

# YOUNG PORTUGUESE HISTORICAL NARRATIVES<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

*Held under the Historical Consciousness Project—Theory and Practice II (HICON II), the results of the study presented is a second phase of data collection, by employing the instrument previously designed (HiCon I). The results are in line with those obtained in former data collections and continue to suggest a greater complexity of national narratives compared to global narratives, constructed by other samples of Portuguese students in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade.*

## KEYWORDS

Historical accounts, Portuguese students' ideas

## INTRODUCTION

The study presented here refers to a second phase of collecting data on how young Portuguese students think about Portuguese history and the world history of the twentieth century.

The study retrieves the research questions and conceptual framework that guided the previous collection of historical narratives of Portuguese students of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade (Barca, 2007; Magalhães, 2008; Barca, 2009; Magalhães, 2011, in press).

## EMPIRICAL STUDY

### METHODOLOGY

The conceptualization of this phase of the study complied with the guiding ideas generated in the first data categorization, the analysis of which revealed similarities, in many respects, with those of Wertsch (2004).

According to this author, we searched for the possible existence of a nuclear narrative structure in the texts students wrote. By nuclear narrative we mean a basic story line present in several narratives of a group, which may be more or less structured and may refer to concrete historical agents.

As in previous phases of data collection, the research questions in this study were:

1. *What types and levels of narratives about the history of contemporary Portugal do young students construct?*
2. *What temporal marks do they identify?*

The sample consisted of 44 students from two 10<sup>th</sup> grade classes of a school of the urban area of Lisbon. Data was collected in May 2008. The students were between 15 and 17 years old, with the following percentage distribution: 15 years old—27.3% 16 years old—52.3%, and 17 years old—20.6%, indicating an educational background without stories of school failure for most of the students. The sample comprised 38% of boys and 61.4% of girls, which is broadly in line with the gender distribution at this level of schooling in Portugal (GEPE, 2010, p.66, [www.gepe.min-edu.pt/np4/?newsId=543&fileName=PerfilAluno0809.pdf](http://www.gepe.min-edu.pt/np4/?newsId=543&fileName=PerfilAluno0809.pdf)).

Participants were asked to perform the two paper and pencil tasks, previously drawn under the HiCon Project I:

### Task 1

Imagine you are at a summer camp with young people from around the world. One day each of them was challenged to tell the story of their country. How would you tell the history of Portugal in the last hundred years?

### Task 2

After hearing the story of several countries, youngsters thought it would be interesting to hear how each one told the story of the world. How would you describe world history in the last hundred years?

The researcher explained the tasks to be performed and these were completed during a 90-minute lesson, having been allocated 30 minutes to perform each task. Data analysis followed the procedures previously used and described in detail by Barca (2007).

## MAIN RESULTS

The analysis of written narratives revealed that, regardless of the degree of sophistication of each production, students tended to have a vision of the history of Portugal, with a common basic plot, present in a nuclear narrative—*“In Portugal we won freedom and democracy*

(but now we also have an economic crisis)—, while “Worldwide there is technological progress, but there is also war and terrorism”. It is also important to underline the continued emphasis on political and economic aspects of the history of Portugal, and the importance (if apparent) attributed to technological progress in the world, to which students refer, although they oppose the existence of war.

Data analysis verified the existence of a set of temporal landmarks of the Portuguese twentieth century. Although with significant differences in emphasis, the majority of students identified as landmarks of the Portuguese twentieth century, the establishment of the Salazar dictatorship and “April 25 1974”. Other landmarks were also identified, albeit with fewer references: the fall of the monarchy / establishment of the republic and the country’s entry into the European Union or, more accurately, in the European Economic Community. A first reflection shows that these ideas appear focused on situations or events of a collective nature and that individual subjects are rarely referenced.

In the world history narratives, the historical markers that emerge were the Second World War, September 11 (attacks in New York) and the Madrid and London bombings. If the first of these milestones coincides with the history taught at school, the other events are mainly related to the present “lived” through the media. Also in these narratives situations or collective events dominate, though there is almost no reference to individual protagonists.

The conceptualization of past data gathering has been incorporated in the analysis of this data and we can see specific narratives, that is, those who “*have temporal and spatial boundaries and involve specific collective actors*” (Wertch, 2004, p.54) with different degrees of completeness and sophistication. According to the categorization defined in other data collection (Barca, 2007, Magalhães 2008, Magalhães, in press), it was possible to find new examples to support the main ideas of previously established categories.

The following example illustrates a narrative included in the category, general considerations

## GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

History has been evolving every day. Wars are no longer constant in most countries. Everything has evolved, cultures, religions and even art. Man has learned new techniques for everyday life and not only I can say that the world remains in great change; the only thing that does not evolve is the ability to help others, everybody wants the best for themselves and others are forced to live alone without help.

Joana—16 years old

As in other data collections, we could not find full narratives on the history of the world. However, José, 15 years old, gave us his version of world history, included in the category of **emergent narrative**. In this text, some timeframes and explanations for the facts are stated:

In 1914 the 1st World War started, which lasted until 1918. This war has brought huge consequences for all countries involved in it, including social, economic and political consequences. In the 30s, in some countries, extremist regimes emerged,, as in Italy, Germany, Spain and Portugal, respectively led by Mussolini, Hitler, Franco and Salazar. The other side of Europe (Russia) had a communist regime, ruled first by Lenin and then by Stalin. Between 1939 and 1945 came the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. After that, there was the process of the reconstruction of Europe. In recent years we live in a climate of terrorism caused by the al-Qaeda attack in 2001 on the twin towers in New York. After that, there has been a war in which the U.S. got involved, specifically in Afghanistan and Iraq.

José—15 years old

As for the history of Portugal, it was possible to find texts that can be categorized as **full narratives**, as exemplified by the following two excerpts:

I would start by talking about the birth of the Republic, October 5 1910, which put an end to the monarchy and to the reign of King Manuel II. In 1926, a dictatorship began. When Salazar established the regime of the Estado Novo, Portugal lived through a time of sadness, with it’s ‘voice’ censored and banned; the only outbreaks were counted by intervention singers such as Zeca Afonso. When Salazar died and Marcelo Caetano replaced the dictator, the Portuguese had hope of a ‘spring time’. Instead of change, censorship and imprisonment continued. In 1974, at dawn of April 25, the soldier Salgueiro Maia led a revolution against the regime and freed Portugal. The Portuguese ‘Carnation Revolution’ gave back freedom. We still live in a Republic ... The Expo 98 served to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of sea route to India by Vasco da Gama in 1498. The discoveries are our ‘pride’ because it was

Portugal who led them. Another landmark year was 2004, for football. Euro 2004 was an unusual success and united the whole country, football fans or not, to support the national team.

Manuela—16 years old

In 1926 ... There was a military dictatorship ... that made this country economically and socially fragile, and social inequalities were clearly visible. Portugal was a country uneducated and subjected to oppression ... This government (by Salazar) was marked by wars in the colonies ... which led Portuguese people to think of revolution. 1969 ... was also the year of the academic crisis ... From this date (1974), Portugal has grown at various levels, as in music ... at the sports level we have now an international tennis tournament ...

I have no more time to continue. But most important was 1991, when I was born.

Luís—16 years old.

In these narratives, we find sets of relevant timeframes and a plot explaining the events. The emphasis on the personal life of the last example in the transcript should be noted.

## CONCLUSIONS

Some similarities and some differences were found, regarding data collected in the former application of the same tasks to different groups of students, at a different time.

Thus, from a global point of view, we can say that both the overall structure of narratives and their levels of sophistication are similar, particularly regarding the higher level of sophistication of narratives of national history. As for the narratives of world history, the texts that fall into a category of “general considerations” are predominant, although, in contrast to previous data collection, the concerns about environmental issues are virtually absent from these narratives.

We should also record that, although references to characters like Hitler, Mussolini, Salazar or Saddam Hussein are repeated, these references are fewer in number; are fewer references to specific characters. However, there is, for the first time, a clear association of April 25 with a specific character —Captain Salgueiro Maia.

We can also say that these narratives emphasize the weight of information coming from media in the world history narratives, as is explicit in the words of Maria:

Given the situation described, my answer would be based on television news, in newspapers and magazines.

Maria—16 years old

From a global point of view, we can say that the narratives we gathered have a lower level of sophistication in world history narratives.

Change is seen mostly as positive, either in a linear way or on a pendulum, as had happened previously. However, it is also possible to detect a cyclical view of change, as it appears in the following extract:

It's always the same, some bombs here, some attacks there, a few revolutions here, books there, nothing new.

António—15 years old.

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<sup>1</sup>The following categories have been then established:

- **General considerations**—evaluative comments about the state of the earth without any concrete timeframe
- **Lists of events**—sets of events, without any chronological order
- **Timeline**—chronologically ordered sets of events
- **Emergent Narrative**—a narrative based on some milestones, often the beginning and end of the story, linked together by a description of what happened and / or an explanation of causes and consequences
- **Full narrative**—a narrative based on a significant number of milestones longitudinal interrelated in a plot in which situations are described and explained in terms of causes and consequences