

**THE OMNIPRESENT PAST**  
HISTORICAL ANTHROPOLOGY  
OF AFRICA AND AFRICAN DIASPORA

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Editors



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*On the cover: 'The Door of No Return', the monument on the site from which the slave traders' ships are said to depart to the New World, in the city of Ouidah on the Atlantic Coast of the Republic of Benin. Photo by Dmitri M. Bondarenko*

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В центре внимания авторов коллективной монографии — многообразие сфер и форм влияния исторического прошлого на современность в Африке и африканских диаспорах: культурную память как фактор общественного сознания, исторические предпосылки политических, социальных, культурных процессов, протекающих на африканском континенте и в африканских диаспорных сообществах в наши дни. Исследование осуществлено в рамках Программы фундаментальных исследований НИУ ВШЭ в 2019 году.

Contributors to this volume discuss a variety of ways the African past (African history) influences the present-day of Africans on the continent and in diaspora: cultural (historical) memory as a factor of public (mass) consciousness; the impact of the historical past on contemporary political, social, and cultural processes in Africa and African diaspora.

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НЕПРЕХОДЯЩЕЕ ПРОШЛОЕ:  
ИСТОРИЧЕСКАЯ АНТРОПОЛОГИЯ АФРИКИ И АФРИКАНСКОЙ ДИАСПОРЫ

Под ред. Д. М. Бондаренко и М. Л. Бутовской  
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## INTRODUCTION

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The aim of this volume is to study various manifestations of how the past influences the present in contemporary African societies and diaspora communities (called so irrespective of the generation of migrants to which the people that form these communities now belong). The contributors look at the role of the past in shaping modern Africa and African diasporas in different contexts – cultural, social, political – and from different perspectives: ‘subjectivist’ (through the imprints and reflections of the past in human minds) and ‘objectivist’ (through the ways by which the social, political, and cultural events of the past direct the processes in the respective spheres nowadays).

From the methodological point of view, this volume reaffirms the manifold relations between History and Anthropology within the framework of postcolonial studies. Despite some powerful trends in anthropology from Malinowski’s functionalism to postmodernism, explicitly or not, history has always been a particular reference for anthropological research (Carneiro 2002; Willford and Tagliacozzo 2009; Bondarenko et al. 2014a). First of all, anthropologists most often deal with the past not only when attempting to reconstruct past events and conditions, but rather to look at social change, innovation, and transformation. Moreover, anthropologists’ increased focus, since the late 1980s, on the affect of memory on people’s attitudes and behavior – the ‘memory boom’ (Berliner 2005; see also: Krause 2007) – signifies a new understanding of the meaning of history for anthropological research. Ways of perception, experiencing and conceptualizing social changes in different cultures has increasingly become the

come the object of study. In this context, the anthropological notion of history has shifted from a universal and objective etic content to local and subjective emic. The emic approach views history as part of cultural and symbolic universe of every community, shaped by the social processes of selection, remembering and forgetting (Tonkin et al. 1989; Fabian 2007). At the same time that the ‘memory boom’ began in anthropology, a ‘memory turn’ began in history, as many historians have focused on the concept of historical memory. These historians concentrated on the diverse ways socio-cultural events shaped a group’s historical memory, mostly over time (Klein 2000; Repina 2013; Niven and Berger 2014).

Thus, the interaction between History and Anthropology was not simple in the past and is not so today. Generally, one may distinguish three approaches or avenues of interest pertinent to contemporary anthropological research on history (Bondarenko et al. 2014b: 7–8). First, a historicist perspective, that tries to discuss actual courses of events and momentums with regard to their consequential structural changes in the respective societies. The second approach is primarily interested in revealing the modes in which historical changes are culturally represented and transmitted, in forms of narratives and codes, mnemotechnical devices, memory cultures, and notions of time. The third approach could be labeled a presentist approach, where scholars are primarily interested in the role of historical references – of history’s use and abuse – particularly in contemporary debates on African societies and African diaspora communities.

Despite all the important differences between cultures and societies of the region at any moment in history, Africa south of the Sahara represents a clear and quite distinctive ‘civilizational model’ (Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000), or ‘evolutionary stream’ (Claessen 2000). This is a manifestation of the African socio-cultural tradition as a durable modus of life that formed in pre-colonial time. The articles in the present volume particularly confirm this argument by showing how so-called African traditional cultures at one and the same time adapt to the modern globalization trends and modify, ‘Africanize’ them. For example, the pre-colonial African city formed the social-mental continuum with the village, i.e., was basically identical to it in social structure and inhabitants’ mentality (Bondarenko 1994; 1996). Today, the situation is different, yet is the urban society distinct from

rural in sub-Saharan Africa to the same extent as in other parts of the world (see Kearney 2018)?

What we regard as the basic common constant foundation of most historical and contemporary sub-Saharan African societies and cultures (and hence of the African socio-cultural tradition), is the principle of communality. To our mind, its gist is the ability of the originally and essentially communal worldview, consciousness, pattern of behavior, socio-political norms and relations to spread on all levels of societal organization, including supra- and non-communal, as well as to find manifestations beyond African societies proper – in the African diaspora communities. Thus, communality follows from, but is by no means reduced to, the fact that the local community has always – most explicitly in pre-colonial time but actually up to now – remained the basic institution in Africa, the core of social life which features have also determined the specificity of African authentic worldview and spirituality (Bondarenko 2015).

In the colonial time, despite all the corruptions it brought, the unity of sub-Saharan Africa as a culture area based on the communal socio-cultural tradition did not disappear. On the contrary, as Claude Meillassoux (1991) emphasized, the community turned out part and parcel of the colonial society without which colonial exploitation actually could not be effective or maybe even possible, at least in such a scale. However, the degree of socio-cultural diversity and hence, trajectories of changes in sub-Saharan Africa increased considerably, since the colonial borders did not reflect the preceding course of the African peoples' own political, social, economic, and cultural history. With rare exceptions, many different peoples were forcibly united within a colony. Not only kinship but also cultural affinity among those peoples was often absent. At the same time, the colonial borders divided one people or tore historically established regional systems of economic and cultural ties no less infrequently. Likewise the colonialists forcibly united peoples that had never formed regional political and economic systems, had different levels of sociocultural complexity, and sometimes did not even know about each other or were historical enemies. At the same time, historically and economically connected peoples and societies were often separated by the colonial borders. These features were supplemented by economic and cultural heterogeneity of the colonial societies. The elements of capitalism, im-

planted by the Europeans in different spheres, did not synthesize with a set of pre-capitalist features of the local societies. There also was little intersection between the autochthonous and new sectors of public life, in which basically different value systems dominated.

The postcolonial states have inherited the artificial complexity of societal composition, economic and cultural heterogeneity alongside with the colonial borders. Many problems the African nations are facing now are rooted in the pre-colonial and colonial history. Many other problems have arisen in already about seven decades of their independent history. All of them are aggravated by the still peripheral status of Africa in the global world-system (Wallerstein 2017).

The chapters in this volume are grouped into four parts. Chapters in the first part look at the ways the past influences the present from the 'subjectivist' perspective of how historical memory contributes to people's views of their lives today and tomorrow, while the second and third parts contain chapters on the legacy of the past as a factor of socio-cultural and political processes in contemporary Africa. Part IV includes studies of the role of the historical past as a factor and socio-cultural context of self-awareness, self-organization, and self-representation of diaspora communities – people of African descent outside Africa and of non-African origin in Africa.

Part I, *Memory of the Historical Past as a Factor of Public Consciousness in Contemporary Africa*, opens with the chapter by Anastasia Banshchikova and Oxana Ivanchenko which highlights the results of the field study conducted by the authors in Tanzania in 2018. The study was dedicated to the historical memory of the Arab slave trade in East Africa and the Indian Ocean in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and this memory's possible impact on modern interethnic relations in the country. Interviews were done with citizens of the historical sites related to the slave trade, such as Bagamoyo, Zanzibar, and Dar es Salaam (the latter being relevant as a mixed urbanized community, showing a 'neutral' attitude to the subject). Individual answers irrespective of location show that the red tape between intolerance and state-planted tolerance towards all the citizens including Arabs (through the ideology of 'one nation' and some school text-books in which the role of Arabs in these events is deemphasized) runs within the family history: people whose ancestors were taken as slaves are almost indifferent to the ideology of tolerance that has made Tanzania one of the most stable



post-colonial African countries. The ways of reproduction of historical memory sometimes get into contradiction with each other, and the way that caused the most severe personal trauma becomes the winner.

Lorenzo D'Angelo explores the ways in which the inhabitants of two different regions of Sierra Leone interpret in terms of the occult some unexpected and mysterious events occurring at a large-scale mining company and at a hydroelectric power dam. He shows that extractive landscapes can be places of great political contest. D'Angelo argues that through the usual weapons of the weak (e.g. sabotage, thefts, and rumors) and the idiom of the occult, people express dissatisfaction with a modernity which has always been promised but never achieved. In doing so, this chapter considers occult narratives as forms of social memory, pointing to a history of violence, terror and uncertainties inscribed in the landscape, dwelling practices, and bodies. In other words, local discourses on the occult are not just ways to make sense of the uncertainties and anxieties of a globalized modernity but also highly politicized practices that embody past experiences.

Daria Zelenova focuses on people's history of self-organization and memories concerning local struggles against apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s. The chapter is based on a series of life history interviews done by its author in 2011–2013 and on the evidence from South African archives. Different fragments of interviews are presented where respondents speak about their involvement in township activism and self-organization practices in the time under consideration. An analysis of people's memories of those struggles allows the author to argue for a more contextualized understanding of 'people's democracy' – the term introduced in the 1980s as a new way of conceptualizing the anti-apartheid struggle.

The opening chapter in Part II, *Legacy of the Past and Sociocultural Processes in Contemporary Africa*, by Marina Butovskaya, is devoted to current transformations of traditional rural communities in East Africa, mainly in Tanzania. She shows that modern tendencies in development of rural East Africa are in line with two general trends: intensification of agriculture (introduction of new modern farming technologies, more efficient varieties of plants and breeds of animals), installment of agro-industrial factories and plants for raw materials processing on the one hand, and depeasantization, commercialization and resettling of big groups of young people to urban spaces in search

of labor and in hope for better prospects for life and wellbeing, on the other hand. Currently, Tanzania is an agrarian country, inhabited largely by agriculturalists and pastoralists with a small share of commercial farmers. The government has made substantial efforts to enable the vulnerable social economic groups and individuals to enjoy land tenure security. The National Land Policy 2016 sets the basement for transforming Tanzania into a semi-industrialized nation by 2025. The depeasantization process has been currently going very fast in Tanzania and may seem to be in part inspired by the new officially announced governmental course on industrialization. All these transformations obviously affect the rural communities – their structure, everyday life and ritual activities, as well as kinship and community networks, mutual obligations of the community members. Discussing the role of traditional institutions in social life and the main trends of their transformation in the rural areas in East Africa, Butovskaya pays special attention to the current changes in social network integration associated with economic trends, labor and educational migrations, transitions in the way of farming and cattle breeding, transformations in customary ceremonial practices (birth rites, funeral rites and commemoration), the problem of AIDS, and cultural transformations.

The chapter by Cecilia Pennacini retraces the most important steps in the history of religion of the Great Lakes region. The author emphasizes that the religious landscape evolved here together with social and cultural processes that need to be observed in a regional scale, because single ethnic groups appear to be changing realities emerging and disappearing, overlapping and mixing together in a continuous flux of exchange. Pennacini makes the picture clear by adopting a wide geographical and temporal perspective. She argues that the emergence of kingdoms in some parts of the region, from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onward, provoked a fundamental shift from a social situation previously based on patrilineal descent groups to centralized political organizations. Before this event, religious life was devoted to local natural entities – called *misambwa* in many of the interlacustine languages – and to the ancestral spirits denominated *bazimu*. When kingdoms and chiefdoms appeared, spirit possession – regionally known as *ku-bandwa* – became the centre of the religious experience. The main characters of this tradition are the spirits of deceased kings, heroes and

heroines, who can penetrate in the bodies of certain individuals thus entitled to become their mediums. The institution of spirit mediumship, regulated by an initiation, gave rise to a class of religious specialists who gained an important mystical power all around the region, used to counterbalance the political power of kings and chiefs. Islam and Evangelization, that reached the region from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, changed dramatically the religious situation as well as the political one, introducing new spiritual entities, practices and leaders. This renovated religious landscape characterized the colonies, where missionaries of different congregations became a very important factor in the new administrative organisation. After Independence, fractions built along diverse religious denominations continued to inform the political life, giving rise to a complex, fragmented situation crossed by conflicts. As a result, post-colonial societies present diversified and often conflictual religious realities, deeply affecting the political situation. At the same time, a vast revival movement is rediscovering the ancient cults, giving back dignities to the spirits of the past.

Pino Schirripa stresses that since the '60s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, anthropology has been engaged from different points of view with the analysis of the new religious movements which had been flourishing in the African continent after the colonial conquest. Those researches have focused on different aspects of the complex phenomenon of the charismatic and Pentecostal churches in Africa. The main aspects which have been investigated were the syncretic forms of those churches, their healing activities, the relationships with the traditional religions and with the mainline Christian Churches. This chapter by Schirripa discusses the current trends of these churches from a long-term perspective, taking advantage of the large amount of data collected on these issues in more than 50 years of research. This allows to carry on an analysis which could take into account a long span of time, from the colony to the postcolony, trying to understand how those churches and movements have changed their practices and roles in the course of time in different political and social contexts.

Emery Patrick Effiboley emphasizes the critical role of art, museums and cultural heritage in the process of nation-building, especially in the era of postcolony. In his chapter, based on the cultural history of the territory of the current Republic of Benin, Effiboley analyzes the museum collections as well as the collecting policy from the inception

of the modern museum in the country to date. He also reviews the political contexts of production of the materials gathered in the museums. The author finally highlights the strategy to build upon local identities rooted in local cultural histories in order to achieve a cohesive national identity for the benefit of the Republic of Benin as a whole.

Asiya Khalitova's chapter is devoted to the history of Guinea's cinema from the 1960s to nowadays. Her research is based primarily on the original data collected in the field, in particular a series of interviews done in Guinea and Russia from 2015 to 2017. The author analyses the influence of two generations of Guinean filmmakers ('pioneers' and 'newcomers') on the national film industry. During the Cold War, Guinea, massively supported by the USSR, sent thousands of its nationals to study at universities of the Eastern bloc countries. The cinema and other propaganda instruments of 'Guinean socialism' were established under the influence and with support of the Soviet Union and its satellites. At the same time the Guinea's first president Ahmed Sékou Touré's paranoia and fear of plots caused the 'institutionalization' of systematic repression against new intellectuals. In the 1970s, the majority of 'pioneers' of the national film industry were accused of dozens of alleged plots and imprisoned. After Sékou Touré's death and the military coup d'état in 1984, the cinema created by 'pioneers' was almost eliminated by the new regime of General Lansana Conté. This negligence towards the cultural heritage is considered by Khalitova as *post-socialist trauma*, an attempt to bury everything connected with the socialist period in Guinea. In contrast with the 'pioneers', the post-socialist generation of Guinean filmmakers ('newcomers') are either self-educated or in the majority have graduated from Western (mostly French) universities. Today, one can also witness the increasing French cultural influence in Guinea, first of all in film industry. The author discusses the professional and identity cleavages between 'pioneers' and 'newcomers' as well as their influence on the development of the Guinean cinema.

In the first chapter in Part III, *Legacy of the Past and Political Processes in Contemporary Africa*, Jason Nkyabonaki expresses his views on the influence of indigenous administration on post-independence administration in Tanzania. He points out that on the one hand, the leveling of the administrative systems in pre-colonial

Tanzania would be to see them as systems that propagated the promotion of common good to the community. This has tempted some scholars in the recent years to meditate and gear towards the thinking of native administrative systems. Their argument is that Tanzanians had well premised themselves for self-governance before colonialism and hence, not due to its legacy. However, on the other hand, the Eurocentric scholarship propagates for modernity to be an elixir for Tanzania's administration development. Tanzania is presented within this paradigm as having dual systems in the post-independence era. This duality is counted as inefficiency for Tanzania should embrace and romance with modern administrative values. The argument is that, the two systems of administration cannot marry and when they marry the inefficiencies such as corruption and favoritism emerge. The central argument is that the hybrid system would create strong institutions as a *sine qua non* condition for administration development. The quandary of administration in Africa is not due to the compatible model but rather a Western modernist view that Tanzania's public administration has not applied *in totus* the Western values which this chapter criticizes as a myopic outlook. Tanzanian public administration post-independence reform geared towards Tanzanianization in order to promote administration efficiency. Hence, this chapter concludes with its author's general statement that administration should reflect the people's culture, norms and taboos for the administration development to be realized.

Jean-Claude Meledje traces the role of pre-colonial and colonial legacy in contemporary social and political life of Côte d'Ivoire. In particular, he concentrates on the spheres of employment and land law. Meledje points out that although the colonial period lasted for only 80 years (1880–1960), such notions as paid employment and land rights introduced by the French colonizers are irreversible and have indelibly impacted Côte d'Ivoire at the political and social levels. Despite numerous efforts made by successive governments, the standard of living of Ivorians has dropped sharply since 1980. By transforming customary rights into the so-called modern property rights, the 1998 Rural Land Act in Côte d'Ivoire intended to deal with land disputes, but it failed. As is evident, land disputes are complex, and their origins can be traced back not only to the behavior of Ivorians and actors involved but above all else to the country's sordid colonial his-

tory. Since the notion of paid work and land ownership problems appeared in Côte d'Ivoire with colonization, Meledje argues, a look at the pre-colonial period can help clarify the situation that hitherto prevailed.

Sergey Kostelyanets focuses on the historical and cultural background and causes of the conflict in Sudan's Darfur region, which commenced in 2003 and has been continuing with greater or smaller intensity until present. The author finds the roots of the current confrontation in certain aspects of the policies of sultans of Darfur (the 17<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries), in the Mahdist uprising (the late 19<sup>th</sup> century), in the colonial Sudanese politics of Great Britain, and in the policies of the Sudanese governments of the postcolonial period. Kostelyanets emphasizes that the racial and tribal affiliation of Darfurians remains a powerful factor of conflict, but refutes the opinion of those researchers who believe that the conflict in Darfur is primarily a confrontation between Arabs and non-Arabs living in the region. In particular, it is noted that the majority of Arabs in the region are not genetic Arabs, but Arabized Africans, so the conflict between Arabs and Africans is artificial and is largely a product of the policy of 'divide and rule'. The author believes that the main reasons and prerequisites for the conflict include the lack of access to natural resources for many groups of the population, the economic and political marginalization of the region, the unresolved land issue, and ill-advised administrative reforms.

The chapter by Nicholas Githuku concerns itself with a range of conventions, ideas and practices governing individual responsibility and self-conduct in society by the evidence from Kenya. They include moral ethnicity, householder ideology, working class consciousness, the ideology of law and order or the tendency toward moral anarchy and subsequent political disorder characterized by runaway corruption in the absence of redistributive civic virtue and reciprocity. This chapter is dedicated to unmasking the hegemonic ideology of law and order that in the postcolony, such as Kenya, protects metropolitan economic interests and those of the wealthy and ruling elite. Githuku analyzes closely the various manifestations of this, as he argues surviving and ever-evolving, colonial ideology of order in contemporary Kenyan politics and reflects on the importance and impact of these manifestations for social and political processes in the country from the

early 1990s to 2019. The author shows that this period of the return of multiparty politics in the country is marked by the twin tyranny of the political elite on the one hand, and the masses on the other in the overlordship of, and symbiotic relationship between, political tribalism and corruption; stultification of the political party system in favor of Gramscian ‘historical blocs’ of ethnicity; and the all-pervasive culture of impunity, a *Sukuma wiki* economy of survival or ‘bandit economy’. This serves as the basis of Githuku’s conclusion that, contrary to the popular trend among political analysts and intellectual experts on Kenya that the ideology of order survived independence and has held sway since, it has not. He posits that the ideology of (law and) order is not static but, rather, dynamic. That it has, as such, like the state, transformed itself since independence into a hybrid ideology of disorder.

Everisto Benyera’s chapter shows how processes and events of already postcolonial past (though rooted in the time of anticolonial struggle) can influence the present, even in Zimbabwe that got independence more recently than most African nations. In particular, he argues that for understanding Zimbabwe’s current political transitions, it is crucially important to pin them on the relationship and balance of power between the civil and military in the political arena. This applies to the 1979, 1987, 2000, 2008 and 2017 transitions. Zimbabwe’s ruling party, ZANU PF, has always had two distinctive wings; the military and the civilian with the military fighting the war and the civilian running politics. Over time, the two converged with the military overshadowing, if not engulfing the civilian. The debate on the role of the military during political transitions in Zimbabwe reached peak levels in 2017 when Robert Mugabe was removed from office through a military facilitated (instigated?) popular uprising. The author emphasizes that incrementally dominant role of the military in Zimbabwe’s politics in the various political transitions is not a nascent development as it can be traced to the formation of ZANU PF. The military have always existed in ZANU PF’s politics, not as a professional partner but as an increasingly domineering factor. Benyera presents Zimbabwe’s 2017 militarised transition as a bottom up process of political change first occurring at party and then at state level. He argues that Zimbabwe’s political transitions are military-driven with the army also controlling the ruling party, and they must be analysed as mili-