LitFest: People Don't like Me in Bollywood Because I Support Narendra Modi," *Times Entertainment*, 12 February 2023, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/bollywood/news/vivek-agnihotri-at-times-litfest-people-dont-like-me-in-bollywood-because-i-support-narendra-modi/articleshow/97827768.cms.

41 Upala Sen, "The Bond between Modi and Some Filmmakers Is Not Accidental," *The Telegraph online*, 5 January 2019, https://www.telegraphindia.com/culture/the-bond-between-modi-and-some-filmmakers-is-not-accidental/cid/1680924.

42 PTI, "Don't Mind Being Called "Chamcha" of Narendra Modi: Anupam Kher," *Hindustan Times*, 12 March 2016, https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/don-t-mind-being-called-chamcha-of-narendra-modi-anupam-kher/story-98vyBaWqob1gXRm1q6dKoN.html.

43 Republic Entertainment Desk, "Everyone Is A Fan of PM Narendra Modi: Yami Gau-

gana Ranaut, is a BJP MP. Akshay Kumar, who has starred in *Toilet*, *Mission Mangal*, and *Prithviraj*, amongst other Hindutva Historicals such as *Gold* and *Kesari*, is a well-known sycophant of Modi. While not an exhaustive list, this serves to illustrate that those directly associated with the Sangh also feature prominently in Hindutva Historicals that have been discussed here.

Hindutva Historicals are also frequently endorsed or publicised by functionaries of the Sangh as well as through bodies and governments controlled by the BJP. For instance, Modi tweeted in support of *Toilet* calling it a 'good effort to further the message of cleanliness.'[44] The BJP twitter handle called the *Accidental PM*, a 'riveting tale of how a family held the country to ransom for 10 long years.'[45] The RSS called *The Kashmir Files*, 'more than a movie... a movement...' and a documentation of 'historical reality.'[46] The press reported that Modi had instructed everyone in the BJP's Parliamentary group to watch the film.[47] Amit Shah, after viewing *Prithviraj* with Akshay Kumar, called the film an important part 'in the journey of India's cultural revival which will take the country back to its glory days.'[48] Over and above such endorsements, Hindutva Historicals often receive state recognition through the waiver of entertainment tax by BJP led state governments.[49] This list includes films like *Toilet*, *Kerala Story*, *The Kashmir Files*, *Prithviraj*, *Mission Mangal*, *Tanhaji,* and *Uri*.

tam on Development in Kashmir, Shooting Article 370," *Republic*, 20 December 2024, https://www.republicworld.com/entertainment/bollywood/everyone-is-a-fan-of-pm-narendra-modi-yami-gautam-on-development-in-kashmir-shooting-article-370.

44 News18, "PM Modi Lauds Akshay's Toilet Ek Prem Katha Trailer," *News18*, 13 June 2017, https://www.news18.com/news/movies/pm-narendra-modi-lauds-akshay-kumar-toilet-ek-prem-katha-trailer-calls-it-a-good-effort-to-further-the-message-of-cleanliness-1430809.html.

45 Kamyani Sharma, "Supporting Role: How Bollywood Acted under the Modi Government," *The Caravan*, 1 April 2019, https://caravanmagazine.in/perspective/how-bollywood-acted-under-modi-government.

46 Webdesk, "The Kashmir Files: More Than a Movie... a Movement," *Organiser*, 17 March 2022, https://organiser.org/2022/03/17/72259/bharat/the-kashmir-files-more-than-a-movie-a-movement/.

47 Sanjay Kak, "The Dangerous 'Truth' of The Kashmir Files," *Al Jazeera*, 13 April 2022, https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/4/13/the-dangerous-truth-of-the-kashmiri-files.

48 Wadhwa, "Akshay Kumar Brutally Trolled for His 'history Textbooks' Remark".

49 Before a centralised Goods and Services Tax (GST) was implemented in 2017, an entertainment tax was imposed on films by individual states. Following the imposition of GST, when a

Conclusion: (Re-) Writing History through Film

That Hindutva Historicals often serve an immediate political purpose, is quite apparent. In them, many contemporary themes are addressed, opponents of the Sangh are misrepresented and vilified, and the Sangh's worldview is propagated. They are frequently released in the months leading up to important elections – *Uri*, *Accidental PM*, *PM Narendra Modi* and *The Tashkent Files* came out just prior to the Lok Sabha elections of 2019 and *Savarkar*, *Atal* and *Article 370* amongst many others were released in the lead up to the 2024 elections. Coming out close to elections and relaying the ideas and messages of the Sangh, they have served as additional propaganda tools. The wider significance of Hindutva Historicals can, however, only be appreciated in the context of the Sangh's project of re-writing history.

While the Sangh and its ideologues have always endeavoured to spread a Hindutva history, after the acquisition of state power, the Sangh's ability to do so has increased manifold. Although this was attempted during the BJP's initial stint (1999-2004), the project of re-writing history was taken up post-haste after 2014. There have been systematic attacks particularly on school curriculums at both the national and state levels. Between 2014 and 2018, 1334 changes were made to textbooks utilised by schools affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education. From 2019 onwards, a number of topics that did not fit into the Sangh's narrative including references to 2002 Gujarat riots, the Naxal movement and excerpts from the poems of revolutionary poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz were dropped from these textbooks.[50] In 2025, middle-school Social Science textbooks removed chapters related to the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals. While, Haryana, a BJP ruled state, sought to parachute the RSS into India's struggle for independence, its history textbooks claiming that the organisation and its founders played a 'positive role' in 'awakening cultural nationalism

state announces a film tax-free, the state GST component is waived.

50 Scroll Staff, "Paragraphs on Gujarat Riots, Chapter on Mughal History Removed from NCERT Textbooks," *Scroll.in*, 17 June 2022, https://scroll.in/latest/1026397/paragraph-on-gujarat-riots-chapter-on-mughal-history-removed-from-ncert-textbooks.

and freedom struggle.'[51] Thus, as Audrey Truschke puts it, while the Hindutva acolytes 'cannot change what actually happened in the Indian past, but they can control what people know about it.'[52] It is in the context of this wider project of re-writing history that Hindutva Historicals must be placed.

Historical films, beyond being economically profitable and widely popular, are a primary access to the past. This has been widely noted in the context of advanced capitalist countries. For Stubbs, historical films were one of the 'principal ways' in which people 'formed relationships with the past.'[53] Parenti notes how for many Americans, these films, along with TV dramas, were the 'final chapter of history.'[54] O'Connor notes that historical films have 'arguably more influence than written history or teachers.'[55] Other scholars have also acknowledged historical films as being the primary source of 'historical' knowledge to a vast majority in both semi-literate and 'post-literate' societies.[56] In the Indian context, Deshpande has recognised the importance of historical films, calling them the 'preferred mode of receiving and understanding the past in contemporary [Indian] society.'[57]

Furthermore, films and historical films, in particular, have long been considered by the Right as pedagogically and politically important. Thus, D.W. Griffith, the director of *Birth of a Nation* (1915), one of the first successful historical films which also included the demonisation of non-white people and the portrayal of the Ku Klux Klan as saviours of the nation, was a 'virtual missionary' on the pedagogical

51 Vivek Gupta, "Haryana: Class 9 History Book Blames Congress for Partition, Lauds RSS, Hedgewar, Savarkar," *The Wire*, 12 July 2022, https://thewire.in/education/haryana-class-9-history-book-blames-congress-for-partition-lauds-rss-hedgewar-savarkar.

52 Audrey Truschke, "Hindutva's Dangerous Rewriting of History," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 24, n.º 25 (2020): 9, https://doi.org/10.4000/samaj.6636.

53 Jonathan Stubbs, *Historical Film: A Critical Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 3.

54 Parenti, *Make-Believe Media*, 68.

55 John E. O'Connor, *Image as Artifact: The Historical Analysis of Film and Television* (Malabar, Fla.: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co., 1990), 7.

56 Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies: Studying History on Film* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007); Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*; Robert Brent Toplin, "The Filmmaker as Historian," *The American Historical Review* 93, n.º 5 (1988): 1210–1227.

57 Deshpande, *Class, Power, and Consciousness in Indian Cinema and Television*, 65.

role of historical films.[58] In Germany, as Weinberg notes, the Nazis were convinced of the potential of films to shape and manipulate the opinions and emotions of the public and produced films which inculcated or reinforced Nazi ideology.[59] In doing so, the historical film was frequently utilised with an early example being that of *Hitler Youth Quex* (1933). A film that celebrated the birth, life, and death of a symbolic Hitler Youth, which, according to Baird, was a Nazi historical that could serve as a 'textbook example of the use of poetic license in the mythical interpretation of historical reality.'[60] There is also the example of *Jud Süss (1940), an historical drama in which 'the Jew' was portrayed as a sexual, blood sucking beast, which is considered* 'one of the most notorious and successful pieces of antisemitic film propaganda produced in Nazi Germany.' Similarly, in fascist Italy, Landy notes how historical films created parallels between past and present with an emphasis on motifs such as 'the importance of the powerful leader,' 'the need for national unity, and 'the supremacy of Italian culture.'[61]

In a similar vein, Hindutva Historicals are, at the most fundamental level, in sync with the Sangh's broader attempt at re-writing history to suit its ideological and political needs. Hindutva Historicals take the Sangh's historico-political myths, beliefs, and ideas and mix them with the immensely popular medium of the Hindi film and spread them among people whose primary and often only interaction with history is through the historical film, in the process aiding in the wider project of re-writing history.

58 Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 11.

59 David Weinberg, "Approaches to the Study of Film in the Third Reich: A Critical Appraisal," *Journal of Contemporary History* 19, n.º 1 (1984): 105–107.

60 Jay Baird, "From Berlin to Neubabelsberg: Nazi Film Propaganda and Hitler Youth Quex," *Journal of Contemporary History* 18, n.º 3 (1983): 496.

61 Marcia Landy, *Fascism in Film: The Italian Commercial Cinema, 1931-1943* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 228.

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John W. Bessai

Countering Distorted Pasts: Interactive Documentary as Public Service in Far-Right History Wars

State-linked interactive documentary can strengthen public historical judgment during far-right "history wars" that circulate mythic pasts through platform media and contest scholarly authority. This article analyzes four National Film Board of Canada (NFBC) digital works—Do Not Track (2015), Circa 1948 (2014), Bear 71 (2012), and Supreme Law (2019)—as public-service infrastructures for evidence, memory, and temporal orientation. The analysis shows how interface sequencing, exploratory navigation, and plural address train repeatable practices: tracing provenance, assembling chronology, weighing perspectives, and recognizing the institutional conditions that shape archives. Methodologically, the study combines close interface analysis with reception traces from press coverage, curator notes, and educational packaging. The four cases demonstrate a shared design logic: public media can organize slow forms of historical attention that platform economies discourage. The article closes with commissioning guidelines for digital public history that support democratic discourse under conditions of polarization: transparent sourcing, plural testimony, participatory authorship, accessibility planning, and maintenance strategies that keep public resources available across technological change.
Keywords: far right, history wars, interactive documentary, public service media.

Contrariando passados distorcidos: o documentário interativo como serviço público nas "guerras da história" da extrema-direita

O documentário interativo patrocinado por poderes públicos pode fortalecer a consciência histórica no contexto das chamadas "guerras da história", nas quais a extrema-direita circula passados míticos através de plataformas digitais e contesta a autoridade do conhecimento histórico. Este artigo analisa quatro obras digitais do National Film Board of Canada (NFBC) – Do Not Track (2015), Circa 1948 (2014), Bear 71 (2012) e Supreme Law (2019) – entendendo-as como infraestruturas de serviço público para evidência, memória e orientação temporal. A análise demonstra como a sequenciação da interface, a

navegação exploratória e o seu direcionamento plural treinam práticas repetíveis: o rastreamento da proveniência, a montagem de cronologias, a ponderação de perspetivas, e o reconhecimento de condições institucionais através das quais os arquivos são construídos. Metodologicamente, o estudo combina a análise próxima da interface destas obras com a sua receção na imprensa, notas curatoriais e materiais educativos. Os quatro casos revelam uma lógica de design comum: os media públicos podem organizar formas lentas de disseminação histórica que a economia de plataformas desvaloriza. O artigo termina com algumas diretrizes para a produção de história pública digital em contextos de polarização: uso transparente das fontes, testemunhos plurais, autoria participativa, acessibilidade, e estratégias de manutenção que mantêm os recursos públicos acessíveis apesar da transformação tecnológica.
Palavras-chave: extrema-direita; guerras da história; documentário interativo; media de serviço público.

Countering Distorted Pasts: Interactive Documentary as Public Service in Far-Right History Wars

John W. Bessai*

Introduction

Far-right political projects treat the past as a resource for mobilization. They circulate claims of civilizational decline, manufacture heroic genealogies, and attach moral authority to selected episodes of national history. Scholars of memory politics track these practices as strategic interventions in public culture, with parties and movements casting themselves as guardians of authentic tradition and as arbiters of legitimate belonging.[1] Platform media amplify these interventions through design logics that reward speed, outrage, and repetition. Viral circulation then turns compressed historical fragments into durable political cues.

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1 Stefan Couperus, Pier Domenico Tortola, and Lars Rensmann, "Memory Politics of the Far Right in Europe," *European Politics and Society* 24, no. 4 (2023): 435–444, https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2022.2058757 (accessed January 24, 2026).

History wars unfold within these conditions. Contested statues, school curricula, museum labels, border myths, and "heritage" rhetoric become sites of struggle over authority and public reason. The struggle involves disputes over facts. The struggle also involves rules of credibility, attention, and evidence. Platform interfaces place primary sources, secondary scholarship, rumour, and propaganda in a shared visual field. That field encourages "credential levelling," a practice that grants similar status to materials with sharply different provenance.[2] The condition supports authoritarian styles of persuasion that treat tradition as a timeless moral warrant.

Canadian history wars concentrate on the authority of institutions that curate records of settler-colonial violence and its afterlives. Residential school history provides a central site of contestation because public disputes turn on archives, testimony, burial-ground investigation practices, and the evidentiary status of institutional findings. The Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples reports on ongoing residential school denialism and describes a backlash pattern that seeks to undermine Survivors' accounts, deny intergenerational harms, and cast the search for unmarked burials as fabrication. The committee calls for federal action to counter the rise of denialism. Canadian far-right media ecosystems and influencer networks intensify these dynamics through platform distribution that rewards compression and repetition, and public safety frameworks describe ideologically motivated violent extremism as a continuing threat environment that includes white supremacist, xenophobic, and anti-authority forms. This analysis positions interactive documentary as public service within this conjuncture by treating interface procedure as an institutional resource for addressing denial, distortion, and provenance collapse.[3]

2 Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2017), https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-researc/168076277c (accessed January 24, 2026).

3 Canada, Parliament, Senate, Standing Senate Committee on Indigenous Peoples, *Honouring the Children Who Never Came Home: Truth, Education and Reconciliation* (interim report, July 2023), 18–20, https://sencanada.ca/content/sen/committee/441/APPA/Reports/APPA_Report_InterlocutorNCTR_e.pdf (accessed February 8, 2026); Greg Elmer and An-

Canadian public discourse organizes around enduring institutional tensions that shape belonging, legitimacy, and authority. This article reads those tensions through the concept of the Canadian aporetic condition, a recurring configuration in which constitutional order, plural citizenship, Indigenous sovereignty claims, and state narratives of national unity produce governance questions that recur across media, policy, and cultural debate.[4] In history wars, instrumentalized narratives compress contested authority into a single story of origin and destiny, narrowing the space for public judgment about responsibility, evidence, and institutional accountability.

The aporetic condition also clarifies why the interface procedure carries political weight. Platform circulation can weaken provenance cues and compress historical time into shareable fragments. An interactive documentary can respond by organizing access to evidence chains, prompting temporal assembly, and staging standpoint evaluation through guided navigation. In this argument, public-service interactive documentary functions as a civic method that keeps institutional tensions legible while supporting disciplined interpretation.

An interactive documentary offers public service resources for this condition. An interactive documentary organizes attention through procedural encounter. Designers can structure how users move through archives, encounter competing voices, and revisit evidence over time. The National Film Board of Canada (NFBC) provides a clear site for this inquiry because it has a statutory mandate to produce and distribute audiovisual works that interpret Canada to Canadians and to other publics.[5] The NFBC also articulates a contemporary commitment

thony Burton, "Rebel Personalities: Canada's Far-right Media," *First Monday* 27, no. 5 (2022), https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v27i5.12546 (accessed February 8, 2026); Public Safety Canada, "Government of Canada Announces Funding to Help Counter Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism," news release, March 12, 2024, https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/news/2024/03/government-of-canada-announces-funding-to-help-counter-ideologically-motivated-violent-extremism0.html (accessed February 8, 2026).

4 John W. Bessai, "Art as a Public Service: The National Film Board of Canada's Role in Shaping Democratic Dialogues and Societal Transformation" (PhD diss., Trent University, 2024).

5 Canada, National Film Act, R.S.C. 1985, c. N-8, Justice Laws Website, https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/n-8/ (accessed January 24, 2026).

to public access and cultural inclusion through its mandate and values framework.[6] This article analyzes four NFBC interactive works as practical infrastructures for historical judgment: *Do Not Track* (2015), *Circa 1948* (2014), *Bear 71* (2012), and *Supreme Law* (2019). Each work addresses a distinct domain of public reasoning that history wars exploit. *Do Not Track* trains habits of provenance tracking under datafied surveillance. *Circa 1948* offers a spatial archive that foregrounds contested urban memory and racialized erasure. *Bear 71* stages environmental history as a relation between living beings and monitoring systems. *Supreme Law* stages constitutional memory through a guided sequence of viewpoints and deep dives, including Indigenous perspectives on constitutional recognition and political action.

The analysis advances three claims. First, an interactive documentary can function as historiographical infrastructure by aligning its interface procedures with practices of historical inquiry. Second, public-service media can develop durable competencies in source evaluation and temporal reasoning through participatory encounters. Third, these competencies matter for democratic discourse because far-right mobilization depends on epistemic shortcuts that flatten provenance, simplify causality, and mobilize mythic chronology.

The article proceeds in six steps. The next section situates interactive documentary within a public-service tradition that includes participatory media experiments at the NFBC. The method section outlines interface analysis and reception tracing. A subsequent section describes the strategic pattern of far-right historical distortion under platform conditions. The four case studies follow. A concluding synthesis proposes commissioning guidelines for digital public history that support durable public access, plural testimony, and accountable archival practice.

6 National Film Board of Canada, "Mandate and Values", last modified October 9, 2025, https://www.nfb.ca/about/mandate-and-values/ (accessed January 24, 2026).

Conceptual frame: interactive documentary as public service infrastructure

Public discourse relies on infrastructures that organize access, credibility, and return. Infrastructure names the durable arrangements—technical, institutional, archival, and material—that make public encounter possible. Jussi Parikka's work on media materiality and Kyle Stine and Axel Volmar's account of media infrastructures and digital time help specify why interactive documentary depends on servers, formats, platforms, preservation systems, institutional mandates, and maintenance labour.[7] Archives, museums, libraries, and public broadcasters shape these infrastructures through selection, metadata, sequencing, and interpretive framing. Interactive documentary extends this infrastructural field by combining documentary address with user navigation. Scholars of interactive documentary describe the form as a "living" documentary that unfolds through participation and interface procedure.[8] Interface designers can align that procedure with practices of historical inquiry.

Interactive documentary scholarship emphasizes three properties that matter for public history: database organization, narrative sequencing, and participatory address. Database organization shapes what materials appear as evidence and how users traverse that evidence. Narrative sequencing shapes causal inference and temporal orientation. Participatory address shapes stance by positioning users as witnesses, co-investigators, or caretakers of memory.[9] These properties create opportunities for public-service design. Public institutions can embed accountability into metadata, licensing, educational packaging, and preservation planning.

7 Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Kyle Stine and Axel Volmar, eds., *Media Infrastructures and the Politics of Digital Time: Essays on Hardwired Temporalities* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021).

8 Sandra Gaudenzi, "The Living Documentary: From Representing Reality to Co-Creating Reality in Digital Interactive Documentary" (PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2013), http://research.gold.ac.uk/7997/ (accessed January 24, 2026).

9 Judith Aston, Sandra Gaudenzi, and Mandy Rose, eds., *i-Docs: The Evolving Practices of Interactive Documentary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

The NFBC has a long institutional history of public-service documentary and recurring experiments in participatory filmmaking. The *Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle* program (1967–1980) placed production capacity in community contexts and treated filmmaking as a civic method. Program architects linked documentary practice with social learning through local dialogue, screening circuits, and participatory collaboration.[10] Contemporary interactive works extend these commitments through interface design that organizes encounter, access, and facilitation, with clear continuities to earlier practices of portable projection and locally hosted discussion.

A public-service approach to interactive documentary requires durable public access across technological change, collaborative plural representation that recognizes unequal capacities and unequal risks for participants, and accountable documentation of editorial decisions, including selection, editing, and omission. These commitments align with public history practice, which treats interpretive authority as a negotiated relation among institutions, communities, and audiences. Digital public history extends that negotiation into the domain of platform governance, since software standards and distribution infrastructures shape what publics can access and how publics can reuse materials.

Contemporary media environments intensify the need for procedural historical reasoning. Research on civic online reasoning shows that expert evaluators often rely on lateral reading strategies: they leave a source, consult multiple references, and assess provenance across sites.[11] Interface design can scaffold these practices through visible sourcing, outward links to archival holdings and independent research resources, and prompts that guide users toward verification through exploration. Feed-based platform design privileges immediacy and affect, which compresses time for cross-checking; verification cues and navigational

10 Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker, and Ezra Winton, eds., *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

11 Sam Wineburg and Sarah McGrew, "Lateral Reading and the Nature of Expertise: Reading Less and Learning More When Evaluating Digital Information," *Teachers College Record* 121, no. 11 (2019): 1-40 (accessed January 24, 2026).

prompts reopen time for inspection and support a habit of provenance testing that carries across contentious historical claims.

In this article, the term public-service infrastructure refers to design decisions that organize the circulation of responsibility. Responsibility circulates among those who can speak with institutional standing, who bear the burden of proof, and who have the means to verify claims. NFBC interactive works can create public-service infrastructure when interface procedures strengthen users' capacity to evaluate sources, assemble chronologies, and recognize institutional contexts that shape evidence. The case studies that follow treat the interface as a civic form. Each interface designs a mode of historical attention that structures how the past becomes legible in the present.

Public-service media theory treats publicly funded cultural production as a civic good that depends on independence, universality, diversity, and accountability. Public broadcasters and public film institutions often frame these commitments in terms of "public value," a term that points to benefits markets rarely supply at scale. Documentary occupies a central role in this tradition because documentary links representation with evidence practices. John Grierson, an early architect of documentary institutions, emphasized documentary as a method for interpreting collective life through creative treatment of actuality.[12] The NFBC emerged within this institutional lineage, with a mandate that links production to public circulation.

The NFBC's statutory framing grants the institution a public interpretive task. The National Film Act authorizes the NFBC to produce and distribute films and audiovisual works designed to interpret Canada to Canadians and to other nations.[13] The NFBC's contemporary mandate statements emphasize access, innovation, and inclusion, placing public reach alongside artistic experimentation.[14] These state-

12 John Grierson, "First Principles of Documentary," in *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsyth Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1946), 79–83.

13 Canada, National Film Act, R.S.C. 1985, c. N-8, s. 9–10.

14 National Film Board of Canada, "Mandate and Values".

ments help position interactive documentary as a public-service form and as a digital art practice with public reach.

An interactive documentary also connects with scholarship on publics and counterpublics. Publics form through attention, circulation, and shared interpretive reference points. Counterpublics form through alternative circulation routes and alternative norms of address. Digital platforms provide infrastructure for both publics and counterpublics, with algorithmic sorting shaping which materials gain prominence. Public institutions can intervene by building public-facing infrastructures that prioritize verification, context, and return. The case studies examined here operate within these conditions and can function as public-facing infrastructures that support verification and contextualization through interface design.

Interface sequencing shapes historical reasoning. Historians establish claims through source criticism, contextual interpretation, and narrative composition. An interactive documentary can translate these practices into navigational tasks. When an interface discloses provenance, marks temporal uncertainty, and presents multiple testimonies with contextual anchors, the design scaffolds historical judgment. That scaffolding carries pedagogical force even when the project does not rely on explicit classroom framing.

Three dimensions of interface design deserve attention in this context: provenance cues, temporal affordances, and participation protocols. Provenance cues include visible attribution, links to institutional holdings, and documentation of editorial decisions. Temporal affordances include timelines, spatialized chronology, rhythm of revelation, and opportunities for return across sessions. Participation protocols include consent systems, moderation rules, collaboration modes, and credit structures that recognize contributors. These dimensions connect with institutional responsibilities because public-service organizations can document and maintain these design elements across a project's lifespan.

An interactive documentary also intersects with preservation politics. Web projects face technical obsolescence through browser standards, plugin deprecation, and hosting costs. Public-service institutions can address this challenge through platform migration plans, open documentation, and partnerships with archival organizations. The NFBC has pursued several such migrations, including shifts from Flash-based works to contemporary web formats. These migrations matter for public discourse because historical pedagogy depends on durable access and repeatable encounter.

Methodology: interface-centred historical analysis

This study treats each interactive documentary as a designed encounter with evidence. The analysis maps interface pathways by documenting entry points, navigation options, and sequencing logic. It identifies the evidentiary materials each project mobilizes, including archival documents, testimonial fragments, data visualizations, and audiovisual scenes. It evaluates how interface procedure shapes historical reasoning through prompts for comparison, verification, and temporal orientation. The term interface refers here to a mediating arrangement of screen design, database structure, code, user action, and institutional framing. Alexander Galloway, Branden Hookway, Lori Emerson, and Lev Manovich each clarify that interfaces organize relations among users, technical systems, and cultural forms; interfaces shape evidence, movement, and interpretation within the documentary encounter.[15]

The study draws on two bodies of material. One body consists of the projects themselves, accessed through NFBC collection pages and associated platforms. A second body consists of reception traces, including institutional press kits, curatorial descriptions, festival notes, critical reviews, and scholarship on interactive documentary. Reception traces clarify the public-facing aims institutions and critics assign to

15 Alexander R. Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012); Branden Hookway, *Interface* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014); Lori Emerson, *Reading Writing Interfaces: From the Digital to the Bookbound* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

each interface, thereby strengthening the explanation of how design choices target public encounter.

Interface analysis relies on repeated walkthroughs. The walkthrough method developed by Ben Light, Jean Burgess, and Stefanie Duguay provides a useful model because it treats an app or digital object as a structured environment whose screens, prompts, defaults, and pathways reveal embedded assumptions about use.[16] Each walkthrough records screen order, the placement of source citations, the location of credits, and the availability of outward links. When a project offers multiple pathways, the analysis tracks routes structured by default prompts and highlighted buttons, since these cues guide attention for most users. The analysis also examines participation-framing text, including consent prompts, privacy statements, and moderation language.

The method aligns with established approaches in interactive documentary studies that treat database structure and user agency as constitutive elements of documentary meaning.[17] Public history scholarship also treats archives, museums, classrooms, and media platforms as sites where publics encounter evidence, authority, and disagreement.

Two boundary conditions shape the study. Web access and platform stability influence the public reach of interactive works. Interface encounters vary across devices, screen sizes, and accessibility settings. The analysis focuses on the published versions available to the general public at the time of writing, with attention to institutional statements about platform versions. Each section names the relevant actor—interface, institution, platform, designer, user, or political movement—when describing agency. Clear attribution of responsibility supports the article's core argument, and interface design supplies an arena where attribution becomes visible.

16 Ben Light, Jean Burgess, and Stefanie Duguay, "The Walkthrough Method: An Approach to the Study of Apps," *New Media & Society* 20, no. 3 (2018): 881–900.

17 Kate Nash, "Clicking on the World: Documentary Representation and Interactivity," in *New Documentary Ecologies: Emerging Platforms, Practices and Discourses*, ed. Kate Nash, Craig Hight, and Catherine Summerhayes (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 50–66.

The evaluation uses five analytic dimensions that recur across the four cases. Provenance transparency concerns how each project signals the origin of its materials and documents editorial decisions through citations, archival identifiers, and descriptive metadata that support verification. Evidence assembly concerns how the interface asks users to assemble meaning through selection, juxtaposition, and navigation, including routines that resemble historical practice such as source comparison, timeline placement, and attention to gaps or uncertainties. Plural address concerns how each project stages multiple perspectives and frames authority through testimonial sequencing, narration, voice positioning, and opportunities for participant contribution. Temporal orientation concerns how the project configures relations among past, present, and future through cyclical return, anticipatory framing, futurity, and affective pacing that shape attention. Maintenance and accessibility concerns institutional commitments to access through version updates, device compatibility, captioning, and educational packaging, since civic learning depends on durability across technological change.

These analytic dimensions support cross-case synthesis. They identify stewardship principles that connect interface design with public obligations: visible sourcing, durable access, accountable voice design, and evidence pathways that users can inspect.

Ethical considerations guide the discussion of participation. Interactive projects that involve user data or user-generated contributions raise questions of consent, privacy, and reuse. The analysis treats privacy prompts and consent workflows as integral elements of documentary form. When projects mobilize tracking systems or data visualizations, the analysis evaluates how each interface clarifies data flows and frames user agency.

The method maintains a cautious stance toward impact claims. Public discourse outcomes arise from multiple causal factors, including institutional distribution, platform dynamics, media amplification, and audience uptake. The article uses the term public-service function to refer to design features that can support historical reasoning, and it uses reception traces, when available, as contextual evidence for those

functions. The argument concentrates on interpretive capacities and procedural features and avoids assigning broad political outcomes to any single work.

Distortion strategy: mythic chronology, symbolic capture, and platform circulation

Far-right memory politics operate through selective narration. Movements elevate episodes that support heroic lineage, suppress episodes that complicate lineage, and reframe violence as defence. Scholars describe this pattern as a new frontier in history wars because it engages interpretive infrastructures alongside factual claims.[18] Parties and movements pursue these interventions through speeches, commemorations, museum controversies, and digital campaigns. Digital campaigns matter because platform media offer rapid circulation, and these routes reward repetition and emotional salience.

Mythic chronology supplies one core technique. Umberto Eco's account of "Ur-Fascism" highlights a cult of tradition that treats the past as a timeless reservoir of Truth. Jason Stanley describes a related dynamic: authoritarian movements narrate a lost past to frame a plural society as in decline.[19] Mythic chronology compresses complexity into morality tales. The tales stabilize identity through simplified origins and simplified threats.

Symbolic capture supplies a second technique. Far-right actors appropriate medieval and early modern imagery—crusader iconography, Viking motifs, runic scripts, and heraldic aesthetics—because these symbols signal antiquity and purity. Medievalism scholarship has traced how white supremacist movements mobilize an imagined premodern Europe as an ethnic fantasy and as a claim to ownership of "Western civilization."[20] Such appropriation often appears in memes

18 Couperus, Tortola, and Rensmann, "Memory Politics of the Far Right in Europe," 435–444.

19 Umberto Eco, Ur-Fascism, *New York Review of Books,* June 22, 1995, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism/ (accessed January 24, 2026); Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (New York, NY: Random House, 2018).

20 Amy S. Kaufman and Paul B. Sturtevant, *The Devil's Historians: How Modern Extremists*

and in performative displays at rallies. The practice works through recognition. A symbol can signal belonging even when a claim lacks documentary support.

The January 6 attack on the United States Capitol provides a widely documented North American instance of this symbolic repertoire, while Canadian far-right online spaces show how comparable imagery circulates through national symbols, settler heritage cues, and claims about belonging. Teaching materials from the Populist Publics project at Carleton University describe the far-right use of Canadian historical images and Canadiana iconography in online spaces as frequent and increasing, especially around immigration, Indigenous peoples, and LGBTQ+ rights. These materials show how maple leaves, frontier imagery, settler heritage signs, and national symbols can carry claims about belonging, exclusion, and historical ownership. Historical imagery then functions as a shortcut for political identity. The image gives the claim an inherited national atmosphere before any evidentiary argument appears.[21]

Platform circulation supplies a third technique. Platform systems translate political communication into engagement metrics. Engagement metrics then shape visibility. Disinformation research emphasizes coordinated manipulation, attention hacking, and iterative testing of messages for maximal spread.[22] Alternative influence networks further accelerate circulation by linking creators across channels and by sending audiences along recommendation pathways that connect main-

Abuse the Medieval Past (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020).

21 "Vikings, Crusaders, Confederates: Misunderstood Historical Imagery at the January 6 Capitol Insurrection," *Perspectives on History*, January 2021, https://www.historians.org/perspectives-article/vikings-crusaders-confederates-misunderstood-historical-imagery-at-the-january-6-capitol-insurrection-january-2021/ (accessed January 24, 2026); Populist Publics, "Canadian Identity: The Use and Misuse of Nationalist Imagery Online," lesson plan, Carleton University, https://carleton.ca/populistpublics/wp-content/uploads/Lesson-Plan-1-Nationalist-Imagery-Online.pdf (accessed February 8, 2026); Elmer and Burton, "Rebel Personalities".

22 Alice E. Marwick and Rebecca Lewis, *Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online* (New York, NY: Data & Society Research Institute, 2017), https://datasociety.net/library/media-manipulation-and-disinfo-online/ (accessed January 24, 2026).

stream content with more radical content.[23] This circulation style favours condensed claims that travel easily through short videos, thumbnails, and captions. The style also privileges claims that require little prior context.

These three techniques intersect with a platform condition of provenance ambiguity. Platform interfaces privilege immediacy and affect, and many timelines and feeds provide thin signals of source origin, editorial context, and evidentiary chain. Such interface design enables a recurring far-right practice: the attachment of institutional aesthetics to materials that originate in ideological propaganda. Disinformation researchers describe this practice as "source laundering," in which repetition and reposting across accounts obscure the origin and produce a false sense of credibility.[24] History wars turn on procedure. Publics require tools for evaluating provenance, placing fragments within chronology, and recognizing how institutions assemble archives through selection, description, and circulation. An interactive documentary can supply these tools by translating historical methods into navigational tasks that organize attention, comparison, and return. The four NFBC works examined here stage that translation through distinct registers—data literacy, urban microhistory, environmental witnessing, and constitutional memory, including Indigenous perspectives on constitutional recognition and political action. Each register engages pressure points that far-right historical politics also mobilize in public discourse, and the projects can support public capacities to evaluate those pressures through interface procedures.

Platform governance shapes these conditions. Platforms curate through recommendation systems, search ranking, and moderation rules. Tarleton Gillespie characterizes content moderation as a set of hidden decisions that define platform publicness and shape what counts

23 Rebecca Lewis, *Alternative Influence: Broadcasting the Reactionary Right on YouTube* (New York, NY: Data & Society Research Institute, 2018), https://datasociety.net/library/alternative-influence/ (accessed January 24, 2026).

24 Wardle and Derakhshan, *Information Disorder*, 20–26.

as acceptable discourse.[25] Moderation regimes affect far-right history content in uneven ways because extremist framing can appear as cultural commentary, satire, or "heritage" advocacy. The ambiguity allows political movements to circulate historical insinuation while avoiding explicit slogans that trigger enforcement.

Scholars of the platform society emphasize that platforms have become core infrastructures for civic communication. José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal describe platforms as institutional actors that shape social life through datafication, commodification, and selection.[26] These dynamics influence historical discourse by shaping which archival resources circulate, which voices gain visibility, and which publics form around narratives.

Platform search and ranking also shape how the public encounters evidence. Safiya Umoja Noble's work on search engines demonstrates how ranking can reproduce racial hierarchies and provide credibility to discriminatory narratives through seemingly neutral outputs.[27] When historical claims circulate through such systems, ranking and recommendation become interpretive forces. These forces rarely provide users with transparent reasoning.

The contemporary attention economy intensifies these effects. Shoshana Zuboff describes surveillance capitalism as a system that extracts behavioural data for prediction and modification, turning attention into an economic resource.[28] In such environments, historical content that provokes anger and identity affirmation can gain disproportionate reach. Historical fragments then operate as affective tokens that anchor political identity.

25 Tarleton Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions that Shape Social Media* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

26 José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal, *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018).

27 Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018).

28 Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2019).

Public institutions confront these conditions with limited leverage over platform infrastructures. Public-service media can still intervene by producing alternative infrastructures that train habits of inquiry. Civic online reasoning research underscores the value of teaching evaluative practices through repeated exercises.[29] Interactive documentaries can deliver such exercises outside formal schooling by embedding them in cultural encounters.

These considerations help specify the stakes for public-service interactive documentary in history wars. Public-service institutions can design interfaces that foreground provenance, contextual anchoring, and temporal assembly. They can also document design decisions in ways users can inspect, provide outward links to archival holdings and research resources, and plan for maintenance that sustains access across technological change. Taken together, these practices position interactive documentary as civic infrastructure that supports historical judgment under conditions of polarized circulation.

Do Not Track: data epistemologies and provenance habits

Do Not Track presents privacy and surveillance as lived conditions of contemporary media use. The interactive web series, conceived and directed by Brett Gaylor, launched in 2015 as a seven-episode project released on a biweekly schedule. The production involved an international co-production network that included the NFBC, ARTE, Bayerischer Rundfunk, and Upian.[30] The project's core pedagogical move involves personalization. Users can grant limited access to browsing data and location cues, and the interface then generates real-time demonstrations of how ad-tech ecosystems assemble profiles. Government press releases describing the series emphasized this "eye-opening personalized look"

29 Stanford History Education Group, "Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning," by Sam Wineburg, Sarah McGrew, Joel Breakstone, and Teresa Ortega (Stanford University, 2016), https://purl.stanford.edu/fv751yt5934 (accessed January 24, 2026).

30 National Film Board of Canada, *Do Not Track*, interactive project page, https://www.nfb.ca/interactive/do_not_track/ (accessed January 24, 2026); Media Impact Funders, Case Study: Do Not Track, Media Impact Festival (2016), https://mediaimpactfunders.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/DoNotTrack.pdf (accessed January 24, 2026).

and linked the design to public education about the web economy.[31] The interface thus connects an abstract political economy of data with a concrete evidentiary experience.

That evidentiary orientation is clearly relevant to history wars because far-right campaigns often treat platform infrastructures as neutral conduits for "common sense." *Do Not Track* turns infrastructure into a subject of inquiry and equips users with repeatable routines for examining capture, inference, and circulation. Each episode follows a recognizable inquiry rhythm: a provocation that frames the problem, a live demonstration of tracking, interviews with researchers and activists, and an optional "dig deeper" layer that extends the episode's claims through explanatory text, outward links, and short interactive tests.[32] In combination, these elements approximate historical source criticism by asking users to move from claim to trace, from trace to context, and from context to judgment.

The project also trains lateral verification through outward movement and return. The "dig deeper" materials route users to organizations, research studies, and policy debates beyond the series. Users leave the episode space, consult external sources, and re-enter the interface with expanded context. That movement mirrors civic online reasoning practices associated with skilled evaluation, and it frames verification as an action users can perform rather than a posture of deference. The interface supports networked evidence work by structuring routes to corroboration and contextual enlargement.[33] The agency enters the evidentiary field through user choice. The interface offers options for data sharing, optional exploration, and privacy settings, and connects those decisions to institutional claims about regulation and responsibility. Evidence becomes proximate to daily judgment because the project links knowledge to settings, consent prompts, and policy language.

31 National Film Board of Canada, "Take Back Control of Your Digital Identity with *Do Not Track,"* news release, April 9, 2015, https://www.canada.ca/en/news/archive/2015/04/take-back-control-your-digital-identity-do-not-track.html (accessed January 24, 2026).

32 Media Impact Funders, "Case Study: *Do Not Track*," 1–2.

33 Wineburg and McGrew, "Lateral Reading and the Nature of Expertise," 1–40.

The series thereby aligns evidence work with practical decision-making, which has a direct bearing on politicized disputes in which actors treat information as spectacle rather than as material for accountable choice.

Reception traces reinforce this interpretation of public-service pedagogy. A *First Monday* article reporting conversations with interactive documentary practitioners described an audience of approximately 800,000 for *Do Not Track*, a scale that signals substantial reach for an experimental digital work.[34] Awards and festival visibility further amplified its circulation, including recognition from the Peabody Awards, which framed the series as an explanation of the political economy of the "free" web.[35] Within the article's argument about historical distortion, *Do Not Track* contributes in three interlocking ways. It cultivates a transferable habit of provenance tracing by training users to reconstruct origin through capture and circulation, a skill that aligns with the pathways through which disinformation hides or launders its source. It frames expertise as practice grounded in repeatable actions—demonstration, inspection, verification—while still acknowledging credentials as one signal among others. It also anchors critique in experiential demonstration: users watch profiling processes unfold, test how different choices affect outcomes, and connect abstract claims to visible procedures.

Episode-level design clarifies how those functions accumulate. Early episodes introduce tracking as a commercial practice tied to advertising markets. Subsequent episodes address personalization, algorithmic sorting, and political consequences of data-driven targeting. Later segments shift toward the labour of content moderation and the uneven distribution of privacy harms across social groups. This progression builds a temporal arc that carries users from basic mechanics

34 Giuliana Cucinelli, Émilie René-Véronneau, and Belinda Oldford, "Interactive documentaries and the connected viewer experience: Conversations with Katerina Cizek, Brett Gaylor, Jeff Soyk, and Florian Thalhofer," *First Monday* 23, no. 5 (2018), https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/6182 (accessed January 24, 2026).

35 Peabody Awards, *Do Not Track*, award profile, https://peabodyawards.com/award-profile/do-not-track/ (accessed January 24, 2026).

to institutional consequences, and it resembles historical narration that moves from source description toward explanatory account.

The release schedule contributes an additional temporal layer by inviting iterative engagement across several weeks. Public-facing documentation for the project described weekly public sessions hosted by the Mozilla Foundation, where audiences discussed each episode and exchanged strategies for privacy action.[36] The social framing supports public service by situating evidence work inside dialogue and return, with learning distributed across conversation and re-entry rather than confined to a single encounter.

The interface also fosters reflexivity about evidence through its personalization. When the series adjusts content using user data, it demonstrates how systems infer identity from traces and how classification converts traces into categories that carry consequences. Evidence arrives through institutional and technical procedures that sort, label, and rank. The analogy extends to historical archives, where cataloguers, curators, and archivists classify materials through institutional vocabularies that shape legibility. An interactive documentary can disclose classification as a procedure, thereby strengthening public understanding of archival conditions.

Do Not Track makes classification visible through graphical panels, pop-up explanations, and selective disclosures that show which data points drive profiling. These design elements connect a trace to an interpretive claim in real time. Users can observe how a click becomes a behavioural signal, and how a signal becomes a predicted preference. The resulting chain resembles historical inference, where a document becomes a trace within a broader explanatory account assembled through context, comparison, and corroboration.

The series also clarifies how narratives travel through infrastructures optimized for frictionless consumption. Personalization influences what appears in the user's field of attention, sorting shapes what registers as relevant, and recommendation structures shape perceived

36 Media Impact Funders, "Case Study: *Do Not Track*," 2–3.

authority. By rendering these systems legible, the project supplies a vocabulary audiences can carry into encounters with politicized historical content on platform feeds.

Taken together, these design choices illustrate the public-service capacity of interactive documentary. *Do Not Track* offers an experiential pathway toward literacies that support democratic discourse: provenance tracing, lateral verification, temporal sequencing, and reflexive awareness of classification regimes. These literacies strengthen public judgment in contexts where mythic chronology and source laundering circulate as a political technique.

Circa 1948: urban microhistory, spatial archive, and contested memory

Circa 1948 offers a digital encounter with Vancouver's postwar history, focusing on two sites: Hogan's Alley and the Old Hotel Vancouver. The interactive work emerged from a collaboration between artist Stan Douglas and the NFBC Digital Studio, including co-creator Loc Dao, combining documentary fragments with a navigable three-dimensional environment.[37] The project positions users within a reconstructed urban space and invites exploration across streets, rooms, and archival traces. Audio fragments, photographs, and documentary scenes appear as discoverable nodes. This spatial structure supports microhistorical reasoning. Users build a sense of context through movement, encounter, and accumulation of detail.

History wars frequently operate at the scale of place. Urban redevelopment debates, memorial controversies, and racialized erasures often hinge on who controls public memory in specific locations. *Circa 1948* addresses these stakes by staging the city as an archive. The interface treats streets and interiors as containers of memory. Users encoun-

37 National Film Board of Canada, *Circa 1948*, interactive project page, https://www.nfb.ca/interactive/circa_1948/ (accessed January 24, 2026); National Film Board of Canada, *Circa 1948* Press Kit (Montreal: NFB, 2014), PDF, https://www.nfb.ca/press-kit/circa-1948/ (accessed January 24, 2026).

ter stories of policing, vice regulation, displacement, and community life that shaped the district in the late 1940s.

The project's spatial archive also foregrounds contested memory through inclusion and omission. One crucial context involves Hogan's Alley, a historically Black neighbourhood in Vancouver that later faced demolition through redevelopment and freeway planning. The press kit and companion materials situate the project's urban reconstruction within broader histories of racialized urban transformation.[38] The project thus operates as a prompt for public historical reflection on how cities produce archives through demolition and rebuilding. Three design mechanisms illustrate the project's historiographical function.

First, the interface aligns evidence with exploration. Users do not receive a single linear narrative. Users gather fragments and assemble a coherent account as they navigate. This structure parallels historical research practices that rely on partial traces. Fragment-based exploration also cultivates a careful stance toward claims. The interface encourages users to treat each fragment as a piece of a larger puzzle, with each fragment offering a partial explanation.

The interface uses atmosphere to convey historical conditions. The reconstructed cityscape presents dim lighting, constrained spaces, and auditory textures that evoke postwar urban life. Atmosphere works here as a sensory entry into history, guiding experiential imagination while keeping attention oriented toward documentary fragments and archival traces. In history wars**,** extremist narratives often operate through atmospheric myth, where mood substitutes for evidence and repetition substitutes for interpretation. *Circa 1948* offers an alternative atmospheric register anchored in trace, context, and place-based documentation.

Third, the project foregrounds institutional mediation. The press kit and credits identify archival sources and production collaborators. Users can trace how the project assembled historical materials. This

38 National Film Board of Canada, *Circa 1948* Press Kit, 3–6.

transparency supports accountability. It also provides a model for public history work that acknowledges curation as an interpretive act.

Reception contexts reinforce the project's public-service orientation. The NFBC framed the work as part of its digital innovation portfolio and released versions for web and mobile platforms.[39] Such distribution strategies extend reach beyond a single exhibition context.

Circa 1948, therefore, offers a distinct contribution to public reasoning about distorted pasts. The project positions historical understanding as an act of assembly rooted in place. Users confront the consequences of policing, moral regulation, and redevelopment through an archive that becomes legible through exploration. That design supports democratic discourse by cultivating patience with complexity and attention to the material conditions that shape memory.

The NFBC described the work as a film noir-inspired, historically based immersive art project that evolved from a feature pitch into a non-linear environment presented as an iOS app and as a projection-mapped installation.[40] Two locales anchor the experience. The first locale places users in a grand hotel occupied by homeless war veterans. The second locale presents Hogan's Alley as a muddy lane shaped by ethnic diversity, vice economies, and police corruption.[41] These locales connect postwar demobilization and urban inequality with racialized spatial politics.

The project's design encourages listening as a historical method. Users encounter characters and voices that appear as "ghosts" within the reconstructed environment. These voices anchor archival fragments in social life. The interface thereby links documents to lived experience, a central practice in public history interpretation.

39 App Store, "*Circa 1948*: The Experience," Apple App Store listing, https://apps.apple.com/ca/app/circa-1948-the-experience/id881289366 (accessed January 24, 2026).

40 National Film Board of Canada, "Vancouver | 2 Ways to Experience *Circa 1948* this Fall," *NFB Blog,* September 16, 2015, https://blog.nfb.ca/blog/2015/09/16/circa-1948-vancouver/ (accessed January 24, 2026).

41 National Film Board of Canada, "Vancouver | 2 Ways to Experience *Circa 1948* this Fall."

Spatial navigation also supports a form of chronological assembly that differs from conventional timelines. Users build a sense of sequence through movement between rooms and streets, and through the accumulation of clues across repeated visits. This design can cultivate a "return" practice. Users can re-enter the environment, explore alternative routes, and assemble a richer understanding of the district's historical tensions.

The NFBC's description of the project emphasizes the research process that supported the reconstruction. Stan Douglas drew on maps and photographs, and the NFBC's digital team converted these materials into an explorable virtual world using Autodesk Maya. This documentation supports historiographical transparency by showing how production choices translate archival materials into a navigable environment.

Circa 1948, therefore, functions as a public-service archive of place. The project helps the public think about urban history through redevelopment and the politics of erasure**.** In history wars, far-right discourse often frames cities as sites of decline and moral disorder. *Circa 1948* offers a grounded archive of the social conditions that shaped urban life, including policing and poverty. That archive supports democratic discussion of the responsibilities cities bear toward marginalized communities.

Microhistorical scholarship emphasizes how small-scale investigations can reveal broader structures through careful attention to detail and to everyday life. Carlo Ginzburg's work on microhistory illustrates how fragmentary traces can support rigorous inference when researchers situate traces within a social context.[42] *Circa 1948* translates a comparable sensibility into a public interface. The project invites users to build context through fragments that accumulate across exploration.

The project also intersects with memory studies that emphasize place as a container of collective remembrance. Pierre Nora's concept of

42 Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

lieux de mémoire points to sites where memory crystallizes through social practice and institutional framing.[43] *Circa 1948* constructs such a site through digital simulation. The reconstructed streets and interiors become a locus where users can rehearse a relationship to contested urban pasts.

This rehearsal carries democratic significance. Public debates about heritage and belonging often hinge on whose experiences count as part of the city's story. By centring spaces shaped by poverty, racialized regulation, and postwar displacement, the project enlarges the archive of civic memory available to publics. That enlargement supports a public discourse that can recognize structural conditions alongside individual narrative.

Finally, *Circa 1948* illustrates how public institutions can use interactive media to create durable points of return. The availability of an app version, a web version, and an installation context indicates a multi-channel public circulation strategy. Such circulation increases the likelihood that educators, curators, and community organizations can integrate the work into broader interpretive contexts.

Bear 71: environmental history, surveillance aesthetics, and cross-species witnessing

Bear 71 situates viewers within Banff National Park and presents wildlife under conditions of technological monitoring. The interactive documentary, created by Leanne Allison and Jeremy Mendes, launched in 2012 and combined documentary footage, a narrative voice, and an interactive map populated with data points for animals and humans.[44] The project uses a surveillance interface as its primary aesthetic. Users navigate a map that resembles a control room screen, with moving points representing animals and people. At launch, the interface could access the user's webcam and place the user's face within the surveil-

43 Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24.

44 National Film Board of Canada, *Bear 71*, interactive project page, https://www.nfb.ca/interactive/bear71/ (accessed January 24, 2026).

lance field. This design choice frames surveillance as a shared condition. The interface implies that monitoring shapes both wildlife management and human social life.

Bear 71 operates as public history through environmental witnessing. The project follows a female grizzly bear as park authorities and automated systems track her movements. That tracking produces the archive that the documentary invites users to read: GPS collar logs, camera-trap images, and monitoring records become documentary traces. The project treats these traces as a form of environmental history that extends established practices of natural-history documentation into the logics of contemporary management and computation. Three dynamics carry the project's historiographical work.

The interface treats data as story material. The map renders the bear's movement as points and trajectories, and each point opens a short clip and an accompanying description of an encounter or event. Users move from trace to trace and assemble a narrative sequence through their own selections. The design ties quantification to interpretation, which is directly relevant in contemporary history wars, where actors circulate statistics and graphics as self-evident proof. In *Bear 71*, classification and visualization shape meaning at the moment of encounter, and the interface makes that shaping visible.

The archive also takes a relational form. The webcam feature and the map's navigational logic place users inside the monitored landscape, and the system returns the viewer's image as part of the documentary field. The interface turns the act of viewing into a disclosed position within the same surveillance ecology that structures the bear's world. This gesture connects with platform critique that treats monitoring as a governing condition of contemporary media environments, and it gives the user a concrete experience of that condition rather than an abstract claim.

A final dynamic concerns cross-species witnessing as an ethical stance. The voiced narration adopts a first-person register for the bear and guides attention through managed space as the bear encounters

fences, roads, tourists, and institutional observation. This narrative choice invites viewers to practice proximity as interpretation: users attend to movement, constraint, and exposure as historical facts of governance. The resulting orientation can widen moral imagination to include non-human life within public discourse. That widening matters in history wars because far-right memory politics often organizes a civilizational storyline around property, sovereignty, and human exceptionalism, thereby narrowing the space for ecological relations and shared vulnerability.

The NFBC later supported adaptations of the project into newer formats as web standards changed. In 2017, the NFBC highlighted a new WebVR version presented at IDFA DocLab, a release that responded to platform change and preservation needs.[45] This migration underscores the public service requirement for maintenance. Historical pedagogy depends on continued access.

Bear 71 also offers a practical model for integrating environmental history into public discourse. The project frames Banff as a lived space shaped by tourism, infrastructure, and management. Users can observe how roads, rail lines, and visitor movement intersect with animal habitats. The interface thus teaches that environmental history involves human institutions, technological systems, and non-human agency.

Within the frame of far-right history wars, *Bear 71* contributes by widening the scope of historical responsibility. Far-right nostalgia often depends on a purified national landscape that erases Indigenous presence and ecological complexity. *Bear 71* counters this tendency through a design that foregrounds entanglement, monitoring, and consequence. The project encourages the public to treat land management as a historical process with ethical stakes.

Surveillance studies provide language for this design. Kevin Haggerty and Richard Ericson describe a "surveillant assemblage" that

45 National Film Board of Canada, "Interactive docs & VR at IDFA DocLab," *news release*, November 16, 2017, https://www.canada.ca/en/national-film-board/news/2017/11/interactive_docs_vr_atidfadoclab.html (accessed January 24, 2026).

gathers heterogeneous monitoring practices into a distributed system of observation and classification.[46] David Lyon emphasizes how surveillance organizes social sorting, shaping how institutions categorize populations.[47] *Bear 71* adapts these concerns to an environmental register, showing how monitoring practices shape wildlife management, tourism governance, and public perception of nature.

The interface procedure supports this adaptation. The map provides a panoramic view that resembles a managerial standpoint. Users can zoom, click, and track movement. This standpoint signals power. It also creates a pedagogical opportunity: the project can expose how a standpoint produces knowledge. When a user clicks a moving point and receives a clip or a text, the interface demonstrates how a system translates motion into an "event" through classification.

The webcam insertion intensifies this lesson. A user's face appears as another data point inside the monitored landscape. The inclusion prompts a recognition that surveillance operates through participation as well as through coercion. Users often grant camera access through everyday app prompts. *Bear 71* turns that familiar act into an interpretive moment, linking consent, observation, and classification.

Scholarship on interactive documentary has treated *Bear 71* as a key case because the project integrates documentary voice with game-like navigation while sustaining documentary commitments to evidence and ethical address.[48] *Bear 71* offers a model for public-service environmental history that remains legible within digital vernaculars of maps, interfaces, and user-driven navigation.

These features address far-right historical distortion through the politics of land. In history wars, far-right discourse often mobilizes land as a symbol that organizes purity claims and exclusionary belonging.

46 Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson, "The Surveillant Assemblage," *British Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 4 (2000): 605–622.

47 David Lyon, *Surveillance Studies: An Overview* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

48 Simo Hakalisto, "Immersion in Interactive Documentaries: A Game-Studies-Driven Approach in a Case Study of Bear 71" (master's thesis, University of Tampere, 2017), CORE repository PDF, https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/250151346.pdf (accessed January 24, 2026).

Bear 71 frames land as a monitored relation shaped by infrastructure, tourism, and management regimes. That framing supplies a public vocabulary for discussing ecological responsibility and institutional consequence, and it strengthens democratic discourse by linking historical imagination to ongoing practices of environmental governance.

Environmental history scholarship has increasingly treated the Anthropocene as a condition that blurs boundaries between natural history and political history. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that climate change forces historical thinking to integrate planetary processes with human institutions.[49] Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz similarly emphasize the political choices that produced the Anthropocene, highlighting the need for historical narratives that connect infrastructure, extraction, and governance.[50] *Bear 71* offers a public-facing translation of this scholarship by situating animal life within monitoring systems that respond to human expansion.

The project's narrative voice, delivered as the bear's perspective, organizes affect and responsibility. Users encounter the bear's movements across seasons, through encounters with roads and rail corridors, and under the pressures of human presence. Each click on the map becomes a small act of witnessing. The interface thereby trains an attentive stance toward ecological consequence.

Interface-based training directly affects contemporary politics. Far-right discourse often frames environmental governance as a threat to sovereignty and a constraint on freedom, placing environmental narratives at the center of disputes over legitimacy and public authority. *Bear 71* engages these disputes through evidentiary practice by tying ecological claims to visible traces and situating those traces within the institutional systems that manage land. The interface allows users to see the spatial relationship between infrastructure and habitat, and the tracking record shows how institutions convert movement into

49 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 197–222.

50 Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2016).

knowledge through collars, cameras, and logs. Public reasoning develops through inspection, spatial comparison, and repeated review of the record.

In that sense, *Bear 71* contributes to democratic historical discourse through an expanded archive of responsibility. The work frames the monitored landscape as a historical product and as a shared future concern. This framing complements the other cases in the article by extending provenance reasoning into ecological governance.

Supreme Law: constitutional memory, Indigenous perspectives, and procedural legitimacy

Supreme Law frames the 1980–1982 patriation and Charter moment as a conflict over procedure, authority, and recognition. The interactive documentary, directed by Katerina Cizek and produced with the NFBC in partnership with the Centre for Constitutional Studies, launched in 2019 and presents the constitutional story through a set of "points of view" anchored by prominent internet creators.[51] Festival preview contexts demonstrate early public circulation. The project appeared in Canadian documentary circuits in 2019, which positioned the work within a broader field of public history and documentary pedagogy.[52] The project organizes constitutional history as a navigable evidence environment. Each point of view functions as an interpretive gateway, introducing a storyline and a set of stakes, while the site's Deep Dives, glossary, and educational materials provide a second layer of docu-

51 National Film Board of Canada, "Stars! Scholars! Canada's Constitution! Katerina Cizek's NFB Interactive Documentary *Supreme Law* Launches May 2," Government of Canada news release, May 2, 2019, https://www.canada.ca/en/national-film-board/news/2019/05/stars-scholars-canadas-constitution-katerina-cizeks-nfb-interactive-documentary-supreme-law-launches-may-2-with-a-lively-look-at-the-stories-behind.html (accessed January 24, 2026); National Film Board of Canada, Supreme Law, NFB Collection page, https://collection.nfb.ca/interactive/supreme_law (accessed January 24, 2026); Centre for Constitutional Studies, *Supreme Law,* resource page, https://www.constitutionalstudies.ca/resources/supreme-law/ (accessed January 24, 2026).

52 National Film Board of Canada, "Ten NFB premieres and a tribute to Studio D women pioneers coming to the 2019 Hot Docs Festival," *Government of Canada news release*, March 19, 2019, https://www.canada.ca/en/national-film-board/news/2019/03/ten-nfb-premieres-and-a-tribute-to-studio-d-women-pioneers-coming-to-the-2019-hot-docs-festival-opening-night-film-by-tasha-hubbard-premieres-by-jo.html (accessed January 24, 2026).

mentation for users to consult during viewing.[53] Within the context of far-right memory politics, *Supreme Law* carries particular force because constitutional myths operate as political instruments. Authoritarian movements can treat a constitution as a sacred origin that guarantees a singular national identity and naturalizes exclusions. *Supreme Law* positions the constitution as a negotiated artifact produced through conflict, bargaining, and public pressure. That positioning widens the public's capacity to treat constitutional memory as contested history.

Supreme Law stages a direct Indigenous intervention into constitutional memory. Its "Indigenous Perspectives on the Constitution" pathway follows Indigenous political action during patriation through advocacy, international appeals, and strategic engagement with parliamentary procedure. That emphasis on action and procedure performs a public-service function: the project clarifies how rights claims entered constitutional text through sustained organizing and institutional contestation. Users encounter constitutional recognition as a practiced politics that drew on community mobilization, committee testimony, media visibility, and international advocacy.

The interface enables historical judgment by connecting narration, documentation, and pedagogy. The point-of-view structure organizes plural address by assigning distinct voices to different perspectives, each carrying a specific narrative position. These voices anchor competing standpoints or differing interpretations of the same topic. The navigation guides users through positions in a clear sequence. The "Deep Dives" expand the documentary form by providing contextual explanation (background information) and definitions (clarifications of key terms) within narrative segments. Glossary terms and background materials accompany story claims and support provenance reasoning

53 National Film Board of Canada, "*Supreme Law* | Engage Students with an Interactive Website on Canada's Constitution," *NFB Blog*, May 1, 2019, https://blog.nfb.ca/blog/2019/05/01/supreme-law-engage-students-with-an-interactive-website-on-canadas-constitution/ (accessed January 24, 2026); *Supreme Law*, Indigenous Perspectives on the Constitution, navigation item accessible via point-of-view pathway, https://supremelaw.nfb.ca/ (accessed January 24, 2026); National Film Board of Canada, *Supreme Law*, NFB Collection page, https://collection.nfb.ca/interactive/supreme_law (accessed January 24, 2026); Centre for Constitutional Studies, *Supreme Law*.

(assessing the source and credibility of evidence) alongside the video. Educational materials integrate the method into classroom routines through guided questions about authorship, voice, and historical representation. The materials begin with the Indigenous pathway, which centers Indigenous experiences and provides a foundation for discussing constitutional recognition and political struggle.

The project also makes temporal re-entry part of its architecture. Users can return using several gateways: video segments, deep dives, and glossary terms. Each return can shift interpretation as users gain more context. This cumulative encounter echoes constitutional politics as a recurring public problem. Civic learning develops through revisiting evidence and re-reading institutional claims. It helps refine judgment over time.

The project's vernacular casting contributes to public reach. Internet creators can mediate procedural history in accessible language, while constitutional scholars and archival clips maintain documentary accountability. The interface keeps these elements in relation through navigation that invites viewers to move from narrative into documentation when questions arise.[54] Within this article's comparative frame, *Supreme Law* links the struggle over historical knowledge to the struggle over institutional legitimacy. Far-right history wars depend on delegitimizing critical historiography and presenting authority as self-evident tradition. *Supreme Law* presents authority as contested procedure, documented evidence, and accountable interpretation. That presentation strengthens democratic discourse by training the public in constitutional reasoning amid polarization.

The work also clarifies the Canadian aporetic condition at the level of constitutional memory. The project keeps tensions among national unity claims, rights language, and Indigenous sovereignty claims visible within a single encounter. Users encounter these tensions through pro-

54 National Film Board of Canada, "Stars! Scholars!"; Centre for Constitutional Studies, Supreme Law, resource page.

cedural history, which can support careful interpretation in polarized environments.

Finally, *Supreme Law* highlights the institutional stakes of maintenance. The project depends on stable hosting, platform compatibility, and ongoing educational circulation. These conditions determine whether constitutional memory remains available as a civic resource, and they define a core responsibility for public institutions that commission digital public history.[55]

Synthesis: a public-service design logic for digital history under polarization

The four case studies show a shared design logic: an interactive documentary can function as public-service infrastructure when its interface procedures support historical judgment. Historical judgment involves provenance, chronology, plural perspective, and reflexive awareness of institutional mediation. Each project implements this logic through different materials and sensory registers.

Across these cases, the Canadian aporetic condition supplies a unifying analytic frame. Each interface turns a durable tension into a procedural learning environment: data capture and civic autonomy; redevelopment and racialized belonging; ecological governance and institutional surveillance; constitutional legitimacy and Indigenous sovereignty claims. Far-right instrumentalisation can convert these tensions into mythic continuity and selective evidence. The NFBC works keep the tensions visible through documentation, sequencing, and plural address, which supports responsible historical reasoning in public space.[56] *Do Not Track* trains provenance habits within data infrastructures. It reveals chains of capture, classification, and targeting, then prompts users to verify claims through outward linking. *Circa 1948* trains the spatial assembly of microhistorical memory. It situates archival fragments within a navigable cityscape, thereby linking evidence to place

55 National Film Board of Canada, *Supreme Law*.

56 Bessai, "Art as a Public Service".

and to redevelopment politics. *Bear 71* trains ecological witnessing through surveillance aesthetics. It connects data points to narrative consequence and frames management systems as historical forces. *Supreme Law* trains in constitutional reasoning through a guided sequence of perspectives and deep dives, including Indigenous perspectives on constitutional recognition and political action.

Across the four cases, five commissioning principles emerge for public-service institutions that aim to address history wars.

Integrate provenance cues into the interface: place citations (references to the source), archival identifiers (unique codes assigned to archival records), and source notes (additional context or explanation about the materials) close to the items they support. When allowed by the rights environment, provide outward links to institutional holdings (the official collections where the materials reside), finding aids (tools that describe the content and structure of archival collections), and research resources. By enabling audiences to test claims and follow evidentiary chains beyond the immediate encounter, these cues strengthen public reasoning.

Design temporal affordances that support return. Temporal affordances let users control when and how they interact. Episodic release structures, clear navigational maps, and revisitable environments invite users to return. Public history grows through repeat encounters and dialogue. Interface design should make returns simple, clear, and rewarding.

Stage plurality through accountable voice design. Voice design concerns how an interface presents perspectives and testimony. Include multiple testimonies and interpretive frames through practices that sustain responsibility. Accountable plurality requires transparent crediting, consent workflows that respect participant agency, and attention to unequal risk, particularly when participation increases exposure to harassment or surveillance.

Treat classification and metadata as civic design. Show how categories shape meaning and how vocabularies distribute legitimacy. Use

alternative labels when institutional language obscures experience or compresses conflict into neutral terms. In history wars, classification shapes what counts as evidence, whose voice registers as authoritative, and which pasts remain legible.

Plan for maintenance and accessibility from the start. Budget for platform migration, captioning, multiple-device support, and archival partnerships. Maintenance ensures public resources stay usable as technology changes. Accessibility broadens participation in historical discourse.

By working together, these principles clarify a practical contribution of interactive documentary to democratic life. Public-service media shape how publics learn to evaluate historical claims, and they help people imagine responsibility across time. When circulation is polarized, design-oriented commissioning offers a means to strengthen historical discourse through cultural practice.

Each case illustrates these principles concretely. Provenance cues appear through *Do Not Track*'s external resources and through its disclosure of tracking technologies. Temporal return appears through the biweekly episodic schedule and through the possibility of revisiting demonstrations with new privacy settings. Spatial return appears through *Circa 1948*'s revisitable cityscape and its fragmentary archive, which rewards multiple paths. Ecological return is evident in *Bear 71*'s map, which keeps movement visible and invites users to connect clips across the monitored landscape. Constitutional return appears through *Supreme Law*'s points of view and deep dives, which invite repeated consultation as users build context across visits.

Plural address also takes distinct forms. *Circa 1948* uses a chorus of voices situated within the city's social geography. *Do Not Track* uses interviews with technologists, activists, and scholars to connect experience with analysis. *Bear 71* uses cross-species address to widen the ethical field of historical discourse. *Supreme Law* stages constitutional memory through a plural perspective and includes Indigenous activism as documented procedural history.

Maintenance concerns are most evident in format migration. The NFBC's work to support new versions of interactive projects illustrates an institutional commitment to access. Such commitments shape the public value of digital history, since civic resources depend on durable access. Commissioning and preservation thus become elements of democratic media policy.

Taken together, the case studies support a normative claim: interactive documentary can contribute to democratic resilience when public institutions treat interface design as public policy. Design decisions about navigation, metadata, sourcing, and preservation shape how publics assemble knowledge. Public institutions hold a distinct capacity to align these decisions with civic obligations, given their mandates and their accountability structures.

Conclusion

Far-right history wars place procedural pressure on democratic discourse. The pressure involves provenance ambiguity, mythic chronology, and symbolic capture accelerated by platform circulation. Platform governance involves multiple actors, and public institutions can build alternative infrastructures that train historical judgment.

The dossier's framing emphasizes anti-intellectual attacks on historical scholarship, the relativisation of historical crimes, and rapid digital dissemination through algorithmic environments. The four cases analyzed here engage these dynamics at the level of practice. They provide accessible evidence environments, maintain institutional context throughout the encounter, and train interpretive routines that make epistemic responsibility visible to users.

The four NFBC works perform this infrastructure-building in distinct registers. *Do Not Track* links data infrastructures to experiential evidence and trains provenance tracing. *Circa 1948* stages urban microhistory through a spatial archive that foregrounds contested memory. *Bear 71* frames environmental history as a monitored relation that binds institutions, ecologies, and consequences. *Supreme Law* stages

constitutional memory through documented procedure and plural perspective, including Indigenous political action during patriation.

Across these cases, the interface procedure functions as civic pedagogy. The projects train repeatable habits: tracking origin, assembling chronology, weighing perspectives, and recognizing institutional mediation. These habits strengthen the public capacity to evaluate historical claims in polarized media environments.

The article also offers guidance on institutional stewardship for public-service organizations seeking to address history wars through digital media. It identifies design commitments that travel across the cases: interfaces that disclose provenance at the point of encounter, structures that support return over time, voice design that sustains accountable plurality, metadata practices treated as civic infrastructure, and early planning for maintenance and accessibility. Taken together, these commitments define a practical agenda for interactive documentary as public service. That agenda supports experiential learning that operates across public culture, including settings that extend beyond classrooms and conventional broadcast distribution.

One limit also requires direct acknowledgment. Public-service media can build interfaces that support provenance, chronology, and plural testimony, yet those capacities depend on public trust in the institution that hosts and circulates them. Far-right media actors have worked to weaken trust in public-sector media by framing public institutions as ideological authorities rather than civic infrastructures.[57] This distrust can restrict the reach of NFBC projects among audiences already drawn into anti-institutional media ecologies. The argument, therefore, rests on a measured claim: interactive documentary can strengthen conditions for historical judgment, while institutional trust shapes whether those conditions become publicly usable.

Future research can extend this account through audience studies that examine how diverse publics use these projects over time, and through policy analysis that tracks how cultural institutions fund

57 Lewis, *Alternative Influence*; Elmer and Burton, "Rebel Personalities".

maintenance and accessibility for digital public history. Such work can deepen understanding of how public storytelling infrastructures shape democratic life in an era of polarized circulation.

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Karina Cretu

Make America Great Again – *Mythic History and the Quest for National Redemption*

This article analyses how right-wing intellectuals aligned with the post-2016 "MAGA" movement mobilise mythic narratives of American history to legitimise exclusionary politics and delegitimise critical scholarship. Focusing on two key case studies, the Claremont Institute and the Trump administration's 1776 Commission, the paper shows how these actors construct a redemptive national myth centred on the Founding, moral unity, and heroic tradition. Through close readings of primary texts such as Michael Anton's "The Flight 93 Election" essay and the 1776 Report, the article demonstrates how historical complexity is rejected in favour of simplified, moralised narratives that frame dissent as unpatriotic. Drawing on theories of political myth, collective memory, and anti-intellectualism, it argues that these actors weaponize the past to undermine pluralist democracy and reframe historical knowledge as a matter of loyalty rather than inquiry. In doing so, they contribute to an epistemic environment in which civic education is reoriented toward indoctrination, and historical truth is subordinated to ideological coherence.
Keywords: political myth; American Founding; MAGA; Claremont Institute.

Make America Great Again — *História mítica e a busca pela redenção nacional*

Este artigo analisa a forma como intelectuais da direita norte-americana alinhados com o movimento "MAGA" pós-2016 mobilizam narrativas míticas da história dos Estados Unidos para legitimar políticas de exclusão e deslegitimar a produção historiográfica crítica. Focando-se em dois estudos de caso centrais – o Claremont Institute e a Comissão 1776 do governo Trump –, o artigo mostra como esses atores constroem um mito redentor em torno da fundação da nação, da unidade moral e da tradição heroica. Através da análise de fontes primárias como o ensaio "The Flight 93 Election" de Michael Anton e o Relatório da Comissão 1776, demonstra-se como a complexidade histórica é rejeitada em favor de narrativas simplificadas e moralizantes que retratam a dissidência como antipatriótica. Baseando-se

em teorias sobre mito político, memória coletiva e anti-intelectualismo, o artigo defende que esses autores instrumentalizam o passado para enfraquecer a democracia pluralista e redefinir o conhecimento histórico como um teste de lealdade. Os mesmos contribuem, assim, para um ambiente epistémico em que a educação cívica é orientada para a doutrinação e a verdade histórica é subordinada à coerência ideológica.
Palavras-chave: mito político; fundação dos EUA; MAGA; Claremont Institute.

Make America Great Again – Mythic History and the Quest for National Redemption

Karina Cretu*

I. Introduction

The struggle over American history did not begin with Donald Trump. Since the late 1980s and especially the 1990s, disputes over multicultural curricula, national history standards, museum exhibitions, Confederate memory, the Smithsonian's proposed Enola Gay exhibition, and later the 1619 Project have repeatedly turned the past into a field of ideological conflict[1]. In these "history wars," arguments about what should be taught, commemorated, or displayed have rarely been only about accuracy. They have also been arguments about national identity: whether the United States should be narrated primarily as a

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1 See Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996); Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Knopf, 1997); Richard H. Kohn, "History and the Culture Wars: the case of the Smithsonian Institution's Enola Gay Exhibition," *Journal of American History* 82, no. 3 (1995): 1036–1063.

story of liberty and providential progress, or as a more nuanced history marked by slavery, settler colonialism, racial hierarchy, exclusion, democratic struggle, and unfinished promises[2].

The post-2016 period nevertheless marks a distinct intensification of this older pattern. Trump's 2015-2016 campaign and subsequent presidency gave national visibility to a network of right-wing intellectuals and institutions that treated history not simply as memory or civic inheritance, but as a weapon in a broader struggle over regime legitimacy. Figures such as Michael Anton and Glenn Ellmers, together with institutions such as the Claremont Institute, Hillsdale College, and the 1776 Commission chaired by Larry Arnn, repeatedly framed contemporary political conflict as a struggle over the "true" meaning of the American Founding[3]. Their core claim is not simply that the Founding matters, which is hardly controversial in American political thought. Rather, they argue that one particular interpretation of the Founding – centred on natural rights, moral unity, civilisational confidence, and hostility to egalitarian or multicultural reinterpretations – should function as the authoritative standard by which present institutions, curricula, and citizens are judged[4].

2 The tension between these two narrative modes has its own extensive historiography. For the "exceptionalist" reading of American history as a story of liberty, see Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996); for critiques and complications of that tradition, see Godfrey Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Sarah Churchwell, *Behold, America: A History of America First and the American Dream* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018); Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective since 1789* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); and Abram C. Van Engen, *City on a Hill: A History of American Exceptionalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020). On the counter-tradition foregrounding slavery and exclusion as constitutive rather than aberrant, see Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin, eds., *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). Wilfred M. McClay, *The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) traces how these competing self-understandings have shaped American intellectual life more broadly.

3 Publius Decius Mus [Michael Anton], "The Flight 93 Election," *Claremont Review of Books*, September 5, 2016; Glenn Ellmers, "'Conservatism' Is No Longer Enough," *The American Mind*, March 24, 2021; Donald J. Trump, Executive Order 13958, "Establishing the President's Advisory 1776 Commission," November 2, 2020; President's Advisory 1776 Commission, *The 1776 Report* (Washington, DC: The White House, January 2021).

4 Richard Slotkin, *A Great Disorder: National Myth and the Battle for America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2024), 13.

This article examines the politics of the past through the concept of historical myth-making. As Maurice Halbwachs argued in his foundational work on collective memory, groups do not preserve the past intact; they reconstruct it in light of present needs, selecting and reframing events to stabilise collective identity[5]. By historical myth-making, this article refers to a mode of political narration that selects, simplifies, sacralises, and moralises the past in order to make it politically binding in the present. This process does not necessarily require the fabrication of events, although outright falsehoods and distortions may form part of it. Mythic history differs from historiography not because it narrates the past — all historical writing involves narrative — but because it converts a selective account of the past into a source of unquestionable normative authority. Its purpose is less to open the past to inquiry than to close it around a set of moral certainties.

This understanding draws on scholarship on collective and cultural memory. Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* is useful here because it shows how particular sites, texts, symbols, and commemorative objects can be deliberately invested with national meaning once an unbroken relationship with the past is perceived to have been lost. Jan Assmann similarly distinguishes everyday "communicative memory" from institutionalised "cultural memory": a canonised body of texts, rites, images, and symbols that performs what he calls a "concretion of identity," defining who belongs to the community and where its normative boundaries lie.[6] Mythic history, in this sense, is history transformed into a symbolic structure of loyalty, belonging, and exclusion.

Moreover, national myths are not inherently right-wing, nor are they unique to the United States. All modern nations rely on symbolic repertoires that condense complex histories into stories of origin, trial,

5 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 38–40.

6 Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24; Jan Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125–133; Jan Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 109–118.

sacrifice, and collective destiny[7]. American exceptionalism has been especially powerful because it operates as both civic ideal and national myth: it presents the United States as a uniquely free, providential, or exemplary political experiment, while also supplying a language through which diverse actors can criticise the nation for failing to live up to its professed ideals[8]. Democrats, Republicans, civil-rights activists, abolitionists, Cold War liberals, religious conservatives, and social movements have all drawn from this reservoir. Martin Luther King Jr.'s invocation of the Declaration of Independence as a "promissory note," for example, used exceptionalist language to expose the contradiction between American ideals and racial injustice[9].

What distinguishes the MAGA[10] variant is not the use of national myth per se but three specific features: the claim that a single interpretation of the Founding should be immune from scholarly revision; the treatment of dissenting historiography as disloyalty; and the deployment of state power to enforce the preferred narrative.[11]

7 The classic accounts are Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006 [1983]); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983). On the narrative structure of national myths – the repertoire of origins, trials, and collective destiny –, see Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). On how academic historiography functions as a "script" through which citizens learn to experience the present as part of a national story, see Pertti Haapala, "Lived Historiography: National History as a Script to the Past," in Ville Kivimäki, Sami Suodenjoki, and Tanja Vahtikari, eds., *Lived Nation as the History of Experiences and Emotions in Finland, 1800–2000* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 29–56. For political myth as an ongoing process of narrative labour, see Chiara Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

8 On the dual character of American exceptionalism as both civic ideal and national myth – simultaneously a source of nationalist self-celebration and a critical standard against which the nation can be judged –, see Peter S. Onuf, "American Exceptionalism and National Identity," *American Political Thought* 1, no. 1 (2012): 77–100, who identifies "dueling exceptionalisms" (liberal-cosmopolitan vs. conservative-essentialist) as a constitutive feature of American political identity.

9 Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream," August 28, 1963, Avalon Project, Yale Law School.

10 In this paper, the term "right-wing" denotes the contemporary MAGA-aligned New Right, the network of nationalist-populist thinkers and activists that coalesced around the Trump Administration since 2016. This movement openly challenges liberal-democratic norms and multicultural inclusion. The paper uses MAGA, far right, and right-wing interchangeably to mean these post-2016 currents rather than older conservative traditions.

11 Leading examples of this intellectual posture include Christopher Caldwell, *The Age of Entitlement: America Since the Sixties* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), which argues

The article develops this argument through two interrelated case studies. First, it examines the Claremont Institute, a long-standing conservative think tank that has positioned itself as a guardian of the American Founding and has promoted a highly moralised reading of constitutional history[12]. Second, it analyses the 1776 Commission, a presidential advisory body created by Donald Trump through Executive Order 13958 in November 2020 and chaired by Larry Arnn, Hillsdale College president and Claremont Institute former president. The Commission's final product, *The 1776 Report*, released in January 2021, sought to provide an official counter-narrative to the 1619 Project[13] and to promote what the administration called "patriotic education".[14] Its significance lies not simply in its defence of the Founding, but in its attempt to translate a mythic and redemptive account of American history into state-endorsed civic pedagogy. The report presented the Founding as the source of timeless principles, treated slavery and racism as deviations already overcome by those principles, and framed critical historiography as a threat to national unity. These cases share a common orientation toward the past as a normative resource and a site of political authority.

that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 created a "rival constitution" that displaced the original framework of limited government and freedom of association with an administered regime of identity-group entitlements – casting the entire post-1960s egalitarian project as a constitutional usurpation rather than a fulfilment of founding promises. Patrick Deneen offers a partly distinct critique in *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018). He argues that the founders' own Lockean liberalism contained the seeds of the individualism and state centralisation that conservatives now lament – a position that shares the New Right's hostility to egalitarian reform but locates the original sin in the Enlightenment Founding itself rather than in its later betrayal.

12 The Claremont Institute, "Mission & Overview – The Claremont Institute," August 23, 2024, https://www.claremont.org/mission-overview/.

13 The 1619 Project was launched by *The New York Times Magazine* in August 2019, on the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in Virginia. It sought to "reframe" American history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans at the centre of the national narrative. The project included essays, poetry, fiction, photography, a podcast, and later educational materials developed with the Pulitzer Center. See Nikole Hannah-Jones, "The 1619 Project," *The New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019; Pulitzer Center, "The 1619 Project Curriculum"; Jake Silverstein, "Why We Published The 1619 Project," *The New York Times Magazine*, December 20, 2019.

14 Nicole Gaudiano, "Trump Creates 1776 Commission to Promote 'Patriotic Education,'" *Politico*, November 2, 2020, https://www.politico.com/news/2020/11/02/trump-1776-commission-education-433885?utm_medium=facebook&utm_source=dlvr.it.

The underlying structure is one of purity, betrayal, and redemption: a morally complete Founding corrupted by progressive elites, critical historians, and "identity politics," awaiting restoration through strong leadership and institutional purification. In this framework, history becomes less a field of inquiry than a terrain to be reconquered.

The article proceeds in four sections. The first situates the argument within scholarship on political myth, American exceptionalism, and anti-intellectualism. The second analyses the mythic grammar of the Founding in MAGA-aligned discourse. The third examines Claremont as a case of intellectual myth-making. The fourth traces the institutionalisation of this myth through the 1776 Commission, and Trump's second-term efforts to reshape public history. The conclusion reflects on the democratic stakes of this politics of history.

II. Theoretical Framework

As the literary theorist and semiotician Roland Barthes argues in *Mythologies*, myth is a second-order semiological system: it takes an already existing sign or historical meaning and reworks it into a new signification. Its distinctive operation is naturalisation. In Barthes's well-known formulation, myth "transforms history into nature": it takes contingent, interested, and historically produced meanings and makes them appear self-evident, timeless, and apolitical[15]. This does not mean that myth is politically neutral. On the contrary, its apparent depoliticisation is precisely what makes it politically powerful: it conceals conflict, choice, and contingency behind the language of common sense, inheritance, or moral necessity. Political philosopher Chiara Bottici similarly treats political myth less as a false belief than as a process of "work on myth," through which a basic narrative pattern is continually reworked to satisfy a need for significance[16]. Political myths orient collective actors within complex political worlds; they assign roles, identify enemies, explain loss, and promise restoration.

15 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Random House, 1993), 109–111.
16 Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, 8–9, 14–16.

This article therefore does not argue that all political uses of history are mythological or illegitimate. Political communities necessarily use the past to orient themselves. Constitutional interpretation, commemorative practice, civic education, and public history all involve choices about what matters. The problem emerges when political actors convert history into a loyalty test and treat dissenting interpretations as evidence of treason, hatred of the nation, or civilisational decay. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur makes a distinction between memory and history that is useful here: collective memory sustains identity, but when memory becomes detached from critical examination it can slide into abusive memory, a form of remembrance mobilised to justify power and silence competing accounts[17].

The American case is especially fertile terrain for this dynamic because American national identity has long been organised around a powerful exceptionalist narrative. The American sociologist and political scientist Seymour Martin Lipset described American exceptionalism as a "double-edged sword": it has supported liberty, egalitarian aspiration, and individualism, but also moralism, anti-statism, punitive politics, and resistance to structural remedies for inequality[18]. More recent historians have complicated the story further. Ian Tyrrell traces exceptionalism as an old but mutable idea, connected to the United States' self-understanding as a new experiment in a world of empires[19]. Abram Van Engen shows how the "city on a hill" became a twentieth-century story of American mission rather than a stable inheritance from the Puritan seventeenth century[20]. Sarah Churchwell reconstructs the entangled histories of "America First" and the "American Dream," showing that both phrases have been repeatedly contested and that nationalist uses of American greatness often coexist with racial exclu-

17 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 412–416.

18 Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*, 19–31.

19 Ian Tyrrell, *American Exceptionalism: A New History of an Old Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 12–19.

20 Van Engen, *City on a Hill*, 3–15.

sion and economic hierarchy[21]. The broader literature on Americanism and national narrative makes the same point: American identity has never been one stable creed, but a repertoire of competing political languages[22].

The MAGA-aligned New Right draws on this repertoire but narrows it. Its use of exceptionalism tends to remove the tension between ideals and contradiction. It treats the Founding as already containing the correct moral answer and treats later movements that foreground racial injustice, gender hierarchy, or exclusion as threats to national unity. This is why historian Jill Lepore's term "historical fundamentalism" is particularly useful. Lepore uses it to describe an approach to the past that treats founding documents and figures as sacred texts whose meaning can be recovered directly and authoritatively, rather than historically interpreted[23].

Historical fundamentalism is not unique to the United States. Authoritarian and nationalist movements across the world have used founding myths, heroic ancestors, and state-controlled memory to sacralise political authority[24]. But in the United States, this tendency

21 Churchwell, *Behold, America*, 5–16.

22 For influential accounts challenging the notion of a singular American political tradition, see Rogers M. Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America," *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993): 549–566. Smith argues that American political development has been shaped by the persistent interaction and conflict of liberal, republican, and ascriptive (racial, ethnic, and gender-based) traditions rather than by a coherent liberal consensus. For analyses of how competing political languages are mobilized in struggles over national identity and historical memory, see Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton University Press, 2001), and Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Cornell University Press, 1995), which traces the recurring opposition between the "virtuous people" and "corrupt elites" across both left- and right-wing populist movements.

23 Jill Lepore, "The Trump Administration's Efforts to Reshape America's Past," *The New Yorker*, August 25, 2025, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/09/01/the-trump-administrations-efforts-to-reshape-americas-past.

24 For case studies of state-directed memory politics, see Nikolay Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), on the instrumentalization of historical memory in contemporary Russia; Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), on the Chinese Communist Party's use of the "Century of Humiliation" narrative to reinforce political legitimacy; and Esra Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), on the political deployment of competing narratives of the Ottoman and Kemalist past.

acquires distinctive force because the Founding already occupies a quasi-scriptural position in civic life. The Founding was genuinely contested and contradictory, and multiple legitimate interpretations of it exist. The problem this article identifies is not that the right interprets it differently from professional historians, but that it denies the contest itself – insisting that one reading is the single authoritative account and that all others are acts of betrayal.

Ruth Wodak identifies a recurring structure across right-wing populist movements: the construction of an ethnic, religious, or linguistic minority as a scapegoat, the deployment of a "politics of fear," and the embrace of what she calls "the arrogance of ignorance" — an anti-intellectual posture that treats appeals to common sense as self-evidently superior to expert knowledge and marks, in her reading, "a return to pre-modernist or pre-Enlightenment thinking."[25] This orientation does not seek to restore any historically accurate condition; rather, it constructs a symbolic homeland purified of conflict, diversity, and ambiguity. In this framework, history becomes a usable past, a selectively curated archive mobilised rhetorically to naturalise inequality, justify border regimes, and portray pluralism as decay[26].

The anti-intellectual component is equally important. Historian Richard Hofstadter described American anti-intellectualism as a suspicion of expertise and abstraction, but he also noted that it did not reject all elites equally[27]. It often denigrated scholars, teachers, and reformers while admiring business, military, religious, or charismatic political authority. Contemporary MAGA-aligned historical politics reproduces this distinction. Academic historians, museum curators, journalists, and teachers are framed as ideological elites who corrupt the nation through complexity[28]. By contrast, self-styled guardians of the

25 Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (Sage Publications Limited, 2015), 22–23.

26 Wodak, *The Politics of Fear,* 126–130.

27 Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (Vintage, 1963), 19–24.

28 Conservative strategist Christopher Rufo argues that the institutional elites have weaponized academic nuance to orchestrate a "cultural revolution" that subverts traditional American values; see Christopher F. Rufo, *America's Cultural Revolution: How the Radical Left Con-*

Founding claim to speak for "ordinary Americans," even when they operate through elite institutions, endowed colleges, think tanks, legal networks, publishing platforms, and federal commissions[29].

This produces what may be called revisionist patriotism – a form of national loyalty defined by adherence to a prescribed interpretation of the past. Historical knowledge that foregrounds violence, contingency, exclusion, or conflict is treated with suspicion when it unsettles the moral unity of the national story. In this way, historical complexity is often subordinated to civic affirmation, and the defence of national myths can come to function as a measure of patriotic commitment[30].

What gives this dynamic its historical depth is its rootedness in available cultural repertoires. As Richard Slotkin has shown, American political culture has repeatedly drawn on myths of frontier conquest, redemptive violence, and civilisational struggle in moments of perceived crisis – patterns that predate the current movement by centuries[31]. Steven Hahn makes the complementary point that illiberalism is not foreign to the American tradition but has coexisted with liberal ideals throughout its history: exclusion, coercion, racial hierarchy, and anti-democratic politics are recurring features of the republic, not aberrations. Together they suggest that the MAGA-aligned New Right does not invent its materials from nothing. It selects from historically

quered Everything (New York: Broadside Books, 2023). This sentiment is codified in *The 1776 Report*, which explicitly accuses the academic establishment of replacing patriotic history with divisive theories designed to fracture national identity; see The President's Advisory 1776 Commission, *The 1776 Report*.

29 This positioning is prominently exemplified by the Claremont Institute and Hillsdale College. Intellectuals affiliated with these networks claim to defend the "silent majority" against a corrupt administrative state; see Glenn Ellmers, *The Soul of Civics: The Claremont Institute's War on the Administrative State* (New York: Encounter Books, 2021). Similarly, elite legal networks like the Federalist Society operate under a populist rhetoric of returning power to "the people" while enacting top-down constitutional shifts; for a critical analysis of this network's institutional power, see Amanda Hollis-Brusky, *Ideas with Consequences: The Federalist Society and the Conservative Counter-Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

30 In contemporary scholarship, this framework is expanded by Stefan Berger, "National History Writing in Europe in a Global Age," *History Compass* 5, no. 1 (2007): 258–268, who analyzes how the state-sanctioned defence of national myths frequently treats critical history (foregrounding violence and exclusion) as a threat to the nation's moral unity, thereby transforming mythic fidelity into a baseline metric for patriotic commitment.

31 Slotkin, *A Great Disorder*, 1–25.

available repertoires, purifies them, and presents them as the authentic core of the nation – a process that makes the current movement harder to dismiss as aberration and harder to defeat through appeals to an imagined liberal consensus that was never uncontested[32].

III. The Myth of the Founding: Purity, Betrayal, and Redemption

The Founding occupies the centre of MAGA-aligned historical myth because it offers a symbolic origin point that can be portrayed as both political and sacred. In this narrative, 1776 and 1787 are not treated primarily as moments of conflict, compromise, contingency, and contested constitutional design. They become a moment of moral clarity in which the nation's principles were fully articulated. The task of politics is therefore not democratic negotiation among competing visions of the good, but restoration of an original order that later actors allegedly betrayed.

The first element of this grammar is purity. Claremont and Hillsdale texts repeatedly present the Founding as the authoritative source of American political morality[33]. They emphasise natural rights, constitutional self-government, and the Declaration of Independence as if these principles formed a coherent and stable moral order from the beginning. The aim is to purify the Founding of its contradictions, transforming a historically contested generation – divided over slavery,

32 Steven Hahn, *Illiberal America: A History* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2024), 1–22; 315-330.

33 This presentation of the Founding as an absolute moral baseline is present across several essays published in *The American Mind*. David Azerrad insists on treating the moral framework of 1776 as an unchanging truth superior to modern progressivism; see David Azerrad, "The Absolute Truth of America's Founding Principles," *The American Mind*, August 26, 2020. To enforce this moral baseline, Claremont legal scholars advocate for a rigid "Natural Law Constitutionalism" to dismantle the modern administrative state; see John C. Eastman, "Justice Thomas: Courage in Defense of Natural Law Constitutionalism," *The American Mind*, May 18, 2026. This positioning transforms constitutional debate into an existential struggle over the survival of the regime itself against an illegitimate ruling class; see Edward J. Erler, "What is Our Regime?," *The American Mind*, August 29, 2022. This ideological project is operationally institutionalized at the K-12 level through *The Hillsdale 1776 Curriculum*, a comprehensive educational blueprint designed to replace critical historical scholarship with a celebratory narrative of natural rights and constitutional perfection; see Hillsdale College, *The Hillsdale 1776 Curriculum* (Hillsdale, MI: Hillsdale College, 2021).

federal power, religion, political economy, party conflict, Indigenous dispossession, and the boundaries of citizenship – into a unified moral subject whose presumed consensus serves as an enduring source of political legitimacy.

This process often relies on invented or retrospective traditions. The phrases "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance and "In God We Trust" as the national motto are frequently absorbed into claims about the Christian character of the Founding, although their federal institutionalisation belongs to the Cold War era rather than the eighteenth century[34]. Their power lies precisely in their capacity to project a later Christian-nationalist synthesis backward onto the founding period. It is an example of historical myth-making: a later symbolic settlement is presented as evidence of original national spirit[35].

The second element is betrayal. If the nation began in unity and virtue, present conflict must be explained as corruption. MAGA-aligned discourse repeatedly identifies "progressives," "globalists," "cosmopolitan elites," universities, bureaucrats, journalists, and critical historians as agents who have severed Americans from their inheritance. Some of these terms, especially "globalists" and "cosmopolitan elites," also carry

34 The inscription "In God We Trust" first appeared on a two-cent piece minted in 1864, during the Civil War, as a way of bolstering the Northern war effort; it did not enter paper currency and later, when coins were redesigned in the late nineteenth century, it disappeared altogether. During the Cold War, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed legislation in 1955 mandating its appearance on all U.S. currency. The following year, "In God We Trust" was adopted as the official national motto, reflecting a broader mid-twentieth-century sacralisation of American identity rather than founding-era constitutional intent; similarly, the phrase "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance (added in 1954) and the motto itself are often retrospectively invoked in claims about the Christian character of the Founding, despite their institutionalisation belonging to the Cold War period rather than the eighteenth century.

35 See Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 4–12. Kruse demonstrates how the fusion of piety and patriotism in the 1950s was deliberately backdated to create the illusion that the Founding Fathers intended to establish an explicitly Christian state. For the sociopolitical mechanisms through which contemporary movements continue to utilize these Cold War relics as "proof" of an original Christian-nationalist foundation, see Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). See also Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle against Communism in the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), which details the legislative histories of the 1954 and 1956 Congressional acts.

long histories as antisemitic dog whistles, even when used in contexts where the speaker can deny explicit antisemitism[36].

Iterations of this narrative frequently invoke the Civil War and Reconstruction as historical analogies. Trump and his allies have described their opponents as an "enemy within[37]," portrayed the federal bureaucracy as an occupying force hostile to the real nation[38], and framed contemporary politics as an "American carnage[39]," a struggle between patriots and traitors. The recurring invocation of a "Second Civil War," together with depictions of political opponents as traitors or enemies of the people, casts the present as a moment of existential crisis in which compromise becomes impossible and extraordinary measures appear justified[40].

The third element is redemption. Within the MAGA narrative, this concept is personalised and dramatised. Leadership assumes mythic significance, with Donald Trump cast as the singular figure capable of restoring national greatness and reversing decline. Religious imagery saturates the rhetoric: Trump is frequently portrayed as God's chosen instrument (using AI imagery[41]), supporters compare his political career to biblical narratives of providential deliverance, and rallies often

36 The terms "globalists," "cosmopolitan elites," and "cultural Marxism" carry well-documented antisemitic genealogies, recoding older conspiracy theories about Jewish financial and cultural power; the "cultural Marxism" trope in particular descends from the Nazi-era charge of "cultural Bolshevism." For the specific analysis of how these terms have a different meaning within modern conservative populist media, see Jonathan Weisman, *(((Semitism))): Being Jewish in America in the Age of Trump* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018), 71–94. For a comprehensive peer-reviewed evaluation of how anti-elitist rhetoric conceals older conspiracy myths, see also Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

37 Stephen Groves, "Trump Suggests He'll Use the Military on 'the Enemy from Within' the U.S. if He's Reelected," PBS NewsHour, October 13, 2024, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trump-suggests-hell-use-the-military-on-the-enemy-from-within-the-u-s-if-hes-reelected.

38 Erich Wagner, "Trump Calls Federal Workforce 'Crooked,' Vows to Hold Them 'Accountable,'" *Government Executive*, August 28, 2024, https://www.govexec.com/workforce/2024/08/trump-calls-federal-workforce-crooked-vows-hold-them-accountable/399138/.

39 Donald J. Trump, "Inaugural Address," 20 January 2017, *Politico*, https://www.politico.com/story/2017/01/full-text-donald-trump-inauguration-speech-transcript-233907.

40 Wodak, "*Wodak, "T*he Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean," *Critical Discourse Studies* 12, n.º 4 (2015): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481211048499.

41 Brad Brooks, Helen Coster, and Joseph Ax, "Trump's AI Image of Himself as Jesus-Like Figure Follows Feud with Pope Leo," *Reuters*, April 13, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/trump-posts-ai-image-himself-jesus-like-figure-drawing-outrage-2026-04-13/.

adopt revivalist or crusading themes[42]. The pro-Trump "Jericho Marches" of 2020, for example, explicitly reenacted the biblical story of the Israelites circling Jericho before its walls collapsed, casting political opponents as obstacles to be removed through divine intervention[43].

This redemptive logic also accommodates strands of Evangelical apocalypticism. Rather than treating contemporary politics as a contest among legitimate rivals, Christian-nationalist narratives often frame the present as a moment of civilisational crisis in which the nation stands at the threshold of either destruction or renewal[44]. Political conflict is therefore invested with eschatological significance: America must choose between fidelity to God's design and national collapse. Such thinking helps explain the movement's hostility toward causes associated with progressive social change, including Black Lives Matter, which some Christian leaders portrayed not as a reform movement but as evidence of cultural and moral decay[45]. In the influential "Flight 93 Election" essay, Michael Anton grouped Black Lives Matter among the "inanities" produced by a decadent ruling class, locating racial justice activism within a broader narrative of national decline rather than democratic reform[46].

At its more militant edge, this redemptive imagination adopts explicitly crusading imagery. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth bears a Jerusalem cross tattoo on his chest, the phrase "Deus Vult" ("God wills it") on his bicep, a sword-and-cross design referencing Matthew 10:34

42 Peter Smith, "Jesus Is Their Savior, Trump Is Their Candidate. Ex-President's Backers Say He Shares Faith, Values," *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 2024, https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2024-05-20/jesus-is-their-savior-trump-is-their-candidate-ex-presidents-backers-say-he-shares-faith-values.

43 David Smith, "In Trump We Trust: Religious Right on Crusade to Make Their Man President," *The Guardian*, June 22, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/jun/22/trump-christians-president-religion.

44 Katherine Stewart, "Inside the Dangerous Rise of Christian Nationalism," *Journal of Illiberalism Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2025): 83–87, https://doi.org/10.53483/ZCPC3596.

45 Ruth Braunstein, "The 'Right' History: Religion, Race, and Nostalgic Stories of Christian America," *Religions* 12, no. 2 (2021): 95, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020095; Josh Buice, "Three Reasons Why Christians Should Reject #BlackLivesMatter," *Statement on Social Justice & the Gospel*, June 12, 2020, https://statementonsocialjustice.com/articles/three-reasons-why-christians-should-reject-blacklivesmatter/; Eliza Griswold, "How Black Lives Matter Is Changing the Church," *The New Yorker*, August 30, 2020, https://www.newyorker.com/news/on-religion/how-black-lives-matter-is-changing-the-church.

46 Publius Decius Mus, "The Flight 93 Election,".

("I came not to bring peace, but a sword") with "Yeshua" inscribed on the blade, and the Arabic word "kafir" ("infidel") beneath "Deus Vult."[47] Historians of the medieval Crusades note that "Deus Vult" was the battle cry of the First Crusade and remains inseparable from Crusader symbolism[48]. Scholars, such as medievalist Thomas Lecaque and Dorothy Kim, have also remarked that the Jerusalem cross and "Deus Vult" have become popular symbols within sections of the far right and appeared together on banners at the 2017 Charlottesville rally[4950].

Moreover, Hegseth's 2020 book *American Crusade* repeatedly frames political conflict as a struggle to defend Christian civilisation, concluding with the exhortation, "See you on the battlefield. Together, with God's help, we will save America. Deus vult!"[51] Scholars, such as historian Kristin Kobes Du Mez and religion scholar Matthew D. Taylor, have situated Hegseth at the militant end of the movement, where political restoration is imagined not merely as electoral victory but as a form of holy struggle against perceived enemies of the nation[52]. Redemption is therefore imagined as a rupture: a moment in which the nation is cleansed of corrupting influences and returned to its rightful path[53]. Political slogans such as "Make America Great Again" operate

47 Marina Dunbar, "Pete Hegseth's Arabic Tattoo Stirs Controversy: 'Clear Symbol of Islamophobia,'" *The Guardian*, March 27, 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/27/pete-hegseth-tattoo-arabic-language.

48 Tomasz Pełech, *Shaping the Image of Enemy-Infidel in the Relations of Eyewitnesses and Participants of the First Crusade: The Case of Muslims* (PhD diss., Université Clermont Auvergne/Uniwersytet Wrocławski, 2020), https://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-03143783.

49 Lydia Wilson, "Pete Hegseth's Tattoos and the Crusading Obsession of the Far Right," *New Lines Magazine*, November 29, 2024, https://newlinesmag.com/essays/pete-hegseths-tattoos-and-the-crusading-obsession-of-the-far-right/.

50 Dorothy Kim, "The Alt-Right and Medieval Religions," *Berkley Forum*, Georgetown University, November 5, 2018, https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/the-alt-right-and-medieval-religions.

51 Pete Hegseth, *American Crusade: Our Fight to Stay Free* (Nashville, TN: Center Street, 2020), 237.

52 Shannon Bond, Tom Bowman, Odette Yousef, and Quil Lawrence, "What's Behind Defense Secretary Pick Hegseth's War on 'Woke,'" *NPR*, November 15, 2024, https://www.npr.org/2024/11/14/nx-s1-5191941/pete-hegseth-defense-department-dei; Julia Carrie Wong, "Pete Hegseth's Holy War: The Militant Christian Theology Animating the US Attack on Iran," *The Guardian*, April 10, 2026, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2026/apr/10/pete-hegseth-christianity-iran-war-crusade.

53 Nicole LaFond and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, "Christian Nationalism's Role in the Insurrection Was Four Decades in the Making," Talking Points Memo, February 3, 2021, https://

within this logic, framing contemporary politics not as a negotiation among competing visions of the future but as a struggle to recover a lost moral order whose restoration carries both national and, for many believers, providential significance.

This framing also underpinned initiatives such as the 1776 Commission, which sought to institutionalise a "pro-American" historical narrative by displacing critical approaches to the past. Significantly, the Commission was created in direct opposition to the 1619 Project, whose central aim was to place slavery and the experiences of Black Americans at the centre of the national narrative. Within the logic of the myth, such reinterpretations could not appear as legitimate historical arguments; they had to be cast as acts of betrayal. The result was a rhetorical shift whereby disputes over race, memory, and historical interpretation were reframed as attacks on the nation itself. In this way, the redemption narrative defended a traditional, predominantly white understanding of American identity from critical scrutiny[54].

Taken together, the tropes of purity, betrayal, and redemption constitute a coherent mythic structure through which right-wing intellectuals reinterpret the American Founding. This structure does not merely simplify the past; it reorganises political conflict around moral absolutes, transforming historical interpretation into a test of loyalty and belonging. In doing so, it prepares the ground for exclusionary nationalism while rendering pluralist democracy –and the critical historiography that sustains it– morally suspect.

IV. The Claremont Institute and Intellectual Myth-making

The Claremont Institute is a conservative think tank founded in 1979 by four students of American political philosopher Harry V. Jaffa – Larry P. Arnn, Christopher Flannery, Peter Schramm, and Thomas Silver. Understanding Jaffa's intellectual influence is essential to under-

talkingpointsmemo.com/cafe/without-help-christian-nationalism-decades-making-might-not-been-insurrection.

54 Slotkin, *A Great Disorder*, 186.

standing the Institute's approach to the American Founding and constitutional government. Jaffa, best known as a student of Leo Strauss and a prominent interpreter of Abraham Lincoln's political thought, became the leading figure of what came to be known as "West Coast Straussianism." Unlike East Coast Straussians, West Coast Straussians tend to treat the American Founding as the embodiment of a "best regime" grounded in natural-right principles, and interpret subsequent progressive institutional development as a departure from that founding order.[55]

This intellectual outlook is reflected in the Claremont Institute's stated mission to "restore the principles of the American Founding to their rightful, preeminent authority in our national life."[56] The statement is significant, presenting the Founding as a lost authority whose principles must be recovered and reasserted in contemporary political life. The Institute gained influence through its *Claremont Review of Books* and fellowships, educating many conservative public figures[57].

In practice, its fellows and associated publications[58] have developed a distinctive mode of intellectual myth-making that combines (1) a rhetoric of civilisational crisis, (2) an "original constitutional vision" presented as morally complete and politically prescriptive, and (3) an

55 Joshua Tait, "The Problem with Right-Wing 'Regime' Talk," *The Bulwark*, August 23, 2022, https://www.thebulwark.com/p/the-problem-with-right-wing-regime-talk.

56 The Claremont Institute, "Mission & Overview".

57 The Institute's fellowship and publication network has been connected to a wide range of influential figures in contemporary conservatism, including Vice President J.D. Vance; Office of Management and Budget Director Russell Vought; former Trump administration officials Michael Anton, Michael Ellis, and James Braid; media personalities Ben Shapiro, Laura Ingraham, Mark Levin, Charlie Kirk, and Jack Posobiec; elected officials and jurists such as Ron DeSantis, Clarence Thomas, and Tom Cotton; and intellectuals and strategists including John Eastman, Victor Davis Hanson, and Michael Needham.

58 Its principal publications include the *Claremont Review of Books,* its flagship quarterly journal of political thought; *The American Mind*, an online magazine and podcast; and the newly established *Founding.com*, which disseminates educational material on the American Founding. The Institute also operates the *Center for Constitutional Jurisprudence*, which promotes originalist constitutional interpretation through litigation and amicus briefs, and the C*enter for the American Way of Life*, a Washington-based policy centre devoted to advancing a "new Right" and defending, what it terms, the American way of life. In addition, the Institute cultivates future conservative leaders through its *Publius*, *Lincoln*, *John Marshall*, *Speechwriters*, and *Sheriffs Fellowships*, which provide intensive instruction in the principles of the American Founding and their contemporary application.

"anti-elitist" posture that treats critical scholarship as a form of subversion. The Institute's contemporary importance is partly institutional, its proximity to Republican political networks and media ecosystems, but it is also intellectual: it offers a language through which political conflict is narrated as regime-level emergency and history is mobilised as normative authority rather than as contested inquiry[59].

As political theorist Laura K. Field underscores, Claremont's current prominence reflects the degree to which the post-2016 environment rewarded apocalyptic framing and modes of argument that render the Founding not as a historical episode but as a moral standard, and contemporary adversaries not as opponents but as enemies of the regime[60].

The Rhetoric of Crisis

Claremont gave its most influential expression of political emergency in 2016, when Michael Anton (writing under the pseudonym "Publius Decius Mus") published "The Flight 93 Election" in the *Claremont Review of Books.* The essay frames the election as a last-resort decision under conditions of existential threat. Its opening formulation establishes the essay's central claim: "2016 is the Flight 93 election: charge the cockpit or you die. You may die anyway.[61]" The metaphor treats democratic choice as an emergency action under hijacking: a Trump vote becomes a risky but necessary attempt to avert certain destruction. Anton deepens the metaphor by characterising a Clinton presidency as "Russian Roulette with a semi-auto," whereas with Trump "at least you can spin the cylinder and take your chances[62]."

However, Michael Anton's significance for Claremont's intellectual project cannot be reduced to the emergency rhetoric of "The Flight 93 Election." His broader work reveals a deeper theoretical claim: the

59 Jean Guerrero, "Donald Trump's Politics of White Fear Have Roots in Southern California," *LAmag*, September 11, 2020, https://lamag.com/opinion/claremont-institute-trump/.

60 Laura K. Field, *Furious Minds: The Making of the MAGA New Right* (Princeton University Press, 2025), 29–30.

61 Publius Decius Mus, "The Flight 93 Election".

62 Publius Decius Mus, "The Flight 93 Election".

American Founding is a coherent political philosophy that should continue to serve as the authoritative standard for American political life. The Founders' principles are presented as universal in theory, but politically realised only within a particular people, culture, and constitutional order. He reads later developments in American history through the prism of fidelity or betrayal to the Founders' regime. Progressivism, administrative government, identity politics, and post-1960s egalitarianism appear not as legitimate reinterpretations of American principles, but as deviations from them[63].

In Anton's account, the Founders' regime rests on equal natural rights and government by consent. By contrast, modern progressivism is understood as replacing consent with expert rule and individual rights with group-based claims. The administrative state becomes, in this reading, not merely inefficient or bureaucratic, but unjust: it transfers political authority away from citizens and toward unelected experts. Likewise, contemporary social justice politics is interpreted as a return to a kind of aristocracy, because it assigns moral and political standing on the basis of group identity rather than equal citizenship[64].

Anton's view of the Founding also underpins his restrictionist approach to immigration and national belonging. Because he treats republican government as dependent on cultural commonality and civic solidarity, mass immigration appears as a threat not only to economic stability but to the conditions of self-government itself. The nation is not imagined as an abstract rights-bearing population, but as a historically formed political community with inherited principles and boundaries. In this respect, Anton's Founding is universal and exclusionary

63 Michael Anton, *After the Flight 93 Election: The Crisis of American National Identity* (New York: Encounter Books, 2019), 45–68. In this text, Anton explicitly builds upon his earlier polemics to argue that modern progressivism and mass globalization threaten the unique socio-cultural preconditions necessary to sustain the Founders' constitutional order.

64 Michael Anton, *The Stakes: America at the Point of No Return* (New York: Encounter Books, 2021), 115–142. Anton argues that the administrative state operates as an unjust, post-constitutional ruling class that strips citizens of political authority. Furthermore, he conceptualizes contemporary identity politics and social justice initiatives as a neo-aristocratic system that fragments the American republic by replacing equal individual citizenship with group-based moral hierarchy.

at the same time: universal because it affirms natural rights, but exclusionary because the political responsibility to secure those rights is confined to a particular constitutional people[65].

Anton's later reflections on American decline make this structure even clearer. Responding to the question of why American self-government had weakened, he argued that the regime was no longer operating as designed and that this alteration had been imposed by actors hostile to the Founders' original design[66]. His diagnosis linked American decline to modernity, mass immigration, the cycle of regimes, and the erosion of religious belief. The central concern was not simply that institutions had changed, but that the moral and intellectual conditions assumed by the Founders had been undermined[67]. The Founding was therefore cast as both a lost model and a still-available standard of restoration.

Seen in this light, "The Flight 93 Election" is not an isolated polemic but the political dramatization of Anton's founding philosophy. The essay's apocalyptic tone follows from a prior claim: if the Founders' regime is the best practicable regime, and if contemporary elites have abandoned or subverted it, then ordinary electoral politics can be reframed as a regime-level struggle. Trump becomes defensible not because he embodies Founding virtue, but because he is imagined as an instrument for halting the destruction of the regime that the Founders created. Anton's emergency rhetoric therefore depends on a mythic structure of purity, betrayal, and possible redemption.

Natural rights and the Jaffa inheritance

Claremont's apocalyptic politics rests on a longer intellectual genealogy. Harry Jaffa argued that the American Founding fused classical political philosophy, biblical morality, and modern natural-rights constitutionalism into a uniquely elevated regime. The phrase "Athens, Je-

65 Michael Anton, "The Case for Trump's Immigration Order," *Claremont Review of Books* 17, no. 1 (2017): 22–29.

66 Michael Anton, *Dispatches from the Late Republic: The Culture, Politics, and Greatness of America* (New York: Encounter Books, 2024), 89–114.

67 Michael Anton, "Unprecedented," *The New Criterion* 40, no. 4 (December 2021): 4–11.

rusalem, and Peoria," associated with interpretations of Jaffa's work, is telling: Athens signifies classical reason and virtue; Jerusalem signifies biblical morality; Peoria signifies ordinary Middle America rather than Washington as the moral centre of the regime[68]. The formulation helps explain Claremont's recurring claim to speak both philosophically and populistically: it presents itself as an elite interpreter of the Founding and defender of ordinary Americans against corrupt elites.

Jaffa's own writings treated liberty as inseparable from moral order. In his 2007 essay "The American Founding as the Best Regime," he insisted that the Framers understood liberty only in explicitly moral terms – for example, the Virginia Bill of Rights said liberty could only be preserved by "justice, moderation, temperance, frugality, and virtue". In this framework, liberty is not freedom as moral autonomy, but a "blessing" that must be good in the sight of God. As Jaffa argues, "...The idea of liberty – or the liberty which is a blessing – being an emancipation of the passions from moral restraint had no place in the constitutional doctrine of the *novus ordo seclorum*. The liberty which is a blessing must be good for the one who possesses it. It must therefore be a good in the sight of God, who is the source of blessings. Such a good must point to felicity, whether in this world or the next, as its consummation. By calling the advantages of liberty 'blessings,' the Constitution... aligns itself decisively with traditional moral philosophy and moral theology.[69]" Moreover, Jaffa bluntly stated that the Founders never imagined liberty encompassing what they deemed vice: "exhibitionism of lesbians, sodomites, abortionists, drug addicts, and pornographers"[70]. This illustrates the narrow, virtue-focused universe that Jaffa thought "Athens and Jerusalem" bequeathed to America[71].

This selective originalism appears clearly in Claremont-affiliated criticism of the civil-rights constitutional order. Jesse Merriam's essay

68 Robert P. Kraynak, "Moral Order in the Western Tradition: Harry Jaffa's Grand Synthesis of Athens, Jerusalem, and Peoria," *The Review of Politics* 71, no. 2 (January 1, 2009): 181–206, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0034670509000308.

69 Kraynak, "Moral Order in the Western Tradition", 181–206.

70 Field, *Furious Minds*, 32-33.

71 Field, *Furious Minds*, 32-33.

"How We Got Our Antiracist Constitution," for example, argues that the post-*Brown v. Board of Education* constitutional order displaced natural rights with a new regime centred on racial discrimination as the supreme evil and diversity as the supreme good[72]. Civil-rights law is not treated as an attempt to fulfil the constitutional promise after slavery and segregation, but is reframed as a betrayal of the older order. This requires treating the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, the Civil Rights Act, and the Voting Rights Act as departures from the Founding rather than as the constitutional system's own mechanisms for addressing the injustices it originally entrenched. The political consequence is to make anti-discrimination law, affirmative action, and structural accounts of racism appear not as responses to historical injustice but as deviations from the Founding – a framing that provides intellectual cover for dismantling the civil-rights state while claiming fidelity to founding principles.

Cultural homogeneity and the boundaries of Americanness

Claremont writers frequently treat cultural cohesion as a precondition of republican self-government. In classical republican theory, this claim concerns the social conditions under which citizens can deliberate about the common good. In Claremont's post-2016 usage, however, cohesion often becomes a language for exclusion. Anton's immigration arguments link demographic change to national decline[73]. Glenn Ellmers goes further, declaring that many U.S. residents are "not Americans in any meaningful sense". He clarifies that besides illegal immigrants, many native-born citizens are "citizen-alien[s]" who "do not believe in, live by, or even like the principles, traditions, and ideals" that once defined America[74].

72 Jesse Merriam, "How We Got Our Antiracist Constitution: Canonizing Brown V. Board of Education in Courts and Minds," The American Way of Life, July 12, 2023, https://dc.claremont.org/how-we-got-our-antiracist-constitution-canonizing-brown-v-board-of-education-in-courts-and-minds/.

73 Publius Decius Mus, "The Flight 93 Election."

74 Ellmers, "'Conservatism' Is No Longer Enough".

Beyond the fact that such claims are nativist, they also transform Americanness from legal citizenship into fidelity to a prescribed historical narrative. The "real" American is the citizen who accepts the Claremont version of the Founding. The "citizen-alien" is the citizen who rejects or complicates it.

Michael Anton's essay "Toward a Sensible, Coherent Trumpism" (the Claremont Institute refused to publish it, but the article was uploaded on the *Journal of American Greatness* blog[75]) illustrates the method. In this post, Anton invokes Lincoln's "Dred Scott" speech, where Lincoln noted that "all men are not equal in all respects" to argue against mass immigration, suggesting that not all peoples are equally suited to republican self-government[76]. In Lincoln's context, the statement concerned the contradictions of slavery and equality in a republic built on universal principles. In Anton's use, it becomes a justification for new hierarchies of civic fitness. Field reads this as characteristic of Claremont rhetoric: historical fragments are removed from context and reassembled to make pluralism seem incompatible with republicanism[77].

A related manoeuvre appears in Claremont efforts to sanitise founding-era slavery. Some Claremont essays and reviews stress that the Constitution avoids the words "slave" and "slavery," and they treat this as evidence that the founding order was fundamentally antislavery in principle[78].

By spotlighting the bits of founding rhetoric that could plausibly be read as anti-slavery, Claremont literature minimises the framers' participation in slavery and the constitutional protections that sustained the slave system. Many Founders enslaved human beings, profited from slavery, compromised to protect slaveholding interests, and embedded

75 Field, *Furious Minds*, 48.

76 Publius Decius Mus, "Toward a Sensible, Coherent Trumpism," March 10, 2016, https://www.unz.com/article/toward-a-sensible-coherent-trumpism/.

77 Field, *Furious Minds*, 49-50.

78 Peter C. Myers, "Vindicating the Constitution," *Claremont Review of Books*, 2019, https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/vindicating-the-constitution/.

slavery in representation, fugitive-slave rules, and federal power[79]. Similarly, these narratives downplay the deep pluralism and conflict in early America. There is little space in Claremont's reconstructed myth for political or cultural diversity at the founding: conflicts over federal power, religious freedom, or women's rights are subordinated to the idea of a unified people. If any challenge to founder myths is raised, it is dismissed as "liberal" revisionism. The overall effect is to purify the founding generation into a monolithic ideological bloc, thereby justifying modern policies that prioritise "natural" hierarchies and exclude dissenters as anti-American.

Anti-elitism as anti-scholarship

A final component of Claremont intellectual myth-making is a populist epistemology that treats scholarly complexity as suspect. Glenn Ellmers dismisses "policy wonks and magazine scribblers" and depicts "universities" and corporate culture as "rotten to the core," insisting that ordinary Americans require action rather than elite discourse[80]. For Ellmers, the heroes are the "plumbers, insurance salesmen, gym owners, and factory workers" who live out authentic American values in their everyday lives. When asked what kind of conservative they are, Ellmers notes, real voters "never" ask – it is an "irrelevant" question.

The irony is obvious: these arguments are produced by intellectuals writing from elite-adjacent institutions for an elite conservative audience. But the rhetoric is politically effective because it divides elites into

79 On the enslaved populations connected to Washington, Jefferson, and Madison, see George Washington's Mount Vernon, "A Decision to Free His Slaves," https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/slavery/washingtons-1799-will; George Washington's Mount Vernon, "George Washington's Will,", https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/slavery/george-washingtons-will; Thomas Jefferson Foundation, "Slavery FAQs," *Thomas Jefferson's Monticello*, https://www.monticello.org/slavery/slavery-faqs; The Montpelier Foundation, "The South Yard Dwellings", https://www.montpelier.org/projects/the-south-yard-dwellings/; White House Historical Association, "The Enslaved Household of President James Madison," August 28, 2019, https://www.whitehousehistory.org/slavery-in-the-james-madison-white-house. On the constitutional protections and compromises related to slavery, see David Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), 3–17; Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 34–42.

80 Ellmers, "'Conservatism' Is No Longer Enough".

illegitimate and legitimate types. Academic historians, journalists, and bureaucrats are corrupt; Claremont intellectuals are restorers of truth.

This posture shields mythic history from critique. When historians challenge the purity of the Founding, they can be dismissed as ideological enemies. When teachers discuss slavery, racism, or exclusion, they can be accused of indoctrination. When museums include painful histories, they can be accused of hating America. The result is an epistemic hierarchy in which one political camp claims exclusive authority to define the national past while denying the legitimacy of scholarly disagreement.

V. The "Patriotic Education" Project

The 1776 Commission was born of Trump's campaign for a federally-directed "patriotic education" and as a response to the 1619 Project launched by *The New York Times Magazine*. In Executive Order 13958 (Nov. 2020), the administration decried a "series of polemics grounded in poor scholarship" that teach students to "hate their own country". The Order insisted America had a "valiant and successful effort to shake off the curse of slavery" and warned that calling the country "irredeemably and systemically racist" ignores the role of Lincoln, King, and other "great heroes" in America's story. The White House directed the new 1776 Commission to promote *"patriotic education"* – meaning "the presentation of the history of the American founding and foundational principles, the examination of how the United States has grown closer to those principles throughout its history, and the explanation of why commitment to America's aspirations is beneficial and justified"[81]. By this definition, schools and federal agencies were to emphasise the Founders' ideals and America's "inspiring" journey toward equality while dismissing any narrative of enduring racial injustice.

The members of the Commission reveal how this project connected Trump-era patriotic education to a longer conservative educational

81 Trump, Executive Order 13958.

infrastructure. The Commission was chaired by Larry P. Arnn, president of Hillsdale College, who had previously served as president of the Claremont Institute from 1985 to 2000. Matthew Spalding, Hillsdale's vice president for Washington operations and dean of the Van Andel Graduate School of Government, served as the Commission's executive director[82]. This overlap matters because Hillsdale had already become a major institutional vehicle for translating restorationist constitutionalism into curriculum, teacher formation, and public pedagogy.

Hillsdale's role requires explanation because its contemporary politics of history draws selectively on an older institutional identity. Founded in 1844, the college presents itself as an abolitionist and non-discriminatory institution whose charter prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, religion, or sex[83]. This history does not so much complicate Hillsdale's current trajectory as enable it: the abolitionist founding supplies a usable past[84].

That interpretation became especially important in the late twentieth century, when Hillsdale came to define its institutional identity through opposition to federal oversight. The college refused federal and state funding, presenting independence from government regulation as necessary to preserve its educational mission[85]. This institutional history later became a rhetorical resource. Hillsdale could invoke its abolitionist and non-discrimination origins while opposing federal oversight, affirmative action, diversity initiatives, and critical accounts of race. In Hillsdale's contemporary self-presentation, equality is defined primarily as formal non-discrimination and institutional independence, while race-conscious remedies and critical accounts of structural inequality are framed as bureaucratic violations of equal treatment.

82 Hillsdale College, "White House Appoints Arnn and Spalding to Lead 1776 Commission," *Hillsdale in D.C.*, December 18, 2020, https://dc.hillsdale.edu/News/White-House-Appoints-Arnn-and-Spalding-to-lead-177/.

83 Emma Green, "The Christian Liberal-Arts School at the Heart of the Culture Wars," *The New Yorker*, April 3, 2023, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/04/10/the-christian-liberal-arts-school-at-the-heart-of-the-culture-wars.

84 Hillsdale College, "Founding Documents and Resolutions," https://www.hillsdale.edu/about/history/founding-documents/.

85 Hillsdale College, "Independence," https://www.hillsdale.edu/independence-/.

Under Arnn's presidency, this institutional tradition converged with the Claremont Institute's natural-rights constitutionalism. Hillsdale expanded beyond the model of a traditional liberal-arts college into a national infrastructure for conservative civic education: the Allan P. Kirby Jr. Center in Washington, D.C., the Van Andel Graduate School of Government, the Barney Charter School Initiative, and the Hillsdale K–12 curriculum all helped translate a particular interpretation of American constitutionalism into teacher training, public lectures, school networks, and curricular materials[8687]. This development became politically salient as debates over the 1619 Project, critical race theory, and public-school curricula intensified after 2019. Hillsdale's older abolitionist identity could be mobilised to support the claim that the American Founding was already fundamentally committed to equality, while its anti-regulatory tradition supported opposition to federal or state efforts to mandate more critical accounts of race, slavery, and structural inequality.

The college's involvement in the 1776 Commission therefore did not represent an accidental association with Trump-era politics. It marked the convergence of three longer trajectories: Hillsdale's formal non-discrimination tradition, Claremont's natural-rights constitutionalism, and the New Right's effort to build alternative educational institutions capable of transmitting a patriotic narrative of American history.

The 1619 Project as catalyst

The 1619 Project was launched in August 2019 as a special issue of *The New York Times Magazine* to mark the 400th anniversary of the arrival

86 Hillsdale College, "Mission & History," *Hillsdale in D.C.*, https://dc.hillsdale.edu/About/Mission-and-History/; Hillsdale College, "School of Government Overview," *Hillsdale in D.C.*, https://dc.hillsdale.edu/School-of-Government/Program-Overview/; Hillsdale College, "Barney Charter School Initiative," *Hillsdale College K–12 Education*, https://k12.hillsdale.edu/Schools/BCSI/; Hillsdale College, "An American Classical Education," *Hillsdale College K–12 Education*, https://k12.hillsdale.edu/.

87 Green, "The Christian Liberal-Arts School"; Stephanie Saul, "A College Fights 'Leftist Academics' by Expanding into Charter Schools," *New York Times*, April 10, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/10/us/hillsdale-college-charter-schools.html.

of the first enslaved Africans in Virginia[88]. Journalists and scholars led by Nikole Hannah-Jones produced essays, poems and other features aiming to "...reframe American history by considering what it would mean to regard 1619 as our nation's birth year."[89] The rationale for treating 1619 as the nation's "birth year" rests on the project's central argument that the arrival of enslaved Africans and the subsequent development of racial slavery constituted the foundational condition of American political and economic life. In this view, the United States is not primarily defined by the Declaration of Independence in 1776, but by the structures of slavery and anti-Black racism that preceded and shaped it, such that 1619 marks the beginning of the historical processes that produced the modern American nation[90].

The project generated legitimate scholarly debate and drew substantial support. Historian David Waldstreicher endorsed its framing of the Revolutionary era, particularly its emphasis on slavery and imperial politics in shaping colonial ideology[91]. Leslie M. Harris, who served as a fact-checker, publicly defended the project's overall interpretive value even while noting editorial disagreements, arguing that it provides an essential corrective to a historiography that has marginalized Black agency[92]. More broadly, scholars and public intellectuals including Matthew Desmond, Jamelle Bouie, Kevin Kruse, and Khalil Gibran Muhammad defended the central thesis that slavery and its legacies are foundational to understanding contemporary American inequalities – a position well within the mainstream of recent historiography[93].

88 Hannah-Jones, "The 1619 Project".

89 Silverstein, "Why We Published The 1619 Project".

90 Brett Milano, "Twitter and the Birth of the 1619 Project," *Harvard Gazette*, November 9, 2023, https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2019/12/the-1619-project-started-with-a-tweet-says-nikole-hannah-jones/.

91 David Waldstreicher, "The Hidden Stakes of the 1619 Controversy," *Boston Review*, January 24, 2020, https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/david-waldstreicher-hidden-stakes-1619-controversy/.

92 Leslie M. Harris, "I Helped Fact-Check the 1619 Project. The Times Ignored Me," *Politico Magazine*, March 6, 2020, https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/03/06/1619-project-new-york-times-mistake-122248.

93 For the specific contributions of these authors defending the project's foundational thesis, see Nikole Hannah-Jones et al., eds., *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* (New York: One World, 2021): Khalil Gibran Muhammad, "Sugar," 73–89; Matthew Desmond, "Capitalism,"

The 1619 Project also generated significant criticism from a group of leading historians who challenged both its empirical claims and its broader interpretive framing. In December 2019, Sean Wilentz, Gordon S. Wood, James M. McPherson, James Oakes, and Victoria Bynum – five of the most prominent scholars of early American history and the Civil War era – issued a formal letter to *The New York Times* requesting corrections to what they described as factual inaccuracies and misleading interpretations[94]. Their primary objection focused on the project's claim that one of the central motivations for the American Revolution was the protection of slavery[95]; they argued that there is little historical evidence that British imperial policy posed an imminent threat to the institution of slavery in 1776. More broadly, they disputed the project's portrayal of figures such as Abraham Lincoln and its tendency to characterise the American founding as fundamentally rooted in slavery, arguing that this presentation oversimplified complex historical developments and ignored established anti-slavery traditions within American political thought. The historians further warned that the project exemplified a "displacement of historical understanding by ideology," in which interpretive and political commitments risked overriding empirical historical analysis. Although *The New York Times* defended the project and issued minor corrections[96], the letter itself became a focal point in wider debates over the relationship between historical scholarship, public history, and political narrative in contemporary America.

Conservative critics framed 1619 not simply as a flawed journalistic project but as proof that universities, media, and schools were teaching children to hate the country[97]. The 1776 Commission was

165–185; Jamelle Bouie, "Politics," 186–205; Bryan Stevenson, "Justice," 261–279; and Kevin Kruse, "Traffic," 280–294.

94 Sean Wilentz et al., "We Respond to the Historians Who Critiqued The 1619 Project," *The New York Times Magazine*, December 20, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/20/magazine/we-respond-to-the-historians-who-critiqued-the-1619-project.html.

95 Nathan Stone, "The 1619 Project and the 'Reframing' of History," *Public Discourse*, June 1, 2020, https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/01/59180/.

96 Jake Silverstein, "An Update to The 1619 Project," *The New York Times*, March 11, 2020, archived March 12, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/magazine/1619-project-update.html.

97 For prominent examples of conservative figures framing the project as an ideological effort

born directly from this political context. Trump announced the need for "patriotic education" in 2020, and Executive Order 13958 created a commission to promote the history and principles of the Founding while opposing what it called radicalised accounts of American history. The backlash to 1619 therefore gave institutional form to the mythic grammar of purity, betrayal, and redemption: 1776 would redeem the nation from 1619.

Educational outreach was an important part of the project's roll-out. In partnership with the Pulitzer Center, the 1619 Project team developed lesson plans, reading guides and other classroom materials for teachers who chose to use them[98]. According to the Pulitzer Center, these materials were adopted in over 3,500 classrooms within the first year, indicating substantial voluntary uptake at the district and teacher level[99]. However, since the curriculum was never mandated as part of federal education policy or incorporated into a nationally standardized curriculum framework, its presence in schools depended entirely on local discretion, with uptake varying significantly across districts and states[100].

At the state level, responses were highly uneven. Some jurisdictions and school districts – particularly in more progressive urban centres such as Chicago Public Schools, Newark Public Schools, and Washington, D.C. – experimented with incorporating elements of the

to foster national self-hatred and anti-American sentiment, see Donald J. Trump, "Remarks at the White House Conference on American History," September 17, 2020, *White House Archives*, where he officially condemned the project as "toxic propaganda" and a form of "child abuse" designed to make students ashamed of their heritage; and The President's Advisory 1776 Commission, 16–18, which formally argued that such revisionist histories constitute a "radicalized challenge" meant to enforce anti-American indoctrination in schools. See also Mary Grabar, *Debunking the 1619 Project: Exposing the Plan to Rewrite American History* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery History, 2021), 12–25, arguing that the project's ultimate goal is to dismantle the constitutional legacy of the Founding Fathers by replacing objective history with resentment-driven ideology.

98 Naomi Schaefer Riley, "'The 1619 Project' Enters American Classrooms," Education Next, December 19, 2024, https://www.educationnext.org/1619-project-enters-american-classrooms-adding-new-sizzle-slavery-significant-cost.

99 Pulitzer Center, *Five Years of Teaching 1619: A Program Impact Report from the Pulitzer Center, the Original Education Partner of The 1619 Project* (Washington, D.C.: Pulitzer Center, 2024), https://pulitzercenter.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/1619Report2024_0.pdf.

100 Riley, "'The 1619 Project' Enters American Classrooms".

materials into social studies instruction, usually as optional or supplementary resources rather than core curriculum content. By contrast, a number of Republican-led states moved to restrict or prohibit the use of the 1619 Project in public schools. Florida, under Governor Ron DeSantis, formally banned its use in K–12 instruction through state education standards and subsequent legislation limiting the teaching of materials deemed inconsistent with state civics requirements, while states such as Texas, Arkansas, and Iowa introduced or passed measures discouraging or restricting its classroom use. These legislative efforts framed the project as ideologically driven and unsuitable for classroom instruction, even as other states treated it as a legitimate interpretive resource within broader debates about how American history should be taught[101].

Writers affiliated with the Claremont Institute warned that its framing threatened to alienate "Americans from their country's true philosophical and political founding in 1776."[102] Figures such as Newt Gingrich and Senator Tom Cotton described the project as ideologically driven and misleading[103].

Content Analysis of *The 1776 Report*

The Commission's 45-page *Report* begins by blasting criticisms of the Founders as a "charge" that is "untrue, and has done enormous damage"[104]. Slavery is treated as a regrettable but universal condition, not

101 For the specific legislative acts and state board rulings banning or restricting the project, see Florida Administrative Code, r. 6A-1.094124 (2021), which explicitly prohibited instructional materials from utilizing *The 1619 Project*; Florida Statutes § 1003.42(2) (amended by the 2022 "Individual Freedom Act" or HB 7), restricting classroom discussions on systemic racism. For Texas, see Texas Education Code § 28.0022 (enacted via HB 3979 and SB 3), which bars teaching that slavery constitutes the true founding of the United States. For Iowa, see Iowa Code § 257.11 (enacted via HF 802, 2021), targeting concepts of systemic racism and prohibited curricula in K-12 instruction.

102 Richard Lindzen, "The 1619 Project Exposed: A Special Edition of the American Mind Podcast," *The American Mind,* June 22, 2021, https://americanmind.org/audio/the-1619-project-exposed-a-special-edition-of-the-american-mind-podcast/.

103 Anna Hiatt, "Conservatives' Freakout Over the 1619 Project Reveals Their Fear of America's Actual Past," *The Nation*, August 22, 2019, https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/conservative-meltdown-1619-project/.

104 President's Advisory 1776 Commission, *The 1776 Report.*

a uniquely American crime: "many Americans labor under the illusion that slavery was somehow a uniquely American evil," the Report declares, insisting instead that slavery "has been more the rule than the exception" in history. It then falsely portrays George Washington and Thomas Jefferson as morally consistent on slavery – e.g. claiming that "by the end of his life [Washington] freed all the slaves in his family estate", and repeatedly cites the Declaration's "all men are created equal" to argue that the Framers knew slavery was "incompatible with that truth". In this telling, the Founders *planted the seeds* of abolition: "the foundation of our Republic planted the seeds of the death of slavery in America," and "the movement to abolish slavery that first began in the United States led the way" to ending slavery. The overall tone is heroic and laudatory: founding principles and later civil rights achievements are described as a "magnificent truth" to be taught with "reverence and love,"[105] and the text repeatedly calls for a form of civic education grounded in affective attachment to the nation, and less in knowledge. This quasi-devotional language is notable. By framing the object of study in terms of "love," the Report treats historical interpretation as a form of civic formation rather than inquiry[106].

Other chapters continue this pattern. The report grudgingly recounts the horrors of Jim Crow, but immediately shifts blame to contemporary "identity politics." The 1960s civil-rights campaign is praised as fulfilling the Founders' promise, quoting Martin Luther King Jr. on the Declaration's "promissory note" to black Americans. Yet it quickly laments that the movement's "heady spirit" was "short-lived": it "was almost immediately turned to programs that ran counter to the lofty ideals of the founders," the report complains, especially the "abandonment of nondiscrimination and equal opportunity in favour of 'group rights'" modelled on antebellum racists[107]. In effect, the *Report* portrays

105 President's Advisory 1776 Commission, *The 1776 Report.*

106 James Grossman, "History as Indoctrination: The 1776 Report," *Perspectives on History* 59, no. 2 (February 2021): 12–15. Grossman notes that the document explicitly treats the nation's founding principles as sacred dogmas rather than subjects for critical evidence-based investigation.

107 Grossman, "History as Indoctrination", 12-15.

any modern effort to address systemic racial injustice (affirmative action, protected classes, etc.) as a dangerous betrayal of "colourblind" principles. Similarly, it depicts early-20th-century progressive reforms such as the expansion of federal regulatory agencies, the establishment of the Federal Reserve System, the introduction of antitrust enforcement under the Sherman and Clayton Acts, and the creation of welfare-oriented labour protections – as initiating a slippery slope toward bureaucratic centralisation. Progressive reformers are thus implicitly likened to later authoritarian tendencies, with the expansion of the administrative state and expert governance cast as a gradual erosion of "unalienable rights"[108]. Throughout, the report omits or downplays entire episodes (for example, it largely sidelines the Confederacy as a political project of slavery and secession) and dismisses movements for political equality as deviations from the Founders' mythos[109].

This is not merely a conceptual inconsistency; it is the Report's central rhetorical operation. By celebrating abolition, the Civil War, and the civil rights movement as expressions of founding principles, the Report claims the moral authority of equality. By simultaneously rejecting the legal and political mechanisms through which equality was pursued in the twentieth century – affirmative action, anti-discrimination law, "group-based" frameworks – it protects the racial and social hierarchies that abstract equality alone has never dismantled. The contradiction is not a flaw in the argument but its function: abstract equality legitimises the myth, while the rejection of substantive equality preserves the status quo the myth serves.

Professional historians overwhelmingly condemned the Commission's report for its selective and ideologically charged treatment of the founding era. The American Historical Association, joined by dozens of scholarly organisations, issued a statement arguing that the Report

108 Gillian Brockell, "'A Hack Job,' 'Outright Lies': Trump Commission's '1776 Report' Outrages Historians," History News Network, January 19, 2021, https://www.hnn.us/article/a-hack-job-outright-lies-trump-commissions-1776-re.

109 "AHA Statement Condemning Report of Advisory 1776 Commission," American Historical Association, n.d., https://www.historians.org/news/aha-statement-condemning-report-of-advisory-1776-commission/.

"consists of two main themes. One is an homage to the Founding Fathers, a simplistic interpretation that relies on falsehoods, inaccuracies, omissions, and misleading statements. The other is a screed against a half-century of historical scholarship"[110].

The Report's treatment of slavery illustrates this pattern. Its claim that Washington "freed all the slaves in his family estate," and its broader portrayal of slaveholding founders as participants in an essentially antislavery founding, are not simply neutral historical summaries but selective framings that compress contradiction into moral vindication[111]. Columbia professor Alexis Coe noted that the Report "lacks citations or any indication books were consulted, which explains why it's riddled in errors, distortions, and outright lies". Historian Ibram X. Kendi tweeted that the Report "makes it seem as if slaveholding founding fathers were abolitionists; that Americans were the early beacon of the global abolitionist movement; that the demise of slavery in the United States was inevitable[112]".

In addition to factual errors, the Report denounces modern colleges for supposedly "peddling resentment and contempt for American principles" (a theme carried into the Report's appendices[113]). It urges students to "stand up to the petty tyrants ... who demand that we speak only of America's sins while denying her greatness", effectively

110 "AHA Statement Condemning Report of Advisory 1776 Commission".

111 The point is not that Washington's manumission provisions were fictitious, but that the Report presents them in a misleadingly redemptive register. Washington's 1799 will provided for the emancipation of the enslaved people he legally owned after Martha Washington's death; Martha Washington manumitted them earlier, effective January 1, 1801. However, of the 317 enslaved people at Mount Vernon in 1799, only 123 were legally owned by George Washington and eligible for manumission under his will. A further 153 were dower enslaved people attached to the Custis estate, whom neither George nor Martha Washington could legally free, while others were rented from neighbours. Similarly, Jefferson's antislavery statements coexisted with his lifelong slaveholding: Monticello records that he enslaved more than 610 people over the course of his life and formally freed only seven enslaved men, two during his lifetime and five in his will. See George Washington's Mount Vernon, "A Decision to Free His Slaves"; George Washington's Mount Vernon, "Ten Facts About Washington & Slavery"; Thomas Jefferson Foundation, "Slavery at Monticello"; Thomas Jefferson Foundation, "People Enslaved at Monticello Who Gained Their Freedom."

112 Brockell, "'A Hack Job'".

113 The President's Advisory 1776 Commission, *The 1776 Report*.

branding any criticism of national myths as unpatriotic[114]. As the AHA pointed out, the effect is anti-pluralist: the Report "erases whole swaths of the American population – enslaved people, Indigenous communities, and women – the way the founders excluded those groups"[115]. Its singular tale of "great men" and grand ideals leaves no room for multiple perspectives or historical nuance.

Ultimately, the 1776 Report valorises uncritical patriotism. It promises a "patriotic education" that supposedly "teaches the truth about America" but does so with "reverence and love" – in practice, glossing over injustice. This pedagogy drew the ire of historians, who charged that it inverts the purpose of education. The AHA warned that the Report effectively "calls for a form of government indoctrination of American students, and in the process elevate[s] ignorance about the past to a civic virtue"[116]. In other words, unquestioning loyalty is held up as a virtue while critical engagement is denigrated. This contempt for "progressive" scholarship and insistence on a simple national myth underscores the Commission's aim: to cement a narrow, sanitised story of America through the power of the state, rather than foster open inquiry.

Trump's Second Term: The Institutionalisation of Mythic History

The ramifications of this project became clearer during Trump's second term. Its premises reappeared in 2025 through executive orders and federal cultural policy that treated public history as an object of ideological discipline. On January 29, 2025, Trump signed the executive order "Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling," directing federal agencies to identify and eliminate support for what it described as "radical indoctrination" in schools. The order revived the logic of patriotic education by treating certain accounts of race, gender, and in-

114 The President's Advisory 1776 Commission, *The 1776 Report*, 16.

115 "AHA Statement Condemning Report of Advisory 1776 Commission".

116 "AHA Statement Condemning Report of Advisory 1776 Commission".

equality not as contested subjects of democratic and scholarly debate, but as anti-American ideological formation[117].

A more direct extension of the 1776 framework appeared in the March 27, 2025 executive order "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History." The order targeted federal public-history institutions, including the Smithsonian, and called for the removal of what it termed "improper ideology" from museums, monuments, education centres, and public displays. Its language echoed the 1776 Report's central premise: that historical interpretation should inspire national unity and greatness rather than foreground conflict, exclusion, or structural injustice[118]. The issue was not simply commemoration, but institutional control over the conditions under which the national past could be publicly narrated.

The material consequences of this logic became visible in disputes over national parks and monuments. In June 2026, a federal judge ordered the administration to restore exhibits and signs removed or altered under the "Restoring Truth and Sanity" directive, including materials concerning slavery, civil rights, Indigenous history, and climate change[119]. The episode demonstrates how mythic history becomes ad-

117 Donald J. Trump, "Ending Radical Indoctrination in K–12 Schooling," January 29, 2025, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-indoctrination-in-k-12-schooling/. For policy analysis of the order's implications for K–12 education and litigation, see Jon Valant, "The Status of Litigation Against the Trump Administration's K–12 Education Agenda," Brookings Institution, September 1, 2025, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-status-of-litigation-against-the-trump-administrations-k-12-education-agenda-a-guide-for-education-leaders/.

118 Donald J. Trump, "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History," March 27, 2025, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/restoring-truth-and-sanity-to-american-history/. For an overview of the order's potential effects on the Smithsonian Institution, see R. Eric Petersen, "Smithsonian Institution: Potential Effects of Executive Order 14253," Congressional Research Service, IF12975, April 23, 2025, https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF12975. For responses from professional historical organizations, see Organization of American Historians, "Statement on Executive Order 'Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History,'" March 31, 2025, https://www.oah.org/2025/03/31/statement-on-executive-order-restoring-truth-and-sanity-to-american-history/; American Historical Association, "Historians Defend the Smithsonian," approved March 31, 2025, https://www.historians.org/news/historians-defend-the-smithsonian/.

119 Complaint, *National Parks Conservation Association v. Department of the Interior*, No. 1:26-cv-10877 (D. Mass. Feb. 17, 2026), https://democracyforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/National-Parks-Conservation-Association-et.-al.-v.-Department-of-the-Interior-et.-al.-.pdf; Preliminary Injunction, *National Parks Conservation Association v. Depart-*

ministrative practice: interpretive signs, museum displays, and public monuments are recoded as ideological threats when they disrupt the preferred story of national innocence.

State-level developments reinforce the same pattern. PEN America reported that in 2025 state legislators introduced ninety-three bills across thirty-two states that would censor higher education, with twenty-one becoming law in fifteen states; it also identified educational gag orders and indirect censorship measures targeting teaching about race, gender, American history, and related subjects[120]. These laws did not begin with Trump's second term, but the federal revival of patriotic education and anti-DEI language strengthened a wider ecology of censorship.

Finally, the 2026 semiquincentennial provides a symbolic stage for this politics of history. Trump's January 2025 executive order on America's 250th birthday created Task Force 250 and reinstated the National Garden of American Heroes project. The White House's Freedom 250 page describes the anniversary as "the most important milestone in our country's history" and quotes Trump presenting 1776 as "the greatest political journey in human history.[121]" Such language is not unusual for

ment of the Interior, No. 1:26-cv-10877 (D. Mass. June 12, 2026), https://democracyforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Parks-PI-Order.pdf. For reporting on the injunction and the restoration of removed materials, see Nate Raymond, "Trump Administration Must Restore History, Science Materials at Parks, US Judge Rules," *Reuters*, June 12, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/trump-administration-must-restore-history-science-materials-parks-us-judge-rules-2026-06-12/. For reporting on the scope of the removals, see Juliet Eilperin, "National Park Signs Related to Native Americans, Climate Change to Be Removed," *Washington Post*, January 27, 2026, https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2026/01/27/national-parks-signs-censorship/; Adrian Florido, "Trump Administration Is Erasing History and Science at National Parks, Lawsuit Argues," NPR, February 18, 2026, https://www.npr.org/2026/02/18/nx-s1-5718006/trump-national-parks-lawsuit.

120 PEN America, *Expanding the Web of Control: America's Censored Campuses 2025* (New York: PEN America, January 15, 2026), https://pen.org/report/americas-censored-campuses-25-web-of-control/. See also PEN America, "PEN America Warns of Expanding Web of Control as Politicians Escalate Campaign to Censor U.S. Colleges and Universities," January 15, 2026, https://pen.org/press-release/pen-america-warns-of-expanding-web-of-control-as-politicians-escalate-campaign-to-censor-u-s-colleges-and-universities/; Liam Knox, "Report: State Lawmakers Enacted 21 Censorship Bills in 2025," *Inside Higher Ed*, January 15, 2026, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/faculty/curriculum/2026/01/15/report-state-lawmakers-enacted-21-censorship-bills-2025.

121 Donald J. Trump, Executive Order 14189, "Celebrating America's 250th Birthday," 90 Fed. Reg. 8849 (February 3, 2025), https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/03/2025-02231/

national commemoration, but in context it belongs to a broader effort to centralise, curate, and spectacularise a heroic national story at the very moment federal institutions are pressured to remove narratives of slavery, race, gender, and exclusion.

The political intention, then, is not merely to celebrate the nation. It is to control the terms under which national memory can be publicly narrated. The power project served by mythic history is threefold: it delegitimises adversaries by portraying them as enemies of the Founding; it disciplines institutions such as schools, museums, archives, parks, and universities; and it presents strong executive intervention as restorative rather than radical.

VI. Conclusion

This article has argued that the MAGA-aligned New Right has constructed a coherent mythic history of the American Founding – organised around the tropes of purity, betrayal, and redemption – and has progressively acquired the institutional means to impose it. What began as intellectual production at the Claremont Institute and Hillsdale College became federal policy through the 1776 Commission, and has since hardened into executive orders, museum purges, digital erasure, educational gag orders, and a commemorative apparatus designed to spectacularise a heroic national story while suppressing the histories of slavery, racial exclusion, Indigenous dispossession, and democratic struggle.

The mythic structure this article describes performs three political functions. First, it delegitimises adversaries by recasting pluralist reinterpretation as betrayal of the Founding – a move that transforms scholarly disagreement into evidence of disloyalty. Second, it disciplines institutions: schools, universities, museums, archives, monuments, and

celebrating-americas-250th-birthday; Section 3 reinstated Executive Order 13934, "Building and Rebuilding Monuments to American Heroes," and Executive Order 13978, "Building the National Garden of American Heroes," and directed the Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy to recommend additional historically significant Americans for inclusion in the National Garden, bringing the total number to 250. See also White House, "Freedom 250," https://www.whitehouse.gov/freedom250/.

federal websites are made answerable not to standards of evidence but to a prescribed narrative of national greatness. Third, it provides a moral grammar in which strong executive action appears not as authoritarian overreach but as restoration – the recovery of a lost order that never existed in the form its defenders claim.

The democratic stakes are not abstract. When the 1776 Report calls on students to "stand up to the petty tyrants" who teach uncomfortable truths, and when federal agencies strip references to minority military service from their websites, the politics of mythic history has moved beyond rhetoric into the material conditions of civic life. What counts as the national past – who appears in it, whose contributions are acknowledged, whose suffering is narrated – is no longer a matter of scholarly debate alone. It has become a site of state power.

This article contributes to scholarship on memory politics by demonstrating how intellectual myth-making, institutional diffusion, and executive action form a connected chain rather than isolated phenomena. It also underscores that the defence of critical historiography is not a partisan act but a democratic one. As the American Historical Association has emphasised, confronting the full complexity of the national past – including its contradictions, its violence, and its unfinished promises – is not anti-American. It is the condition under which informed citizenship remains possible.

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La construcción de un nuevo pasado "oficial" en el marco de la "batalla cultural": dos efemérides en la Argentina de Milei (12 de octubre y 24 de marzo)

En este trabajo nos vamos a concentrar en el modo en que Javier Milei libra lo que denomina "batalla cultural" sobre el pasado argentino. Para ello su gobierno ha avanzado en la re-significación de aquellos acontecimientos históricos que forman parte de las efemérides nacionales ("feriados"). Nuestro objeto de análisis serán las intervenciones públicas en las redes sociales, en entrevistas y en discursos del propio Milei, junto con las publicaciones del sitio oficial casarosada.gob.ar. En ellas veremos las interpretaciones que se proponen tanto del pasado reciente como de sucesos más lejanos. En el caso del 24 de marzo, referido a la última dictadura militar, Milei y su gobierno han reivindicado la perspectiva de la denominada "memoria completa" y han cuestionado el número de víctimas de la represión estatal. También han vuelto a utilizar la denominación "Día de la Raza" para conmemorar el 12 de octubre. En ambos casos, contradiciendo los desarrollos historiográficos y los consensos sociales alcanzados. Apelaremos a la noción de "nostalgia" desarrollada por Frank Ankersmit, y a su variante "reaccionaria", como un concepto fértil para dar cuenta de la interpretación del pasado propuesta por Milei y su gobierno.
Palabras clave: conmemoración; efemérides; batalla cultural; historia; memoria.

The construction of a new "official" past within the framework of the "cultural battle": two commemorations in Milei's Argentina (October 12 and March 24)

In this work, we will focus on how Javier Milei is waging what he calls a "cultural battle" over Argentina's past. To this end, his government has advanced in the reinterpretation of historical events that form part of the national holidays. Our object of analysis will be Milei's public interventions on social media, in interviews, and in speeches, along with publications on the official website casarosada.gob.ar. In these, we will examine the interpretations proposed for both the recent past and more distant events. In the case of March 24, referring to the last mil-

itary dictatorship, Milei and his government have championed the perspective of the so-called "complete memory" and have questioned the number of victims of state repression. They have also reinstated the term "Día de la Raza" (Day of the Race) to commemorate October 12. In both cases, they contradict established historiographical developments and social consensus. We will appeal to the notion of "nostalgia" developed by Frank Ankersmit, and its "reactionary" variant, as a fertile concept to account for the interpretation of the past proposed by Milei and his government.
Keywords: commemoration; ephemeris; cultural war; history; memory.

La construcción de un nuevo pasado "oficial" en el marco de la "batalla cultural": dos efemérides en la Argentina de Milei (12 de octubre y 24 de marzo)

Rosa E. Belvedresi*

Introducción

Cuando, en 1965, A. Danto concluía que no era posible una crónica ideal, formada por las notas que un cronista tomara de todo lo que ocurriera al mismo tiempo en que sucedía, estaba señalando algo más que una imposibilidad lógica. Una crónica ideal era imposible lógicamente ya que no podía contener lo que denominaba "oraciones narrativas", es decir, aquel grupo de proposiciones que se pueden sostener como verdaderas solo cuando los acontecimientos a los que refieren han sucedido. Esas oraciones no están disponibles para un cronista que da cuenta de lo que sucede, al mismo tiempo en que los sucesos acontecen.[1] Pero Danto estaba señalando algo más, algo que es fácilmente corroborable cuando revisamos la producción de la historia académica: no hay una descripción última del pasado ya que los significados de lo sucedido no

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1 Arthur Danto, *Narration and Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

pueden ser agotados en una descripción final. Lo que ocurrió, si bien está fijo en términos ontológicos, pues no podemos modificarlo, está abierto conceptualmente. Y ello se debe no solo a la mejora en el desarrollo de las técnicas de investigación historiográfica o al hallazgo de nuevos materiales de prueba, sino a que establecemos nuevas relaciones entre los hechos que permiten la producción de nuevos significados, los cuales, a su vez, se vinculan con las condiciones sociales e históricas en las que son producidos. De allí entonces que, como suele decirse, cada nueva época se da su propia "historia".

Dicho esto, es evidente el uso que los gobiernos y los poderes políticos hacen de la historia para producir narrativas que justifiquen su posición actual, tanto para buscar antecedentes que los doten de "profundidad histórica" y demostrar que no son advenedizos, como para proponer una determinada lectura que permita destruir los que consideran mitos ideológicos que obstruyen la grandeza de un país (y, a su vez, proponer otros). Pero, como señala bien A. Megill cuando se pregunta por la relación entre populismo e historia académica, esas reinterpretaciones del pasado, asociadas a ciertos proyectos políticos vigentes en determinadas coyunturas, pueden no alimentarse de, ni desafiar, la producción historiográfica académica.[2]

Argentina es un país en el que la historiografía ha jugado un papel central en su conformación misma como nación. Ya Bartolomé Mitre, quien fuera presidente entre 1862 y 1868, fue autor de una historia sobre Manuel Belgrano (prócer de las luchas de la independencia y creador de la bandera nacional). Mitre buscó que su obra histórica fuera, a la vez, una justificación de la línea política que él mismo representaba, en su texto se "incubaba el más exitoso 'mito de los orígenes' de una nación que el mismo Mitre inventaría y presidiría".[3] Obviamente, el uso de la historia no es propio de un solo caso, sino que se replica fácilmente

2 Allan Megill, "Does Populism Challenge the Expertise of Academic Historians?", en *Claiming the People´s Past. Populist Politics of History in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Berber Bevernage *et al.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 288-305.

3 Fernando Devoto y Nora Pagano, *Historia de la historiografía argentina* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2009), 21.

en cada país del planeta. Podemos preguntarnos ¿qué novedad trae el gobierno de Javier Milei?

Si bien las pujas por reinterpretar el pasado en sintonía con los intereses políticos del gobierno de turno no son nuevas, es posible que en el caso del presidente argentino se den algunas notas cuya relevancia vale la pena señalar. Nos proponemos analizar las interpretaciones sobre el pasado que pueden inferirse de las intervenciones que Milei y su gobierno realizan en la esfera pública (redes sociales, conferencias y entrevistas), que tienen por tema las efemérides del calendario. Nos referimos a aquellas fechas que el Estado define como feriados, o festivos, que son los días en los que se suspenden las actividades tradicionales (no se dictan clases, los organismos estatales están cerrados y la actividad privada, en su mayoría, se pausa). Esas fechas especiales tienen un impacto directo en la actividad escolar de los niveles primario y medio, ya que alrededor de ellas se organizan actividades curriculares específicas: actos escolares, tareas de investigación por parte de los estudiantes, visitas a lugares significativos, etc. Al mismo tiempo, impactan en la vida social al alterar el ritmo cotidiano.[4] En nuestro análisis, apelaremos a la noción de "nostalgia" provista por el filósofo de la historia Frank Ankersmit, la que nos habrá de proveer con un elemento teórico útil para dar cuenta de actitud de Milei frente al pasado argentino según quedaría ejemplificada en sus intervenciones respecto de dos de esas fechas simbólicamente relevantes (12 de octubre y 24 de marzo).

Milei: las efemérides y la nostalgia

Representante de lo que denomina "anarco-capitalismo", el presidente Milei se manifiesta a favor del liberalismo en términos económicos y, según suele afirmar, también políticos. El anarco-capitalismo impulsa la desaparición del Estado; o bien, hasta que se logre, su reducción a una mínima expresión, limitado a salvaguardar la vida y los bienes de los

4 Nora Rabotnikof, "Política y tiempo: Pensar la conmemoración", *Sociohistórica* 26 (2009): 179-212, http://www.fuentesmemoria.fahce.unlp.edu.ar/art_revistas/pr.4513/pr.4513.pdf.

individuos.[5] En sus actos proselitistas previos a la elección que lo llevó a la presidencia de Argentina en diciembre de 2023 (y el mismo día de su triunfo), Milei repetía una especie de oración laica: "el liberalismo es el respeto irrestricto del proyecto de vida del prójimo, basado en el principio de no agresión y en defensa del derecho a la vida, a la libertad y a la propiedad".[6] Como señalan Morresi y Vicente, esta frase expresa la aspiración de "dejar de lado la idea de bien público y concentrarse solo en el individuo como medida de todas las cosas".[7] La expresión del que sería su credo político se asocia, de manera llamativa, a una posición cercana a las que podrían considerarse de "extrema derecha", afín al conservadurismo que ha hecho escala en varios gobiernos del mundo. Esta orientación política se ha expresado en América Latina en figuras como las de Jair Bolsonaro en Brasil o Nayib Bukele en El Salvador. Y, desde la asunción de Donald Trump como presidente de Estados Unidos en enero de 2025, ha alcanzado su mayor visibilidad.

Críticas a la homosexualidad, sostenidas incluso en el marco de eventos internacionales, cuestionamientos a la ley que permite la interrupción voluntaria del embarazo junto con los constantes ataques a quienes sostienen tesis referidas a la igualdad o a la necesidad de un orden económico justo, son muestras de lo que Milei entiende debe sostenerse en el marco de lo que denomina "batalla cultural" (un ejemplo de las características de esa "batalla" puede encontrarse en el discurso que Milei dio en la Conferencia Política de Acción Conservadora, CPAC, en Buenos Aires, en 2024).[8] Y el pasado, o al menos sus interpretaciones, son un objeto privilegiado en esa "batalla".

5 Sergio Morresi y Martín Vicente, "Rayos en cielo encapotado: la nueva derecha como una constante irregular en la Argentina", en *Está entre nosotros. ¿De dónde sale y hasta dónde puede llegar la extrema derecha que no vimos venir?*, coord. Pablo Semán (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI editores, 2023), 62.

6 La frase es un poco más extensa y es adjudicada a Alberto Benegas Lynch (h), a quien Milei califica de "prócer". Se trata de un economista ligado a la escuela austríaca y a la defensa de la minimización del estado y de un liberalismo irrestricto que tiene puntos de contacto con el pensamiento conservador (en particular en cuestiones vinculadas a equidad y género). Véase: https://www.libertadyprogreso.org/index.php/es/alberto-benegas-lynch-h.

7 Morresi y Vicente, "Rayos en cielo encapotado", 67.

8 Los sitios web donde pueden encontrarse las intervenciones o publicaciones de Milei y su gobierno, y algunas notas periodísticas que se indican en el cuerpo de este artículo, se listan al final.

La "batalla cultural", o "cultural war" en el ámbito inglés, a la que Milei apela es utilizada por un complejo conglomerado ideológico de extrema derecha mundial que conjuga conservadurismo con una interpretación del liberalismo muy particular. Refiere a una estrategia de intervención pública (política y discursiva) que, mientras defiende la libre acción de los individuos en la economía sostiene, al mismo tiempo, tesis anti-liberales en otros aspectos (tales como la sexualidad, las expresiones artísticas o el ejercicio de la libertad de expresión). Ese conglomerado ideológico entiende que debe involucrarse con la cultura para influir en la formación de valores y así crear las condiciones para un cambio político afín a sus orientaciones.[9]

La interpretación que ofrece Milei de los feriados del calendario (o días festivos) constituye una expresión contundente de esa "batalla cultural", como intentamos mostrar en lo que sigue. La asignación de un significado a una fecha específica tiene varias connotaciones. En primer lugar, ese significado está orientado a la conformación de una memoria colectiva compartida que se articula alrededor de esas fechas (en muchos casos, fundacionales de la identidad de un grupo). En segundo lugar, son el resultado de una intervención directa del control estatal al definir qué fechas pueden formar parte del calendario escolar y los modos en las que ellas serán abordadas.[10] Y finalmente, son un lugar privilegiado de intervención del poder político en la esfera pública, tanto de los integrantes del partido de gobierno como de quienes están en la oposición. El gobierno de Milei opera a través del propio presidente, los canales oficiales o sus colaboradores más cercanos en el primer y último de los ítems señalados. La intervención en las redes sociales y el espacio público en general tiene como finalidad discutir la construcción de una memoria colectiva en particular y, a su vez, propender a la conformación de otra.

9 Esa estrategia, que busca un cambio no solo político sino cultural, se caracteriza como "*metapolitics*", y ha sido analizada, por ejemplo, por Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, *War for Eternity. Inside Bannon's Far-Right Circle of Global Power Brokers* (London: HarperCollins, 2020), 61-64.

10 Elizabeth Jelin, *Los trabajos de la memoria* (Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores, 2002); Inés Dussel y Myriam Southwell, "Los rituales escolares: pasado y presente de una práctica colectiva", *El monitor de la educación* (junio de 2009).

En este trabajo, proponemos entender la interpretación del pasado que puede inferirse de las intervenciones públicas del propio Milei y de su gobierno (e incluso desde antes de que fuera presidente) en relación con dos fechas en particular (12 de octubre y 24 de marzo), en el marco de los análisis que Frank Ankersmit realiza sobre la experiencia histórica en clave de nostalgia. Para Ankersmit, en la nostalgia se da la verdadera experiencia histórica, como experiencia de la *diferencia* entre el pasado y el presente. La nostalgia es, nos dice, una muestra de la "inasequibilidad" del pasado, el cual, por ende, no puede transformarse en un objeto.[11] La nostalgia está, así, en tensión con el conocimiento histórico y nos aproxima más a la estética que a la epistemología. En los análisis más complejos que ha dedicado a la nostalgia y a la experiencia histórica, Ankersmit introduce el concepto de "trauma histórico". Y asocia a la nostalgia con dos de sus modalidades. Si bien siempre el trauma tiene que ver con una pérdida, que define en términos de "olvido" del pasado, en una de sus variantes se puede apelar a una forma de resolución que es imposible para la otra. El que denomina "trauma$_2$" se vincula a una actitud "conservadora", que entiende que el mundo anterior se ha perdido y nunca podrá ser reconstruido. Los conservadores *creen* subsanar ese dolor nostálgico a través del conocimiento histórico. El "trauma$_1$", en cambio, es propio de la actitud "reaccionaria". Esta es incapaz de reconocer que el mundo cambió y que, como resultado, se ha dado la transición a una nueva identidad. Frente a los cambios irrevocables que se han producido, el reaccionario busca recuperar aquella identidad previa, algo imposible porque el mundo es radicalmente otro. El reaccionario, dice Ankersmit, quiere "ser de nuevo lo que en el pasado una vez fueron".[12] De ahí que esta posición reaccionaria sobre el pasado no pueda alimentar la búsqueda del conocimiento histórico, a diferencia de aquella del conservador (para quien el pasado solo puede transformarse en "un deseo de saber", aunque imposible de satisfacerse en su completitud).[13]

11 Frank Ankersmit, "Historismo y posmodernismo. Una fenomenología de la experiencia histórica", en *Historia y tropología. Ascenso y caída de la metáfora* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2004), 386.

12 Frank Ankersmit, *Experiencia histórica sublime* (Santiago de Chile: Palinodia, 2008), 123.

13 Ankersmit, *Experiencia histórica sublime*, 124.

Creemos que esto nos puede proporcionar un buen marco para entender la actitud que Milei expresa sobre el pasado histórico argentino. Sus intervenciones públicas se ajustan a la caracterización del "trauma$_1$", toda vez que parece manifestar una nostalgia radical respecto de un pasado irrecuperable, objeto del olvido que Ankersmit caracteriza como el "abandono de un mundo anterior, perdido para siempre".[14] En sus publicaciones en las redes sociales y en sus discursos, Milei habla de un pasado que, como señalaría Ankersmit, es un pasado que ya no puede volver. Si es que alguna vez existió o no es irrelevante en este punto (tanto para Ankersmit como para Milei), lo que importa es señalar la actitud de Milei frente al pasado como una en la que se añora algo que no puede ser asido y del cual solo pueden ofrecerse sensaciones que parecerían provenir de un mundo ya desaparecido.[15]

Dos efemérides en la era de Milei

Consideraremos para el análisis de las posiciones del actual presidente argentino sobre el pasado algunas publicaciones en sus redes sociales (en las que es particularmente activo). Tomaremos también como su posición la que se expresa en los sitios oficiales del gobierno, para lo cual nos vamos a concentrar en especial en el dominio *casarosada.gob.ar* (que se utiliza en la página oficial del gobierno y que incluye el vínculo a sus redes sociales). Analizaremos dos ejemplos que corresponden a dos momentos temporales, uno más lejano y otro más cercano, con la finalidad de mostrar que la "nostalgia" de Milei no se restringe al pasado reciente, aquel que se suele asociar con la memoria colectiva, sino que también busca incluir en su narrativa sucesos del pasado más lejano (y, por ende, también alejados de su experiencia personal). Nos estamos refiriendo a las fechas del 12 de octubre y a la del 24 de marzo, casos en los que Milei habría hecho explícita su posición "reaccionaria" (en términos de Ankersmit, que hacemos propios).

14 Ankersmit, *Experiencia histórica sublime*, 117.

15 Por supuesto que no profundizamos en la compleja teoría de Ankersmit sobre la experiencia histórica, solamente hacemos uso aquí de algunos de sus conceptos.

12 de octubre

En América Latina el 12 de octubre tiene resonancias especiales, por ser el día que Cristóbal Colón arribó a estas tierras. En 1492 se habría producido el "descubrimiento" por parte de Europa del "nuevo continente". España, origen de la empresa colonizadora, celebra el 12 de octubre su "Fiesta Nacional" (antes conocida como "Día de la Hispanidad"), pero la rememoración de esta fecha atraviesa toda América. En Argentina y otros países latinoamericanos durante décadas el feriado fue conocido como "Día de la Raza", una denominación intrigante, ya que no queda claro a qué referiría el término "raza".[16] En 1917 el presidente Hipólito Yrigoyen estableció el 12 de octubre como feriado nacional, a través de un decreto en cuyos considerandos se rendían honores a la "España descubridora y conquistadora" que había legado "una herencia inmortal que debemos mantener con jubiloso reconocimiento" (Decreto s/n del 4 de octubre de 1917). En el gobierno de Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, y en medio de una ola de cambio de nombres de los días feriados y de imposición de nuevos, el 12 de octubre pasó a denominarse "Día del respeto por la diversidad cultural" (según el Decreto 1584/2010). Sin entrar a discutir si ese cambio de denominación fue o no razonable, lo que es digno de mención es que el gobierno actual volvió a la vieja designación, recuperando la referencia a la raza para denominar el feriado del 12 de octubre. Desde las cuentas oficiales de *casarosada.gob.ar* se difundieron videos (en 2024 y en 2025) en los que se propone una interpretación bastante curiosa de la llegada de Colón, caracterizado casi como un "emprendedor" frente a las incertidumbres que lo acechan (y, en parte, replicando el tono épico de los considerandos del decreto de Yrigoyen mencionado antes).[17]

16 Alejandro Cattaruzza, *Los usos del pasado. La historia y la política argentina en discusión 1910-1945* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2007); Guido Braslavsky, "Polémica por el 'Día de la Raza': un reconocido historiador cruzó a Milei y dijo que el mensaje del Gobierno 'es una provocación'", *Clarín*, 13/10/2024, https://www.clarin.com/politica/polemica-dia-raza-reconocido-historiador-cruzo-milei-dijo-mensaje-gobierno-provocacion_0_GPzCv34TG1.html.

17 @casarosada, "12 de octubre - Día de la Raza", *YouTube* [video], 12/10/2024, https://www.youtube.com/shorts/pZ6XMzBgcUw; "Día de la Raza". *Casa Rosada Presidencia*, 12/10/2025, https://www.casarosada.gob.ar/informacion/actividad-oficial/9-noticias/51098-dia-de-la-raza [texto y video].

En ambos videos, la llegada de Colón es descripta por una voz en *off* con un fondo musical heroico en términos del comienzo de una "nueva era de progreso y civilización en el nuevo mundo", inicio de la "modernidad en América". Colón es un símbolo de la "expansión y el progreso", a la búsqueda de "nuevas oportunidades para el desarrollo y la civilización". En 2025 la llegada de Colón se sigue presentando como el inicio de un "proceso de civilización, orden y progreso", pero ahora se le agregan otras connotaciones.

En la expedición, Colón, se dice, hizo frente a la "adversidad" y "la incertidumbre de lo desconocido", ejerciendo su "liderazgo". Al llegar, encontró "pueblos enfrentados" que practicaban "rituales sangrientos"; un "mundo sumido en la barbarie" en el que logró establecer las primeras estructuras sociales y políticas "fundamentadas en el derecho, la fe cristiana y los valores occidentales". Así, "la civilización prevaleció sobre el salvajismo".[18] Esta fecha permite recordar algo "más grande que nosotros": la civilización occidental. Sorprendentemente concluye con la afirmación: "sin raíces no hay futuro", e insta a que "honremos este legado". Es posible que Argentina, a partir del mito de una república "blanca", pueda construir la ficción de que sus raíces son europeas y que, por ende, su historia habría comenzado en 1492.[19] Difícilmente se pueda sostener lo mismo de otros países americanos en los que hubo organizaciones sociales complejas y en los cuales los descendientes de las comunidades originarias ocupan un lugar relevante en la escena política.[20]

18 Ya en 2021 el partido ultraderechista español Vox había publicado en la red social X un posteo en el que celebraba los quinientos años de la caída de Tenochtitlán y la consiguiente liberación, por parte de España, de "millones de personas del régimen sanguinario y de terror de los aztecas", https://x.com/vox_es/status/1426121513112047619.

19 El mito de una Argentina "blanca" surge de la conformación particular dada al país por el influjo de las distintas oleadas migratorias que contribuyeron a poblar el país desde el siglo XIX. Es decir, muy posteriormente a la llegada de los colonizadores europeos. Es un mito reforzado por la idea de que el actual territorio argentino estaba desierto (véase lo que comentamos un poco más adelante).

20 Véase el caso de México y las discusiones suscitadas por los quinientos años de la conquista de América, y las permanentes discusiones alrededor del mantenimiento de una estatua de Cristóbal Colón – Aurelia Valero Pie y Nora Rabotnikof, "¿Qué hacer con el pasado? Tiempo, memoria e historia en los debates contemporáneos en México en torno a la estatua de Cristóbal Colón", *Historia y Grafía* 60 (enero 2023): 85-86, https://doi.org/10.48102/hyg.vi60.445.

Podemos decir que la propuesta interpretativa que el gobierno de Milei ofrece de la fecha en cuestión es a todas vistas tendenciosa, lo que se da de la mano con la falta de solidez científica del posteo en cuestión. Es discutible que la instauración del nuevo orden social y político que trajo consigo la colonización europea de América pueda ser leída solamente en clave de proveer más libertad, cuando las poblaciones originarias fueron víctimas de explotación bajo sistemas de cuasi-esclavitud y de expoliación a través del pago de tributos.[21] La intención obvia del posteo es discutir con aquellos que, desde la historiografía, han sostenido una visión alternativa, matizada, sobre las luces y sombras del proceso de colonización; y que lo han hecho sin caer en construcciones románticas del pasado indígena ni suponer una empresa humanitaria desinteresada por parte de los europeos.[22] La vastedad del territorio americano, su diversidad geográfica y la variedad de organizaciones sociales que lo poblaron hacen imposible sostener una tesis que uniformice esas diferencias bajo la caracterización de "salvajismo", como pretenden los videos referidos. Los grupos humanos distribuidos en el territorio exhibían diversos grados de organización, desde estructuras nómades o semi-nómades (fundadas en la caza, la recolección y el intercambio; como en regiones de América del Norte y del Sur), hasta estructuras sociales, culturales, políticas y religiosas complejas que dieron lugar a estados de gran extensión geográfica y poderío militar (como los asentados en Mesoamérica y en parte de América del Sur).

Pero hay algo más que podemos señalar en las interpretaciones que son sugeridas por esos videos, y es su anacronismo. La referencia a las ideas de la libertad apunta a una particular construcción semántica actual, difícilmente extrapolable a las ideas que guiaron el proceso de colonización. El anacronismo, si bien puede ser ineludible en la comprensión histórica debe, sin embargo, al menos evitarse de manera in-

21 M. Ambrosi De la Cadena, "La Española y Cumaná: producción y colonialidad en Bartolomé de las Casas". *Revista Latinoamericana de Filosofía* 51, n.º 2 (2025): 199-224, https://doi.org/10.36446/rlf440.

22 Véase a modo de ejemplo dentro de la extensa producción especializada Enrique Tandeter, *Nueva historia argentina*, tomo 2: *La sociedad colonial* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2000).

tencional.[23] La publicación propone una visión del continente tal como es en la actualidad, en la medida en que Colón habría "sentado las bases de las estructuras sociales y políticas" propias de la vida occidental (en el video de 2025 se ve una imagen de lo que parecen ser construcciones de alguno de los Virreinatos, que se constituyeron mucho después).[24] Así se ubica a Colón en clave de "antecesor" de los procesos históricos que condujeron a las unidades sociales políticas. Se trata de una manera de entender el pasado como si, en germen, ya contuviera lo que sería el futuro (presente para nosotros).

La aclamada consideración del Día de la Raza como el inicio de una etapa civilizatoria va de la mano de otra intervención digital (en abril de 2024 y 2025) al referirse a un nuevo aniversario de la llamada "Campaña del Desierto". Con esa denominación se refieren un conjunto de avances militares sobre territorios dominados por poblaciones indígenas durante el siglo XIX, que afianzaron el territorio nacional y extendieron las fronteras hacia el sur (la región patagónica). Si bien hay consenso sobre el impacto que esas campañas tuvieron para la consolidación territorial del estado argentino, también hay muchas críticas referidas al trato que se dispensó a las poblaciones originarias (las que fueron perseguidas, asesinadas o esclavizadas) así como a la denominación de la zona patagónica como "desierto", puesto que estaba habitado.[25] El posteo de *casarosada.gob.ar* no da cuenta de la complejidad del conjunto de esos hechos históricos que, efectivamente conllevaron a la conformación de un espacio estatal nacional y a una particular organización social que se mantiene hasta nuestros días (los territorios del sur fueron divididos entre algunas familias, lo que permitió la acumulación de grandes superficies en pocas manos, con ello el país afianzaría un perfil agroexportador del cual ya no lograría despegarse).

23 Rosa Belvedresi, "¿Es posible la comprensión histórica sin anacronismo?", *Artcultura: Revista de História, Cultura e Arte* 23, n.º 43 (2021): 82-94.

24 "Día de la Raza". *Casa Rosada Presidencia*, 12/10/2025, https://www.casarosada.gob.ar/informacion/actividad-oficial/9-noticias/51098-dia-de-la-raza, [texto y video]; en especial a partir de los primeros cincuenta segundos.

25 Pilar Pérez, *Archivos del silencio. Estado, indígenas y violencia en Patagonia central, 1878-1941* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2016).

Se trata, como decíamos, de la mirada nostálgica al pasado que Ankersmit caracteriza como reaccionaria, en cuanto abraza un pasado irrecuperable. La validez fáctica de esa descripción del pasado no es lo relevante para Milei, sino lo que podríamos caracterizar como su fuerza "performativa", por la cual conmina a una recuperación de una identidad perdida (aquella de los descubridores y conquistadores de un nuevo continente que forjaron el mundo occidental).[26] Esta nostalgia "reaccionaria" de un mundo desaparecido apela a una identificación emotiva. Parece moverse en un nivel pre-racional, despertando sentimientos y emociones cuyo objeto es difuso pero que proponen la promesa de felicidad por volver a un mundo del cual habríamos sido expulsados, al perder el sentido de quiénes éramos realmente: herederos de Occidente (es decir, descendientes de los conquistadores europeos, no de los pueblos originarios). Como lo afirma en sus varias intervenciones en las CPAC, su intención es dar un "giro" hacia "la verdad", para "*recuperar* el contacto con los valores occidentales".[27] La decadencia argentina de los últimos "cien años", que denuncia insistentemente, habría sido consecuencia de esa separación de la civilización occidental.[28] Su lectura de la llegada de los europeos a América, entonces, viene a saldar esa separación para re-poner a la Argentina en el lugar en el cual debería estar (como ejemplo de lo que un gobierno guiado por "las ideas de la libertad" puede ofrecer a sus ciudadanos).

26 El carácter performativo del discurso refiere a su capacidad de generar aquello de lo que está hablando. Hablar es, entonces, una forma de intervenir en el mundo, haciendo que ocurra eso que se expresa en el lenguaje. Sobre la relación entre la acción performativa y la historia véase Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree y Jay Winter, eds., *Performing the Past. Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

27 Énfasis agregado, intervenciones en las CPAC de Brasil, 2024, y Mar-a-lago, 2025. Oficina del Presidente, "Discurso del Presidente Milei en la 5.ª edición de la CPAC en Brasil", *YouTube* [video], 7/7/2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_ngOGwi9u0; Oficina del Presidente, "Discurso del Presidente Javier Milei en la Cena de Gala del CPAC en Mar-a-Lago, Miami", *YouTube* [video], 7/11/2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6w1NXcgOyC0.

28 Para Milei, el inicio de la decadencia argentina se ubicaría en las primeras décadas del siglo xx, es decir, en el momento en que el país aprueba una ley electoral que habilita el voto universal y secreto. Beatriz Bragoni, "El panteón de Milei y los historiadores", *Passés Futurs* 17 (2025). https://doi.org/10.4000/157kr.

24 de marzo

Probablemente el ejemplo más notable de las posiciones de Milei y su gobierno sobre el pasado reciente lo constituyen las publicaciones sobre el 24 de marzo realizadas en las redes sociales oficiales, así como en las del propio presidente. En esa fecha se recuerda el inicio de la última dictadura militar en el país, que se extendió desde 1976 hasta diciembre de 1983 (cuando asumió Raúl Alfonsín, candidato por la Unión Cívica Radical, ganador de las elecciones de octubre de ese año). El gobierno militar argentino fue simultáneo a otras dictaduras en la región y, como en todas ellas, se cometieron numerosas violaciones a los derechos humanos. Luego del denominado "Juicio a las Juntas", propiciado por el gobierno de Alfonsín y realizado en 1985, se instaló la idea, fundada en ese proceso judicial y las pruebas allí presentadas, de que el gobierno militar había realizado acciones ilegales en el marco del terrorismo de estado. Esa tesis se constituyó como respuesta jurídica a otra sostenida por los defensores del gobierno militar según la cual este solo había reaccionado a las acciones violentas llevadas adelante por las organizaciones armadas ilegales en el marco de una guerra civil (si bien se reconocería que la respuesta estatal habría sido "excesiva"). A pesar de esa condena judicial, la impunidad ganó terreno en Argentina. Primero, con la sanción de varias leyes que el propio gobierno de Alfonsín promulgó como respuesta a la inestabilidad generada por las reacciones del conglomerado militar. En segundo lugar, por la amnistía que dictaría el sucesor de Alfonsín, Carlos Menem, entre 1989 y 1990. Esa situación se revertiría durante el gobierno de Néstor Kirchner, a comienzos de los años 2000. A partir de ese momento se instaló desde el gobierno nacional (en manos del matrimonio Kirchner durante más de una década) una narrativa sobre el gobierno militar centrada en el discurso de la memoria y la reivindicación de la vida y acción de quienes fueron víctimas (tanto aquellos que serían conocidos como "desaparecidos" como quienes sobrevivieron y aportaron sus testimonios).[29]

29 Elizabeth Jelin, *La lucha por el pasado. Cómo construimos la memoria social* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2017).

Ha habido una gran discusión acerca de la relación que el kirchnerismo estableció con las organizaciones de derechos humanos y los intereses que lo habrían movido a hacerlo.[30] En cualquier caso, desde 2003 se instaló un discurso sobre el pasado reciente articulado en, al menos, dos ejes: 1) el estado había cometido delitos gravísimos en el contexto de la represión de la violencia armada; 2) esa represión fue en realidad una excusa para instalar en el país un modelo económico liberal que beneficiaría a los grupos sociales alineados con los intereses capitalistas (industriales y sectores agrario y financiero); de ahí la caracterización como "dictadura cívico-militar" del que sería, hasta la actualidad, el último gobierno dictatorial en Argentina. En 2006, bajo la presidencia de Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, se promulgó la ley 26.085 que instauró el día 24 de marzo como feriado (festivo) inamovible con la denominación de "Día nacional de la memoria, por la verdad y la justicia".[31] La influencia que el kirchnerismo ha ejercido en sus doce años de gobierno sobre las luchas por la memoria colectiva ha dado lugar a una configuración de sentido instalado en términos simbólicos, que también ha tenido su expresión en los actos conmemorativos. A esa influencia han reaccionado muchas críticas que señalan que la memoria colectiva propulsada por el kirchnerismo y sus aliados ideológicos expresa una parcialidad engañosa, frente a la cual defienden lo que denominan una "memoria completa".

Otro punto de disputa se centra en la cifra de desaparecidos. En las movilizaciones sociales por la búsqueda de justicia se suele hablar de "30.000" desaparecidos. Quienes lo critican sostienen que los desaparecidos no superan los 9.000, según los registros de la CONADEP (*Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas*, creada por Raúl Alfonsín para investigar la represión ilegal; su informe, conocido

30 Cinthia Balé y Gustavo Guille, "Memory Policies and Uses of the Past during Kirchnerist Governments in Argentina (2003-2015), en *Claiming the People´s Past*, 49-65.

31 La ley 23.555 de 1988 fija qué feriados pueden trasladarse de su fecha original, con fines turísticos, y cuáles otros son inamovibles, tales como el 25 de mayo y el 9 de julio (relacionados con la independencia nacional), entre los que se incluía ahora el 24 de marzo. El feriado ya había sido instituido como "Día Nacional de la memoria por la verdad y la justicia" en 2002 (ley 25.633), pero con la nueva normativa se fijó su carácter inamovible.

con el título *Nunca más*, es una fuente documental de lo sucedido bajo la última dictadura).[32] El número "30.000" se ha instalado con un fuerte impacto simbólico, a la vez que la dificultad para dar más precisiones fácticas lo ha vuelto blanco de gran parte de la carga discursiva contraria a las políticas de memoria.[33]

Vamos a analizar las intervenciones que Milei y su gobierno llevan adelante en relación con las conmemoraciones del 24 de marzo considerando estos dos aspectos, el referido a la denominada "memoria completa" y el que tiene que ver con el cuestionamiento al número de desaparecidos.

Memoria "completa"

La expresión hace referencia a que la construcción de la memoria colectiva sobre lo sucedido en la última dictadura militar solo da cuenta de las acciones realizadas por parte del aparato represivo estatal, ocultando aquellas otras llevadas adelante por las organizaciones armadas que, incluso antes de 1976, pretendían cambiar el sistema político a través de la violencia. La memoria construida a partir de los crímenes probados por el juicio contra las cúpulas militares (y aquellos otros procesos judiciales realizados luego contra quienes operaban bajo sus órdenes a partir de la caída de las leyes de impunidad en 2003) y, en especial, los énfasis reivindicativos que el kirchnerismo posó sobre sus víctimas, son el objeto de la crítica que el gobierno de Milei lleva adelante bajo la promesa de implantar lo que denomina "memoria completa". Si bien la construcción memorial propiciada por el kirchnerismo tuvo críticos, muy en especial en lo referido a la falta de matices o en la propia exculpación de las complicidades que el Partido Justicialista (partido político al que pertenecía el matrimonio Kirchner) habría tenido con el

32 Emilio Crenzel, *La historia política del Nunca Más. La memoria de las desapariciones en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2008).

33 El número de víctimas desaparecidas, es decir, aquellas de las que no se sabe aún su destino final, no ha podido determinarse con certeza debido al carácter ilegal y oculto de la represión llevada adelante por el propio estado. A ello debe sumarse el ocultamiento, o directamente la destrucción, de la información sobre ellas (tanto de archivos como de edificios que funcionaron como centros clandestinos de detención).

régimen militar, la estrategia de Milei busca cuestionar esa construcción desde otros puntos de vista.[34]

En este contexto, vale aclarar que el concepto de memoria colectiva es vasto y ha sido objeto de un intenso escrutinio por parte de las ciencias sociales. Algunos autores consideran que se trata de la extrapolación de una noción que solo puede aplicarse a individuos;[35] mientras para otros la dimensión colectiva es la única que puede ser estudiada en términos sociológicos (como se desprenden de los análisis pioneros de Halbwachs).[36] Queremos dejar en claro que, aun cuando se enuncie aquí en singular, la memoria colectiva tiene múltiples modulaciones, que hacen que pueda ser caracterizada como "coral" para dar cuenta de su carácter plural.[37] La constitución de un especial elenco de elementos que se consideren dignos de la rememoración colectiva no está exenta de disputas. En ellas el Estado juega un papel central en su esfuerzo por transformar una conformación particular de la memoria colectiva en "memoria oficial" (al ejercer las denominadas "políticas de la memoria").[38] Justamente la condición polémica de la memoria colectiva, y su relación con las políticas de estado, es lo que brinda un marco en el cual son posibles las acciones discursivas del gobierno de Milei.

34 Entre los críticos al kirchnerismo por su política de derechos humanos se encuentran intelectuales reconocidos (vinculados difusamente a una orientación de izquierda o al partido radical, al cual pertenecía R. Alfonsín). Entre ellos podemos mencionar a Beatriz Sarlo, Claudia Hilb, Luis E. Burucúa: y también familiares de desaparecidos pertenecientes a organismos de derechos humanos como Norma Morandini o Cristina F. Meijide. Las críticas a la construcción memorial del período kirchnerista no son propias del gobierno de Milei. En 2009 Hugo Vezzetti publicó un influyente libro donde se señalaban las limitaciones de las políticas de la memoria tal como la estaban desarrollando los gobiernos kirchneristas y en 2010, T. Todorov publicó una nota periodística crítica luego de una visita a la Argentina (en los diarios *El País* de España y *La Nación* de Argentina). Hugo Vezzetti, *Sobre la violencia revolucionaria. Memorias y olvidos* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2009); Tzvetan Todorov, "Los riesgos de una memoria incompleta", nota publicada en el diario *El País* (España) y republicada en el periódico argentino *La Nación* el 8/12/2010, disponible en: https://www.lanacion.com.ar/opinion/los-riesgos-de-una-memoria-incompleta-nid1331651/.

35 Tzvetan Todorov, *Los abusos de la memoria* (Buenos Aires: Paidós/Asterisco, 2000).

36 Maurice Halbwachs, *Los marcos sociales de la memoria* (Barcelona: Anthropos Editorial, 2004).

37 Elizabeth Jelin (comp.) *Las conmemoraciones: las disputas en las fechas "in-felices"* (Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores, 2002), 63-79.

38 Bruno Groppo, "Las políticas de la memoria", *Sociohistórica* 11-12 (2002). Disponible en: http://www.fuentesmemoria.fahce.unlp.edu.ar/art_revistas/pr.3067/pr.3067.pdf.

Su estrategia argumentativa se alimenta fundamentalmente de la interpretación que el escritor y abogado Nicolás Márquez ha realizado del último gobierno militar, expuesta en un conjunto de publicaciones (a los que se suman videos subidos a su canal de *YouTube*). En 2022, cuando aún era diputado y refiriéndose al último gobierno militar, Milei sostenía en un reportaje a la agencia Bloomberg: "Hubo una guerra. Sí. Pero los abusos cometidos por el Estado son peores. Pero de ahí a decir que los terroristas eran jóvenes idealistas y que era buena gente, hay un abismo."[39] En estas afirmaciones se pueden identificar dos lugares comunes de su discurso: la negación del terrorismo de estado y, a lo sumo, la aceptación de que la represión pudo ser "excesiva"; junto con el ataque a las víctimas (definidas como "terroristas"). Y antes, en otro reportaje, en el marco de la crítica a la política sanitaria contra la pandemia de Covid-19 del gobierno peronista de Alberto Fernández (del cual Cristina Fernández de Kirchner era vicepresidenta), sostenía que "les debe gustar asesinar gente, de hecho tienen a varios asesinos en sus filas... tienen gente que hacía terrorismo en los '70".[40] En el debate presidencial de octubre de 2023, antes de la segunda vuelta que finalmente habría de consagrarlo, sostenía que "estamos absolutamente en contra de una visión tuerta de la historia" y reservaba el término "terrorista" solo para referirse a las acciones de las organizaciones armadas: "los terroristas de Montoneros, los terroristas del ERP", sin incluir ninguna mención al terrorismo de estado.[41]

Los "30.000"

El otro foco de crítica por parte del gobierno de Milei se dirige al número de desaparecidos. Los organismos de derechos humanos desde los inicios de su lucha por justicia han insistido en que la cifra de desapa-

39 Francisco Aldaya, "¿Qué piensa Javier Milei del golpe militar de 1976, los desaparecidos y las Malvinas?", *Bloomberg Línea*, 7/04/2022, https://www.bloomberglinea.com/2022/04/07/que-piensa-javier-milei-del-golpe-militar-de-1976-los-desaparecidos-y-las-malvinas/.

40 Viviana Canosa, "Javier Milei: 'Este Gobierno asesinó a 30.000 personas'", *A24*, 30/3/2021, https://www.a24.com/politica/javier-milei-este-gobierno-asesino-30000-personas-n821253.

41 *La Nación*, "Milei: 'No son 30.000 los desaparecidos, son 8753'", *YouTube* [video], 2/10/2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLvNQY99yXU.

recidos era de 30.000. Dicho número se transformó en un emblema que se estampó en banderas y pancartas en cada movilización y se incluyó en las consignas coreadas en las innumerables marchas para repudiar al gobierno militar (cada 24 de marzo, pero también en las muchas ocasiones en las que se demandó justicia en contextos de impunidad). El número surge de una extrapolación que se hizo tempranamente entre los datos disponibles y la proyección de aquellos otros que, por diversas circunstancias, no se habrían podido recabar (por involucrar víctimas cuyos familiares no hicieron las denuncias correspondientes, por tratarse de personas alejadas de los centros urbanos más importantes y, por ende, imposibilitadas de acceder a espacios desde los cuales dar a conocer su situación; o, finalmente, porque decidieron no hacer pública su condición de familiares de desaparecidos).[42] Obviamente, un número que termina en cero posee una potencia simbólica de la que carecería si se tratara de un número con cifras distintas.[43] Se trata, como dijimos antes, de un número instalado en las expresiones públicas de la memoria colectiva construida alrededor de la figura de las víctimas de la represión ilegal y, como tal, objeto de críticas de aquellos cercanos a la constelación ideológica del gobierno militar (aunque no únicamente, como lo señala Crenzel al referir a las discusiones entre familiares de desaparecidos).[44]

En sus intervenciones y las de sus voceros, y en el portal *casarosada.gob.ar*, Milei se centra en cuestionar ese número afirmando lo que denomina el "curro" (negocio) de los derechos humanos (la interpretación de las acciones de las agrupaciones de derechos humanos en sus denuncias del terrorismo de estado como una actividad que buscaba un beneficio económico ya había tenido un espacio privilegiado de

42 Emilio Crenzel, "¿Cuántos son los desaparecidos y cuantas las víctimas de la desaparición forzada en la Argentina? Debates político-memoriales e investigación académica", *Latin American Research Review* 59, n.º 4 (diciembre 2024): 948-964, https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2024.1.

43 El valor simbólico de la cifra "30.000" queda claro en el uso que el colectivo LGTBQ+ hace del mismo, al referir a "30.400" en sus manifestaciones contra el último gobierno militar para, de esta manera, hacer visibles a las víctimas de la represión estatal ilegal por su orientación sexual, que serían unas 400. Esa cifra es sugerida por el activista C. Jáuregui en un texto de 1987. Carlos Jáuregui. *La homosexualidad en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Tarso, S.A., 1987), 158.

44 Crenzel, "¿Cuántos son los desaparecidos", 953.

expresión en Mauricio Macri, quien ejerció la presidencia entre 2015 y 2019).[45] Hacia fines de 2025, el por entonces Subsecretario de Derechos Humanos, en una participación en el Comité contra la Tortura de Naciones Unidas, y en respuesta a un informe particularmente crítico contra Argentina sobre estos temas, afirmó que "se hizo un negocio del pasado que esta gestión no va a tolerar", y que hay que reforzar una "memoria completa, no soslayada ni negada" que incluya a los "mil muertos por la acción de las milicias guerrilleras".[46]

En varias ocasiones, a propósito de las víctimas de Covid-19, Milei ha recurrido a ironías para criticar la cifra de desaparecidos. En su primer discurso inaugural de las sesiones del Congreso Nacional, el 1 de marzo de 2024, dirá, en referencia a los fallecidos a causa de la pandemia: "Si hubiéramos hecho las cosas como un país no mediocre hubiéramos tenido 30.000 muertos, *de verdad*" (énfasis añadido).[47] La discusión por el número en sí podría considerarse no grave, ya que se trataría de una discrepancia entre un símbolo colectivo y el dato empírico más preciso (una tensión típica en la relación entre memoria e historia). Pero la discusión por el dato numérico suele provenir de sectores afines a la ideología que alimentó al gobierno militar, o que incluso niegan la existencia de los gravísimos delitos de los que sus miembros fueron acusados (y cuyos cargos han sido probados por la justicia).

En 2024 el dominio *casarosada.gob.ar* publicó un texto y un video de casi 13 minutos que pivota sobre los temas clásicos de quienes

45 El "macrismo", es decir, el movimiento político formado alrededor del empresario Mauricio Macri, ya había adelantado algunas de las interpretaciones del pasado que encuentran una expresión más desembozada en el gobierno de Milei, véase Fabio Wasserman, *En el barro de la historia: política y temporalidad en el discurso macrista* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sb, 2021), cap. 2 (en esp. pp. 76-82).

46 Véase el resumen de la respuesta argentina en el sitio *web* del diario *La Nación* – Jaime Rosemberg, "El Gobierno activa la segunda etapa de la 'batalla cultural' en derechos humanos", *La Nación*, 8/12/25, https://www.lanacion.com.ar/politica/el-gobierno-activa-la-segunda-etapa-de-la-batalla-cultural-en-derechos-humanos-nid08122025/. También se publicó un texto en el sitio de la subsecretaría, donde no se hace referencia a la tesis de "memoria completa", pero se insiste en el supuesto carácter parcial e ideologizado del informe.

47 Javier Milei, "Palabras del Presidente de la Nación, Javier Milei al inaugurar el 142 período de sesiones ordinarias de la Asamblea Legislativa, desde el Congreso de La Nación", *Casa Rosada Presidencia*, 1/3/2024, https://www.casarosada.gob.ar/informacion/discursos/50380-el-presidente-inaugura-el-142-periodo-de-sesiones-ordinarias-del-congreso.

defienden la idea de "memoria completa": no ha habido justicia ni reparación para las víctimas de las acciones violentas llevadas adelante por organizaciones armadas en el período previo al golpe militar, el número "30.000" se "inventó" para conseguir financiamiento internacional primero y para lucrar con las reparaciones económicas luego y, finalmente, es necesario dejar atrás el pasado para mirar hacia adelante como una empresa conjunta.[48] El video registra el testimonio de la hija de una víctima del ataque de una organización guerrillera cuyo padre, el militar Humberto Antonio Viola, y su hermana fueron asesinados en un atentado realizado en 1974 por el Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo. Se suman la intervención de un exguerrillero que ha sostenido insistentemente haber sido el creador del número "30.000" (sin que haya quien pueda corroborarlo), y la de un ex miembro del gobierno de Carlos Menem, autor de numerosos libros sobre la violencia de los años setenta, cuyo discurso hilvana los otros testimonios para culminar con una especie de arenga en favor de la unión entre los argentinos. El texto que acompaña el video insiste en que se "ha ocultado una parte de la historia" y en la necesidad de "consolidar la memoria completa". También se remarca que la cifra de desaparecidos consignados en el informe de la CONADEP es de 8.961 personas desaparecidas entre 1976 y 1983, así como se reconoce la existencia de 380 centros clandestinos de detención, según prueba el mismo informe (cuya acta de entrega al presidente Alfonsín se adjunta en esa publicación).

En 2025, el sitio oficial *casarosada.gob.ar* publica un video y un texto del politólogo Agustín Laje, reconocido vocero de las ideas de memoria completa, en el que se insiste en que, hasta ahora, se ha contado una historia parcial. Utiliza la figura del "demonio único" para desacreditar la interpretación que sostiene que hubo terrorismo de estado. Esa interpretación, argumenta, habría ocultado las operaciones de las guerrillas antes del golpe militar (entrenadas y financiadas por el régimen cubano), así como el accionar represivo ilegal realizado por la

48 "24 de marzo: Día Nacional de la Memoria por la Verdad y la Justicia Completa". *Casa Rosada Presidencia*, 24/3/2024, https://www.casarosada.gob.ar/slider-principal/50413-24-de-marzo-dia-nacional-de-la-memoria-por-la-verdad-y-la-justicia-completa [texto y video].

organización *Triple A*, estrechamente vinculada a algunos personajes del gobierno peronista que sería derrocado en 1976. Respecto del número de desaparecidos, vuelve a referir a los números del Informe de la CONADEP y a denunciar el borramiento de las víctimas del accionar de las organizaciones armadas, y culmina: "este 24 de marzo rompamos con el relato impuesto y reivindiquemos nuestro derecho a conocer la verdad completa".[49]

Podría decirse que la idea de "memoria completa" apela a un imposible, ya que toda memoria tiene un componente importante de olvido, el cual la mayoría de las veces opera sin que seamos conscientes de ello.[50] Para el caso de la memoria colectiva, por el carácter polémico y plural que señalamos antes, el olvido adquiere connotaciones particulares, ya que puede vincularse a los mecanismos por los cuales las comunidades sociales rescatan una formación memorial frente a otras. Aquellas que no son parte de la construcción aceptada, son expulsadas a los márgenes desde donde pueden ejercer formas de resistencia más o menos eficaces, dependiendo de los recursos (materiales y simbólicos) a los que puedan acceder. Pero la "memoria completa" mentada en las intervenciones de Milei y su gobierno no apuntan a cualquier memoria marginalizada sino solo a aquella con las que puede mantener una conexión ideológica. Si retomamos el caso de la "crónica ideal" propuesta por Danto que mencionamos al inicio de este trabajo, podría parecer que la "memoria completa" pretende cumplir esa tarea que, habíamos dicho, era imposible. Toda forma de rememoración (colectiva o individual) se asienta sobre reconstrucciones, reconfiguraciones y selecciones. Ello no configura un defecto o una falta, sino que son las condiciones que hacen posible el ejercicio del recuerdo. Suponer que determinada formación particular de la memoria colectiva pueda cumplir con la condición de ser "memoria completa" es ocultar su condición de ser expresión de un punto de vista determinado y presentarla como la única posible.

49 Casa Rosada, "La libertad de conocer nuestra historia. Día de la memoria. Completa", *YouTube* [video], 24/3/2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bJfuRCAan8&rco=1.

50 Paul Ricoeur, *La memoria, la historia, el olvido* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2004), 531-581.

Negacionismo y nostalgia

Lo que puede verse en las publicaciones de *casarosada.gob.ar* y en las intervenciones en redes sociales del propio Milei –y de sus partidarios más cercanos– es un discurso que implica posiciones negacionistas, refrendadas a la vez con acciones de gobierno como el desfinanciamiento de las políticas de memoria sostenidas hasta ahora y la falta de apoyo institucional a los juicios que todavía se llevan adelante (lo que motivó el crítico informe de las Naciones Unidas mencionado anteriormente). Esta posición negacionista, aun cuando se intente moderarla, se centra, primero, en la equiparación de la violencia de las organizaciones armadas ilegales con la represión estatal, también ilegal, y luego en la discusión del número de víctimas, a sabiendas de que obtener una mayor precisión al respecto es una meta poco probable de alcanzar.

El cuestionamiento al número de víctimas de la represión y la apelación a una "memoria completa" buscan oscurecer la comprensión que la historiografía y las ciencias sociales han producido sobre el último gobierno militar, el cual habría puesto en marcha un "genocidio reorganizador"; para usar la expresión de Feierstein.[51] Es decir, uno que buscó reconfigurar las relaciones sociales. Como todo hecho histórico, el "problema de la violencia" de los primeros años de la década de los setenta en Argentina (que se suele esgrimir como "causa" de la represión posterior) es complejo y requiere ubicarlo en un marco amplio que dé cuenta de las transformaciones sociales y políticas ocurridas durante el último gobierno peronista. Esa complejidad queda oculta por una descripción pobre de esos hechos pasados en términos de violencia "de un lado" y "del otro".[52]

En relación con el número de víctimas, vale repetir que, al ser clandestina, ilegal y cometida por el Estado, la represión es en sí misma un hecho difícil de mensurar, aun cuando las ciencias sociales y las investigaciones judiciales han intentado dar cuenta con mayor fidelidad

51 Daniel Feierstein, *El genocidio como práctica social. Entre el nazismo y la experiencia argentina* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007), 104-110.

52 Marina Franco, *Un enemigo para la nación. Orden interno, violencia y "subversión", 1973-1976* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012), 225-239.

de los datos que refieren a la cantidad de desaparecidos. La reconstrucción a la que se ha podido llegar es el resultado de la recopilación de denuncias, primero de manera casi artesanal por grupos vinculados a los derechos humanos y luego presentadas bajo un informe único por la CONADEP.[53]

La referencia insistente en que las "banderas de los derechos humanos" se han puesto al servicio de intereses particulares en contra del bien común retaceando el reconocimiento de todas las víctimas sugiere que las víctimas de la violencia de las organizaciones armadas no habrían gozado de los beneficios de la reparación y la justicia que sí alcanzaron a las que fueron víctimas del terrorismo estatal. Debe recordarse que el gobierno militar, que tomó el poder en 1976, tenía todos los resortes legales, jurídicos e institucionales a su alcance para llevar justicia a las víctimas de las organizaciones armadas. Sin embargo, se eligió el método de la desaparición y tortura de personas alcanzando incluso a quienes no tenían vinculación con las organizaciones armadas pero cuya acción política o social era considerada "peligrosa", privilegiando así la persecución a los "enemigos" del régimen antes que la búsqueda de justicia para los crímenes que, se decía, el gobierno militar venía a proveer. También debe reconocerse que la insistencia de los gobiernos kirchneristas en proponer una visión altamente idealizada de la militancia que llevó adelante acciones armadas en contra de un régimen democrático como el de Isabel Perón o contra figuras relevantes del establishment político y económico impidió la conformación de una memoria colectiva más matizada y generó en quienes fueron víctimas de la violencia previa al golpe la sensación de desamparo.[54]

53 Como bien señalan Lvovich y Grinchpun, el negacionismo se vincula a posiciones derivadas de la banalización y la trivialización. Daniel Lvovich y Boris Matías Grinchpun, "Banalización, relativización, negacionismo. Un escenario en los campos de batalla por la memoria del pasado argentino reciente", *Contenciosa* 12 (enero-noviembre 2022), https://doi.org/10.14409/rc.10.12.e0014. En estos dos últimos casos se busca establecer comparaciones entre lo que resulta incomparable o se oculta el carácter específico de un hecho histórico al, supuestamente, vincularlo con su contexto de emergencia. Para una enumeración y análisis de los argumentos negacionistas véase Hernán Confino y Rodrigo González Tizón, *Anatomía de una mentira: quiénes y por qué justifican la represión de los setenta* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2024).

54 Quien ocupa el puesto de vicepresidenta, Victoria Villarruel, forjó su figura política como

El negacionismo de Milei expresa esa forma de nostalgia que Ankersmit vincula con los reaccionarios, pues las interpretaciones que expresa refieren a un pasado de unidad que las políticas de memoria de los gobiernos kirchneristas habrían destruido. Sin embargo, la unidad mentada en la figura de una reconciliación nacional que una a todos los "argentinos de bien" no podrá nunca consumarse pues la sociedad argentina no puede volver a una supuesta condición idílica perdida una vez que ha conocido que el horror del "poder desaparecedor" podía desarrollarse desde sus propias entrañas.[55]

La identidad a la que Milei parece apelar, romantizada bajo la forma de una sociedad pacífica y unida, habría desaparecido como consecuencia no tanto de la violencia del terrorismo de estado sino de las políticas de memoria posteriores que se desarrollaron durante las primeras décadas de 2000. La respuesta de la nostalgia, en su variante reaccionaria, ante esa identidad perdida es proponer una aproximación sentimental a un pasado desaparecido. La unidad inicial, aquí mentada nostálgicamente, se habría perdido a causa de la acción de los grupos que buscaron imponer una visión de la historia bajo la cual el país quedaría dividido entre unos y otros. Esa mirada ocultaría la condición causal que la violencia de las organizaciones armadas antes del golpe de 1976 habría tenido en el desencadenamiento de la represión posterior. La intervención de Agustín Laje en el video del 24 de marzo de 2025, que apela a la "verdad completa" para superar la "visión tuerta" de la historia (la expresión es de Milei) y los "revanchismos", ofrece el marco de sentido dentro del cual se haría posible la verdadera reconciliación con el país que Argentina era antes del inicio del siglo XXI.[56]

abogada defensora de las víctimas de las organizaciones armadas. Es fundadora del CELTYV (Centro de Estudios Legales sobre el Terrorismo y sus Víctimas), organización que busca: "el reconocimiento de los derechos humanos de las víctimas del terrorismo de los 70" (según su sitio de *Instagram*). No nos ocupamos de su figura ya que tiene un papel bastante secundario en el gobierno actual, a pesar de la alianza inicial que la llevó a ser la segunda en la fórmula que finalmente ganaría las elecciones.

55 Pilar Calveiro, *Poder y desaparición. Los campos de concentración en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Colihue, 2001).

56 Casa Rosada, "La libertad de conocer nuestra historia | Día de la Memoria. Completa", *YouTube* [video], 24/3/2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bJfuRCAan8&rco=1.

Final: ¿Qué relato sobre el pasado se busca instalar?

Comenzábamos este texto haciendo referencia a dos cuestiones obvias. En primer lugar, la imposibilidad de alcanzar un relato irrevocable del pasado (una "descripción final", en términos de Danto). Y, en segundo lugar, la centralidad que el control de días festivos, las conmemoraciones, tiene sobre la relación que las comunidades establecen con su pasado. En los ejemplos de los recordatorios aquí señalados, referidos al 12 de octubre y el 24 de marzo, el gobierno de Javier Milei no ha realizado, todavía, modificaciones al tipo y contenido de los actos escolares, como puede verse en el mantenimiento de materiales educativos en la página *web* del área respectiva.[57] Sin embargo, las intervenciones públicas del propio Milei y de sus voceros, así como las publicaciones en el dominio *casarosada.gob.ar* ya permiten avizorar el sentido que se procura imponer y las modificaciones que se aspira a lograr en la memoria colectiva a partir del aparato ideológico provisto por los dispositivos asociados a las conmemoraciones.

Al intentar pensar el conjunto de interpretaciones sobre el pasado que Milei y su gobierno dan a conocer a la opinión pública, propusimos la categoría de "nostalgia reaccionaria", asociada al "trauma$_1$", según la caracterización de Ankersmit. En efecto, pueden leerse sus intervenciones en la esfera digital y en los medios como la expresión de un ansia por volver a una identidad pasada, cuyo contenido es evanescente pues no queda claro siquiera si ha existido. Es decir, Milei da cuenta de los hechos históricos en clave de una "idea" afectiva del pasado. No discute con la historia profesional, la cual le ha sido especialmente reticente, ni avanza en modificaciones mayores en el calendario de conmemoraciones.[58]

57 El portal *educ.ar*, dependiente del Ministerio de Capital Humano (dentro del cual se encuentra la Secretaría de Educación) mantiene los materiales educativos que fueron producidos por las gestiones kirchneristas. Pero en la pestaña referida a la conmemoración del 12 de octubre se aclara que los contenidos pueden contener "información desactualizada" o "abordajes pedagógicos no vigentes". Ello hace suponer una futura revisión, véase: https://www.educ.ar/recursos/92892/conmemoracion-del-12-de-octubre.

58 Véase el balance crítico realizado por historiadoras e historiadores en el dossier "Argentina en la tormenta" recientemente publicado por *Passés Futurs* 17 (2025), disponible en: https://journals.openedition.org/passesfuturs/634.

Es temprano aún para saber si finalmente la agenda política del gobierno actual llegará a ocuparse también de los contenidos escolares asociados a las efemérides o si modificará su calendario, urgido como está por las cuestiones económicas de un país que sufre recurrentes crisis. Pero las opiniones expresadas en las redes sociales nos permiten sospechar la necesidad de apelar a nuevas reinterpretaciones del pasado que sean útiles a la agenda de la "libertad". Es posible que, si este proyecto político continúa y si encuentra un clima de época adecuado, esas reinterpretaciones produzcan cambios sustanciales en la memoria colectiva y en las formas en que ella se expresa. Solo el tiempo lo dirá.

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Robson Bello

A intersecção entre história pública e indústria cultural nos videogames

Neste artigo pretendo demonstrar a intersecção entre a chamada História Pública e a teoria da Indústria Cultural, a partir do objeto sociocultural que é o Videogame. Na contemporaneidade, a lógica-mercadoria passou a estruturar as relações de produção, circulação e consumo e eu defendo que isso é fundamental para se pensar as representações históricas no último século. Assim, as hipóteses que orientam esse trabalho são: o entrelaçamento entre História Pública e Indústria Cultural, e o paradigma de mercadoria cultural. Para discutir essas hipóteses, realizo discussões teóricas e apresento dois estudos de caso, a saber, os chamados «jogos de estratégia», que represento a partir das séries *Civilization* e *Age of Empires*; e a franquia *Assassin's Creed*.
Palavras-chave: história pública; indústria cultural; videogames; mercadoria; cultura.

The intersection between public history and the cultural industry in video games

In this article, I aim to demonstrate the intersection between so-called Public History and the theory of Culture Industry, using the video game as a sociocultural object of study. In the contemporary world, the "commodity logic" has come to structure the relations of production, circulation and consumption, and I argue that this is fundamental to understanding historical representations over the last century. Thus, the hypotheses guiding this work are: the intertwining of Public History and the Cultural Industry, and the paradigm of the cultural commodity. To explore these hypotheses, I engage in theoretical analysis and present two case studies: namely, the so-called "strategy games", which I examine through the *Civilisation* and *Age of Empires* series; and the *Assassin's Creed* franchise.
Keywords: public history; culture industry; videogames; commodity; culture.

A intersecção entre história pública e indústria cultural nos videogames

Robson Bello*

1. Introdução

Há um lugar especial e particular para os videogames, ou jogos eletrônicos, serem pensados na sociedade contemporânea. Nos mais de cinquenta anos de história dos videogames, muitos foram os jogos que representaram ou se apropriaram de diversos elementos do passado, historiográfico, ficcional ou mitológico. Séries como *Call of Duty* (2003-2024), *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2025), *Civilization* (1991-2025), *Age of Empires* (1997-2024), *Valiant Hearts* (2014 e 2023), *God of War* (2005-2023), *Monkey Island* (1990-2022), e tantas outras, introduziram jogadores a uma narrativa interativa, que demandava uma dose de participação de diferentes "fazeres históricos", seja do ponto de vista da imersão do indíviduo em fatos ditos "reais", alegóricos, ou conduzindo e mobilizando tropas, massas e dados estatísticos em simulações do pas-

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sado. A importância social, cultural e econômica dos jogos eletrônicos tendeu a crescer e abarcar diferentes países e condições materiais. Hoje, seja em um computador, um "console", ou na palma da mão com um celular, conteúdos históricos circulam publicamente a partir de uma lógica-mercadoria que parte dessa perspectiva lúdica.

Meramente do ponto de vista econômico, que simboliza ao nosso interesse somente a circulação de imagens e narrativas utilizando elementos do passado, a série *God of War*, por exemplo, que apresentou versões espetacularizadas da mitologia grega e nórdica, vendeu dezenas de milhões de cópias. Enquanto a série *Call of Duty*, outro exemplo, que figurou muitos momentos bélicos históricos em uma jogabilidade de tiro em primeira pessoa, vendeu em totalidade mais de 500 milhões de cópias até 2023[1]. Esses números destacam e indicam, insisto, não só a dimensão econômica dos jogos eletrônicos, mas como imagens, espaços e simulações de períodos históricos circularam publicamente em grande magnitude entre consumidores nas primeiras décadas do século XXI.

Chapman, em um estudo de mais de dez anos atrás, já notava como apesar da circulação gigantesca de jogos como *Civilization* e *Assassin's Creed*, a disciplina histórica tem muitas vezes deixado de lado o estudo profundo desses objetos culturais[2]. Isso tem mudado, mas ainda muitas discussões têm sido deixadas de lado. É nesse sentido que concordo com Spring, que já discutiu, também há uma década, como os jogos podem ser objetos de reflexão acadêmica[3]. Normalmente, os jogadores tomam mais tempo para jogar do que assistir um filme, ler um livro, ou visitar o museu, mas ainda se tomou muito pouco espaço nas discussões dentro da academia[4]. Esse é um problema ainda visível na metade da década de 20 do século XXI e, apesar de novas gerações de

1 Gene Park, "At Half a Billion Sales, *Call of Duty* Is as Good as It's Ever Been", *The Washington Post*, October 30, 2024. https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/video-games/2024/10/30/call-of-duty-black-ops-6-500-million-copies-sold/.

2 Adam Chapman, "Is *Sid Meier's Civilization* History?", *Rethinking History* 17, n.º 3 (2013): 312-332.

3 Dawn Spring, "Gaming History: Computer and Video Games as Historical Scholarship", *Rethinking History* 19, n.º 2 (2014): 207-221.

4 Abbie Hartman, Rowan Tulloch, e Helen Young, "Video Games as Public History: Archives, Empathy and Affinity", *Game Studies* 21, n.º 4 (2021).

pesquisadores contribuírem significantemente para o avanço do campo, ainda há resistência e desconhecimento pelo campo historiográfico em geral. Em relação ao marxismo, James Woodcock coloca o seguinte:

> So why should Marxists be interested in videogames? The first reason is that videogames are not simply some diversion, or opium of the people, but a complex cultural commodity. Marxists should be interested in videogames because their production, circulation, and consumption can provide important insights into the inner workings of contemporary capitalism[5].

Neste artigo, discutirei os entrelaçamentos entre a História Pública e a chamada indústria cultural, em particular aos jogos eletrônicos, sobretudo a partir da ideia de que os jogos AAA e do Norte Global (respectivamente, jogos com grande investimento de produção e jogos localizados sobretudo nos EUA, Canadá, Europa e Japão) circulam com enorme força por todo o globo. Diante dessa perspectiva teórica, discordo radicalmente da proposição de Keogh, para quem não existe uma indústria do videogame[6]. Sendo a maior parte da produção pulverizada, descentralizada, *indie* (jogos de pequenas produtoras), ou não, o conceito de indústria cultural, como proposto por Adorno e Horkheimer, aponta o caráter de cultura transformada em mercadoria em um sistema totalizante dentro do capitalismo tardio[7]. O conceito de "indústria" toma aqui a perspectiva de uma produção massiva feita sob procedimentos especializados voltados à disseminação e ao lucro. Sejam grandes produtoras ou indivíduos que programam seus jogos, há uma dimensão em que a lógica de produção de mercadorias está sempre presente. Casos específicos, pontuais ou não, em que os jogos eletrô-

5 James Woodcock, *Marx at the Arcade. Consoles, Controllers, and Class Struggle* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019).

6 B. Keogh, *The Videogame Industry Does Not Exist: Why We Should Think Beyond Commercial Game Production* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2023).

7 Theodor Adorno e Max Horkheimer, *Dialética do Esclarecimento: Fragmentos Filosóficos* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 1985).

nicos são pensados como intervenções artísticas não alteram o cenário em que há uma produção industrial de representações e memórias – ao qual me atenho aqui sobretudo no que diz respeito ao passado.

Minha primeira hipótese é de que não é possível pensar História Pública desenlaçada do conceito de indústria cultural no caso particular dos videogames. Como segunda hipótese, tomo o caso particular desta mídia para pensar uma situação com especificidade onde a interatividade se torna um "fazer histórico", mas que reproduz muitas das perspectivas tradicionais e conservadoras do que se entende por História. Assim, pretendo articular ambas as discussões com perspectivas teóricas sobre os dois referidos conceitos e estudos de caso concretos que permitem visualizar tais hipóteses. Assim, colocam-se as perguntas: como os videogames são veículos de História Pública e estão inseridos numa indústria cultural? Quais e como são algumas das representações mais populares que circulam entre os jogadores, exigindo deles um *input* para sua realização?

O percurso a ser seguido será inicialmente o de apresentar e refletir sobre as categorias de História Pública e de indústria cultural, em seus sentidos de "público" e "comodificado", tomando como fio condutor as noções de memória e representação histórica. Em seguida, discutirei dois casos em particular: os jogos de estratégia, ao qual representarei a partir das séries *Civilization* e *Age of Empires*; e a série de jogos chamada *Assassin's Creed*, em suas narrativas "principais", bem como o modo "Discovery Tour" existente na franquia entre 2018 e 2020.

2. Os videogames, na intersecção entre História Pública e indústria cultural

Primeiramente é preciso definir precisamente os conceitos a serem trabalhados. A chamada História Pública é notadamente entendida como aquela que circula nos meios públicos, em certa oposição à história produzida na academia[8]. Sayer afirmou que é uma parte intrínseca

8 Juniele Rabelo de Almeida e Marta Gouveia de Oliveira Rovai, "Apresentação", in *Introdução à História Pública*, ed. Juniele Rabelo de Almeida e Marta Gouveia de Oliveira Rovai (São

da História hoje e historiadores públicos têm quebrado as barreiras entre os historiadores profissionais e feito a História mais ampla e relevante para a sociedade[9]. Hamilton e Gardner discutiram como o termo representa um amplo espectro de uma série de relações borradas entre historiadores e seus consumidores, colaboradores, audiências e públicos, e alguns veem como uma forma de superar a ponte entre educação e prática, outro como meio de tradução, mediação e popularização[10]. Sara Albieri discutiu as diferentes formas que a História Pública pode aparecer, como por exemplo, a educação histórica e os lugares de memória[11]. Assim, a partir destas perspectivas, compreendo que História Pública é o conhecimento sobre o passado que é produzido e circula sob diferentes setores da sociedade, e é acessado de forma intencional ou não nas diferentes formas de contato com conteúdos dito "históricos". A História Pública, é, portanto, um campo em que diferentes representações, sobretudo, mas não exclusivamente, não-acadêmicas informam as diferentes visões sociais em disputa sobre o que já aconteceu em distintas formações sociais.

Já o conceito de indústria cultural, como proposto por Adorno e Horkheimer, se levanta contra a ideia de "cultura de massas", entendida como produção das massas para as massas, e vai compreender que a produção de mercadorias culturais no capitalismo tardio é um "sistema", uma totalidade, no sentido hegeliano[12]. Nesse sentido, a "Cultura" passa a ser uma mercadoria e o objetivo é a venda para as massas. No entendimento deste conceito, as distinções entre "alta" e "baixa" cultura, "arte" e "não arte" são superadas. A partir de uma lógica industrial de produção, há uma tendência à homogeneização e padronização, e a diversão é entendida como prolongamento do trabalho sob o capitalismo tardio em uma cultura em que toda produção é semelhante formalmente.

Paulo: Letra e Voz, 2011), 7-12.

9 Faye Sayer, *Public History: A Practical Guide*, 2.ª ed. (Londres: Bloomsbury, 2019).

10 Paula Hamilton e James B. Gardner, "The Past and Future of Public History: Developments and Challenges", in *The Oxford Handbook of Public History*, ed. Paula Hamilton e James B. Gardner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

11 Sara Albieri, "História Pública e consciência histórica", in *Introdução à História Pública*, 89-102.

12 Adorno e Max Horkheimer, *Dialética do Esclarecimento*.

A produção é pensada já no seu consumo, na "manipulação" das massas aproximando-se da construção onírica, onde seus produtos preenchem o inconsciente, por exemplo, de quadros de referência sobre o passado. Defendo que grande parte da memória histórica hoje é constituída por filmes, livros, videogames, e produtos criados por essa indústria cultural.

Nesse sentido, a História Pública relaciona-se com ela na medida em que não se limita, mas é condicionada por essa lógica de produção cultural. A produção de expressões culturais e simbólicas tornou-se, a partir de meados do século XX, inserida em uma indústria que controla e fomenta a produção, circulação e recepção destas mercadorias. Sejam filmes, livros, jogos, ficcionais, acadêmicos, didáticos etc., sejam músicas, danças, estátuas, placas, exposições, museus, o circuito passa necessariamente pelo mercado e pela instituição da lógica-mercadoria. A produção de textos, imagens e narrativas sobre o passado que circulam em diferentes ambientes sociais, nesse sentido, está sempre intersecionado com a produção industrial de mercadorias culturais. Por sua vez, ao olharmos para o prisma da indústria cultural, sua produção em massa sobre o passado sempre possui um caráter público.

Essa relação dialética onde os dois polos guardam sua autonomia e mutuamente se tensionam apresenta-se como característica fundante da relação cultural como tais objetos se colocam no mundo social mediado pela instituição do Capital. O "valor de uso" das representações históricas (isso é, como elas transmitem e informam conteúdos sobre o passado, divertindo e entretendo, ou educando e conscientizando) está sempre associado ao seu "valor de troca" (isso é, como elas são produzidas e colocadas a circular no mercado para serem consumidas). Relação de consumo de objetos, narrativas, espaços, assim, está estruturada pela mediação com a lógica-mercadoria. Isso está colocado para todas as relações sociais de construção de memória na contemporaneidade. Quando um Estado-nação faz uma celebração política de um evento memorial, por exemplo, não é mais possível desassociá-lo de uma gama de produtores e consumidores desse evento. Isso, obviamente, é ainda mais evidente quando falamos propriamente de um objeto como um livro, um filme, ou um jogo.

Um dos casos mais exemplares da intersecção entre História Pública e indústria cultural nos videogames é o caso de *The Oregon Trail. The Oregon Trail* foi criado por três estudantes universitários (Don Rawitsch, Bill Heinemann e Paul Dillenberger) em Minnesota. Rawitsch, professor de História, e *conscientious objector* da Guerra do Vietnã, foi contratado, em 1974, pelo Minnesota Educational Computing Consortium (MECC), que estava à época desenvolvendo um sistema estadual de distribuição de *softwares*, e disponibilizou *The Oregon Trail* para a rede estadual de ensino. Em 1978, e com a tecnologia dos disquetes, a biblioteca de jogos do MECC passou a ser vendida para as instituições de ensino de todos os Estados Unidos da América e, em 1985, o jogo foi lançado para computadores pessoais e passou a ser vendido para o grande público e se tornou um grande sucesso. Finalmente, se tornou uma "marca" e foi comprado por outras companhias, como a The Learning Company e a Gameloft, alterando substancialmente as razões por trás da produção. Por três décadas, o jogo se tornou muito conhecido dos estudantes estadunidenses, e é até hoje reconhecido como uma memória do ensino da época. *Oregon Trail* foi uma das primeiras tentativas de representar e ensinar sobre o passado através dos videogames.

Neste *game*, o jogador deve conduzir uma família pela Trilha do Oregon, saindo da cidade de Independence, em Missouri, e indo até à cidade de Oregon. Após escolher personagens, definir a família e os recursos disponíveis, a jornada trata-se de uma tela bidimensional cujo movimento é da direita para a esquerda, fazendo referência à ida ao Oeste e demonstra a caminhada da diligência familiar entre diferentes marcos geográficos. O caminho ao Oeste apresenta travessias de rios, paradas em fortes e outros marcos geográficos da trilha, dentre outros. O jogador deve adquirir novos mantimentos, assim como conversar com locais e descobrir como melhor percorrer os caminhos. A estrutura de regras também estabelece condições de viagem de acordo com o período do ano, e eventos aleatórios, tais como a quebra de peças da diligência ou o assalto de bandidos ou indígenas, dificultam a jornada. O fim do jogo é quando se chega em Oregon e a pontuação é dada de acordo com os feitos realizados.

Voltado a educação histórica, *The Oregon Trail* tentou simular uma experiência de jornada para o Oeste no século XIX demonstrando as dificuldades do processo. Assim, retratou a adversidade da *wilderness*, representada pelo clima, terreno, doenças, fome e os inimigos, na forma de bandidos e indígenas. Para a superação das adversidades, são necessários a racionalização administrada dos recursos e o domínio do conhecimento dos obstáculos impostos. Em versões posteriores, como em *The Oregon Trail V*, conhecimentos enciclopédicos acompanharam a jogatina dando maior contexto ao explorado.

Historicamente, durante as últimas décadas, houve críticas à sua representação. Bill Bigelow, em 1997, sobre *The Oregon Trail II* (MECC, 1993), uma das continuações do jogo original, que implementou algumas novidades, foi enfático: "In fundamental respects, *The Oregon Trail* is sexist, racist, culturally insensitive, and contemptuous of the earth. It imparts bad values and wrong history".[13] Em concordância, Bello apontou como *Oregon Trail* reforça o Mito da Fronteira em uma visão colonialista que lida com a *wilderness* e com os indígenas como obstáculos[14].

Há, no entanto, historicidade aparente na série: Bauer, Huettl e Phillips refletiram como *The Oregon Trail* passou, originalmente, de um jogo que apresentava positivamente o colonialismo, e apagava a história nativo-americana, para a proposta da Gameloft, em 2020, de "bring a new level of respectful representation to the game"[15].

The Oregon Trail não foi o primeiro nem o único jogo educacional sobre História, mas certamente foi um dos mais icônicos para toda uma geração de estudantes estadunidenses. Um ícone cultural que circulou uma certa visão sobre o passado estadunidense por décadas, e que tem impacto sobre a memória histórica até os dias atuais. É também símbo-

13 Bill Bigelow, "On the Road to Cultural Bias: A Critique of *The Oregon Trail* CD-ROM", *Language Arts* 74, n.º 2 (1997): 84-93.

14 Robson Scarassati Bello, "O *playground* do passado: o videogame e a reificação da memória, do lúdico e do Oeste americano (1971-2018)" (Tese de doutorado, Universidade de São Paulo, 2023).

15 William J. Bauer, Margaret Huettl, e Katrina M. Phillips, "Retracing The Oregon Trail". *California History* 99, n.º 3 (2022): 53-63.

lo de como uma iniciativa educacional e restrita de professores foi sendo incorporada e se tornando uma grande marca da indústria cultural. Em 2025, o significado e as intenções de *The Oregon Trail* são muito diferentes daquelas de 1971.

Diferentes elementos nos fazem atentar à especificidade da relação dos videogames com a História Pública e a construção de consciências históricas e memória determinadas pela indústria cultural, de forma que refletir sobre essas questões nos coloca a tarefa de pensar ideias como interatividade, exploração de espaços virtuais, representações e simulações de comportamentos de indivíduos e grupos sociais.

É importante ressaltar que os videogames são parte de culturas visuais de produção para o consumo de massas, e instituem uma memória reificada sobre o passado que pode ser coletiva ou individual, oficial ou estética[16]. Éthier e Lefrançois, em um estudo com entrevistas com historiadores da série *Assassin's Creed*, afirmam que jogos provêm uma história secular (que aqui entendo como história pública) que está em constante disputa com as memórias formatadas pelas diferentes instituições sociais[17]. Decerto, há uma multiplicidade de "histórias" sendo transmitidas pelos videogames, assim como há diferentes formatações sociais, mas compreendo que esse processo têm uma tendência à homogeneização, dentro da perspectiva da indústria cultural. De acordo com Santos, Coelho e Bezerra , são dispositivos que ressignificam o passado para dar sentido ao presente[18].

Há, na verdade, um processo histórico na transformação na estrutura de produção e circulação das memórias e representações, que passaram a ser mercadorias, produtos de consumo. Concordo com Enzo Traverso, para quem o passado tem se tornado reificado e uma *commodity*, mesmo que De Groot, por sua vez, tenha visto nessa comodifica-

16 Alberto Venegas Ramos, *Pasado interactivo: memoria e historia en el videojuego.* (Gasteiz: Sans Soleil, 2020).

17 Marc-André Éthier e David Lefrançois. *Le jeu et l'histoire:* Assassin's Creed *vu par les historiens* (Montreal: Del Busso Éditeur, 2020).

18 Christiano Britto Monteiro dos Santos, George Leonardo Seabra Coelho e Rafael Zamorano Bezerra, "Memórias sensíveis da guerra e a percepção da História em narrativas de jogos de videogames", *Revista Estudos Históricos* 36, n.º 78 (2023).

ção novos sentidos sendo construídos sobre o passado[19]. De forma mais apropriada, Sturken compreendeu o consumidor como uma espécie de "turista" do passado, em uma relação de apropriação e fetichismo com a História[20]. Taussig ressalta como nos estudos antropológicos de seu momento histórico, a forma-mercadoria tem sido deixado de lado em seu sentido marxista. Munakata aponta como mesmo livros didáticos se tornaram mercadoria[21].

Tomo a reflexão de Landsberg, que entende que as memórias da mídia de massas passaram a ser disseminadas e a circular em grupos sociais distintos, para refletir como os jogos de videogame forjados através de celebrações para impedir de serem apagadas[22]. Personagens, cenários, monumentos e objetos são representados, muitas vezes acompanhado de glossários enciclopédicos que contextualizam ao jogador, guardam a memória histórica e disseminam conteúdos e usos do passado para milhões de jogadores.

Uma série de autores discute como memórias e percepções históricas são formadas a partir dos jogos eletrônicos. Por exemplo, Coelho e Silva argumentaram que os jogos eletrônicos fazem parte de uma cultura digital que fomenta a constituição de percepções históricas[23]. Belyaev e Belyaeva também refletiram como os videogames ocupam boa parte do tempo na construção de consciência histórica e identificam que a memória política e ideológica cultivada é "ocidentalista" ("Westernizing"), sobretudo americana-cêntrica, onde a superioridade dos valores ocidentais é imputada na consciência histórica[24]. Nesse sen-

19 Enzo Traverso, *O Passado: Modos de Usar* (Barreiro: Unipop, 2012); Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture* (Londres: Routledge, 2009).

20 Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

21 Michael Taussig, "«History as Commodity». In Some Recent American (Anthropological) Literature", *Critique of Anthropology*, 1, n.º 9 (1989): 7-23; Kazumi Munakata, Dossiê "Manuais escolares: múltiplas facetas de um objeto cultural". *Pro-Posições* 23, n.º 3 (2012).

22 Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (Nova Iorque: Columbia University Press, 2004).

23 G. Coelho e L. da Silva, "Cultura digital, *games* e educação histórica: interfaces a partir da netnografia", *Revista Hydra: Revista Discente de História da UNIFESP* 6, n.º 12 (2023).

24 Dmitry Belyaev e Uliana Belyaeva, "Historical Video Games in the Context of Public His-

tido, sob outra ótica, Li argumenta, no contexto chinês, que os jogos eletrônicos trabalham com a possibilidade de incentivar o pensamento contrafactual, e têm potencial para coletivamente e digitalmente moldar a consciência histórica dos jogadores[25].

Radetich e Jakubowicz, por sua vez, propõem uma reflexão interessante, em que quando questionados se os videogames podem ensinar e transmitir consciência e memória histórica respondem que basta olhar ao uso destes jogos eletrônicos para aprendizado e difusão ideológica tanto pelo exército dos Estados Unidos quanto grupos fundamentalistas[26]. Também argumentam que os videogames oferecem um novo paradigma para lidar com o conteúdo histórico, uma virada epistemológica onde a representação aparece como "se realmente tivesse acontecido" e impõe novos desafios sobretudo aos professores.

Essa experiência complexa, no entanto, não se limita à relação jogador-jogo em seu estado de produção original. Para McCall, os jogadores também interagem ativamente com a história pública criando suas próprias regras de jogo, implementando mods[27] e debatendo a precisão histórica em fóruns da internet[28]. Já Pureza afirmou que os espaços de discussão sobre jogos eletrônicos, como revistas, vídeos, redes sociais e blogs são mercadológicos e, de certa forma, retroalimentam a dimensão do mercado, enquanto os historiadores, por sua vez, não entram nesse debate[29].

tory: Strategies for Reconstruction, Deconstruction and Politization of History", *Galactica Media: Journal of Media Studies* 4, n.º 1 (2022): 51-70. https://doi.org/10.46539/gmd.v4i1.204.

25 Li, Ning. "Playing the Past: Historical Video Games as Participatory Public History in China". *Convergence* 27, n.º 3 (2021): 746-767.

26 Laura Radetich e Eduardo Jakubowicz, "Using Video Games for Teaching History: Experiences and Challenges", *Athens Journal of History* 1, n.º 1 (2015): 7-18.

27 *Mods* são modificações dos jogos criadas por jogadores que conhecem como utilizar ferramentas para tal fim. É um assunto complexo que destoaria da discussão presente, uma vez que há produtoras que incentivam e outras que coíbem, há a necessidade de domínio de técnicas, e suas representações ora confirmam ora desafiam as produções originais. Basta dizer que são ainda outra forma de lidar com as representações criadas.

28 Jeremiah McCall, "Video Games as Participatory Public History". In *A Companion to Public History*, ed. David Dean (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018). https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118508930.ch29.

29 Felipe C. Pureza, "O «pecado original» e os videogames: limites da História Pública diante da «acumulação primitiva de capital»", *Canoa do Tempo* 10, n.º 1 (2018): 123-141. https://doi.org/10.38047/rct.v10i1.4421.

Em relação a outras mídias e suportes, os videogames, ou jogos eletrônicos, trazem camadas distintas de engajamento com a memória histórica e a História Pública. É possível destacar três dimensões em que isso é feito: a interação com a narrativa, com o espaço e com a jogabilidade. Enquanto narrativa, os jogos transmitem histórias que contam uma determinada representação do passado, tal como filmes, livros, e tantos outros meios comuns à indústria cultural e à História Pública. Mas essas "histórias" podem ser contadas através de uma narrativa diacrônica de começo-meio-fim, ou através de uma narrativa espacializada[30]. É a articulação entre narrativa, espaço e jogabilidade que, enfim, constitui a forma fundamental e própria dos jogos eletrônicos de formularem uma percepção sobre o passado.

Os videogames também têm um caráter de memória espacializada; isto é, é possível percorrer um espaço narrativizado em que se encontram diferentes iconografias apresentadas em ambientes biofísicos, estruturas culturais e grupos e indivíduos. Nesses espaços, não só representações do passado são encontradas, mas também simulações de comportamentos de objetos programados[31]. A diferença entre representação e simulação deve ser sublinhada e pode ser definida desta forma: a representação é estática, enquanto a simulação define o comportamento dos elementos representados. Um exemplo para deixar claro: em uma representação fílmica, um soldado sempre irá agir da mesma forma, não importa quantas vezes se assista, enquanto na simulação, esse soldado pode ser programado para andar de um lado ao outro, e agir e reagir a outros elementos do cenário, e ao *input* do jogador; nesse sentido, sempre age de formas diferentes. Isso pode ser aplicado tanto à natureza, quanto aos grupos sociais.

Chegamos então à outra característica dos jogos eletrônicos: as possibilidades de jogabilidade e interatividade. Crawford definiu como

30 Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote, e Maoz Azaryahu, *Narrating Space/Spatializing Narrative: Where Narrative Theory and Geography Meet* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2016).

31 Espen Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

"verbos" as ações disponíveis aos jogadores: andar, correr, manipular um objeto, etc[32]. É a partir do que o jogador pode, deve ou deveria fazer que se definem sentidos ideológicos ao jogo. Como o jogador deve agir[33]? Agindo diplomaticamente? Violentamente? Deve ele controlar um indivíduo, um grupo, uma civilização inteira? O que é possível que ele faça ou não faça? As diferentes interações com a narrativa e o espaço constituem uma relação própria do jogador com o produto de representação e simulação histórica à sua frente. O jogador se relaciona, assim, não só como espectador/leitor, mas como um interator participante.

A estudiosa de mídias interativas Janet Murray define três parâmetros para a interação: imersão, transformação e agência. O interator deve imergir no ambiente espacial narrativo, e assim, por um breve período, se transformar num outro que terá agência sobre esse lugar. A partir desses parâmetros, Murray entende que o interator deve tomar uma posição de alteridade, e compreensão dessa alteridade, e agir sobre sua nova realidade. Do ponto de vista de jogos elaborados a partir de narrativas históricas, isso significa tomar a posição de um agente do passado, entender sua relação com esse tempo e a partir disso "fazer história"[34].

Nessa direção, através do conceito de performatividade, Nolden compreende que os jogadores têm uma percepção histórica individual de "fazer história", e que os jogos eletrônicos têm diferentes formas, são heterogêneos, e seus aspectos históricos se misturam aos complexos sistemas computacionais e mecânicas de jogo[35]. Já Telles, de forma parecida, afirma que os jogadores "aprendem fazendo" a partir do ambiente imersivo e das regras de jogabilidade[36].

32 Chris Crawford, *The Art of Computer Game Design* (Berkeley: Osborne Press, 1984).

33 Gonzalo Frasca, "Play the Message: Play, Game and Videogame Rhetoric" (Tese de doutorado, IT University of Copenhagen, 2007).

34 Janet H. Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017).

35 Nico Nolden, "Gaming Public History: Academics and Digital Games", in *Making Histories*, ed. Paul Ashton, Tanya Evans e Paula Hamilton (Berlim: De Gruyter Brill, 2020), 151-162.

36 Helyom Viana Telles, "Um passado jogável? Simulação digital, videogames e História Pública", *Revista Observatório* 2, n.º 2 (2016): 163-191. https://doi.org/10.20873/uft.2447-4266.2016v2especial1p163.

Se tomarmos a ideia de "aprender fazendo" como um paradigma da História Pública e da indústria cultural nos videogames, então encontramos uma nova intersecção com as memórias produzidas dentro das diferentes experiências da sala de aula.

Numa das principais obras sobre o assunto, Squire, em seu livro sobre ensino e videogames, enfatizou o potencial de engajamento dos estudantes e a centralidade que este tem na participação do conteúdo através dos jogos[37]. Anteriormente, Gee já havia enfatizado o potencial de aprender com videogames, sobretudo a partir de seus elementos lúdicos propriamente ditos[38].

McCall afirmou que os videogames são uma mídia poderosa para interpretar e lidar com o passado, e podem ser muito úteis na sala de aula; entretanto, é sempre necessário estudá-los criticamente pois são interpretações, e devem ser comparados com fontes primárias, secundárias e sob o aconselhamento dos professores[39]. Olsson apresenta uma discussão e um plano de aula para ensinar sobre o sufrágio feminino nos Estados Unidos a partir das representações de *Red Dead Redemption II* (Rockstar, 2018), e se indaga sobre as possibilidades de aprender o tema sobre o assunto, contrastando o que é mostrado em jogo com fontes primárias, aferindo que o potencial de aprendizagem é muito interessante.[40]

Watson, Mong e Harris utilizaram um jogo educacional para ensinar História e afirmaram que o estudo do *game* levou a uma transição de um ensino "centrado no professor" para um ensino "centrado no estudante", isso é, uma passagem de uma aula expositiva para uma em que os estudantes ativamente se engajaram na discussão do objeto e

37 Kurt Squire, *Video Games and Learning: Teaching and Participatory Culture in the Digital Age* (Nova Iorque: Teachers College Press, 2011).

38 James Paul Gee, "Are Video Games Good for Learning?", *Nordic Journal of Digital Literacy* 1, n.º 3 (2006): 172-183.

39 Jeremiah McCall, "Teaching History With Digital Historical Games: An Introduction to the Field and Best Practices", *Simulation & Gaming* 47, n.º 4 (2016): 517-542. https://doi.org/10.1177/1046878116646693.

40 Tore Olsson, "Teaching History with Video Games", *The American Historical Review* 128, n.º 4 (2023): 1472-1487.

de suas representações[41]. Em um estudo para estudantes de graduação, Wainwright apontou que os videogames têm potencial para ensinar questões teóricas de forma impactante, permitindo que os estudantes levantassem questões de pensamento crítico que em outros formatos não fariam[42]. McCall dedica um livro ao uso de videogames como ensino de história e afirma seu potencial de criar uma consciência histórica a partir do diálogo com os estudantes[43]. McMichael afirma em suas considerações que o público estudantil lidará, seja jogando diretamente ou vendo em contextos promocionais, conteúdos históricos veiculados sobre videogames, e utilizar jogos de computador para ensinar História pode ser muito produtivo para ensiná-los a pensar criticamente[44].

Tendo a concordar com Anderson, que critica a separação entre jogos estreitamente voltados para o aprendizado e jogos de entretenimento. Este afirma que jogos como *Valiant Hearts: The Great War* (Ubisoft, 2014) ensinam sobre o passado, mesmo que tangencialmente, através de suas representações e dos conteúdos enciclopédicos veiculados conjuntamente[45].

É nesse sentido que os jogos eletrônicos são passíveis de serem estudados na intersecção entre História Pública e indústria cultural, como objetos socioculturais que residem na dialética entre a lógica-mercadoria e a circulação de narrativas públicas sobre o passado. Seja seus usos como "puro entretenimento", seja seus usos em instituições educacionais, ou outros espaços sociais, eles se configuram na relação sujeito-objeto mediada pelo capital.

41 William R. Watson, Christopher J. Mong e Constance A. Harris, "A Case Study of the In-Class Use of a Video Game for Teaching High School History", *Computers & Education* 56, n.º 2 (2011): 466-474.

42 Alexander Martin Wainwright, "Teaching Historical Theory Through Video Games", *The History Teacher* 47, n.º 4 (2014): 579-612.

43 Jeremiah McCall, *Gaming the Past: Using Video Games to Teach Secondary History*, 2.ª ed. (Nova Iorque: Routledge, 2022).

44 Andrew McMichael, "PC Games and the Teaching of History", *The History Teacher* 40, n.º 2 (2007): 203-218.

45 Steve L. Anderson, "The Interactive Museum: Video Games as History Lessons Through Lore and Affective Design", *E-Learning and Digital Media* 16, n.º 3 (2019): 177-195.

Neste segundo momento do artigo, pretendo me voltar à análise das representações em dois conjuntos de jogos: os jogos de estratégia, como *Civilization* e *Age of Empires*, e a série *Assassin's Creed*. Essa escolha de jogos permitirá exemplificar e entender melhor algumas das compreensões, dentro das representações da indústria cultural e da História Pública que mais circulam entre os jogadores, e algumas das noções tradicionalistas de compreensão sobre o passado.

Essa divisão nos dois casos se dá a partir de Bello e Vasconcelos, que dedicaram-se a demonstrar as diferentes modalidades de jogar, ensinar e aprender sobre o passado, e que distinguiram jogos centrados na experiência de tomar a posição de um indivíduo ou da construção de uma civilização[46]. Isto é, há diferenças na forma de imersão entre o papel de se colocar como um sujeito participante do processo histórico e a forma dos jogos de estratégia, em que se mobilizam diferentes grupos e ferramentas estatais e sociais para decidir o curso da História.

3. *Civilization* e *Age of Empires* e os jogos de estratégia

Os jogos de estratégia histórica estiveram presentes desde o início da história dos jogos eletrônicos, mas foi a partir das décadas de 1990 e 2000 que jogos como *Civilization* (Microprose, 1991), *Civilization II* (Microprose, 1996), *Caesar* (Impressions Games/Sierra, 1992), *Age of Empires* (Microsoft, 1997), *Europa Universalis* (Paradox, 2000) e *Shogun: Total War* (Creative Assembly, 2000) estabeleceram as bases para a representação histórica que, do ponto de vista teórico, tomou sobretudo o ponto de vista da média e da longa duração de processos históricos.

Os *games* de estratégia marcaram gerações. Neles, milhões de jogadores dedicaram inúmeras horas a explorar representações e simulações de construção civilizacional. Puderam fazer isso de forma solitária ou em sessões *multiplayer* com outros jogadores, formando comunida-

46 Robson Scarassati Bello e José Antônio Vasconcelos, "Videogames e ensino de História: distintas modalidades de jogar, ensinar e aprender sobre o passado", *Convergências: Estudos em Humanidades Digitais* 1, n.º 5 (2024): 205-227.

des de circulação de conteúdo histórico. A grande maioria desses jogos também possuíam enciclopédias sobre diferentes temas, que ajudavam a contextualizar os espaços históricos representados.

Para discutir os jogos de estratégia, tomo aqui como paradigmáticas as séries *Civilization* e *Age of Empires*, expressivas das questões a serem trabalhadas, uma vez que ambas são definidas pelas ideias de Estado moderno, de acumulação de capital a partir da lógica-mercadoria e de "progresso" dos tempos históricos desde o início da chamada "pré-história".

No início da década de 1990, um marco dos jogos históricos foi criado pelo desenvolvedor *Sid Meier: Civilization* (Microprose, 1991). Neste jogo, era possível escolher uma de entre várias "civilizações" e desenvolvê-la dos seus primórdios "pré-históricos" até às idades mais avançadas do progresso. Poucos anos mais tarde, *Sid Meier's Colonization* (Microprose, 1994) levou a dinâmica para simular a colonização europeia na América, mas foi a sequência direta, *Civilization II* (Microprose, 1996), que expandiu ainda mais o sucesso em relação ao primeiro. Nas décadas seguintes, *Civilization III* (Firaxis, 2001), *Civilization IV* (Firaxis, 2005), *Civilization V* (Firaxis, 2010), *Civilization VI* (Firaxis, 2016) e *Civilization VII* (Firaxis, 2025) demonstraram a popularidade e a longevidade deste modo de representação. Outros jogos *spin-off* foram *Civilization Revolution* (Firaxis/2K, 2008) e *Civilization Revolution 2* (Firaxis/2K, 2014).

Originando-se nos jogos de tabuleiro de guerra, a série *Civilization* apresentou uma visão colonialista da História, onde dever-se-iam ocupar novos espaços, vencer "tribos bárbaras" e outros povos, e avançar sua civilização socialmente e tecnologicamente a partir da chamada ideologia do "progresso", isso é, nos moldes eurocêntricos, a civilização ruma da chamada "pré-história" até às chamadas sociedades "modernas" e à corrida espacial. Para Kapell e Elliott, em *Civilization V* trocas econômicas não produzem identidades ou crenças e as "tribos primitivas" são incapazes de se transformar e progredir, diferentes das ditas "civilizações"[47].

47 Matthew Wilhelm Kapell e Andrew B. R. Elliott, eds., *Playing with the Past: Digital Games*

Pautado numa visão teleológica da História, era necessário realizar acumulação de capitais na forma de diversos recursos e conquistar e defender determinados territórios. Diferentes modelos de governo podem ser adotados, como Comunismo, Liberalismo, República, Democracia, que influenciam na microgestão das organizações sociais e de produção. Diferentes acordos diplomáticos e trocas econômicas podiam ser realizados e eram ferramentas no desenvolvimento civilizacional, onde índices como cultura ou sociedade são dados estatísticos que certas vezes influenciam de alguma forma uma ou outra a mecânica do jogo.

Na série *Civilization*, o jogador controla o desenvolvimento civilizacional como um autocrata divino que decide todos os rumos da sociedade. A "civilização", por sua vez, é pensada em termos do Estado moderno e nacional, mas a estrutura de ocupação territorial é feita através da lógica de cidades-Estado cujos centros são responsáveis pelo desenvolvimento das várias cidades-colônias e suas expansões. De acordo com Bijsterveld Muñoz, o nacionalismo e o Estado-nação em *Civilization V* são as únicas forças relevantes no processo histórico[48]. Joly-Lavoie e Yelle, em seu uso do cenário da queda de Roma em *Civilization V*, chegaram à conclusão de que a visão sobre a sua queda e desaparecimento foi explicada com noções simplistas de invasão e decadência[49]. Voorhees compreende que há uma reificação da entidade do Soberano no "eu" do jogador em jogos como *Civilization*[50]. Já Pureza vai enfatizar o aspecto neoliberal da economia e da visão do mundo presente na série[51].

Nesse sentido, estou de acordo com o já clássico artigo de Chen, para quem as representações de *Civilization V* são um objeto em que po-

and the Simulation of History (Nova Iorque: Bloomsbury, 2013).

48 Ainhoa Bijsterveld Muñoz, "National Identity in Historical Video Games: An Analysis of How *Civilization V* Represents the Past", *Nations and Nationalism* 28, n.º 4 (2022): 1311-1325.

49 Anne Joly-Lavoie e Frederic Yelle, "Using Video Games to Teach High School History: The Case of *Civilization V*", in *E-Teaching History*, ed. Joanna Wojdon (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 119-134.

50 Gerald A. Voorhees, "I Play Therefore I Am: Sid Meier's *Civilization*, Turn-Based Strategy Games and the Cogito", *Games and Culture* 4, n.º 3 (2009): 254-275. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412009339728.

51 Fernando Cauduro Pureza, "«Mais um turno»: *Civilization* e a narrativa neoliberal sobre a (a-)história", in *Experiências Docentes e a Construção do Saber Histórico* [recurso eletrônico], org. Cláudia Cristina do Lago Borges e Priscilla Gontijo Leite (João Pessoa: Editora do CCTA, 2022).

demos explorar nossas fantasias históricas, como se estivéssemos vendo o passado dentro de um aquário se desenvolvendo de forma caótica.[52] Do ponto de vista teórico, a metafísica do jogo é recheada de contradições: materialista e deísta; multiculturalista e imperialista. Assim, discordo razoavelmente de Koabel, que estuda as periodizações em *Civilization V* e *Europa Universalis IV* e chega à conclusão de que ambos utilizam períodos trabalhados na longa tradição historiográfica, de Marx a Fernand Braudel, ainda que de formas diferentes.[53] A "teoria da história" de *Civilization* é muito mais simplista do que nesses autores.

Do ponto de vista do ensino, muitos autores trabalharam a questão, com considerações mais ou menos otimistas, como é o caso de Pagnotti e Russell, que afirmam que *Civilization IV* é uma forma interessante de engajar os estudantes com ferramentas que permitem lidar com o conteúdo histórico[54]. Joly-Lavoie e Yelle também notam a dificuldade de utilizar o *game* como ensino dada a quantidade grande de horas a dominar os códigos de jogo e a realizar uma experiência completa[55]. Apesar de notarem um potencial para o desenvolvimento do pensamento histórico, enfatizam a necessidade de acompanhamento por parte de um professor e a comparação com a historiografia.

Já Mol, Politopoulos e Ariese-Vandemeulebroucke enfatizam o alto número de jogadores que já jogaram algum dos jogos da série *Civilization* e foram informados com diversos conteúdos históricos e visões do passado, mas acreditam que o jogo não pode ser substituto ao ensino tradicional[56]. Em artigo posterior, Mol, Politopoulos e Lammes os viram como arenas para discursos políticos nos termos de liberdades humanas[57].

52 Kuan-Hsing Chen, "*Civilization* and Its Disk Contents", *Radical Society: Review of Culture and Politics* 30, n.º 2 (2003): 95-107.

53 Greg Koabel, "Simulating the Ages of Man: Periodization in *Civilization V* and *Europa Universalis IV*", *Loading...* 10, n.º 17 (2017).

54 John Pagnotti e William B. Russell, "Using *Civilization IV* to Engage Students in World History Content", *The Social Studies* 103, n.º 1 (2011): 39-48.

55 Joly-Lavoie e Yelle, "Using Video Games to Teach High School History".

56 Angus A. A. Mol, Aris Politopoulos e Csilla E. Ariese-Vandemeulebroucke, "«From the Stone Age to the Information Age»: History and Heritage in Sid Meier's *Civilization VI*", *Advances in Archaeological Practice* 5, n.º 2 (2017): 214-226.

57 Angus Mol, Aris Politopoulos e Sybille Lammes, "On Being Stuck in Sid Meier's *Civilization*: The Promise of Freedom in Historical Games", in *Conference Proceedings of DiGRA 2023*

Compreendo que *Civilization* expressa uma visão tradicionalista e conservadora do processo histórico, centrado em um presentismo onde a lógica da mercadoria, do Estado moderno e do progresso são os fios condutores.

Outra série de jogos de desenvolvimento civilizacional que marcou a história dos jogos históricos foi *Age of Empires* (Microsoft, 1997) e suas sequências: *Age of Empires II* (Microsoft, 1999); *Age of Empires III* (Microsoft, 2005); e *Age of Empires IV* (Xbox Game Studios, 2021). Enquanto *Civilization* apresenta um desenvolvimento histórico da "Pré-História" até o "Futuro", cada *Age of Empires* apresentou segmentos menores de desenvolvimento histórico: por exemplo, *Age of Empires II* dedicou-se somente à alta e baixa "Idade Média". Também diferentemente de *Civilization*, que apresentava uma jogabilidade baseada em "turnos", o controle da civilização de *Age of Empires* era completamente em "tempo real", e mais voltada à rapidez da coleta de recursos e criação de exércitos para sobrepujar seus oponentes.

A noção da ideologia do "progresso" e do Estado nacional e moderno, entretanto, continuaram presentes. Para Eucídio Arruda, tal noção de Estado e civilização evoca síntese, expansão e domínio, que são objetivos do jogo, ainda que os jogadores possam criar outras relações baseadas em distribuições de poderes diferentes daquelas pretendidas pelo jogo[58].

É possível inferir, no entanto, que apesar de representados enquanto Estados, a lógica de gestão destas civilizações é a de uma moderna gestão administrativa empresarial, onde deve haver controle de recursos humanos e materiais, e o investimento é pensado em uma lógica liberal de retorno e expansão. Eu penso que, nesse sentido, essa visão sobre o passado se assemelha a um presentismo de como o mercado e o capital do século XX-XXI compreendem a economia e a sociedade de períodos anteriores aos seus. Para Marconi da Costa, a "Idade Média" de *Age of Empires* reproduz sobretudo as visões conservadoras e tradi-

Conference: Limits and Margins of Games Settings, 2023.

58 Eucídio Arruda, *Aprendizagens e Jogos Digitais* (Campinas: Alínea, 2011).

cionalistas sobre o período, ainda que tenha potencial de desafiar essas percepções[59]. *Já em uma perspectiva ecológica, Mukherjee discute como videogames representam a natureza, e observa que em jogos como Age of Empires* ela é vista como um recurso a ser obtido e exaurido para o desenvolvimento do império e da civilização[60].

Outras posições, como Maguth, List e Wunderle, ao utilizarem *Age of Empires II* como estudo de caso para o ensino de História, se depararam com uma série de desafios complexos, como o próprio acesso ao jogo, mas indicam um potencial positivo[61].

Jogos como *Civilization* e *Age of Empires* se concentraram na construção, planejamento, disposição e gerenciamento de estruturas e relações sociais, sobretudo em larga escala, e partiram sobretudo das noções de Estado moderno e da ideologia do progresso para substanciarem as suas mecânicas de jogabilidade. Tais noções podem ser consideradas um presentismo que projeta-se ao passado, mas cujo efeito é corroborar a compreensão de parte do público jogador de que a) o governo estatal sempre existiu, a racionalidade administrativa sempre foi um parâmetro; e sobretudo b) há uma ideia intrínseca de "evolução-progresso" da História.

Claro que o nível de complexidade é muito distinto, e há diferenças significativas entre cada série e ainda em relação a outros jogos de estratégia. Por exemplo, enquanto as civilizações em jogos como *Civilization* e *Age of Empire* começam todas com o mesmo nível de força e recursos, em *Europa Universalis* há uma desigualdade no tamanho do território, nas diferentes relações políticas pré-estabelecidas, etc.: se o jogador jogar bem, é possível que o Império Asteca vença seus colonizadores, a Rússia conquiste a Europa ou o Brasil seja conquistado in-

59 B. Marconi da Costa, "A História medieval vista de cima: imagens dos grupos populares em *Age of Empires IV*", *Convergências: Estudos em Humanidades Digitais* 1, n.º 5 (2024): 76-102.

60 Souvik Mukherjee, "No Cyclones in *Age of Empires*: Empire, Ecology, and Video Games", in *Ecogames: Playful Perspectives on the Climate Crisis*, ed. Laura de Beke, Joost Raessens, Souvik Mukherjee e Gabriella Farca (Londres: Routledge, 2024), 163-179. https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/86369/1/9789048557219.pdf#page=164.

61 Brad M. Maguth, Jeremy S. List e Michael Wunderle, "Teaching Social Studies with Video Games", *The Social Studies* 106, n.º 1 (2014): 32-36.

teiramente pelos franceses. Apperley afirma que estes jogos trabalham com uma ideia de contra-factualidade, e podem inspirar a compreensão de que os processos históricos não eram determinísticos e sim fruto de causalidades e casualidades determinados pelos agentes políticos e sociais que de fato fizeram a História[62].

Os jogos de estratégia permitiram aos jogadores diferentes relações sobretudo com a ideia de Estado moderno, o desenvolvimento de forças produtivas e militares em uma lógica mercadoria e a reprodução da ideologia do progresso, onde as civilizações evoluem de um ponto mais primitivo para outro, mais avançado. Assim, mercadorias culturais centrais à indústria do videogame reforçaram publicamente noções conservadoras e tradicionais de compreensão do passado.

4. *Assassin's Creed* e os "Discovery Tour"

Já há quase vinte anos, desde 2007, a Ubisoft, produtora francesa com estúdios no Canadá, desenvolveu a série de jogos chamada *Assassin's Creed*, que vêm representando diferentes tempos históricos em cada um de seus episódios. A variedade é imensa; e isso só entre os jogos principais da série: *Assassin's Creed* (2007) representou a Terceira Cruzada; *Assassin's Creed II* (2009) e *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* (2010), a Itália renascentista; *Assassin's Creed: Revelations* (2011), a Istambul do início do século XVI; *Assassin's Creed III* (2012), a Revolução Americana; *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* (2013), o Caribe "pirata" do século XVIII; *Assassin's Creed Rogue* (2014), a Guerra Franco-Indígena nos Estados Unidos; *Assassin's Creed Unity* (2014), a Revolução Francesa; *Assassin's Creed Syndicate* (2015), a Londres da Revolução Industrial; *Assassin's Creed Origins* (2017), o Egito de Cleópatra; *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* (2019), a Guerra do Peloponeso; *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* (2020), as invasões viking na Inglaterra; e

62 Tom Apperley, "Modding the Historians' Code: Historical Verisimilitude and the Counterfactual Imagination", in *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*, ed. Matthew Wilhelm Kapell e Andrew B. R. Elliott (Nova Iorque: Bloomsbury, 2013), 185-198.

Assassin's Creed Mirage (2023), a Bagdad do século IX. Finalmente, em 2025, *Assassin's Creed Shadows* apresenta o Japão do século XVI.

É importante explicar ao público leitor não familiarizado com os jogos eletrônicos que as representações de jogos como *Assassin's Creed* são fundamentalmente diferentes dos jogos de estratégia expostos anteriormente. Primeiro porque os jogos de estratégia acompanham Estados, sociedades, estruturas estatísticas de desenvolvimento tecnológico e cultural, e o fazem sobretudo por uma câmera aérea. De outra forma, *Assassin's Creed* apresenta uma câmera em terceira pessoa em um ambiente tridimensional, e é possível percorrer as cidades e ambientes com um personagem único, correndo, escalando e interagindo com elementos do cenário. O significado disso é uma relação muito diferente com o espaço histórico e uma pretensão de imersão no ambiente do passado, diferente da mobilização de recursos dos jogos anteriores.

Cada jogo é uma empreitada e uma jornada em narrativas e espaços gigantescos de reconstrução histórica. Por exemplo, em *Assassin's Creed III* é possível participar de perto dos eventos da independência dos Estados Unidos, como a "Festa do Chá de Boston"; e em *Assassin's Creed Unity* é possível percorrer a Bastilha ou andar no teto da Notre-Dame durante o período revolucionário. A série trabalhou junto a artistas e historiadores para reconstituir os tempos históricos adaptados à jogabilidade em espaços virtuais voltados ao entretenimento. Há especificidades na elaboração da memória e da consciência histórica dentro de um ambiente que possui cenas fílmicas, espaços navegáveis e possibilidades de imersão e interatividade com estes aspectos. É nesse contexto que a série propõe um olhar multicultural em que os protagonistas Assassinos são defensores da liberdade contra a tentativa de controle e tirania de seus adversários, os Templários. Isso é feito sob a pretensão de re-apresentar o passado "assim como ele foi", e estabelece uma verossimilhança sobre este, sendo configurado a partir de escolhas representacionais e técnicas. Tal ideia deve ser severamente questionada, uma vez que as representações sempre são históricas e dizem respeito a como o passado é imaginado pelos produtores no presente, que projetam e compreendem esse pretérito sob a luz de uma ótica

do presente, e particularmente nestes jogos, com a intenção principal de divertir e entreter. Em um artigo muito interessante, é importante ressaltar que, enquanto representações, Yglesias e Fornari atentam para até mesmo como as "paisagens sonoras" são representações, e não reproduções fidedignas de sons do passado[63].

Do ponto de vista de construção de narrativas públicas sobre o passado, há uma rica discussão bibliográfica que trabalha tal questão. Por exemplo, para Hammar, *Assassin's Creed: Freedom Cry*, um jogo que representa a luta contra a escraviudão no Caribe, demonstra como memórias marginalizadas podem ser disseminadas através destes *games*[64]. No entanto, em um sentido oposto, Shaw entende que não há possibilidades emancipatórias nestes *games*, mas sim uma tirania do realismo[65].

Ainda que a referida "tirania do realismo" possa ser problematizada, uma vez que as narrativas da série dependem de muitos elementos ficcionais, tal impossibilidade emancipatória, a qual me posiciono de acordo, no entanto, não impediu que muitos estudos fossem feitos a respeito do aprendizado sobre o passado que *Assassin's Creed* poderia oferecer. Em um estudo de caso recente, Nabais e Trindade atentaram para as potencialidades e limitações que tais jogos permitem, justamente interseccionando tais elementos[66]. Karsenti e Parent aplicaram *Assassin's Creed II* (Ubisoft, 2009), *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* (Ubisoft, 2010) e *Assassin's Creed: Revelations* (Ubisoft, 2011) em uma sala de aula para verificar os efeitos de aprendizagem a partir destes *games*. Apesar dos estudantes não jogarem de fato, os autores descrevem um

63 Vinicius Yglesias e José Fornari, "As representações de paisagens sonoras históricas na franquia de games *Assassin's Creed*", *Convergências: Estudos em Humanidades Digitais* 1, n.º 5 (2024): 103-132. https://doi.org/10.59616/cehd.v1i5.968.

64 Emil Lundedal Hammar, "Counter-Hegemonic Commemorative Play: Marginalized Pasts and the Politics of Memory in the Digital Game *Assassin's Creed: Freedom Cry*", *Rethinking History* 21, n.º 3 (2017): 372-395. https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2016.1256622.

65 Adrienne Shaw, "The Tyranny of Realism: Historical Accuracy and Politics of Representation in *Assassin's Creed III*", *Loading...* 9, n.º 14 (2015).

66 F. M. D. Nabais e S. M. da G. D. do C. Trindade, "As potencialidades pedagógicas do videogame *Assassin's Creed Origins* na graduação em História: um estudo de caso no ensino superior português", *Convergências: Estudos em Humanidades Digitais* 1, n.º 5 (2024): 366-387.

engajamento intenso para além da chatice (*boredom*) dos livros escolares e a possibilidade de "experienciar história"[67].

Capitalizando em cima dessa noção de que os jogadores aprendem com *Assassin's Creed*, em 2018, 2019 e 2020 a Ubisoft desenvolveu três modos chamados "Discovery Tour" para seus jogos *Origins*, *Odyssey* e *Valhalla*. Cada um destes "Discovery Tour" apresenta experiências museificadas que mostram didaticamente conteúdos, respectivamente, do Egito Antigo, da Grécia Antiga e do período de invasão dos Vikings na Inglaterra. As dezenas de tópicos de aprendizado e de disseminação de memórias são distribuídos em pontos, locações, ao redor do mapa original dos *games* e, a partir de objetos históricos, mapas e outros artefatos, um narrador lê um texto que descreve e explica o conteúdo.

Entretanto, o que esse conteúdo aponta é uma coleção de fatos e documentos, cuja pretensão é informativa, sem grandes reflexões críticas, e sem desafiar pré-noções acerca dos períodos re-apresentados; pelo contrário, aparentemente reforçam muitas das ideias esperadas do público a respeito do Egito, da Grécia e dos vikings. Além disso, há um processo progressivo de *Origins* até *Valhalla* de narrativização do espaço museal. Enquanto em *Origins* o modo "Discovery Tour" se aproxima de uma visita guiada a um museu, em *Odyssey* o jogador já deve conversar com os "atores" para receber as explicações; e quando chega-se em *Valhalla*, há uma pequena narrativa em que o jogador acompanha o ponto de vista de vários personagens enquanto eles ensinam sobre o passado. Essa transição é significativa: é uma tentativa de cada vez mais imergir o aluno no ensino de História; mas, por outro lado, o modo "Discovery Tour" acaba por se aproximar da experiência *dos Living History Museums*, principalmente estadunidenses.

Sobretudo a partir dos anos 1980, os *living history museums* foram um movimento, tanto nos Estados Unidos quanto na Europa, de apresentar espaços onde cenários e atores pretendem reconstituir o passado "tal como ele foi" com uma pretensão pedagógica (Meneses, 1994).

67 Thierry Karsenti e Sébastien Parent, "Teaching History with the Video Game *Assassin's Creed*: Effective Teaching Practices and Reported Learning", *Review of Science, Mathematics and ICT Education* 14, n.º 1 (2020): 27-45. https://doi.org/10.26220/rev.3278.

Muito associado aos *heritage sites* e aos museus ao ar livre, os *living history museums* escolhem um período específico, como a Guerra Civil Americana, ou algum momento da Idade Média, e se esforçam para criar as vestimentas, costumes, edifícios e *life styles* do período, e convidam os visitantes a se vestirem e agirem adequadamente ao cenário. Essa experiência reduz o passado a uma encenação e a uma representação estética, uma experiência sensorial que busca a imersão, não o distanciamento crítico e analítico do passado a partir de categorias de análise (Meneses, 1992)[68].

Entre a apresentação factual expositiva que coleciona documentos e a busca do passado "tal como ele foi", o que apreendi em minhas pesquisas até o momento é um profundo entendimento da História dentro do enquadramento positivista. Isso quer dizer que o conteúdo não é apresentado de forma crítica ou reflexiva, mas sim como um conjunto de informações não problematizadas que procuram "informar" o jogador sobre a realidade daquelas representações. Nesse sentido, o modo "Discovery Tour" funciona também como uma forma de corroborar a autenticidade das representações e simulações dos jogos principais.

Não obstante, entre as narrativas principais que espetacularizam o passado e a violência e seu contraste com o modo educacional dos "Discovery Tours", a série *Assassin's Creed* é um marco da intersecção entre História Pública e indústria cultural e da experiência de tentativa de formação de uma consciência e de uma memória históricas que ainda precisa de ser estudada mais profundamente. Igualmente, as noções representacionais progressistas, mas ideologicamente comprometidas com um passado conspiratório de luta da liberdade contra a tirania, informam visões sobre a sociedade que inspiram compreensões modernas de teorias da conspiração. Não é possível desqualificar de antemão que circulação pública de representações e memórias construídas sobre o passado veiculado na série pode inspirar consumidores e estudantes a

68 Ulpiano T. Bezerra de Meneses, "Do teatro da memória ao laboratório da História: a exposição museológica e o conhecimento histórico", *Debates: Anuário do Museu Paulista* 2, n.º 1 (1994): 125-142; Meneses, "A História, cativa da memória? Para um mapeamento da memória no campo das ciências sociais", *Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros*, n.º 34 (1992): 9-23.

uma pesquisa crítica, bem como familiarizá-los com eventos, cenários e pensamentos diversos.

Entretanto, tal perspectiva otimista deve ser pensada criticamente à luz de nossas categorias centrais, isso é, indústria cultural e História Pública; memórias e representações. O conteúdo narrativo de *Assassin's Creed* espetacularia e fetichiza a violência, e presentifica as compreensões sobre os espaços e eventos históricos, tornando-os sincronicamente semelhantes e diferindo a consciência histórica dos períodos sobretudo por seus elementos estéticos, e não socioculturais. Isso é, seja o período da Terceira Cruzada ou da Londres da Revolução Industrial, os indivíduos e grupos sociais se comportam e pensam mais ou menos da mesma forma, e os cenários são, sobretudo, um grande parque de diversões histórico.

5. Considerações finais

Para se discutir as representações históricas no último século é fundamental pensá-las em sua lógica-mercadoria dentro de um complexo industrial e em sua circulação pública de massas. O "valor de uso" está necessariamente atrelado ao "valor de troca" das produções culturais, e isso estrutura a forma pela qual o público as acessa. No caso dos videogames, a relação dialética entre indústria cultural e História Pública é complexa e as suas representações e a construção de memória histórica se dão através das diferentes formas de simulação, isso é, da articulação entre narrativas, espaços e possibilidades de interatividade.

Como demonstrei, os jogos de estratégia como *Civilization* e *Age of Empires* reforçam a ideia de Estado moderno, sociedade regulada pela mercadoria e pela ideologia do progresso como parâmetros trans-históricos e presentistas. Já *Assassin's Creed* pretende demonstrar o passado "tal como foi" através de uma narrativa também presentista e trans-histórica, mas através de uma luta alegórica entre Liberdade e Tirania, sendo que os "Discovery Tours" em particular trabalham, por

um lado, com uma perspectiva museal antiquada e positivista e, por outro, colocam o jogador em uma posição de consumo dos conteúdos.

Assim, o que todos estes jogos aparentam apresentar é um tempo esvaziado a partir de uma ótica anacrônica cuja leitura sobre o passado é pensada em termos do presente, e cuja simulação, por mais bem intencionada que seja, reproduz valores do nosso tempo, não de alteridade ou de emancipação. É possível expandir a orientação dessa pesquisa para pensar, futuramente, como outras mercadorias culturais que representam o passado em filmes, livros, etc. se constituem de forma semelhante.

Podemos nos questionar se os jogos eletrônicos desafiam ou reforçam as noções dominantes de compreensão do passado, e a resposta seria que, em sua maioria, sobretudo de jogos AAA, suas representações apelam a um senso comum já previamente constituído socialmente sobre a História. No entanto, fazem isso de uma forma muito particular: engajando os jogadores em uma participação em que "fazem a história". O significado disso ainda deve ser mais estudado, mas o caminho indicado é que essa "cultura da participação" remete a uma ideologia individualista e contrafactual, sendo necessário o acompanhamento de profissionais e educadores voltados à problematização daquilo que é disseminado. É, entretanto, inegável, que conteúdos históricos são, à revelia daqueles, muito publicizados nestes *games*.

Finalmente, encerro este artigo reafirmando o entrelaçamento entre História Pública e indústria cultural na contemporaneidade, sobretudo no caso dos videogames, em que o "fazer histórico" assenta as condições para o consumo do passado. No entanto, é importante apontar que não só os videogames ditos "históricos" beneficiariam desse tipo de abordagem, mas também diversos tipos de mercadorias culturais, como filmes, livros ficcionais e didáticos, produções na internet, e assim por diante.

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Dionysis Asimiadis, Elias Vavouras, Foteini Kagioglou and Paraskevi Evangelou

Memory, Identity, and the Market: Neoliberalism as a Regime of Historical Representation

This paper examines neoliberalism not only as a theory of economics, a political strategy, or a regime of governance, but also as a history of representation that influences the way societies remember, the way they constitute themselves as a community in time, and the way history, as a body of meanings, is shaped in a culture of reference that is governed by a set of norms that come from the world of economics. It claims that, as a technology of power, as a set of cultural practices, and as a form of governance of history, neoliberalism inaugurates particular forms of experiences of history that need to be explored in greater detail, such as the privatization of history, the story of a history that is primarily focused on the emergence of the subject in the narrative of a history of societies, as well as a history that constitutes a body of meanings that come from the strategies of economics in order to give meanings to history. It is contiguous to the theory of history that is offered in discourses on power in the humanities as well as the theory of history in sociology, suggesting that the hegemony of power that is exercised by neoliberalism is not only in the way in which societies in the present are governed, managed, and ordered, but also in the way in which history is shaped in a culture that is governed by a set of meanings that come from economics. Finally, this article underlines the need to develop a history of history that rebuilds a history of collectivity and a history of culture that is not managed in a set of meanings that come from economics as a critique of the uses of history in the contemporary era.
Keywords: neoliberalism; identity; historicity; memory.

Memória, Identidade e o Mercado: O neoliberalismo como regime de representação histórica

Este artigo examina o neoliberalismo não apenas como uma teoria económica, uma estratégia política ou um regime de governação, mas também como uma história da representação que influencia a forma como as sociedades se lembram, como se constituem enquanto comunidade no tempo e como a história,

enquanto corpo de significados, é moldada numa cultura de referência regida por um conjunto de normas provenientes do mundo económico. Defende-se que, enquanto tecnologia de poder, enquanto conjunto de práticas culturais e enquanto forma de governação da história, o neoliberalismo inaugura formas particulares de experiências históricas que precisam de ser exploradas com maior detalhe, como a privatização da história, a narrativa de uma história que se centra sobretudo na emergência do sujeito na história das sociedades, bem como uma história que constitui um corpo de significados derivados das estratégias económicas para atribuir sentido à história. É contígua à teoria da história oferecida nos discursos sobre o poder nas humanidades, bem como à teoria da história na sociologia, sugerindo que a hegemonia do poder exercida pelo neoliberalismo não se manifesta apenas na forma como as sociedades contemporâneas são governadas, geridas e ordenadas, mas também na forma como a história é moldada numa cultura regida por um conjunto de significados provenientes da economia. Por fim, este artigo sublinha a necessidade de desenvolver uma história da história que reconstrua uma história da coletividade e uma história da cultura que não seja gerida por um conjunto de significados derivados da economia, como uma crítica aos usos da história na era contemporânea.
Palavras-chave: neoliberalismo; identidade; historicidade; memória.

Memory, Identity, and the Market: Neoliberalism as a Regime of Historical Representation

Dionysis Asimiadis, Elias Vavouras, Foteini Kagioglou and Paraskevi Evangelou*

Introduction

The neoliberal doctrine has been extensively researched as an economic ideology, a political plan, and a form of governance for the past few decades because of its impacts on the structural transformations between the state, the marketplace, and society in general concerning public policy, labor relations, and welfare systems. However, relatively little research has been conducted on its impacts on the transformation of historical consciousness per se, or more specifically, the ways in which societies in general respond to history, in terms of building a shared memory of the past and its meanings. This paper proposes that neoliberalism should be

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viewed not only as a form of economic governance but rather also as a form of historical representation in general, and one which has radically transformed the way in which history is narrated and represented.

There has been important scholarship that has been relevant to the topic of neoliberalism and memory, but it has been largely categorized in different conceptual camps. There has been scholarship on neoliberalism that has illustrated how market rationalities are no longer restricted to economic matters but seep into the realm of social values, subjectivities, and forms of governing, particularly through the framework of governmentality. At the same time, scholarship on memory and critical histories has also been concerned with how politics are involved in using the past, including constituting and erasing history and how it consolidates into institutionalized collective memories. It seems to be less work being done at this point to address the intersection between these two intellectual traditions, how neoliberal logics actually constitute meanings and histories through refiguring memory itself into this intellectual, culturally consistent and controlled resource that is also compatible and legitimate in relation to markets.

This paper argues that neoliberalism represents a regime of historicity that rearranges the relationship between time, memory, and social experience. In this regime, history is progressively conceptualized as a series of lessons in efficiency and flexibility, while social conflict and political antagonisms become effaced or become impossible to read. Memory is no longer conceptualized and articulated primarily as a space of dispute over issues of power and injustice but as a technology of normalization. The dominant form of rationality under neoliberal discourse is market-driven rationality, which reconstructs and restates the terms on which meanings and representations of the past are possible.

Since the end of the twentieth century, and most notably since the dissolution of actually existing socialism, it has been possible to discern a gradual but profound shift in the preponderant representation of history and memory. Representations of the past, which were once grounded in collectively lived struggles, including class struggle, anti-colonialism, and the labor movement, have been progressively superseded by those

focused on self-realization, personal adaptation, and individual success. As part and parcel of this trend, cultures of commemoration in multiple European societies have correspondingly shifted their focus from collectively lived forms of politics to themes of reformist passage, economic modernization, and entrepreneurial success. This trend marks not only an ideological displacement in historical narratives but also, bit by bit, a displacement of historical meanings, whereby social conflict increasingly loses its political edges and historical process itself increasingly gets reframed from one of struggle to one of managed adaptation.

The paper examines the neoliberal mode of past representation and its respective impact on memory and historiography. By employing theories of neoliberal governmentality in respect to the discursive construction of meaning, and methodologies of memory studies and historical sociology, the project examines the ways in which the rationality of neoliberal culture reshapes the conscience of the past. The first level of examination covers the way the representation of the past changes in neoliberal culture. The second level of examination covers the production of past-related understandings of the subject. The last level of examination entails the analysis of case studies in regard to the representation of the collective memory of society. The final level of conclusion covers the impact of the neoliberal way of representing the past on the future of historiography.

The culture of the market and the production of historical subjects

In this section, the theories of neoliberal governmentality and cultural political economy will be mainly used to critically examine how the rationality of the market reshapes collective subjectivity and temporality. In particular, it focuses on how the discourse of neoliberalism recasts the concepts of history and memory in terms of personal self-administration, flexibility, and performance, as opposed to struggles and conflicts.[1]

1 Thomas Biebricher, *The Political Theory of Neoliberalism* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 88-96.

A history of neoliberalism, from the latter half of the 20th century until today, resists examination if considered only in terms of its economic moment and applications. This is because neoliberalism started as a particular set of policy initiatives, only to become a wider culture of signification, in which the way individuals understand themselves, social relations, and by extension, time, is reshaped in certain ways. It is not simply a notion of the market that functions as a device of resource allocation, but a set of principles that organizes social experience in terms of subjectivity. In this wider cultural field, the concept of autonomy becomes linked to that of perpetual transformation, whereby the value of the individual is measured in terms of his or her competitiveness, in which the path of one's life becomes a space of risk efficiency. This leads to a disembodiment of history, in which collective meanings are effaced, in which history becomes not a social phenomenon, but a story of individual progress or failure.[2]

A normativity of historic perception is introduced that leads to a transformation of history into a realm of individual management. This is not a process of encouraging the individual to see history as a common reservoir of experiences, as a realm of meanings shared collectively, but rather as a body of usable examples that are to be turned into capital. Memory is no longer a bond that ties the individual to structures of society, to class experiences, to historical struggles, but a process of privatized self-assertion that revolves around the theme of a personal history, of a process of self-improvement, of a "entrepreneurial" reading of experience. As this logic is gradually integrated, the relationship between historical memory and the trajectories of a collectivity is abandoned in favor of a new focus on the performativity of the individual narrative. Indeed, the use value of history is no longer measured in terms of its role in shaping shared orientations or in grasping social conflicts, but in terms of its potential to attest to a "trajectory of resilience" and of "investment-oriented appropriation" of history as a personal experience.[3]

2 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23-31.

3 Dionysis Asimiadis, "The Witches of the Reich: The Dimension of Female Mysticism in Nazi

Within this larger transformation, the neoliberal rationality works not only to shape the institutional and political structures but also reaches down to the level of historical perception itself. The transformation of history within neoliberal culture is a process delivered by the establishment of specific norms of historical interpretation that reconstruct the relation between individuals and historical time. Instead of functioning as a common horizon for collective memory, history is recreated as a resource available to be tapped at the level of the human subject. It is here that a specific normative status within historical perception is developed.[4]

Anti-fascistic experience, which constituted a central axis of the idea of a democratic culture of the sort that had been formed since World War II, came gradually into disfavor in favor of experiences that favored "European competitiveness" in a globally interlinked environment. This transition is not only a transition in a thematic focus of a commemorative culture; this transition is a condition of a profound transformation of a historical sensibility in the realm of a political use of history, as a condition of a transition from a collectively experienced trauma of a "war" as well as a "state of dictatorship," in favor of a history in terms of a legitimization of a market-oriented economic idea as well as a celebration of a creativity of individual adaptability as a collectively shared value.[5]

At the same time, in the realm of cultural production films, documentaries, autobiographies, online forms of digital storytelling a new aesthetics of the "self-made subject" is gradually institutionalized, where a crisis becomes a problem of the subject rather than of the social. In the aftermath of the economic crisis of 2008, the public culture of the West is characterized by a systematic privileging of stories of the subject's ability to compensate, rebuild the subject, and derive "creative"

Ideology," *Dianoesis* 17, n.º 1 (2025): 271-294.

4 Dag Einar Thorsen, "The Neoliberal Challenge: What Is Neoliberalism?," *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice* 2, n.º 2 (2010): 130-141.

5 Michael Clarke, *Regulation: The Social Control of Business between Law and Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 112-119.

outcomes from the process of destruction. Losing a job, losing social relations, losing mechanisms of social protection is not a consequence of a set of structural economic policies, of a crisis of capital accumulation, of a crisis of power, of a crisis of subjectification of capital, of a crisis of capital as a subject of history, of a crisis of capital as power incarnate in a particular form of governance of the economic, of a crisis of capital in the form of a set of relations of power that constitutes a particular form of governance of the economic. Rather, losing a job, losing social relations, losing social protection is a stepping stone toward subjectification, toward the process of subjectification as a crafting of a new subject capable of a new compensate-and-rebel strategy of making a new way out of crisis, of making a new career out of crisis, of making a new product out of crisis, of making a new subject out of crisis, of making a new life out of crisis.[6]

This shift is particularly visible in contemporary forms of cultural production. Films, documentaries, autobiographical narratives, and digital storytelling platforms increasingly privilege figures of the "self-made subject," whose trajectory is presented as a story of resilience, reinvention, and personal optimization. Within these narratives, crisis is framed less as a manifestation of structural contradictions and more as an individualized challenge to be managed and overcome. Especially in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, public culture in Western societies has systematically foregrounded stories of entrepreneurial recovery, creative self-reinvention, and adaptive success, while marginalizing accounts that emphasize social conflict, collective vulnerability, or structural inequality. In this way, cultural representations contribute to the normalization of a neoliberal historical sensibility in which the subject, rather than society, becomes the primary bearer of historical responsibility.[7]

6 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 100-108.

7 Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 205-220.

In this culture and political context, the idea of history becomes separated from any community of experience and is instead organized according to a new logic of personalized experience. Memory is no longer a space of social contestation over history and a means of critical reflection on the social past, but a strategy of subjectivation that enables individuals to legitimize themselves according to this new regime of history. By silencing the conflicts, asymmetries, and power relations that pervaded history, a new regime of history comes into existence in which the market is characterized as a concrete, automatic principle of social organization. History is no longer conceived as a space of articulation of experience and possibility of a society in a particular time, a place of production of biographies that are no longer separate, competing, and atomized, reproducing values of autonomy, flexibility, and performance of the singular subject able to frame his life according to this new regime of history.[8]

The neoliberal reconfiguration of public history and collective memory

The reshaping of history as a form of memory under the neoliberal regime is also evident in the realm of public history, where the state-defined memories of history, museums, and culture of the past come to be shaped not in the form of a set of shared experiences relating to conflict and struggle within society, but in terms of success, productivity, and a competitive framework of identity. History as a form of shared political experience comes to be characterized not by a set of assumed shared experiences of the past that underpin the notion of progress as a social activity, but by a set of assertions that underpin the notion of progress as a product of individual initiative.[9]

At this point, it is necessary to move from a descriptive analysis of the transformation of memory to an investigation of the mecha-

8 Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe, eds., *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Liberal Thought Collective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 233-241.

9 Regina F. Bendix, Aditya Eggert and Arnika Peselmann, eds., *Heritage Regimes and the State* (Göttingen: Göttingen University Press, 2013), 348, doi:10.4000/books.gup.

nisms underlying a specific type of transformation through neoliberal discourse. Already in these cases, memory management occurs in conjunction with neoliberalism in a more than auxiliary way: in fact, it shapes the very terms under which memory and the past are produced as meaningful and legitimate.[10] Nation-building and urban history, and conflict in the past, are re-coded in terms of a rhetoric of efficiency, competitiveness, and innovativity, and in terms of the reliability and effectiveness of institutions. Historically defined conflict is neither explicitly disavowed nor explicitly forgotten; rather, it is effectively effaced through depoliticization, aestheticization, and managerialization. The end result is a transformation of memory into a resource to be managed, optimized, and harmonized with the demands of economic and developmental governance. Here, the cases covered, from the US and the UK to post-transition Spain and modern Athens, demonstrate the extent to which neoliberal reason seeps into public history and transforms social conflict into stories of successful transition and renovation.[11]

In the context of post-Cold War Europe, this transition is associated with the progressive erosion of the antifascist paradigm in public memory. The collapse of the regimes in Eastern Europe and the integration of Europe can be understood as a trigger for the transition to a politics of memory rooted in the values of economic liberalization and "rationalization" and integration in the challenging global context. A politics of memory is understood to be rooted in the memory of the past.[12]

The Berlin example is particularly illuminating with regard to this dynamic. After reunification, the memory topography of Berlin was reformulated in terms of the story of the success of liberal democracy

10 Dionysis Asimiadis & Elias Vavouras, Neoliberal Spatialities of the Self: Everyday Architectures of Optimization in Digital and Urban Environments, *Space and Culture*, *0*(0) (2026), https://doi.org/10.1177/12063312261448027

11 Dionysis Asimiadis, "The Political Economy of Neoliberalism in the Global South," *The Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean Review* 2, n.º 1 (2025).

12 Nick Tsampazis, "The Natural Gift in Rousseau's Politics and Educational Theory," *Dianoesis* 15, n.º 2 (2024): 139-152, https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.38178.

and the "successful" transition to a market economy. By contrast, the memory of working-class culture and the "antifascist tradition" of East Germany faded away. This memory came to be disvalued and delegitimized as a symbol of the "outmoded" world of politics. These spaces of collective memory related to industry and working-class culture came to lose their historical density and to be reformulated according to the logic of Berlin's reconstruction and the cultural economy. Berlin's public history came to be organized less in terms of the social history of its experience of the twentieth century and more according to the principles of innovation and entrepreneurial creativity. In effect, "the collective memory of conflict and engagement fades away to be replaced with a memory that does not see the transition to the market economy as a choice at all, but as the inevitable path to follow a path indicative not of politics per se but of progress".[13]

A representative example in this context was the delegitimization and subsequent tearing down of the Palast der Republik, which was one of the key symbolic representations of the German Democratic Republic, in preparation for the subsequent establishment of the Humboldt Forum, symbolizing the rehabilitation of the pre-socialist narrative. This was consistent in the sense that parts of the Berlin Wall, especially the East Side Gallery, were converted from conflict locations to touristic environments, largely decoupled from the conflictive meaning they originally portrayed.

Within areas such as Prenzlauer Berg, working-class and politicized neighborhoods of East Berlin were quickly reshaped through privatization and gentrification processes, transformed into symbols of a new drift towards a "creative city." Memories of class-based politicization were neither openly suppressed nor forbidden, but simply made redundant by their replacement with discourses of creativity, openness, and competitiveness. The working-class neighborhoods of Eastern Berlin were reshaped from politicized communities into spaces of cultural

13 Melinda Cooper, "The Alt-Right: Neoliberalism, Libertarianism and the Fascist Temptation," *Theory, Culture & Society* 38, n.º 6 (2021): 29-50, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276421999446.

consumerism and entrepreneurial urbanism, decoupling places of former socialist labor culture and antifascist politics from their politicization.

A similar dynamic is at work in Spain during the transition. The lack of a memory policy with regard to the anti-Franco resistance and the Civil War opened up a space for the construction of a model of "silent reconciliation," in which economic liberalization and swift integration into the global market became the basis for the new social and political order. Conflict and tragedy in history gave way to a story of economic success and a "modernized" nation with dynamic entrepreneurs. This memory of violence and social resistance had to cede place to the aesthetics of optimism consistent with competitiveness and entrepreneurship.[14]

The new mnemonic order that emerged in Spain beginning in the 1970s rested on the imperative to skirt any meaningful political confrontation with the violent past of Francoism. The so-called "pact of forgetting," formalized in the 1977 Amnesty Law and legitimized politically and culturally through the ideals of "reconciliation without remembrance," established a context in which the memory of the dictatorship and the Civil War could only have a private, not public or historical, status.[15]

This logic was materially reflected in emblematic memory sites such as the Valle de los Caídos, which for decades remained largely detached from critical historical reinterpretation. Rather than serving as a space of confrontation with authoritarian violence, such sites were absorbed into a depoliticized narrative of national reconciliation, compatible with a forward-looking discourse of modernization and economic integration. The unresolved status of these memorials exemplified a broader tendency to treat historical conflict as an obstacle to social consensus and developmental progress.

14 Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 114-126.

15 Friedrich Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty: Volume 1. Rules and Order* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1982), 53-59.

In Latin America, Chile during the post-dictatorship era provides a typical illustration of the neoliberal treatment of history. The transition to democracy took place within a context in which the economic policies of the regime remained intact, and memory became a depoliticized form of resistance. History became a public concern that revolved around economic stabilization and the "maturity" of institutions and economies, to the extent that the violence of repression and the social organization of resistance became a form of subordinated history. It seemed that the neoliberal model itself represented a promise of social advancement and became a memory culture with a neoliberal ethic related to the principles of private social responsibility.[16]

In the Anglo-Saxon world, the reforms of the 1980s in the United Kingdom and the United States were accompanied by an intensive effort to re-signify national history. Working-class memory was marginalized, and the collective image of the labor movement receded behind a narrative of national entrepreneurial revival and the triumph of individual initiative. Political memory was structured around forms of private responsibility and economic self-reliance, while social conflicts and the struggles of subordinate classes were relegated to footnotes in the national narrative.[17]

A pattern similar to the one above developed in the Greek capital of Athens after the year 2000. These activities of urban regeneration, the promotion of the culture of the city, and the organization of global events contributed to the flowering of the "urban extroversion" paradigm, which tended to dim the memory of democracy's fight and of social movements during the history of post-dictatorship Greece. The neoliberal ideology of "developmental dynamism" penetrated the public space through architectural transformation and cultural initiatives in

16 Friedrich Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty: Volume 2. The Mirage of Social Justice* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1982), 86-93.

17 Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishers, 1972), 231-240.

such a way that the axis of the historical understanding of the urban experience became economic prosperity.[18]

The concept of "urban extroversion" in Athens can be grasped not as a matter of mere cultural transformation but as a concrete synthesis of infrastructural projects, heritage reconceptualizations and cultural institutions. These factors were enhanced in the run-up to the Olympic Games in 2004 and later constituted a new urban imaginary. The Olympic cycle served as a discursive vehicle to enhance an umbrella project covering a broad range of initiatives aiming at making Athens readable as a "modern European metropolis." Major transport and mobility initiatives included the upgrading of the Athens Metro and its expansion, the reinstatement of the Tram transport system, in function in 2004 and road construction initiatives related to the broader metropolitan transport links.[19]

The process involved characteristic heritage and tourism-oriented projects often described as a synthesis of the city's classical history and a tourism-oriented present. In particular, this involved the project known colloquially as "the unification of archaeological sites," together with characteristic pedestrianization projects surrounding the old town. These projects significantly altered the everyday experience of the city center along a trajectory of curated cultural consumption. As a result, city space was reclaimed and now serves as a focus for investment, branding, and cultural experience. Former industrial and infrastructural areas were transformed for cultural and recreational use, and "regeneration" and "quality of life" increasingly became a managerial discourse addressing conflictual urban history. The post-Olympic legacy of characteristic facilities and sites further developed this trajectory: a number of facilities constructed for the Olympics are now in a condition of prolonged abandonment or post-use conflict, becoming a public

18 Andreas Andrianopoulos, *Neoliberalism for Beginners* (Thessaloniki: Epikentro Publications, 2017), 91-97.

19 Aspa Gospodini, "Portraying, Classifying and Understanding the Emerging Landscapes in the Post-industrial City," *Cities* 23, n.º 5 (2006): 311-330.

icon of a development model fixated on mega-events and spectacle rather than a collective long-term need.[20]

In this sense, it is not only that Athens was modernized during its Olympic cycle; rather, it is a matter of how it reshaped the terms according to which its history and its meaning could be made to count as "useful," promoting only those narratives pertinent to its role in a globally focused expansion and downplaying its memory of social struggle. Notably, this mnemonic transformation gained pace rather than receding with the advent of the crisis and ensuing austerity regime beginning in 2010. The crisis neither brought back memory to antagonism nor simply kept it there; rather, it regularly extended and deepened rather than interrupted and challenged the framework according to which it came to define Athens's place in a globally aware future: Athens was further supplemented with storytelling strategies emphasizing its actions and meanings through a logic of resilience and transformation and cultural entrepreneurship; and it came to understand heritage anew according to its imagination with regard to a tourism-strategically driven governance. New "flagship" institutions further cemented these initiatives with a future-perfect cultural topography; indeed, a series of new institutions further cemented and further formalized a cultural role understandable only and exclusively according to a future-actualized explanation; thus, either a newly established flagship institution emphasizing its role through a series of developed and established contemporary cultural events and projects emerged with a brand-new cultural significance and role in Athens's newly reshaped topography and image with a newly established so-called Onassis Stegi established and launched in December 2010 and depicting and thus establishing its newly reshaped profile and role in Athens in a high-end cultural and artistic transformation and role and emphasizing thus its newly reshaped and interpreted logic and action according to its indicator-term logic and explanation through its core and newly established action emphasizing its newly reshaped aim and

20 Lila Leontidou, "Urban Social Movements in «Weak» Civil Societies: The Right to the City and Cosmopolitan Activism in Southern Europe," *Urban Studies* 47, n.º 6 (2010): 1179-1203.

role according to its logic and indicator-term explanations with a newly obtained cultural and artistic status and role as a newly established contemporary cultural and artistic platform and resource and another newly established.[21]

From the formation of neoliberal memory politics in diverse territories, it is possible to see that there is one logic at work: that of disconnecting experience with collective forms of action in order to construct it according to the ethic of individual initiative. The politics of conflict is consigned to a footnote, whilst the "story of smooth transition," "institutional reconstruction," and "economic maturation" constitutes the public discourse according to which history itself is developed through the market. In the realm of public memory, such a transformation of the historical imaginary means the progressive deactivation of the collective forms of memory and the gradual effacement of the conflictual element of the past. The politics of memory is replaced with a technology of forgetting characterized by the primacy of stability and consensus over the image of a "modernized" national body. The public space is no longer a place for the promotion of historical sensitivity but rather the means for the ratification of the value of performance and "success."[22]

This produces a compaction of the critical reflection of a society on the elementary forms of its collective existence. Memory ceases to be a means of critical and transformative democracy to simply serve as a means to ensure a smoothly functioning incorporation of subjects within a normalized economic and cultural space. This is precisely the place where the strongest disruption takes place: the historicity of emancipation is deprived of its horizon and frozen at a non-political tempo in which the past simply verifies the present.[23]

Neoliberal knowledge and the transformation of historiography

21 Yannis Hamilakis, *The Nation and Its Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 186-199.

22 Basiliki Sioufa, "Alasdair Macintyre: A Critic of Modernity," *Dianoesis* 13, n.º 2 (2024): 127-140, https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.37786.

23 Thomas R. Dye, *Understanding Public Policy* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2013), 209-223.

Neoliberal rationality is implicated in the overall knowledge regime, with direct implications for the practice of historiography and for the terms of the academic status of historical knowledge. This does not merely concern the organization of knowledge domains or methodological standards. The structure of knowledge domains and methodological standards corresponds to value systems that receive legitimacy through market mediation. These involve not just the performativity of knowledge results and their alignment with normative standards of productivity. It is necessary for historical knowledge to subject itself to metrics of assessment that correlate academic excellence with indicators of "efficiency," "managerial performance," and "productivity" output. It is within this context that "originality" is no longer measured according to its potential to question established standards of historiography or to shed "historical insight" on forms of social experience heretofore marginalized. It is measured according to alignment with metrics and with processes of "usefulness."[24]

Prior to examining the meaning of neoliberal rationality in relation to the practice of historiography and the production of knowledge, it is necessary to clarify the nature of neoliberalism as an intellectual enterprise. Neoliberalism has been misconstrued as a series of economic propositions, but it actually exemplifies a distinctive way of thinking about society, temporality, and the nature of change.[25] Whether in the form of Hayek's constructive criticisms of constructivist rationalism or in the ideas of Friedman, who focused on the role of the responsible, learning individual, neoliberal discourse henceforth has consistently positioned itself as a skeptical approach to the kind of historical mindedness that imagines a collective political asset in the appeal to history.[26]

As shown in the work of Mirowski and Plehwe, neoliberalism is a collectively realized intellectual project in which the narratives of

24 Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham, *Using Foucault's Methods* (London: Sage, 1999), 84-88.

25 Dionysis Asimiadis and Foteini Kagioglou, "The Algorithmic Transformation of the Homo Economicus: Neoliberalism, Artificial Intelligence, and the End of Anthropocentrism", *Dia-Noesis: A Journal of Philosophy* 19, n.º1 (2026), 15-36

26 Dionysis Asimiadis and Foteini Kagioglou, "The Trauma of Autonomy: Neoliberalism and the Forms of the Subject's Exile", *Dia-Noesis: A Journal of Philosophy* 18, n.º 2 (2025), 63-82.

necessity and inevitability are constructed in such a way as to naturalize the market as a transhistorical agency, as opposed to a historically specific institution. In this way, the past is reduced from a field of conflictual density to a repository of lessons on efficiency, flexibility, and failure. In this sense, Foucault's work on neoliberal governmentality, as described in *The Birth of Biopolitics*, is illuminative of how a regime of truth is created in which the explanation of history is secondary to economic rationality, in which memory is displaced in favor of optimization techniques and self-government.[27]

Nevertheless, from this point, neoliberalism not only fails to account for history but also reworks it. History makes sense in so far as it confirms the need and efficacy of competition, the rightness and righteousness of inequality, and, most importantly, the necessity and inevitability of the market. This epistemological stand has profound implications for historical discourse and memory politics, which further narrows down the playing field in which history can function.[28]

Publication itself increasingly takes on the status of a performative indicator rather than a sign of analytical depth, and academic legitimacy itself is transferred less from the strength of argument to the strength of attraction and alignment with resource priorities. The history of thought is brought under a discipline of knowledge that institutes practices of self-regulation, adaptation, and results production according to predetermined parameters and constraints. This regime is not only established through formal regulations at this institutional level; it is also produced on a daily basis through a microphysics of practices. It involves the translation of "research success" to systematic conformity with established formats not only with regard to subject matters of choice but also with regard to the manner of presenting the results. An established focus on "clarity," "objectivity," and "applicability" with regard to methodological tools is presented as a mode

27 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 144-160.
28 Karl Raimund Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (Hassell Street Press, 2021), 95-103.

of technical neutrality. This mode prevents interpretations that focus attention on conflictual and subversive aspects of history.[29]

The historian is asked to function as a manager of institutional expectations: to articulate proposals in the language of operational goals, to show the 'value' of their work in programmatic form, to structure their work according to schedules of productivity, to enter collectively organized networks with preferences for the reproduction of institutionally recognizable models. The very role of bibliographic practice is altered: citation patterns not merely signify scientific communication but serve as well to display institutional affiliation and conformity to currents of inquiry that have established their 'value' and priority of production. A novel form of academic rivalry appears, in which focus moves not to the patiently dug-up sources or to systematic inquiry into the structure of historical experience itself, but to an effort to achieve itself through methods of adaptation. Synthesis, theoretical discussion, and carefully constructed historical inquiry give place to methods prioritizing efficacy, the success of the manager, and visibility to indicators of 'impact.' Knowledge itself is brought to model the role of a scientific subject not functioning as critical analyst of social process but as producer of systematic and 'monitorable' results.[30]

Institutional hierarchies reinforce this direction. Access to resources and career advancement depend on the researcher's ability to present themselves as an efficient agent of a model of "academic entrepreneurship," which subjects historiography to logics of operational planning and instrumentalization. The pursuit of truth and historical understanding is replaced by the production of results recognizable by an institutionalized evaluation apparatus one often shaped by funding requirements rather than the needs of historical inquiry.[31]

29 James D. Faubion, ed., *Foucault Now: Current Perspectives in Foucault Studies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 31-36.

30 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. Birth of the Prisons* (Broadway, NY: Random House, 1977), 164-180.

31 Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 380-390.

In many countries, the funding of historical research has been restructured according to criteria that privilege topics compatible with the ideology of institutional stability and social consensus. Fields that focus on social conflict, subordinate groups, struggles for collective rights, and critical analyses of state and economic mechanisms tend to be marginalized in favor of research agendas aligned with "developmental" narratives, studies of institutional "maturation," and projects emphasizing the adaptability of societies to economic imperatives. The research landscape is gradually shaped not by the theoretical imperatives of historical investigation but by the pursuit of institutional reward.[32]

The logic of evaluation introduces new forms of discipline into scholarly activity. The production of historical knowledge incorporates measurement indicators, short-term performance horizons, and the expectation of added "social value," often equated with visibility in the public sphere and the ability to attract funding resources. Research becomes an activity of resource management and simultaneously a practice of self-surveillance: the historian is required to internalize a system of continuous proof of effectiveness, regulating not only the content of scholarly production but also the very formation of academic identity. The very notion of the historical object is also displaced. Topics intersecting with concepts such as innovation, economic adaptability, entrepreneurial activity, and political consensus acquire privileged status not because of scholarly merit, but because they correspond to the dominant value system. Conversely, historiography that investigates state violence, the materiality of social inequalities, the role of movements, and the structures of exploitation is often treated as outdated or "pessimistic," and in certain contexts stigmatized as politically "unproductive."[33]

It is a transformation of the very expectation of what historical inquiry is supposed to achieve. The critical potential of historical discourse to disclose the contradictions contained within silenced experi-

32 Eileen Ka-May Cheng, *Historiography: An Introductory Guide* (London: Continuum, 2012), 132-141.

33 Adam Budd, *The Modern Historiography Reader* (London: Routledge, 2008), 225-243.

ences and to place at the forefront forms of collective action against the existing order is circumscribed within the orbit of a prevailing epistemological order that ensconces the neoliberal configuration of the world within a logic of inevitability. History is no longer to be conceived as a site for critical engagement with the past and its contradictions; instead, history could well transform itself into a descriptive knowledge of evolutionary processes to match the tenets of a "rational" historicizing of the social.[34]

Thus, neoliberal logic is not simply externalized as a framework or structure but is also internalized as a horizon. It is a structure of historical normativity wherein conflict is rendered deviation itself, memory of emancipation is rendered unnecessary baggage, and the potential of history to constitute itself as a field of politics is severely circumscribed. The production of historical knowledge is rendered a means of stabilizing the economic order at its current level even as it sustains the illusion of scientific status.[35]

Conclusion

Neoliberalism is not only imposed as a regime of economic governance but also as a form of historical thought and social understanding. The logic of historicity is organized according to principles of efficiency, adaptability, and individual performance, leading to a circumscribed form of understanding social change as the outcome of collective struggle. Memory and history come to be incorporated in mechanisms of normalization that emphasize stability over disruption, consensus rather than conflict, and individual accountability rather than collective action. The modes of institutionalized knowledge production begin to adopt forms of evaluation according to market performativity.

The establishment of such a regime of historical reception has increased the distance between the experience of history contained in

34 Nick Tsampazis. "The Cognitive Grounds of Hobbes' Leviathan," *Dianoesis* 13 (2024): 63-84, https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.37783.

35 Sioufa, "*Alasdair Macintyre*".

social struggles and the manner in which history is understood at the current juncture. The critical potential of history as a means of critique and the role of history as a site of alternatives to current forms of social organization is undermined, and a temporality is established that places a preference on depoliticization and the appropriation of history through the means of technology. The primacy of flexibility and self-management as the historical virtues is not simply ideological; it constitutes new subject-positions and makes impossible the role of memory as the bearer of a democratic imagination.

Despite the strength of such dispositions, there is always the potential for the discipline of historiography to emphasize the contradictory nature of history and to recover experiences that have been rendered invisible. Critical history can always challenge the limitations of the institution of normalcy to resituate history as a site of contingency. Emphasizing actions in history that diverge from the horizon of effectiveness compels one to recognize that history is driven by conflict and the potential of societies to remake their norms.

The role of historical scholarship in the current democratic context is to confirm the radical openness of social time. It is only with an understanding of history as a space in which the forms of power and resistance have been formulated that one can imagine alternative futures. History as the practice of critical thought can serve as a resistance to the neoliberal version of history and can revive the collective function of thought and dissent.

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Pierre Nora (1931-2025). L'histoire, la mémoire, le présent. *In memoriam*

Felipe Brandi*

Le 2 juin 2025 disparaissait, à l'âge de 93 ans, Pierre Nora, figure majeure de l'historiographie, de l'édition des sciences sociales et de la vie intellectuelle françaises. Élu à l'Académie française en 2001, professeur à l'Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris puis directeur d'études à l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, il figure parmi les principaux artisans du renouvellement de l'historiographie au cours du dernier demi-siècle. À la tête de collections qui ont profondément marqué les sciences de l'homme françaises – notamment la « Bibliothèque des Histoires », la « Bibliothèque des sciences humaines » et « Archives » –, il fit connaître à un large public et inscrivit durablement dans le paysage intellectuel français les œuvres d'auteurs majeurs comme Georges Duby, Jacques Le Goff, Georges Dumézil, Michel Foucault, Mona Ozouf, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, François Furet, Frances Yates et bien d'autres

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encore. Homme de revue, Pierre Nora dirigea et anima pendant quatre décennies, aux côtés de Marcel Gauchet et de Krzysztof Pomian, *Le Débat*, fondé chez Gallimard en 1980 et devenu au fil des ans un observatoire privilégié de la vie intellectuelle en France.

Par son activité d'éditeur comme par ses écrits, Pierre Nora contribua ainsi à faire émerger et à consacrer de nouveaux objets, de nouvelles interrogations et de nouvelles manières de penser et d'écrire l'histoire. La trilogie *Faire de l'histoire* (1974), qu'il dirigea avec Jacques Le Goff, les monumentaux *Lieux de mémoire* (1984-1993), ainsi que les *Essais d'ego-histoire* (1987) sont devenus de véritables classiques de l'historiographie contemporaine, des références incontournables pour plusieurs générations d'historiens. Ayant rencontré une large audience internationale, ces ouvrages ont renouvelé la réflexion et la recherche en histoire, transformant non seulement les objets et les questionnements de l'historien, mais aussi le rapport même que celui-ci entretient avec le temps, l'événement, la mémoire et le présent. Peu d'œuvres, au cours des cinquante dernières années, auront ainsi exercé une influence aussi durable sur l'historiographie, en France comme au-delà de ses frontières.

Mémoire, patrimoine, histoire du temps présent, histoire publique, usages du passé : ces domaines sont devenus des dimensions centrales de l'historiographie contemporaine, en France comme à l'échelle internationale, et leur essor au cours des quarante dernières années doit beaucoup à l'impulsion décisive donnée par Pierre Nora. C'est pour rappeler l'ampleur de son héritage intellectuel et la place singulière que son œuvre et sa pensée occupent au sein des transformations récentes de l'historiographie que la revue *Práticas da História* a souhaité lui rendre hommage, à l'occasion du premier anniversaire de sa disparition. Nous tenons ainsi à exprimer notre plus vive gratitude aux professeurs François Dosse, Christophe Prochasson et Thomas Serrier, qui nous ont fait l'honneur d'accepter notre invitation et de contribuer à cet hommage en nous confiant leurs témoignages sur Pierre Nora, sur son œuvre et sur l'homme qu'ils ont connu et côtoyé. Par la singularité des regards qu'ils portent sur lui, ces témoignages offrent un éclairage précieux et

vivant sur sa personnalité, son parcours, ses écrits, son aura et son legs. Nous leur sommes donc particulièrement reconnaissants pour ce geste d'amitié et de générosité, par lequel ils ont accepté de partager avec nos lecteurs le souvenir de Pierre Nora et leur connaissance de son œuvre. Enfin, nous avons souhaité accompagner leurs textes d'une étude d'historiographie – un essai de mise en perspective du parcours intellectuel de Pierre Nora et de sa pensée historienne, dont le propos est de faire ressortir l'originalité de sa réflexion sur ce qu'il appelait la « dimension historiographique de l'histoire ».

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Pierre Nora: le moment Nora

François Dosse*

Pierre Nora aura été un monument pour la discipline historique de la dimension de ce qu'a été Ernest Lavisse au XIX^e^ siècle, mais pour construire une tout autre histoire, passant du roman national à une histoire réflexive, au second niveau. Il aura aussi été un éditeur hors-pair qui a orchestré l'âge d'or des sciences sociales en France dans les années 1960-70.

Je lui ai consacré une biographie intellectuelle parue en 2011, *Pierre Nora. Homo historicus* qui m'a permis de le côtoyer et ce fut un enchantement. Pourtant, qui aurait pu imaginer qu'un jour je me lancerai avec passion dans sa biographie ? Pas moi en tout cas, et certainement pas lui non plus, ni en général la confrérie historienne. Lorsque je publiais *L'histoire en miettes* en 1987, j'avais pour thèse adverse à démonter la déconstruction de la discipline historique qu'il incarnait alors avec sa notion d'éclatement portée comme l'étendard de la nou-

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velle histoire dans sa « Bibliothèque des histoires » chez Gallimard. Si je pressentais bien que c'était là et pas ailleurs que se trouvait la pensée en histoire, j'étais persuadé qu'il y avait un sens de l'histoire dont il convenait d'accélérer le rythme, tâche dévolue à chaque génération, et dont l'historien devait dévoiler le moteur. La référence actuelle à la notion de sens n'a plus la même signification. Elle entend exprimer le fait que l'agir et le dire humains sont porteurs d'un sens émergeant dont les sciences humaines ont à rendre compte. Cela ne présuppose aucun *telos*, mais une approche herméneutique de l'autre dans l'espace et dans le temps. Je pensais appartenir à une génération qui n'avait pas eu à faire le deuil – qui a conduit la génération précédente, celle de l'après-guerre, et parmi elle beaucoup d'historiens passés par le PCF (François Furet, Denis Richet, Jacques Ozouf, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie...) – à brûler l'objet de leur adoration. Je réalise aujourd'hui à quel point ma génération a dû elle aussi réaliser un véritable travail de deuil par rapport à ce qui a constitué pour beaucoup d'entre nous l'identité politique de notre jeunesse, nourrie par une conviction inébranlable en des lendemains qui chantent et consacrant tous nos efforts à faire chanter l'histoire à l'occasion d'un prochain grand soir.

Il a fallu « faire avec » la mort de cette espérance eschatologique au rythme des découvertes de ce qu'elle recouvrait. Ayant eu à vivre des années orphelines et retrouver d'autres voies d'espérance, c'est dans cette quête d'une autre voie que j'ai découvert que la perspective historiographique ouverte par Pierre Nora était celle d'une quête constante de sens, de reprise réflexive d'un sens toujours instable et lié à l'agir, au présent. Au-delà de l'épistémologie historienne, il y a eu la rencontre avec l'homme et la découverte progressive de ses qualités personnelles, insoupçonnées du public, masquées sous sa réputation de mondain, séduisant mais homme de caste ne dérogeant pas à la règle de l'endogamie et restant confiné dans son milieu privilégié.

Le pur hasard m'a placé un jour dans la situation d'être un des maîtres de conférences de son cours magistral donné en 1995 à Sciences-Po sur l'historiographie en France aux XIX^e^ et XX^e^ siècle. En cette occasion privilégiée, j'ai pu découvrir un homme qui ne corres-

pondait pas du tout à cette image. Derrière l'arrogance et l'assurance supposées, je découvrais un intellectuel anxieux, peu sûr de lui, dans le doute sur lui-même et les autres, jamais assis sur une position de certitude, très à l'écoute, disponible ; autant de traits qui me l'ont rendu tout de suite très sympathique.

Contrairement à ce que l'on peut supposer, il porte un pessimisme de fond et un doute qui est profondément ancré en lui. J'aurai plus tard l'occasion de mesurer à quel point Pierre Nora est foncièrement affectif, attentif à l'autre, doté d'une sensibilité exacerbée, aimable au sens de Sénèque, en particulier lors de la disparition de Paul Ricoeur. Il m'enverra en ce moment douloureux une très belle lettre, attestant de cette extrême sensibilité, alors que nous n'étions encore nullement engagés dans quelque élaboration biographique le concernant : « Puisque je ne connais personne de la famille de Paul Ricoeur, c'est à vous que je pense spontanément pour partager ma tristesse, qui est réelle. Bien sûr une belle vie et une belle mort. Mais n'empêche. C'était un homme comme on n'en fait plus beaucoup, et il va nous manquer. A vous particulièrement. Au moins lui aurez-vous beaucoup donné, de son vivant [1]. »

Ces qualités, j'en avais eu un avant-goût plus tôt, lorsque s'était révélée à moi la probité de l'honnête homme dans la mesure où, en tant que pourfendeur de ses thèses, il aurait pu légitimement m'inscrire sur la liste noire des interdits de séjour. Tout au contraire, dès 1988, soit un an seulement après la publication de *L'histoire en miettes*, Pierre Nora m'ouvrait les colonnes de sa revue *Le Débat* pour exprimer mon point de vue sur les *Essais d'ego-histoire* [2]. Plus tard, il consacrera tout un dossier à la publication de mon *Histoire du structuralisme* dans *Le Débat* [3], et plus tard encore, il me demandera d'écrire un article à l'occasion du vingtième anniversaire de la revue sur le changement de repères revendiqués par les intellectuels entre 1980 et 2000 [4]. Cette ouverture atteste de la part de Pierre Nora une conception de ce qu'est pour lui le

1 Pierre Nora, lettre du 26 mai 2005.

2 François Dosse, « Autour de l'ego-histoire », *Le Débat* (mars 1988) : 122-124.

3 *Le Débat* 73 (janvier-février 1993).

4 *Le Débat* 110 (mai-août 2000).

débat démocratique, dénué de l'esprit de secte, posture exceptionnelle dans un monde intellectuel français plus souvent familier des exclusives et des anathèmes.

De mon côté, j'évoluais d'un marxisme critique à son deuil progressif et à l'abandon de la téléologie qu'il portait. Ayant réalisé ce travail de deuil grâce à ma plongée dans l'œuvre de Paul Ricoeur, je ressentais le désir d'écrire une biographie intellectuelle de Pierre Nora peu après avoir achevé celle consacrée à Paul Ricoeur. Au printemps 1999, je lui soumettais un projet dans ce sens : « Votre place centrale dans la vie intellectuelle française en cette seconde moitié du siècle atteste l'intérêt que pourrait revêtir, plus qu'un livre d'entretiens, une véritable biographie intellectuelle qui rende compte de vos multiples activités d'éditeur, d'auteur, d'animateur de revue et de réseaux, de concepteur de projets, de passeur [5]. » J'ajoutais que me lançant alors dans une biographie de Michel de Certeau, rien ne pressait, et que l'on pouvait se donner le temps de la réflexion. Je n'ai pas reçu de réponse de Pierre Nora à cette lettre, mais alors que nous nous retrouvions à un colloque à Québec peu de temps après, il est venu s'assurer auprès de moi que j'avais bien compris son silence. Quand un peu interloqué, je lui répondis que je n'ai pas d'explication, il m'expliquait qu'il était en train de rédiger ses mémoires. Le félicitant de cette excellente et prometteuse initiative, je renonçais bien évidemment à mon projet.

Quelques années plus tard, Pierre Nora m'informe à la sortie d'un séminaire qu'il n'arrive pas à écrire ses mémoires, ce que je relie alors à un emploi du temps chargé incompatible avec la solitude nécessaire à leur réalisation, ce qui n'est pas faux, mais tient sans doute aussi à d'autres raisons plus profondes. Ne voyant rien venir, je me permets alors au mois de mai 2008 de revenir à la charge, gardant, sans trop y croire le secret espoir que cette biographie soit encore réalisable. Quelle ne fût donc pas ma joie d'entendre un jour au téléphone la voix si bien posée de Pierre Nora qui acceptait que l'on se voie pour en étudier la

5 François Dosse, lettre à Pierre Nora, 23 avril 1999.

possibilité et pour que l'on s'entende sur un dispositif d'écriture qui promettait de ne pas être simple.

La première question que je posais à Pierre Nora, tout en lui demandant de ne pas répondre tout de suite, était de réagir à l'affirmation de Jacques Derrida selon laquelle la catégorie de l'avenir est une catégorie juive par excellence. Pierre Nora a la réputation par ses objets de prédilection de faire valoir plutôt le passé, au point d'être devenu au sein de notre République Monsieur commémoration, l'homme par excellence des célébrations, des décorations, et d'une manière de muséographie, de patrimonialisation du passé. Je n'ai pas reposé ma question car mon enquête m'a appris combien, derrière ce faux-semblant, se lovait le regard toujours vif, toujours en alerte de possibles nouveautés, porté vers l'innovation, récusant systématiquement toute vision passéiste, nostalgique ou mélancolique, prêt même à trahir pour quelque aventure intellectuelle prometteuse.

A chaque étape de son parcours, on retrouve cette tension vers l'avenir, chemin non tracé justifiant de parcourir des expérimentations des plus inédites. Pierre Nora reste en alerte et sensible à l'événement dans sa force d'ébranlement, comme capacité d'ouverture à un monde nouveau. L'événement, par définition, est tout entier porté vers le devenir, à partir de la faille qu'il constitue entre passé et avenir : « Il semble que les événements soient plus vastes que le moment où ils ont lieu et ne peuvent y tenir tout entiers », écrit Proust [6]. Le sens d'une rencontre importante ou d'une décision majeure ne se révèle d'ailleurs que dans un après-coup : « Personne ne fait l'histoire, on ne la voit pas, pas plus qu'on ne voit l'herbe pousser [7] ». Ce retard, cet écart temporel, cette différ*a*nce comme l'appelait Derrida, dans le sens de différer, n'est pas un trait supplémentaire de l'événement, il est sa nature même. Et ce retour de l'événement est analysé par Pierre Nora dès 1972, lors même que toute l'historiographie dominante de l'époque lui tourne le dos.

6 Marcel Proust, *La prisonnière*, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, tome III (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 902.

7 Boris Pasternak, exergue de Claude Simon, *L'herbe* (Paris: Minuit, 1958).

Plus tard, la liaison qu'il entreprend entre histoire et mémoire se donne pour horizon d'en saisir les métamorphoses de sens, et Pierre Nora, peut être rapproché de Charles Péguy dans sa volonté de conserver du vif, du vivant dans ce qui est passé. On retrouve même, dans ce rapprochement avec Péguy, l'Affaire Dreyfus qui a tant marqué Péguy dans sa résistance à la fossilisation de l'événement pratiquée par l'école dominante chez les historiens, mais qui a aussi marqué la famille Nora en la personne du père de Pierre Nora, Gaston, qui l'a vécu difficilement en tant qu'enfant juif. Péguy dénonce la pratique de refroidissement des historiens de métier qui s'efforcent de penser « l'Affaire » en la rangeant dans un passé définitivement forclos, tout en pansant les plaies du passé. Au contraire, la mémoire continue à faire vivre cette affaire, à transmettre son sens, à scruter son secret, et à élever une protestation contre les responsables politiques qui auront réussi prématurément à transformer les citoyens actifs en historiens passifs : « Ils nous ont fait perdre *le goût* de l'affaire Dreyfus [8]. »

La disponibilité de Pierre Nora à l'événement, à l'actualité, à ce qui bouge, lui aura permis de traduire en historien les enjeux majeurs de son temps, d'être pleinement le contemporain du présent qu'il a traversé à la manière d'un poisson dans l'eau. On peut donc parler d'un moment Nora de la vie intellectuelle française de la même manière que l'on peut parler dans le passé d'un moment Michelet ou d'un moment Lavisse pour reprendre la généalogie d'une filiation d'historiens consacrés.

Ce moment est caractérisé par l'âge d'or des sciences humaines que Pierre Nora a orchestré, ayant eu la chance d'arriver chez Gallimard au moment même de l'explosion des sciences humaines au milieu des années 60. C'est aussi le moment du triomphe de ce que l'on a appelé la nouvelle histoire qui trouve en Pierre Nora celui qui, avec d'autres, en a assuré le rayonnement exceptionnel dans la décennie suivante, celle des années 70.

8 Charles Péguy, *Clio* (Paris: Gallimard, 1932), 256.

Pourtant cette adéquation qui semble sans failles entre Pierre Nora et ce qu'il a incarné est animée par un sentiment d'incomplétude de l'écrivain qu'il était destiné à être et qui reste sans œuvre personnelle, dont l'essentiel du temps aura été consacré à l'élaboration et à la diffusion des œuvres des autres. Telle est l'énigme essentielle de ce parcours, qui reste non résolue. Pierre Nora se sera nourri toute sa vie des autres avec d'autant plus d'intensité qu'il semble que la confrontation avec la solitude de l'écrivain lui soit difficile, éprouvante à affronter de par l'intensité d'une tension qu'il ressent au plus profond, qui le taraude et dont sinon la résolution, tout au moins son atténuation, aura été permise par le choix de consacrer sa vie à l'histoire.

En même temps on peut penser que ce que l'on peut qualifier de « moment Nora » aura joué contre Pierre Nora lui-même dans la mesure où il aura été à ce point absorbé par les exigences de ce moment intellectuel qu'il aura dû renoncer à sa vocation première d'écrivain, et donc abandonner toute idée de faire œuvre au sens traditionnel. Au regard des promesses de sa jeunesse, peut-on alors parler d'un certain échec personnel ? Tout son parcours et ses réalisations si nombreuses démontrent le contraire avec éclat. Il aura été un accoucheur d'exception de l'œuvre des autres, et loin de se contenter que l'on vienne à lui, il aura joué un rôle majeur qui est en soi une œuvre monumentale, plus fondamentale que bien des œuvres personnelles.

Il aura sur ce plan fait valoir une conception de la figure de l'éditeur qui se conçoit comme celle d'un vrai créateur, d'un auteur soucieux d'une certaine cohérence dans la mise en scène de la pluralité. Il aura par ailleurs, inconsciemment, résolu sa tension entre l'intellectuel juif qu'il est et l'historien spécialiste de l'histoire nationale en élaborant une partition particulièrement suggestive de l'agencement entre histoire et mémoire, introduisant un nouveau paradigme historique et initiant une nouvelle manière d'écrire l'histoire. Si une œuvre est une œuvre lorsqu'elle met au travail, et lorsqu'elle permet des rebonds, des ricochets à la surface de l'eau, Pierre Nora a bien fait œuvre, au-delà de ce que pouvaient pressentir ses proches lorsqu'il n'était qu'une jeune pousse prometteuse.

Il aura incarné un grand moment, particulièrement fécond, de la vie intellectuelle française. Mais ce moment revêt une fragilité qui tient au fait que Pierre Nora a quelque peu délaissé la question posée par la relève générationnelle de son héritage. Pour ne prendre que l'exemple significatif de sa revue, *Le Débat*, sa direction, restée immuable depuis 30 ans, est entre les mains de trois intellectuels de grand talent. Maître d'œuvres, il aura fait de sa vie une œuvre. Il se sera fait une certaine idée de l'édition a bien conscience de défendre une conception du métier qui est en train de prendre l'eau. Il se présente sur ce plan comme « un des derniers dinosaures », et j'en aurais fait l'heureuse expérience puisqu'il aura publié la synthèse de mon travail d'exploration de la vie intellectuelle française depuis 1944 en publiant mes deux volumes de ma *Saga* chez Gallimard [9]. De mon côté, j'ai réussi à le convaincre de publier ses magnifiques textes dispersés dans des revues difficilement accessibles. Il me disait que ce serait pour après et je l'ai convaincu en lui disant que, dans mon enquête, je ne cessais d'entendre qu'il était un excellent éditeur mais sans œuvre historique. Il a été convaincu par mes arguments et a publié pas moins de trois volumes, l'un dans la collection blanche, *Historien public* dans lequel il écrit : « C'est à François Dosse que je dois de m'y être décidé. Il m'avait poussé à publier, à l'appui de la biographie qu'il était en train de me consacrer, un recueil des interventions qu'il avait exhumées, ou rencontrées au cours de son enquête. Et, pour me convaincre, il m'avait même envoyé un premier canevas, assorti de présentations destinées à les remettre en contexte [10]. » Il en est résulté ce livre auquel se sont ajoutés deux ouvrages dans la « Bibliothèque des histoires [11] », avec cette dédicace personnelle humoristique car il avait beaucoup d'humour : « Pour vous, mon cher François. J'ai écouté et obéi. Merci ».

Dans cette biographie, j'ai tenu à me lancer dans une vaste enquête auprès de nombreux témoins pour démultiplier les points de vue et les éclairages, sollicitant de rencontrer ses proches, ses confrères, quelques-

9 François Dosse, *La saga des intellectuels français.* tome 1 *: A l'épreuve de l'histoire, 1944-1968*; tome 2: *L'avenir en miettes, 1968-1989* (Paris: Gallimard, 2018; rééd. « Folio », 2024).

10 Pierre Nora, *Historien public* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011), 11.

11 Pierre Nora, *Présent, nation, mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011); Pierre Nora, *Recherches de la France* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013).

uns de ses anciens étudiants, de ses innombrables auteurs. Si Pierre Nora a fait montre d'une grande disponibilité pour répondre à mes questions, il n'a nullement été interventionniste. Me laissant une liberté totale dans ma recherche, il m'a ouvert de plus en plus largement ces archives personnelles. Manifestant une confiance croissante à mon égard, je me suis tenu de mon côté à un effort de discrétion qui m'a coûté, car les moments précieux au cours desquels Pierre Nora répondait à mes questions ont été pour moi des moments privilégiés dont je n'ai pas voulu abuser. Sous le masque du sérieux académique, je découvrais en même temps son sens inné de l'humour, un imitateur doté d'un sens du cocasse, toujours sarcastique et dévastateur sur la comédie humaine qui l'entoure, maniant le scalpel avec un art consommé du récit.

Je plongeai donc, tête baissée, dans les archives des collections de Pierre Nora et me trouvai immergé dans le cœur du réacteur, celui de la fabrique de l'histoire et des sciences humaines pendant plus de quarante ans, incarnée par un tremblement de l'être, car je découvrais chez Pierre Nora une identité en abîme : sous l'éditeur connu, respecté et admiré par le public, je retrouvais l'historien qui m'était familier, tout en allant de surprise en surprise car sous l'historien, je devinais le littéraire, le poète, le créateur.

L'éditeur, qui en lui s'est identifié à l'excellence, recouvre une promesse non tenue, celle de l'auteur qui est pourtant là, bien présent, mais dans des textes souvent interstitiels, mal perçus dans leur cohérence par le public. Très jeune, il est bien conscient d'avoir une œuvre à accomplir et il l'aura accomplie en consacrant l'essentiel de sa vie aux œuvres des autres, faisant par là-même de sa vie une œuvre, une vie pour les autres. Soucieux de conserver la possibilité d'exprimer l'une ou l'autre de ses identités, Pierre Nora est toujours aux aguets, à l'écoute de la nouveauté, disponible pour l'accueillir. Cette disposition d'esprit a un prix, celui de renoncer à des appartenances institutionnelles trop lourdes qui ont tendance à soumettre l'individu qui les sert à suivre des rails tout tracés.

Toujours prêt à l'aventure intellectuelle, Pierre Nora est particulièrement soucieux de préserver son espace de liberté, ce qui fera de lui

ce qu'il appelle « un central latéral », il ne se laisse jamais réduire à sa fonction, si prestigieuse soit celle qu'il occupe chez Gallimard. Il entend en être, mais avec un pas d'écart qui lui permet une expression tout à fait libre. Ce geste qui consiste à préserver sa liberté est chez lui de l'ordre du vital, indispensable à sa respiration, chaque combat collectif où la liberté est mise à mal le trouvant aux avant-postes avec un courage certain qui contredit l'image répandue dans le public d'une « pensée tiède ». Que ceux qui en doutent lisent son ouvrage *Les Français d'Algérie*, ils y verront un regard glacé et glaçant, sans complaisance. Tous ces combats pour les libertés ont fait de lui le président presque naturel de l'association « Libertés pour l'histoire », succédant dans cette fonction à René Rémond.

Sous son succès public, sa mondanité, comme le dit son amie Mona Ozouf, « Pierre a l'intelligence du malheur », ce qui pondère singulièrement cette première impression. La traversée de la tragédie de la guerre entre 10 et 14 ans n'est pas étrangère à sa part d'ombre. L'équivoque identitaire qu'il ressent n'est pas sans effet sur son équilibre personnel. Pierre Nora nourrit un doute, une forme d'inquiétude, source d'une constante anxiété et de somatisations en tous genres qui ont grevé sa santé au point que lorsqu'un de ses cousins lui demande à l'âge de 18 ans ce qu'il souhaite pour son anniversaire, il lui répond tout de go, la santé. La vie est pour lui une difficulté perpétuée. Il souffre à l'idée même de devoir souffrir ! Son hypocondrie le poursuivra toute sa vie, se manifestant significativement avec intensité autour de sa date d'anniversaire. Cette fragilité physique se double chez lui d'un constant besoin de réassurance narcissique, le pire étant selon lui toujours sûr, il a un besoin constant d'être réconforté par les encouragements de ses innombrables amis et par la force du cercle familial. En même temps, s'il cède parfois au mur des lamentations, Pierre Nora ne le fait jamais sans humour ; il se tourne lui-même comme autrui en dérision, si bien qu'il n'y a chez lui aucune complaisance au drame, au tragique historique ou personnel.

D'où viennent ces fragilités ? Le biographe n'a pas de sondes pour pénétrer les reins et les cœurs, et ne peut qu'émettre quelques hypothèses au terme de son enquête. Disons qu'elles s'enracinent sur

un terreau qui engage tout autant son histoire personnelle que l'histoire collective à laquelle il appartient. L'équation familiale d'un père très autoritaire et d'un frère aîné de dix années, Simon, qui a fait figure de substitut de père à ses yeux et même de héros a fortement contribué à rendre difficile l'affirmation de sa singularité. Le passage du « petit Pierre », qu'il était, le petit dernier, amusant, rétif à la loi du père, qu'on adore sans le prendre vraiment au sérieux, au Pierre Nora, autorité incontestée de la vie intellectuelle française, n'a pas toujours été aussi facile qu'on le croit.

Il y a aussi la tragédie de l'histoire traversée à l'âge de 12 ans lorsque la Gestapo vient le chercher et qu'il doit s'enfuir pour échapper au nazisme. Avoir vécu si tôt dans sa chair la politique antisémite de L'État français a fortement marqué un Pierre Nora qui se donnera pour objet l'approfondissement de ce que peut être le fait national, le sentiment national. Evitant le double écueil d'une posture purement dénonciatrice du phénomène national qui n'y verrait que le visage du refus de l'autre, de la crispation identitaire, et de l'autre la vision nationaliste pétrie de fierté de tous les éléments de la francité, il aura passé sa vie à naviguer entre ces deux récifs pour exprimer son amour de la France, d'une certaine France. S'il n'a eu de cesse d'exprimer son amour de la France, ce n'est en effet pas celle au visage grimaçant du régime de Vichy qui a failli l'envoyer droit vers les chambres à gaz, ce n'est pas non plus la France qu'il aura l'occasion de connaître lors de ses deux années d'enseignement à Oran à la fin des années 50, celle du colonialisme, d'une guerre qui n'ose dire son nom, ni encore celle des rodomontades anti-américaines du farouche coq gaulois gaulliste. La France qu'il chante, sa France, est celle, plus souriante de l'affirmation selon laquelle « il n'y a pas plus heureux qu'un juif en France », celle de l'universalisme de ses valeurs républicaines. Oui, cette France-là, il l'aime jusqu'à se refuser à la plupart des invitations au voyage, jusqu'à ne se sentir bien que dans la langue française, et d'achever sa grande entreprise des *Lieux de mémoire* par trois volumes consacrés aux *France*.

Il évoque souvent ses angoisses en utilisant un terme fort et évocateur : « Ce qui me taraude ». Cette identité juive aura été vécue sur

un mode mineur, comme une tonalité de fond qui aura nourri le fait d'être toujours tourné vers l'avenir, son sens de l'intellect que définit son ami Philippe Meyer répondant à qui lui demande qui est Pierre Nora : « C'est très simple, si vous avez la solution, il a le problème ». En tant qu'intellectuel juif néanmoins, il se refuse à tout ce qui pourrait l'obliger au nom d'une solidarité communautaire aux dépens de ce à quoi lui ferait penser sa raison, et c'est en ce sens où il fait honneur à ce qu'il y a de plus juif en lui.

Mon hypothèse est qu'il a trouvé, avec sa grande entreprise des *Lieux de mémoire*, une réponse historienne personnelle à cette situation clivée de l'intellectuel français juif, d'où sa relation passionnelle avec ce monument éditorial. Il y est inscrit bien davantage qu'en tant que chef d'orchestre, car il en est le compositeur, le créateur, et sa réalisation, certes collective, est d'une certaine manière sa *Recherche du temps perdu*. Il a les traits de son ouvrage et l'on pourrait affirmer, comme Jules Michelet dans sa fameuse préface de 1869 à son *Histoire de France* : « Mon livre m'a créé. C'est moi qui fus son œuvre. Ce fils a fait son père. S'il est sorti de moi d'abord, de mon orage (trouble encore) de jeunesse, il m'a rendu bien plus en force et en lumière, même en chaleur féconde, en puissance réelle de ressusciter le passé. Si nous nous ressemblons, c'est bien. Les traits qu'il a de moi sont en grande partie ceux que je lui devais, que j'ai tenus de lui [12]. »

Homme des confluences entre l'histoire politique à la Renouvin et la nouvelle histoire à la Le Goff, Pierre Nora aura incarné une voie possible pour des intellectuels juifs se refusant aux facilités du repli identitaire, en montrant que l'on peut tenir et penser ensemble les deux dimensions que sont l'histoire et la mémoire, en faisant travailler dans leurs lieux les vertus propres à chacune, et en évacuant leurs tentations exclusivistes. C'est le plus incontestable apport, décisif, de Pierre Nora à l'historiographie, celui d'avoir, par sa singularité de juif, valorisé la

12 Jules Michelet, préface à *L'histoire de France*, dans Œuvres complètes, tome IV, éd. établie par Paul Viallaneix (Paris: Flammarion, 1974), 14.

mémoire, le *Zakhor*, mais en la soumettant au feu roulant de la critique de la discipline historique, à la vigilance historienne.

Issu d'une famille bourgeoise juive miraculée, Pierre Nora aura construit son parcours adossé à l'ombre de la tragédie qu'il a traversé dès son enfance. En 1942, à 12 ans, il est réfugié dans un collège, Le Portique, dans la région de Grenoble. Le directeur du Collège, Charles Juillet, lui aura sauvé la vie en une nuit de janvier 1944 lorsque, voyant arriver la Gestapo vers 3 heures du matin, il l'invite à sauter par la fenêtre et à prendre la fuite.

A l'exception du père, Gaston Nora, titulaire de la Croix de guerre et de la médaille militaire, chirurgien qui a pu poursuivre son activité à Paris à condition de porter l'étoile jaune et de rester sous étroite surveillance, toute la famille Nora s'était réfugiée à Grenoble. A l'été 1943, la mère de Pierre, Julie Lehman, sa sœur et lui s'installent à Villard-de-Lans dans le massif du Vercors, dans la pension Georges. Quant à ses frères, Simon et Jean, ils ont rejoint la résistance, le maquis du Vercors. A Méaudre, la peur des incursions allemandes était constante. Dès ses 13 ans, il tient son journal, y consignant y compris des informations dangereuses comme les parachutages, les actions de tel ou tel résistant, au risque de tomber dans les mains des Allemands. De son côté, son frère aîné, Simon, a rejoint à 22 ans la compagnie du capitaine Goderville durant l'été 1943, et il a ainsi combattu, sans le savoir jusqu'à la veille de sa mort, sous les ordres du poète Jean Prévost.

Le jeune Pierre Nora traverse ces événements sans traumatisme apparent, mais dans un climat d'horreur quotidien. Il restera marqué par la traversée de cette période mortifère où le danger extrême se trouve à chaque croisement. Il en résulte chez lui un profond sentiment de gravité, et en même temps un sens tout aussi aigu de la dérision pour tout ce qui ne touche pas à l'essentiel, c'est-à-dire aux forces vitales, ce qui va faire de lui un adolescent, puis un jeune homme décalé.

Pierre Nora, petit dernier de la famille, est pour toute la famille petit Pierre. Tout le monde l'adorait. Le père exerçait au sein de sa famille une autorité sans partage, imposant ses points de vue et ré-

gentant le destin de tous dans un climat de crainte peu à peu mis en question par les deux frères aînés, Simon et Jean. L'autorité paternelle ne souffrait pas de discussions au point que son fils Pierre le qualifie de « Pétain juif » tant son austérité était ostentatoire ainsi que son sens du rituel et du devoir. Mais le petit dernier échappait pour l'essentiel à cette férule par son sens précoce de l'humour. Sa première vocation, enfant, était d'être acteur. Il déclamait, apprenait des rôles, et ce goût du jeu théâtral le suivra jusqu'à l'âge adulte.

De son œuvre, on retiendra en priorité quatre leçons. En premier lieu : « Liberté pour l'histoire » – c'est un ses combats majeurs qui se situe dans la défense de la liberté de faire de l'histoire contestée par principe par la multiplication des lois mémorielles depuis le début des années 2000. Lorsqu'en 2005, l'article 4 de la loi du 23 février stipule que « les programmes scolaires reconnaissent en particulier le rôle positif de la présence française outre-Mer, notamment en Afrique du Nord », la coupe est pleine. D'autant qu'au même moment un auteur de Pierre Nora, Olivier Pétré Grenouilleau qui vient de publier un ouvrage remarqué sur la traite négrière reçoit le prix du Sénat et se retrouve poursuivi par le collectif DOM (départements d'Outre-Mer) au motif de négationnisme pour avoir déclaré que la Traite n'est pas assimilable au génocide des Juifs. Le plus souvent Pierre Nora montre quelques réticences à se placer aux avant-postes d'un engagement militant, mais l'urgence d'une riposte par rapport aux empiétements répétés de L'État lui paraît rendre nécessaire de dépasser les formes de protestations habituelles. Une nouvelle association se constitue, « Liberté pour l'histoire ». Présidée par René Rémond, celle-ci, qui a pour vice-président Pierre Nora, appelle à signer une pétition réclamant l'abrogation de toutes les lois mémorielles. Cet Appel, qui date du 12 décembre 2005, porte la signature de dix-neuf historiens. Lorsque René Rémond meurt en avril 2007, c'est tout naturellement que Pierre Nora se retrouve élu président de l'association. Ce combat est parvenu à alerter les députés de l'Assemblée qui ont entendu avec attention les historiens auditionnés en 2008 dans le cadre d'une Mission sur les lois mémorielles. Ils sont parvenus à adopter à l'unanimité le Rapport Accoyer qui prend acte d'une dérive à éviter.

En second lieu, l'auto-réflexivité de l'historien. Il a contribué à ouvrir à la réflexivité, au second degré qui a consisté à s'engager sur un continent vierge, peu exploré jusque-là, celui de l'approche historiographique. Avant même d'exercer des responsabilités éditoriales, Pierre Nora se donne pour objet le métier d'historien avec son étude sur le rôle dans la formation du sentiment national de l'historien Ernest Lavisse, qu'il publie en 1962 dans la *Revue historique* [13]. Il y dévoile le caractère matriciel du discours historique dans la construction du consensus national. En même temps, il s'emploie à démythologiser la figure en bronze d'un Lavisse républicain de toujours, alors qu'il n'est qu'un rallié de la dernière heure. Les archives font, en effet, apparaître un Lavisse précepteur du prince impérial, fermement attaché pendant longtemps au bonapartisme et converti à la République pour des raisons patriotiques. Plus tard, en 1982, Pierre Nora insiste sur la nécessaire auto-interrogation de l'historien sur sa propre pratique et donne pour nom à cet exercice celui d'ego-histoire. Ses *Essais d'ego-histoire* publiés en 1988 sont une véritable innovation car les historiens avaient pour règle de s'effacer devant l'archive et de faire abstraction de leur subjectivité. En troisième lieu, il nous aura présenté les Palais de la mémoire : c'est son innovation majeure, celle des *Lieux de mémoire* dont la publication des sept volumes s'est déployée entre 1984 et 1993. Un malentendu persistant est né chez beaucoup qui tient au moment de la parution du premier volume qui en expose la problématique et qui correspond en 1984 à un moment de retour sur la Maison France. Certains y ont perçu un regard nostalgique sur un monde que nous avons perdu, une forme de nationalisme en mal d'objet, d'autres ont même cru voir renaître le projet lavissien d'un nationalisme exalté. Pierre Nora serait-il le prêtre d'une nouvelle religion civile, soucieux de ré-enchanter une France désenchantée, sur le déclin ? Certains le pensent, au prix d'un contre-sens absolu sur l'entreprise qui est la sienne. En effet, la visée des *Lieux de mémoire* consiste à utiliser la compétence

13 Pierre Nora, « Ernest Lavisse : son rôle dans la formation du sentiment national », *Revue historique* 228 (1962): 73-106 ; repris dans Pierre Nora (dir.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, tome 1, *La République* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984 ; rééd. Quarto, 1997), 239-275.

critique de l'historien par rapport à une histoire/mémoire indistincte et mythique. Le premier geste auquel invite Pierre Nora est celui de la distinction de ces deux notions que sont la mémoire d'une part, l'histoire de l'autre ; pour ce faire, il s'appuie sur les analyses qui remontent aux années 1920 et 1930 du sociologue Maurice Halbwachs. Après avoir distingué, l'historien doit employer son savoir-faire pour démythologiser. On retrouve avec la problématique des *Lieux de mémoire*, la visée intellectuelle de Pierre Nora d'éclairer le présent. Il est d'ailleurs élu en 1976 sur une chaire d'histoire du présent à l'EHESS. Enfin, il aura été celui qui aura pensé un « retour » de l'événement. Alors que l'école historique française faisait prévaloir les phénomènes de longue durée, les invariants, il va innover là encore en réhabilitant l'événement comme porteur de sens, au contraire de ce qu'affirmait Fernand Braudel qui voyait en l'événement « l'ennemi des sciences sociales ». Dès 1972, en pleine vogue de « l'histoire immobile » (E. Le Roy Ladurie), il annonce le « retour de l'événement », d'abord dans la revue *Communications*, puis dans la trilogie *Faire de l'histoire* en 1974. Il ne s'agit pourtant pas d'en revenir à la conception ancienne de l'école méthodique, de Lavisse, mais d'un événement perçu comme porté par ses supports médiatiques, comme construit. Il prend l'exemple de l'événement de Mai 68 dont l'ampleur est inconcevable si on ne prend pas en compte l'impact des radios périphériques dans le prolongement émotionnel de la perception auditive des barricades et affrontements du quartier latin. De la même manière, l'événement-monde qu'a constitué l'alunissage de la mission Apollo et les premiers pas de l'homme sur la lune doivent être analysés à partir de l'impact de l'image télévisuelle. Il appartient alors à l'historien de déconstruire l'événement pour saisir comment les médias produisent l'événement.

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Pierre Nora, lieu de mémoire

Christophe Prochasson*

Pierre Nora s'est imposé sur la scène historiographique française à un moment où celle-ci disposait d'un rayonnement international de premier ordre, aujourd'hui devenu l'objet d'une nostalgie entêtée. Ce qu'on désignait alors sous le terme de « nouvelle histoire » (comme s'était affichée, en ces mêmes années mais avec de tout autres attendus, une « nouvelle philosophie ») devait beaucoup au talent de l'inventeur des *Lieux de mémoire*. Historien de la France contemporaine, éditeur chez Julliard puis chez Gallimard, enseignant (métier qu'il exerça sans doute avec une passion modérée) et animateur de débats publics, Pierre Nora cochait toutes les cases de ce qui fit en France le succès de ce qu'il appelait lui-même l'*historien public*.

Un ouvrage, rassemblant plusieurs de ses articles, porte d'ailleurs ce titre. *Historien public*, publié en 2011, dessine les contours d'une façon de faire de l'histoire qui ne se réduit pas à un programme d'enquête, ni à une épistémologie, encore moins à une méthode. Tout en

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promouvant, plutôt qu'en revendiquant, un style historiographique, Nora ne fut d'aucune école, pas même de cette « nouvelle histoire » qui rassemblait nombre de ses amis tirant profit de son savoir-faire éditorial.

Ce grand et constant lecteur de Proust fut cependant d'abord un auteur, singulier, inimitable, indifférent aux modes intellectuelles qu'il considérait avec dédain. Avant de rejoindre l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS), temple de la « nouvelle histoire », où il fut élu « directeur d'études » en 1977, il avait enseigné pendant une douzaine d'années à l'Institut d'études politiques de Paris où l'on se préoccupait assez peu d'innovations intellectuelles. L'histoire politique s'y écrivait dans une veine nationale que moquait depuis longtemps les « historiens des *Annales* » installés, dans la « maison d'en face », à l'EHESS.

L'œuvre historienne de Nora s'accorde d'ailleurs avec les sensibilités en cours dans les deux maisons. Elle fait du politique l'instance privilégiée de l'analyse des sociétés. Elle ne néglige pas pour autant l'apport des sciences sociales ni les appuis de la philosophie comme l'illustra bientôt la publication des *Lieux de mémoire* qu'il dirigea de 1984 à 1992. Les perspectives et les outils de l'histoire traditionnelle, l'échelle nationale, l'événement, le poids du passé, y sont revisités et y prennent une dimension théorique nouvelle. Il nous manque encore une histoire intellectuelle de cette grande œuvre collective qui marqua la fin du siècle dernier pour mieux comprendre comment elle fut fabriquée, sous quelles influences elle fut élaborée, par le truchement de quelles négociations elle déboucha sur ce modèle innovant qui inspira des initiatives parallèles à l'étranger. Il nous reste à comprendre enfin comment *Les Lieux de mémoire* revêtirent, à leur tour, le statut de « lieu de mémoire ». J'y reviendrai.

L'historien public, selon Nora, n'est pas un historien engagé ni un vulgarisateur coupé de la vie savante. Dans l'un des textes retenus par le recueil éponyme, Nora, qui, à l'inverse de nombre d'historiens de sa génération, à l'exemple de son propre beau-frère et ami, François Furet, ne fut jamais adhérent du Parti communiste, fait le compte rendu de la Semaine de la Pensée marxiste de 1963 durant laquelle se distillait

les dernières avancées intellectuelles du communisme international. Il y ironise devant le spectacle offert par de jeunes militants du PCF ayant renoncé à la flamme de l'exaltation révolutionnaire pour lui préférer l'administration de la preuve scientifique : « Ils ont la vertu d'être extrême en tout, écrit Nora, dans le don de soi, dans le messianisme révolutionnaire, dans l'intransigeance exterminatrice et dans l'absurdité, ce ne sont plus des fanatiques, ils prennent des notes. Ainsi, ces élèves, bien peignés, bien rangés et plumes à la main, ont troqué leur passion révolutionnaire pour la passion d'un savoir dont ils espèrent qu'il contribuera à l'émancipation de ceux qui souffrent. »

L'historien public, tel que l'envisage Nora, est d'un tout autre bois que l'historien engagé. Il est celui qui se trouve à l'interface du monde savant, de la corporation des historiens et d'un espace public défini comme surface de l'intermédiation comprenant journaux, revues, télévision, radio, conférences publiques, etc. Il est celui qui a un pied dans le monde universitaire et l'autre dans les media, intervenant non pas dans le débat politique, à proprement parler, comme un expert ou un commentateur plus lettré que ne le sont les journalistes, mais comme un déchiffreur de ce que certains sociologues appellent « affaires ». Tel est le rôle que s'est donné Pierre Nora, peu homme de media audiovisuels dont il fit un usage très économe, mais « revuiste » obstiné comme créateur et animateur, aux côtés de Marcel Gauchet et Krzysztof Pomian, de la revue *Le Débat*, à partir de 1980 et jusqu'à la curieuse mise à mort du périodique en 2020 par ceux-là même qui lui avaient donné vie.

Grâce à ses outils de communication, les historiens publics, hommes « d'affaires » parmi lesquels se range Pierre Nora, ont pour mission de dérouler la pelote événementielle qui les a produites. Comme ses semblables, Nora mit à la disposition du public moins son expertise, au risque d'une imposture scientifique dont il avait sans doute bien conscience, qu'une « habitude professionnelle », comme l'avait expliqué Emile Durkheim dans son analyse de l'intervention des intellectuels dans l' « affaire » Dreyfus, mère de toutes les « affaires » que Pierre Nora étudia et médita avec constance et acribie.

D'autres « affaires » surent aussi l'occuper tout au long de sa longue vie : de la guerre d'Algérie, qui le conduisit à publier en 1961 chez l'éditeur Christian Bourgois un premier ouvrage, *Les Français d'Algérie*, aux controverses des années 1980 et 1990 engendrées par le vote des lois mémorielles, dont la série fut ouverte par la « loi Gayssot » pénalisant le négationnisme ciblant la Shoah. La liste est longue des « affaires » où s'alignent la question de l'identité nationale soulevée par le projet d'une Maison de l'histoire de France envisagée un temps par le président de la République Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012), le témoignage censuré du docteur Gubler, médecin personnel du président François Mitterrand (1981-1995), les polémiques un peu forcées et souvent injustes autour de la création de la nouvelle Bibliothèque nationale voulue par Mitterrand, voire la traduction française du livre d'Eric Hobsbawm, *L'Age des extrêmes*, paru en langue anglaise en 1994, traduit en près de quarante langues, mais refusé par plusieurs éditeurs parisiens parmi lesquels Gallimard où Pierre Nora disposait d'une autorité peu contestée pour tout ce qui relevait du catalogue des sciences humaines. Sur ces dossiers, comme sur bien d'autres, les interventions de Pierre Nora attestèrent toujours chez cet homme, issu de bonne famille, soucieux de la justesse du ton et respectueux des règles de la bienséance et des bonnes manières, une énergie militante dont une certaine brutalité pouvait même parfois se dégager.

Dans le deuxième volume de ses *Mémoires*, intitulé *Une étrange obstination* et récemment publié (2022), Pierre Nora se présente, non sans une certaine coquetterie, comme l'humble éditeur des très grands noms qui firent l'éclat des sciences humaines françaises dans leurs « trente glorieuses » (1960-1990). Il le fut, sans aucun doute, au moins de deux manières. La première, selon les modalités les plus classiques, comme l'éditeur d'une grande maison d'édition, installé dans son petit bureau de Gallimard, où s'asseyaient visiteurs, aspirants auteurs ou quémandeurs, sur un canapé défoncé ayant accueilli d'illustres postérieurs. Nora dominait de la hauteur que lui procurait un confortable fauteuil. Il épiait autant qu'il écoutait ses interlocuteurs. *Une étrange obstination* a ainsi la valeur d'un grand catalogue des sciences hu-

maines qui accompagna leur âge d'or sous la houlette d'un directeur de collections (Bibliothèque des sciences humaines ou Bibliothèque des histoires) qui dut parfois batailler pour imposer ses choix au sein même de la maison dont il connaissait tous les arcanes au point d'entretenir avec la dynastie Gallimard des relations contrastées, qui ne furent pas toujours bonnes, comme il en fait l'aveu dans ses Mémoires.

Au bout du compte, la récolte est impressionnante. On relève peu de faute de goût, même si les dernières années de son magistère éditorial souffrirent parfois de ce qu'il reconnaissait lui-même comme le résultat de son éloignement de la vie universitaire qui avait beaucoup alimenté les « Bibliothèques » et la conséquence de sa dépendance à l'égard de prescripteurs qui n'eurent pas toujours son exigence ni son jugement pour détecter les talents neufs. Ayant aussi profité des conseils avisés de Marcel Gauchet et de Krzysztof Pomian, le bilan n'en reste pas moins tout à fait remarquable et place Nora au sommet de l'édition en sciences humaines au terme d'une longue carrière entamée chez Julliard avec un premier succès, la collection « Archives », dirigée avec l'appui d'un autre grand éditeur de sciences humaines, historien comme lui, mais plus jeune, Jacques Revel, disparu en mars 2026, dont le jugement était très sûr et l'information scientifique impeccable.

Ce « professeur », qui le fut finalement peu, n'étant pas suivi par une lignée d'étudiants comme en connaissent les universitaires les plus magnétiques, eut pour disciples des livres, quoique Nora n'ait rien eu d'un chef d'école : à l'inverse, donc, du rayonnant professeur de philosophie du Lycée Condorcet, Alphonse Darlu, qui fascina tant de grands esprits de la fin du XIX^e^ siècle, à commencer par Proust, qui affirmait que ses meilleurs ouvrages étaient ses élèves. A la même enseigne qu'élèves, disciples ou étudiants ont chacun leur personnalité, les livres accouchés par Nora s'inscrivent dans une multitude de familles d'esprits et de tempéraments. Ne cherchons donc pas dans ses collections la moindre uniformité. Si l'on avait réuni les auteurs à une même table, il ne fait guère de doute que l'hétérogénéité du propos, de la méthode ou du style eussent fait voler en éclats tout effort d'unité. Cette pluralité et ce libéralisme intellectuel de grande tradition ont fait

la force de ce que fut la « nouvelle histoire », coup éditorial plus que programme historiographique lancé par une trilogie à succès publiée dans la « Bibliothèque des histoires » en 1974 sous la direction de Nora et du médiéviste Jacques Le Goff : *Faire de l'histoire*.

Il y eut sans doute beaucoup de malentendus dans la réception de ce retentissant collectif qui contribua à placer « l'école historique française » en pleine lumière. Le grand éditeur, un peu « à l'ancienne », que fut incontestablement Nora, fit ici merveille, alors même qu'il n'est pas certain qu'il se soit reconnu dans toutes les nouvelles façons de « faire de l'histoire », d'ailleurs assez variées, dont se réclamaient les auteurs rassemblés dans ces trois volumes.

L'une des illustrations les plus convaincantes des quiproquos nés de la « nouvelle histoire » tient à la façon dont ce « courant historiographique » fut présenté comme héritier d'un rassemblement tout aussi problématique et dont la tradition académique, toujours un peu paresseuse, avait supposé l'existence en bonne et due forme : « l'école des *Annales* ». Or à y regarder de près, ni la « nouvelle histoire », ni sa prétendue lointaine ascendante, ne disposaient de la consistance qu'on leur accordait. L'une et l'autre étaient surtout riches de tempéraments certes hostiles à toute routine intellectuelle mais ne partageant pas les mêmes épistémologies, ni les mêmes méthodes ni, surtout, les mêmes relations aux sciences sociales.

Pierre Nora en est d'ailleurs l'exemple le plus accompli. Bien que directeur d'études de l'EHESS, établissement de renom étroitement associé à la production historiographique des *Annales*, Nora se tint à distance de la vie du prestigieux périodique. Il ne fut jamais membre de ses comités et n'accorda qu'une très discrète attention à ce qui y était publié. Le tournant « critique » des *Annales* en 1988 et l'intensification des relations entre histoire et sciences sociales qui en découla le laissa à peu près indifférent, plus prompt qu'il était à nouer des liens avec la philosophie ou la littérature, déesse cachée de l'œuvre de Pierre Nora, qu'avec les disciplines reines qu'étaient l'anthropologie et, plus encore, la sociologie, dominée, en ces mêmes années, par un auteur qui ne pu-

bliait pas chez Gallimard mais aux Editions de minuit, le grand rival éditorial au chapitre des sciences humaines : Pierre Bourdieu.

Du côté de l'histoire, Pierre Nora s'est aussi tenu à l'écart des controverses scientifiques et des polémiques institutionnelles qui s'élevaient notamment entre l'histoire académique, notamment l'histoire politique écrite à Sciences-po d'où il venait, et l'histoire dans le « style » des *Annales*, plus internationalisée et plus ouverte sur les sciences sociales. L'atteste également un autre rôle d'éditeur qui le propulsa sur le devant de l'arène intellectuelle : *Les lieux de mémoire*. Ce monument, véritable annuaire de l'historiographie française des années 1980 et 1990, accueille historiennes et historiens issus des sensibilités les plus éparses, ayant accepté de se plier à une problématique proposée par Nora. On y rencontre les grands noms de « l'école des *Annales* » ou apparentés de la « nouvelle histoire » (Jacques Le Goff, Jacques Revel, Roger Chartier, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, etc.) comme ceux de l'Université (Antoine Prost, Philippe Contamine, Pascal Ory, Madeleine Rebérioux, etc.) voire de Sciences-po (René Rémond, Michel Winock). Tous ne s'y sont d'ailleurs pas entièrement soumis, comme c'est souvent le cas dans les entreprises collectives même aussi intellectuellement serrées que le sont *Les Lieux de mémoire*. Chaque auteur s'y coule avec une singularité qui donne à chaque texte une tonalité particulière. Nora n'en a pas moins considéré *Les Lieux de mémoire* (qu'il appelait avec une vraie tendresse et une modestie un peu feinte « *Les Lieux* ») comme sa grande œuvre personnelle, à la jonction de son travail d'éditeur et de son œuvre d'historien, puisqu'il y fut aussi l'un des auteurs en nom propre par la rédaction d'importants textes de cadrages et de plusieurs monographies : « Lavisse, instituteur national », « *Le dictionnaire de pédagogie* de Ferdinand Buisson », « L'*Histoire de France* de Lavisse », « Les mémoires d'Etat », « Gaullistes et communistes », « La génération ».

Quelle situation posthume est-elle réservée à Pierre Nora ? Son œuvre est insérée dans un moment de l'histoire intellectuelle dont la page vient de se tourner. L'extinction volontaire du *Débat*, dont la lugubre mise en scène a frappé les esprits, a retenti comme une son-

nerie aux morts. Après en avoir été l'un des hérauts à la fin du siècle dernier, Pierre Nora ne se reconnaissait plus dans un temps qui n'était décidément plus le sien. La chute des princes est toujours douloureuse. Décliniste, il contemplait le passé avec une certaine nostalgie. Les siens avaient disparu ou n'occupaient plus le centre de la vie intellectuelle. Plusieurs se trouvaient rétrogradés au rang d'une pensée réactionnaire qui n'avait plus cour. Les nouvelles questions, surgies au sein des sciences humaines, touchant aux modalités de l'affiliation sociale (genre, race) ou aux rapports avec la nature n'étaient pas de celles qui étaient en mesure de solliciter l'intérêt d'un historien formé par une université, même rénovée sous les espèces de l'EHESS, attachée à certaines hiérarchies et valeurs autant sociales qu'intellectuelles. Le « wokisme » trouva en Nora l'un de ses plus farouches adversaires.

L'histoire nationale, dont *Les Lieux de mémoire* avaient présenté une version raffinée et originale, lui semblait avoir perdu de son lustre, au profit de nouvelles approches en appelant à des échelles plus larges. Les nouvelles catégories qui s'imposaient, « transnational », « global », « mondial », etc., prétendant apporter à l'histoire des regards neufs laissèrent Nora perplexe voire franchement critique. Une vive controverse qui l'opposa au projet de l'*Histoire mondiale de la France* dirigée par l'historien Patrick Boucheron en fait état.

Les deux volumes de *Mémoires* de Pierre Nora sont un témoignage attristé de ce décrochage. Irritante pour ceux qui acceptent la marche du monde quitte à l'infléchir si elle ne leur convient pas, émouvante pour d'autres qui se désolent devant pareil excès de nostalgie, la mélancolie du père des *Lieux de mémoire* clôt une vie faite de drames personnels et de retentissantes réussites. Nora y confie son regret amer d'une époque passée où les livres faisaient événements, sonnaient comme l'annonce de temps nouveaux, prétendaient avancer des réponses inouïes. Mais ces confessions autobiographiques, cirées d'un humour parfois grinçant qui ne manquait pas à Nora, vont au-delà du genre habituel auquel lui-même avait encouragé les historiens à se plier dans un exercice appelé à un certain succès : l'ego-histoire. Les deux volumes de ses *Mémoires* donnent sens à une œuvre d'historien

en la plongeant dans la biographie de son auteur. Celui-ci, tout en ne boudant pas le plaisir du récit pour lui-même – Nora est incontestablement un conteur de grande tradition –, n'en a pas moins un objectif : rendre compte d'un projet visant à élucider les modalités par lesquelles s'articulent mémoire, nation et individu. Le programme n'a peut-être pas tout perdu de son actualité.

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Pierre Nora, la mémoire, l'Europe, les frontières

Thomas Serrier*

En cette année 2025, qui a vu, le 2 juin dernier, la disparition de Pierre Nora (1931-2025), le légendaire maître-d'œuvre des *Lieux de mémoires* (1984-1992), il est sans doute risqué – tant tout a été savamment dit et redit en matière d'analyse de l'œuvre et d'hommage au grand homme ! – de revenir une nouvelle fois sur la notion de « lieux de mémoire » qui a fait sa célébrité. Car, même si le recul peut manquer, il semble évident que c'est cette invention heuristique d'une fécondité inégalée qui demeurera. C'est aussi son succès inouï, tant scientifique que public, qui explique qu'outre son œuvre formidable « d'historien éditeur d'historiens », à la tête de la collection « Bibliothèque des histoires » chez Gallimard, cet « homo historicus » de part en part, ayant « fait le don de sa personne à l'histoire », a pu exercer un magistère intellectuel incomparable de la fin des années 1980 à la fin des années 2000 voire encore au début des années 2010 : il y eut de fait, sans exagération aucune, en France, mais aussi à une échelle européenne, un « mo-

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ment Nora » ; une vingtaine d'années, pas moins, où, semblait-il, « le soleil ne se couch[ait] plus sur *Les Lieux de mémoire* » – toutes ces belles expressions étant empruntées à son biographe François Dosse.[1] Le risque de la redite et du manque d'originalité est donc fort ; il est néanmoins tempéré par le besoin de réactualiser sans relâche un outil de compréhension du présent. Or, l'entrée brutale dans une nouvelle ère mondiale, dont nous sommes actuellement les témoins inquiets, et tout spécialement les nuages qui planent sur l'avenir européen, rendent un retour aux sources plus nécessaire encore. La grammaire mémorielle européenne a-t-elle encore quelque chose à voir avec celle qui avait présidé à l'élaboration du concept à partir de 1977-78, autour du légendaire séminaire « Les lieux de la mémoire collective » devenu « Les lieux de mémoire » à l'EHESS ? En cette année 2025, centenaire de la notion de « mémoire collective » introduite par Maurice Halbwachs dans *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925), force est de constater que les sociétés européennes ne semblent pas prêtes de sortir de l'« ère de la commémoration » diagnostiquée par Nora dans son fameux essai éponyme clôturant *Les lieux* : j'écris ces lignes au terme d'une semaine qui a vu l'Allemagne rappeler ses multiples 9 novembre, les célébrations de la chute du Mur de 1989 étant pour toute éternité liées par le hasard de l'histoire aux douloureuses commémorations du pogrom contre les Juifs du Troisième Reich, connu sous le terme de « Nuit de Cristal » de 1938 ; plusieurs pays commémorer l'armistice du 11 novembre 1918 (ou, pour la Pologne, l'indépendance reconquise ce même jour) ; la France faire collectivement retour sur le trauma encore vif des attentats du 13 novembre 2015, dix ans après. Mais l'ordre mémoriel dans une Europe marquée par le retour de la guerre sur son sol, le génocide à Gaza à ses portes, et le défi d'un néo-impérialisme qui s'affirme à l'échelle du monde, permet-il encore de « penser [notre histoire] *avec* l'Europe, *dans la durée* et *ensemble* », comme l'auteur de ces lignes l'écrivait dans le prologue au gros volume *Europa. Notre histoire,* de près de 1400 pages, ouvrage réunissant cent cinquante et une contributions rédigées

1 François Dosse, *Pierre Nora. Homo historicus* (Paris: Perrin, 2011), 595 et 349.

par cent neuf auteurs, dans une approche et une architecture qui ne pouvaient cacher leur dette envers les *Lieux* de Nora ?[2]

Lieux de mémoire, France, nation, Europe : admettons d'emblée que ces trop succinctes réflexions s'adressent, dans le fil de la biographie intellectuelle et de la chronologie éditoriale de Pierre Nora, davantage qu'au moment inaugural des *Lieux*, à ses doutes semble-t-il indépassables sur l'européanisation possible du modèle, qu'il exprima en diverses occasions à l'époque où il mettait un terme à l'entreprise, l'achèvement des *Lieux*, son extraordinaire succès éditorial et les premiers échos internationaux étant concomitants de la fin du communisme à l'Est et de la chute du Mur de Berlin : les trois volumes du dernier tome, « Les France », sont, rappelons-le, publiés en 1992.

Avant même que la publication issue de l'enquête collective initiée par Pierre Nora ait été achevée, une question s'était tout de suite posée, dont l'ouverture des frontières à l'Est ne pouvait qu'accentuer l'urgence: celle d'un saut d'échelle, possible, imaginable, voire souhaitable. « Y a-t-il des lieux de mémoire européens ? Y réfléchir, ne serait-ce pas une contribution essentielle à la construction européenne ? Une Europe de la mémoire créatrice », suggérait ainsi son ami Jacques Le Goff à l'occasion d'un commentaire des *Lieux* donné pour *Le Monde* en 1993.[3] On n'a pas oublié combien Nora, ainsi mis en demeure de préciser les limites de validité de sa notion, a longtemps valorisé le cadre national comme matrice et espace privilégié des *Lieux de mémoire.* L'invention des « lieux » répondait pour lui à la nécessité de définir une nouvelle manière d'écrire l'histoire de France, dont la saisie par la mémoire, neuve à son époque, correspondait selon lui par excellence à la mutation d'une « nation guerrière, impérialiste et messianique » en « nation-mémoire », dont « l'ouverture [...] sur le monde extérieur passe aujourd'hui par une pleine maîtrise de son héritage.

2 Thomas Serrier et Étienne François, dir., *Europa. Notre histoire* (Paris: Les Arènes, 2017), 12.
3 Jacques Le Goff, « Le temps national retrouvé », *Le Monde*, 5 février 1993.

Son avenir international, par ce que nous avons tenté ici : une exacte mesure du particulier ».[4]

Non que Nora ait rejeté en bloc pareille idée d'une adaptation européenne de sa notion, d'autant que la question lui était le plus souvent amicalement posé par des historiens européens devenus des proches, tentés par l'importation de la notion et de la méthode dans leurs pays et dans leurs champs, à l'instar d'un Étienne François pour l'Allemagne, certains ayant suivi, comme le néerlandais Pim den Boer, les dernières années de son séminaire mythique à l'EHESS. Rappelons, plus que toute autre, la complicité intellectuelle de Nora, depuis les années du *Débat*, lancé en 1980, avec Krzysztof Pomian, « le type même du grand Européen », « circul[ant] intellectuellement entre l'Est et l'Ouest, la Pologne et la France, mais aussi entre les disciplines, histoire et philosophie, entre les domaines scientifique, artistique, historique ».[5] Regroupant dix-sept contributions articulées autour de trois axes, les « lieux », la « commémoration », le « patrimoine », le numéro 78 de la revue *Le Débat*, dirigée par le trio Marcel Gauchet, Nora et Pomian, consacrait ainsi dès 1994 sous le titre « Mémoires comparées » une première série de réflexions à la transposition possible des *Lieux*.

Nora s'est lui-même, en mainte occasion, plié à l'exercice d'une réflexion théorique, méthodologique et pratique consacrée à cette question, admettant ainsi, en évoquant ses *Lieux*, que « pareille entreprise n'a de sens, en France même, que si elle débouche, à l'heure de l'Europe, sur un horizon comparatif, et sur ce que l'on pourrait appeler le marché commun des mémoires européennes ».[6] De nombreuses notations montrent un Nora sensible à une certaine injonction morale, découlant de la nécessaire conceptualisation d'une Europe des mémoires en cette décennie consécutive à la grande division du continent de la

4 Pierre Nora, « La nation-mémoire », in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, t. 2. *La nation*, rééd. (Paris : Gallimard, 1997), 2216.

5 Pierre Nora, *Une étrange obstination* (Paris: Gallimard, 2022), 240.

6 Pierre Nora, *Présent, nation, mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011), 379 ; article édité la première fois sous le titre : « La notion de lieu de mémoire est-elle exportable ? », in *Lieux de mémoire et identités nationales*, ed. Pim den Boer et Willem Frijhoff (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 1993).

Guerre froide : « On peut en effet, et sans doute doit-on s'essayer à dresser une topographie de la symbolique européenne, chercher le modèle commun d'une mémoire qui nous divise, dessiner la mémoire dont nous habitons, chacun à notre façon, un héritage qui nous sépare et nous réunit. »[7]

Paradoxalement, la *success story* européenne des « lieux de mémoire », scrupuleusement analysée par l'historienne polonaise Kornelia Kończal, n'a pas le moins du monde dissipé les doutes de Nora quant à la faisabilité de « lieux de mémoire européens », au contraire.[8] Dans un article de 2008, ayant également fait l'objet d'une intervention dans le cadres des Allianz lectures de Munich, et justement intitulé « Y a-t-il des lieux de mémoire européens ? », il soulignait combien il était « frappant de constater que Les Lieux de mémoire français n'ont, depuis vingt ans, généré sur les lieux de mémoire européens qu'une interrogation un peu vaine, ils ont suscité, en revanche, une pléthore d'entreprises similaires dans le cadre national. »[9] De fait, à partir de la moitié des années 1990 et tout au long des années 2000, l'approche d'une histoire nationale par sa ou ses mémoires, d'abord expérimentée à propos du cas français, fut étendue à d'autres pays, impliquant l'adaptation du modèle à d'autres modalités de rapport au passé. On se souvient, des trois volumes *I luoghi della memoria* de Mario Isnenghi, chronologiquement les premiers ; des quatre volumes des *Plaatsen van herinnering* aux Pays-Bas, de Henk Wesseling ; des trois volumes des *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte* d'Étienne François et Hagen Schulze. (Étienne François, sollicité à son tour par son éditeur C. H. Beck, après le succès de librairie des volumes allemands [2001], fera partie des historiens réfléchissant les plus activement à une possible européanisation des *Lieux* durant les années 2000.) Nora lui-même cite également les

7 Nora, *Présent, nation, mémoire*, 379.

8 Kornelia Kończal, « Pierre Noras folgenreiches Konzept von les lieux de mémoire und seine Re-Interpretationen. Eine vergleichende Analyse », *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 62 (2011): 1-2, 17-36.

9 Pierre Nora, *Présent, nation, mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011), 389; article édité la première fois sous le titre « A la recherche de 'lieux de mémoire' », in *Les Arpenteurs de l'Europe*, dir. Renée Herbouze (Arles: Actes Sud/Cultures France, 2008).

Sites de la mémoire russe, de Georges Nivat ; les *Lieux de mémoire au Luxembourg*, de Sonja kmec, Benoît Majerus, Michel Margue et Pit Péporté ; enfin *À l'Est, la mémoire retrouvée*, d'Alain Brossat, Sonia Combe, Jean-Yves Potel et Jean-Charles Szurek et préfacé par Jacques Le Goff. Il faudrait, dans une liste bien trop longue pour être exhaustive, ajouter les *Lieux de mémoire suisses*, de Georg Kreis ; les trois volumes de *Memoria Austriae*, d'Emil Brix, Ernst Bruckmüller et Hannes Stekl ; enfin le gigantesque projet des *Lieux de mémoire germano-polonais* (2011-2015), dirigé par Hans Henning Hahn, Robert Traba, s'étalant sur trois volumes d'études de cas et deux volumes de recueils d'articles de théoriciens de la mémoire en Allemagne et en Pologne.

Si elle prouvait dans les faits la fécondité de la notion, et si elle démontrait au passage que la thèse initialement portée par Nora d'une « nation-mémoire » unique définissant la France et rien d'autre, et d'une méthode par conséquent intransposable, nécessitait d'être révisée, la multiplication rapide de publications appliquant l'approche des « lieux » à d'autres pays et à d'autres cultures n'en soulignait pas moins la validité du cadre national voire stato-national, même lorsqu'étaient mis en avant les intermittences des constructions étatiques, la primauté du culturel, ou l'importance de « mémoires partagées » et de lieux « transnationaux », comme les *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, ou *Les lieux de mémoire germano-polonais*. Bref, Nora avait de quoi, à la vue de cet empilement de projets éditoriaux, venus défricher les uns après les autres la dimension mémorielle d'histoires nationales particulières, rester dubitatif quant à la dimension européenne des mémoires. D'où son constat non dénué d'ironie : « Voici vingt-cinq ans que l'on discute de l'existence possible de lieux de mémoire européens, sans autres résultats tangibles que de sympathiques colloques internationaux tandis que l'Europe, pendant ce temps-là, s'est construite cahin-caha dans les faits et les institutions ».[10]

De fait, les raisons de demeurer sceptique n'ont pas perdu de leur validité. Nora en dénombrait plusieurs, à commencer par les plus

10 Nora, *Présent, nation, mémoire*, 385.

terre-à-terre, comme la gageure, pour ne pas dire l'impossibilité pure et simple, consistant à identifier un auteur capable de décrire, comme en tournant autour, toutes les facettes et tous les contenus d'un même objet, pour autant qu'un « lieu » d'échelle véritablement européenne ait pu être défini. Et d'ajouter : « Distribuer son traitement à des historiens de nationalités particulières ne résoudrait pas le problème. »[11]

Plus profondément, Nora s'est souvent interrogé sur l'européanité d'un « lieu », autrement dit, sur la capacité d'un lieu à s'imposer dans la conscience des contemporains et au regard analytique du chercheur comme une « unité significative, d'ordre matériel ou idéel, dont la volonté des hommes ou le travail du temps a fait un élément symbolique du patrimoine mémoriel d'une quelconque communauté ».[12] Retrouvant consciemment ou inconsciemment les intuitions d'un Reinhart Koselleck autour de la « mémoire négative » comme matrice des identités politiques et culturelles allemandes d'après-guerre, Nora s'est inquiété de ce que « les seules incarnations européennes [soient] négatives : les deux plus prégnantes seraient sans doute Verdun et Auschwitz », ajoutant : « N'y a-t-il pas quelque chose d'inquiétant à constater que les lieux de mémoire européens qui s'offrent à l'esprit sont d'abord des lieux de deuil ? » [13]

Sur un plan plus méthodologique, il dénombrait une série de « contradictions de principe » rendant illusoire, selon lui, toute saisie par les mémoires de cet objet malaisément identifiable qu'est l'Europe. Les trois principales, à l'en croire, étaient qu'« un lieu de mémoire suppose un sentiment d'appartenance, l'expérience d'une communauté partagée ; il suppose une inscription dans le temps, une durée de fabrication, de fermentation. Il suppose un cadre, une tradition, la formation d'un imaginaire et d'un ensemble de représentations collectives. Bref, il suppose une histoire immédiatement ressentie comme commune. Or l'expérience spontanée de l'Europe n'est nullement celle de l'unité, c'est

11 Nora, *Présent, nation, mémoire*, 381.

12 Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 2226.

13 Nora, *Présent, nation, mémoire*, 386-387.

au contraire celle de la division. L'ambition de l'Europe est de surmonter ses divisions, qui ne sont pas seulement nationales, mais de toute nature : langues, populations, territoires, religions. Qui sait si le lieu de mémoire le plus naturel de l'Europe (par rapport, notamment, aux Etats-Unis) ne serait pas celui de 'la frontière'? »[14] Aura-t-on constaté que tout en soulignant la difficulté de conceptualisation d'une échelle véritablement européenne, Nora, sans nul doute influencé par sa lecture de Pomian et de son essai *L'Europe et ses nations* (1990), où le fait frontalier sert de principale clé de compréhension de l'Europe, livrait lui-même un instrument d'analyse et d'organisation ?[15]

Oserons-nous le dire (j'inclus mon ami et complice Étienne François dans ce « nous ») ? Ce sont ces contraintes, ces défis qui nous ont travaillés, et finalement décidés à nous lancer dans l'entreprise des lieux de mémoire européens, à la même époque où, parallèlement, une équipe emmenée par Heinz Duchhardt et l'Institut d'histoire européenne de Mayence, et complétée par Pim den Boer, Georg Kreis et Wolfgang Schmale dirigeait trois volumes d'*Europäische Erinnerungsorte* (2012). Première étape : la rédaction à quatre mains d'un cahier sobrement intitulé *Lieux de mémoire européens* pour la Documentation Photographique à l'initiative de la rédactrice en chef Nathalie Petitjean. Modeste par son ampleur, ambitieux conceptuellement par la nécessité qu'il impliquait de tester en pratique, « grandeur nature », la faisabilité de vingt-trois lieux de mémoire européens potentiels, ce dossier nous permit d'en avoir le cœur net. Témoin de son insatiable curiosité d'esprit et d'un élégant *fair-play* intellectuel, Nora adouba le projet en signant un avant-propos élogieux soulignant, dans notre cahier, la « manière d'aborder la mémoire européenne [qui] rompt avec l'illusion d'une unité préétablie comme avec celle d'une unité supposée, fondée sur une histoire une, un héritage, une civilisation, au profit d'une présentation kaléidoscopique et d'un puzzle à géométrie variable, ouvert

14 Nora, *Présent, nation, mémoire*, 386.

15 Cf. Thomas Serrier, « L'histoire de l'Europe est celle de ses frontières », in *Europa. Notre histoire*, dir. Étienne François et Thomas Serrier (Paris: Les Arènes, 2017), 737-751, qui reprend une citation inaugurale du livre de Pomian.

et toujours discutable. »[16] S'ensuivirent, à son invitation, trois longues réunions de travail d'une après-midi entière qui rythmèrent l'année 2013 à une cadence plus ou moins trimestrielle. Objectif : trouver une organisation d'ensemble adéquate et dresser une liste d'entrées pour un hypothétique projet de *Lieux de mémoire européens*, qu'accueillerait la « Bibliothèque des histoires » chez Gallimard. La première et la dernière rassemblèrent Pierre Nora, Étienne François et moi-même, la deuxième les mêmes plus Krzysztof Pomian, dans le bureau tout aussi légendaire qu'exigu et croulant sous les livres de Pierre Nora chez Gallimard, au 5, rue Sébastien Bottin. Visiblement l'architecte des *Lieux de mémoire* de la France et son complice du *Débat*, très impliqué à cette époque dans son projet de musée d'histoire de l'Europe à Bruxelles, s'étaient pris au jeu...

De ces trois longues et studieuses séances de travail, je garde en mémoire la vivacité des échanges, menés sous la férule affable de « Pierre » et tout entiers tournés vers l'examen de la viabilité conceptuelle et éditoriale de l'entreprise. Je me souviens que, dans cette phase tâtonnante, nous avions adopté, en guise de catégories de travail, certains titres de chapitres des *Lieux* particulièrement adaptés, selon nous, à une approche de l'Europe qui fasse justice des multiples divisions mémorielles du continent : « Conflits et partages », « Partages de l'espace-temps ». À la notion-même de frontière et aux études de cas de frontières singulières étaient dévolue une large place dans ces débats à bâtons rompus.

Des raisons tant personnelles qu'éditoriales et conceptuelles conduisirent finalement à l'abandon du projet chez Gallimard, et à sa reconceptualisation, aux Arènes, où Étienne François et moi-même, à l'initiative de l'éditrice Hélène de Virieu et du PDG des Arènes Laurent Beccaria, purent développer un projet en deux, puis trois volumes, initialement conçus comme *Lieux de mémoire européens*, et finalement publié en un seul épais volume, mentionné plus haut : *Europa. Notre*

16 Pierre Nora, « Avant-propos », in *Lieux de mémoire européens*, dir. Étienne François et Thomas Serrier, Documentation Photographique n.° 8087 (Paris: La Documentation Française, 2012).

histoire. Si la dynamique d'ensemble est demeurée proche, certains choix prirent cependant le contre-pied des perspectives antérieures. S'il fallait noter au plus court certaines différences fondamentales distinguant le volume abouti sous cette forme, en 2017, du stade primitif des discussions menées avec Pierre Nora, en 2013-2014, il me semble qu'il faudrait en retenir trois : premièrement, face à l'interrogation taraudante touchant aux contours de validité de tel ou tel « lieu » – tel événement, tel personnage, tel conflit, telle rencontre, tel phénomène, toujours localisés, toujours situés, pouvaient-ils décemment être considérés comme authentiquement « européens » ? –, Étienne François et moi-même avons finalement préféré abandonner autant que faire se peut toute normativité et tout établissement trop auctorial d'un assortiment de « lieux », pour adopter une liste ouverte, expérimentale. Nous l'avons élaborée collégialement avec plusieurs spécialistes d'autres champs et d'autres espaces, lors notamment d'une énième version de ces « sympathiques colloques internationaux » organisés à l'Académie des Sciences de Berlin (parmi nos conseillers informels : Luisa Passerini, Jay Winter, Włodzimierz Borodziej, Valérie Rosoux, Bénédicte Savoy, Catherine Gousseff, Drago Roksandic, Pierre Monnet, Ibrahima Thioub, Mike Plitt). Deuxièmement, pleinement soutenus en ce point par nos éditeurs, qui avalisèrent sans ciller la perspective de passer de deux à trois volumes, nous avons assumé l'idée d'un fourmillement nécessaire, qui rendrait au mieux compte non seulement des multiples perspectives possibles dès lors qu'il est question d'Europe, mais aussi de la dialectique complexe de mémoires et de contre-mémoires caractéristique de l'Europe, tout en permettant de plus ou moins hiérarchiser la valence des « lieux » sélectionnés. *Europa* serait résolument « labyrinthique », et non pas « cathédralesque », pour paraphraser Nora.[17]

Nous eûmes, enfin et surtout, l'intuition, libératrice au regard du redoutable doute systématique sur l'européanité toujours trop fragile de tout « lieu », qu'il fallait tout simplement confier aux cent neuf contributeurs retenus l'entière liberté de dire, si oui ou non, à la lu-

17 Pierre Nora, « Comment écrire l'histoire de France ? », in *Les lieux de mémoire*, 2219.

mière de leur expertise, ils considéraient « leur » lieu comme véritablement « européen » – tout l'intérêt étant de laisser à chaque spécialiste le soin d'apporter des réponses, souvent contradictoires, et de définir des contours d'Europe toujours changeants, qui fluctuent de fait d'une entrée à l'autre.

Nora suivit avec intérêt, quoique naturellement de plus loin, l'évolution jusqu'à son terme de cette publication, nous faisant alors l'amitié d'un bilan rigoureux sous forme dialoguée, retranscrit dans les colonnes du *Débat*. À travers ses questions transparaissent tout autant son intérêt demeuré entier pour le sujet que son analyse sans compromis des difficultés méthodologiques d'une histoire mémorielle de l'Europe, la moindre n'étant pas celle d'avoir dû élaborer au sein d'un projet d'histoire mémorielle une forme de transmission d'un savoir historique factuel, qui peut de fait, donnée caractéristique – et partie du problème – faire défaut selon les espaces européens où l'on se place : « On a l'impression, remarque Nora, que, au départ, vous vous étiez calés sur l'idée des lieux de mémoire européens. Puis vous êtes passés au problème plus général des mémoires européennes, de la diversité des mémoires et de leur unité problématique. Et à partir de là vous avez fait un troisième voyage qui vous a menés de la mémoire à l'histoire. »[18] Au détour de son questionnaire ressurgit également, transposée à l'Europe, l'une de ses intuitions primordiales de l'époque des *Lieux de mémoire* de la France, à savoir que le surgissement d'un moment mémoriel de la nation, fait de « permanence actualisatrice », survient au moment d'une « déprise », d'un « arrachement brutal au passé traditionnel ».[19] Où l'on retrouve sans doute trace de la belle remarque de Milan Kundera : « Européen : celui qui a la nostalgie de l'Europe. »[20] Ou, dans les mots de Nora : « La plongée de l'Europe dans sa mémoire exprime-t-elle son

18 « Europa. Notre histoire, Étienne François, Thomas Serrier : un échange avec Pierre Nora », *Le Débat* 198, (janvier-février 2018): 147.

19 Pierre Nora, « La nation-mémoire », *Les lieux de mémoire*, 2213 et 2215.

20 Milan Kundera, *L'art du roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 154. On se souvient que le célèbre article de Kundera, « Un Occident kidnappé ou la tragédie de l'Europe centrale » (1983) avait été publié en France par *Le Débat*.

épuisement historique, ou, au contraire, la confirmation qu'elle reste comme un avant-garde de l'Histoire ? »[21]

Concluons justement sur cet aspect, à la lumière de l'état de l'Europe actuelle, à la lumière notamment du différentiel spatial de rapports au temps, à l'Histoire et à la mémoire – ce que François Hartog a judicieusement appelé le régime d'historicité – qui oppose de nouveau deux parties du continent, même si la renationalisation des mémoires observable partout s'accompagne de clivages mémoriels internes, et invite à complexifier. Le 24 février 2022 a cependant, d'une certaine manière, clarifié les choses, en jetant une lumière crue sur l'altérité mémorielle russe à l'ère de Poutine. Nous en avions eu l'intuition en débutant notre article inaugural d'*Europa* « L'ombre de la Seconde Guerre mondiale » par la question, inspirée du livre de James J. Sheehan : « Où sont passés tous les soldats ? », et en émettant en creux l'hypothèse que l'espace d'analyse correspondait à cet espace défini par « le paisible *way of life* qui préside au tournant du XXIe siècle de Lisbonne à Tallinn et de Dublin à Bucarest ».[22]

L'Europe – qu'il faudrait donc résolument limiter, du moins pour l'heure, à ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler l'Europe occidentale et l'Europe centrale – est-elle pour autant, comme disait Nora, à « l'avant-garde de l'Histoire » ? Une certitude demeure. Proposer non pas « l'histoire 'telle qu'elle s'est réellement déroulée' » mais « une histoire d'Europe débattue, revendiquée, réinterprétée, bref réactualisée de génération en génération : tout ce qui a suffisamment compté pour nos prédécesseurs pour qu'ils l'enregistrent, le conservent, le transforment, le transmettent, le discutent et se le disputent, parce que cela faisait sens à leurs yeux ; mais aussi tout ce qui, dans notre héritage partagé et conflictuel, nous semble vital », c'est analyser des enjeux qui se nouent autour de l'Histoire et de la mémoire, mais qui dépassent de loin la seule question des

21 « Europa. Notre histoire », 160.

22 Étienne François et Thomas Serrier, « L'ombre de la Seconde Guerre mondiale », in *Europa. Notre histoire*, 28.

formes de « présences du passé ».[23] La possibilité d'un rapport critique à la mémoire reste un bien précieux de nos démocraties.

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23 Étienne Francois, Thomas Serrier, « Prologue », in *Europa. Notre histoire*, 14.

Pierre Nora.
L'histoire « au second degré »

Felipe Brandi*

Au cours des quarante dernières années, les recherches historiques furent, d'une manière globale, frappées par deux évolutions majeures qui en ont redessiné radicalement les contours : d'une part, la montée en puissance de la mémoire ; de l'autre, l'essor extraordinaire de l'histoire contemporaine. D'un côté, la mémoire cesse d'être tenue pour l'adversaire de l'histoire pour se faire finalement reconnaître comme étant, à la fois, objet et, surtout, partie intégrante de l'histoire, son revers indissociable. De l'autre côté, l'histoire contemporaine, secteur longtemps discrédité, relégué depuis la constitution de l'historiographie universitaire au XIX^e^ siècle à une position marginale, puisque jugé trop proche des passions politiques, parvient de façon surprenante, en à peine quelques décennies, à occuper le centre même de la discipline historique. Forte de

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ses conquêtes et sûre de ses moyens, l'histoire contemporaine rayonne, à l'heure actuelle, comme le champ le plus vaste, le plus dynamique et le plus influent de l'historiographie, le présent étant devenu la catégorie centrale, dominante, de notre intelligibilité historique. Au confluent de ces deux évolutions qui, ensemble, ont profondément changé le visage de la recherche historique, un nom de toute évidence s'impose. Celui de Pierre Nora, historien, éditeur, académicien, homme de revue et animateur de la vie intellectuelle française, enseignant à l'Institut d'études politiques puis directeur d'études à l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, théoricien de la mémoire collective, penseur critique de l'identité nationale.

Ayant publié aux alentours de mille titres en tant qu'éditeur chez Gallimard et chez Julliard, non seulement Pierre Nora représente une maison d'édition à lui tout seul, mais il est aussi le nom commun derrière des maîtres-ouvrages tels que *Le Dimanche de Bouvines*, *La Naissance du Purgatoire*, *Mythe et Épopée*, *Les Mots et les choses*, *La Logique du vivant*, *La Vision des vaincus*, *Les Jardins d'Adonis*, *Montaillou, village occitan* et bien d'autres encore. Incomparable découvreur de talents, historien-sismographe, à même de détecter les moindres secousses du paysage des sciences sociales de son temps et de sentir dans quelle direction souffle le vent, anticipant ainsi les modes intellectuelles et les variations du goût des lecteurs, Pierre Nora circule, de son bureau chez Gallimard à sa résidence Place Furstenberg, entouré d'un prestige quasi princier, pleinement conscient de son autorité et de la sûreté de son jugement. *Homo historicus*, fédérateur de la vie des idées, il est fréquemment présenté, chez ceux qui ont brossé son portrait, comme l'« éminence grise » des sciences de l'homme en France, comme un mélange d'homme de lettres et d'entrepreneur clairvoyant, inventeur de deux concepts qui ont fait fortune aussi bien chez les historiens qu'auprès du grand public, ceux de « lieu de mémoire » et d'« ego-histoire ». En réalité, Pierre Nora fut tout cela, et bien davantage : passeur d'idées, médiateur entre les recherches de pointe des sciences de l'homme et le grand public cultivé, il fut aussi le témoin aigu des bouleversements politiques et des métamorphoses successives de la vie culturelle française au cours du siècle qu'il a traversé.

Architecte et chef d'orchestre des *Lieux de mémoire*, il a, par son apport, renouvelé notre manière de réfléchir à la part du passé dans le présent, en nous rendant plus sensibles à ses points d'ancrage, à ses lieux de fixation symboliques – et ce, tout en tendant à la France un miroir insoupçonné d'elle-même. Aussi bien dans les collections qu'il dirigea chez Gallimard qu'à la tête de la revue *Le Débat*, il n'a cessé de défendre l'exercice d'une réflexion libre, à l'abri des conformismes et des dogmatismes. Analyste lucide du « métier d'historien » et de ses transformations, son regard inquiet s'est porté sur l'événement, la mémoire, le présent, ainsi que sur l'éclatement du grand récit national sous l'effet des revendications d'identités plurielles. Interrogeant la fabrique de l'histoire et ses rapports au présent et à la mémoire, il s'est fait, au cours des années soixante-dix, le hérault d'une historiographie prête à entrer dans son âge réflexif. Et c'est dans ce cadre que s'inscrivent ses questionnements sur la place actuelle de l'histoire dans la cité – non plus un simple héritage, mais une responsabilité partagée à l'égard d'un passé disputé et parfois conflictuel.

Jeunes années

Né en 1931 à Paris, au sein d'une famille de la grande bourgeoisie juive libérale, Pierre Nora a grandi dans un cadre privilégié où la culture et les échanges intellectuels occupaient une place centrale. Peu fervente, républicaine et parfaitement assimilée, sa famille n'en fut pas moins frappée, malgré son appartenance à un milieu aisé et protégé, par les lois d'exclusion et les persécutions antisémites instaurées sous l'Occupation, qui vinrent ainsi brutalement rappeler la fragilité de cette intégration. En 1940, alors que l'étau se resserrait, son père, Gaston Nora, vétéran de la Grande Guerre et chirurgien urologiste renommé, chef de service à l'hôpital Rothschild, prit la décision d'envoyer les siens se réfugier dans le Sud. À Hendaye, sa mère et les quatre enfants tentèrent, sans succès, de franchir la frontière pour gagner l'Amérique via l'Espagne. Ce sera donc en France, au rythme de l'exode et des déplacements imposés, que sa famille vivra la guerre, dont elle sortira indemne, miraculée, malgré une série d'échappées in extremis. Entre neuf et treize ans, Pierre Nora connaît donc de première main le conflit.

Grenoble, le Vercors, Isère : une succession d'étapes, dictée par la nécessité d'échapper à la traque, jalonne ces années de passage de l'enfance à l'adolescence. Tandis que ses deux frères aînés, Simon et Jean, rejoignaient le maquis du Vercors, le jeune Pierre parvient lui-même à échapper de justesse à des moments de quasi-capture, notamment en se jetant, à douze ans, par la fenêtre d'un premier étage de son pensionnat lors d'une rafle de la Gestapo en plein hiver.

De son propre aveu, l'expérience de la guerre change à jamais la vie pour un enfant de douze ans. Elle entraîne d'abord une prise de conscience, en tant que juif persécuté, de la singularité de son existence – de sa judéité et de sa position particulière de Français « pas comme les autres ». Et si la guerre ne le rendit pas plus croyant – à l'adolescence, il refusera de faire sa bar-mitsva –, la conscience aiguë de sa judéité se fait vivement sentir, avec une intensité pressante, dans l'élan de solidarité profonde qu'il éprouve envers Israël lorsque la menace pèse sur le pays à l'occasion de la guerre des Six Jours. C'est une telle conscience qui s'exprime, là encore d'une manière tout aussi révélatrice, dans sa demande de faire graver l'étoile de David sur son épée d'académicien lors de son entrée à l'Académie Française, en 2002. Geste symbolique s'il en est, qui traduit aussi bien son identité vécue, juive *et* française, que la source cachée d'une œuvre : celle d'un historien de la mémoire qui a pris la France à la fois pour laboratoire, terrain et principal sujet d'étude.[1]

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Après avoir fréquenté le lycée Louis-le-Grand, à Paris, Pierre Nora se forme en philosophie et ambitionne d'entrer à la prestigieuse École normale supérieure, haut lieu de formation et passage obligé pour une partie de l'élite parisienne. Il échoue pourtant, revers traumatique qui brise le parcours académique classique qu'il avait suivi jusque-là et qui le hantera toute sa vie. Humilié « jusqu'à l'os », convaincu qu'il était destiné à l'ENS et que sa vocation philosophique venait d'être interrompue, il

1 *Cf.*, notamment, François Dosse, *Pierre Nora. Homo historicus* (Paris: Perrin, 2011), 256 et *sq.*

transformera ce revers en une sorte d'événement fondateur, déterminant sa destinée d'historien et d'intellectuel « hors norme ». Échec providentiel, pourrait-on dire, le poussant à se frayer une voie à lui tout seul, à se placer dans une zone d'intersection, jusqu'alors peu explorée, entre l'université et l'édition, en circulant sans cesse de l'une à l'autre. Contraint de renoncer à la philosophie, il se tourne vers l'agrégation d'histoire. Sa conversion à l'histoire naît donc d'un revers scolaire majeur qui le conduit à investir pleinement une discipline dans laquelle il trouvera peu à peu sa voie. Une fois agrégé, il est mobilisé en 1958 mais écarté des combats pour raisons de santé. C'est alors au lycée Lamoricière, à Oran, qu'il s'initie au métier d'enseignant à la fin des années 1950.

Pendant de nombreuses années, Pierre Nora fut l'auteur d'un seul ouvrage : *Les Français d'Algérie* (1961). Directement nourri de son expérience d'enseignant à Oran et étayé par un vaste travail d'archives, cet ouvrage de jeunesse, auquel Nora restera attaché toute sa vie, devient la pierre angulaire marquant la sortie de terre d'un projet d'histoire contemporaine qui pour l'instant s'ignore, mais qui sera épuré, élargi, mis au point au long des six prochaines décennies. Non moins déterminante en ces années fut la découverte, à la bibliothèque municipale d'Oran, du petit manuel d'Ernest Lavisse. Incarnation de la pédagogie historique de la III^e^ République, « instituteur national », Lavisse deviendra, plus qu'une figure tutélaire, une présence obsédante, matricielle, qui accompagnera Nora jusqu'à ses derniers écrits, comme une sorte d'anti-modèle ou de double inversé. Deux directions menant vers ses recherches futures semblent dès lors s'esquisser. Alors que *Les Français d'Algérie* amorçait une première réflexion sur le contemporain à travers une interrogation sur la présence du passé dans le présent, la découverte de Lavisse marque, chez Nora, le premier mouvement vers l'histoire de l'histoire – l'étude du rôle que jouent l'écriture historique et l'institution scolaire dans la formation de la conscience nationale et dans le mode d'inculcation du sentiment patriotique.[2]

2 *Cf.* Pierre Nora, « Ernest Lavisse : son rôle dans la formation du sentiment national », *Revue historique* 228, n º 1 (1962) : 73-106.

Initiation au métier d'éditeur

De retour en France, Pierre Nora se lance dans la préparation de sa thèse, jamais achevée, à la Fondation Thiers. Là encore, la trajectoire qui semblait toute tracée et conduisait à une carrière de chercheur se voit derechef interrompue, un nouvel horizon, inattendu, s'ouvrant au jeune historien en quête de sa voie : l'édition. Le métier d'éditeur, qui fera sa renommée et auquel il se consacrera pendant soixante ans, débute pour lui en 1963 avec la création de la collection « Archives » chez Julliard. Collection novatrice, qui proposait des livres historiques de poche au moment même où ce nouveau format parvenait, non sans résistances, à faire sa percée dans le marché éditorial français. L'objectif était de permettre aux lecteurs un contact direct avec des documents d'archives – le matériau brut des historiens –, présentés par des spécialistes. Dotés d'une typographie et de couvertures très modernes, les volumes de la collection – qui accueillit notamment '*L'Œil de Moscou' à Paris*, de Jules Humbert-Droz, *Auschwitz*, de Léon Poliakov, *Le Congrès de Tours, 1920*, d'Annie Kriegel ou encore *L'An Mil*, de Georges Duby – rendaient la recherche historique la plus actuelle accessible, pour une somme modique, à un public vaste et diversifié, amateur comme universitaire.

Le succès d'« Archives » ne tarde pas à attirer l'attention de Claude Gallimard, soucieux de renforcer le secteur d'histoire et des sciences humaines dans son catalogue. Tout juste nommé enseignant à l'Institut d'études politiques, Nora est ainsi invité à conduire cette expansion au sein de la maison qui règne sur le paysage littéraire français. Devant l'intrusion de la production universitaire au sein de ce haut-lieu des lettres, des résistances se dressèrent. Nora lui-même s'est plus d'une fois amusé à raconter l'accueil hostile qu'il reçut d'Aragon, qui le gratifia, non sans mépris, du surnom mordant de « Monsieur Notes-de-bas-de-page ». Nous sommes alors en 1965, et la toute jeune expérience d'« Archives » avait déjà révélé sa capacité d'inventer des formules éditoriales séduisantes, son aptitude à débusquer les voix neuves, à pressentir des titres à fort potentiel, et son talent pour atteindre un public étendu. Il saura apaiser les réactions de méfiance. Et, fort de la

bénédiction du vieux Gaston Gallimard, tiendra bon, s'installant durablement au sein d'une maison d'édition où sa carrière d'une longévité exceptionnelle finira par faire de lui l'une des figures phares, reconnu par Antoine Gallimard lui-même comme étant « plus Gallimard que les Gallimard ». Le voici, donc, décidé à consacrer sa vie et son talent au service de l'œuvre des autres : dénicheur des voix nouvelles et instigateur de projets, commandant des titres, travaillant dans l'ombre des chefs-d'œuvre. L'éditeur est, en effet, un personnage étrange, une figure des coulisses, mû par la joie de découvrir un manuscrit inattendu, d'en reconnaître le potentiel et de deviner ce qu'il pourra devenir. Son métier est affaire de flair : il prend le risque de défendre des textes auxquels il croit et fonde son travail sur des échanges incessants avec les auteurs, dont il se fait à la fois l'allié fidèle, le complice vigilant, le conseiller patient, le contradicteur exigeant, le guide à travers ce chemin incertain qui mène de la première ébauche à l'ouvrage achevé. Et tout cela, pourquoi ? Peut-être pour le seul plaisir d'assister à la naissance d'un livre, la quête de cet émerveillement indescriptible de pouvoir livrer au monde une œuvre sur laquelle il avait osé parier et qu'il a aidé à accoucher.

Chez Gallimard, son premier projet est la création de la « Bibliothèque des Sciences humaines », en 1966, qui reprend le modèle, en le déployant, de la Bibliothèque des Idées (1927) et de la Bibliothèque de Philosophie (1950), reconnaissables à la couronne de titres disposés en arc sur leur couverture blanche. Entrée fracassante, s'il en est, puisque accompagnée de la parution de *Les Mots et les choses*, de Michel Foucault, de *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, d'Émile Benveniste, de *La Parole chez les Dogons*, de Geneviève Calame-Griaule, suivis de *Les Étapes de la pensée sociologique*, de Raymond Aron, d'*Homo Hierarchicus*, de Louis Dumont, et de *La Logique du vivant*, de François Jacob. Succès éclatant et immédiat, répété avec les collections « Témoins » (1967), la « Bibliothèque des Histoires » (1971), « Le Débat » (1990), ou encore la reprise de la collection « La Suite des temps ». Au total, environ 700 titres qui ont marqué d'une empreinte durable le paysage des sciences de l'homme en France au cours de la seconde moitié du XX^e^

siècle. Parmi toutes ces initiatives éditoriales, une mention spéciale revient à la « Bibliothèque des Histoires », que Nora lui-même qualifiait de « navire amiral d'une armada de collections » et qui garde, en effet, quelque chose d'une bibliothèque rêvée de l'historiographie française du dernier tiers du XX^e^ siècle. Placée sous le signe de l'« éclatement de l'histoire », d'une histoire fécondée par la multiplication de nouveaux objets et par une extraordinaire dilatation de son territoire, sa « Bibliothèque des Histoires » promeut une historiographie qui refuse de s'isoler et revendique pleinement son appartenance aux sciences de l'homme. Elle devient le bastion d'une avant-garde historienne, fortement inspirée par les problématiques anthropologiques. Son impressionnant catalogue accueille les ouvrages devenus classiques de Georges Duby, l'anthropologie historique promue par Jacques Le Goff, *Les Jardins d'Adonis*, de Marcel Detienne, le best-seller *Montaillou, village occitan*, d'Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Penser la Révolution française*, de François Furet, *La Fête révolutionnaire*, de Mona Ozouf, *La Vision des vaincus*, de Nathan Wachtel ou encore *L'Écriture de l'histoire*, de Michel de Certeau. Une production foisonnante, diverse, kaléidoscopique et profondément novatrice, que Pierre Nora a choisi d'accompagner d'un véritable manifeste : la série en trois volumes *Faire de l'histoire*, dirigée avec Jacques Le Goff et publiée en 1974, devenue l'acte d'auto-affirmation collective d'une nouvelle génération d'historiens sûre de son fait.

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Les collections créées par Pierre Nora – en premier lieu sa « Bibliothèque des Histoires » et sa « Bibliothèque des Sciences humaines » – incarnent ce que l'on a convenu d'appeler l'âge d'or de l'histoire et des sciences sociales françaises. Ce jugement, devenu un lieu commun, n'en demeure pas moins profondément vrai. Les œuvres de leur catalogue constituent sans conteste le fruit d'un moment intellectuel d'une extraordinaire vitalité, qui s'est étendu de la veille des années 1960 jusqu'à très loin dans les années 1980 : les véritables « Trente Glorieuses » de l'historiographie et des sciences sociales en France. En effet, l'entrée de Pierre Nora chez Gallimard en 1965 coïncide avec la période où le pay-

sage éditorial et littéraire français connaît un tournant majeur. Il est marqué par la montée en puissance de la littérature *d'essai* et par l'essor spectaculaire des publications savantes. Grâce à son alliance singulière entre écriture érudite et élégance stylistique, l'essai parvient à s'imposer de nouveau dans le champ des lettres françaises entre les années 1960 et 1990, retrouvant — comme au XVIII^e^ siècle — sa place légitime au cœur de la création littéraire. Des figures éminentes des sciences sociales françaises, auteurs d'ouvrages jusque-là réservés à un public restreint de spécialistes, ont été soudain propulsées au premier plan de la scène éditoriale et médiatique, prenant la place autrefois occupée par les grands noms de la littérature.

Ce phénomène a conduit à une profonde transformation qui a ébranlé aussi bien le domaine de la création savante que les pratiques culturelles des Français. Pierre Nora figure parmi les éditeurs qui ont pris aussitôt conscience de l'existence d'une demande croissante pour ce type de littérature académique de la part d'un lectorat de plus en plus large, dont le profil, les goûts et les attentes évoluaient rapidement dans le contexte de l'expansion universitaire dans la France des années 1960. À vrai dire, toutes ses collections s'adressent à ce nouveau public instruit qui s'élargit, avide d'ouvrages académiques situés à mi-chemin entre la production strictement savante et la diffusion destinée à un lectorat plus large. Combien d'auteurs de son catalogue, issus de disciplines réputées austères, ont vu soudainement s'accroître leur prestige social et scientifique ? Foucault, avec *Les Mots et les choses*, accède au statut de vedette. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie connaît un succès de vente extraordinaire avec *Montaillou*, qui dépasse 150 000 exemplaires. C'est encore sous l'impulsion de Nora que des œuvres comme *Mythe et Épopée*, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* ou *Homo hierarchicus* ont contribué à faire connaître du grand public les travaux de Georges Dumézil, Émile Benveniste et Louis Dumont. À ces grands noms de la scène intellectuelle française, il conviendrait d'ajouter, enfin, les auteurs étrangers que Nora a contribué à faire connaître en France, tels qu'Ernst Kantorowicz, Erwin Panofsky, Francis Haskell, Karl Polanyi, Thorstein Veblen ou encore Arnaldo Momigliano.

Vers une *histoire au second degré*

Parmi toutes les collections de Pierre Nora, la « Bibliothèque des Histoires » occupe une place à part. Si elle fut toujours sa collection chérie, ce fut, d'abord et avant tout, parce que Pierre Nora inaugure sa carrière d'éditeur revendiquant sa forte identité d'historien. Mais d'historien *du présent* – c'est-à-dire de ce temps vif, ouvert, déchiré par le conflit des interprétations. Réalité en flux, toujours en mouvement, trop fuyant pour être apprivoisé et dépourvu de distance critique, le présent est une temporalité indocile, saturée par la surabondance documentaire et par le déferlement des événements, obligeant l'historien à repenser les méthodes traditionnelles de sa discipline. « Histoire du présent » : cet intitulé qu'en 1976 Nora choisit pour sa direction d'études à l'EHESS, où il enseigna pendant vingt ans, ne renvoyait pas à un simple découpage chronologique, mais recélait, en fait, un véritable programme de recherche.

Longtemps délaissée par l'historiographie, considérée comme impropre à l'analyse historique parce que trop proche pour se soustraire aux passions, l'histoire contemporaine a représenté, pour Nora, non seulement le champ de ses enquêtes, mais aussi une cause à défendre. L'historiographie qui triomphe dans la seconde moitié du XIX^e^ siècle est en effet convaincue que l'histoire ne saura répondre à sa mission scientifique qu'à la condition de prendre ses distances à l'égard de l'actualité et de se rendre étanche aux partis pris du présent. Persuadés que la vérité serait inéluctablement corrompue, faussée, par toute intrusion des préoccupations contemporaines, Gabriel Monod et Gustave Fagniez n'avaient-ils pas, lors de la fondation de la *Revue Historique* (1876), posé la rupture entre passé et présent comme la condition indispensable à une historiographie vouée à un « but désintéressé et scientifique » ? D'après eux, tous les événements postérieurs à la chute de Napoléon en 1815 appartenaient au présent et devaient, de ce fait, être écartés de toute étude historique soucieuse d'impartialité. En effet, ce n'est qu'à partir des années 1960 que l'histoire contemporaine commence à acquérir en France une première reconnaissance comme champ de recherche légitime. Véritable rupture avec une ancienne méfiance à l'égard du

contemporain, solidement ancrée chez les historiens, cette inflexion se confirme dans le sillage des événements de 1968. On assiste alors à un glissement continu – d'abord discret, puis de plus en plus marqué – des centres d'intérêt de la communauté historienne vers le XIX^e^ et, plus encore, le XX^e^ siècle.

Depuis le tournant des années 1970, Pierre Nora plaide la cause de l'histoire contemporaine – de cette histoire qui lui apparaît alors comme une « histoire sans objet, sans statut et sans définition » ; une histoire qui ne s'était jamais vraiment trouvée, réduite qu'elle était à un « simple appendice temporel ».[3] Refusant la césure séparant le contemporain de l'histoire, il se donne pour tâche de mettre au jour ce que l'histoire contemporaine pourrait introduire d'irréductiblement nouveau dans la pratique historienne. En ces années encore, Nora se cherche en tant que contemporanéiste. Bien avant qu'il ne se tourne vers la mémoire, ce qui lui paraît constituer les traits originaux du contemporain, c'est d'abord l'accélération du temps historique, l'inscription du présent dans une échelle désormais mondiale, l'entrée décisive des masses dans l'histoire et le sentiment inédit que le présent est désormais vécu comme immédiatement historique. Plus profondément encore, le présent inaugure selon lui un nouveau régime de l'événement : celui-ci n'est plus simplement rapporté par les médias, mais produit, amplifié et démultiplié par eux, à chaud, dans l'immédiateté de l'information. À ses yeux, l'histoire contemporaine est une histoire dont le cœur ne bat pas dans le silence des archives, mais « dans le brouhaha d'une salle de rédaction ou le tohu-bohu cérémonieux d'une conférence de presse ». À nous de vivre désormais dans la « profusion d'un monde surévénementalisé ».

En 1968, Pierre Nora vivait boulevard Saint-Michel, quasiment en face de la Sorbonne. Depuis le balcon de son appartement — devenu, l'espace de quelques jours, un poste d'observation improvisé où se réfugiaient plusieurs journalistes — il assistait aux affrontements qui

3 Pierre Nora, « Pour une histoire contemporaine », in *Mélanges en l'honneur de Fernand Braudel* (Toulouse : Privat, 1973), 413-426.

se déroulaient sous ses fenêtres. Un soir, alors que les CRS chargeaient la foule, une scène décisive se grava en lui : il entendit Julien Besançon, le reporter d'Europe 1, micro à la main, commenter en direct ce qui se passait sous leurs yeux. Nora suivait sa voix à ses côtés, tandis que, quelques mètres plus loin, dans son propre salon, un transistor en relayait l'écho anonyme, identique à celui entendu par des millions d'auditeurs dispersés à travers le pays. Cette voix dédoublée, présente et délocalisée, ce décalage infime entre la voix en direct et sa reproduction radiophonique, fut pour lui une révélation : il comprit soudain que désormais, l'événement ne se donnait plus dans la seule épaisseur des faits, mais qu'il était façonné, mis en forme, amplifié, voire produit par les médias. Il se donnait dans la manière dont les médias l'enveloppaient, l'organisaient, le faisaient exister. L'année suivante, l'alunissage d'Apollo confirma cette prise de conscience : le monde entier, rivé devant les écrans, vivait conjointement un même présent, fabriqué image après image. Pour Nora, les médias ne reflétaient plus les faits, ils les engendraient. À partir de là se dessine une nouvelle intelligence du contemporain, attentive non seulement aux faits, mais à leur mise en scène et aux dispositifs qui les transforment en expérience collective. Une nouvelle intelligence « au second degré » de l'histoire.

L'expression « histoire au second degré » est employée par Nora dans son célèbre texte d'ouverture aux *Lieux de mémoire*. Elle n'y figure pas comme un simple énoncé conceptuel, mais désigne une orientation de pensée qui nous permet d'unifier l'ensemble de son travail. L'idée, en fait, travaille sa pensée bien avant d'être explicitement nommée : on en entrevoit déjà les linéaments dans le plan d'ensemble qui se cache derrière la création de la collection « Archives », ou encore dans sa lecture enthousiaste, inspirée, du *Dimanche de Bouvines* (1973) de Georges Duby.[4] En 1987, elle réapparaît dans le texte d'introduction

4 Pierre Nora n'a cessé de souligner comment *Le Dimanche de Bouvines*, de Duby, subvertit la grande histoire nationale traditionnelle, tout en inaugurant une nouvelle manière de faire de l'histoire, désormais indissociable de la réflexivité historiographique. « Je crois, affirme-t-il, que c'est le premier livre qui fait de l'histoire et de l'historiographie en même temps, et qui dresse l'historiographie comme une des dimensions historiques réelles et pas marginales ». Marquant l'avènement d'une nouvelle intelligence de la notion même d'« historiographie », au sens moderne du mot, *Bouvines* a constitué pour Nora « le plus éloquent révélateur du nouveau rap-

aux *Essais d'ego-histoire*, qualifiant les témoignages rassemblés dans le recueil de documents « au second degré », avant de gagner le statut de programme théorique dans un texte, en réponse à Paul Ricœur, pour la revue *Le Débat* en 2002. À dire vrai, c'est très probablement à la précoce découverte de Lavisse que l'on doit l'éveil, chez Nora, d'une intelligence « au second degré » de l'histoire ; Lavisse lui fit mesurer le rôle de premier ordre que la transmission de l'histoire avait joué dans la construction de l'image que la France s'était faite d'elle-même. Voilà très tôt indiqué le chemin qui finira par le mener vers les futurs *Lieux de mémoire*.

Chez Nora, l'histoire « au second degré » est une histoire qui se tourne vers les conditions de sa fabrication, vers les opérations de l'atelier de l'historien, vers les institutions, les modes de transmission du passé et les cadres symboliques qui en assurent la gestion. Elle marque, dans sa pensée, l'entrée de la recherche historique dans son âge réflexif et la pleine conversion de l'histoire en historiographie. Historiographie entendue, cette fois, non plus comme simple histoire des historiens et de leurs travaux, mais comme mise à jour de l'opération historique elle-même et comme déplacement autoréférentiel d'une histoire des faits à une histoire des médiations et des mises en sens. La réalité du passé est désormais indissociable de sa réactivation dans le présent, et l'étude de ce qui un jour fut devient inséparable de l'analyse des interprétations, appropriations et significations successives qui l'ont arraché à l'oubli, l'intégrant ainsi dans notre imaginaire collectif.

Les Chemins de la mémoire

Cette conception d'une histoire « au second degré » traverse toute l'œuvre de Pierre Nora, tout en trouvant dans les *Lieux de mémoire* sa réalisation la plus aboutie. Vaste entreprise – trois tomes, sept volumes réunissant 130 auteurs en un total d'environ 5 000 pages – qui ne vise nullement à dresser un catalogue de repères patrimoniaux, mais à dé-

port au passé en train de s'établir » et l'une des inspirations majeures de la dimension réflexive et historiographique des futurs *Lieux de mémoire*.

placer le regard de l'historien vers la manière dont une collectivité – en l'occurrence, la France – élabore et gère son rapport au passé. Avant toute chose, à l'encontre d'un usage abusif de la notion aujourd'hui répandu, il convient de montrer clairement que chacun de ces « lieux » n'y est jamais envisagé comme un objet immédiatement donné ou comme une réalité simplement héritée, mais plutôt comme une construction historique à part entière, traversée par des conflits d'interprétation et des investissements symboliques répétés ; un nœud de significations, d'usages et de réappropriations successives, dont l'historicité propre devient l'objet même de l'analyse. En ce sens, ce qu'interrogent les *Lieux de mémoire*, ce sont les conditions dans lesquelles le passé a été conservé, transmis, figé, voire sacralisé – bref, rendu pensable dans le présent et reconnu comme héritage collectif. La première originalité du projet de Nora est là : loin de se contenter d'étaler une réflexion historiographique, il entend d'abord la mettre à l'épreuve. L'ouvrage *Lieux de mémoire* en constituant l'exercice même, la mise en œuvre concrète, par l'exemple.

Les premiers linéaments de cet ambitieux projet remontent au séminaire « Histoire du présent » que Pierre Nora inaugure en 1977-1978, lors de son entrée comme directeur d'études à l'EHESS. Consacré aux « lieux de la mémoire collective », le séminaire prend pour point de départ la condition ingrate dans laquelle se trouvait alors l'histoire contemporaine, reléguée au rang de « parente pauvre de l'historiographie scientifique ».[5] Persuadé que l'histoire contemporaine « ne se définit pas par une chronologie, ni par une méthode, mais par un point de vue », Nora proclame qu'il faut, en réalité, la reconnaître comme une « histoire *autre* », qui contraint l'historien à reconsidérer en profondeur les rapports entre histoire et mémoire. Son objectif premier était d'interroger les dynamiques et la sédimentation du sentiment national en France, mais, plutôt que d'en proposer une histoire abstraite ou institutionnelle, il lui paraît plus fécond d'en suivre les incarnations concrètes, en s'attachant aux lieux — au sens le plus large du terme, à la fois

5 Pierre Nora, « Histoire du présent », *Annuaire de l'EHESS*, 1977-1978, 177-179.

concret et métaphorique — où la mémoire nationale et le sentiment d'appartenance collective ont pris corps. Pour ce faire, Nora choisit de partir des lieux que la société elle-même a érigés en mémoriaux, et c'est dans ce cadre que s'esquisse une première compréhension de ce que sont les « lieux de mémoire » : des lieux matériels et topographiques, tels que les archives, les bibliothèques nationales ou les musées des monuments français, où le passé est conservé et accessible ; des lieux monumentaux et architecturaux, comme le Père-Lachaise, le Panthéon ou les monuments aux morts ; des lieux commémoratifs et symboliques, incarnés par les anniversaires, pèlerinages ou statues, qui relient le souvenir individuel à la mémoire collective ; des lieux conservatoires et transmissifs, tels que associations, manuels scolaires ou récits mémoriels, par lesquels la mémoire se perpétue et se transmet ; enfin, des lieux officiels et des lieux particuliers à certaines familles politiques ou religieuses, qui reflètent la pluralité et la conflictualité des appropriations du passé au sein de la communauté nationale française.

Une fois de plus, la réflexion de Nora se nourrit des transformations sociales de son temps, la genèse des *Lieux de mémoire* s'inscrivant pleinement dans les recompositions intellectuelles et politiques de la France de la fin des années 1970, dont trois d'entre elles méritent d'être rapidement soulignées. Primo, la disparition des deux pôles majeurs qui avaient structuré la vie politique française de l'après-guerre : le gaullisme et le Parti communiste français. Issus l'un et l'autre de l'expérience fondatrice de la Résistance, ils constituaient deux cadres interprétatifs, deux récits unificateurs, deux visions idéologiquement concurrentes, mais également puissantes et cohérentes, de l'histoire nationale et de l'identité de la France. À partir des années 1970, l'équilibre issu de leur rapport de force se défait. La fin du gaullisme coïncide avec l'érosion du récit résistancialiste imposé au lendemain de la Libération. Le monopole d'une mémoire héroïsée de la guerre se fissure, tandis que refait surface le souvenir plus sombre de la France de Vichy. D'après Nora, l'unité mémorielle forgée autour de la Résistance cède la place à une pluralité de récits, marquant un premier décrochage entre mémoire nationale et identité politique. Parallèlement, l'épuisement

de l'horizon révolutionnaire – qui avait longtemps orienté le temps historique vers l'avenir – transforme en profondeur le rapport que les Français entretiennent avec le passé. La perte de crédibilité d'un futur conçu à l'aune d'un projet de rupture restitue au passé une autonomie nouvelle. Désormais détaché d'un projet d'avenir qui le subordonnait, le passé s'impose et se trouve mis en valeur – non pas, toutefois, sous la forme d'une tradition vécue comme héritage continu, mais comme un monde désormais séparé de nous, devenu à la fois lointain et précieux, opaque et chargé d'un sens incertain.

Secundo, la disparition des « collectivités-mémoires », au premier rang desquelles les communautés paysannes. Le projet des *Lieux de mémoire* repose sur le diagnostic d'une transformation plus profonde de la société française, due à l'impact de l'industrialisation, de la croissance économique et de l'urbanisation sur l'assise rurale de la France, balayant tout un ensemble de traditions, de coutumes, de styles de vie inscrits dans la longue durée. Dès lors, les formes traditionnelles de transmission du passé se désagrègent. L'une des hypothèses fondatrices des *Lieux de mémoire* procède ainsi d'un constat paradoxal : on n'en vient à tant parler de mémoire que parce que l'on est en train de perdre les milieux qui en assuraient une transmission spontanée, incorporée aux pratiques quotidiennes. C'est précisément parce que la mémoire n'est plus portée par des milieux vivants qu'elle devient un enjeu prenant, un problème pour le présent et un objet des historiens. Qu'elle est, en somme, accaparée par l'histoire. À défaut d'une mémoire qui se transmet de façon organique, certains lieux – les archives, les musées, les monuments et les commémorations – sont investis par l'histoire de la responsabilité de sa conservation. Ces sont des dispositifs de cristallisation d'une mémoire qui n'est plus transmise spontanément. Ils offrent des points d'ancrage à des communautés désormais privées de leurs anciens ressorts mémoriels.

Tertio, la montée irrépressible des mémoires minoritaires, identitaires et éclatées, laquelle s'accompagne d'un déplacement profond des conflits politiques vers le terrain du passé. La prolifération des mémoires minoritaires s'inscrit dans un vaste ensemble de ruptures : effon-

drement des ordres nationaux et coloniaux, désagrégation des modes de vie traditionnels, luttes de démocratisation à l'échelle mondiale, sans oublier la puissance inédite des médias de masse, capables de donner visibilité et légitimité à des récits appartenant à des groupes historiquement dominés ou marginalisés. Dans ce nouveau paysage, de nombreux groupes sociaux entreprennent de reconquérir une mémoire autonome, un passé propre, conçu comme un ressort essentiel de leur affirmation identitaire dans le présent. La mémoire acquiert, dès lors, une portée nouvelle, indissociablement politique et éthique. Investie d'une mission réparatrice, elle cesse d'être prise pour un simple registre du souvenir pour fonctionner comme un opérateur de reconnaissance, se présentant comme le moyen de combler les silences et les oublis d'une histoire officielle jugée excluante. La mémoire devient donc, en ces années, un enjeu politique central, au croisement des luttes de représentation et des revendications, portées par les minorités, de l'inscription de leurs trajectoires particulières – longtemps négligées – dans le cadre plus large du récit national. En mettant en avant des injustices héritées et des passifs historiques non résolus, des groupes sociaux jusque-là dépourvus de visibilité publique accèdent au statut d'acteurs politiques à part entière. En réponse aux exclusions et aux silences produits par les récits nationaux unificateurs, ils formulent des attentes de réparation qui redéfinissent les contours de l'appartenance collective. Or, ce qui est ici en jeu, ce n'est plus seulement l'interprétation du passé, mais les conditions sociales et politiques de sa reconnaissance. La mémoire devient ainsi un instrument central de reconfiguration des identités, au moment même où de nouvelles catégories d'identification – ethniques, religieuses, culturelles ou liées au genre – entrent en tension avec les cadres hérités de la nation.

L'impact de ces trois transformations sociétales transparaît dans chacun des textes de cadrage (introductions, chapitres, conclusions) que Pierre Nora lui-même, en tant que maître d'œuvre des *Lieux de mémoire*, rédige au fil des différents volumes, leur lien plus ou moins direct avec l'entreprise étant pourtant thématisée d'emblée dans le texte inaugural intitulé « Entre mémoire et histoire, la problématique des lieux ».

Texte complexe, exigeant, à la fois elliptique et truffé d'idées, d'images saisissantes et de formules frappantes, et qui a été incessamment relu et commenté, suscitant des interprétations fort diverses quant à la pensée et aux intentions de Nora. Érigé sur une tension conceptuelle entre mémoire et histoire – la première, une disposition affective, vécue dans un présent perpétuel et soumise aux caprices du souvenir et de l'oubli ; la seconde, une construction intellectuelle, critique et procédurale, fondée sur des traces –, ce texte d'ouverture des *Lieux* joue tout le temps de leur rapport, tantôt en les opposant, tantôt en les rapprochant, ce qui finit par créer une oscillation non résolue qui confère à ces pages une opacité du propos qui a valu à Nora un certain nombre de malentendus. Car il est, en effet, tout sauf aisé de cerner le moment exact où l'opposition tranchée de la mémoire et de l'histoire cède la place à une compréhension du lieu de mémoire comme un objet qui ne se laisse finalement saisir que dans leur imbrication même. Alors, qu'est-ce donc qu'un « lieu de mémoire » ? À son origine, l'expression renvoie aux *loci memoriae* des arts de la mémoire de l'Antiquité, tels que décrits par Cicéron et Quintilien.[6] Dans cette conception rhétorique, les *loci memoriae* désignent une technique mnémonique fondée sur la spatialisation de la mémoire, qui consiste à associer des éléments à mémoriser à une série de lieux distincts, qui serviront de supports stables du souvenir. La remémoration s'opère alors par un parcours imaginaire de l'orateur à travers ces *loci*, dont l'enchaînement spatial permet de restituer les contenus mémorisés dans leur ordre. Un *locus* n'est donc pas un lieu matériel, mais un procédé mnémotechnique, un repère mental qui permet à l'orateur d'organiser et de fixer les idées selon les espaces parcourus, assurant ainsi la mémorisation du discours. Chez Nora, en l'occurrence, un lieu de mémoire est, à la fois, matériel, fonctionnel et symbolique, et renvoie à toute représentation partagée ou disputée du passé, investie au cours du temps d'une valeur identitaire aux yeux d'une communauté. Il comprend, simultanément, des édifices et des sites, des institutions et des symboles, mais aussi des devises, des rites,

6 Nora reconnaît que l'expression « lieu de mémoire » lui vient de *L'Art de la mémoire*, de Francis Yates, publié par ses soins dans la « Bibliothèque des Histoires » (Paris : Gallimard, 1975).

des clivages, à condition de témoigner d'un enracinement du présent dans la durée.

« Unité significative, d'ordre matériel ou idéel, dont la volonté des hommes ou le travail du temps a fait un élément symbolique d'une quelconque communauté » : voilà la définition officielle d'un lieu de mémoire que forge Nora, à la demande du dictionnaire *Le Robert*, en 1993. En réalité, rien ne saurait mieux illustrer la signification et la portée de ces lieux que le plan même de l'ouvrage et leur inventaire d'un bout à l'autre des trois tomes – *La République*, *La Nation*, *Les France* – et de leurs sept volumes. En position inaugurale au sein de l'architecture d'ensemble, porte d'entrée dans l'immense édifice : la III^e^ République, incarnation d'une idée, d'un horizon, d'une réalisation de la France – celle-là même qui a pourvu le capital mémoriel dont la génération de Nora a été l'héritière, toujours opérant au moment de l'élaboration du projet des *Lieux de mémoire*. Contrainte de fonder sa légitimité sur le recours au passé, la III^e^ République semble, aux yeux de Nora, s'imposer d'emblée, car c'est elle qui a entrepris de démocratiser une mémoire collective publique en mobilisant, au premier chef, l'institution scolaire et les dispositifs pédagogiques. En fin lecteur de Lavisse, Nora y décèle une véritable entreprise volontariste de mise en mémoire. Très exactement, le fondement même sur lequel se dresse tout le projet des *Lieux*. Si la III^e^ République s'impose comme le problème de départ auquel il convenait de s'attaquer, c'est parce qu'elle a donné naissance à une authentique politique de la mémoire, en façonnant un passé à sa mesure ; un passé orienté et appelé à déboucher sur l'affirmation de l'unité républicaine.

Avec le deuxième tome, *La Nation*, déployé en trois volumes, le projet des *Lieux de mémoire* change d'échelle. L'inventaire des « lieux » s'élargit considérablement, et la cohérence du projet devient plus lisible, le centre de gravité de l'analyse se déplaçant vers la représentation que la France a forgée d'elle-même et continûment cultivée. Voilà, en substance, une vraie histoire de France au second degré. Car la nation est elle-même définie ici comme *représentation* et comme *projection*. Pour la saisir dans sa spécificité, la méthode adoptée est stratigraphique, distinguant ce qui

relève de l'immatériel, du matériel et de l'idéel. L'immatériel est consacré aux grandes étapes de la formation de la conscience nationale. On distingue, d'abord, l'héritage, ce fonds lointain nourri par la mémoire féodale, puis monarchique (les sanctuaires de Saint-Denis, les traditions dynastiques). Ensuite, et plus intéressant pour nous ici : l'histoire, le rôle décisif que l'histoire de France a joué en tant que ciment de la communauté nationale.[7] La mémoire de l'État national s'étant solidifiée, selon Nora, dans une tradition historique, dans une historiographie. Avec le matériel, sont ensuite abordés le territoire, les frontières, l'État, la notion d'Hexagone et celle de patrimoine. Et en dernier volet de ce triptyque : l'idéel, c'est-à-dire la gloire et la grandeur de la France, spécialement dans leur expression militaire (Verdun, la galerie des batailles de Versailles, mais aussi les statues et les noms des rues) et, par-dessus de tout, le grand trésor national, objet majeur de fierté collective : la langue française et son génie.

Soyons attentifs à la réflexivité historiographique, propre à une approche « au second degré », à l'œuvre dans *La Nation*. Car l'histoire et les historiens y occupent une position centrale, reflet, selon Nora, de la prégnance singulière de l'histoire au sein de la culture française. La figure de l'historien y apparaît comme un acteur majeur de la continuité nationale, à la fois pédagogue et artisan de la conscience collective. En prenant pour objet l'historiographie elle-même, *La Nation* met ainsi en lumière la manière dont l'histoire a longtemps constitué le cadre privilégié – voire le moule – de la mémoire collective française.

Avec *Les France*, le troisième tome, le projet des *Lieux* est finalement compris dans toute son extension. Historiens de métier, journalistes, commentateurs dans la presse et grand public : tous prennent enfin la mesure de la portée, de l'étendue et de l'ambition même de l'œuvre. Comptant environ 1 000 pages chacun, les trois derniers volumes marquent une véritable inflexion du projet, lequel se penche

7 Nora dira même que l'histoire a joué en France un rôle équivalent à celui de la philosophie pour les Allemands, de l'*American way of life* pour les Nord-Américains, du folklore pour certains pays de l'Europe de l'Est, de l'économie pour les Pays-Bas, de la tradition pour la Grande-Bretagne.

désormais, de façon nettement plus assumée, sur ce que la France a de pluriel, d'hétérogène, d'antagonique et de discontinu. Ce que Nora entend à présent faire ressortir, ce sont ces lignes de partage sur lesquelles la France érige son identité, ses polarisations structurantes, les fractures où se sont cristallisés ses lieux de division (politique, sociale, religieuse, géographique) : Francs et Gaulois, l'Ancien Régime et la Révolution, catholiques et laïcs, les rouges et les blancs, Français et étrangers, gaullistes et communistes, la droite et la gauche, le front de mer et la forêt... Ce n'est pas encore tout. Autrement plus impressionnante est, à nos yeux, une inflexion seconde – méthodologique, conceptuelle – à l'œuvre elle aussi au fil de ces trois derniers volumes. Car, avec *Les France*, l'entreprise elle-même change de nature. Elle n'est plus portée par le simple repérage des lieux ; désormais, elle se consacre à mettre au jour le processus même de transformation d'objets familiers *en* lieux de mémoire. Le but ne consiste plus à établir, entre différents « lieux », des rapprochements parlants, bien que toujours surprenants, mais à mettre à l'épreuve la notion même de « lieu de mémoire », qui avait déjà gagné la faveur de la critique et du public, afin de vérifier si elle demeurait opératoire lorsqu'elle était appliquée à des objets déjà fortement investis par la mémoire collective, et quelle intelligibilité elle serait alors capable d'en extraire.

Le grand finale de ce « livre symphonique »[8] que sont les *Lieux de mémoire* réside, donc, dans cette décision prise par le chef d'orchestre de placer au premier plan de toute l'entreprise l'opération intellectuelle consistant à convertir, grâce à l'inventivité de l'historien, des objets bien connus, appartenant à la tradition ou à la vie quotidienne, en lieux de mémoire. C'est ainsi qu'à présent, l'attention à la réalité du « lieu » s'efface devant l'acte même de le « lieu-de-mémoriser » – c'est-à-dire de l'inscrire dans l'histoire des appropriations et des disputes dont il fut l'enjeu, des strates successives de signification qui s'y sont déposées, des contre-mémoires qui l'ont contesté, en montrant précisément *pour qui*, et à quelles fins, un *topos* devient un « lieu de mémoire ».

8 Michelle Perrot, « Le siècle du patrimoine », *Libération*, 28 novembre 1986.

Car il ne suffit plus, à présent, de tenir un « lieu de mémoire » pour une réalité quelconque façonnée par l'action des hommes et chargée au cours du temps d'une valeur symbolique et identitaire pour un groupe social donné ; bien au contraire, il s'agit désormais de faire un pas en amont et de reconnaître que tout « lieu de mémoire » est, d'emblée, le fruit d'une élaboration historiographique – de sorte que c'est bien sur cette opération intellectuelle première que Nora entend, en définitive, tourner notre regard.

> Décrire le front de mer en géographe ou décrire ce que la façade maritime de la France incarne de sa vocation manquée ne relève pas du même travail. Analyser la cathédrale en architecte est une chose, montrer ce que ce modèle social et miroir du monde doivent au poids d'histoire et d'imaginaire que lui a donné le romantisme en est une autre. Étudier Descartes comme le plus grand philosophe français (...) et expliquer comment la philosophie française s'est constituée autour de Descartes n'aboutissait pas au même résultat. Retracer l'histoire politique ou idéologique de la gauche et de la droite ou examiner comment ce couple de mots, que la France a rendu universel, et qui nous est devenu si familier, s'est fait la catégorie de base de la confrontation démocratique des sociétés contemporaines, dessinent des chemins différents.[9]

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Les *Lieux de mémoire* s'achèvent en 1993, le dernier tome étant publié une quinzaine d'années après la création du séminaire de Nora à l'EHESS qui en a constitué le banc d'essai. Au cours de ces années, pendant même que la réflexion de Nora mûrissait et que le projet sortait peu à peu de terre, le thème de la mémoire parvient à s'imposer comme l'un des foyers majeurs du débat intellectuel aussi bien que des controverses qui secouaient l'espace public, les années 1980 étant marquées par une véritable « inflation mémorielle ».[10] Pendant que les

9 Pierre Nora, *Une étrange obstination* (Paris : Gallimard, 2022), 271.

10 Marie-Claire Lavabre, « Usages et mésusages de la notion de mémoire », *Critique Internationale* 7 (2000): 48-57.

publications sur le thème se font toujours plus nombreuses, la mémoire investit des champs disciplinaires variés, traverse et souvent polarise les débats. Objet d'usages concurrents, elle tend également à s'affirmer comme un enjeu politique particulièrement sensible, la mémoire nationale en venant à figurer comme une question relevant désormais de l'action publique. Comme une affaire d'État. En fait, les crimes de masse du XX^e^ siècle — guerres mondiales, régimes totalitaires, apartheid —, les processus de décolonisation en Afrique, les transitions démocratiques et les luttes pour la reconnaissance des exactions commises par les régimes autoritaires en Amérique latine et en Europe du Sud, auxquels vient ensuite s'ajouter l'effondrement du bloc soviétique, constituent autant de séquences historiques qui se conjuguèrent de manière à préparer la montée en puissance de la mémoire en ces années. Musées et mémoriaux se multiplient, tandis qu'un public élargi manifeste un intérêt croissant pour les récits des victimes des persécutions politiques et pour la découverte des visions du passé que les cadres historiographiques dominants avaient largement invisibilisées. Longtemps disqualifiée comme subjective, déformante et manipulable, la mémoire acquiert, à ce moment, le triple statut de problème historiographique, de force sociale et politique, de catégorie éthique, jusqu'à apparaître, aux yeux de l'opinion, comme étant plus authentique – voire plus vraie – que l'histoire.

Catégorie métahistorique, la mémoire était-elle maintenant sur le point de l'emporter sur l'histoire ? Étrange sort, en effet, d'une notion pensée à l'origine comme un outil critique,[11] mais qui très rapidement échappe au contrôle des historiens. Ces derniers furent, de toute évidence, directement concernés par ce basculement. Au sein même de leur discipline, la mémoire connaît plusieurs retournements successifs en ces années : après avoir été longtemps pensée comme antagonique à l'histoire, elle cesse d'abord d'être appréhendée dans un rapport de stricte opposition et se fait reconnaître comme un objet légitime d'enquête historique. En peu de temps, elle s'imposera aux historiens comme

11 Lavabre, « Usages et mésusages de la notion de mémoire », 50.

une présence contraignante, l'écriture de l'histoire se trouvant désormais elle-même placée sous la pression des disputes mémorielles. En réalité, au cours des dix années qui séparent le premier et le dernier tome des *Lieux* et à l'arrière-plan de leur élaboration, la notion de mémoire a subi une dilatation si spectaculaire qu'elle finira par tenir lieu d'histoire, par l'engloutir et par désigner précisément ce qu'on entendait autrefois par « histoire », tandis que l'histoire se trouve à son tour investie d'une charge mémorielle. Les deux notions en viennent ainsi à se recouvrir, et leur distinction même devient de plus en plus incertaine. De sorte que nous aurions probablement tort de lire les textes que Nora rédige en amont et en aval des *Lieux* en supposant que les deux mots, « mémoire » et « histoire », y conservent exactement le même sens. Cela peut paraître un peu surprenant, mais son texte inaugural de 1984, ceux de 1993 et ceux qu'il publie après les années 2000 ne mobilisent en aucun cas un sens unique (et univoque) pour ces deux notions centrales. C'est la croyance en leur stabilité sémantique qui, en dernière analyse, est à l'origine d'une grande partie des malentendus suscités par nombre de lectures consacrées à l'entreprise des *Lieux*. Quoi qu'il en soit, malgré sa polysémie et sa dilatation accélérée, la notion de mémoire s'impose comme le maître-mot de la fin du XX^e^ siècle. Par leur dimension et leur portée, les *Lieux de mémoire* (1984-1993) se situent, tout naturellement, en première ligne de cette marée mémorielle qui déferle dans les années 1980. Ils s'imposent comme une référence majeure pour la compréhension du phénomène avant même la parution des derniers volumes. Non pas uniquement en tant qu'outil analytique ou entreprise savante, mais aussi parce qu'ils constituaient, en eux-mêmes, des révélateurs et des reflets du phénomène même qu'ils étaient, au départ, censés décortiquer. Par un étrange retournement, voilà les *Lieux de mémoire* happés par « l'ère de la commémoration », pris à leur insu dans la noria mémorielle qu'ils prétendaient saisir de manière critique.

Ce chevauchement apparent entre le projet des *Lieux de mémoire* et le phénomène dont il voulait rendre compte n'a pas mis l'ouvrage à l'abri des malentendus. D'aucuns, il est vrai, allèrent jusqu'à y voir une entreprise de sacralisation des emblèmes de l'identité française, en

la prenant, à rebours des intentions de Nora, pour un monument célébrant les supports sur lesquels se dresserait la mythologie nationale. En dépit de ces malentendus, le succès de l'œuvre reste pourtant incontestable. Les *Lieux de mémoire* furent partout salués comme un événement éditorial, suscitant l'éblouissement de la critique, l'adhésion des pairs et l'engouement d'un large public. À la parution de chaque tome, l'ouvrage impressionnait par ses dimensions, sa nouveauté, son audace, son architecture inventive et vertigineuse. Au total, ces quelques cinq mille pages forment un véritable massif, à la fois monumental et labyrinthique, un tour de force éditorial qui n'aurait sans doute jamais vu le jour si Nora n'avait occupé cette position singulière d'historien-éditeur chez Gallimard, patron des collections phares des sciences sociales françaises, qui lui permit de mener à bien un projet aussi grandiose, ambitieux et risqué. Il ne fait guère de doute, comme l'a très bien souligné Margarida de Souza Neves, que l'extraordinaire succès des *Lieux de mémoire* lui servit de passeport pour l'Académie française. Il constitua, à bien des égards, ce fil d'or qui vint broder son habit vert d'académicien.[12]

Au triomphe éditorial des *Lieux de mémoire* se superpose la fortune spectaculaire de la notion même de « lieu de mémoire » dans la sphère publique. Au prix d'un contresens, elle échappe à son concepteur et est à la fois indûment dilatée et paradoxalement restreinte, se figeant dans la désignation de lieux concrets – le café *Le Fouquet's*, la piscine Molitor ou la salle de spectacle *L'Olympia* sont aussitôt étiquetés comme des lieux de mémoire. Ces usages abusifs entraînent une déperdition du sens et de la portée heuristique d'une notion que Nora avait au départ forgé comme un instrument d'intelligibilité de l'histoire – ce que ces exemples d'édifices classés, à l'évidence, ne sont pas. Ce sont, certes, de hauts lieux iconiques de la vie parisienne, mais qui ne recèlent pas la charge symbolique des objets répertoriés par Nora, tels la devise « Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité », le Panthéon, les monuments aux morts, le Code civil, le 14 juillet, Versailles, le soldat Chauvin, la

12 Margarida de Souza Neves, "Pierre Nora", in Maurício Parada (dir.), *Os historiadores – clássicos da história*, vol. 3 (Rio de Janeiro/Petrópolis: Editora PUC-Rio/Vozes, 2014), 202-223.

Marseillaise, le mur des Fédérés, le front de mer ou les centenaires de Voltaire et de Rousseau.

Sans aucun doute, ce type d'usage indiscriminé de la notion entraîne-t-il une dilution de son sens – à la limite, tout peut passer, sous un certain angle, pour un « lieu de mémoire » –, mais nous pourrions considérer, par effet de contraste, ces emplois sauvages du concept, mobilisé pour justifier des classements patrimoniaux ou accroître l'attractivité touristico-culturelle d'édifices parisiens emblématiques, comme étant l'illustration en creux de l'originalité même de la proposition de Nora. Originalité qui se décante sous différents aspects. En effet, les *Lieux de mémoire* s'inscrivent, tout d'abord, dans un mouvement de renouvellement de l'Histoire de France comme objet et comme genre, mené par quelques-uns des plus grands historiens français. Publiés à peu près à la même époque que *L'Identité de la France*, dernier opus de Fernand Braudel, l'*Initiation à l'histoire de France*, de Goubert, les *Histoire de France Hachette* (Duby, Le Roy Ladurie, Furet, Agulhon), ou encore l'*Histoire de la France*, dirigée par Burguière et Revel, les *Lieux* s'en démarquent à divers égards : non seulement par leur ampleur, leur rupture avec la chronologie ou leur distance à l'égard de l'événement, mais surtout par le type d'approche « au second degré » qui y est mis en valeur et par leur manière inédite d'envisager la France elle-même comme une réalité symbolique (vol. I, p. 24). Alors même que quelques-uns des représentants les plus renommés de l'historiographie française s'employaient à écrire autrement l'histoire nationale, déconstruisant et reconstruisant le genre, voilà que Nora opère un déplacement plus radical en prenant le problème à revers : il ne s'agit plus pour lui d'essayer de comprendre la France par le récit de son devenir, mais d'en démonter la machinerie symbolique, afin de la saisir cette fois à partir de sa propre mythologie historique – c'est-à-dire, à partir du rôle qu'a joué l'inculcation de l'histoire dans la formation de la conscience nationale. Ce qui, *in fine*, fait de ses *Lieux de mémoire* l'anti-Lavisse. À y regarder de plus près, il n'est pas interdit de penser que c'est cette volonté d'appréhender la France à travers l'imaginaire national et ses supports

symboliques qui, en définitive, fait des *Lieux* non seulement la négation méthodique du « roman national », mais son exact contrepoint.

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Certes, l'entreprise n'est pas sans angles morts. Jouissant d'un peu de recul, il est bien possible d'en relever certaines lacunes et d'en pointer quelques biais structurants. Avec plus de cent entrées, allant de Jeanne d'Arc à la gastronomie, des Trois couleurs au clocher, de l'Hexagone à la vigne et au vin, on ne peut qu'être frappé par l'absence de toute entrée consacrée à l'Empire, à la colonisation et à la notion même de « Métropole », conduisant à la mise hors champ du passé colonial, de l'Indochine à l'Afrique, de l'Océanie à la Caraïbe. Cette absence, déjà relevée par d'autres, est d'autant plus surprenante que ce passé s'inscrit dans une durée séculaire, et constitue l'un des ressorts majeurs de la puissance, de la prospérité et de la projection internationale de la France. Au sein d'un ouvrage qui se propose d'interroger l'histoire de France à partir de ses mécanismes de construction symbolique, comment ne pas reconnaître que ces expériences coloniales, loin d'être périphériques, ont profondément façonné les représentations que la France s'est forgées d'elle-même ? La croyance dans la mission civilisatrice dont elle s'est fièrement investie, la profusion d'allégories de la France portant la lumière dans le monde qui ornent encore l'iconographie monumentale de ses édifices publics, le discours universaliste qu'elle revendique, ou encore l'empreinte linguistique et culturelle durable laissée par l'empire témoignent de l'importance de cet héritage dans la construction symbolique de la nation. Que ces expériences coloniales – traversées par des échanges matériels et culturels de différents ordres et marquées par l'émergence de lignes de fracture appelées à perdurer –, qui ont fini par s'inscrire au sein même de l'espace métropolitain, n'aient pas trouvé place dans les *Lieux de mémoire* ne peut qu'interroger, tant cet effacement du passé colonial constitue l'un des silences les plus étonnants du projet.

À vrai dire, on ne comprend pas cet angle aveugle des *Lieux* si l'on ne reconnaît pas que la mémoire dont il est ici question est une

mémoire hexagonale, prioritairement. Au terme de cinq siècles d'une histoire coloniale qui s'est étendue sur près de vingt-quatre millions de kilomètres carrés et a concerné quelque quatre-vingts colonies, combien d'expériences, de représentations, de symboles, de conflits et de disputes mémorielles n'auraient pu y trouver place, à côté de et au même titre que la conversation, la galanterie, le café ou la *Recherche* de Proust ? En fait, comme ces entrées en témoignent, la France des *Lieux de mémoire* est une France bien particulière – pensée depuis le centre, et pour le centre. Une France de la culture, une France d'universitaires, une France contemplée depuis le point de vue des intellectuels, de ceux qui la pensent et l'enseignent – en témoignent les entrées sur la Khâgne, le *Tableau* de Vidal de La Blache, la Coupole, le Collège de France, Ferdinand Brunot, entre autres. Une France peut-être révolue à l'aune de la troisième décennie du XXI^e^ siècle. Force est de reconnaître, par conséquent, la forte dimension générationnelle de ces *Lieux de mémoire*. Que nous apprend le choix même des objets inventoriés sur les valeurs, les critères, les expériences et l'horizon culturel d'une génération très précise d'intellectuels ? À quarante ans de distance, dans une France aujourd'hui beaucoup plus diverse, travaillée par des dynamiques multiculturelles non exemptes de tensions, quelle est, au juste, la représentativité des objets retenus par Nora ? Les lieux qu'il a répertoriés constituent-ils encore des repères pour les jeunes générations, celles qui, nées après 1993, n'entretiennent plus un même rapport au passé et pour lesquelles l'identité nationale apparaît souvent comme une catégorie polémique, clivante et contestée ? La portée symbolique de ces « lieux » demeure-t-elle opérante dans une France qui se pense comme partie de l'Europe, quoique toute traversée par des référents culturels transatlantiques ?

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Toute œuvre étant fille de son temps, le monument des *Lieux* ne serait-il pas voué à devenir lui-même un lieu de mémoire historiographique, celui d'un âge révolu de la pensée historique et des sciences sociales françaises ? Voire d'une certaine idée de la vie intellectuelle en

France ? On pourrait en débattre indéfiniment. Ce qui est sûr, néanmoins, c'est que l'ouvrage demeure un jalon majeur, non parce qu'il aurait renouvelé notre connaissance de l'histoire de France et de son imaginaire historique, mais parce qu'il nous a rendus plus conscients de nos formes diverses de rapport au passé, de nos manières multiples d'habiter l'histoire et de nous y inscrire. Il a appris aux historiens à quel point l'approche des *faits de mémoire* est autrement plus complexe que celle des *faits d'histoire*, dans la mesure où elle exige un changement de perspective qui n'a rien d'évident. En effet, « traiter l'objet historique en lieu de mémoire, c'est donner la parole au présent, non comme l'héritier du passé, mais comme l'usager du passé, toujours susceptible de réanimer des enjeux qui somnolent, de réemployer des matériaux enfouis ».[13] La portée réflexive de l'entreprise est manifeste, car, chez Nora, la mémoire émerge comme une histoire *en abîme*. C'est-à-dire, une histoire qui se renvoie à elle-même et qui s'auto-problématise. Voilà la dimension à la fois théorique et historiographique que la mémoire acquiert dans son travail, la mémoire contraignant l'histoire à s'observer à travers le miroir même de ses usages et de ses représentations (mythologies, légendes, traditions). C'est cette inflexion qu'illustrent, toujours d'après Nora, l'entrée de la recherche historique dans son âge réflexif et la conversion ultime de l'histoire en historiographie.

Or, l'historiographie porte, à ses yeux, une dimension « iconoclaste et irrévérencieuse ». Traversée par un « contenu polémique », elle pousse les historiens « à s'emparer des objets les mieux constitués de la tradition »,[14] en mettant notamment en question ce qui, en France du moins, était investi d'un « rôle recteur et formateur de la conscience nationale » : l'histoire elle-même. Mais si l'historiographie présente une portée « iconoclaste et irrévérencieuse », est-ce uniquement parce qu'elle défie le lien étroit, jadis établi, entre l'histoire et la conscience d'une identité nationale ? N'est-ce pas aussi en raison de cette circularité vertigineuse inhérente à une démarche résolument métahistorique :

13 Mona Ozouf, « Le passé recomposé », *Le Magazine Littéraire* 307 (1993) : 22-25.

14 Pierre Nora, « Entre Mémoire et Histoire », *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, vol. 1, *La République* (Paris : Gallimard, 1984), xxi.

des historiens faisant l'histoire des historiens qui, par conséquent, selon les principes mêmes qu'ils professent, deviendront bientôt eux-mêmes des objets historiques pour les historiens de demain ; l'histoire-connaissance de l'histoire-matière devenue elle-même matière pour une autre forme de connaissance historique, au second degré ?[15] C'est cette réflexivité, ce retour de la conscience historique sur elle-même, qui conduit l'historiographie – au sens précis où l'entend Nora – à prendre pour objet « non plus les déterminants, mais leurs effets ; non plus les actions mémorisées ou même commémorées, mais la trace de ces actions et le jeu de ces commémorations ; pas les événements pour eux-mêmes, mais leur construction dans le temps, l'effacement et la résurgence de leurs significations ; non le passé tel qu'il s'est passé, mais ses réemplois permanents, ses usages et ses mésusages, sa prégnance sur les présents successifs ; pas la tradition, mais la manière dont elle s'est constituée et transmise ».

Les Ego-histoires

On ne saurait trop y insister : cette démarche « au second degré », réflexive et *en abîme*, traverse de part en part l'entreprise historienne de Pierre Nora, et nous plonge au cœur même de sa manière personnelle, originale, de concevoir l'historiographie. Chez lui, la réflexivité historiographique procède par approfondissements successifs. À un premier niveau, l'histoire cesse de se contenter de prendre le passé pour objet et se tourne vers les opérations qui l'ont constitué en objet historique. Au-delà des événements, ce qui intéresse désormais l'historien, c'est la manière dont ils ont été élaborés, façonnés, transmis et appropriés. Ensuite, à un deuxième niveau, plus profond, l'historien qui se consacre à l'historiographie soumet sa propre discipline au même examen critique que celui qu'elle appliquait jusque-là à d'autres objets. L'historien et la discipline historique cessent alors d'occuper une position de surplomb. Ils sont eux-mêmes reconnus à présent comme des objets historiques

15 *Cf.* Felipe Brandi, « L'avènement d'une "histoire au second degré" », *L'Atelier du Centre de Recherches Historiques*, n° 7, 2011.

parmi d'autres. L'historiographie n'est, par conséquent, plus entendue comme une simple spécialité ; elle *produit* et elle *représente* une modification du statut même du savoir historique. La conscience historique découvre qu'elle appartient elle-même à l'histoire, et les historiens deviennent désormais sensibles aux liens invisibles, souterrains, entre l'histoire qu'ils font et celle qui les a faits.

Dès lors, celui qui écrit l'histoire des historiens sait que son propre travail pourra, à son tour, devenir l'objet d'une future histoire de l'historiographie. La réflexivité historiographique ne connaît ainsi aucun terme assignable : chaque regard porté sur le passé demeure susceptible d'être lui-même historicisé. Voilà la circularité et la mise en abîme de l'approche historiographique prônée par Nora, où chaque niveau d'analyse semble en appeler un autre. Mais alors, que se passe-t-il lorsque les historiens sont invités à prendre pour objet l'histoire qui les a constitués autant que celle qu'ils ont produite ? Tel est le pari que Pierre Nora lance à ses confrères au début des années 1980, en les conviant à un exercice d'« auto-histoire ».

À l'orée des années 1980, bien avant que l'enquête inaugurale du séminaire qu'il anime à l'EHESS ne débouche sur la publication du premier tome des *Lieux de mémoire*, Pierre Nora conçoit déjà un autre projet éditorial, tout aussi audacieux. Intitulé « Projet d'"auto-histoire" » et adressé à quelques-uns des représentants les plus éminents de l'école historique française, il entend renverser l'attitude traditionnelle des historiens, habitués depuis la constitution de l'histoire scientifique à s'effacer derrière leur œuvre, afin de les mettre au défi de s'affranchir de cet idéal de retrait et de reconnaître, enfin, qu'au-delà – ou plutôt *en deçà* – de leurs travaux se tient une personnalité historienne, elle-même façonnée par les expériences historiques de son temps. La proposition – mieux : le pari lancé à ce groupe précis d'historiens n'avait rien de simple à l'époque : « *faire leur propre histoire comme ils feraient l'histoire d'un autre sur la base d'une documentation qu'ils sont pourtant les seuls à posséder* (...) [; s'engager dans] *un effort, honnête et vrai, pour appliquer à eux-mêmes, dans leur style propre et avec les méthodes éprouvées qui sont les leurs, le regard aigu, englobant, explicatif, qu'ils*

porteraient sur un autre (…). Se faire donc, pour un moment, historien au second degré ».[16]

Bravant ce vieil idéal d'effacement, que signifie pour un historien se prendre pour objet ? Le fait d'être historien permet-il de porter sur soi, sur sa formation, son milieu et son époque un regard singulier que la démarche historienne est seule à pouvoir façonner ? Pierre Nora a lui-même, à différentes reprises, rapproché son projet de ce que de l'on a convenu d'appeler le « retour du sujet » dans les années 1980, l'engouement à la même époque pour la biographie, la revanche de l'*agency* sur la prééminence accordée jusque-là aux déterminismes structurels. Mais il y a bien autre chose, par-delà cette conjoncture intellectuelle. La dimension « au second degré » de l'exercice – explicitement revendiquée dans le projet dactylographié qu'il adresse à ses auteurs – fait clairement apparaître à quel point le défi historiographique de l'« auto-histoire » peut être envisagé comme une sorte de prolongement, de dérivé des *Lieux de mémoire*. Mais là où les *Lieux* interrogeaient les rapports qu'une société entretient avec son passé, le nouveau projet porte sur les rapports que les historiens eux-mêmes entretiennent avec le leur. Voilà en quoi l'« auto-histoire » peut être comprise comme la traduction pratique de la réflexivité-limite de ce que Nora appelle la « dimension historiographique de l'histoire ».

On comprend dès lors mieux pourquoi, après une longue gestation, les *Essais d'ego-histoire* paraitront en 1987 avec l'ambition affichée de contribuer à un « genre nouveau, pour un nouvel âge de la conscience historique ». Âge réflexif, s'il en est, aux yeux de Nora, puisque tout entier pris dans la spirale d'une histoire vouée à sa propre mise en abîme. Sur-le-champ, une telle ambition, revendiquée par l'ouvrage, fut jugée excessive, intempestive. Elle suscita l'irritation. Aux yeux de certains, une telle ambition paraissait confirmer la réputation de hauteur qui entourait déjà la figure de son maître d'œuvre. Le titre même de l'ouvrage, avec son étrange néologisme d'« ego-histoire », ne fit qu'ali-

16 Pierre Nora, « Projet d'"auto-histoire" » (dactyl.), s.d. (1981-1982), consulté dans le Fonds Duby, IMEC, DBY 11 [DBY97/6], chemise article Ego-histoire II.

menter les malentendus : plusieurs ne voulurent y voir qu'un exercice d'égotisme ou d'autosatisfaction. D'autant plus que les sept invités du projet étaient des historiens de renom international, des vedettes de la profession. Parvenus au sommet, n'avaient-ils désormais rien de mieux à faire que de consacrer leur autorité acquise à la mise en scène de leur histoire personnelle ?

Nonobstant les lectures contrastées auxquelles il donna lieu, les *Essais d'ego-histoire* ont réussi non seulement à saisir quelque chose de l'air du temps, mais à pressentir une transformation qui ne faisait encore que s'amorcer. En tant qu'expérience inaugurale, l'exercice déconcerta au départ ceux-là mêmes auxquels il était destiné. Les sept auteurs réunis dans le volume disent, à des degrés divers, leur embarras devant cette entreprise inédite. Beaucoup hésitent, doutent de ce qu'ils peuvent livrer d'eux-mêmes et se demandent s'ils sont prêts à franchir le pas, tandis que plusieurs autres – Annie Kriegel, Michel de Certeau, François Furet, Pierre Goubert, Paul Veyne ou Pierre Vidal-Naquet – préfèrent décliner l'invitation, tout en reconnaissant l'intérêt du projet. Malgré quelques textes précurseurs, qui ont pu inspirer Nora, comme ceux de Philippe Ariès, d'Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, de Fernand Braudel lui-même,[17] l'« ego-histoire » n'avait alors, au milieu des années 1980, rien d'une démarche naturelle aux yeux des historiens français. Et pourtant, l'expérience fera bientôt école. Ce qui paraissait d'abord intimidant devient une pratique courante. Les historiens seront désormais nombreux non seulement à se lancer dans la rédaction de leur récit de vie, mais aussi à faire de leur propre trajectoire un objet d'histoire, comme si le pari lancé par Nora avait contribué, à lui seul, à rendre pensable une nouvelle manière d'écrire l'histoire des historiens.

Au cours de la décennie 1990, quelques participants des *Essais* prolongeront l'expérience dans des projets personnels : Raoul Girardet, avec *Singulièrement libre* (1990) ; Georges Duby, avec *L'Histoire continue* (1991) ; Jacques Le Goff, avec *Une vie pour l'histoire* (1996). En-

17 Philippe Ariès, *Un historien du dimanche* (Paris : Seuil, 1980) ; Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Paris-Montpellier, PC-PSU, 1945-1963* (Paris : Gallimard, 1982) ; Fernand Braudel, « Personal Testimony », *The Journal of Modern History* 44, n.º 4 (1972) : 448-467.

suite, ceux qui l'avaient au départ refusé se prêteront finalement eux-mêmes à l'exercice, chacun à sa manière : Annie Kriegel, *Ce que j'ai cru comprendre* (1991) ; François Furet, *Le passé d'une illusion* (1995) ; Pierre Goubert, *Un parcours d'historien* (1996) ; Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Mémoires* (1995-1998) et, une vingtaine d'années plus tard, Paul Veyne, *Et dans l'éternité je ne m'ennuierai pas* (2014). Finalement, l'histoire réserve à l'ego-histoire une métamorphose que Nora lui-même n'avait pas anticipée : sa conversion, aussi inattendue que paradoxale, en une formalité académique. Institutionnalisée, elle devient l'un des exercices attendus de l'habilitation à diriger des recherches. Ironie de l'histoire : à l'insu de son concepteur, le pari historiographique de l'ego-histoire s'est mué en procédure.

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L'aventure de l'ego-histoire ne s'arrête pourtant pas là. L'histoire lui réserve un dernier rebondissement, et l'ego-histoire connaîtra une issue plus glorieuse – cette fois, sous la plume même de son concepteur. De toute évidence, une fois les *Essais* parus, Pierre Nora est resté longtemps hanté par la tentation de s'y livrer à son tour. La fécondité de l'entreprise ne faisait plus de doute. En témoigne le nombre alors croissant de récits autobiographiques signés par des historiens, y compris par ceux-là même qui s'étaient soustraits à l'expérience. Pourtant, en tant que concepteur du projet, Nora reconnaîtra le premier la difficulté de l'exercice proposé, lorsqu'il lui reviendra de relever le défi qu'il avait lui-même lancé à ses auteurs. Une quinzaine d'années après la publication des *Essais*, il reconnaît que ce fut par une discrétion mal placée qu'il s'était, à tort, dérobé à l'exercice, et livre les premières pistes d'une ego-histoire à venir.[18] Il s'y dépeint comme un « marginal central », évoque sa place dans sa famille, les tensions au sein de la fratrie, l'impact de l'expérience de la guerre et revient enfin sur ce qu'il ressent comme une « vocation à demi-réalisée, à demi-manquée ». Il reconnaît surtout le cheminement hasardeux qui l'a conduit à l'histoire, discipline à laquelle il ne se sentait nullement destiné. Il s'était succes-

18 Pierre Nora, « L'ego-histoire est-elle possible ? », *Historein* 3 (2001) : 19-26.

sivement imaginé philosophe, médecin, psychiatre, économiste, metteur en scène, avant d'hésiter encore, après l'agrégation, entre l'histoire de l'Amérique, celle du monde arabe ou celle de la France contemporaine, sur laquelle il finit par revenir, un peu « comme on rentre chez soi ».

À partir des années 2000 et de son entrée à l'Académie Française (2002), Pierre Nora s'autorise à esquisser, au fil des entretiens qu'il accorde, les lignes de force et les épisodes majeurs autours desquels s'organiserait son ego-histoire.[19] Vus rétrospectivement, ces entretiens tiennent lieu de laboratoire : c'est là qu'on le voit organiser ses souvenirs et essayer différentes manières de raconter sa vie, comme s'il mettait à l'épreuve les conditions de possibilité de cet exercice qu'il avait lui-même imaginé et qui, depuis lors, n'a cessé de le travailler. Pendant plus de trente ans, Pierre Nora a différé sa propre ego-histoire. Alors qu'il s'apprête à fêter ses quatre-vingt-dix ans, voilà qu'il publie en 2021 le premier tome de ses mémoires, suivi un an plus tard d'un second tome, qui retrace son parcours d'éditeur-historien dans ces années où la vie intellectuelle française connaissait l'un de ses derniers grands moments de rayonnement mondial. Après avoir publié plus de sept cents titres en tant qu'éditeur chez Gallimard, il se résout enfin, pour reprendre sa propre formule, à s'éditer lui-même. Tirant parti du retrait imposé par la pandémie de COVID-19 en 2020, Pierre Nora se lance avec enthousiasme, assisté par Christelle Fourlon-Kouayep, dans cette entreprise autobiographique. Il est désormais venu rejoindre les auteurs de son propre catalogue. À leur parution, *Jeunesse* et *Une étrange obstination* furent salués par la critique et le grand public. Leur accueil enthousiaste tient notamment au portrait évocateur d'une France qui semble appartenir à un autre âge, mais aussi à l'incontestable élégance de leur écriture. Longtemps éclipsé par son activité d'éditeur, le talent littéraire de Nora apparaît enfin au grand jour. Désormais, aux multiples figures de l'éditeur, de l'historien, du professeur et du directeur de revue, s'ajoute celle de l'écrivain.

La parution de chacun des deux volumes suscita une véritable ruée médiatique. Presse écrite, radio et télévision se saisirent de ces

19 D'après François Dosse (*Pierre Nora*, 597), en 1999 déjà, Nora songeait à écrire ses mémoires.

mémoires, rivalisant d'entretiens, de comptes rendus et de portraits. Abondant en épisodes marquants, en évocations et en anecdotes cocasses, ces deux ouvrages offraient une matière exceptionnelle aux journalistes, qui mirent volontiers en avant le récit des années de guerre, le rapport de Nora au judaïsme, son goût précoce pour la poésie, son éducation sentimentale ou encore les portraits tendres et parfois sévères de sa famille – en particulier l'admiration mêlée de rivalité qu'il voue à Simon, le frère aîné. Au fil de cette couverture médiatique, combien de portraits et d'épisodes hauts en couleurs ont fait le bonheur de la presse ! Celle-ci se régale de scènes comme celle où, à Grenoble, le jeune Nora, âgé de dix ans, se fait tapoter la joue par Pétain, ou encore des innombrables anecdotes de la gent intellectuelle : les altercations avec Foucault, la visite au cabaret Crazy Horse avec Le Roy Ladurie, ou la réaction de ce dernier lorsque Nora lui propose quelques coupes dans le manuscrit de *Montaillou*. Pierre Nora possède le secret de ces scènes où un détail, une réplique ou une notation suffisent à ressusciter toute une époque. Les journalistes se sont naturellement emparés de ces épisodes, propres à nourrir leurs récits. Derrière une galerie de noms vénérés da la vie intellectuelle française, ils se délectent de voir se dévoiler les rivalités entre auteurs, les susceptibilités académiques, les passions et les contradictions très humaines des figures les plus éminentes des sciences de l'homme contemporaines. En témoin privilégié d'un monde intellectuel qui s'efface peu à peu, Pierre Nora en vient presque à se voir érigé en lieu de mémoire. Mais derrière tous ces portraits et anecdotes qui ont largement alimenté la couverture médiatique, ses mémoires recèlent quelque chose de plus profond : une vision singulière de la France du XX^e^ siècle, une réflexion sur le métier d'éditeur et sur la montée de la mémoire, ainsi qu'un portrait d'un âge extraordinaire des sciences humaines françaises, brossé *de l'intérieur*, depuis son cœur même. Ce qui frappe surtout, à la lecture de ces deux volumes, c'est le nombre de figures brillantes et de personnages de premier plan que Nora a côtoyées. Comme si, à quatre-vingt-dix ans, il révélait devant tout le monde que son grand œuvre n'avait finalement été autre que sa propre vie.

Un âge qui se clôt

La parution du premier tome des mémoires de Pierre Nora suit de près sa décision d'arrêter la publication de la revue *Le Débat* qu'il avait créée, sous l'impulsion de Claude Gallimard, au tournant des années 1980, et qu'il dirigea pendant quarante ans, aux côtés de Marcel Gauchet et de Krzysztof Pomian. Laboratoire d'idées et espace de réflexion autour des transformations et des enjeux du monde contemporain, *Le Débat* constitue, en quelque sorte, un troisième versant de l'œuvre contemporanéiste de Nora, au même titre que ses *Lieux de mémoire*. Parallèlement à son travail d'éditeur et à son œuvre d'historien, la revue devient, pour lui, un espace privilégié où s'élaborent ses interrogations sur le présent, aussi bien à travers les très nombreux textes et éditoriaux qu'il signe lui-même que par les contributions des auteurs qu'il y réunit.

Articulé autour des trois axes de son sous-titre : Histoire, Politique, Société (qui ne vont pas sans rappeler le célèbre triptyque du sous-titre qu'arborait alors la revue des *Annales* : *Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*), *Le Débat* s'inscrit dans la tradition des grandes revues généralistes françaises, comme la *Revue des Deux Mondes*, la *Revue de Paris*, le *Mercure de France*, la *NRF*, *Esprit*, *Les Temps modernes*, *Critique* ou encore, son exact contemporain, *Commentaire*, tout en se donnant pour ambition d'investir cet espace laissé libre entre la recherche savante spécialisée et la *doxa* journalistique. Lancée au lendemain de la mort de Sartre, la revue s'est dès le départ définie par une interrogation constante, presque obsédante, sur la figure de l'intellectuel, sa place et sa mission au sein de la société. Son texte inaugural, intitulé « Que peuvent les intellectuels ? », prend acte d'une crise de légitimité qui frappe alors cette figure sociale, largement discréditée par les compromissions de quelques-uns de ses représentants avec les expériences totalitaires du XX^e^ siècle. Prenant ses distances aussi bien avec le modèle de l'intellectuel universel, persuadé de parler au nom de l'Histoire, qu'avec l'intellectuel à la Foucault, volontiers porté à la radicalisation critique, à la dénonciation systématique et à une langue de plus en plus opaque, *Le Débat* plaide pour un nouveau type d'intellectuel : l'intellectuel dé-

mocratique, celui dont le but n'est plus d'éliminer ses adversaires, mais qui accepte le pluralisme des opinions et entend désormais dialoguer, trouver des compromis, débattre avec ceux qui ne pensent pas comme lui. Nouvelle figure de l'intellectuel, qui s'affirme davantage comme médiateur du débat démocratique que comme conscience prophétique de la nation, mais qui se verra bientôt contraint de composer avec un paysage culturel qui se renouvelle très rapidement à partir des années 1980, et au sein duquel la culture de l'image prend progressivement le dessus sur l'écrit et les connaissances savantes. L'essor de la société de communication, en cette fin du XX^{e} siècle, transforme durablement les conditions mêmes d'intervention des intellectuels dans la cité, la légitimité de leur parole reposant de moins en moins sur le livre, l'université ou les revues. L'emprise croissante des médias audiovisuels déplace peu à peu les critères de la reconnaissance intellectuelle. Les idées comme les événements, mais aussi les individus eux-mêmes, voient de plus en plus leur valeur se mesurer à l'aune de leur visibilité publique. La notoriété médiatique tend ainsi à supplanter l'autorité autrefois fondée sur l'œuvre.

Toutes ces évolutions finiront par entrer en ligne de compte lorsque, en 2020, à l'occasion du quarantième anniversaire de la revue, Nora, Gauchet et Pomian décident ensemble d'en interrompre la publication. À l'instar de « l'étrange destinée » des *Lieux de mémoire* – une « histoire contre-commémorative » qui se retrouve finalement rattrapée par l'« ère de la commémoration » –, *Le Débat* finit par être emporté par cet ensemble de mutations contemporaines qu'il s'était donné pour tâche de décrypter. L'expansion d'internet, les transformations des pratiques de lecture – les articles étant désormais consultés isolément, en ligne, et non plus dans l'économie d'ensemble de chaque numéro – ont pesé, d'après Nora, dans leur décision d'arrêter. Mais il y avait surtout, là derrière, le sentiment qu'une page de l'histoire intellectuelle française était en train d'être tournée. Deux ans après la fin des *Temps modernes*, le temps des grandes revues générales d'idées leur semblait toucher à son terme. En réalité, l'arrêt du *Débat*, qui prit nombre de ses lecteurs de court, avait été mûri de longue date. Alors

qu'en 1990, la revue célébrait son dixième anniversaire sur une note d'optimisme, dans le contexte de la réunification de l'Europe ouverte par la chute du mur de Berlin et la fin de la guerre froide, le ton adopté dix ans plus tard, à l'occasion de son vingtième anniversaire, n'aurait pu être plus contrasté. L'éditorial d'ouverture du premier numéro de 1980, « Que peuvent les intellectuels ? », trouve alors son envers dans une nouvelle interrogation, plus sombre : « Adieu aux intellectuels ? ». Pour le trentième anniversaire, l'éditorial est traversé par un profond malaise dans le temps. Nora y constate que « l'esprit de l'époque va dans le sens contraire à celui du *Débat* », de sorte que la question de savoir s'il faut ou non continuer est désormais posée sans détour. L'inquiétude ne porte plus seulement sur la place et le rôle des intellectuels, mais sur la disparition des conditions mêmes qui avaient rendu possible un périodique comme *Le Débat*. Que voit Nora autour de lui ? Un rétrécissement continu des horizons intellectuels, un affaiblissement des institutions de transmission, de l'école à l'université, un recul de la lecture au profit des écrans, l'avènement d'une société qui « se consacre moins à la réflexion qu'à la communication ». Finalement, c'est la culture même du débat qui lui paraît céder la place à une culture de l'affrontement médiatique, des polémiques instantanées et du *clash*. Consternation. Le diagnostic qui pousse Nora, en 2010, à défendre la poursuite du *Débat* est celui-là même qui le conduira, dix ans plus tard, à décider d'y mettre un terme. Le constat demeure identique ; seule la conclusion pratique a changé.

Plus qu'une fin de revue, la décision d'interrompre *Le Débat* constitue un diagnostic en acte sur l'état de la vie des idées en France au bout des deux premières décennies du XXIe siècle. C'est un *statement*, lancé comme un cri d'alarme. Geste de clôture, qui recèle une protestation et une prise de position. Nora ne ménage pas ses mots : à ses yeux, la production intellectuelle française peine à retrouver les conditions qui lui avaient naguère assuré sa force et son rayonnement. Un tel diagnostic ne pouvait manquer de susciter des réactions. Il était tentant, et sans doute plus facile, d'y voir la plainte nostalgique des générations vieillissantes, le regret d'un monde révolu, voire le réflexe

conservateur de ceux qui ne seraient plus capables de reconnaître les formes nouvelles de pensée. Mais ce procès en nostalgie résiste mal à l'examen lorsqu'il est intenté à celui qui n'a cessé d'accueillir de jeunes historiens et de s'intéresser à ce qu'ils écrivaient. Ce ne fut donc jamais la nouveauté en tant que telle que Nora récusa. François Dosse a bien décrit cette attention qu'il a toujours accordée « à l'actualité, à ce qui bouge ».[20] Ce qui est en cause, aux yeux de Nora, c'est le fait que les conditions qui avaient autrefois donné à la pensée française son éclat, sa capacité à franchir les frontières disciplinaires et nationales, à produire des œuvres qui s'inscrivent dans la durée, ne puissent plus, de toute évidence, être reconduites. Rétrécissement. Repli.

Si le regard que Nora porte, à la fin de sa vie, sur le paysage intellectuel contemporain dérange, c'est sans doute parce que la comparaison avec les grandes décennies de l'après-guerre demeure, pour tous ceux qui les ont vécues, difficile à éluder. La barre avait été placée très haut. Mais c'est aussi, et peut-être surtout, parce que ses paroles prennent un relief particulier dans un contexte marqué par l'hégémonie croissante d'un modèle de production académique largement structuré par les normes anglo-saxonnes. Il serait pourtant réducteur de voir dans cette critique une simple déploration du présent au nom d'un « c'était mieux avant ». Chez Nora, la fin du *Débat* et la publication de ses mémoires participent, en fait, d'une même action, d'un même souci de clore de son vivant les chantiers restés ouverts, d'achever ce qui pouvait encore l'être, de ne rien laisser en suspens. Son geste est à cet égard moins celui d'un homme qui renonce que celui d'un témoin qui prend acte. Il ne voit pas se dessiner de relève et ne propose pas de formule pour l'après, convaincu qu'un cycle de la vie intellectuelle française touchait à sa fin. La publication de ses mémoires donne à cette clôture sa forme la plus personnelle : revenir sur le chemin parcouru, faire l'inventaire de ce qui fut accompli, en rappeler l'importance et laisser, contre l'oubli, le témoignage d'un monde dont il fut l'un des derniers acteurs. Il y a là quelque chose de profondément testamentaire.

20 Dosse, *Pierre Nora*, 599.

Nora avait acquis la conviction que le monde intellectuel et culturel qui avait été le sien ne lui survivrait pas. Étrange conviction pour celui que ses contemporains ont reconnu comme l'homme du Patrimoine, le maître des *Lieux de mémoire*.

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Manan Ahmed Asif, *Disrupted City: Walking the Pathways of Memory and History in Lahore*. New York: The New Press, 2024, 373 pp.

Zain R. Mian*

The past decade has seen a renewed interest in Lahore. The city has been the subject of diverse research spanning the disciplines of literature, history, cinema studies, and urban studies.[1] Manan Ahmed Asif's *Disrupted City* adds to this varied corpus. Written for the general reader, it blends scholarly curiosity with a searching personal narrative. The book's strength lies in its excavation of Lahore's multiplicity, which it

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1 See, for example: Chris Moffat, *Lahore after Modernism: Architecture and Its Histories in Pakistan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2026); Ammara Maqsood, Chris Moffat and Fizzah Sajjad, eds., *Lahore in Motion: Infrastructure, History, and Belonging in Urban Pakistan* (London: UCL Press, 2025); Nasir Abbas Nayyar, ed., *Lāhaur kī kahānī, shā'irī kī zubānī* (Lahore: Gurmani Centre for Languages and Literature, 2025); Iftikhar Dadi, *Lahore Cinema: Between Realism and Fable* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2022); Salma Siddique, *Evacuee Cinema: Bombay and Lahore in Partition Transit (1940-1960)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Ahmed Saeed, ed., *Lāhaur: ek shahr-e be-misāl misāl* (Lahore: Sho'bah-e tārīḳh o muṭāli'ah-e pākistān jāmi'ah panjāb, 2021); Ian Talbot and Tahir Kamran, *Lahore in the Time of the Raj* (Gurgaon: Penguin, 2016); Anna Suvorova, *Lahore: Topophilia of Space and Place* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011); William J. Glover, *Making Lahore Modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

synthesizes through its use of the vignette form. Asif's *Disrupted City* centers perspectives and histories that are marginal to contemporary Lahore. It asks how suppressed memory might operate within and against the Muslim nationalist imagining of the city since Partition.

The book's structure rests on six chapters bookended by an Introduction and Afterword. Entitled "City," the first chapter introduces readers to important touchstones of Lahore's precolonial architecture. Asif offers glimpses of the Tomb of Anarkali and the shrines of Mian Mir and Data Darbar, among other locations, to invoke a near millennium of Lahori history and the intersecting sacral landscapes that link contemporary Lahore to its deep past. The second chapter on "History" considers how Lahore has been narrated across historical eras. It moves from significant histories, such as *Tahqīqāt-e Chishtī*, to other genres such as news reports and Post-Partition memoirs. Asif shows how various writers produced views of Lahore indicative of their historical moment, and which reflected their visions for the city. He thus sets up his third chapter on "Nation," which explores the new imagination and material development of Lahore under the Pakistani state. Asif suggests it was during this period that Lahore was severed from its many pasts, a process that entailed removing public statues, writing new histories, and imposing Urdu to the detriment of other languages. The following chapter on "Memory" then considers how new origins were crafted for Pakistani citizens. Asif shows how the Two Nation Theory shaped a variety of practices in the new country. These include the linking of modern monuments to medieval conquerors and the growing fascination with the warrior figure as a national hero in historical novels. The fifth chapter on "People" surveys important figures who created or challenged the new Pakistani self in Lahore. It is followed by a final chapter, entitled "Place," in which Asif narrates fragments from his own contemporary explorations of Lahore.

Disrupted City considers how Lahore as a postcolonial, Islamic city requires a distinct theoretical approach compared to traditional scholarship on the city as such. The book's structure reflects Asif's methodological investment in walking, a practice he figures as critical

to both imagining and depicting cities. Asif frames his book as a response to "the colonial inheritance of walking in the colony."[2] He writes not as "an outsider prying open the city," but as one intent on exploring how Lahore has both formed and occluded its margins as it has been made and remade over time. Asif's stress on walking gives the book its structure. Each chapter is divided into many brief sections, all of which are numbered, with none being more than some six pages long. More than the chapters that contain them, these sections are the basic units of *Disrupted City*. Each takes a limited subject for its point of departure, often a book, statue, monument, or person. Asif creates vignettes that mix impressionistic and historical treatment. Though brief, they allow for a general overview of their subject and its role in shaping Lahore. Reading these sections resembles meditating before one historic site before proceeding to the next. As each familiarizes the reader with a single subject, the book itself walks across Lahore from one section to the next. These sections bear out Asif's commitment to breadth. He uses them to view the city capaciously. Rather than visualize Lahore through a few deeply analyzed parts, he seeks to bring its whole structure into view.

Disrupted City links the textual and material construction of Lahore. It positions, for example, the exclusion of Lahore's Hindu and Sikh past from books and magazines as the discursive corollary of the "physical erasure of temples, Devanagari and Gurmukhi scripts, and street and neighborhood names."[3] Asif argues that Lahore is partitioned from its own past. Understood in this context, *Disrupted City* attempts to write Lahore out from calcified ways of thinking about its past and present. An important example of this is Section V in the chapter entitled "History," in which Asif presents news excerpts that trace Partition violence from February 2nd to September 22nd 1947.[4] In contrast to a dominant historical lens that reckons Partition in terms of religious-political communities,

2 Manan Ahmed Asif, *Disrupted City: Walking the Pathways of Memory and History in Lahore* (New York: The New Press, 2024), 273.

3 Asif, *Disrupted City*, 107.

4 Asif, *Disrupted City*, 96-97.

what is remarkable about many of these excerpts (and especially those published prior to August) is their tendency to frame those arrested or killed not as Hindus, Muslims, or Sikhs, but simply as persons. Though Asif's aim here is to evoke "the encroaching drumbeat of disaster" that would have then resounded in Lahore, his excerpts also complement the book's overarching thrust in that they suggest the importance of thinking beyond the communal logic of Partition in both the immediate and long term.[5] *Disrupted City* asks how Lahore might remember its past differently if it saw the victims of violence not as members of religious communities who could then be valorized or forgotten, but rather as its own citizens, as Lahoris. The book attempts to not only rethink the city but to craft a new way of being. It thus aspires to create "new Lahoris, inside and elsewhere."[6]

Asif's inclusive Lahori identity contrasts against the Pakistani state's ideal national subject, one whose affective bonds to the nation would entail forgetting Lahore's many non-Muslim pasts.[7] Asif explores the role of figures such as I.H. Qureshi and S.M. Ikram, members of Pakistan's early intelligentsia who sought to lay the cultural and intellectual foundations of the new state. He rather successfully captures the broad intellectual context in which they operated and were challenged by non-statist historians such as K.K. Aziz and Mubarak Ali.

A key undercurrent to the creation of the Pakistani national imagination was Urdu, whose imposition Asif traces in gestures across sections. Asif recognizes that Urdu's institutional importance to Pakistan is the long-term outcome of colonial language policy in Lahore and Punjab.[8] He also notes that the language was later appropriated by "the religious elite" and intellectuals such as Qureshi after Partition.[9] These two moments in the late 19th and mid-20th century are, however,

5 Asif, *Disrupted City*, 99.

6 Asif, *Disrupted City*, 19.

7 I here rely on Qasmi's distinction between the citizen and national subject. See Ali Usman Qasmi, *Qaum, Mulk, Sultanat: Citizenship and National Belonging in Pakistan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023), 15.

8 Asif, *Disrupted City*, 137-138.

9 Asif, *Disrupted City*, 118, 143.

connected by a significant history that merited inclusion in the book, namely that of the conscious appropriation of Urdu by notable Punjabi figures such as Sheikh Abdul Qadir, Mohammad Iqbal, and Salahuddin Ahmad. Central to Lahore's literary, political, and intellectual landscape in the first half of the 20th century, they formed part of the "Urdu-first" stratum to which Asif gestures, and were integral to the promotion of Urdu as a language of education and aspiration.[10] If the links between Urdu and Muslim nationalism were first forged under the colonial state, they were stabilized and strengthened by local notables who actively denigrated Punjabi while developing Urdu as the national lingua franca. The absence of this Lahori history of Urdu nationalism from *Disrupted City* risks oversimplifying the language's place in the city and Pakistan more broadly. A section threading the above figures could have served as an important link between the moments Asif traces. It would have encouraged a more complex understanding of how Urdu's widespread institutionalization in Punjab and Pakistan erupted from Lahore, and with the complicity of its middle and upper classes.

Overall, *Disrupted City* is an important complement to recent scholarship on Lahore. Whereas academic work on the city typically positions it as the object of either spatial, historical, or literary inquiry, Asif shows how we might read Lahore as an interdisciplinary object. His book synthesizes and so renders Lahore's many pasts legible to the non-specialist reader. Insistent on reading the city's past and present together across disciplines, it thus also offers methodological insights for a scholarly audience.

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10 Asif, *Disrupted City*, 137.

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Joana Cunha Leal e Mariana Pinto dos Santos, eds. *The Primitivist Imaginary in Iberian and Transatlantic Modernisms*. Londres: Routledge, 2024, 202 pp.

Pedro Cardim*

Estamos perante um livro de grande qualidade e verdadeiramente plurifacetado. Embora situado na área disciplinar da história da arte e dos estudos sobre cultura visual, é uma obra eminentemente interdisciplinar, pois, a fim de discutir o que foi o "primitivismo" nos espaços ibéricos e latino-americanos, mobiliza conceitos e ferramentas interpretativas da história, da antropologia, da literatura e dos estudos culturais.

Como se sabe, na sua versão europeia o "primitivismo" desenvolveu-se a partir do final do século XIX. Nesse contexto finissecular, muitos artistas do Ocidente sentiram-se atraídos pelas artes de África, das Américas e da Australásia, convictos de que essas sociedades possuíam uma moralidade e uma forma de expressão artística superiores às das sociedades ditas "civilizadas". Movia-os o desejo de recuperar uma suposta simplicidade e autenticidade de um tempo pretérito, das origens. Para além da atração pelas culturas africanas, ameríndias e da Australásia,

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esta apreciação positiva de um suposto "primitivo" materializou-se no fascínio pela *Volkskunde*, a "etnografia local", a busca do que era puro, original e verdadeiro; e no interesse pela pastoral, que expressava a oposição entre o artista culturalmente sofisticado e a pessoa normal, esta última simples, mas capaz de captar, com muito mais intensidade, as coisas importantes da natureza. Como é bem sabido, este interesse pelo primitivo foi igualmente uma maneira de escapar ao naturalismo, uma forma de figuração que muitos então consideravam exausta. E foi, ainda, um modo de criticar o *status quo* burguês e o formalismo académico que se institucionalizou no campo das artes no século XIX.

Incidindo numa série de contextos ibéricos e latino-americanos, este livro propõe-se lidar com o primitivismo como algo que jamais esteve fixo. Em vez disso, o primitivismo é encarado, aqui, como uma realidade fluida, que adquiriu diferentes significados e se prestou a variadas utilizações. Por isso, os estudos aqui reunidos apostam na exploração de temporalidades e de discursos muito entrelaçados e sempre numa circulação multidirecional. Mostram que tais discursos brotaram de diversos centros e moldaram uma experiência de modernidade bastante desigual, heterogénea e multitemporal (p. 5).

É desse primitivismo algo policêntrico e multidirecional que nos falam vários dos trabalhos que integram este volume. No seu estudo sobre o cubismo, por exemplo, Mark Antliff e Patricia Leighten questionam a leitura difusionista – a partir de Paris – da conversão do cubismo numa linguagem de múltiplas vanguardas. Colocando em dúvida a narrativa centro-periferia e dicotomias como "líderes" e "seguidores", o estudo de Antliff e Leighten apresenta, em vez disso, uma realidade eminentemente policêntrica, com os múltiplos polos do cubismo a atuarem simultaneamente e com grande intensidade, muitos deles no chamado "Sul" (pp. 34 segs.). Antliff e Leighten insistem, ainda, no carácter local e até não traduzível de várias expressões do cubismo, vendo nele, muitas vezes, a expressão de um anticosmopolitismo (p. 38).

Num sentido próximo do que acabou de ser apresentado vai o estudo de Joana Brites sobre Canto da Maya. Brites identifica muitos traços de primitivismo na trajetória desse artista, mostrando que tal resultou da já

referida reação contra a alienação moderna. Canto da Maya fê-lo através do distanciamento do academicismo e do enfatizar da forma e do volume em detrimento da verosimilhança. Reclamou o poder mágico da arte, a sua capacidade de ligar as pessoas a uma totalidade na qual elas se inseriam, e viu nessa busca uma forma de regeneração da sociedade e da arte modernas. Nesse sentido, primitivizou certos aspetos da sua vida e enveredou por um processo de quase *going native*, de que um dos principais momentos foi quando se fez fotografar num suposto traje africano. Brites insiste que tal poderia ter tido um potencial subversivo, de crítica à exploração dos africanos por Portugal. Porém, no caso de Canto da Maya não teve essa finalidade crítica, não levou a uma posição subversiva ou a um marcado interesse em conhecer o *outro* (p. 146). Nesse sentido, a sua obra mostra como alguma arte europeia tinha naturalizado o colonialismo e mostra, também, que o primitivismo não comportava, necessariamente, uma crítica à violência e à exploração coloniais.

Mais adiante voltarei a este tema, o colonialismo, verdadeiramente transversal a esta obra.

Para já, gostaria de referir que o interesse estético pelo primitivismo reaparece em vários outros estudos, como o dedicado a Joaquim Sunyer e a Joan Miró. Aí, o que sobressai é uma conceção de primitivismo muito ligada à simplicidade pastoril, convertida, no contexto do Noucentisme catalão, numa espécie de aspiração estética. M. Lluïsa Faxedas Brujats sublinha o marcado envolvimento do Noucentisme com a ideia de primitivo, por exemplo, no interesse pelos pastores como celebração da harmonia de uma existência simples, muito melhor do que a vida urbana. Mostra que tal se filiou num forte sentimento de comunidade entre os catalães, muitas vezes associado ao que era arcaico, antigo, sobretudo da herança mediterrânica (p. 157). O propósito era enfatizar esse espírito mediterrânico partilhado, uma vez mais como forma de se opor ao projeto de modernidade e de civilização. No estudo de Faxedas Brujats reencontramos, portanto, um outro tópico transversal a este volume: a tensão entre a ideia de um mundo natural harmónico e as pressões do mundo moderno em rápida transformação.

Marta Soares também percorre um território próximo do que acabou de ser referido. Estuda o grupo de artistas e de intelectuais que se reunia em torno do Café Alameda, em Granada, no início dos anos 1920, onde pontificavam Federico García Lorca, o compositor Manuel de Falla e o artista Hermenegildo Lanz (1893-1949). Todos eles partilhavam um forte interesse por marionetas e viam no primitivismo uma estética teatral muito mais "verdadeira". Para eles, o teatro de marionetas era não só uma forma de questionar o teatro burguês, mas também uma modalidade de expressão muito mais capaz de captar a simplicidade, o imóvel, o misticismo, o divino, o irracional... Essa opção pelo primitivo também se ligava ao animismo, ou seja, à extensão da vitalidade a coisas inanimadas, algo típico das fases mais básicas da cultura mental ou de conceções infantis. Para muitas dessas figuras, o teatro de marionetas era bem mais capaz de captar a complexidade do mundo do que o teatro representado por atores humanos (p. 173).

Porém, o tema forte deste volume é, sem dúvida, a articulação do primitivismo com o colonialismo (e o pós-colonialismo). Como sabemos, o "primitivismo" que foi forjado pelos europeus, ao mesmo tempo que envolveu a atração pelas artes de África, das Américas e da Ásia, também reproduziu estereótipos racistas com os quais os europeus e seus descendentes justificavam, desde há muito, o domínio colonial sobre as populações desses continentes. Não podemos esquecer que o imperialismo europeu foi legitimado, desde as suas origens no século XV, como um empreendimento que visava transmitir a "civilidade" e, mais tarde, a "civilização" aos povos das Américas, da Ásia e de África, quase sempre retratados como primitivos ou barbáricos.

O "primitivismo" do começo do século XX continuou a considerar essas populações como pertencentes a um "passado" atrasado, mesmo estando estas no presente, negando-lhes o acesso à tecnologia e descaracterizando-as por utilizarem artefactos tecnológicos tidos como "primitivos". Era um imaginário que supunha, portanto, uma hierarquia entre os grupos humanos.

Além disso, como refere Rafael Cardoso, um dos colaboradores deste livro, as discussões do Atlântico Norte sobre o primitivismo fre-

quentemente deram como certo que o conceito operava numa única direção: para fora da Europa Ocidental e da América do Norte, em direção ao Hemisfério Sul. O olhar primitivista era considerado uma projeção do "eu" colonizador, subordinando o "outro" colonizado e, simultaneamente, dele se apropriando. Na sua versão norte-europeia, o primitivismo produziu, portanto, um efeito de obscurecimento do contributo dado por artistas e escritores latino-americanos para a renovação artística de inícios do século xx (Rafael Cardoso).

Este livro demarca-se deste tipo de leitura. Estudando o modo como essas atribuições de "primitivismo" atuaram em contextos pós-coloniais, sobretudo ibéricos e latino americanos, demonstra que essa atitude primitivista esteve sempre sujeita a apropriações. Desde logo, porque muitos latino-americanos e ibéricos contestaram o primitivismo como um projeto estritamente etnográfico e perceberam que ele era parte integrante do empreendimento colonial mais amplo. Nesse sentido, distanciaram-se da compreensão binária colonizador/colonizado que, para além de ignorar a história longa dessa ideia, também obscurecia "os primitivismos que floresceram nas sombras dos impérios europeus" (Rafael Cardoso, p. 99).

Incidindo deliberadamente em diversos artistas e contextos latino-americanos, este livro deixa bem patente que o primitivismo, quando cultivado por artistas dessa parte do mundo, serviu para criticar o impacto cultural negativo da modernidade ocidental sobre os povos colonizados. Os acontecimentos do século xx contribuíram para abalar fortemente o imaginário de superioridade da Europa. Vários estudos reunidos neste volume mostram que a Grande Guerra, com a Europa em barbárica autodestruição, foi um importante momento de viragem das perceções da Europa por parte dos latino-americanos. E mostram, igualmente, que, em diferentes pontos da América Latina, várias figuras reagiram contra modernistas europeus que lá iam exercer exercícios de autoridade intelectual e artística. As obras primitivistas de artistas anticoloniais foram críticas dos estereótipos ocidentais sobre os povos colonizados, a ponto de alguns chegarem mesmo a manifestar um an-

seio pelo modo de vida pré-colonial, uma certa nostalgia pelo mundo que havia sido destruído pelo colonialismo europeu.

Grande parte dos trabalhos aqui reunidos estudam casos de persistência de uma ideologia colonial muito assente na ideia de primitivo. Porém, uma vez mais sobressai, nesses estudos, o carácter multiforme e adaptável do primitivismo, ao ponto de esse imaginário poder ser "usado" para alcançar objetivos muito diversos e, por vezes, completamente opostos.

O estudo de Mariana Pinto dos Santos é um dos que mais diretamente exploram a tríade primitivismo, colonialismo e anticolonialismo. Pinto dos Santos defende que o primitivismo com referência a África pode ser encontrado, em Portugal, na arte e, também, no campo da etnografia e das narrativas coloniais. Dá como exemplo o antropólogo Diogo de Macedo, curador de exposições coloniais na década de 1930 e autor do livro *Arte Indígena Portuguesa*, de 1934, uma obra estreitamente ligada à exposição colonial do Porto. Macedo interessou-se pelo primitivismo como uma busca da expressão primordial, mas fê-lo sempre marcado por um olhar de superioridade de um Ocidente/Norte supostamente civilizado e modernizador, face a um Sul barbárico, primitivo e carente desse influxo do Norte civilizado para ser capaz de inovar. O modo como Macedo interpretou os famosos bronzes do Benim é um ótimo exemplo da sua forma de ligar a arte do século XV à modernidade europeia: defende que a marca portuguesa terá sido fundamental para que essa elevada expressão artística se realizasse. Para Macedo, a mistura com a estética dos portugueses constituía um exemplo de "boa miscigenação".

Num sentido completamente oposto vai Ernesto de Sousa, também estudado por Pinto dos Santos. Sousa foi organizador, em 1946, da *Semana da Arte Negra*, na Escola Superior Colonial. Na conferência de abertura, assinalou a afinidade entre os modernos e a tendência abstrata da arte primitiva. Como destaca Pinto dos Santos, colocou a arte africana no mesmo plano que os muralistas mexicanos ou a obra de Portinari e incluiu no seu discurso uma forte crítica ao colonialismo, à sua violência e à sua dinâmica exploradora. O seu apreço pelo primi-

tivismo africano aproximou-se, desse modo, das tradições surrealista e neorrealista de denúncia da relação entre arte e colonialismo (pp. 128 segs.). Conclui-se, portanto, que o primitivismo esteve tanto na base da ideologia colonial portuguesa quanto na sua subversão.

O conceito de atraso e a sua relação com o primitivismo também estão muito presentes neste e em outros estudos reunidos no volume em apreço. Vários deles refletem criticamente sobre o impacto desses conceitos não só nas narrativas históricas das "periferias" (tanto extraeuropeias quanto do próprio Sul europeu), mas também na *master narrative* da história da arte (p. 6). A esse respeito, é muito instrutivo o trabalho de Alejandro Mejías-López sobre José María Arguedas, antropólogo peruano que foi a Espanha para estudar a sociedade espanhola. Com um *background* de estudos quechua, Arguedas viu nos espanhóis um dos povos menos evoluídos do mundo, formulando um autêntico primitivismo invertido: uma Espanha atrasada face à situação das suas antigas colónias. Arguedas não estava obviamente sozinho nesta visão de uma Espanha primitiva e atrasada; vinha na senda de José Martí ou Rubén Darío e a ele se juntaram figuras como Alejo Carpentier. Do estudo realizado por Mejías-López extraem-se duas ideias-fortes: antes de mais, o modernismo hispano-americano foi o catalisador do modernismo espanhol (e não o contrário); em segundo lugar, esse modernismo latino-americano terá tornado possível a expressão do modernismo espanhol como um primitivismo de si mesmo.

Pode assim dizer-se que, a par da inegável relação entre primitivismo e dominação colonial (e pós-colonial), este volume também evidencia que o primitivismo proporcionou um amplo repositório de recursos para o desenvolvimento de leituras diametralmente opostas. Para tanto, contribuiu o que poderíamos chamar de uma fundamental polissemia do "primitivismo". Joana Cunha Leal, ao estudar a exposição *Los pintores íntegros*, realizada em Madrid em 1915 e resultado do labor de Ramón Gómez de la Serna, mostra que a ideia de integridade cultivada por Gómez de la Serna teve a sua origem no "conceito do artista como um «primitivo», significando, aqui, antirracional, espontâneo e, acima de tudo, «autêntico»". Na sua muito sugestiva análise da

exposição *Los pintores íntegros*, Joana Cunha Leal mostra que esta não apenas defendia a europeização de Espanha, mas tornava os valores da arte popular local e da cultura popular intercambiáveis sob o "guarda-chuva" do cubismo.

Acresce que, através do estudo do mural mexicano, Cunha Leal assinala igualmente a forma como Diego Rivera concebeu, retrospetivamente, a sua apropriação do folclore mexicano como forma de produzir uma arte autêntica e universal (p. 59). Para Rivera não se tratava apenas de primitivizar as referências coloniais, mas também de trazer um núcleo da vanguarda europeia para o cerne da resistência anticolonial e da cultura revolucionária mexicana da sua época (p. 59).

O mural e a sua primitivização são o objeto de outro estudo deste volume, dedicado a Joaquín Torres-García e a David Alfaro Siqueiros. Begoña Farré Torras assinala que, tanto na América Latina como na Europa, o mural moderno foi primitivizado pela associação com o pré-renascentista, o pré-colonial e o fresco, e transformado num remédio para os males do individualismo, do capitalismo e do imperialismo do mundo moderno e dos seus mercados de arte. O seu uso foi defendido como uma expressão genuína tanto da cultura pré-hispânica quanto da cultura popular mexicana contemporânea (p. 66). Nesse sentido, o trabalho de Farré Torras ilustra muito bem como os elementos primitivistas se cruzaram com questões de identidade regional e nacional, em ambos os lados do Atlântico (p. 66).

Já Rafael Cardoso, no seu estudo sobre antropofagia, primitivismo e antiprimitivismo, explora uma outra faceta do modo como este imaginário funcionou como estratégia contra a influência europeia, desta feita no Brasil. Analisando como a *Revista de Antropofagia* abordou, em 1929, o tema do primitivismo, Cardoso mostra que este foi visto como o caminho para ultrapassar uma civilização decadente como a europeia. "Só o selvagem nos vai salvar", chegou a afirmar Oswaldo Costa. Já no "Manifesto de poesia pau-Brasil", de Oswald de Andrade, o primitivismo serviu o propósito da luta contra a cultura de elite e contra o artificialismo das academias.

Porém, como reconhece o próprio Rafael Cardoso, o legado da *Antropofagia* revelou-se mais radical do que o que alcançou nos anos 1920. Para Cardoso, as estratégias discursivas do movimento são muito mais interessantes do que a retórica anticolonial direta pela qual é habitualmente celebrado. O grande "truque" da *Antropofagia* foi incorporar o olhar "exotizante" do primitivismo europeu e posteriormente devolvê-lo à Europa sob a aparência de antiprimitivismo. Como refere o próprio Cardoso, os mentores da *Antropofagia*, ao se posicionarem simultaneamente como selvagens e modernos, conseguiram subverter as hierarquias que permitiam aos europeus ditar à América Latina a suposta inferioridade cultural (p. 110).

Enquanto repositório de recursos, o primitivismo prestou-se, portanto, a muita ambivalência. Alguns exemplos dessa ambivalência primitivista já foram mencionados. O que agora gostaria de referir, para encerrar, refere-se ao estudo sobre os treze artigos escritos por Benjamin Péret, um dos fundadores do surrealismo, durante a sua estadia no Rio de Janeiro entre 1930 e 1931. Tais escritos foram publicados no *Diário da Noite*, de São Paulo, e neles sobressai o marcado interesse de Péret pelas religiões afro-brasileiras, as quais, convém lembrar, tinham sido sempre severamente reprimidas, tanto pelas autoridades coloniais portuguesas quanto pelo Estado brasileiro. Péret destacou não propriamente a autenticidade ou a pureza original dessas religiões, mas sim o carácter impuro, compósito e sincrético dessa experiência religiosa. A sua leitura muito própria do que ele chamou de Candomblé e Makumba constitui um dos poucos exemplos, naquela época, de uma apreciação positiva dessas formas de religiosidade e da sua estética. Porém, e uma vez mais, Péret é fundamentalmente ambivalente na avaliação que faz do papel que essas religiões desempenharam na resistência contra a escravatura: reconhece, sem dúvida, o seu contributo, mas considera-o insuficiente para uma verdadeira transformação social.

Em suma, o principal contributo deste volume coletivo é a cabal demonstração da fundamental instabilidade do conceito de "primitivo". Os trabalhos aqui reunidos mostram que o primitivismo podia designar realidades bem diferentes e também que, na senda do que os coloniza-

dos já haviam feito ao longo de vários séculos de dominação europeia, os ex-colonizados souberam tirar partido das atribuições de "primitivo" contra eles dirigidas. Aproveitaram-se da porosidade do conceito de "primitivo" e moveram-se nas suas brechas. Nesse sentido, vários dos estudos aqui reunidos evidenciam o potencial do primitivismo para desestabilizar o discurso colonial e abalar o imaginário subjacente.

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Roger Chartier. *Escutar os mortos com os olhos*. Lisboa: Tinta-da-china, 2025, 72 pp.

António Camões Gouveia*

Uma escolha e uma coleção

O pequeno livro de Roger Chartier abre uma coleção em que "a história é um espertador do entendimento" (pp. 13-14), frase de 1563 pedida emprestada a João de Barros (1496-1570). A coleção é coordenada por Rui Tavares e assume uma direção de que a epígrafe/título é promissora e que fica clara na apresentação (pp. 13-15). A proposta desenhada pretende dar acesso "a livros de muitos historiadores e historiadoras, diferentes entre si: modernos e antigos, científicos ou humanísticos, quantitativos ou qualitativos, mais analíticos ou mais sintéticos" (p. 15).

Entretanto, em setembro de 2026 saiu a coletânea de quatro ensaios de Carlo Ginzburg (1939-2026) *Nenhuma ilha é uma ilha*. A diversidade é evidente. Sob o tom de literatura inglesa, estudam-se um

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bispo espanhol, a *Utopia* de More, o *Dicionário* de Bayle, um conto de Stevenson... No mínimo, promissor!

Um autor: Roger Chartier

Roger Chartier construiu o seu caminho na direção aberta pelos *Annales* (1929) e, sucessivamente, foi alargando as áreas de estudo e aperfeiçoando metodologias. O seu caminho de investigação sobre a história da cultura moderna entre os séculos XIV e XVIII regista inovação pessoal nos conteúdos, nos temas abordados como na revisão e criação de conceitos. Com ele, e com as equipas que soube ir criando, o livro, a leitura, o autor, as bibliotecas, os seus usos e interpretações tornaram-se objetos, sujeitos e agentes de cultura, permitindo novos olhares e, na verdade, releituras de temáticas que antes pareciam encerradas.

Chartier foi capaz de fazer entender, e de praticar, análises e construções históricas numa confluência das identidades de objeto e de metodologias da história do livro, da história da leitura, da história da cultura escrita e de indiciar propostas até aos leitores. A sua produção bibliográfica dá conta deste alargamento, ainda que não perdendo nunca o lastro das dimensões sociais e das sociabilidades da cultura.

As metodologias de abordagem e discussão do livro-objeto, do livro conhecível ao livro prisioneiro, dos poderes de encomenda, mecenato, comércio, propaganda, ... às contrafações e censuras permitiram-lhe uma vitalidade de análise constante e, ainda hoje, motivadora.

Um texto, de um autor, para uma coleção

Quanto ao texto de Roger Chartier, trata-se da tradução do livro *Écouter les morts avec les yeux* (Paris: Collège de France/Fayard, 2008). Desta vez sob a epígrafe de um verso de Francisco Quevedo (1580-1645), escrito em 1620 e só publicado em 1648!, passa-se a escrito a lição de abertura do seu primeiro curso no Collège de France, aquando da sua admissão em 2007.

Com uma clareza e precisão conceptual, discursiva e exemplificativa, o texto de Roger Chartier não nos pode merecer mais do que uma aceitação.

Por isso, não nos guia qualquer preocupação mais do que notar algumas linhas de fundo na sequência das quais deve estar atento um professor de história ou um historiador.

Autores e livros motivadores

Um grande ponto de partida: Henri-Jean Martin e o *Aparecimento do livro (*pp. 19-20), "um dos títulos fundadores da história do livro" (p. 20), de quem Roger Chartier escreve que "sem ter sido seu aluno, fui seu discípulo" (p. 20), classificação afetiva e marcante na vida de alguém que se sente um professor. A Henri-Jean Martin junta-se, desde logo, Lucien Febvre (p. 20) e, depois, Don McKenzie (pp. 20-21) e a sua proposta de estudo conjunto de "compreensão histórica dos escritos, da descrição morfológica dos objetos que os contêm" (p. 21) e, por fim, Armando Petrucci com os "papéis atribuídos à escrita, as suas formas e suportes, e os modos de leitura" (p. 22). Estas leituras, os seus enfoques e interligações permitem a Roger Chartier enunciar a pergunta de fundo que irá conduzir as suas futuras lições do Collège de France, iniciadas a 11 de outubro de 2007 e distribuídas por todo um ano, sob o tema estruturante "Escrita e culturas na Europa moderna" (p. 17), tendo como eixo diretor "o lugar que a escrita ocupou na produção dos saberes" (p. 22).

Neste âmbito, importa percorrer a construção de uma biblioteca de referentes capazes de alicerçar a lição que veio a ser preferida. Caso a caso, as prateleiras de Chartier vão-nos deixando aproximar dos nomes centrais de Martin, Febvre, McKenzie e Petrucci, e acrescem-lhes Gutenberg, era de esperar!, Montaigne, não nos espanta, Michel Foucault, é fundamental, Jorge Luis Borges, agarrado à Biblioteca de Alexandria dos Ptolomeu. Na sequência, volta a recuperar-se Lucien Febvre, enquanto o grande historiador da época moderna, Fernand Braudel e a preocupação de aprofundar os tempos do tempo, um pa-

rêntese com as agendas próprias de Paul Ricoeur e Yosef Yerushalmi, e o retorno a uma prosopografia do fazer história que se estende aos estudos de Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Jean Delumeau e Daniel Roche, que Roger Chartier define como "mestre junto do qual aprendi o ofício de historiador" (p. 34), e uma extensão, de assinalar, ao revolucionário Norbert Elias. No *zoom* de aproximação ao livro, lançado pela proposta de Kant, já estruturada e estudada por Ernst Curtius, que "disse praticamente tudo" (p. 39) sobre o que é o livro e as suas funções.

Livro implica o autor. Implica? Implicou? É essa "relação original e indestrutível entre a obra e o seu autor" (p. 43) que nos faz regressar aos livros que Michel Foucault construiu e divulgou, com a sua configuração de ideias e de práticas de uso e leitura do livro. Aí, o "autor" emerge como protagonista, o que Chartier cuidadosamente interpela e limita, pois esta proposta não comporta algo que é "historicamente muito variável" (p. 43). Dois exemplos (pp. 43-46) procuram clarificar a necessidade de variação da "função do autor" (p. 45) afirmada por Foucault.

Percebe-se, por tudo isto, que Roger Chartier, na construção da aula e na sua formulação escrita, instalado na "ordem dos livros", avance para dois temas convergentes abordados em quatro outros textos: "cultura escrita e literatura" (pp. 47-53), "produção do texto" (pp. 55-67), "princípios da análise" (pp. 69-73) e "o excesso e a perda" (pp. 75-78).

Exemplificar com livros e autores. O peso do "Siglo de Oro"

Os exemplos do mundo do livro, dos livros e com livros, são retirados de Shakespeare, Furetière, Lope de Vega, Cervantes, Kant e os seus *O que são as luzes?* e "Doutrina do direito" na *Metafísica dos costumes*. Depois de voltar ao mundo ibérico, a Melchor de Cabrera e a Alonso Victor de Paredes, a impressão e a sua tratadística permitem saltar para uma aproximação a outra tríade de autores: Blackstone, Diderot e a orgânica das ideias de Fichte. Do livro na sua ligação à autoria(s) são exemplos Shakespeare e Cervantes nas suas edições de

Rowe e de Mayans y Siscar respetivamente, ou as intromissões "perpetradas pelo malévolo Avellaneda" (pp. 45-46). São páginas de rigor e de criação interpretativa, de análise de propostas criteriosas de compreensão e sua configuração de ideias e de práticas de uso da leitura do livro, escreva-se, sobre a "ordem dos livros ou, mais genericamente, o regime de publicação dos escritos" (p. 46).

Conclusão, sem nada encerrar...

Nesta nota, fica tudo por dizer e escrever. Como um livro dificilmente é peça de uma exposição em museu, também esta escrita do oral da lição de Roger Chartier dificilmente se entende, se lê!, sem retirar algumas das suas peças-livros de fundo da prateleira da nossa biblioteca e, o que teria sido excelente, ter-se ouvido a sequência e síntese das suas lições neste curso.

Tudo por dizer e escrever? Tudo, ... menos a vontade que o livrinho nos cria de ir ler para melhor "espertar" o nosso entendimento.

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Gouveia, António Camões. "Recensão a *Escutar os mortos com os olhos*, de Roger Chartier". *Práticas da História, Journal on Theory, Historiography and Uses of the Past*, n.º 22 (2026): 541-545. https://doi.org/10.48487/pdh.2026.n22.49693.