

Historical consciousness and social representation: a study on the perceptions of young students about Brazil *1

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Abstract

In this article, we analyze the perceptions of young students about Brazil, starting from the dialogue between the historical consciousness and social representations theories. Through the production of written narratives, we aim to identify the worldviews which our participants use to guide themselves over time and to envision their future. Therewith, we intend to value the mental constructions of the subjects in the school context contributing to the strengthening of research in the field of Teaching of History. This study was carried out in a public state school located in the Butantã neighborhood, in the city of São Paulo/SP, Brazil, in 2017. It was part of it 127 students, between the ages of 14 and 18, males and females, distributed in five groups of the 1st grade of High School. The data was obtained through a questionnaire and analyzed accordingly with the assumptions of Grounded theory with the help of IRAMUTEQ. This enabled the construction of a dendrogram composed of three classes which implied in the identification of representations about the present time (class 1), articulations with the past (class 2), and projections for the future (class 3). Under the results, we evidenced ideas related to the perception of a country in crisis, with a prejudiced past and with a future, contradictorily, promising. Once worked in class, these ideas can contribute to the formation of the historical consciousness of the students.

Keywords

Teaching of History – Historical consciousness – Social representations – Young people – Public school.

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Introduction

In this article, we analyze the perceptions of high school students about Brazil, starting from a dialogue between the theories of historical consciousness and social representations. Through the production of written narratives, we aim to identify the worldviews which these young group use to guide themselves over time and envision their future. Therewith, we intend to value the mental constructions of subjects in school context, contributing, therefore, with the strengthening of the research in the Teaching of History field.

Derived from an ample discussion, the Teaching of History consolidated itself as a field of studies and research when it highlighted themes related to teachers formation, production of school knowledge, usage of textbooks and their different languages, curriculum reform, besides the implementation of educational policies (GUIMARÃES, 2012; OLIVEIRA, 2003). Following a more recent perspective, we privilege here, the study of the historical consciousness, embodied through a field research from which we get involve with a specific educational context with the purpose of unveiling, at least in part, the teaching-learning relationship of History in the classroom (CAIMI, 2015).

Considering the need to incorporate not only the teachers but also the students as subjects of the constitution of school History, we use the social representations theory, social psychology approach which, in the Teaching of History, allow us to “comprehend the construction of daily knowledge, its ways of functioning and usage in daily life, in order to understand the processes that are the basis of changes in thought and social practices” (ALMEIDA; SANTOS, 2011, p.288).

Historical consciousness in Rüsen’s theory

Under the perspective of the German historian Jörn Rüsen (2001, 2015), historical consciousness can be understood as a universally human element that, rooted in the historicity of life itself, denotes a set of actions or intentions in time. In this sense, historical consciousness is a cognitive process that establishes an immediate relationship between past and present, ensuring projections of the future. In addition, it contributes to the formation of identity, a phenomenon capable of shaping the “world of human life” and providing the self with “continuity and consistency” in a cultural relationship with his or hers group (RÜSEN, 2009, p. 174).

As an inherent need to the human being, the historical consciousness enables the interpretation of our experience in time, favoring the construction of historical thought which, inserted in a logic narrative, structures and gives meaning to the historical events. Object of Rüsen’s disciplinary matrix, the historical thought constitutes itself in the relationship between: factors that include the dimensions of practical life and specialized science; practices which denote the communicative structures of the thought, and; levels of meaning which denote the possibilities of attribution of meaning to the past.

Therefore, the historical thought can be defined as a process of methodization History of whose result conducts us to a type of scientific knowledge. Availing from Assis’s observations (2010), we can synthetize that from the methodized historical thought, the

science of History deals with truths based on empirical, normative and narrative criteria, favoring “interpretations of the human world subjected to complementation, criticism and overcoming by other interpretations” (ASSIS, 2010, p. 27).

Considered as one of the most complex operations of thought, the interpretation “connects the facts of the past” through a “controllable intersubjectivity” which invests it of an “explanatory function”, thus producing the “historical knowledge”, presented in narrative form (RÜSEN, 2015, p. 171-186). In turn, the narrative has argumentative elements that evidence the scientific character of History and its “communicative relevance”, though they attribute different meanings to the experience of this nature. Consequently, History can be based on the models: traditional, whose meaning is “one and lasting”; exemplar, summed up in the maximum “Master History of life”; critic, based on the denial of prior guidance; and genetic, whose meaning is acquired in change, allowing the past to be connected with different ways of living.

Related to this thought, historical consciousness is evidenced through the different levels of meaning and interpreted as a set of ideas which comes from the lack of orientation in time. As a specific type of memory, its operations are only perceived “when it is recognized their ‘insertion in life’: the reason they occur, which results they achieve in the daily practical life of those who perform them” (RÜSEN, 2001, p. 55).

Through the different levels of constitution of meaning, historical consciousness crosses Rüsen’s disciplinary matrix and reveals the vital process of historical culture. The first of them is the *functional*, whose constitution of meaning occurs in a previous way, for instance, the language. Opposite to it, the *reflective* level emerges, which appropriates and interferes in the first to subjectively construct new meanings. The third level, *pragmatic*, operates a mediation between the previous ones, this way, “previous decisions are incorporated into the production of what can be a historical knowledge with meaning” (RÜSEN, 2015, p. 97).

For Rüsen (2001, 2015), historical consciousness is the very foundation of History science and, in this sense, it must be analyzed as a “phenomenon of the vital world”, that is, “as a form of human consciousness that is immediately related to practical human life”. His presupposition is “the thesis that man has to act intentionally”, according to his action and passion, to relate to nature, with others and with himself or herself (RÜSEN, 2001, p. 57). This “intentional surplus of human action” denotes a distinction between two types of time consciousness that, although dichotomous, are mixed in the projections that we make: the “experience” and the “intention” (RÜSEN, 2001, p. 58).

Articulated, these elements (experience and intention) compose the “orientation of human action (and suffering), a mental operation in which man seeks to adapt his intentions to act according to his experience in time. Historical consciousness is constituted, therefore, through the “intellectual transformation of natural time into human time”, “natural time” being understood as contingent events and “human time” as human representations about life itself (RÜSEN, 2001, p. 60).

With this brief panorama, we wanted to show the relevance of the Rüsenian thought regarding the productions whose focus remains not only on the processes of historical knowledge acquisition, but also on how these knowledges can relate to the practical life

of subjects in school context. Next, we enter the theory of social representations in an attempt to establish a dialogue between both perspectives.

Moscovici's theory of social representations

The social representations theory (SRT) originates in the work *La psychanalyse, son image et son public* (1961), by the Romanian psychologist Serge Moscovici. In it, the scholar attributes to common belief the value of an object that, originated in science, takes on particular forms in culture. Thus, the different currents of thought that considered the popularization of scientific knowledge as a movement capable of devaluing or misrepresenting science itself were rejected (ALMEIDA; SANTOS, 2011).

According to Sá (2002, p. 29, the author's highlight), "the term *social representations* designates both a set of phenomena and the concept that encompasses them and the theory built to explain them, identifying a vast field of psychosociological studies". Paraphrasing Moscovici, the scholar realizes that, despite of the ease with that we can capture the reality of social representations, its conceptual understanding is more complex, considering that the creator of the field himself "resisted presenting an accurate definition" with fear that this attempt would reduce its conceptual scope (SÁ, 2002, p. 30). This positioning contributed, on the other hand, to the multiplicity of perspectives that give the social representations field a diversity of objects.

This phenomenon presupposes the perception of the world from the construction of ideas that seek to respond to the "stimuli of the physical or almost physical environment, in which we live" (MOSCOVICI, 2011, p. 30). The processing of this information generates a type of understanding that lets slip some *obviousness* such as the transience of knowledge or the perception that our reactions are directly related to the community to which we belong.

For Moscovici (2011, p. 38), the representations define themselves as:

[...] social entities, with a life of their own, communicating with each other, mutually opposing each other, and changing in harmony with the course of life; fading, just to emerge again under new appearances.

With this, the intellectual suggests that:

[...] far from being passive recipients, [people and groups] they think for themselves, produce and communicate incessantly their own and specific representations and solutions to the issues they pose. (MOSCOVICI, 2011, p. 45).

In a thinking society, such representations are inserted in the contrast between two universes that do not possess the same specific structure and, as a result, can be perceived as representation or science. In the first, it is highlighted the consensual universe, whose importance, warns Moscovici (2011), is to make familiar something that is unfamiliar. In this aspect, the representations evidence "images, ideas and languages shared by a certain group [that] always seem to dictate the direction and the initial expedients with which the

group tries to settle with the unfamiliar” (MOSCIVICI, 2011, p. 57). On the opposite side, there is a reified universe through which a known object is used to elaborate the rational reconstruction, therefore, turning the familiar into unfamiliar.

In the consensual universe, cognitive operations that result in representations are marked by the processes of anchoring and objectification. These mechanisms act in our particular sphere, ensuring the comprehension and interpretation of a given object, which enable us to reproduce and to control it (MOSCOVICI, 2011).

Anchoring can be defined as “a process which transforms something strange and disturbing, that intrigues us, in our particular system of categories and compares it with a paradigm of a category which we think to be appropriate” (MOSCOVICI, 2011, p. 61). In this process, we choose paradigms or prototypes stored in our memory that allow us to establish comparisons and, consequently, attribute a positive or negative relationship with someone or something. On the other hand, the nomination is related to the need to identify things and beings “adjusting them in a dominant social representation” (MOSCOVICI, 2011, p. 68).

Being a process “more active than anchoring”, the objectification denotes that the “uncommon and imperceptible to a generation, becomes familiar and obvious to the following” (MOSCOVICI, 2011, p. 71). In other words, the objectification is the mechanism which enables the materialization of abstractions, favorizing the discovery of the iconic quality of an idea and the reproduction of a concept in image. In despite of not all the images being susceptible to representation, whether because of the difficulty of access or for being a tabu, the process of selection enables them to integrate a figurative nucleus that evidences a set of ideas. To have meaning, this set must be accepted and, afterwards, assimilated by society. This way, “the images become elements of reality, instead of elements of thought” (MOSCOVICI, 2011, p. 74).

In short, the objectification occurs through selection, formation of a figurative scheme and naturalization. This mechanism is completed with the anchoring, that is, the everyday use of the social representation of a given object. Developed in parallel and in context, the separation between the referred schemes is, merely, “analytical, somewhat artificial, but methodologically necessary” (CARDOSO, 2012, p. 46).

Dialogues between the historical consciousness theory and the social representations theory

Some attempts to establish a dialogue between the theories of social consciousness and social representations have already occurred. For Alves (2006, p. 13), for instance, it is possible to evaluate the construction of historical consciousness “starting from the encounter/confrontation in the classroom of different knowledges derived from the common belief and the science of History, through the analysis of the social representations constituted by their subjects: students and teachers”. In an ethnographic study conducted with young students, the researcher noticed the realization of Rösen’s disciplinary matrix during the learning process, notwithstanding the applicability of the substantive concepts seized was different from what teachers expected, since it depends on the social representations of each group.

Corroborating with this idea, Ribeiro (2006, p. 197) pointed out that, in the elaboration of “spontaneous concepts”, the ideas expressed by the students resemble to a “concept impregnated with personal experience, of which the child only acquires consciousness relatively late, when capable of defining it in meaningful words”. The researcher obtained this conclusion after:

[...] identify and analyze aspects of the historical learning process through the representations built by the children about concepts and information worked in class, in activities with memory and material culture. (RIBEIRO, 2006, p. 19).

Moscovici’s thought as well as Rösen’s theory suggest the construction of knowledges that can be understood as *phenomena of the vital world*, that is, paved on the daily life experience and oriented by the production of behaviors, practices and constitution of meanings. Inserted in a temporal relation, the representation of a contemporary phenomenon to the participants of the research can reveal a set of knowledges that influence their ways of articulating the past, present and future dimensions, and, consequently, the way of perceiving History.

On one hand, the social representations are defined as “a form of knowledge socially elaborated”, as “product and mental activity process” (ABRIC, 2001, p. 13). In turn, historical consciousness is found “embedded in procedures and institutions, in which the human beings receive their cultural trait or [...] in which they are ‘built’” (RÜSEN, 2014, p. 100). Together, they can function as a “system of reality interpretation” (theory of social representations) in a “temporal” perspective (theory of historical consciousness) that contributes to the orientation. The approximations between both theories can be evidenced from their objects and functions, according to the following table:

Table 1 - Comparison between social representations and historical consciousness

	Social representations	Historical Consciousness
Objects	Common belief	Memory
Functions	To Explain the reality (facilitating the social communication)	To contemplate the experience of vital praxis (needing to be communicated)
	To define identities (safeguarding the groups specificities)	To form identities (from the pretentions of the group recognizing)
	To allow the orientation and justification (the behaviors and practices)	To allow the orientation (of human actions in time)

Source: Own elaboration based on Abric (2001) and Rösen (2014).

In the representations field, the common belief is an object originated in science that takes particular forms in culture. Similarly, historical consciousness has in memory (or in the culture memorization) an object that can be determined “by the producers,

recipients and mediators of the historical formation of meaning, through the ways of its representation and through the means and institutions in its mediation” (RÜSEN, 2014, p. 101-102). In both cases, people and groups think for themselves and, this way, exhibit answers to the problems which are presented to them” (MOSCOVICI, 2011). Therefore, we can affirm with Rüsen (2014, p. 103) that, from the ideas of the common belief or memory, “human beings experiment, motivate and standardize, legitimate and criticize, transmit and modify their individual or collective vital praxis”. By operationalizing these categories (common belief and memory), we find different functions, some of which are equivalent and that will guide the discussions of the data analyzed ahead.

Method

In this study, we follow the assumptions of the qualitative research, which advocates the need to observe the object in its natural environment and whose abstractions are constructed throughout the research. Thus, we were interested in the ways which the subjects experienced, interpreted, and attributed senses to the observed phenomenon (BOGDAN; BIKLEN, 1994). Even working with the universe of “meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values and attitudes”, we were also inspired by the universe of quantitative indicators, which enabled a “mathematical description” of the “thought” of our subjects (MINAYO, 2009, p. 21; MINAYO; SANCHES, 1993).

The research was carried out in a state public school, located in Butantã neighborhood, in the city of São Paulo/SP, in 2017. It was part of it 127 students between the ages of 14 and 18, males and females, distributed in five groups of the 1st year of High School. The school is composed of young people who declare themselves brown (42.1%), white (27.4%), black (20.1%), yellow (6.7%) indigenous (3.7%). It should be noted that these participants come from families composed of for or more members (75%) and have a monthly income of up to three minimum wages (81.1%).

The data collection was carried out with the authorization of coordinators and teachers. Thus, we applied an instrument formed by 11 opened questions, among which, we sought to investigate the students’ ideas of Brazil today, emphasizing the way they perceived themselves in this temporal dimension. Next, we tried to understand what kind of phenomenon or past event could be evoked to explain the present situation. Finally, we encouraged participants to develop perspectives for the future, both in relation to their country and their role in this process.

Inspired by the studies of Alves (2006) and Ribeiro (2006), in addition to the theoretical perspectives of Moscovici (2011) and Rüsen (2001, 2009, 2010, 2014, 2015), the research instrument aimed at the construction of narratives which contemplated the temporal dimensions (past, present and future). With this, we wanted to test our hypothesis that perspectives of the current moment, and their political, economic, social and cultural dimension, could influence the processes of anchoring historical events, as well as the construction of historical consciousness of the young students. Moreover, the instrument enabled to introduce new quantitative elements through which it was possible “to identify the organization of responses; to expose the explanatory factors or

specificities of a sampling, or between samplings; to identify and situate the positions of the groups studied in relation to the explanatory axes” (ABRIC, 2001a, p. 56).

Based on the Grounded theory of Strauss and Corbin (2008), the data analysis sought to establish concepts, delimiting their properties and dimensions in order to comprehend the phenomenon studied. The answers presented to the research instrument were collected in a single corpus – called *Perceptions about Brazil* – and submitted to IRAMUTEQ. With the aid of this computational program, we performed a Descending Hierarchical Classification (DHC), a type of multivariate analysis that enables the construction of categories based on the frequency of words, whose graphic representation is a dendrogram (CAMARGO; JUSTO, 2013).

Results

By submitting the textual *corpus* to IRAMUTEQ, the software fragmented the answers into 502 text segments (TS), of which 415 (82.67%) were considered in the analysis. The text segments presented an average occurrence of 33.63 words, whose frequency in the *corpus* were of 7.55 times. For the construction of the dendrogram bellow, we considered the 10 more frequent words (f) and power of association to the class – chi-square (χ^2).

Graph 1 - DHC of the *corpus Perceptions about Brazil*

Class 1 Present 137 TS (33.01%)			Class 2 Past 110 TS (26.51%)			Class 3 Future 168 TS (40,48%)		
Words	f	χ^2	Words	f	χ^2	Words	f	χ^2
Situation	54	74.16	Slavery	20	49.46	To study	70	82.82
Affect	43	61.00	Black	13	37.21	To imagine	28	37.49
Crisis	45	53.72	Past	34	28.76	To improve	33	34.80
Brazil	92	45.08	Racism	14	28.38	To work	40	34.76
Expensive	13	27.23	To exist	15	28.11	College	22	34.16
To steal	21	26.17	Prejudice	20	21.40	Future	28	31.81
Bad	31	26.01	To show	9	17.75	To try	21	29.14
Stay	23	25.69	To favor	10	17.51	To help	28	26.95
Money	24	20.19	Motive	7	15.58	Study	16	21.16
Difficult	20	20.04	Violence	10	15.01	Good	41	19.90

Source: Dendrogram produced with the aid of IRAMUTEQ.

The dendrogram above reveals that the *corpus of Perceptions about Brazil* suffered two partitions. The first one isolated the class 3, separating it from the others. The second one originated classes 1 and 2. In this division, we observed that the most significant was class 3 with 40.48% of the TS considered in the analysis; followed by class 1, with 33.01%; and, class 2, with 26.51%. Let us look at these categories in more detail below.

Representations of the Present

According to class 1, we observed the predominance of answers whose country representation was articulated with the present, evidenced, above all, the noun “situation” (f = 54):

The situation in Brazil is bad, even though I have almost no idea of how it is, but from what the media says it is broken. (student 12, male 15 years old).

The situation in Brazil is not the best, it is a mess, the politicians talk, and do nothing, too much robbery, vandalism, and disrespect etc. (student 72, male, 14 years old).

Currently, in Brazil’s situation, there is a lot of corruption and thefts, because of the government we are in an awfully hard crisis. Many people are unemployed, homeless and that is what the government said that would change and for better, we are still waiting. (student 270, female, 16 years old).

Society nowadays has shown some behaviors that leave us outraged. Situations of corruption, teenagers using drugs and many deaths, we are passing through a critical condition and we must overcome it. (student 271, male, 14 years old).

In despite of the misinformation or superficiality of the answers to deal with contemporary issues, the students built several ideas, although fragmented, about the current situation in Brazil. We observe that the narratives favor a complex moment, whose events permeate situations of political and economic order, in which corruption and dishonesty predominates; and social problems, in which violence and drug abuse contribute to the configuration of a situation anchored in the idea of “crisis” (f = 45). As they intensify, the described episodes “worsen” Brazilians lives, “affecting” (f = 43), in some cases, themselves, as they say:

It is not directly affecting my reality or my family, at least I think so. But I know that the situation is not cool. (student 12, male, 15 years old).

The current situation in Brazil has been affecting every family, I can say mine too, there are people waiting for a job vacancy, this crisis does not help, right? We are in a difficult phase. Because the government is doing fine since they are stealing. (student 270, female, 16 years old).

It affects me in several ways, for example, security, I can leave home and be shot or everything that I have worked for get robbed. (student 324, male, 15 years old).

It affects the prices of everything because we pay a lot of taxes and things should be cheaper, because we pay a lot of taxes and outside Brazil things are way more cheaper, because out there they do not steal like here in Brazil. (student 296, male, 14 years old).

Some participants remain oblivious of recent events and prefer to agree with the discourse that circulates, possibly, in their cycle of coexistence. Others, however, highlight more specific situations, such as unemployment, increased household expenses and insecurity. In a “radical” conception, the representations outlined above could be understood as a “creation” resulted from social practices, that is, a “reflection of the way of production in which the individuals are inserted” (ABRIC, 2001b, p. 196).

Despite of the importance of this aspect, the representations also depend on cultural factors, besides of the factors related to the system of norms and values, as well as to the subject’s activity (ABRIC, 2001b). Mutually engendered, social practices and representations can be transformed starting from extern circumstances, understood as “any state of the world outside of the social representation” (FLAMENT, 2001, p. 45). Thus, we mean that, although it is understood as a characteristic element of the present, of the set of representative ideas of Brazil, the perceptions related to a conception of “crisis” are flexible and can be transformed into different situations.

On the one hand, these ideas express a popular type of knowledge (or the common belief) related to the consensual universe which characterizes the social representations (ÁLVARO; GARRIDO, 2006; CHAVES; SILVA, 2011). On the other hand, we cannot disregard being different “forms and functions reasoning an historical knowledge in the daily, practical life” (RÜSEN, 2010, p. 32). After all, historical consciousness is constituted not only in the school environment, but also in spaces marked by the expression of the “historical culture” for instance the cinema, theater, museum, television, among other types of media (CARDOSO, 2008, TATIAUX-GUILLON, 2011, RÜSEN, 2014).

Articulations with the past

Class 2 grouped a set of reflections around the “past” (f = 34) of Brazil. Regarding this temporal dimension, whose period was not determined in the research instrument, the teens presented several images, many of which permeated the idea of “slavery” (f = 20). Asked what the past would be like, we have obtained answers such as:

I do not think it was pleasant, because it had many slavery issues and all, but I believe that the organization was better (student 12, male, 15 years old).

It was greener and with more indigenous people. And after the colonization they suffered and then came slavery. In Brazil’s past many did not have a happy ending. (students 76, male, 14 years old).

When comparing Brazil's colonial past to the current moment, the students are emphatic about the superiority of the existing problems of that time. Undoubtedly, the slavery phenomenon was so overwhelming that its effects can still be perceived today, either through "racism" (f = 14) or other types of "prejudice" (f = 20) as pointed out:

In past Brazil there was a lot of slavery, much more racism, etc., whereas today's Brazil, slavery has diminished, however racism still exists. (student 28, female, 15 years old).

To me, Brazil is a country that will never change. We are in the 21st century and there is still racism, prejudice against religions and slavery. (student 250, female, 14 years old).

A lot of racial discrimination, the prejudice predominates in Brazil nowadays. Many white people when they see a black person on the street immediately think it is a thief, a criminal and such [...] from the past to this day, the prejudice is not over. (student 268, female, 14 years old).

The attitudes of ethnic, religious and gender hostility pointed out in the narratives are perceived through a learning that goes beyond the school education. The students reveal personal experiences which make possible for them to talk about topics directly connect to the social groups which they are part of. Thus, they mention the treatment granted to the "black" (f = 13), and, also to the "woman" who even though, today, "work to the labor market, because are not considered so inferior (student 319, female, 15 years old), there was period in which they lived "without the right to nothing" (student 65, female, 14 years old), because "they had no active voice in society" (student 11, female, 14 years old). By endorsing this speech, they reveal the "prejudice" (f = 20) and "violence" (f = 10) perpetrated against LGBT and indigenous people. In this sense, they draw up comparisons between past and present events:

In Brazil, many things are happening, [...] formerly the attacks were against religious people like the Jews. The relationship is that nowadays, it happens the same thing, attacks against religions, but beyond that, there are attacks against gay, poor, black, all because of their hair, etc. (student 26, female, 15 years old).

Prejudice was seen almost as if a person was gay or an aberration, because for people in the past everything was about assaulting, killing, etc. Now, it has changed only a little, because there are laws, even though, there are people who do not follow the law and they usually keep the prejudice of before. (student 41, female, 15 years old).

[...] formerly who commanded here were the indigenous, people but the Portuguese arrived killing, raping, and stealing and today there is still the same thing. (student 34, male, 14 years old).

To the extent that they reveal the continuities or, at least, unresolved situations of our History, these historical agents are used to explain the current situation of Brazil,

mainly its social and cultural aspect. Besides the referred agents, it is necessary to mention the phenomena and characters remembered in the narratives, such as:

The coups, riots, the violence. With the coup, it came to be laws and norms. They negatively favored because the world is more violent. (student 267, others, 15 years old).

Getúlio Vargas, if I am not mistaken, it was him who did the economic crisis in the past with the labor laws [...] The relation is that the society and the government have influenced many things in the population. [...] They negatively favored because they are not doing anything to put an end to this violence. (student 79, female, 15 years old).

Dictatorship, wars, awful government in which only the rich people voted. Because it is similar, because even today, women do not have the same fairness, and the rich people have more rights. (student 323, female, 15 years old).

Eneias, Bolsonaro, Lula, Dilma and World War II, Brazil has fought. [...] I wish they let some of these people in the shit Hitler made [...] unfortunately there are still others like him [...] who wants another war because of the skin color [?], Nobody. These racists as Hitler, will never come to power again, that is something positive. (student 251, male, 15 years old).

In these narratives, we noticed the mention to facts which, although are explained equivocally or superficially – when there are explanations –, exhibit a more recent panorama of History. These facts evolve political events, as the coup in 1964 and the dictatorship in Brazil, as well as the World War II and German Nazism – even if mentioned in a veiled way. Parallely, it emerges characters such as Getúlio Vargas, Lula, Dilma and Hitler, inserted in the narratives in a less articulated way, without an explanation of their roles, for example. Although the slavery past and its effects are recalled more frequently, topics with a greater temporal proximity such as those mentioned above, were also evoked to justify a specific moment: the “crisis” (f = 45) in Brazil.

Projections for the future

Finally, the class 3 pointed out ideas related to the “future” (f = 28). In this moment, we sought to understand not only how the young participants envisioned the future of Brazil, but, mainly, how they put themselves in this exercise of reflection. Among the projects of personal order, it stood out the desire of obtaining a well-succeeded professional career, initiated by studies, and culminating in a good job, stood out. In addition, the students revealed the longing to raise a family and acquire their own assets, such as a house and car. The strategy for this is observed in the use of the most frequent word (f = 70) and greater power of association to the class (x² = 82.82): “study”.

I see myself married, with my home, my car, my motorcycle, I do not want to be in Brazil, I intend to be with financially well. [...] I am studying, I will start to work so I can have the money to accomplish that. (student 78, female, 15 years old).

As a father, with a family, working and having my own home. [...] Studying, taking a course, and learning. (student 47, male, 15 years old).

Although they consider their studies as an important element in the fulfillment of these desires, the teens did not fail to consider the difficulties, unrelated to their efforts, mainly due to the economic and social conjunctures of the country:

If it continues this way, I find myself having a hard time with money. If my dream works out, I will be finishing medical school and researching, maybe living abroad. [...] Working hard and giving my best. I study every day after school, I intend to take a course in 3rd year of High School to try the entrance exam, the famous ENEM. And go to college. (student 11, female, 14 years old).

With today's country we cannot tell because things only get worse to the people, but I want to be working and financially stable. [...] Studying. (student 306, male, 15 years old).

Regarding the expectations related to Brazil in the future, we observe that, now, the uncertainties about the current moment have given occasion to the recognition of a complex situation, permeated by difficulties that cannot "continue":

If it continues this way it will be practically uninhabitable, but if there are changes in laws and give the citizen the possibility to go out on the streets, at least without fear. (student 33, male, 14 years old).

If it continues the way it is, people will be poorer, and those who are already rich will become wealthier, like mayors and congressmen. (student 26, female, 15 years old).

If it continues this way Brazil's economy will sink, education and health will definitely be set aside. (student 283, female, 14 years old).

Again, these projections seem to be associated to social problems, such as urban violence and economic inequality. Furthermore, it is also evidenced the fear of governmental projects, as the social security and High School reforms. Therefore, in the students' opinion, it is needed to have changes capable of rebuilding the country. In this sense, a series of improvements related to health, education and housing are suggested when questioned about what they would do if they were the presidents:

I would make a radical change in the public education in Brazil, invest much more in security and the well-being of the citizens, I would improve public health which is precarious. And most importantly, I would hear the people, do the impossible so anyone could harm themselves and live together in harmony. (student 11, female, 14 years old).

Firstly, I would change the entire the government, to end the corruption, take the homeless off the streets and welcome them and give them the rights every Brazilian have, invest public education and the country. (student 318, female, 14 years old).

I would invest in more education and make tougher laws for crimes that I find repugnant, but, wow, what a trip: me, president. (student 12, male, 15 years old).

Even when presenting humorous answers to the hypothetical situation which led them to think about their futures, the young participants expressed serious opinions capable of revealing situations which afflict the daily life of the Brazilian population. These answers reveal, above all, the dissatisfaction with several kinds of inequality experienced by a significant part of the group surveyed, whether they are related to economic, cultural, or social aspects. Comparing the individual and collective expectations of the future, we observe somewhat contradictory ideas. On the one hand, although the recognition of the present difficulties, the students project their individual future as successful. Conversely, the country in which they will be facing even more problematic situations. This finding can suggest, that even if subtly, the student's difficulty in seeing himself as an active subject of History.

Discussions

From the dialogue between the theories of historical consciousness and social representations, we analyze the perceptions of young students on Brazil. In this sense, we peer narratives that revealed a set of ideas centered in recent events, but which permeated distinct temporalities, articulating knowledges of the past and establishing projections of the future. These perceptions were converted into the formation of a "human temporal consciousness, in which the experience of the past as History [was] interpreted to the present" (RÜSEN, 2014, p. 97).

In general, the students have shown interest in responding the questionnaire, even though they did not present a mastery of the contents evoked. This positioning was configured as a necessity – we could say, a commitment – of "correctly evaluating the beings and objects, of fully comprehending the reality" (MOSCOVICI, 2011, p.30). In doing so, the teens produced narratives that we consider historical, in view of the updating of a past experience connected in a relative and significant way with the present, with the purpose of establishing orientation in time (RÜSEN, 2010).

As an example of this cognitive process, we can highlight the setbacks made by the students who have mobilized in the past themes such as slavery and prejudice to understand the present situation, ideas possibly related to the self-referencing of these young people, mostly brown or black. The past outlined in the narratives became problems, such as the generation of unemployment and insecurity that, in turn, began an even darker future, with the amplification of these same issues. Marked by common belief ideas or even by a set of memories, the participant's narratives make evident functions that could be related both the social representation and historical consciousness.

Initially, with the purpose of contemplating the experience, the students began an "intellectual work of problems and challenges of the vital praxis" (RÜSEN, 2014, p. 105), through which:

[...] the memories spring[ed] from a problematic constellation between the subject and the object and were founded in the human faculty of culturally responding to the reality of a precarious and contingent world with the formation of structures of meaning. (RÜSEN, 2014, p. 105).

Therefore, we perceive how the young participants were capable of apprehend the present events, stimulated by an interpretation of the past that guaranteed them the development of orientations with cultural meaning.

Considering the need to transmit these representations of the past, it was necessary to “enter into a communicative process, in which a problem of orientation of the *vital praxis* itself [was] interpreted through a reciprocal exchange between those involved” (RÜSEN, 2014, p. 107). The human reaction to the contingency experiences, as well as their communication contexts could be very well be associated to the need of explaining the reality, accordingly with the function derived from the social representations’ theory. In the light of this theoretical model, we observe how historical consciousness has led to the acquisition and integration of knowledge in assimilable and understandable milestones for young students.

Next, we have evidenced that the pretensions of the group recognition through the narratives which pass through symbolic, normative, cognitive, and aesthetic meanings, guaranteeing, therefore, an identity perception. Based on this aspect, the individuals were capable of attribute a point of meaning to History “which elevate[ed] the difference among the temporal dimensions and the lack of concatenation between what happened to the unity of a continuity brought to the present, thus enabling guidance in the change of time” (RÜSEN, 2014, p. 112). Moreover, we infer that the ideas put forward by the participants elucidated the human capacity to “transcend itself culturally, that is, to constantly establish new limits and then, once again, transcend them” (RÜSEN, 2014, p. 114).

Finally, we observe a variety of behaviors or practices that guaranteed the perception of different forms of orientation. In a social-historical and cultural perspective, we envision the recognition of a multiplicity of factors (intentional and contiguous) that interfered in the human action to assure an updating of History. Even though it is possible to evidence narratives related to this ideal type, the orientation mechanisms put forward by the young people in their representations of the past demonstrated, above all, the need to produce anticipations and expectations, thus becoming “a guide to action” (ABRIC, 2001, p. 16).

Final considerations

Conducted in 2017, this research capture, to some extent, the impacts of a troubled moment of in our recent History, that is, the *impeachment* of the president Dilma Rousseff and the ascension of Michel Temer. In spite of not discussing these events in depth and only tangentially, our participants exposed ideas that demonstrated the influence of perspectives of the moment lived in the processes of anchoring historical events, as well as the construction of historical consciousness – thus confirming our initial hypothesis. However, much more than evidencing historical knowledge seized in the school context, young people seemed to adhere to a type of discourse quite common among the mass media.

Although we recognize the value of knowledge from other spaces, either for the formation of historical consciousness or for the construction of social representations, we do not focus on media influences on the perception of the young participants, which is revealed as a very promising study possibility.

Nevertheless, the data analysis revealed the identification of ideas related to the perception of a country in crisis, with a prejudiced past and a future, contradictorily, promising. This disharmony between the past-present dimension compared to the future dimension may reveal the difficulty that the young person has to perceive himself or herself as a historical agent. For this reason, we highlight the importance of a teaching planning that is able to consider the previous historical meanings of the students. Starting from these perceptions, the teacher can contribute to the formation of historical consciousness, in order to expand the critical capacity of the student, for whom the past must become a present with usefulness for life.

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