Beyond the epistemological debates about the time in history, the relativity of historical time: decolonial theory facing the Western historiographical hegemony

Além dos debates epistemológicos sobre o tempo na história, a relatividade do tempo histórico: a teoria descolonial enfrentando a hegemonia historiográfica ocidental

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Antonio Evaldo Almeida Barros
Doctor of Ethnic and African Studies
Institution: Universidade Estadual do Maranhão, Universidade Federal do Maranhão
Address: R. da Estrela, 329, Praia Grande, São Luís – MA, CEP: 65010-200
E-mail: antonioevaldoab@gmail.com

Fábio Henrique Monteiro Silva
Doctor of History
Institution: Universidade Estadual do Maranhão
Address: R. da Estrela, 329, Praia Grande, São Luís – MA, CEP: 65010-200
E-mail: profabioouema@gmail.com

Sylvain Mbohou
Doctor of African History and International Relations
Institution: Universidade Estadual do Maranhão
Address: R. da Estrela, 329, Praia Grande, São Luís – MA, CEP: 65010-200
E-mail: sylvain.mbohou@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
This article is a theoretical reflection on the epistemological debate about the time in history. The aim here is to put the temporality of the Western historiographical hegemony into orbit in order to highlight its limitations. Based on the axiological principles of the decolonial studies theory, we put the emphasis on the philosophy of the “New History” (Nouvelle Histoire) born in the historiographical extension of the École des Annales, French History school founded in 1929 by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch. The result is that the hegemony of Western historiography has shown its limits across the classical divisions of history. The existence of multiple conceptions of time throughout the world requires the construction of a complex epistemology of temporality in historical research.

Keywords: epistemology, time, École des Annales, decolonial studies.
RESUMO
Este artigo é uma reflexão teórica sobre o debate epistemológico acerca do tempo na história. O objetivo é colocar em órbita a temporalidade da hegemonia historiográfica ocidental, de modo a evidenciar os seus limites. Com base nos princípios axiológicos da teoria dos estudos descoloniais, centramo-nos na filosofia da Nova História (Nouvelle Histoire), que surgiu como uma extensão historiográfica da École des Annales fundada em 1929 por Lucien Febvre e Marc Bloch. O resultado é que a hegemonia da historiografia ocidental mostrou os seus limites nas divisões clássicas da história. A existência de múltiplas conceções de tempo no mundo exige a construção de uma complexa epistemologia da temporalidade na investigação histórica.

Palavras-chave: epistemologia, tempo, Ecole des Annales, estudos descoloniais.

1 INTRODUCTION
This study is coming from a scientific communication project that were proposed as part of the doctoral seminar organised from 21st to 22th May 2015 by the History Department of the University of Dschang (Cameroon), the general topic of which was "Time in History". In fact, we realised that at the end of the XVIIIth century, the revolution of ideas initiated by the "Philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment" had favoured the development of scientism. Since then, and in contrast to the religious and superstitious conceptions that had prevailed until then, the everyday life facts and phenomena have been subjected to the sieves of scientific analysis: we are thus witnessing the development of the scientific spirit: it is the scientism. This led to a debate on the real meaning of social sciences in general and history in particular. Since the XIXth century, history has also been concerned with the epistemological debate in the domain of the social sciences. As a discipline, History rightly claims the status of an autonomous science considering its methods, its object and its purposes. Unlike the so-called exact or experimental sciences, which aim is to obtain the absolute truth of things, history for it case as a discipline belongs to the category of the human sciences:

1 PhD History Seminar « Le temps en histoire », Université De Dschang, ÉCOLE DOCTORALE, UNITÉ DE FORMATION DOCTORALE ARTS, LETTRES ET SCIENCES SOCIALES, 21-22 mai 2015, http://www.sfhom.com/IMG/pdf/programme_seminaire_dschang.pdf. After almost a decade, a lot of water has flowed under the bridge. So we thought it would be a good idea to revisit the subject, to take it further and refine it, but this time as part of a scientific collaboration with two colleagues and friends.
“l’Histoire est une science humaine qui est à la recherche d’un certain degré de certitude dite morale ou de probabilité qui lui permet de restituer et d’expliquer le passé de l’Homme” (History is a human science which seeks a certain degree of so-called moral certainty or probability which enables it to reconstruct and explain man’s past), (KI-ZERBO, 1978, p. 27). It is an effort to reconstruct man’s past in time and space in an intelligible way (BLOCK: 1974, p. 36). The aim is to learn from it in order to better understand the present and plan for the future. As such, « L’histoire est une vrai science et non seulement une petite science conjecturale » (“History is a real science, not just a little conjectural science”), (KI-ZERBO, 1978, p. 27). Here, the truth envisaged is not absolute but relative. This is linked to the environment that in some way influence or is likely to influence the historian’s work. This is obvious from an analysis of world historiography. In this respect, we have remark that historical science is very often dominated by Western historiography which epistemological position reflects some kind of scientific hegemony. In the world history, we are witnessing the emergence of “Global history”, which took hold in the 1980s and 1990s on the initiative of the historian Bruce Mazlish (MAZLISH: 1998, pp. 385-395). This historical approach is interested in the search for interconnections and entanglements. It favours a so-called universal approach of the world history. It tries very hard to qualify the disparities between the ‘Global North’ and the ‘Global South’. This hardly conceals the hegemonic impulses of the proponents of this historiographical approach, which very often follows the classic divisions of the world history, despite the fact that it is not easy to apply this division to the realities of others regions of the world. Whether we understand history as the past, knowledge about the past or the science that studies the past, it is clear that the question of time arises acutely, because of the existence of different temporalities which bring more complication in the historian’s work, particularly in terms of the definition a the specific temporality adapted to the research object. This article therefore raises the problem of the epistemological complexity of time in history. So, what are the theoretical, methodological and epistemological considerations that historians must take into account in the 21st century, a century marked by globalisation, in order to make their way in the construction of an intelligible
temporality in their research or activities? Based on the ideas conveyed since the nineteenth century by the great historical schools, this study is founded on the philosophy and epistemology of time in history and the axiological principles of decolonial studies. It will therefore be important to begin by clarifying the concept of time before raising the problem of the domination of Western temporality through the classical divisions of the world history, while noting its non-operational nature in all regions of the world. For this reasons, we thing about an epistemology of the complexity of time that can reconciles the various approaches dealing with this issue.

2 THE PLACE OF TIME IN HISTORY: CONCEPTUAL PRECISION AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITIONING

First of all, it is necessary bring some theoretical and conceptual about the time in order to grasp its meaning and understand it better. There is a general tendency among historians to favour empirical practice, while leaving theoretical reflexion to specialists in the philosophy and epistemology of History. Yet, Descartes stated in the Discourse on Method that: "Common sense is the most widely shared thing in the world" (DESCARTES, 1966, p. 33). He certainly didn't mean to imply that this is an exercise for the average person or some daring adventurer. In fact, he was trying to point out that it is not enough to have common sense to hope to achieve convincing results; you also have to know and be capable of making good use of it. This is what the philosopher called “Method” (DESCARTES, 1966, p. 34-35). Although this method is not unique and is reflected in the diversity of opinions due to the fact that men conduct their thoughts in different ways by considering different things, rigorous reflexion must nevertheless be the watchword of all scientific work (DESCARTES, 1966, p. 33). This is why empirical and philosophical representations of time must be examined in such a way as to interest the historians and make their works as intelligible as possible.
2.1 AN ATTEMPT TO DEFINE TIME

What, in fact, is time? This fundamental question requires to review the different conceptions that people have had about time across the ages and space. Etymologically, the word “time” comes from the Latin *tempus* and refers to a division of the flow of time into finite elements. The notion of division or subdivision that emerges is in some ways reminiscent of chronology. With the West as its starting point, chronology has referred, since Antiquity, to the succession of historical events in time and to the science of dates and historical events. Others interpretations of chronology suggest, for example, that it can be equated with: « La mise en ordre du temps selon la succession des faits, chaque fait étant situé par rapport aux autres en fonctions d’un système de repérage, d’une échelle de temps » (“The ordering of time according to the succession of facts, each fact being situated in relation to the others according to a system of reference, a time scale”), (TOUBKIS: 2004, p. 135). As in all historical work, in addition to the spatial framework, the design of a study and the understanding of its results also, and above all, depend on the definition of the temporal framework (XENOPOL: 1908, p. 1-2). The chronological range thus offers an intelligible point of access to the fresco of time, and consequently conditions any analyses that may emanate from its definition. It thus plays a part in structuring the memory of peoples and their mentalities (POUNTOUGNIGNI NJUH: 2021, p. 147). From this point of view, chronology appears to be a frame of reference and above all a guide. This is the logic behind the statement: « L’historien qui veut remonter le passé sans repère chronologique ressemble à un voyageur qui parcourt dans une voiture sans compteur une piste sans bornes kilométriques » (“The historian who wants to go back into the past without a chronological reference point is like a traveller who, in a car without a speedometer, travels a track with no mileposts”), (KI-ZERBO: 1978, p. 16). Halphen (2005, p. 18) agrees, arguing that there is no history without chronology. The same is true of Jean Vansina, for whom: « sans chronologie, il n y a pas d’histoire, puisqu’on ne peut plus distinguer ce qui précède de ce qui suit » (“Without chronology, there is no history, since we can no longer distinguish what precedes from what follows”), (VANSSINA: 1980/1999, p. 182). This analysis highlights chronological time,
which is essential to the historian’s work. It allows the researcher to easily travel through time, in full knowledge of the milestones to be crossed. In this logic, the departure and arrival points are clear and mark out the path, without which it is difficult to establish with accuracy the absolute or relative anteriority of one fact in relation to another (POUNTOUGNIGNI NJUH: 2021, p. 147). In this way, chronology gives a better or easier grasp of the pattern of events. This allows us to situate ourselves in relation to the past, the present and the future (SAHA 2018, p.1880). From an epistemological point of view, and in terms of the historian’s position in relation to chronological time, it would appear that what we are dealing with here is a perception of the linearity of time that could easily be assimilated to event history (Histoire évènementielle), one of the main characteristics of the Ecole méthodique founded in 1876 by Gabriel Monod (Bourdé: 1997).

2.2 ONTOLOGICAL AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO TIME

While we may think we have a better grasp of it, we also quickly realise that time is a data that is difficult to control. Very often, thinking about time requires to follow theories of knowledge, including the philosophy and epistemology of history. In this perspective, we can make a distinction between an ontological and a phenomenological apprehension of time.

Ontologically, time is an abstract and therefore elusive data that cannot be frozen or tamed. The nihilistic impulse of Spinoza’s metaphysics (1652-1677) is part of this movement. For him, there is neither finality nor purpose in the universe. So, the idea of the purpose of human nature appears therefore a simple and pure invention. Time, in this case, necessarily derives from God nature. It is an infinite and accomplished time which, far from discouraging the historian, authorises a degree of knowledge. This time, to which on cannot give a face, suffers from nothing. It cannot be altered no wrinkled or influenced (...) because it is a perfection. However, if we agree that the cosmos is the result of the “Big-bang”, then considered to be the beginning, as Stephen HAWKING very opportunely suggests (quoted by SAHA 2018, p.1877), we are curiously tempted to wonder what came before. The answer to this obviously enigmatic question is not easy at all to be find. From a religious perspective, the most mythical accounts
of cosmos-genesis reveals that the Universe came into existence at a particular moment, in the more or less distant past. It is at this point that the sense of the existence of a "First Cause" develops, and it is difficult to go into further detail about this (HAWKING: 1989, p. 16).

From a phenomenological perspective, time refers to the embodiment of a movement or evolution: it is movement-time. It is the symbol of the immobility of space (SAHA 2018, p.1881). It also refers to the past (or the time that has passed), which ordinary people can only fundamentally grasp through its content, particularly through vestiges/heritages. It also refers to a mythic time that has more to do with our hopes and desires than anything else. In this case, we are talking about time-future. We are dealing here with a turn of events that we hope will come. Despite people's assurance about what will happen, they don't any control over this time because they can neither bring it by anticipation nor prevent it from happening. To put it plainly, it is a range of elucidations of data which, despite their true therapeutic value, escape of all control and consequently provoke more illusions of certainty about events (SAHA 2018, p.1880).

2.3 THE CONCEPT OF TIME ACCORDING TO THE HISTORICAL SCHOOLS

Within the various historical schools that have emerged in Europe in general and in France in particular, the conception of time and the value placed on it are elements for assessing the evolution of epistemological and methodological positioning in the vast field of historical studies (BOURDE Guy and HERVE: 1997). Here, our analysis is rooted in the philosophy of the Ecole Méthodique and the Ecole des Annales, as well as on schools that followed them in the same logic (DELACROIX Christian, DOSSE François & GARCIA Patrick: 2007).

The Methodical School of History, inspired by the German model, is also described as positivist. It was founded by Gabriel Monod and Gustave Fagniez, who launched the Revue historique in 1876, and by Charles-Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos, authors of L'Introduction aux études historiques, the reference publications of this historical movement (CARBONELL: 1975). Here, the historian's work is essentially based on documents, with a view to achieve objectivity by applying rigorous technics to the inventory of sources.
Consequently, this excludes all philosophical speculation. However, this positivist ideal obliges historians to focus on event-based facts, limiting themselves to political, military or diplomatic aspects. The event-based history that characterises this historiographical movement was to be the main object of criticism formulated by the various historiographical tendencies of the *Ecole des Annales* (CARBONELL: 1975).

In the late 1920s, there was a real historiographical revolution (Burke, 1991). The emerging historiographical movement was characterised by its criticism of the cardinal principles of the positivist school of history. The pioneers thinkers of *the Ecole des Annales*, namely Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre and Fernand Braudel, advocated a global and holistic history. This referred to an open history that embraced new subjects because it took into account all the facts of society as a whole. This historiographical trend gives priority to the “long term” at the expense of the “short term” which characterised the positivist school of history (Bloch: 1952, p. 11-16). By giving a fundamental place to the “long term” and to the transdisciplinarity, the Annales School of History profoundly renewed historiography though (BURGUIERE: 2006). As a logical extension of this historiographical trend, we have moved towards a History of "Present Time" (Garcia: 2023; Noiriel: 2006; Gonçalves: 2011, p. 35). From this historical perspective, we need to understand the past through the present and vice versa. This movement between the past and the present highlights the importance of “Present Time” in the history of human societies around the world. It could be likened to “social time”, because it is oppressive and engulfing for every individual, who engages in a losing battle against time, an indomitable category (SAHA: 2018, p.1882). We can see, then, that history is undergoing a plural broadening of its horizons. It is now involving the history of mentalities and historical anthropology. Culture is also becoming an object of study in history. It is a subject that preoccupies Philippe Poirrier, who is interested in the challenges of “cultural history” (Poirrier, 2004). That is what Pierre Nora and Jacque Le Goff have called "La Nouvelle Histoire" (Le Goff: 1978). This historiographical overview enables us to appreciate the evolution of the epistemological debates between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries relating to the concept of time
within the various historical schools in the Western world in general and in France in particular (DELACROIX: 2007). This historiographical development is remarkable. It reflects the intensity of intellectual activities which is useful for human thought. However, the epistemological positions adopted by this Western historiography reflect a some king of hegemony. The paradigm framing elements of this historiography, which are specific to the Western world or to Europe, are not really operational in others regions of the world.

3 THE DOMINATION OF WESTERN TEMPORALITY: THE LIMITED OPERATIONALLY OF THE CLASSICAL DIVISIONS OF UNIVERSAL HISTORY

There is a well-known dictum that "all roads lead to Rome", meaning that there is not just one way to reach the same goal, but several. This statement let us remember a part Roman Empire history². Above all, it shows that Rome was the "Centre of the World" at that time. This emphasis on Rome's pre-eminence left a lasting impression on the minds of Europeans. This was reflected in many areas of life. In cartography (see Mercator), Europe is still considered to be the main frame of reference from which the rest of the world is seen and represented. So, it is not surprising that we talk about the West, the East and the Far East. These geographical distinctions are very expressive.

² This expression was inspired by the famous Roman roads built in a star shape around the city. They enabled all goods to be transported into the city. Appius Claudius Cæcus, censor and then consul in 312 BC, was the first to build these roads leading to Rome. The roads were wide enough to allow two chariots to pass each other unhindered. And for Romans on foot, there were pavements reserved for pedestrians, allowing them to travel safely. And every twelve kilometres or so, there was a place to eat and sleep. So the origin of this expression is really due to the fact that everything converged on Rome. At the time, there were 29 roads linking Rome to the Italian provinces. And not only that, since the roads stretched beyond the Alps, particularly in Gaul. They all had one thing in common: they all started from the golden mile set by Emperor Augustus at the end of the Roman Forum. (Cf. Catherine « Pourquoi tous les chemins mènent-ils à Rome ? » in https://www.destinationrome.fr/bons-plans/vie-pratique/pourquoi-tous-les-chemins-menent-a-rome/ (consulté le 08.12.2023).
3.1 THE ADVENT AND THE IMPOSITION OF THE CLASSICAL DIVISIONS OF UNIVERSAL HISTORY

In the same logic, the writing method of world history has been, and still is, largely influenced by this Eurocentric paradigm. The division of the great periods of world history is a perfect illustration of this situation. The main classical divisions of history are essentially linked to the European history, or rather to that of the Western world in extension. Anyway, the periodisation is central in History research. For Jacques Le Goff, « ce découpage n’est pas un simple fait chronologique, il exprime aussi l’idée de passage, de tournant, voire de désaveu vis-à-vis de la société et des valeurs de la période précédente » (“this division is not simply a chronological fact; it also expresses the idea of a passage, a turning point, even a disavowal of the society and values of the preceding period”), (Le Goff: 2014, p. Prelude). Since the nineteenth century, French university history has been canonically divided into four (04) periods (GIBERT, LE BIHAN ET MAZEL: 2014). These are Antiquity, the Middle Ages, Modern Times and the Contemporary Era. This French-inspired canonical division has become classic by necessity. Although, it has been more or less called into question by the German and Anglo-Saxon concepts due to certain national specificities, it is clear that it is widely used. French historians do not miss the opportunity to boast to the scientific world that canonical periodisation does have its limits, but at the same time they believe that there is no other “satisfactory method” (LE BIHAN ET MAZEL: 2016, p.785). The classical division of history therefore becomes a tool and a reference framework in history studies. Thus, during colonial period, Africa history was seen as : « un vulgaire appendice, un lambeau de l'Histoire du pays colonisateur » (nothing more than a vulgar appendix, a fragment of the history of the colonising country), (KI-ZERBO: 1978, p. 9).

3.2 THE CLASSICAL DIVISIONS OF HISTORY FACING THE PLURALITY OF TEMPORALITIES ACROSS THE WORLD

Elsewhere in the world, the classic division of history is not adapted to local realities. So, it is very difficult to reconcile it with of Asian peoples, pre-Columbian America or Africa history. This is linked to the existence of many temporalities.
For example, when we use the expression "Pre-Columbian America", it is always in relation to European history, that of the arrival in America of Christopher Columbus. By a kind of alchemy, this bewilderment was transformed into a feat, or rather into the "discovery of America in 1492", when people had been living there for centuries before. It is also the case with Africa past, as you can read here:

« (...) des dates comme la prise de Constantinople (1453), qui n'ont exercé aucune influence directe sur l'histoire de l'Afrique, ne sauraient être utilisées comme charnières. Les termes Moyen Âge ou Renaissance n'auront donc pas le même sens (si tant est qu'ils enaient) pour notre histoire. De même, les dates de la Grande charte anglaise, des révolutions américaine et française, de la révolution soviétique d'octobre, si significatives qu'elles soient pour l'histoire universelle, ne sauraient servir de jalons spécifiques pour l'histoire de l'Afrique (KI-ZERBO : 1978, p. 26).

(...) dates such as the capture of Constantinople (1453), which had no direct influence on African history, cannot be used as turning points. The terms Middle Ages or Renaissance will therefore not have the same meaning (if any) for our history. Similarly, the dates of the English Magna Carta, the American and French revolutions, and the Soviet October Revolution, however significant they may be for universal history, cannot serve as specific milestones for African History. (Translation).

In addition to this problem of the indadaptation of Western chronology, it should also be pointed out that there has been some attempt to deny the existence of African history. Leading the charge was the German philosopher Freidritch. W. G Hegel, who in 1830 declared: "Africa is not a historical part of the world" (Cf. KI-ZERBO: 1978, p. 10). By giving a certain consideration to North Africa, or so-called "white Africa", the supporters of this nihilistic impulse with strong racial or racist connotations came to consider Black people or sub-human, with a prelogical mentality and living in primitive societies (BRULH: 1925; GOBINEAU: 1963; HEGEL: 1967). Yet Africa, the "cradle of humanity", saw the first human civilisations develop on its soil (KI-ZERBO: 1978, p. 40-56). Another widespread curiosity in the Western world is the belief that Africa is a single country and that the African history only began with the slave trade, slavery and colonization. This is what is denounced in the following statement: "A história de África não começa com as descobertas e a colonização". (The history of Africa does not begin with the discoveries and colonization), (HUGON: 2009, p. 19). It is therefore through the prism of the relationship between the White (breeder,
warrior, civiliser) and the Black (farmer, amorphous and savage) that the whole African history has long been perceived (DIKA AKWA: 1982, p. 9).

Consequently, faced with the remarkable achievements of the great Negro-African civilisations, we were quick to whitewash their authors (DIKA AKWA: 1982, p. 15). Clearly, one can remark that the world history is dominate by the classical divisions inspired by the western world/european history. This Eurocentric historiographical hegemony has some limits, because it is unsuited to the plurality of temporalities throughout the world in general and in Africa in particular. That why it is necessary to look for an epistemology that takes in account the plurality of temporalities.

4 TOWARDS AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF PLURALITY OF TEMPORALITIES IN HISTORY

This articulation of our reflection is focused on the principles of the decolonial study theories (MIGNOLO: 2013). The aim here is to explore the avenues of a temporality devoid of controversy. This approach may lead to a specific epistemological positions in relation to the problem of definition of a temporal framework and its influences on the construction of historical research object.

4.1 THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF TEMPORALITY IN DECOLONIAL STUDIES OR AN ATTEMPT TO RESPOND TO EUROCENTRIC TEMPORALITIES HEGEMONY

Considering the existence of a plurality of temporalities, it becomes necessary to envisage a consequent epistemology. For the region outside the Western world, this could be described as epistemological disobedience, even though it is the most appropriate way to take in consideration the temporal realities experience of each peoples.

The response to Hegelian-inspired Eurocentric historiography, which excludes (black) Africa from world history on the pretext that Africans (sub-Saharan) are not human beings, should not lead to Afro-centrism. This epistemological and methodological stance, like the one it claims to combat, can also be strongly criticised. This is why history in Africa should work: « Pour
restaurer la conscience historique africaine, pour lutter contre l’aliénation cognitive à l’égard du passé africain, il est urgent de décoloniser l’histoire, de promouvoir une histoire scientifique » ("To restore African historical consciousness, to fight against cognitive alienation with regard to the African past, it is urgent to decolonise history, to promote a scientific history"), (WONDJI and LOUGOU: 1975). However, it is more a question of promoting a scientific history devoid of controversy. This is precisely what we are concerned with here: « Il ne s’agit pas de fabriquer à l’Afrique un passé qu’elle n’a pas, mais tout simplement de rechercher celui qu’elle a eu en réalité, quel qu’il soit » ("It is not a question of fabricating for Africa a past that it does not have, but quite simply of searching for the past that it actually had, whatever it may be"), (DIKA AKWA: 1982, p. 9). It is by respecting as much as possible this axiological neutrality, the hold of subjectivity in analyses and choices that the historian's profession takes on its particularity (BLOCH: 1987).

Joseph Ki-Zerbo, considering the existence of a time plurality throughout the world, already pointed out the need to treat each one according to its specificities in order to sufficiently highlight its originality. Until now, African studies, for example, have been marked by the imprint of domination. Addressing himself to Cameroonian historians and history students, Daniel Abwa called for a paradigm shift, pointing out that: "In research, publications and expression, we are still pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial". He was asking to take a serious consideration of African realities in the division of time History activies. According to this historian, at the expense of the classic divisions of world history, which are clearly out of step with the past of many peoples, the history of Africa can be better understood through the following kind of divisions:

1° Les civilisations paléolithiques caractérisées par un leadership incontestable de l’Afrique.
2° La révolution néolithique et ses conséquences (essor démographique, migrations, etc.).
3° La révolution des métaux ou le passage des clans aux royaumes et empires.

3 Speech by Daniel Abwa, in his capacity as current president of the Cameroonian History Society, at the academic tribute ceremony (retirement) to Professor Samuel Efoua’a Mbozo'o at the University of Yaoundé I, on 27 July 2017; ceremony organised by the Forum des Historiennes du Cameroun.
4° Les siècles de réajustement : premiers contacts européens ; traite des Noirs et ses conséquences (XVe-XIXe siècles).
5° L’occupation européenne et les réactions africaines, jusqu’au mouvement de libération d’après la deuxième guerre mondiale.

1° The Palaeolithic civilisations, characterised by the undeniable leadership of Africa.
2° The Neolithic revolution and its consequences (demographic boom, migrations, etc.).
3° The metal revolution, or the transition from clans to kingdoms and empires.
4° The centuries of readjustment: first European contacts; the slave trade and its consequences (15th-19th centuries).
5° European occupation and African reactions, up to the liberation movement after the Second World War.
6° Independence and its problems. (Translation).

It is therefore possible to define a historical and specific division for African history as well as that of others parts of the world. This division is not without its critics, because all regions in Africa did not have the same trajectory. However, the periodization proposed by Joseph Ki-Zerbo at least has the merit of being based on socio-economic factors which are, in reality, the main driving forces behind human evolution (KI-ZERBO: 1978, p. 27). Whatever happens, the study of the past of peoples other than those of Western world therefore presupposes the definition of a temporality adapted to local realities, despite the fact that: “Le destin du continent et de sa diaspora dans le présent ne procéderait pas de choix libres et autonome, mais de l’héritage d’une histoire imposée marquée au fer par le crime et toutes sortes de conditionnalités » (‘the destiny of the continent and its diaspora in the present does not derive from free and autonomous choices, but from the legacy of an imposed history marked by crime and all sorts of conditionalities’), (AMOUGOU: 2018, p. 10). It is therefore necessary to counterbalance the hegemony of Eurocentric temporality, which has shown its limitations in several ways. However, the use of the time in history teaching and research requires a few precautions.

4.2 PEDAGOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRECAUTIONS ABOUT TIME IN HISTORY

In the historian works, time is generally used in several ways. The first dimension is related to the teaching of history, while the second concerns research.
From a pedagogical point of view, historian is called upon to confront the dilemma of the conceptualisation of the time and therefore its meaning. This is understood according to geographical contexts. In this way, it is very tempting to resort to the classic divisions of history (Antiquity, the Middle Ages, Modern Times, Contemporary Era) or to a thematic approach, which highlights Economic History, the History of Civilisations and Religions, Political History and Relations. The practical implications of these considerations of the time are manifold for the historian and the teaching of history. It is a question of choosing a temporality and a chronology so as to know where to start. It is better to considered the present as the anchor or reference point for the exploration the past. This help to start from the known towards the unknown. The choice of temporality and chronology, must be translated into a specific verbal tense and a specific type of narrative (SAHA: 2018, p.1883-1884).

Epistemologically and methodologically, historians and time appear to be inseparable in the construction of the intelligibility of discourse and historical narratives. This is why researcher defines the temporal framework of his work on the basis of referents. The choice of referents, although in some ways open to question, constitutes the temporal space in which the facts, events and social phenomena of interest to the researcher take place (SAHA: 2018, p. 1884). Thus, the defined time is the result of social practices and specificities to people or region where the research is carried out. Consequently, it goes without saying that: « A chaque temps son histoire et sa génération d’hommes » (‘Each time has its own history and its own generation of men’), (ESSOMBA: 2001, p. 16). In other words, each period has its own particular issues. The temporal framework in historical studies therefore calls for a hierarchical planning decision taken into consideration the priorities and emergencies. This mental operation planning is most important. Consequently, crucial determinants can result in the construction or deconstruction of the chosen operation of the temporality. This is linked to the different perceptions of time and the uses we make of it in everyday life or in the scientific (historical) studies (POUNTOUGNINI NJUH: 2021, p. 148). Thus, from an epistemological perspective, time appears to be a mental and methodical construction of the researcher (historian). Drawing inspiration from his
environment, the historian makes choices in order to define the temporal framework of his study.

5 CONCLUSION

Our theoretical reflexion here was focused on the epistemological debates about the concept of the time in History. Finally, the result is that Western historiographical hegemony has been a fact since the nineteenth century. The limits of this epistemological trend are linked, on the one hand, to the classic divisions of universal history, which is easy to be applied to others parts of the world, and, on the other hand, to its nihilistic approach to the history of other peoples, particularly Africans. Facing this denial, the development of another epistemological approaches based on the decolonial studies theory has led to the methodological construction of a temporality of plurality due to the existence of multiple conceptions of time throughout the world. The philosophical conception clearly shows that time has an ontological and phenomenological dimensions. This diversity of conception cannot justify the domination or imposition of one type of temporality. As a result, it stands in stark contrast to European-centric periodization hegemony. From this perspective, the historian's work becomes more complex. The researcher is therefore supposes to define the temporal framework of his study, reconciling as far as possible the principles of axiological neutrality and the realities of the references of his environment. This is a risky exercise that could lead to a result that is entirely subjective without actually being so. Rather, it reflects an epistemological position that leads to what we modestly describe in this research as the “relativity of time in history”, since historians are obliged to make choices according to the object of their study. So, if it is clear that time is a real subject of epistemological debate, what impact do its results have on the teaching of History?
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