

## Portuguese Students' ideas about slavery and the slave trade from Africa to Brazil when dealing with textbook sources

Ideas de los alumnos portugueses sobre la esclavitud y la trata de esclavos desde África a Brasil al trabajar con las fuentes de los libros de texto

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### Abstract

This exploratory study is part of a post-doctoral project investigating how Brazilian and Portuguese textbooks present slavery and the slavery trade, as well as how Portuguese students interpret these issues, particularly when they use the sources in their textbooks. A group of 8th-grade students (aged 13–14) from a school in northern Portugal was asked to reflect on the meaning of slavery and its potential consequences for Brazil and Portugal, drawing on evidence related to the slave trade and labour during the 16th century, as presented in their textbooks. The students' responses were analysed inductively, and the findings are discussed in terms of (a) the specific analytical process employed and (b) the insights gained regarding the relationship between textbook representations and students' perceptions, framed within the context of situated learning. This framework suggests that prior knowledge, personal experience, and the specific task at hand may influence students' ideas and outcomes.

**Key words:** students' historical ideas, slavery and slave trade, textbooks historical sources, Africa, Brazil and Portugal.

### Resumen

Este estudio exploratorio es parte de un proyecto postdoctoral sobre cómo los libros de texto brasileños y portugueses presentan la esclavitud y el tráfico de esclavos, y cómo los estudiantes dan sentido a esta cuestión, especialmente cuando utilizan las fuentes de sus libros de texto. Se preguntó a un grupo de estudiantes portugueses de 8º grado (13-14 años) de una escuela del norte de Portugal sobre el significado de la esclavitud y sus posibles consecuencias para Brasil y Portugal a la luz de la evidencia sobre el tráfico de esclavos y el trabajo esclavo durante el siglo XVI expuesta en sus libros de texto. Los datos de los estudiantes fueron analizados inductivamente. Se discutirán teniendo en cuenta (a) el proceso específico de ese análisis, y (b) algunos resultados sobre cómo las concepciones de los libros de texto y las ideas de los estudiantes posiblemente se relacionan dentro de un principio de aprendizaje situado, donde el conocimiento previo, la experiencia y la tarea específica en sí mismo podría influir en las ideas y/o resultados de los estudiantes.

**Palabras clave:** ideas históricas de los estudiantes, esclavitud y trata de esclavos, libros de texto y fuentes históricas, África, Brasil y Portugal.

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Barca, I., Solé, G. y Squinelo, A. P. (2024). Portuguese Students' ideas about slavery and the slave trade from Africa to Brazil when dealing with textbook sources. *CLIO. History and History teaching*, 50. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs\\_clio/clio.20245010807](https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_clio/clio.20245010807) - / Recibido 30-06-2024 / Aceptado 22-10-2024

## 1. Introduction

If we assume a contextualised learning approach it is crucial to pay attention to how students use textbook information, especially in educational contexts where that resource is supposed to play a central role in constructing historical knowledge. Indeed, students construct their own ideas under diversified influences, and textbooks may play a role in the learning process whether as a relevant or just as one more resource (Afonso, 2014; 2020; Hsiao, 2005; Moreira, 2004; Nicholls & Foster, 2005; Nakou & Apostolidou, 2010; Schmidt & Braga, 2010; Schmidt, 2017; Squinelo, Solé & Barca, 2018; Solé, 2021). Nonetheless, an investigative focus on how students make historical sense of the information provided by their history textbooks appears quite scarce if compared with the huge amount of studies about history textbook messages (Afonso, 2014; Bittencourt, 2002; Moreno-Díaz, 2021; Solé, 2021; Valls, 2008).

The study carried out by Hsiao (2005) is probably one of the first consistent pieces of research to explore how students construct historical ideas on competing accounts provided by several textbooks including their own. The degree of familiarity with each textbook was one of the variables considered in discussing the relative credibility attributed by students to competing accounts. Sharing the same broad focus on how students construct historical knowledge with textbook resources add, a few investigative works have also been carried out in Portugal and Brazil. So far, they have mainly explored how students construct knowledge upon either several historical sources or accounts given by their own textbook<sup>1</sup>.

In this study, we focus on students' conceptualisation of the slavery issue as, (a) it is related to a past common to Portugal and Brazil, (b) it is part of the substantive history syllabus reflected in textbooks in both countries, and in those contexts (c) it is gaining more attention (again) either at the historiographical and the educational field. This concern is growing particularly in Brazil, where Afro-descendent and native communities can now have more access to formal education, thus gaining an increasing visibility in educational research and contributing to strengthen historical awareness of cultural diversity.

Studies in history education carried out by Gevaerd (2016), Schmidt (2017) and Squinelo, Solé & Barca (2018) among others may be considered as a sign of such state of affairs. In Portugal, the increasing cultural and academic dialogue with Brazil is contributing to shed more light on the slavery and the slave trade from Africa to Brazil, an issue which appears to have been almost silenced till recent times (Caldeira, 2017). Furthermore, it must be stressed that the democratic turning point in the mid-1970s in Portugal, entangling the end of the colonial war and decolonisation in Africa and Asia, opened room for a couple of years to overtly discuss difficult themes such as slavery and colonialism in a genuine historical approach, integrating several dimensions and enriched by diversified points-of-view. At those times, people needed to understand what was going on, why those radical changes were happening. Within that context, social

forces and intellectuals, historians and educationalists included, deconstructed the idea of an idealised national past. In the historiographical field as well as in some educational practices, African slaves came to be viewed not only as victims of economic and political decisions as well as resistant and progressively strugglers for social equity and freedom. Rüsen's ideas on temporal orientation (1993; 2001; 2015) help us to understand a phase of a "critical-genetic historical consciousness".

According to those ideas on temporal orientation, Hawthorn (1999) also suggests, counterfactual thinking is at the core of explanations in history and social sciences; weighing the relative power of (a set of) reasons and actions in the past as causes or consequences of certain events or states of affairs, implies to comparing actual scenarios with alternative, eventually plausible scenarios in the light of historical evidence<sup>2</sup>.

In a similar vein, Epstein (2009) provides a theoretical and social context for these views, tracing different approaches to addressing slavery as a complex historical phenomenon. These approaches range from early ideas that portrayed enslaved people as passive victims to more recent views that highlight their resistance and resilience, including their creation of culture and struggle for social justice. Epstein also discusses how slavery can be viewed as an economic system designed to exploit Black people, particularly in the United States, while recognising the contributions of those who built the nation, regardless of the conditions under which they worked. Despite this, from the 1980s to the present, the significance of these and other controversial issues seems to have faded somewhat in Portuguese historiography (Caldeira, 2017).

Although the mandatory history syllabus includes the transatlantic slave trade, the teaching of Portuguese "discoveries and expansion" is often brief and superficial, sometimes perpetuating old stereotypes. This might explain why students in Portugal rarely mention slavery, colonial war, or colonialism in their national narratives, while in Cape Verde and Mozambique, these topics are integral to their historical narratives (Barca, 2015).

Increased contact among Portuguese-speaking communities in the current era of globalisation has provided opportunities to share ideas about a common past with a more open and multi-perspective approach. As reported by Cainelli, Pinto, and Solé (2016), earlier studies by Solé explored Portuguese primary students' ideas on using diverse historical evidence and empathy toward people in slavery, finding that children's thoughts ranged from romantic stereotypes to more sophisticated notions, suggesting an emerging evidential reasoning and a growing awareness of human diversity. Cainelli and Barca (2013) studied the ideas of Brazilian and Portuguese fifth graders on relations between the two countries, finding a range of postures among students in both countries when considering alternative historical scenarios. These ranged from romanticised views of an unchanging natural world to more advanced reasoning that considered hypothetical, objective changes. Solé (2019) analysed how controversial topics like

slavery appear in official documents, such as the *Aprendizagens Essenciais* [Essential Learning] (ME, 2018; 2022), and in Portuguese and Brazilian 8th-grade textbooks. This analysis highlighted how educational policies, particularly in Brazil, have influenced the inclusion of such topics in textbooks, spurred by specific legislation passed in 2003, 2004, and 2008 (Laws 10.639/2003 and 11.645/2008).

In same wavelength, Epstein (2009) contributes to better contextualise those views at theoretical and social levels while tracing various approaches to treat the slavery issue as one difficult past phenomenon – from old ideas of viewing enslaved people just as passive victims poorly cultivated to rather highlighting their resistance and resilience by creating their own culture and struggle for social justice, or even describing slavery as an economic system organised in a way to keep black people exploited by white people (in the USA), and even yet by asserting the role of nation's builders for those who worked on anything to develop the country.

However, since the 1980s till recent times for a number of conditions the significance of this and other controversial issues appeared to have faded away in Portuguese historiography (Caldeira, 2017). And nowadays, although the mandatory history syllabus includes the slavery and slave trade from Africa to Brazil, the teaching of Portuguese 'discoveries and expansion' tends to be brief, smooth, sometimes integrating old stereotypes<sup>3</sup>. Such a context might help to explain why students' national narratives in Portugal almost never allude to slavery, colonial war, colonialism, while in Cape Verde and Mozambique, for example, they tend to make part of their substantive historical narrative the past (Barca, 2015).

Despite this, from the 1980s to the present, the significance of these and other controversial issues seems to have faded somewhat in Portuguese historiography (Caldeira, 2017). Although nowadays the mandatory history syllabus includes the transatlantic slave trade, the teaching of Portuguese "discoveries and expansion" is often brief and superficial, sometimes perpetuating old stereotypes. This might explain why students in Portugal rarely mention slavery, colonial war, or colonialism in their national narratives, while in Cape Verde and Mozambique, these topics are integral to their historical narratives (Barca, 2015).

Closer contacts among the several Portuguese-speaking peoples in the current period of globalisation are giving room to share ideas over a common past in a more open, multi-perspectiveful attitude. Such as Cainelli, Pinto and Solé reported in 2016, former studies carried out by them Solé studied Portuguese primary graders' ideas on the use of diversified evidence and on empathy toward human beings in the slave condition and found that children's thoughts might convey either romantic stereotypes or more elaborate notions suggesting the emergence of an evidential reasoning and a fair awareness of human diversity; Cainelli and Barca (2013) studied Brazilian and Portuguese fifth graders' ideas on relationships between the two countries found several students' postures in both countries when looking at possible alternative scenarios to the

slavery trade past, from romantic stereotypes of a never-changing natural world to a more sophisticated reasoning when imagining hypothetical, somehow objective changes. Solé (2019) analysed how difficult and conflicting controversial topics, especially slavery, appear in official documents, namely in the *Aprendizagens Essenciais* [Essential Learning] (ME, 2018; 2022), and in 8<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks in Portugal and Brazil. It also sought to analyse the historical processes linked to the relationship between interculturality and historical consciousness expressed in the textbooks for this year of schooling in both countries. This issue has generated a great deal of controversy and intense debate, more so in Brazil than in Portugal, due to educational policies that have determined the incorporation of such issues into teaching, based on specific legislation that came into force in 2003, 2004 and 2008, namely Laws 10.639/2003 and 11.645/2008, and which have been incorporated into Brazilian textbooks. In Portugal too, the *Aprendizagens Essenciais* [Essential Learning] (ME, 2028, 2022) requirements on this subject have been echoed in recent school textbooks.

In line with discussion above, the main objective of this study is to explore how Portuguese students construct the idea of slavery based on textbook sources (GO). From this main objective, three specific objectives were outlined:

- EO1. Analyse students' ideas about slavery and the slave trade before the study and by exploring sources from the textbook sources.
- EO2. Understand how students interpret the sources in the textbook and build on this historical evidence.
- EO3. Evaluate how students establish a relationship between the past and the present based on a counterfactual challenge related to slavery.

Thus, the following research questions were formulated:

- What ideas do Portuguese students construct about the concept of slavery based on textbooks?
- How do students interpret the textbook sources on slavery?
- What consequences of the slave trade and slavery do students envisage for Brazil and Portugal?

## 2. Method

This is an exploratory study with a predominantly qualitative, interpretative approach (Erickson, 1986; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Data analysis employed an inductive coding strategy inspired in the Grounded Theory), along with some basic quantitative statistical procedures to provide additional insights (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

## 2.1. Participants

A small-scale study, conducted in 201, involving 16 Portuguese students (6 girls and 10 boys, age 13–14) attending year 8 in a school located in Braga, Portugal. The school was deliberately chosen since one of the research authors exercised pedagogical supervision there. The participant class was selected so as to be a heterogeneous group in terms of achievement and socio-economic background, although they should be considered as a relatively homogeneous group in cultural and ethnic dimensions.

## 2.2. Instruments and procedures

In order to get answers to the research questions, a questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire included two parts. It consisted of two parts. The first part, whose results are not analysed here, focused on students' perceptions of how frequently they used their history textbook both inside and outside the classroom. In the second part, students were asked about the meaning of slavery and its possible consequences for Brazil and Portugal in light of evidence on the slave trade and labour during the 16th century, as presented in their textbooks<sup>4</sup>.

To address the research questions, a questionnaire was developed.

This second part of questionnaire included three questions:

Question 1. "What do you understand about the slavery issue from your history lessons?"

Question 2. "Examine your textbook historical sources: what does each source portray?"

Question 3. "What would be different and what would remain in the history of Brazil and Portugal if the Portuguese had not initiated the slave trade from Africa to Brazil?"

Question 1, "What do you understand about the slavery issue from your history lessons?", intended to explore students' broad ideas before to invite them to engage more specifically with the textbook sources.

The second question of this part focus on four textbook sources, about slavered and slavered trade, selected by researchers according to criteria of historical significance.

Question 2, "Examine historical sources in your textbook: what does each source portray?": students were invited to interpret each one of the four sources reproduced from the history textbook, chosen by the researchers based on their historical significance:

A drawing depicting slave labour in a Brazilian sugarcane mill.

An excerpt from the Sermon of Priest Antonio Vieira (17th century), offering a critical, humanistic view of the slave trade.

An excerpt from the India House Regulation (1509), describing how slaves were priced before being sold in slave markets.

A drawing depicting a black servant waiting on a wealthy Portuguese family during a meal:

- A. A drawing depicting a (slave) labour scene in a Brazilian sugarcane mill.
- B. A written excerpt from the Sermon of Priest Antonio Vieira (17th century) entitled “Slavery”, conveying a critical, humanistic view of the slavery trade.
- C. A written excerpt from “India House Regulation, 1509” entitled “Slaves - a merchandise as any other” describing the process of attributing a price to each slave before they were sent to be sold in the slave markets.
- D. A drawing depicting a meal moment where a black servant waiter was serving a Portuguese wealthy family.

The question 3 aimed to stimulate the relationship between past and present.

Question 3, “What would be different and what would remain in the history of Brazil and Portugal if the Portuguese had not initiated the slave trade from Africa to Brazil?”. This counterfactual question aimed to challenge students to think about the potential consequences of this historical issue entailed a counterfactual task to challenge students’ ideas about significant consequences of such past issue. This task was inspired on Cainnelli & Barca (2013).

Prior authorization to collect students’ data was requested to the school administrative staff. Data were collected near the end of the academic year 2018, after the students had studied a few months before the slavery theme inserted in the “Expansion and change during the 15th-16th centuries”. An individual questionnaire (paper and pencil tasks) was administered in a history class by an invited teacher, who provided students with brief guidelines about the aims of the study, confidentiality, and the tasks, which were completed individually in 45 minutes without additional support.

### **3. Data analysis and discussion of results**

Data analysis followed an inductive coding strategy inspired in the Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) in order to reach somehow comprehensive answers to the research questions. The analysis focused on, (a) interpreted signs of the slave displayed in the students’ responses, and along the interpretation activity of textbook sources and,



(b) constructing patterns related to the significance students attributed to this historical issue. Initially, an open coding process was applied to identify concepts and create an initial categorisation.

Following this phase, we undertook analytical procedures of axial and selective coding to refine the categories based on several attributes of the historical meaning of slavery. This involved revising, breaking down, or merging the initial categories and generating broader categorisations. These framed the attributes attached to the historical concept of slavery (related to *labour conditions* and *human rights*) and assigned meaning to the significance students gave to the slave trade in terms of its historical consequences.

### 3.1. Students' ideas in progress: initial ideas

To explore students' initial ideas about slavery, we first asked: "What do you understand about the slavery issue from your history lessons?" In this first approach, students' ideas on slavery and related trade suggested diverse patterns associated to a *more* or *less* objective conceptualisation over what it means to be a slave. Some students manifested more comprehensive notions of the slave condition - humans as property of other humans being forced to work and being traded – and express the inequity of such practice as in these two students' responses, for example:

"It is a bad thing, using people bought to do the work for us and being treated badly, people were 'chased', separated from their families and sold." (Informant 1)

"They were people used as if they were nothing, they were black, and they had to obey to those who had them." (Informant 2)

In Informant 2's response, the association between skin colour and the concept of slavery is evident. Some others just focused on forced, unpaid and painful labour conditions, while another one mainly stressed human inequity and lack of freedom, such as:

"Slavery is something bad that differentiates human beings from each other. It's also about a lack of freedom and inhumanity." (Informant 3)

"Slavery means making others work for you with no payment at all, and even getting beaten to work." (Informant 4)

Yet some others just relied on tautologies, while a few either assumed that did not know or simply did not respond to the question. If we look at the several features of slavery such as presented by students, they appeared linked to *forced labour* in *diverse activities*, *unpaid work*, and *hard labour*, for example:



“Slavery is the name given to how the slave works, to be a slave means to have to work for other people with no payment at all and even to be beaten to work”. (Informant 4)

“I understand that slavery is using other people to do what we want.” (Informant 5)

“I think it was making others as servants to do very heavy work in hot sun.” (Informant 6)

Concomitantly, the ethical view over slavery is expressed or suggested in several answers when pointing to *lack of freedom, bad treatment, colour discrimination*. According to the examples above, it seems clear that notions of slavery and slave conditions of life equate in those students’ conceptions, that is, slavery is described by pointing to what it means to be a slave, with no explicit discussion of the historical context (in diverse dimensions) of that institutionalised practice in those times and places. In spite of that, the conceptual categories identified as related to slavery or slave condition allowed to consider two perspectives under which students conceive the slavery issue: *labour conditions perspective* (forced labour in diverse activities, unpaid work, hard labour), and *human rights perspective* (lack of freedom, bad treatment including being traded, colour discrimination). The two broad perspectives tend to appear both embedded in most of the initial ideas expressed by the students, and their several notions might appear either aggregated or isolated in each answer.

### 3.2. Reconstructing ideas with textbook sources add

Answers to question 2 (*Examine your textbook historical sources: what does each source portray?*) were supposed to imply a conceptual reconstruction by (re) interpreting the textbook sources (A to D) related to the slavery and trade in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century. When analysing the answers given by the students in the light of those sources, we found that they tended to interpret the visual sources in a quick ‘bird’s view’, as implied in the following two answers:

“(source A) Portrays slave labour force, (in source D) while the slaves worked the owners were resting.” (Informant 7)

“(in source A) Slaves are working, (in source D) slaves are serving their owners.” (Informant 6)

A few students made more contextualised inferences as this one:

“(source A) Depicts black people working for other lighter-skinned people, and it portrays slavery, (source D) portrays the bourgeois luxury life, with exotic animals inside the house and the slave to serve them such as it was due.” (Informant 3)

As to interpreting the written sources, students tended to pick up some expressions or just to transcribe titles, as in this example just rephrasing the title of source C:

“Slaves were not treated as people but as worthless things.” (Informant 4)

In spite of all this, even with very brief answers the majority of students assigned some meaning related to slavery in the light of the sources they were coping with.

Going further to exploring students’ ideas along the source interpretation tasks, we conducted a cross-analysis by comparing each conceptual category through answers given to questions 1 and 2 by student. Most students selected textbook ideas according to what might be more significant for them, thus contributing to enlarge, reconstruct, reinforce or keep their own initial ideas. It is worth to notice the dynamic process of assigning deeper meanings to the troubled issue by students when confronted with additional or recalled information provided by the textbook sources. Indeed, the majority appeared to better clarify and/or contextualise their initial conceptualisation on slavery in its historical features and as a focus of human rights concern. Some students were able to situate slavery within a particular context—“the slave trade from Africa to Brazil” (Informant 1) or “work in sugar plantations and mills” (Informant 7)—as well as in other activities, including domestic work. They reiterated the inhumanity of the slave condition, as shown in this example:

“The slaves were transported in slave ships; many died before they reached the place where they were to be sold.” (Informant 8)

Answers like the last one show some detailed interpretation of the slave trade from Africa to Brazil at the time. By analysing the textbooks sources students mention the violence of the slave trade and express humanistic ideas of condemnation as in the following excerpts:

“They were chosen by those who would go to buy them and the person who was about to sell them would decide their price - inhumanity!” (Informant 9)

“The slaves were traded in Africa, they were sold, transferred and exploited by their owners.” (Informant 10)

“They were evaluated to see if they were priceful or not!” (Informant 11)

One of the most significant conceptual changes in this interpretative process came from a student who initially offered an almost tautological response: “A bad theme. In ancient times there was a lot of slavery” (Informant 12). However, this same student later appropriately pointed to some objective conditions of the slave trade after analysing sources B and C: “The slaves were transported in slave ships; then they were chosen by those who were about to buy them.” (Informant 12)

Some other students kept their previous ideas in answering to question 2, occasionally reinforcing them with a few objective features. We might include in this trend the ambiguous ideas of one student who showed a sympathetic attitude toward slaves in the first answer, “to be a slave means to have to work for other people with no payment at all and even to be beaten to work” (Informant 13), and in source analysis inferred that “sugar mills... other cultures, better fabrics and wooden raw materials came up due to the slave force” (Informant 13) (does this mean a sympathetic attitude, a cynical view or poor inferences in the light of sources given?). As to the tautological answers initially displayed, they were kept as such since they revealed serious incoherencies along the source analysis tasks except for the student whose tautologies on slavery were clarified and expanded during textbook source analysis (transcribed above).

Other students maintained their previous ideas in response to question 2, occasionally reinforcing them with a few additional objective features. One student, for instance, demonstrated a sympathetic attitude towards slaves in her first answer- “To be a slave means to have to work for other people with no payment at all and even to be beaten to work” (Informant 13)- but during source analysis, she inferred, “Sugar mills and better fabrics and raw materials came up due to the slave force” (Informant 13). It is unclear whether this statement reflects sympathy, cynicism, or poor inferences in light of the sources provided.

Tables 1 and 2 present an overall picture of students’ ideas about slavery /slave conditions along tasks to questions 1 and 2. They appear categorised in the two entangled perspectives already discussed: *Labour conditions* and *Human rights Perspective*.

<b><i>Labour conditions Notions</i></b>	<b><i>Frequency (Question 1)</i></b>	<b><i>Frequency (Question 2)</i></b>
Forced labour	9	5
Unpaid labour	1	1
Hard work	1	-
Diverse activities	5	10
Agricultural activity	1	4

Table 1. Slave labour conditions.

<b>Human rights Notions</b>	<b>Frequency (Question 1)</b>	<b>Frequency (Question 2)</b>
Lack of freedom	8	10
Slave trade	1	9
Bad treatment	2	6
Colour discrimination	1	6

Table 2. Human rights perspective on slavery.

Table 1, on notions of *Slave labour conditions*, as already mentioned earlier in this section, indicates that forced labour is the most evident notion linked to the initial ideas on slavery given (n=9). This notion seems to be less evident in answers to question 2 (which was addressed to objective features of slavery), but it should be emphasised that it is implicit when students report the inhumane trade of slaves from Africa to work in Brazil (slave trade was considered as an autonomous notion in this frequency analysis). The same argument can also be applied to the mentions about hard, unpaid labour conditions, initially pointed out by two students but almost not existing in the second task. Several initial mentions on slave work in diverse activities increased with source tasks (A and D, directly focusing on that) when students referred to, for example, domestic work, sugar cane plantations and mills in Brazil.

Concerning the *Human rights perspective*, in Table 2, the notion more present in the students' answers is *lack of freedom* referred to by 8 students to the first question and by 10 students during their source analysis. The lack of freedom is stressed in the reports of many students like the one who stated,

“Slavery is something bad that differentiates human beings from each other, it's also lack of freedom and inhumanity.” (Informant 3)

In this category we included a stronger, more appropriate meaning when it appears explicitly linked to the notion of a person as property of another person; it increased a little during the source analysis on the slave trade, e.g. “the slaves were treated as non humans, they were like objects, they were evaluated to see whether they were worth anything - or not!” (Informant 9). The transatlantic *slave trade* organisation and the conditions in which the Africans were traded gained much more visibility during source analysis. *Bad treatment* related to slave labour (thus out of the trade situation) is more referred to when exploring the sources than when students initially express their conceptions. In the same way, *colour discrimination* against Africans is more frequently evoked when analysing the sources on slave trade and work in Brazil.

### 3.3. Giving significance to the Portuguese slave trade from Africa do Brazil

The third question, “What would be different and what would remain in the history of Brazil and Portugal if the Portuguese had not initiated the slave trade ...” intended to fuel a counterfactual reasoning as an ingredient for a powerful explanation concerning historical consequences of the issue at stake. Thus, data were analysed in broadly terms to look for historical plausibility and significance in the projections students made. Starting from this broad focus, the inductive analysis permitted to generate some conceptual patterns in the alternative scenarios displayed. Firstly, almost all students’ projections appeared as fixed predictions with no discussion of alternative scenarios; beyond that, it is possible to consider more or less elaborate patterns in terms of historical complexity and plausibility.

#### *a) Complex Scenarios*

As the most complex scenarios in terms of historical argumentation (not taking into account, for now, some cynicism they might convey), we selected two out of the 12 projections presented. The Informant 7 predicted that “Portuguese people would have gone to Brazil and this land would continue to be a colony of Portugal”, and Informant 3 hypothesised that “maybe the same would happen someday later, so luckily that happened at that time as now we know that such thing is inhumane”. The former seems to envisage the use of Portuguese free labour in Brazil (to fit economic needs) and in addition to guarantee the Portuguese domination. This argumentation could be discussed in the light of historical evidence, since (a) Portuguese settlements occurred in the non-populated islands of Madeira and Azores along the 15th-century, but (b) considering the demographic dimension it would be unrealistic to cover labour force needs in Brazil in the same way, besides c) several countries whose economies did not mainly rely on slave labour got political freedom. The latter conveys a more open alternative scenario (if not, maybe) although historical evidence shows that slavery (and its trade) had been practised for ages before and after such a transatlantic affair (e.g., during Roman Empire, which uses to be a well-known historical topic among students). Perhaps that student’s argumentation involves a tacit wish of justifying the slave labour force system in the past in the name of a ‘good conscience’.

#### *b) Simpler Alternative Projections*

Several other students predicted a single alternative future of that past without the slavery trade from Africa to Brazil. Some of those projections can also be discussed on historical grounds: two of them imagined the possible use of native slaves instead of Africans in Brazil, thus assigning a sense of inevitability to slavery in that context (perhaps considering the pressures driven by economic ambitions). This projection ignores that such scenario was the first, although failed tentative of Portuguese settlers to guarantee a convenient labour force in Brazil. Other two projections focused on negative consequences for the colonising country, “Portugal would not get so much richness at the time” (Informant 9), or “it would not exist so many things” (Informant 1).

This kind of inference could be contrasted with evidence on a faster and deeper techno-economic development of other countries in Europe not directly relying on a slavery system; from a human perspective, that argument may be overtly ethnocentric or rather might join a fresh approach in viewing slave labour as contributors to nations' development.

### *(c) Linear Plausibility Projections*

A third category of projections entails a more linear plausibility for the "if not..." challenge, once the alternatives given imply just a straightforward absence or reduction of Africans or slaves existence in Brazil due to eliminating the Afro-Brazilian slave trade factor, "there would not exist Brazilian slaves in Brazil" (Informant 4), "there would not exist so many slaves in Brazil" (Informant 6), "the Brazilians and the Portuguese would be much white-skinned" (Informant 10). These views might imply human right concerns about the slavery issue or ambiguous moral attitudes about ethnical diversity.

### *d) Utopian Visions*

Finally, two other projections imagined an alternative, utopian place ruled by social justice, "I believe that life in Portugal would be better, everyone would have the same rights" (Informant 2), or "human beings would be treated in a different way and that would persist through history" (Informant 13). Other students just imagined that "Brazil would not exist" (Informant 14) or "it would be different" (Informant 15), with no exploration of some objective, possible consequences in the light of history.

Independently of the level of complexity and plausibility in the scenarios given, we can also consider several orientations in the substantive consequences attributed to the slave trade factor. According to the students' projections, *if this did not occur...*

- Other ethnic groups would be enslaved.
- Free people labour would be used and colonial status would be kept in Brazil.
- There would be less economic development.
- Social justice would be greater.
- There would exist less ethnic diversity.

The first two possibilities are both oriented toward meeting labour force needs, but they give opposite solutions for that, the former focusing on maintenance of slavery, the latter pointing to the use of free people labour. While one presuppose the inevitability of slavery at the time, the other suggests the political (although ethnocentric) advantage for skipping out of the slavery system. The third possibility stresses the negative economic consequences without the transatlantic slave trade and seems to align with the idea of inevitability of slavery. The fourth possibility shows a main concern with human values and rights, although in non-objective grounds. The fifth possibility focuses on peoples' skin colour, perhaps acknowledging a less frequent miscegenation in Brazil and in Portugal. The last section will reflect a little further on these findings.

#### 4. Final reflections

The majority of students did not come blank-minded to the end of academic year in relation to slavery and the slave trade from Africa to Brazil practiced by the Portuguese in 16<sup>th</sup> century, as they showed when answering to a first question about the issue. Concerning the research question on ideas about slavery that Portuguese students construct with the use of their history textbook, data from this small group of participants allow to answer that their initial ideas on slavery appear to be somehow enlarged or clarified when (re)interpreting textbook sources (from generic or tautological ideas to more detailed and situated ones) in most cases.

The familiarity with textbook sources factor was not ‘tested’, but indeed the students gained awareness of the institutionalised slave trade and the inhuman conditions in which Africans were transported to Brazil when confronted with sources provided by their textbook and reproduced in the questionnaire.

Students also developed a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse activities in which enslaved people were forced to work, from sugarcane plantations and mills to domestic work. This process helped students make more contextualised inferences about the labour conditions of enslaved people, which were not only linked to hard labour in the fields and mills but also to other areas of life.

Also, they could develop a more substantiated picture of diverse activities in which the slaves were forced to work – from sugarcane plantations and mills to domestic work. This process might fuel more contextualised inferences about slave labour conditions, which were not only linked to painful labour in farms and mills. Thus, in both aspects the sources contributed to students constructing more diversified and realistic ideas of the slave trade and labour in their more or less cruel aspects.

Nonetheless, resistance and cultural dimensions in daily life of slaves so as to be considered as active human beings and not just passive victims are absent either in sources as in the students’ ideas. These dimensions are visible in the current 8<sup>th</sup> grade textbooks, adopted in 2022, which present a perspective of struggle and resistance on the part of African peoples, through the introduction of textual and iconographic sources, such as the “Quilombos” (places where thousands of enslaved people managed to live in freedom after fleeing the Portuguese colonists) and dance practices such as “Capoeira” of African origin (a martial art disguised as a dance), which enslaved people used to train and prepare to fight against their persecutors after escaping.

However, themes of resistance and the cultural lives of enslaved people—as active human beings rather than passive victims—were absent in both the sources and the students’ ideas. These themes are now more visible in the current Year 8 textbooks adopted in 2022, which present a perspective of struggle and resistance on the part of African peoples. The textbooks include sources on the “Quilombos” (settlements where



enslaved people who had fled lived in freedom), and African-origin practices like “Capoeira” (a martial art disguised as a dance), which enslaved people used to train and prepare to fight against their persecutors after escaping.

This specific findings in this study appear from those in Gevaerd (2016) study with Brazilian students or in Epstein (2009) study with ethnically diverse students in USA, although the accounts on the slaves as victims tend to be similar across countries.

It made be said in this study a similar focus should be considered to consequences of slavery trade for Africa. Concerning the historical context, it appears poorly tackled by students, although they sometimes allude to economic and social dimensions. It must be noted that the textbook sources also offer a quite hazy historical context they rather focus on objective practices of slavery and slave trade – which can be useful as it happens to be impressive for students. However, this should not prevent educators from engaging students in more challenging tasks related to historical thinking.

The counterfactual exercise proposed in the final question intended to provoke students in that direction. In a first approach, the analysis revealed that students’ projections mainly rely on a predictive pattern, the hypothetical reasoning made of more than one scenario being almost absent.

Exercising an historical thinking open to weighing several possibilities in terms of causes and consequences of a given state of affairs might be desirable to foster historical consciousness in terms of relating past, present, and horizons of expectations (Rüsen, 1993; 2001; 2015). In relation to the research question on how students interpret the textbook sources, already partially given above, we can add that in spite of an apparent superficial source interpretation students made their inferences based on what seemed to be more significant for them. At the end, textbooks sources contributed to reinforce or expand the initial ideas expressed by the majority of students.

Even in this very group of participants it is possible to hypothesise the emergence of diverse and ambivalent ideas about slavery. Taking into account the whole set of answers given by each student, almost all condemn or complain about the slaves’ conditions of living, but they assume diverse postures about the slavery system when imagining counter consequences tacitly viewed as significant: there are those who (a) for human rights concerns counter pose an egalitarian world with social justice, or give somehow objective alternatives for supplying material needs; (b) tacitly justify the system at that time presupposing the inevitability of slavery; (c) accept that system in the name of economic development, perhaps presupposing the inevitability of slavery too. How far are those ideas social constructions or make part of the human nature? Some of these postures toward slavery have been discussed in historical grounds, as for example the question of inevitability of slavery and its role in economic development (Caldeira, 2013). Although it is difficult to be totally convincing about these issues, in most countries slavery and slave trade is not legal anymore. For the part of history education, at least it

can contribute to highlight in historical grounds the possibilities of building more awareness of human rights (and of other rights) among the young (and not so young) people. In the project of which this preliminary study is part, it is intended to carry on by involving students from more diverse cultural settings, in Portugal and Brazil, and apply written tasks and follow-up interviews in order to simultaneously better understand their ideas and challenge their views on this theme. Enlarging the students' perspectives about 'dark sides' of history (such as the slave trade) might be a way to develop themselves as human beings. We consider that much more research about relationships between students' historical ideas and those provided by textbooks is required namely in educational settings where students tend to be forgotten as active textbook readers and, therefore, as relevant agents of their own history learning.

## 5. Acknowledgment

This work is funded by CIEd – Research Centre on Education, Institute of Education, University of Minho, projects UIDB/01661/2020, through national funds of FCT/MCTES-PT, and is funded by CITCEM – Research Centre Transdisciplinary, Culture and Memory, Faculty of Letter, University of Porto, projects UIDB/0459/2020, through national funds of FCT/MCTES-PT.

## 6. Contributor Role Taxonomy (CRediT)

Conceptualisation: Isabel Barca; Ana Paula Squinelo; Glória Solé; Data curation: Ana Paula Squinelo; Glória Solé; Formal analysis: Glória Solé; Isabel Barca; Funding acquisition: Glória Solé; Isabel Barca Investigation: Glória Solé; Isabel Barca; Ana Paula Squinelo; Methodology: Glória Solé; Isabel Barca; Writing - original draft: Glória Solé; Isabel Barca; Writing - review & editing: Glória Solé; Isabel Barca.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This is the case of a few PhD theses and MA dissertations presented in Portuguese language in both countries. The earliest study, an MA dissertation presented by Moreira (2004), looked for year 7 students' inferences when analysing a set of textbook sources about medieval agricultural changes in Europe; she found that students revealed diversified levels concerning historical evidence and, in addition, that they tended to reason at higher degrees when supported by written sources than by visual and graphic ones (although they declared to prefer the latter). In the same overall approach, a few PhD theses presented in Portugal and in Brazil (e.g., Afonso, 2014) focused on the scrutiny of students' understandings of textbook sources and accounts.

<sup>2</sup> In the same wavelength, the Portuguese historian L. M. Duarte in his preface to Russell's book (2017) on the slave trade, acknowledges the logical power of using counterfactual possibilities when discussing the slave trade. In the history education field, a former study (Cainelli & Barca, *apud* Cainelli, Pinto & Solé, 2016) had already used a counterfactual question to explore students' ideas on permanence and change ("what if the Portuguese had not arrived to Brazil?"). They found that some students considered the alternative future of that past as a permanent and untouched nature and way of native life in 'Brazil' while some others hypothesised somehow more plausible scenarios.

<sup>3</sup> See Cainelli, Pinto, & Solé (2016), pp. 128-130.

<sup>4</sup> Textbook used by the students: Cirne, J., & Henriques, M. (2016). *Viagem na História* 8. Porto: Areal Editores. Textbooks in Portugal are adopted for six years, and this textbook was in force at this school until 2021-2022.

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