

## Cultura visual e educação: grupos de discussão com estudantes no ensino secundário português<sup>1</sup>

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### Resumo

Imersos num mundo onde as distinções tradicionais entre produção e recepção se esbatem, os jovens confrontam-se com uma multiplicidade de imagens e interpretações do passado. Ao mesmo tempo, a sua atenção é cada vez mais disputada e fragmentada e o uso de equipamentos tecnológicos e as competências criativas são mais estimulados. Este trabalho visa colmatar uma lacuna na investigação sobre o papel do cinema no processo de (des)construção crítica dos pontos de vista dos jovens sobre si próprios e sobre o mundo. Neste artigo, apresentamos alguns resultados de 10 grupos focais conduzidos em escolas públicas em Portugal com 69 estudantes do ensino secundário. Como estímulo à discussão, usamos excertos de filmes cujos temas abordam a ditadura portuguesa, o colonialismo, as lutas de libertação e as relações interculturais. Os resultados mostram a importância do cinema na discussão crítica de temas como o racismo, a xenofobia e a homofobia na atualidade.

**Palavras-chave:** Anti-racismo. Cinema. Educação.

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## **Visual culture and education: discussions with young students in Portugal**

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### **Abstract**

Immersed in a world where traditional distinctions between production and reception are blurred, young people are confronted with various images and interpretations of the past. At the same time, their attention is increasingly disputed and fragmented and the use of technological equipment and creative skills are increasingly encouraged. This work aims to fill a gap in research on the role of cinema in the critical (de)construction of young people's points of view about themselves and the world. In this article, we present some results of 10 focus groups conducted in public schools in Portugal with 69 secondary school students. As a stimulus for the discussion, we use excerpts from films whose themes address the Portuguese dictatorship, colonialism, liberation struggles and intercultural relations. The results of this study show the importance of cinema in the critical discussion of topics such as racism, xenophobia and homophobia today.

**Keywords:** Anti-racism. Cinema. Education.

## **Cultura visual y educación: debates con jóvenes estudiantes en Portugal**

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### **Resumen**

Inmersos en un mundo en el que las distinciones tradicionales entre producción y recepción se difuminan, los jóvenes se enfrentan a una multiplicidad de imágenes e interpretaciones del pasado. Al mismo tiempo, su atención es cada vez más disputada y fragmentada y uso de equipos tecnológicos y habilidades creativas son estimulados. Este artículo pretende llenar un vacío en la investigación sobre el papel del cine en el proceso de (des)construcción crítica de las visiones de los jóvenes sobre sí mismos y el mundo. Presentamos algunos resultados de 10 grupos de discusión realizados en escuelas públicas de Portugal con 69 estudiantes de secundaria. Como estímulo para el debate, utilizamos extractos de películas cuyos temas tratan de la dictadura portuguesa, el colonialismo, las luchas de liberación y las relaciones interculturales. Los resultados muestran la importancia del cine en la discusión crítica de temas como el racismo, la xenofobia y la homofobia en la actualidad.

**Palabras clave:** Antirracismo. Cine. Educación.

## Introduction

Gillian Rose (2008) discusses the concept of visuality, noting that visual culture is concerned with how images are seen and the context in which they are produced and disseminated. The author distinguishes between the concepts of visual and visuality, considering visual to be physiological—what the human eye can see while visuality pertains to the interpretation of what is seen, that is, how that vision is constructed. In this text, we aim to discuss how "images visualize (or render invisible) social difference" (ROSE, 2008, p. 7) and explore how young people visualize images related to the past and colonial violence. As the author states, "there are different ways of seeing the world, and the critical task is to differentiate the social effects of these different views" (ROSE, 2008, p. 5).

In his book *The Right to Look*, Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011) tells us that the term "visuality" is an "old word for an old project." The author notes that it should not be understood as a theoretical term meaning the totality of all images and visual devices but as a term from the early nineteenth century referring to the "visualization of history." Our capacity to construct visualizations of history manifests the authority of the viewer. Mirzoeff (2011) argues that the autonomy claimed by the right to look is countered by the authority of visuality. However, he emphasizes that the right to look came first, and we must not forget it, as it claims autonomy, refuses to be segregated, and spontaneously invents new forms, constituting a claim to reality as key to a democratic politics. The right to look is, in turn, strongly interconnected with the right to be seen. The "realism" of counter-visuality is the means by which attempts are made to make sense of the unreality created by the authority of invisibility, from slavery to fascism and the war on terror (MIRZOEFF, 2011). For the author, the choice is between continuing to advance and authorize authority or asserting that there is something to see and democratizing democracy. The authority of coloniality has constantly demanded visuality to complement its use of force. By tracing the decolonial genealogy of visuality, the author identified three primary complexes of visuality and counter-visuality: the "plantation complex," which sustained Atlantic slavery; the "military-industrial complex"; and the "imperialist complex," which, from the author's perspective, is still very present among us. Each of these complexes responded to and generated forms of counter-visuality. The clash of visuality and counter-visuality produced not only imagined relationships but also materialized visualizations such as images of all kinds, laws, policies, and more.

In response to the dangers of a single story (ADICHIE, 2009), there are several contemporary audiovisual productions that can be understood as counter-visuality. Chimamanda Adichie tells us that one cannot speak of a single story without discussing power. The stories, how they are told, who

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tells them, and when they are told heavily depend on power structures. The author adds that power is the ability not only to tell someone else's story but to make it their definitive story. Some films have challenged prevailing thought regimes, single stories, and hegemonic visualities. Whether in the classroom or in daily interactions with the media, they can play a central role in questioning memories, imaginaries, and knowledge, as they draw attention to silenced and forgotten events and injustices, deconstructing widely propagated stereotypes.

Cinema and the arts, particularly films, thus serve as important tools for multidimensional and multicultural media literacy, engaging various consumers, producers, and users across different ages, social profiles, and cultures (AUTHOR 1 AND AUTHOR 2, 2019). This article aims to reflect on the intersection of visual culture, interculturality, and education based on the results of discussions with secondary school students in Portugal. In the focus groups conducted, excerpts from films about the Portuguese dictatorship, colonialism, and intercultural relationships in everyday life were used as stimulating materials.

## **The Discourse of Cultural Diversity, Interculturality, and Anti-Racism**

Since the 1990s, the Council of Europe beyond organizing extensive networks of non-governmental organizations and youth movements has initiated campaigns against racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and intolerance. It has also brought these issues to discussion, urging its member states to adopt measures in this regard.

On the other hand, the idea of “race” seems to persist in people's minds, remaining deeply rooted in the social memory of societies, political imaginaries, structures, and practices of European countries. At the beginning of this century, with the intensification of hate speech in the public sphere and anti-immigration rhetoric, pressures against “non-assimilation” and “illegal immigration” have grown in Europe. Concepts such as “integration” and “social cohesion” have become popular in European politics and legal frameworks, often interpreted as a demand for “assimilation,” where minorities are expected to accept the values and traditions of the majority society (HORSTI, 2014).

The vocabulary seems to have shifted from an anti-racist discourse to one of cultural diversity. While the policies of the 1990s concerning media and migrant and ethnic minority populations addressed racism and xenophobia as problems within European societies, recent initiatives have identified the “non-assimilation” of migrants as the primary issue. The latest vocabulary employs terms like “cultural diversity,” “inclusion,” and “social cohesion,” in contrast to the international guidelines of the 1990s, which included words like “xenophobia,” “racism,” “equality,” and “discrimination”

(AUTHOR 2, 2017). According to Horsti (2014), the reasons behind this shift in political language are complex. After World War II, overt racism (PETTIGREW & MEERTENS, 1995) was deemed unacceptable. However, policy formulation involves constant rewriting and an effort to avoid repeating the same vocabulary. Indeed, by the end of the 1990s, the concept of racism had accumulated a weight of negative connotations, while the term cultural diversity appeared more promising and positive. It does not accuse individuals of being racist, encompassing everyone. However, the discourse of cultural diversity can contribute to silencing the narrative and history of racism and colonialism. By erasing the concept of racism, policymakers risk diminishing the ideology of racism, the history of European colonialism, and policies of whitening. This shift diverts attention from the ongoing issues of discrimination in European societies and the media, diluting and making it easier to deny experiences of discrimination (HORSTI, 2014).

Recently, Araújo (2018) conducted an analysis of what she designates as "narratives of the interculturality industry" during the period from 1991 to 2016 in Portugal. The author argues that the "interculturality industry" conveys a set of conceptions, diagnoses, and measures related to diversity that help legitimize certain political interventions and perpetuate ethnic-racial inequalities in education. She particularly analyzes four narratives: 1) the narrative that depoliticizes colonialism to attest to a historical vocation for interculturality; 2) the construction of Portugal as a homogeneous country that suddenly became heterogeneous; 3) the overemphasis on the role of immigration, projecting the country as European; 4) the relationship between demographic changes and political and institutional responses aimed at highlighting difference. In these narratives, the author observes both the erasure of certain issues, such as the violence of the colonial process, and the trivialization of historical processes like slavery and racism. Araújo (2018) concludes that in the educational context, the history taught remains dominated by a depoliticizing approach to the so-called "discoveries" and often involves the segregation of Black and Roma students. The author proposes analyzing the "cumulative effect of successive invisibilizations" (p. 28), such as the experiences of struggles against colonialism, slavery, and racism. As she notes, the voices and struggles of social movements and activists for anti-racist education have a long history and challenge the "Eurocentric canons of knowledge and the inequities (re)produced by school structures, arrangements, and practices" (ARAÚJO, 2018, p. 28). Recent results from an interdisciplinary project support this perspective (AUTHOR 1 AND AUTHOR 3, 2022; AUTHOR 3 et al., 2022).

Very recently, the Portuguese public sphere debated the national plan to combat racism and discrimination 2021-2025 (PNCRD 2021-2025), which adopts as a strategy not only the prohibition

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and punishment of racial discrimination but also the strengthening of means aimed at the prevention and combat of racism. Between March 22 and 26, 2021, the PNCRD 2021-2025 was open for public discussion, involving several entities (Commission for Equality and against Racial Discrimination, Working Group for the Prevention and Combat of Racism and Discrimination, Advisory Council for the Integration of Roma Communities, and the Council for Migrations). Subsequently, between April 9 and May 10 of the same year, the Plan was open for public consultation on the ConsultaLEX website, allowing for new contributions from civil society.

From this debate, we were particularly struck by the 20 unfavorable opinions regarding the PNCRD 2021-2025, which allow us to "infer a fundamental objection to the purpose and strategy assumed" (Report of the Public Consultation PNCRD 2021-2025, p. 6). According to the document, of these 20 unfavorable opinions, 13 "revealed a misunderstanding and/or rejection of the transversal principles of the plan and the assumptions of equality and non-discrimination policies" (p. 7). Among the arguments is the idea that "there is no (structural) racism in Portugal"; that "measures to compensate for inequalities and positive action are unfair or 'racist'", and could even "reinforce social cleavages," "polarizing the moderates"; that "social inequalities are a reflection of economic issues" and that political action should focus there (p. 7). Among these unfavorable opinions, there are also those who recognize the existence of discrimination but do not identify with the measures proposed by the PNCRD 2021-2025, even in the language used, suggesting that there should be no talk of discrimination/diversity/equality, but rather of equality of opportunity. Additionally, there are those who believe that measures should consist of specific awareness actions and not be implemented by the State. These perspectives, which assert that there is no racism in Portugal, are present in the Portuguese public sphere, both intervening in the formulation of public policies and influencing the daily lives of migrant and racialized people, requiring in-depth analysis.

On the other hand, there are favorable proposals for the PNCRD 2021-2025, centered on the fields of education and culture (79 out of 433 proposals), which contribute to reinforcing the directives. Most of the favorable proposals suggest strengthening or altering certain measures. One of the proposed measures is the explicit reference to the historical processes of colonialism and slavery. As we know, the narratives in history textbooks in Portugal tend to naturalize these processes, failing to contribute to the questioning of the legacy of slavery in post-colonial (European) societies (ARAÚJO AND MAESO, 2010). Another proposal we highlight is the necessity of including the historical presence

of "discriminated groups"<sup>5</sup> in the educational and cultural context. This includes, for example, the Roma communities, which are named in history textbooks in Portugal almost exclusively in the context of Nazism and fascism, invisibilizing their presence in the Portuguese context for over half a century. Other measures include involving and listening to students' experiences/perspectives on these topics, actions directed at producers of educational resources, including textbook publishers, to include themes of racism and discrimination, as well as information about the school profile of Roma communities and students who are children of foreign nationals. In addition to these proposals, the articulation of the Plan with the National Cinema Plan and the National Arts Plan are suggested, recognizing the role of the arts and cinema, in particular, in the critical discussion of perceptions about the past in an educational context. Lastly, we emphasize a proposal aimed at promoting ethnic-racial equality in the educational process by implementing mechanisms of listening, recording, intervention, support, and empowerment in schools for those who suffer from discrimination<sup>6</sup>.

Na versão publicada do Plano Nacional de Combate ao Racismo e à Discriminação mantêm-se algumas das sugestões apresentadas durante a discussão pública. Por exemplo, a necessidade de exploração de imagens e recursos sobre a diversidade e a presença histórica dos “grupos discriminados”, discutindo os processos de discriminação e racismo, bem como o colonialismo e a escravatura. A disponibilização de recursos pedagógicos que promovam uma educação para a igualdade e a não discriminação, incluindo materiais que estimulem o debate em torno dos impactos no racismo na contemporaneidade são, para além de muitos outros, aspectos que integram a versão final deste plano.

The relationship between the PNCRD 2021-2025 and the National Arts Plan seems fundamental, as the Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 42/2019, published on February 21, recognizes the potential of the arts to cultivate respect for diversity, freedom, personal expression, and openness to

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<sup>5</sup> Although the report does not specify which groups are referred to when it mentions "discriminated groups," the beginning of the Plan that was under public discussion defines what is meant by racial discrimination. Thus, racial discrimination is understood as "any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, color, ancestry, or national or ethnic origin that has the purpose or effect of destroying or compromising the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on an equal basis, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, and cultural domains or in any other area of public life, in accordance with Article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination" (PNCRD 2021-2025, 2021, pp. 4-5). The plan recognizes racism as a multifaceted phenomenon with various expressions, ranging from "negrophobia and afrophobia to anti-Roma sentiment, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia (PNCRD 2021-2025, 2021, p. 5).

<sup>6</sup> In addition to these and other contributions in the fields of education and culture, the axis related to media and digital communication received a significant set of proposals (34), which include the reinforcement of various measures presented, such as the promotion of media literacy and the development of mechanisms for reporting and denouncing situations of discrimination and incitement to violence and hate speech online; training and awareness-raising actions for journalists and newsrooms, as well as a national code of conduct with digital platform operators regarding discrimination and incitement to violence and hate speech online. The revision of legislation on combating discrimination and hate speech was also one of the highlighted proposals.



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others. This document outlines the integration of the National Reading Plan, the National Cinema Plan, the Aesthetic and Artistic Education Program, the School Libraries Network Program, and the Portuguese Museums Network. In the document "National Arts Plan: a strategy, a manifesto" (2019), there is a proposal to contribute to an inclusive school that promotes better learning for all.

The autonomy of schools in curricular development, adapting content to specific contexts and the needs of their students, is emphasized, as well as the goal of empowering the educational system so that artistic education serves as a tool for the "development of students' competencies," for the "operationalization of legislation on inclusive education," and "as a strategy for a school that promotes citizenship skills." It is precisely in association with the curricular component Citizenship and Development, and the need to create pedagogical resources, that themes such as human rights, interculturality, and gender equality emerge. However, topics related to colonialism, racism, and discrimination, which have been extensively discussed in recent Portuguese films<sup>7</sup>, for example, are not included in this document, whose language focuses on the idea of inclusion through artistic education.

## **Cinema and Critical Discussion of History: Previous Studies**

In a study with secondary school students, Author 2 (2017) finds that students assign a central role not only to the film they watch but, more importantly, to how it is explored with them. For the students, sessions with film professionals enable a comprehensive understanding of the film. With this idea, they express the importance of discussing different perceptions regarding the theme explored in the film, analyzing feelings, attitudes, aesthetics, and the historical context of the work. The majority of students report that watching films contributes to their learning process, emphasizing that testimonies, such as those from participants in the film *Li Ké Terra* (2010)<sup>8</sup>, allow for reflection on their own representations regarding the depicted reality, viewing it from another perspective and aiding them in forming judgments and attitudes about young immigrants or those perceived as immigrants. Expressions from the youth, such as "sometimes without encountering these situations, with these testimonies, we have different opinions"; or "films give us a new perspective, and with

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<sup>7</sup> See Alcindo (2021), by Miguel Dores or Jamaica (2021), by José Sarmento Matos.

<sup>8</sup> *Li Ké Terra* was the film viewed by the 124 students. Directed by Filipa Reis, João Miller Guerra, and Nuno Baptista, it tells the story of two young individuals of Cape Verdean descent born in Portugal.

that new perspective, we can judge people differently. And the situations as well" (Author 2, 2017), point to this potential of film in the identity reconstruction of young people.

Por outro lado, neste e em estudos anteriores, verifica-se a persistência de expressões de racismo e a associação das pessoas racializadas à criminalidade, à agressividade e à falta de agência (AUTOR 1, 2007; AUTOR 2, 2017). Os jovens mobilizam experiências migratórias de familiares para justificarem a situação de exclusão social dos migrantes em Portugal (a ideia de que os portugueses também são discriminados quando emigram).

The perception of the 'Others' as more homogeneous than the in-group (AUTHOR 1, 2002) and the stereotypes about a collective from which they seek to differentiate persist in the analyzed discourses. The fact that they have witnessed episodes of racism in the school context, particularly discrimination based on a supposed cultural difference distinguishing the practices of the in-group from those of other groups (clothing, language) indicates the persistence of a more concealed and elusive prejudice. This cultural racism is characterized by the subliminal message that highlights an innate difference between groups, which contributes to the reification of racial hierarchies.

The representations that associate racialized individuals with subordinate social roles, poverty, dominated places, and the performance of unskilled functions, as well as a lack of education, are present in the discourse of young people, highlighting the importance of historical representations in the (re)construction of social identity, norms, and values of groups. Conversely, most young people consider that the Portuguese are welcoming, friendly, and respectful of other cultures, where migrant populations integrate easily. This perception may have been influenced by the diffusion and hegemony of the "lusotropicalist myth" (CASTELO, 1998; FREYRE, 1953/1959), affecting the way they relate to other groups.

Pereira (2019) also conducted a reception study involving more than 270 students, who were invited to discuss Mozambican and Portuguese films<sup>9</sup>, in Portugal. The results of this study indicate that the participants in the debates, as well as the films analyzed, are constructed from (with rejection, guilt, denial, or acceptance) a view of the "other Portuguese" as exploitative, colonialist, racist, etc. (PEREIRA, 2019). The participants acknowledge that racism exists in Portugal, but none identify as racist; rather, racism is associated with "other" Portuguese people. Additionally, the university students believe that there has been a considerable decrease in racism in Portuguese society in recent years. One participant, originally from Guinea-Bissau, reinforced this perception of the group: "I

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<sup>9</sup> Mozambican films: *O Jardim do Outro Homem* (2006) by Sol de Carvalho; *O Último Voo do Flamingo* (2011) by João Ribeiro; and *Virgem Margarida* (2012) by Licínio de Azevedo. Portuguese films: *Tabu* (2012) by Miguel Gomes; *Cavalo Dinheiro* (2014) by Pedro Costa; and *Yvone Kane* (2015) by Margarida Cardoso.

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notice a significant evolution in Portuguese society. When I arrived here, it was a much more racist society than it is today” (PEREIRA, 2019, p. 445). The participation of young Africans in another group may have also influenced the discussion, where the "other" is perceived as "one of us" in Portugal. In this case, it led to a debate about the idea that the film deals with people, moving away from the notion that it is "their drama”.

The realization of focus groups contributed to the confrontation of a diversity of perspectives and increased attention to the viewpoint of the "other," making "the importance and positive value of effective intercultural dialogue" evident in these discussions (PEREIRA, 2019, p. 458). Despite the tendency for the reproduction of social stereotypes, this research confirms that film serves as a particularly effective means in the (re)elaboration of how we perceive ourselves and in questioning established discourses, also demonstrating the efforts of Mozambican and Portuguese filmmakers in this regard (PEREIRA, 2019).

## Methodology

Aiming to understand the narratives of students about the past and present of intercultural relations, we conducted focus groups as a data collection technique within the framework of a broader research project. We recognize that focus groups contribute to understanding the breadth and diversity of experiences and dilemmas in everyday life, as well as to gaining a better understanding of how people, in interaction, (re)construct and assign meaning to their own experiences and the surrounding social world (AUTHOR 1, in press). In this article, we reflect on the discourses mobilized by young secondary school students in Portugal on topics such as the Portuguese dictatorship, violence, colonialism, and intercultural relations, using films as stimulus material in a debate that aimed to be a space for (re)construction, contestation, consensus, and conflict, drawing on diverse images and perceptions.

In Portugal<sup>10</sup> 10 focus groups<sup>11</sup> on cinema were conducted in cities in the Central and Northern regions (Aveiro, Braga, and Penafiel) between 2020 and 2022. The focus groups were held in three public schools, with a total of 69 secondary school students aged between 16 and 19 years. Among them, 45 identified as female, 23 as male, and one person identified as non-binary.

Each session lasted a maximum of 90 minutes. In four sessions (8 groups), excerpts from the films "48" (2010) by Susana de Sousa Dias and "Uma Memória em Três Atos" (2016) by Inadelso Cossa

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<sup>10</sup> The same investigation was also conducted in Mozambique as part of a research project].

<sup>11</sup> The Ethics Committee for Research in Social Sciences and Humanities (CEICSH) at the University of Minho issued a favorable opinion for the development of the project and assigned it the reference CEICSH 025/2020.

were used as stimulus materials. In one session, involving two groups, students viewed excerpts from the films "Deixa-me ao Menos Subir às Palmeiras..." (1972) by Lopes Barbosa and "Tabu" (2012) by Miguel Gomes<sup>12</sup>. The groups were mostly heterogeneous in terms of gender, although there was one session in which only girls participated (n=14). The counting of the number of girls and boys was based on the gender indicated by the students in the questionnaire, and in the transcription, they were categorized by gender according to the names provided.

The selection of classes was made through contact with schools and teachers, based on their indicated availability. Each session was conducted with students from the same subject, but without the intervention of the teachers. The focus groups were moderated by members of the research team. The first cinema focus groups were conducted in February 2020, immediately before the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic, while the others took place after the schools reopened.

### **Perceptions of Young Students: Cinema, Racism, and Education**

In the focus groups conducted with secondary school students in Portugal, as part of a research project on intercultural relations, excerpts from films were used to explore the perceptions and representations mobilized in the students' discourse on themes presented in the films. The films address topics such as dictatorship, colonialism, liberation struggles, and the violence experienced during this period in Mozambique and Portugal. The discourses of the young students rejuvenate some of the findings from previous research (AUTOR 1, 2002; AUTOR 2, 2017; PEREIRA, 2019). Students indicate that this type of activity in school can help raise awareness about these topics and facilitate learning about history. The opportunity to hear accounts and testimonies from those who experienced the events depicted in the films is highlighted as an important aspect of their teaching-learning process, especially when compared to more lecture-based classes.

Helena: (...) I think films are something that everyone likes, and there are some films that are really good, that are well made to raise people's awareness. So I think, for example, it's better in a class for us to watch a film that truly touches us than for the teachers to start explaining, and often we tune out and end up not [listening]. (Focus group discussion on *Uma memória em três atos (A Memory in Three Acts and 48)*)

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<sup>12</sup> For information about the films viewed, please consult Autor 2 (2022), Pereira (2016), Autor 2 et al. (2022), and Khan (2022).

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In addition, they believe that films can facilitate discussions on topics such as racism, suggesting ways to take action, deconstructing how they see themselves, and reflecting on their behaviors as well.

Heloisa: First of all, I think this is helping us reflect (...), not just in terms of racism, but for example, we're discussing how sometimes comments can influence other people's attitudes and how we see ourselves differently. Wanting to change for others rather than wanting to change for ourselves. And I think that's a big difference. (Focus group discussion about *A Memory in Three Acts* and 48)

There is a tendency among young people to attribute prejudiced or more negative attitudes and behaviors to older generations, thereby valuing their social identity. Generally, we find that the young participants in the activities sought to positively differentiate themselves from the attitudes of older generations, which are understood as an outgroup, while young people are the ingroup (TAJFEL, 1974), as illustrated in this example:

Helena: "Those who commit acts of racism or inequality against women, all these things, are often the older people in Portugal. And, well, the younger ones try a bit to change, to be different, right? And the older people try to continue being who they were; they believe more in the past than in change." (Focus group on *A Memory in Three Acts* and 48)

Despite some young people acknowledging that there are exceptions—such as conservative individuals among their peers and older individuals who can "change their mindsets"—there is almost a consensus in the groups about this generational differentiation. Several students mentioned that discrimination has decreased over time and that "it will eventually come to an end, but right now we are still very far from that" (João):

João<sup>13</sup>: But I think older people will commit a racist act before younger people do.  
Gabriela: "I think our generation has already normalized things a bit, like people of color, homosexuals, everything. I think it's all a bit more normalized now. It probably does come a bit from the older generation."  
Moderator: "Normalized in what sense?"  
Diana: "Normalized because we can accept it. We can accept a person of color well. Of course, there are always exceptions, but that, again, depends a bit on the education a person receives at home. Even if it's good education, it also depends on the mindset of the person and the people they interact with."  
(Grupo focal sobre *Tabu e Deixem-me ao menos subir às palmeias (Tabu and Let Me At Least Climb the Palms)*)

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<sup>13</sup> The names used in the transcription are fictitious.

Few students placed their generation in the role of agent for this transformation of mindsets. Those who did cited examples of changes they initiated in family members, mentioning discussions about same-sex relationships, for example. Additionally, they revealed having witnessed situations of xenophobia. On the other hand, they attributed the education of their families as justification for the possibility of young racists: “it also depends on the parents, whether they are conservative or not, or if they just don’t have these practices, they weren’t educated in these situations,” and they bet on future generations: “I don’t know if there are parents who educate their children to be [racist] or not. So I like to believe that the people who are going to grow up now and in the future will have less of this feeling.”

In one of the groups that participated in the activity, some young people proposed creating an anti-discrimination day. The proposal was about the need for a date to raise awareness about the issue: “something about what we talked about, discrimination, something to remind people not to do it or the importance it has in the lives of those who are affected,” citing three main reasons for discrimination in Portugal: racism, homophobia, and xenophobia. In another group held in the city of Braga, where there is a representative Roma community, in addition to associating expressions of racism with the “older generations,” some young people emphasized that prejudice against the Roma population is greater than towards other groups, corroborating the results of previous studies (AUTHOR 1, 2002; SILVA, 2016; CASA-NOVA, 2021).

Students recognize that racism exists in Portugal, but it’s “the others” who are racist. An example is the analogy with the use of social media, declared by one of the youths: “on Instagram, no one is racist. But in reality, I think they are,” he argues. This matters not only because the student brings a closer example to reality and the present context but also reinforces that conducting focus groups with young people allows for the emergence and debate surrounding the meanings attributed to a specific theme/problem, associating these issues with their daily lives.

The films viewed by the students bring to light invisibilities and people who have been rendered invisible in official history. More specifically, the film *48* reveals the memories of people who lived through the military dictatorship in Portugal, using archival footage and first-person accounts, both individual and familial memories, accompanied by the voices of witnesses (AUTHOR 2, 2022). It is these testimonies that attracted the most attention from the students: “it’s the accounts and the confirmation of the truth that we already suspected.” As another student emphasizes:

MACEDO; BALBÉ; CABECINHAS.

Maria: These films that were shown to us helped us understand a side of Portugal that was hidden. And I'm sure that most of us didn't know what people who were detained by the PIDE were subjected to, the methods of torture and so on. That's what stood out the most. That's what shocked us the most. And by showing this, I think it alerts us to a need for change. We need to change our attitudes (Focus group on *Memória em três atos* and 48)

As Mirzoeff (2011) points out, the "realism" of counter-visuality provoked by the testimonies and archival material in the films leads us to seek to make sense of the unreality created by the authority of invisibility, embodied in the curricular knowledge that tends to depoliticize events such as slavery or fascism (ARAÚJO, 2018).

When asked about the themes addressed in the films, violence was present in the discourse of the youth in all focus groups. One example of the cited themes is the following dialogue:

Diego: About racism.

José: It's not even racism.

André: I think it's about separation and difference, you know.

José: Can we say that the PIDE is a topic? Cruelty, crime.

André: Violence. Often or in almost all cases, probably unnecessary.

[...]

André: I think you can perceive the separation [between when it's Portugal and when it's Mozambique] by the way they hide things. I think Portugal hides a bit of what happened. Like, at least they didn't talk about the tortures as much as they did in the last one; in Portugal, they didn't talk about that as much.

(Group focal about *Memória em três atos* and 48)

The violence of the colonial process is, therefore, one of the aspects that the young participants in the study presented in this text are most unaware of when discussing excerpts from films specifically about this theme, thus corroborating the erasure of these topics from their educational and social daily lives. Supporting previous studies, the students expressed openness to dialogue, understanding that "cinema can play a central role in challenging hegemonic representations and promoting social change" (AUTHOR 2 AND AUTHOR 1, 2019, p.131).

## **Final considerations**

Critical reflection, stemming from the exhibition and discussion of films in the classroom, can contribute to the deconstruction of social stereotypes and enable students to reflect on their own identities, discourses, and cultural practices. The study presented reveals the importance of debate spaces where young people can question taboos, learn about and understand other realities, and (de)construct views about the past, present, and future. At a time when young people's attention is

increasingly contested and fragmented, and their technological and creative skills are also being stimulated, it is essential to discuss the role of the arts and cinema in the critical deconstruction of young people's viewpoints about themselves and the world.

The information gathered in the focus groups can be quite useful for defining policies to combat racism and altering entrenched behavioral practices. As we have seen, students indicate that this type of activity in school can contribute to their teaching-learning process, as well as help them deconstruct how they see themselves and reflect on their behaviors. We also found that behaviors considered prejudiced or more negative are attributed by young people to older generations, as they seek to positively differentiate themselves from the attitudes of these generations (TAJFEL, 1974). Meanwhile, the role of young people as agents of change in perceptions and behaviors rarely emerges in the debate, even though they report witnessing situations of xenophobia, racism, and homophobia in their daily lives and school contexts.

Despite this observation, some young people expressed critical views regarding contemporary society, debating and often contesting different representations of the past, especially the colonial past. This work clearly shows us how much remains to be done regarding awareness of the long-term effects of colonialism in our daily lives. One absent theme was extractivism and the current environmental challenges, along with their complex connections to processes of social exclusion. These are dimensions we intend to continue exploring within the framework of research on decolonial activism.

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