

## Keynote Address

# Ritual of Dawn and Dusk: commemoration as an experience of a border and multiplied time or the antinomies of memory

*Ritual de Aurora e de Crepúsculo: a comemoração como a experiência de um tempo fronteiro e multiplicado ou as antinomias da memória*

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### RESUMO

Este texto foi apresentado como conferência de abertura do XXVI Simpósio Nacional de História, ocasião em que se comemoravam os 50 anos de fundação da Anpuh-Brasil – Associação Nacional de História. Ao mesmo tempo em que analisa os vários sentidos do comemorar, trata da relação entre as práticas de comemoração e o trabalho do historiador, faz uma reflexão sobre a relação entre memória, temporalidade e rituais de comemoração, e se apresenta também como um texto comemorativo, por isso sujeito às mesmas ambiguidades e antinomias que aponta em todo gesto de comemoração. Ele constitui, ainda, uma análise das práticas de comemoração e um texto comemorativo. Texto, portanto, fronteiro e antinômico.

Palavras-chave: comemoração; tempo fronteiro; memória.

### ABSTRACT

This paper was presented at the opening conference of the XXVI National Symposium of History, which commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Anpuh-Brazil – the National History Association. At the same time as analyzing the various senses of celebrating, dealing with the relationship between the practices of commemoration and the work of the historian, which is a reflection on the relationship between memory, temporality and rituals of commemoration, this text is also a commemorative text, and thus subject to the same ambiguities and antinomies that it highlights in every gesture of celebration. It is at the same time, an analysis of the practices of commemoration and a commemorative text, and thus both border and antinomian.

Keywords: celebration; border time; memory.

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We are here to commemorate. It is night, a night full of life and joy. Not everybody is here, not everyone could appear at this commemoration. While tonight is a night of celebrated and festive presences, it is also a night of lamented and suffered absences. We are in the middle of the night and it brings us, as well as the clear presence of life, the phantasmal presence of death. We have all come for a ritual which requires to be effective the presence of some others. Part of the actual etymology of the word commemoration is the Latin root *comes*, which means companion, in other words, commemoration is not just bringing something to the memory, recording and remembering something or someone, it is doing this with a companion, with someone. Commemoration is a collective act, an action which can only be realized accompanied, an action which convokes and demands the presence of another. Nevertheless, commemoration is also marked by a dual absence. The absence of many companions who can no longer come to the commemoration and the absence of what is commemorated, since only its absence, which the commemorative act seeks to make present, justifies the actual commemoration. We are in the middle of the night, suspended, between the past and the present, between a past which wants to make itself present and a present which in the same gesture want to make itself the past. We are in the middle of the night, we balance on the tenuous line which separates remembering and forgetting. There is only commemoration if we manage to forget, if not the dead, at least the pain of death. But there is also only commemoration if we remember the dead, and in remembering them, we remember that death itself exists.

We are here for a ritual which convokes and obliges remembering. The word commemoration comes from the Latin *commemoratio*, a declination of *commemoratio*, which in turn draws on the verb *memorare*, which means to remind, to record, to remember. The word commemoration has, nonetheless, an almost imperative meaning, in other words, the remembering, the recording gains here a meaning of need, almost of obligation. Commemoration is the necessary evocation of a memory, it is linked to memorable facts, acts, and persons, acts or persons not only worthy of being remembered, but which should be remembered, and which cannot and should not be forgotten. However, we will all discover tonight, that it is impossible to commemorate without forgetting. Where will we seek the necessary joy, the indispensable jubilee, how will we subjectively incline

ourselves for commemoration without forgetting the sadness of the absence of colleagues gone, without forgetting what this commemoration means in its most profound sense: the inexorable passage of time, the finitude of everything and all, loss as the tragic dimension of our existence?

Although we are in the middle of the night, commemoration is a ritual which has a similarity with the dawn and with the dusk. It opens a time of exception, it constitutes a temporality in which lights and shadows meet and mix. The commemoration opens a border temporality, multiple and indecisive between joy and sorrow, between life and death, between remembering and forgetting, between being and un-being, between presence and absence. Commemorating is installing oneself in a temporality in which rays of light and thick mists dispute, in a type of cosmic dance, their prevalence. We tend to think of the commemorative act as the shedding of light on something forgotten, sheltered or housed in the opaque zone of the past. No ritual of commemoration can prevent that in evoking or summoning to the present, beings, events, and things of the past, they bring with them wisps of shadows, a certain blackness, a dark cloud which prefixing itself to the dazzle of the commemoration, creates an indecisive and undecidable time between clarity and darkness. While both in memories and in history we can construct times of clarity, times of darkness, times of laughter, times of tears, the time of commemoration always appears to be on the limit or the bond between light and shadow, between happiness and pain. It is common that tears flow in the middle of laughter when we commemorate. Commemorative sensibility seems to oscillate between the effusion of the re-encounter and the melancholy of missed encounters. To commemorate is to propose to re-encounter what used to be, making ourselves available to the other which calls us from the past, but it is also discovering the impossibility of this encounter, it is the confirmation of a distance which cannot be overcome, temporal distance, spatial, distance, cultural, etc. For this reason, the act of commemorating can have the tones of dawn, it can be progressively bathed by the brilliant white light which marks the opening of a new time, which comes full of promises of what is new to come, which illuminates a horizon and fills it with expectations to be achieved in this new time which opens for life and closes for death. But it can also have the tones of the end of the day, of dusk, it can be bathed in the dimmed golden light which brings the sole promise of plunging into the

night, the darkness, a sky appearing to be streaked with blood, hemorrhaging, dripping from the sky, perhaps to remember the great crimes which certainly once again this day men have committed somewhere. The commemoration can have the same meaning as the ending of one more day of life, which reduces and finally makes the horizon disappear, bringing more anguish than expectations, when all that you want is to sleep and to dream, a new form of dying alive and the manner of affirming life while you wait for a new day. We can say that commemorations are rituals which create a certain state of spirit, which convokes a certain disposition of the soul, which can oscillate between the joys of dawn and the melancholies and sadness of dusk, which can intercross and be shuffled, without stopping to recognize that beauty, the maximum criteria with which we should judge life, is present in each of them.

Commemorations are made from memories, remembering and forgetting, but they are also made from dreams, hopes, and investments in the present aimed at the future. Since the formation of the word in antiquity the connection between commemorating and remembering, between commemoration and memory is not just of an etymological nature, such as a political nature or even an ethical nature. Commemoration is directly related to the social, cultural and political uses of memory, it is one of the modes not only of its transmissions, but also of its preparation and production. The commemorative act not only constitutes a moment in which a duty of memory is established, not only constitutes a moment in which remembering is voluntarily convoked, but also constitutes a privileged moment for the proliferation of memories, for the preparation of versions of whatever is being commemorated. The act of remembering is always done in the present, but it brings with it an expectation of the future. What we are doing today by remembering the creation 50 years ago of the Association of University Professors of History (*Associação dos Professores Universitários de História*), now Anpuh-Brazil – the National Association of History (*Associação Nacional de História*), is not only concerned with presentifying that moment. With this remembering we want to construct meanings that can serve as an inspiration and stimulus for the organization to survive another 50 years.

A fifty year old organization which, nevertheless, has since the beginning promised its eternal youth, since it was born a full grown girl. The *Associação dos Professores Universitários de História* (Apuh) was born out of a motion

presented by Professor José Roberto do Amaral Lapa during the I Symposium of Third Level History Teachers, held by the Faculty of Philosophy, Science and Letters in the city of Marília, between 15-20 October 1961. We can say that Marília is the name of the mother and José Roberto the name of the father of this girl. A girl in a hurry, since as can be seen, concerned with commemorating her birthday in advance, brought to the winter the commemoration of her spring birth, perhaps to remember that in her trajectory not everything would be flowers, there would be days of cold and storms. Our founding document, which in this act and this text assumed the place of a monument, since it would be cited to serve as an artifact, as an apparatus which aimed to provoke through the presence of a given memory, a given inheritance, a given memory, stated:

Considering the isolation in which university professors of history work, some in relation to others.

Considering the importance of dialogue between scientists these days.

Considering the success which other initiatives of this type have achieved, I submit for the assessment of this Round Table the proposal of the creation of an entity which can bring together university professors of history.<sup>1</sup>

A founding act which appears to convoke its own commemoration, since to commemorate the presence of companions is required, the document which convokes the creation of an entity to bring together university professors of history included its first justification which was the solitude of these professionals, their isolation. The afterwards named National Association of University Professors of History, which received the acronym it still has today (Anpuh), despite later becoming the National Association of History, since it brought together history professionals active in primary and secondary education, was born as a space for meeting, dialogue, diagnosing on occasion, as was fundamental for the practice of the scientists which the historians wished to be. However, paradoxically, commemorating this birth today against solitude is not, at the same time, the finding that it continues to be present amongst us? The act of commemorating demands company, demands being together, but in commemorating something which occurred in the past do we not convoke absences, do we not establish in our present the absence of those who have left? That entity whose meetings fitted in a single room,

now congregate multitudes in its biannual symposiums, and, if we add what happens in state level meetings, we can say that it has effectively achieved its aim of taking historians out of isolation. However, by gathering almost 8000 people are we less lonely, less individualistic, showing more solidarity? Is loneliness in the middle of such a dense population not more painful? Have our meetings not become missed encounters?

However, it is undeniable that the meetings sponsored by Anpuh became, and continue to do so, opportunities to make friends and companions. In its symposiums we can see the names which people the bibliographies and the libraries of the area gain faces and bodies, they materialize. In them we can hug and shake the hands of our bibliographic references, lunch and talk with our footnotes. Similar to the manner in which the discourse of history constructs figurations of people from the past, recreates them for the uses of the present, simulates them through narrative, the events of Anpuh have this gift of materializing, of giving flesh and bone to our erudition. In this event, in the middle of this night, like the effect of a crazy time machine, I see before me an entire library, various layers of time, numerous versions of the past willing and available in this space. Here are bodies and minds which tell the history of Anpuh, here are hands and arms which have taken part in this construction, here are companions who are witnesses, they are not just documents, but rather monuments of our organization. Their lives and their work are inseparable from the history of institution, their names are fused with that of Anpuh. What a joy it is to have here amongst us today one of those who saw this Association born, he brings with him not just his brilliance as an intellectual, but a luminous glimpse of the dawn of our entity: Francisco José Calazans Falcon. Commemorating is reinventing dawns, it is inventing beginnings, it is constructing landmarks for memories, Professor Falcon, and his testimony, is fundamental for making our commemoration possible. From that initial meeting, there continue to be amongst us, although they cannot be here tonight, referential names in our historiography which deserve to be praised, since the commemoration also has a religious, a sacred, dimension, it possesses a dimension of a cult, of celebrating something or someone memorable, something or someone that cannot be forgotten, which brings a certain memory to the present to be the object of re-inscription, or consecrated reinvention, although it also has a desacralizing and profaning

dimension, to the extent that it calls to be feted: names such as Aydil Ferreira de Carvalho Preis, Ataliba Teixeira de Castilho, Manoel Lello Bellotto, Maria Yedda Linhares, Norma de Góes Monteiro and Sônia Aparecida Siqueira have to be worshipped and feted at the same time, since they remind us that historiographic practice is effectuated on the razor's edge between reverencing and desacralizing. Here are various former presidents and members of various boards. Others cannot appear, but they are also responsible for making this organization be reborn every day, for which we all owe them our gratitude. And since we are talking of dawns, we cannot forget to honor what is pure light, the cozy warmth of the fire, the spark which always animates our organization, which in the moments of greatest difficulty puts its unparalleled energy, as it is placed until today, at the disposition of the construction of our Association, which, if commemorating is only possible among companions, and if commemorating is celebrating, she cannot be absent, since she is our great companion: Ismênia de Lima Martins.

Others, however, as important for the existence of this Association and for Brazilian historiography, have already been lost beyond the dusk. In the founding act of Anpuh there are names of people who became supporting pillars for the organization and who were decisive for Brazilian historiography to reach the quality and vigor it has today: Eurípedes Simões de Paula, who presided and sustained the institution, often at his own expense, directly and permanently helped by his wife, Maria Regina da Cunha Rodrigues, for ten years, who he justly designated his Boss, to whom we give our greatest tribute; Alice Piffer Canabrava, Déa Ribeiro Fenelon, Eduardo d'Oliveira França, Francisco Iglésias, Hélio Vianna, Nícia Vilela Luz, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and so many others who we remember as monumental names, which are imposed almost like monoliths, for all they have done for the institutionalization of historical knowledge in Brazil, but which still come to us this night like a great emptiness, a great gap, impossible to be filled. Although it is a cliché and commonplace, the commemoration discourse cannot escape from them, because commemoration involves narrative construction, since all commemorations imply the preparation of a story, a ritual, a connection of signs aimed at the production of a significant data, a common place for all who are commemorating to inhabit. Commemorating not only requires company, but requires the construction of its own space common to those who are

commemorating. There is no commemoration without a sharing of feelings, although commemorating also allows divergence and conflict. A commemoration can be taken for what it is, a discourse, a text which, as is common to all of them, cannot avoid the contradiction and the possibility of different readings. I am only making one possible reading of the memory of our organization, in which given people are chosen to appear, to see the sun rise, others remain in the shadows, because this is also how we proceed when we write history, we cannot tell everything, we cannot talk about everyone. Our look and our talk are perspectives, situated, placed in a given place, make choices, privilege given characters and leave other submersed in silence and in forgetting. The commemoration faces the same tasks and the same impossibility as historiography, talking about someone absent, intending to say everything to them, but knowing it fragmented and fragmentary. Speeches which want to speak about the real, but which have in the real their limit. In these speeches the real is precisely what is avoided, but at the same time convokes us to say it. Seductive, it invites us, incites and excites us to say it, it provokes us, but like a capricious partner, it withdraws, it distances itself, it avoids the speech that seeks to state it definitely. Although it is imposed as the law of our speech, stating the real, speaking about the real, stating the truth of the real, if it arrives it will be its death, its tomb, its burial. Set in the place of God, who for a long time was the limit and the Unlimited, the Real, the Truth, it is what at the same time limits and makes unlimited the historiographic discourse and the discourse of commemoration, distinct genres of cultural history and distinct uses of memory. Only the possibility of stating in a distinct form the real, only the possibility of killing versions of the real to have others born is what allows historiographic discourse to proliferate indefinitely. Forgive me, but those who have another version of the truth and reality of the past of our organization to tell, can be happy, since my narrative, like that of any historian is the dawn, not the dusk of time, it opens the possibility of new narratives coming to be made, it has no intention of finalizing, of closing all entrances to and exits from the past, of holding the property of light, which is extinguished for all the others who do not share their clarity. Like all historians' texts, it lights a candle in the middle of the darkness of time.

While the real is, for us humans, this excavation in the infinite, it is also the unappealable, the irrevocable, against which we can only defend ourselves



through symbolization, the imagination, fiction, the dream, utopia, creative activity. Irrevocably it is real that time, this abstract material to which we dedicate ourselves, this ethereal being which is materialized in our narrative historians, has brought us other companions, other dear friends, who have had a decisive importance for the affirmation of this organization, who can today only come to this commemoration as absences and as a verb. Only the words, only the evocation of their names and their deeds, a social attribution given to us historians, can for a brief instance bring us their beloved presences: Afonso Carlos Marques dos Santos, an enthusiast and a constant in the life of this organization; Alcir Lenharo, who conceived the idea of the Post-Graduate Forum; Manoel Luiz Salgado Guimarães, the president who preceded me, creator of the Anpuh Dissertation Prize, which now bears his name. Names which make the antinomies of memory and the ambiguities of commemorative gesture more patent, because in these are mixed the joy of remembering, of the reencounter, albeit fleeting, and the sadness of the realization of loss. For this reason we do not commemorate only to remember, to record, to make the past present, we also commemorate to mourn, to re-signify what has past. Each commemoration is an effort to, by ritualizing a fact, a deed, a being, to construct one more layer of meaning which, at the pretext of approximating them, bringing them to us, serves more as a buffer, like a protecting skin against the reality of the object of commemoration, a reality which is its finitude, its past being. We commemorate to protect ourselves from what is commemorated, to poetically create hope from longing. The end of the Second World War is commemorated every year to try to heal the painful and monstrous wounds it left. Each commemoration is an attempt at explanation, it is one more chance to understand what is real: pain, tragedy, death, events.

Commemorations since antiquity have convoked the epic discourse, that which installs events and people in the field of the heroic, in this discourse of commemoration other heroes of our organization must be mentioned, particularly the heroines, since Anpuh was always marked by the action of women, a space of female citizenship conquered by them with many struggles and many efforts. How to dissociate Anpuh from the actions of Maria Helena Rolim Capelato, a professional and ethnical reference in our community, and generosity in person? The work of Raquel Glezer, who gave me the honor of

accepting to be vice-president of the organization I preside and who helped to put this event together? The work of Sylvia Bassetto, who is in charge of the organization of this grandioso symposium that starts today? Or that of Maria Stella Bresciani; Eni de Mesquita Samara; Sandra Jatahy Pesavento; Zilda Márcia Gricoli Iokoi; Maria Lígia Coelho Prado; Lana Lage da Gama Lima and so many others who I cannot name, but who have also created the soul of this organization? Anpuh also has its male heroes: how to think of an Anpuh symposium without the joy and presence of Luiz Carlos Soares; without Edgar Salvadori de Decca; without Arnaldo Contier; without the work of Holien Gonçalves Bezerra, José Miguel Arias Neto and so many others, who have led this organization to the level at which it is today? Like heroes and heroines who have entered the field of immortality, in the memory of the organization they are already monuments.

Vicissitudes of the commemorative speech which tries to construct a time as timeless, it simulate people who gain airs of immortality. As can be noted by those presences here, this speech I am making is also marked by ambiguity, since we know that every speech is situated, it is the fruit of a place of talk, it is the fruit of a given context of enunciation. This speech which I am making as a historian, but at the same time as the president of an organization which in this act initiates the commemorations of its fiftieth anniversary, cannot but be tense and dual-headed, between the speech of the historian and the speech of one who commemorates, between a speech with critical pretensions and one with celebratory pretensions. The commemorative speech obeys the distinct rule of historiographical discourse. Commemorations are related to the field of memory, they are one of the ways of the production and the reworking of memories, since history can only have in relation to the commemorative act the same posture of critical distance, of differentiated approximation maintained in relation to memories. Although we cannot deny the ephemeris which commemorative dates have served as an incentive for historiographic production, that around commemorative dates there has grown the production of texts, of books, and the holding of academic events by the community of historians, as we have done today and will do in the coming days, what is expected from this production is that it takes commemoration as the opportunity to put into question the discourses and practices which sustain, legitimate and constitute it. The historian is the party-pooper, he will

ruin the cakes, mess up the food, poison the canapés of the guests sharing the solemn occasion. The historian is the one who critically deals with another meaning which is associated with the idea of commemoration, in other words commemoration as celebration, as a solemn act, a meaning related to the field of the sacred, which tends to make commemoration an act of sacralization. While we are in agreement that one of the privileged uses of history in our time is exactly that which makes it a desacralizing discourse, a laicizing discourse, a discourse which relinquishes the epic as the narrative model and which increasingly tends to search in satire its model of constructing a plot and intelligibility for what it narrates, becoming a counter-sense in commemorative historiography, since the discourse of humor, caricature, parody, and irony is not consistent with the discourse of commemoration. Commemorations tend to delete the critical sense, commemorations convoke adherence to senses, to speeches, to the imagination, to the symbology which justifies and constitutes it. The commemoration convokes the epic discourse, the discourse which seek to make heroic, when historiography has nowadays stopped looking for or creating heroes, or at least seek to make heroes of people from the less privileged layers, those previously excluded as subjects: Menocchio will not let me be called Pinocchio.<sup>2</sup> The commemoration has a religious meaning, a meaning which convokes to grouping, to the formation of a certain harmony or collective disposition in relation to the data enunciated and to ritual data. Commemorations have for this reason an enormous importance in the construction of social cohesion, they are central to the constitution, transmission and legitimacy of what Benedict Anderson called imagined communities such as the nation, the region, the locality.<sup>3</sup> In this context, the historiographic discourse should sound like an out-of-tune song, like a speech that is going to leave the chorus of the content disrupted. I believe that there is consensus among historians that the role to be exercised by historiography in relation to commemorations is to problematize the official versions, discourses and practices which sustain and reproduce it, and to seek to show the political and discursive strategies which sustain a given commemoration, which interests represent what is being commemorated and with what interests the commemoration is held, always making public the annoying question: is what is being commemorated really worthy of

commemoration? Are there really socially relevant motives for this commemoration?

In relation to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Anpuh-Brazil (the National Association of History), I answer these questions affirmatively, my speech is also divided among the speech of the dawns – which is the commemorative speech, a speech which enunciates beginnings and re-beginnings, which even when talking of things gone treats them as if they were emerging, as if a new sun over them will raise them up, giving everything which is the object of commemoration tones of mornings and awakenings – and the crepuscular discourse of history– which always talks of something that supposedly has been concluded, of a time that no longer is in the present or which ended at a given landmark of mutation, an afternoon speech, one for the end of times, which is always given at a supposed end to assess what constituted it, what produced it. While the commemorative discourse opens the time for new times for the adhesion of past time, to make the past present and offer it as a future, historiographic discourse opens possibilities for other futures at the cost of dispensing with what has already been said, of enunciating as past what was previously enunciated, decreeing as past what is in front of us. While the time of the commemorative discourse is the time of myth, the time of ‘once upon a time,’ thus a time which immobilizes, which brings as a promise the repetition of the same, the cyclic return of similarity and identity, the historiographical discourse constructs new mobile temporalities, marked by the eternal return of difference, of coming to be, of becoming, of the dispersal of identities and similarities. By oscillating between the discourse of the historian and one of master of ceremonies, my presentation has come to occupy this frontier place, this fold between the discourse of historiography and the discourse of elegy, has come to dwell in the hinge between the sarcastic and the encomiastic, has come in the middle of the night to announce dawns and to speak of dusks.

The muses, destiny, providence, nature, spirit, reason, laws, principles, the mode of production, the class struggle, will, context, structures, multiple determinants, desire, chance, or any other figure of agency used by historian to try to explain or understand historic events, were necessary to explain that there would be in the presidency of this organization when it held the event commemorating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary someone who was also born in 1961,

who there is also commemorating or suffering his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday this year. Only four months separate our existences which came to meet for the first time 20 years ago in 1981 when the National Symposium was held in João Pessoa. Still an undergraduate student that meeting was decisive for my professional career, definitely turning me into a lover of history and admirer of this entity. Although this 50 year old can be at the beginning of my dusk, I hope that the 50 year old Association has only dawns ahead. I want to end by thanking everyone who made and makes Anpuh exist and who have given me this enormous honor and joy in presiding it in the last two years. Viva Anpuh!

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ata de fundação da Associação dos Professores Universitários de História (Apuh). Marília, 20 out. 1961. (Acervo da Anpuh-Brasil – Associação Nacional de História).

<sup>2</sup> A reference to GINZBURG, Carlo. *O queijo e os vermes*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1987.

<sup>3</sup> ANDERSON, Benedict. *Comunidades imaginadas*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2008.

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