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# NATIONAL NARRATIVES OF SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE STUDENTS<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*This study aims at understanding how the master narratives conveyed by the national accounts given by 14 to 18-year-old Spanish and Portuguese students converge or differ from one another and how they relate to national identity and temporal orientation. Data analysis was carried out in a qualitative approach inspired by Grounded Theory. The results suggest a parallel but conceptually convergent schematic template focused on initial conquests, a golden period of maritime discoveries, and a recent dictatorship overcome by the restoration of democracy. Some particularities of students' accounts linked to specific historical situations in each country, as well as diversified attitudes of the young people toward "their" nation-states are also discussed.*

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## NARRATIVAS NACIONAIS DE ESTUDANTES ESPANHÓIS E PORTUGUESES

## Resumo

*Este estudo tem por objetivo compreender como as narrativas mestras veiculadas pelas narrativas sobre a História nacional de estudantes espanhóis e portugueses de 14 a 18 anos convergem ou diferem entre si e como se relacionam com a identidade nacional e a orientação temporal. A análise dos dados foi realizada em uma abordagem qualitativa inspirada na Teoria Fundamentada (Grounded Theory). Os resultados sugerem um modelo esquemático paralelo, mas conceitualmente convergente, focado em conquistas iniciais, um período áureo de descobertas marítimas e uma recente ditadura superada pela restauração da democracia. Algumas particularidades nas narrativas dos alunos ligadas a situações históricas específicas em cada país, bem como posturas diversificadas dos jovens em relação a "seus" estados-nação, são também discutidas neste artigo.*

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## RÉCITS NATIONAUX D'ÉLÈVES ESPAGNOLS ET PORTUGAIS

### Résumé

*L'objectif de cette étude est de comprendre comment les récits officiels de l'histoire nationale convergent ou diffèrent des récits produits par des élèves espagnols et portugais de 14 à 18 ans et quel rapport ils entretiennent avec l'identité nationale et l'orientation temporelle. Les données ont été analysées selon une approche qualitative s'inspirant de la Théorie à base empirique (Grounded Theory). Les résultats suggèrent un modèle schématique parallèle, bien que conceptuellement convergent, axé sur les conquêtes historiques, l'âge d'or des découvertes maritimes, et la superation de la dictature récente par la restauration de la démocratie. L'article discute aussi certaines particularités des récits nationaux des élèves, liées à des situations historiques spécifiques à chaque pays, ainsi que les différentes positions des jeunes à l'égard de "leurs" états-nations.*

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## NARRATIVAS NACIONALES DE ESTUDIANTES ESPAÑOLES Y PORTUGUESES

### Resumen

*Este estudio tiene como objetivo comprender cómo los grandes relatos transmitidos por las narrativas de la historia nacional de los estudiantes españoles y portugueses de 14 a 18 convergen o difieren entre sí y cómo se relacionan con la identidad nacional y la orientación temporal. El análisis de los datos se realizó con un enfoque cualitativo inspirado en la Teoría Fundamentada (Grounded Theory). Los resultados sugieren un modelo esquemático paralelo, pero conceptualmente convergente, enfocado en conquistas iniciales, un período áureo de descubrimientos marítimos y una reciente dictadura superada por la restauración de la democracia. Algunas particularidades en las narrativas de los alumnos vinculadas a situaciones históricas específicas en cada país, así como posturas diversificadas de los jóvenes en relación con "sus" estados-nación, son también discutidas en este artículo.*

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## THE INVESTIGATIVE FRAMEWORK

**T**HE LEARNING OF NATIONAL HISTORY BY YOUNG PEOPLE APPEARS TO BE A CONCERN of westernised societies, where master narratives of the nation disseminated in school and outside school contexts may play a significant role in the shaping of collective identities. By a master narrative of a given past – also called core narrative –,<sup>2</sup> we mean what Wertsch (2002, p. 62) called a “schematic narrative template”, in the sense that it conveys a general meaning and function that “can underlie several different specific narratives, each of which has a particular setting, cast of characters, dates, and so forth”. Rösen’s matrix (2004), when highlighting the dynamic relationships between the subject’s practical needs and historical knowledge, offers a relevant clue to the understanding of connections between collective memories and national history.

In political contexts where the students’ accounts manifest an identification with their nation-state, the master narrative – if it exists – highlights successful events and situations implying a core idea of “triumph over alien forces” (WERTSCH, 2002) or “freedom and progress” (BARTON; LEVSTIK, 2004). According to those studies, master narratives appear grounded on markers pointing mainly to positive origins, challenging or troubled developments, and a political “happy end”. In this plot, attributions of exceptional achievements to individual or group agents implicitly or explicitly appear. In the same line of

<sup>2</sup> Studies in Portugal tend to use the term *narrativa nuclear* (core narrative) (eg. BARCA, 2007).

reasoning, several other studies have suggested a converging model in students' master narratives of the history of their independent countries, where "the triumph over alien forces" message may gain several contours and can be combined with "progress toward freedom" (BARCA; SCHMIDT, 2013; CARRETERO *et al.*, 2012; KROPMAN; VAN BOXTEL; VAN DRIE, 2015). Moreover, as Barton (2001) noted in the USA, a frequent use of "we" by students in their national accounts suggests a clear identification with their country. Notwithstanding this major trend of an optimistic master narrative underlying the students' accounts, there are cases in which young people's texts (a) may suggest the existence of competing master narratives (BARCA, 2015), or (b) they do not allow to conclude whether a master narrative for the nation does exist or not (LEE, 2004).

So far, in spite of the remarks above, studies point to a major trend of relatively converging master narratives across several countries, when students narrate the history of consolidated nation-states. In other cases, when students identify themselves with a non-independent nation, the master narrative also shows essentialist contours focusing origins, developments and an "end", but it conveys a less optimistic view, since they tend to stress "traumatic events", as it is the case in Catalonia (SANT *et al.*, 2015), or an idea of "victimisation", such as in Québec (LÉVESQUE; LETORNEAU; GRANI, 2013). In Northern Ireland, students' main narrative issue appears to be more complex. It seems that students accounted for a troubled history in a relatively recent past, when open conflicts in a divided society happened and there were strong debates about which history should be learned at school (McCULLY; WALDRON, 2013). However, an approach focused on historical enquiry, including the exploration of concepts such as empathy, evidence and multiple perspectives might have contributed to more rational young people's views on how to deal with their neighbour "others" (McCULLY, 2008).

There is perhaps a consensual recognition that children and young people gain national identification in the social context before and alongside with schooling experiences. The school is the place where children and young people may face their national past in a more historical form. But history is probably mostly taught in a too conventional, narrative form (as opposed to historical enquiry), giving room to strong debates about what place and visibility should be given to national history in the curriculum. Conversely, the historical enquiry approach seems to undervalue a given content that permits reinforcing collective identity, thus leaving to informal contexts alone the identification function. Indeed, how to attain a balance between the former and the latter approaches to school history still remains a debatable issue (GUYVER, 2013).

In Spain some qualitative studies on students' accounts have suggested that there is master narrative that shows a collective identification with their nation-state. This master narrative points to an essentialist scheme based on significant situations of the national past from its origins (mainly the unification with the Catholic Monarchs) to the recent dictatorship and the transition to democracy in 1975 (SÁIZ SERRANO, 2015, 2017, 2019; SÁIZ SERRANO; COLOMER,

2016; SÁIZ SERRANO; LÓPEZ FACAL, 2015, 2016; COLOMER, 2016). Students aged 16-18 years and trainee teachers from public schools in Valencia participated in those studies.

In Portugal several studies on students' accounts about the contemporary (national and world) history have also revealed a national master narrative based on two main situations: dictatorship and democratic revolution (BARCA; MAGALHÃES, 2005; BARCA, 2015). Data were collected from students attending years 9 and 10 (aged 14 to 18 years) in public schools with diversified geographical contexts.

A national master narrative can be considered a genuine manifestation of collective identity, provided it is shaped “to value complexity, diversity and inclusivity” (McCULLY; WALDRON, 2013, p. 154). But a master narrative does not indicate much about how and why the complex human relationships over time and places are understood. It is crucial to look at the specific narratives that young people construct and to analyse them: for instance, to what extent such narratives try to explain a given situation through the relative weighing of multiple factors (CHAPMAN; FACEY, 2009), or if they entail some form of historical empathy (ASHBY; LEE, 1987) through a rational effort of understanding the human world in situated contexts.

In line with the empirical studies aforementioned, particularly those carried out in Spain and in Portugal, this study aims to understand in what ways students' national master narratives in both countries converge and differ from one another.

## NATIONAL CONTEXTS OF THE STUDENTS' NARRATIVES

National history narratives reproducing essentialist stereotypes were massively disseminated in Spain and Portugal during Franco and Salazar dictatorships. It can be said that in each country a homogeneous idea of “triumph over alien forces” was reproduced at various instances carefully controlled through censorship. That master narrative relied on a story line that highlighted the brave ages of origins, splendid times of discoveries and colonisation, followed by times of decadence due to attacks of external enemies and anti-patriots, and finally a “recovery” over disorder to maintain a “great, unified nation” (from a dictatorial point of view). Being school a powerful vehicle of indoctrination, that message was instilled in textbooks (LÓPEZ FACAL, 2008; LÓPEZ FACAL; SÁIZ SERRANO, 2016; TORGAL, 1989). The particularities in the historical versions cultivated in each country were naturally related to the relevance attributed to specific individual heroes and enemies and related states of affairs: unification in Spain, independence in Portugal; fight against the French invasion and loss of colonies in Spain, fight for maintaining “a non-small country, from Minho to Timor” in Portugal.

After the fall of dictatorship in both countries, the strong essentialism of those master narratives was immediately rejected by civil society, including

schools. The historians who were formerly censored and even exiled could finally publish their work in Spain and Portugal. Critical discourses against “the glorious past” came to light, giving visibility to opposing ideas, such as the right to be free or even the right to construct alternative models of society. Thus, by then in Spain and in Portugal, the essentialism of the national narrative was hidden (LÓPEZ FACAL, 2000). Ideas of modernity and humanism legitimated the emergence of competing nationalisms, such as the Catalan and the Basque ones, as well as the independence of the former Portuguese colonies in Africa and Asia. The practice of historiography grounded on objective evidence reappeared in both countries. It is possible to observe that fresh historiographical trend since the mid-1970s or 1980s, providing more balanced and critical analyses of national construction, thus giving room to address national and international issues from diverse points of view. Notwithstanding this, a neo-nationalism seems to have appeared in the 1990s through a public discourse conveying an exemplary idea of progress. A set of essentialist, old attributes of the nation came back together with a few new features, especially related to parliamentary democracy and socioeconomic development (the latter is currently questioned due to an economic crisis). In Spain, the history taught in school recently appears to reflect a traditional substantive focus conveyed by the curriculum and textbooks (VALLS, 2007; LÓPEZ FACAL, 2008; SÁIZ SERRANO, 2017). In Portugal, the history subject might tend to tacitly convey the master narrative of an old surviving nation with some periods of a glorious past, but it also attempts to offer a historiographical attitude (VERÍSSIMO, 2013; LAGARTO, 2017).

Therefore, a “banal nationalism” as discussed by Billig (1995) may be cultivated in Spain and in Portugal, although in competition or in combination with more complex historiographical approaches.

## METHOD

The present study intends to shed some light on how students’ accounts of the history of Spain and Portugal national accounts and related master narratives appear to converge or differ from one another, and in what ways this may be related to issues of national identity. Our broad purpose is to contribute to the debate on the learning of national history, particularly in Iberian settings, and on how to empower young people with historical competences to better address their current needs of temporal orientation. It is an exploratory study with a dominant qualitative approach to tentatively compare some key ideas conveyed by the students’ narratives. The qualitative data analysis is inspired in the Grounded Theory, namely when using an open, axial and selective process of data coding (CORBIN; STRAUSS, 2008). An additional quantitative analysis involving descriptive statistics is also undertaken but not used in a systematic way (RIAZI; CANDLIN, 2014, p. 5).

Deliberate, stratified samples of 14-18 year-old students were selected in several public schools with a heterogeneous population, in Spain and in Portugal.

The data collections were independent in the two countries, but they converged at an initial goal, which was to search for a possible master narrative of the nation to be inferred from the students' specific accounts. It must be stressed that the results are not considered representative of the students' population; rather they can be seen as signs of ideas about national identity in the samples investigated.

In Spain, 212 accounts were collected from students attending seven schools in Valencia; 127 accounts were from students of the first post-compulsory course, aged 16-17 years, and 85 from students of the second post-compulsory course, aged 17-18 years. Data collected in 2013 and 2015 were re-examined in a new light for this specific study. In this country, the students' main approach to national and world history occurs at ages 12-16 years. In post-compulsory education, the 16-17 year-olds who attend humanities and social sciences study contemporary world history, and all students aged 17-18 years study history of Spain.

In Portugal, 111 accounts were collected in 2016 from 14-17-year-old students attending the last year (year nine) in which all students are taught history, in four schools (two in Lisbon and two in Porto). The still considerable grade retention explains the age range in schooling year 9. In this country, all students study national history in schooling years 5 and 6, and world and national history in 7 up to 9 years (aged 12-17 years). At schooling years 10-12 only the students enrolled in humanities or social sciences study a similar but more "in-depth" world history with some integrated topics of national history.

Therefore, the place of national history in the curriculum diverges in these two countries: all students aged 15-16 years in Portugal have experienced a diachronic approach to national history in a more systematic way than students at the same age in Spain. As such distinction might be reflected in the substantiation of the accounts of students at the same age – as it was observed in the very first moment of open coding for this study –, we opted for including 17-18-year-old students in the Spanish participant group, as by then they learn history of Spain in a more systematic form.

Each set of participants received an A4 sheet of paper headed by the written task proposal. In Spain the younger students were asked, "what do you remember of the history of Spain? Please write a synthesis", while the older ones (aged 17-18 years) focused on the contemporary history of Spain. In Portugal, all the participants were asked to narrate their national history as if each one were on a holiday abroad and together they decided to "tell the history of their own country". The history teachers who volunteered to apply the research task in one of their history classes were provided with a set of guidelines concerning data collection: (a) information for students about the project goals (to investigate students' ideas about their national history with no assessment purposes); (b) information about confidentiality of students' identities; and (c) information about the requirement of non-intervention in the students' written task. The task was applied in a 45-minute class. Upon a brief introduction, students wrote their accounts in due time (on one page in average).

Data analysis was carried out with an essentially qualitative approach inspired by the Grounded Theory and considered the theoretical framework already discussed. Firstly, in an open coding phase, we looked for expressions in the specific accounts indicating past events, situations, individual or group characters, causal links. In a second (axial/selective) phase, we interrelated several elements to create broader categories: historical periods (such as the Age of Discoveries), historical dimensions (e.g. political ones), “narrative” forms (from timelines to descriptive/explanatory texts). We also examined and related subjective expressions assigning positive, negative or neutral adhesion to specific substantive clusters of groups and individuals, as well as the contextualised meaning of the use of “we” for the nation. In a third phase, and especially relying on substantive and subjective indicators, we attempted to inductively trace the main master narrative for each country. A quantitative analysis by percentage of relevant occurrences contributed to better ground the main inferences. In a fourth, selective phase, we scrutinised some convergences and distinctions between the two sets of national accounts, as well as some variation among students’ attitudes toward the nation in each country.

## SUBSTANTIVE CONTENT AND EXPLANATORY POWER IN SPECIFIC ACCOUNTS

The scrutiny of the students’ accounts focused on (a) substantive content such as states of affairs, particular deeds, agency, inherent historical dimensions (political ones, and so forth), and (b) causal thinking.

### SUBSTANTIVE CONTENT

The most popular picture of the past among the students in both countries can be traced around two or three of these substantive temporal clusters: origins; discoveries; dictatorship and current democracy.

The views on the original roots of the nation vary slightly between students in the two countries and within one country only. In Spain near half the students (43%) situate the beginning of Spain as a united state in the reign of the Catholic Monarchs, as an 18-year-old boy states: “the unification made by the Catholic monarchs happened first”. More than half the students (65 %) also mention ancient peoples – Iberians, Romans, Visigoths, Muslims/Arabs, and Christians – linked to the “re-conquest”:

*Spain was conquered by the Roman Empire that gave us the legacy of Latin [...]. Spain was conquered by the Arabs [...] And now we have advanced irrigation techniques, medicine and the Arabic numbers. However, Spain was gradually conquered back by a group of Christians [...]. That process led to a set of different Spanish kingdoms [...]. (18 year-old girl)*



In Portugal young people tend to choose the conquest of independence as the single foundational marker (52%), as the following two students claim: “Portugal was born in 1143 with king Afonso Henriques who fought intensively for the nation” (14-year-old girl), or “the history of Portugal as a European nation begins in the medieval ages when the County of Portugal became autonomous from the Kingdom of Leon” (14-year-old boy). A few Portuguese students (11%) think about earlier roots than the conventional period of independence. Some of them start their accounts by looking at ancient peoples in the Iberian Peninsula and point to cultural and economic influences, like many Spanish students do:

*I would begin with the epoch of the Roman Empire domination because it influenced the “country” in several ways [...]. Portugal lived a period dominated by the Barbarians [...] like a bridge to the rising country. The Moors also influenced the “country” [...]. I find this phase when Portugal was not formed yet very interesting. (17-year-old boy)*

Thus, concerning the origins of each country, while the idea of political-military action is common to both sets of accounts, they differ in another sense: the Spanish accounts point to the unification process (the referent Spain may equate that of Iberian Peninsula) whereas the Portuguese stress the separatist turning point of the independence.

The relevance of two other historical periods – discoveries and empire, dictatorship and democracy – converges in both countries. The former is present in 62 % of the accounts in each country (in Spain, the discovery of America is more stressed than the Spanish empire); the latter is present in 67% of the accounts in Portugal, whereas in Spain 77% of the accounts focus on the dictatorship and 23% explicitly refer to democracy.

Regarding the age of discoveries, students in each country give competing versions when they evaluate – and value – the international relevance and power of their nations during that period:

*In 1492 Spain discovered the Americas due to the expedition of Columbus. By conquering this territory, for instance with Pizarro, Spain turned to be the greatest empire in the world. (17-year-old boy)*

*We were the pioneers in conceiving the caravel and the greatest discoveries at the time. We divided the world with the Spanish and owned half the planet. (14-year-old boy)*

Thus, when narrating the age of discoveries, Spanish students tend to highlight the great power of their country. However, in Spain they also mention the conquest process upon the discoveries while in Portugal they omit such

process of dominance; in Spain they stress their country's power all over the world, as they do in Portugal, but in the latter, in some cases students tend to recognise that the “world” was divided between the two countries.

In more substantiated accounts, other past events and situations between the “golden age” of discoveries and the rise of the dictatorship are occasionally mentioned or discussed. In both countries they may focus on cultural, economic and social consequences of the “empire” period and/or specific deeds of royal dynasties, Napoleonic invasions, foundations of the republican regimes. The civil war in Spain (1936-1939) or the “Spanish” domination in Portugal (1580-1640) are occasionally mentioned and discussed as relevant causes and/or consequences of other historical situations.

The accounts about the concomitant years of the dictatorship, followed by the democratic turning point, evoke similar situations in Spain and Portugal. Nonetheless, students never mention such similarity:

*People did not live great moments during the Franco dictatorship; they lived in uncertainty, fear and famine after the civil war [...]. We have reached democracy at present bit by bit with ups and downs. (18 year-old boy)*

*In Portugal there were those like Salazar who took the power, established the New State and seized the joy of life [...] forbidding a number of activities. The Portuguese [...] fought for freedom and got it on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1974, an important date for the people. (15-year-old girl)*

Each set of accounts may point to several aspects of contemporary times. In Spain, the Franco dictatorship may be related to the economic closure and technological underdevelopment of the country, while the “transition to democracy” is seen as leading to a rapid democratic reconstruction of the country; they tend to acknowledge the current regime (defined as a “parliamentary monarchy”), as this student who states, “Spain lived a prosperous period having been ranked the 9<sup>th</sup> world power”. However, this student claims, as some others do, that “now we suffer an economic crisis”.

In Portugal, the Salazar dictatorship tends to be characterized as censorship and poverty, but occasionally financial health or the colonial war are also mentioned. The Democratic Revolution of 1974 may be described in some detail and current times are pictured either by referring to relaxation times (“we have the ‘fado’ song, famous football players...”), or linked to economic troubles (“now we are experiencing an economic crisis”).

So far, regarding temporal dimensioned, political affairs seem to be the main axis guiding the narrative of national history. Economic and social dimensions are sometimes mentioned or even discussed, as well as cultural and

technological achievements related mainly to original influences and to the age of discoveries.

Historical agency across times appears mainly oriented toward the nation as a whole (“people”, “Spain”/“Portugal”) or to the nation’s individual leaders. In parallel with the use of a homogenous “we” (“we were isolated from Europe for 40 years”), Spanish students mention Spain or *the Spanish* as a political, geographical and social entity (“Spain discovered the Americas”, “the Spanish fought for their rights and there was a Second Republic”), and the same occurs in Portugal with references to Portugal, to *the Portuguese*, and to “we” (“the Portuguese found India”, “in spite of having recovered freedom in 1974, we entered an economic crisis”). In Spain, the use of “the Spanish” is infrequent and occurs especially among younger students. But other peoples or countries may be mentioned in both countries when considering situations of international conflict or cooperation. It must be noted that, concerning colonisation affairs, the world regions are mentioned (Africa, America, Brazil, India) instead of the peoples dominated. Regarding the agency attributed to individuals, there seems to be a (moderate) emphasis on kings, other leaders and maritime explorers.

### CAUSAL THINKING

If we consider what matters as a good historical narrative, the scrutiny of the students’ writings allowed to distinguish between more descriptive or more explanatory patterns. We consider this focus also relevant in order to think about the usefulness of surveying national master narratives to foster a consistent temporal orientation.

Within a descriptive pattern, some accounts display a coherent sequence of past facts and situations, despite implying just a few causal links. Two examples follow:

*The history of Spain I have studied begins in the Ancient Regime. I remember the Catholic Monarchs and Columbus. He wished to reach India across the ocean and in 1492 he discovered America, which became a great source of goods for Spain. From 1936 to 1939 a civil war occurred. The Franco gang won. Franco conducted the coup from the African colonies. (16 year-old girl)*

*Portugal has a long history of development, like other peoples, the first king [...] and [...] when they discovered the maritime way to India, which facilitated the opening of new routes and commercial exchanges. Portugal established several relationships [...]. We also had a period of dictatorship, and we did not participate in the Second World War by chance. Currently Portugal is part of the European Union. (14-year-old boy)*

The explanatory narratives picture a given past as consistent interrelated situations, explicitly conveying more or less powerful causal relationships. For instance, contemporary problems might be explained by a multifaceted past situation that functions as a set of converging contributing factors:

*Just to conclude, we can refer to a set of problematic issues that affected Spain in the twentieth century. The military issue due to a widely interventionist attitude of the army; the social issue which led to the formation of unions; the religious issue between the Catholic Church and the state; and finally the regional issue, mainly related to the intentions of Catalonia and the Basque Country to obtain more autonomy, which thus permanently puts pressure on the Spanish governments. (17-year-old girl)*

In the excerpt above, the Spanish student considers diverse and partly conflicting points of view, all involving national problems in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Portuguese accounts do not exhibit such multifaceted explanations; instead they show a multifactorial pattern, but point to cumulative factors with no internal tension. But, in general, in both countries the students tend to mention or discuss a single factor or two. For instance, in Portugal they may try to explain the current economic crisis by long-term bad management, the dictatorship policy or the democratic policies. In a few cases, these narratives may raise less conventional factors: “I would stress the Napoleonic invasions and the French Revolution for having propelled the liberal monarchies and the republic later on”, as a 17-year-old boy claims; or even in a less usual perspective, another (15-year-old) boy observes that “it is quite strange how such a small country did something so great and fought to keep a large part of the world”. This comment reminds us of a historiographical model of a “how-possibly” explanatory question discussed by Dray (1964), but it must be noted that the problem posed by that student functioned as an emotional feature to emphasise his conclusion on “the Portuguese greatness”. In sum, the students may employ causal links in their narratives, but they are usually mild explanations, if we take into account that a powerful explanation in history should try to evaluate the most decisive factors among several contributing ones.

## MASTER NARRATIVES AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

As already stressed, irrespective of substantive particularities and explanatory power, students’ accounts in both countries tend to signal mainly state of affairs related to three temporal clusters.

The students tend to refer to the origins of the nation since ancient times of conquests that brought advantages for the future, but above all they tend to appreciate the age of the imperial past and the present democracy. However, this

optimistic picture is tinged with some nostalgia of past glories, perhaps deeper among the Portuguese students, who often note that “Portugal is a small country but has a great history”

The fact that those three substantive clusters represent the historical periods most mentioned by the young people does not entail that each person narrated all three. In Spain, 26% of students wrote about the three clusters, 38% about the discovery-conquest of America, and 38% about the dictatorship of Franco. In Portugal 36% of students wrote about the three clusters, and 27% wrote about two of them (origins and discoveries or dictatorship/democracy, discoveries and dictatorship/democracy).

Examining more specifically the schematic message in each country, we conclude that: (a) in Spain the formation of the country appears linked to a process of unification achieved under the Catholic Monarchs, while in Portugal the foundation is associated to the independence achieved by king Afonso (despite recognising the cultural legacies of other peoples who occupied the territories in both countries in earlier times); (b) the age of discoveries acquires similar traits of nostalgic greatness in Spain and Portugal (although in the latter some students recognise Spain as a parallel empire); (c) the recent times of dictatorship and democracy are described with similar attitudes, often stressing or evoking opposite characteristics (e.g. fear/joy, censorship/freedom, poverty/welfare) in both countries. For the present times, the recent economic crisis seems to provoke in students some mixed feelings over the current democratic regime.

Therefore, Spanish and Portuguese students convey a relatively convergent historical image of Spain or Portugal respectively, and the past they narrated in each group is treated as “their” history. The sense of belonging to a nation indicated by the use of “we” (BARTON; LEVSTIK, 2004; CARRETERO *et al.*, 2012) is observed here too. However, the students may use not only “we” or “Spain”/“Portugal”; in fact, in students’ accounts in Portugal, the term “Portuguese” is also employed when narrating with pride or criticism of national affairs, corroborating former studies (GAGO, 2008). Perhaps this is a tacit (just semantic?) legacy of the nationalistic indoctrination during the recent dictatorships. And it is noteworthy that the students scarcely show awareness of the similarities with their neighbours’ history, perhaps due to the nationalistic legacy. In the same line of reasoning, the “triumph over alien forces” as well as power and glory messages cultivated during the two Iberian dictatorships still seem to influence the meanings attributed to the national foundations and the maritime discoveries and expansion. Nonetheless, on the whole, the master narratives suggest some fresh contours, since, in recent times, the main message seems to be the triumph over internal forces to gain freedom, peace and modernity. In the same line of reasoning, ancient national leaders tend to be viewed as heroes, but Franco and Salazar overtly appear as hated dictators. A teleological view of a 20<sup>th</sup> century moving towards democracy seems more visible in Spain, where the transition to democracy (1975-1978) appears as an idyllic process, or as a mechanistic movement in some cases (“Franco dies and democracy comes back”). In Portugal the 25<sup>th</sup> of April is viewed as a symbolic milestone of a

(peaceful) socio-political revolution toward democracy, in which the Portuguese people assumed the agency. As already stated here, the recent economic crisis in both countries makes students look back at the past in an attempt to find why this is happening now.

### SIGNS OF TEMPORAL ORIENTATION: FINAL COMMENTS

We argue that this exploratory study about Spanish and Portuguese students' national narratives allows us to highlight some convergent and specific elements in master narratives and in particular narratives. An essentialist master narrative appears to combine ideas found in other national settings (the triumph over alien forces and/or a route to freedom) with other two core ideas ("power and glory" in the golden age, "triumph over internal enemies" in contemporary times). The former of these two messages might appear more explicit in this setting than in other countries with a longer experience of democracy.

Thus, the young people in this study – from Valencia region in Spain, and from Lisbon and Porto areas in Portugal – tend to show an overt identification with their corresponding nation-state. We must stress that the study design does not allow generalising these results. And, in a certain way, these results might be seen as a trivial finding, since it is in line with several related studies in other countries (mentioned in the first section). However, considering other studies, namely in Catalonia, where students reveal competing nationalisms, one could expect (at least from an external point of view) students' identification with the nation-state to be more visible in Portugal than in various regions of Spain. That "hypothesis" has not been confirmed in this case, and further studies in other regions of Spain can shed more light on it. Anyway, Spain and Portugal are two neighbour states with parallel, relatively similar histories, and this may contribute to make possible the existence of a converging schematic template, at least among students in some geographical areas like those studied here. Even with people who have scarce knowledge of the history of their neighbour state, shared ideologies have spread a quite similar national master narrative in both countries. When the "triumph over alien forces" message was disseminated during the strongly nationalistic period, that core idea in Portugal was especially addressed against Spain (nowadays Spain is no longer seen as an enemy), and in Spain it led concerns to focus on other more powerful neighbours, and thus almost ignore Portugal.

The current master narratives underlying the Spanish and Portuguese students' accounts in this study can broadly fit into traditional modes of temporal orientation, but they only partially coincide with commitments to a glorious past. It is possible to find now some fresh orientation: for the post-dictatorship times, the core idea gained the contours of "triumph over internal enemies" as a route to freedom and peaceful cooperation.

Observing shared perspectives does not invalidate listing some significant particularities found in the students' ideas of each country. For instance, the

Spanish students see the unification as a foundational milestone, whereas in Portugal students massively consider the independence movement as *the* foundational marker; Spain tends to be conceived as one of the old and large nation-states in Europe, while in Portugal the idea of a “small country with a great history” tends to be highlighted. Furthermore, both groups of students express a variety of attitudes regarding their identification with the nation. Students may judge certain situations and developments by displaying just their bright side or, in a more balanced view, by discussing positive and negative aspects; in radical but residual views, they may suggest a nationalistic attitude or a (mild) ironic deconstruction (e.g. “we always spoil everything”) of their country.

Causes and consequences tend to simply reproduce conventional explanations, and this does not contribute to foster dynamic past and present conceptual relationships (WERTSCH, 2002). The fact that the two data sets are not equivalent concerning the subjects’ experience of historical learning by age (students in Portugal are provided with a systematic approach to national history at younger ages than in Spain) allowed observing that some of the older students attending systematic courses of history were the only ones who gave multifaceted and interrelated explanations; conversely, some younger students with a systematic approach to history presented historical narratives as coherent as some of the older ones who started later a systematic learning of history. As this study did not intend to explore variations in students’ causal thinking, we think that it is worth further examining this issue in the history education field as a clue for the relevance of systematic learning of the history subject. In spite of this, the non-equivalence of the two data sets appears not to have affected the national master narratives since they suggest relative convergences. School and other instances of socialisation may influence this main trend. Recent textbooks and teaching approaches have (partially) changed and this is somehow reflected in the master narratives. But it must be noted that the students’ narratives still appear to reflect a banal conception of *their* nation, where there is little room to understand the national past in a grounded and multifaceted way. The age of discoveries appears unquestioned while perspectives of “others” (e.g. slavery issues) or even of those in their own nation who suffered with epic moments are almost forgotten. In fact, the media, sports and local contexts may play a relevant role in the shaping of a master narrative that evokes a banal nationalism. It must be taken into account that the feelings of belonging to a certain group are inescapable, as they are part of the identity construction, but this should also be nurtured by reason and multifaceted evidence. Although in both countries the learning of history is not directed toward recalling facts or characters, history tends to remain oriented toward the understanding of a single explanatory version. The models of narratives displayed suggest that students are rarely committed to develop an analytical historical thinking, a crucial competence to escape superficial views about temporal inter-relations.

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