

Abstract: The representations of world history conveyed by the media and disseminated in global encyclopaedias are perhaps some of the clearest examples of how much still needs to be done to decolonise knowledge. Thus, it is urgent to give voice to different narratives about world history, so as to reveal the versions of people and groups who have been systematically “erased” from History during the colonial period and still often remain invisible in the dominant narratives in the so-called post-colonial period. In this article, we comparatively analyse the results of a survey conducted among young people in Mozambique and Portugal. In both countries, we investigated the social representations of world history. The common trends and the divergences in the representations of world history, particularly with regard to the colonial period, are discussed taking into account the role of national identities in structuring collective memories.

Keywords: social memory, social representations, world history, colonialism, decolonisation.

1. Introduction

In a chronicle published in the newspaper *Sol* (06.01.2012: 24), Nathaniel Ngomane asked ironically “Lusophony: who wants to be erased?”. In this chronicle, Ngomane denounces the Lusocentric version of the History he was forced to learn in school in Mozambique, during the *New State*, where he learned about the Portuguese heroes, but he learned nothing about the Mozambican heroes. Ngomane also denounces the implicit violence of the term “peoples of Portuguese-expression” that, according to him, contributes to the erasure of the identity of the peoples of the so-called Portuguese-Speaking African Countries. In fact, nobody wants to be erased or reduced to a homogenising expression that does not take into account the heterogeneity of the “Lusophone space”.

This positioning supports the perspective of Alfredo Margarido (2000: 6), who considers that the invention of Lusophony occurred through a collective amnesia about colonial violence. In his words, “the current Lusophile discourse merely seek to conceal, not to eliminate, the brutal traces of the past” (2000: 76).

Along the same lines, Maria Manuel Baptista states that “Lusophony signals, in Portugal, the place of the truly ‘unsaid’, a kind of ghostly space of our culture, although paradoxically this concept is used so often” (2006: 24). For the author, a strategy of active oblivion of some of the fundamental aspects of the History

Who wants to be erased? Social Representations of World History and Decolonisation of Thought

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that links Portugal to other Portuguese-speaking countries is evident on the Portuguese side.

In his turn, Moisés de Lemos Martins (2013) warns about the need to remain vigilant and to deconstruct the various misconceptions arising in the concept of Lusophony, among which he highlights four: 1) the misconceptions of a Portuguese centrality in the Lusophone space; 2) misconceptions about the reconstitution in a post-colonial context of the narratives of the ancient empire with neo-colonial purposes; 3) the mistakes of Lusotropicalism and the myth of a “sweet colonization”; and 4) the misconceptions of some post-colonial speech, often based in a narrative of “resentment”. To deconstruct these misconceptions without creating new ones is undoubtedly an arduous task, but it is essential for the “decolonisation” of thought and for a new and more complex understanding of post-colonial relations among Lusophone peoples.

The representations of world history conveyed by the media and disseminated in global encyclopaedias are perhaps some of the clearest examples of how much still needs to be done to decolonise knowledge. Thus, it is urgent to give voice to different narratives about history, so as to reveal the versions of people and groups who have been systematically “erased” from History during the colonial period and still often remain invisible in the dominant narratives of world history in the so-called postcolonial period.

In this article, we comparatively analyse the results of a survey conducted among young people in Mozambique and Portugal. These studies were conducted as part of a broader research project that aims to critically examine the “Lusophony” as a symbolic construction and the social representations of history that connects the various Portuguese-Speaking countries¹. The aim of the present study was precisely to uncover the different versions of world history, as there is no “common history”, but various versions of the story, which always correspond to reconstructions of the past, an ongoing reconfiguration depending on the present-day agendas. These studies aim to contribute to the decolonisation of knowledge.

2. Social Representations of history and identity dynamics

According to Licata et al. (2007), collective memory is an ensemble of social representations of the past, shared by a given social group. Collective memory plays four important roles on groups’ identity contributing to: the definition of group identity; building positive distinctiveness through favourable comparisons between the ingroup and the outgroup; the justification and legitimating of groups’ behaviours; and the mobilisation for collective action.

Remembering is a selective process of reconstruction of the past, which depends on social belonging and networks of individuals as well as their life experiences and trajectories. Recognising the social character of memory does not imply assuming uniformity in the memories within a given group, because each individual belongs to several groups simultaneously. Different social groups tend to remember different facts and when remembering the same fact, they tend to remember it differently.

In the analysis of collective memory, it is necessary to take into account two fundamental frames of reference - *time* and *space* (Halbwachs, 1950/1997). All memories are social since our thoughts and feelings are constructed through language and reified by the processes of human communication (Gergen, 1994). Thus, memory is both a social product and a social process. Memory is constantly (re)constructed through communication (interpersonal, intergroup, media, etc.). In this sense, the theory of social representations (Moscovici, 1988) is a fundamental tool

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for understanding how historical memories are constructed, how they are shared, and their political and cultural functions.

3. Representations of world history in Mozambique and Portugal

In this section we comparatively analyse the results of a survey conducted among Mozambican and Portuguese youths. In Portugal, the data were collected in October 2003 and in Mozambique in May 2009. There were a total 298 respondents, 180 Mozambican and 118 Portuguese. The respondents were university students, with an average age of 22 years.

In both countries the questionnaires were written in Portuguese. In Portugal all respondents declared Portuguese as their mother tongue. In contrast, in Mozambique participants declared a great diversity of languages as mother tongue; the vast majority of the Mozambican participants (69%) declared the Portuguese language as a second language.

In this article we compare the pattern of results between Mozambicans and Portuguese participants. We should not forget that each national group is highly heterogeneous, comprising a great variety of individuals, with different backgrounds and life experiences, and belonging to groups with different positions in the social structure. In this sense, we do not intend to generalise the results of these studies to the population of these countries; we just intend to address, in an exploratory way, the impact of national belonging in the representations of world history. The focus on young people was due to the fact that we intend to study the representations of people born after the Carnation Revolution: April 25, 1974. The fact that the samples consisted exclusively of university students was due, on the one hand, to feasibility issues in the application of questionnaires in good conditions and, on the other hand, to issues of comparability with previous studies conducted in other countries (Liu *et al.*, 2005), also using samples of university students.

Students were invited to participate in an international study about history, and it was explained to them that what mattered was their personal *opinion* about history and not their level of knowledge. The questionnaire had the same structure in both countries, with just small adjustments of content, according to the exploratory interviews and pre-testing conducted in each country.

Following an adaptation of the methodology pioneered by Liu *et al.* (2005), participants were asked to list the five events they considered to be the most important in world history in the last thousand years. Once the participants finished the event list, they were to assess the impact (positive or negative) of each event listed and, subsequently, indicate the emotions associated with each event. The nomination of events was completely free as no prior list of events was provided so as not to influence their responses. The emotions associated with events were also collected in an open-ended fashion. The level of impact of the events was measured through a close-ended scale (1 = very negative, 7 = very positive). Table 1 shows the overall percentages of the nominations of the ten most frequently nominated events, in each country, as well as their estimated impact, positive or negative, in world history.

Mozambique	%	Impact	Portugal	%	Impact
World War I	61	2.2 (1.8)	World War II	72	1.6 (1.1)
World War II	46	2.2 (1.8)	World War I	51	1.6 (1.1)
Industrial revolution	26	6.8 (0.8)	September 11, 2001	30	1.1 (0.3)
Independence Africa	24	6.8 (0.8)	Portuguese discoveries	26	6.2 (1.1)
Colonialism	19	2.7 (1.8)	Carnation revolution	25	6.3 (1.0)
September 11, 2001	18	2.8 (2.6)	Industrial revolution	20	6.0 (1.1)
Obama Victory	14	6.6 (1.2)	Man in the Moon	18	6.4 (0.8)
French revolution	13	6.6 (1.3)	Iraq War/Invasion	12	1.6 (0.8)
Berlin Conference	12	3.3 (2.2)	Atomic Bomb	12	1.7 (1.7)
Foundation of the UN	11	7.0 (0.0)	Fall of Berlin Wall	11	5.9 (1.5)

Table 1 – *Most important events in World History*

Legend: % = percentage of spontaneous nomination of specific event in world history; Impact = Average impact (and standard deviation); impact scale: 1 = very negative, 7 = very positive.

The most striking feature of Table 1 is the prominence of Westerncentrism in the social representations of world history: The events related to Europe and North America and the “global” events involving Western nations appear at the top of the Table in both countries. This is particularly evident in the case of Portugal as all the events in the *top 10* occurred in Western countries or are linked to Western dominance. In the case of Mozambique, this Westerncentrism is evident in half of the *top 10* events, while the other large group of events is associated with issues of colonialism and human rights. Replicating the pattern of data observed in other countries (Liu *et al.*, 2005, 2009), the two World Wars were the most often nominated events as the most important in world history. The data collected in Portugal follow the trend observed in other European countries with the Second World War at the top of the table, followed by the First World War. This pattern of results is curious since Portugal actively participated in World War I and not in World War II. However, with respect to the data collected in Mozambique, we observe a reversal of this order: the First World War is the most nominated event followed by the Second World War; this was probably because Africa, and namely Mozambique, was an important battle field during the First World War. Overall, the results show the centrality of war and political issues in the representations of world history, replicating to a certain degree a global agenda shaped by Western nations (e.g., Liu *et al.*, 2005, 2009). However, it is also evident that this pattern of results is not a simple replication of a “global agenda”, as participants from both countries give emphasis to the events of their own country or region. This is particularly evident in the case of Mozambican participants’ responses indicating the presence of a pan-African agenda.

As mentioned earlier, the pattern of results obtained in Portugal is prototypical of a Westerncentric perspective, largely reproducing the version of world history that is disseminated in Europe and by the “global” media, where the key events are driven by Western countries. However, two of the events included in the *top 10* differentiate the Portuguese data from those obtained in other European countries: the Portuguese Discoveries (26%) and the Carnation Revolution (25%). Thus, the Portuguese participants highlighted the role of their own country as an active player in world history. The “Portuguese Discoveries” were considered to have a very positive impact on world history being associated with positive emotions (pride, joy, happiness, fascination).

In turn, Mozambican participants highlighted the “Independence of Africa” as one of the most important events in world history (28%), rating it with a very positive impact ($M=6.8$), and associating it with positive emotions (pride, joy, happiness). The fact that the Mozambican participants evoked African independence, and not specifically the independence of Mozambique (reported by 3% of respondents), points to a pan-African agenda, which highlights the common struggle of the African people against European oppressors. The “Colonialism” (19%) is perceived as negative by Mozambican participants as well as the Berlin Conference 1884/5 (12%), during which European countries divided Africa among themselves, setting arbitrary African borders according to European interests.

The events related to the promotion of human rights and equal opportunities for all are particularly salient in the *top 10* in Mozambique, as were the French Revolution (13%), the Foundation of the United Nations (11%) and Obama Victory (14%). Although they do not appear in the *top 10*, some events related to the *apartheid* regime in neighbouring countries are also salient in the Mozambican data: Apartheid (8%), Nelson Mandela Release (5%), End of Apartheid (3%), Nelson Mandela Imprisonment (2%). The events considered more negative by Mozambican participants are not visible in the *top 10*: Slavery (8%) and Racism (3%) (impact average, respectively $M=1.1$ and $M=1.0$). Some of the events that are considered more positive are also not included in the *top 10*: Abolition of slavery (5%) and the End of Apartheid (3%) (average impact: $M=7.0$ in both cases). Taken together, the cluster of events related to the promotion of human rights and equal opportunities for all were more absent in Portuguese answers as were the references to colonialism, slavery and racism.

In short, the cluster of events related to the promotion of human rights and the struggle for freedom and independence were more salient in Mozambican data than in the Portuguese data; Portuguese participants tended to “forget” these events, going along with the pattern of results obtained in other European countries (Cf. Liu *et al.*, 2005, 2009). In turn, the Mozambican data were consistent with those obtained in other sub-Saharan African countries, which also gave prominence to the oppressive effects of colonialism and to the colonial liberation and independence (cf. Cabecinhas & Nhaga, 2008; Cabecinhas & Évora, 2008).

Thus, the events that led to the end of colonialism and the independence of African countries were perceived positively by African participants but tended to be ignored by European participants. The events related to the promotion of human rights and equal opportunities for all were perceived as very positive by both Europeans and Africans, but the percentage of spontaneous nomination of these events was lower in European than in African samples.

Overall, the data collected in Portugal replicated those of Liu *et al.* (2005, 2009), according to which world history is perceived as being shaped by Western countries, “erasing” the role of other peoples in world history. However, data collected in Mozambique, giving visibility to the fight against colonialism, racism and other forms of oppression, clearly indicated that they do not want to be “erased” from world history. The type of sociocentrism observed in Mozambique was linked to a more pan-African agenda than a nationalist one, with participants favouring the nomination of events related to the “common fate” of African people and their struggle for liberation from colonial rule and achieving independence.

Another prominent aspect of these data was the strong recency effect, with recent events being privileged compared to more ancient ones again replicating the pattern of results obtained by Liu *et al.* (2005, 2009). The vast majority of events spontaneously nominated by university students from both countries took place in the 20th or 21st centuries. This huge recency effect suggests that when thinking about world history participants were highly influenced by the media agenda of the moment of data collection, which serves as the “anchor” for thinking history.

Although data from both countries indicated a strong recency effect, in the case of Mozambique, a focus on the very recent past was even stronger. Portuguese students evoked the distant past, perceived as the “glorious” (Miranda, 2002) Age of Discovery, contributing to an attenuation of the recency effect while Mozambicans students focused on African independence contributing to a strengthening of the recency effect. The fact that the history of Africa prior to European settlements have been for a long time silenced in the history textbooks in African countries may also have contributed to this tendency, since it was only recently that the history of Africa prior to European settlements started to be uncovered by the new African historiography and disseminated in schools through history textbooks.

As already mentioned, the end of colonialism and African independence were among the events considered most positively in world history by Mozambican participants, while slavery and racism were considered as the most negative ones. Overall, the events related to human rights issues were more salient for Mozambican participants than for Portuguese participants, who tended to focus more on a Westerncentric narrative of world history, in which Western countries are seen as playing the leading roles.

4. Discussion

In this article we have performed a comparative analysis of the representations of world history for Mozambicans and Portuguese youths. In general the data showed some common trends, denouncing the persistence to a considerable degree of Westerncentrism in the representations of the world history, but also revealed some important divergences.

Regarding the common trends, the results of these studies largely replicated those observed in samples of university students in Europe, Asia, Oceania and the Americas (e.g. Liu et al., 2005, 2009): a strong recency effect, with a focus on very recent events, most of them occurring in the 20th or 21st centuries; and a strong Westerncentrism, although this is counterbalanced by some degree of sociocentrism, both in the Portuguese and Mozambican samples.

Concerning the divergent trends, the emergence of a pan-African narrative in Mozambican data was especially important as the various events that relate to the common struggle of African peoples for liberation of colonial rule and achievement of the independence, and the focus on events related to the promotion of human rights and equal opportunities for all were highlighted. The cluster of events linked to colonialism was important in both samples, however the Portuguese participants focused on the “Portuguese Discoveries” and not on its consequences, whereas the Mozambicans participants focused on the end of colonialism, the independence of African nations, and the negative effects of colonialism. The colonial liberation emerged as a major narrative counterbalancing the Westerncentric one. This pan-African narrative, as mentioned earlier, contrasts with the results of previous studies with university students in the various continents except Africa (Liu *et al.*, 2005, 2009), but are consistent with those obtained in other sub-Saharan African countries (e.g. Cabecinhas & Évora, 2007; Cabecinhas & Nhaga, 2008). While Europeans tended to “forget” the pervasive effects of colonisation when thinking about world history, Africans rather tended to make these effects salient. In both cases, forgetting or remembering serves identity protection functions (Licata *et al.*, 2007).

Several recent studies have shown the pervasive effects of the colonial process in the formation of attitudes, social stereotypes and current intergroup relations (Volpato & Licata, 2010). The long term oppressive effects of colonialism are often underestimated, contributing to its maintenance. By rendering salient a narrative of colonial liberation, Mozambicans participants clearly demonstrate

that they do not want to be “erased” from world history. An African proverb says “*until the lion has its own storyteller, the hunter will always have the best part of the story*” (in Meneses, 2008). Listening to the various versions of history will, undoubtedly, help us to achieve a deeper understanding and a decolonisation of thought.

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