

## **Chapter 16**

### **Telling Children about the Past in Brazil**

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#### **1. Introduction**

In this chapter we will highlight Brazilian government policy initiatives in two distinct, yet closely interrelated spheres. The first involves legislative reforms concerning archeological heritage. Second is educational policy relating to heritage at the elementary level of formal education, which is mandatory for Brazilians between the ages of 7 and 16 under current legislation.

We begin by summarizing the history of archeological heritage as a concept in Brazil, where different laws reflected ideological changes in society throughout the twentieth century. This historical synthesis seeks to present the Brazilian context to foreign readers, so that they may better understand the course of subsequent analysis. We then examine the present state of heritage education in Brazil. We seek to diagnose the capacity of Brazilian public education to convey both the concept of heritage and its concrete expression, namely examples of heritage, to future citizens. In order to achieve this objective, we present the results of a survey<sup>1</sup> conducted with students in various cities throughout the country.

We then turn our attention to the principal resource used in formal education: textbooks. This analysis seeks to develop one of several possible explanations for the characteristics of heritage knowledge collected from students involved in the survey. It also seeks to reflect the discrepancies between the concept of heritage actually being conveyed to future generations on the one hand, and what Brazilian society defines as 'its heritage' on the other. Hence the importance of the synthesis presented at the beginning of this paper on heritage legislation, as this is the sphere in which that same concept is given clear and definite expression.

Although this chapter will deal exclusively with cultural heritage, it is crucial that readers bear in mind the reality of social hierarchy in Brazil, since archeology as an activity and science is a product of that reality. That is, hierarchical order based on ethnic criteria has imposed a structure that has defined tangible dimensions of Brazilian society such as education, legislation and institutions.

## 2. Historical and legislative background

The history and main subjects of archeological resource management in Brazil must be understood within the context of the country's complex geography and historical development. Brazil is a large country, with a land area of 8,511,965km<sup>2</sup> and an Atlantic coastline spanning 7,408km. In the north is the heavily wooded Amazon Basin, covering half the country; the northeast region is semi-arid scrubland; a large savannah or *serrado* area stretches to the south; and semi-tropical vegetation grows from São Paulo State in the south up to the Pampa in Rio Grande do Sul State.

The country witnessed more than three hundred years of absolutist Portuguese rule, its inhabitants being vassals rather than citizens in a rigid hierarchical system. Independence in 1822 perpetuated this system through the continuation of dynastic rule up to 1889; the *aggiornamento* of the republic did not change the *arcana* of social power: people in power rule, others obey, as privilege and patronage were pervasive. Following the first period of republican rule, subsequent regimes did little to modify the hierarchical social order. That is, from the beginning of European colonization until quite recent times, Brazilian social order assigned the white ethnic group a position of privilege, while the indigenous and black ethnic groups occupied a position of inferiority and subordination.

The abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888 led to a long process of economic change, culminating in the consolidation of the capitalist system throughout the country. The capitalist system establishes its own hierarchical order, placing those who possess the most capital at its apex and those with the least at its base. In the case of Brazil, even though capitalist order was not based on ethnic criteria, until recent times the system served to reinforce the social inferiority of the black and indigenous groups in relation to the white ethnic group.

The reason for this lies in a pre-existing social order that allowed access to the means of production only to whites. For example, during the 1822–1889 imperial period, legislation strictly forbade ownership of private property by individuals of the black ethnic group. Thus land, commercial establishments, liberal professions and other means of generating capital became inherited privileges that were exclusive to whites, while the two other ethnic groups were deprived of elements essential to generating and/or accumulating capital, once again consigning them to a position of socio-economic inferiority.

Nevertheless, there is a gradual trend for change with regard to socio-economic subordination, which was initially identified exclusively with the black ethnic group<sup>2</sup> That is, as the capitalist system advances, the criteria of social hierarchy based on capital accumulation relegates and sidelines ethnic criteria as a factor in social organization. In other words, poverty in Brazil can no longer be seen as an ethnic problem, since it af-

fects citizens of white and black ethnicity equally; likewise, wealth cannot be considered an ethnic privilege. By the late 1980s this trend attained a degree of consolidation, owing to the establishment of a democratic system in Brazil. Democracy brought with it an increase in institutional initiatives aimed at eradicating the ethnic inequalities still existing in Brazil.

In studying Brazilian society, scholars are astonished by the apparent contradictions within its unusual social structure. The private will of elite families is often assumed as public policy and personal subordination is a feature of the national character. The authorities consider the public domain, or *Öffentlichkeit*, to use Habermas' definition of the common interest, as *cosa nostra*, with loyalty a key word when defining a society based on privilege.

The current population of Brazil stands at approximately 190 million people. According to data from the 2002 Brazilian Ministry of Education census (online), some 35 million are currently in elementary school, 8.7 million are in secondary school and nearly 3.5 million are enrolled in university-level studies (Table 1). At elementary and secondary levels of compulsory education, 91,10 % are in state institutions and 9,90 % of students are in private ones. The latter group belong not only to the better-off social and economic classes, but also to the white ethnic group. As a consequence, the public system is homogenous in terms of students' family income, which is insufficient to gain access to a fee-paying school. In higher education these figures are inverted in both quantitative and socio-economic terms, as private institutions receive the largest number of students, and because students with the most economic resources gain preferential access to places in public universities, whose social and academic prestige exceeds that of private universities.

Brazilian identity has been linked to its archeological heritage ever since the nineteenth century, though legislation was only introduced much later. In the Court in Rio de Janeiro, Romantic nationalism was grounded on the idealization of natives, and archeology played a role in this movement. At the beginning of the twentieth century, prehistoric and historic archeological heritage contributed to the forging of Brazilian identity. In this context it is natural that the earliest document providing for the official protection of archeological heritage, dating from eighteenth-century Portugal, sought to protect 'any old buildings, statues, inscriptions in Phoenician, Greek, Latin, Gothic or Arabic, as well as coins' (Silva 1996, 10), a

Level	Public	Private	Total
Elementary education	31,915,585	3,234,777	35,150,362
Secondary education	7,587,684	1,122,900	8,710,584
Higher education	1,051,655	2,428,258	3,479,913

Table 1 Number of students by educational level and institution. Source: INEP – Brazilian Ministry of Education.

regulation whose application in the Portuguese colony in South America was improbable. In the nineteenth century, despite the foundation of the Historical and Geographical Institute and the attention paid by the court to scholarship in general, no law governing archeological heritage was passed.

In 1936, leading São Paulo intellectual Mário de Andrade drafted a bill for archeological and ethnological resources, classifying them into four categories: artifacts, monuments, landscapes and folklore. This was on the verge of congressional approval when Parliament was closed in a *coup d'état* staged by serving President Getúlio Vargas. He had supported the bill through his Education Minister, and soon afterwards published it as a decree (decree number 25, dated 30 November 1937). The Brazilian National Artistic and Historic Heritage Service, or Brazilian Heritage (*Serviço Histórico e Artístico Nacional*), was established in January 1937, charged with protecting, preserving and publicizing heritage. In 1940 the Service began to register and protect archeological sites and collections. However, most cultural property remained beyond the protection of the decree. It was at this time that another leading intellectual, Paulo Duarte, became the leading champion of heritage protection in Brazil. Cultural properties included pottery, lithic artifacts, cemeteries, shell middens, rock art, as well as a variety of natural resources such as rivers, caves, fauna, and even traditional paths. A new Penal Code was also issued in 1940, making the destruction of cultural resources including archeological ones a punishable offence for the first time. From 1940 onwards Brazilian Heritage established a register of protected sites and archeological collections. Decree 25/37 is still in force. In 1948, a law was passed in Paraná State protecting Spanish and Jesuit settlements, including a surrounding area of one hundred hectares, a measure which led to the subsequent establishment of the heritage Parks of Vila Rica, Santo Inácio and Ciudad Real. Several judges and other officials also sought to achieve legal protection for shell middens in different areas of the country.

The Commission for Prehistory, established in 1952 by Paulo Duarte, aimed at protecting archeological sites, shell middens and resources. Duarte was a liberal who had fought for the creation of the country's first university at São Paulo in the early 1930s. Having lived in exile during the dictatorship of Vargas (1937–1945), he returned to the country with the idea of initiating the scholarly study of prehistory. Duarte had been influenced by French humanism; his friendship with Paul Rivet and admiration for the *Musée de l'Homme* in Paris led him to propose the creation of the São Paulo-based Commission, which was later renamed the Prehistory Institute.

Duarte was intensely active in the years of democracy in Brazil (1945–1964), organizing a series of initiatives for the development of archeology and heritage protection. Congress finally approved a bill providing for protection of archeological sites in 1961 (Law 3924), this being the

first actual comprehensive law regulating the protection of archeological remains. While the decree of 1937 aimed at protecting 'assets linked to the memorable facts of Brazilian history and those of exceptional value' (Law 3924, article one), the 1961 law was much broader in scope, as it applied to 'any archeological or prehistoric monument' (*ibid.*). Archeological sites were protected immediately *ex ui legis*. As members of the Prehistory Commission, Duarte and leading anthropologists Helbert Baldus and Egon Schaden drafted the bill, which was approved by the Brazilian congress in 1961 as Law 3924/61. To this day it remains the only federal law expressly regulating archeological heritage. The Law covers 'archeological and prehistoric monuments' and provides that they are protected by the law and should be preserved; they are to be controlled by the State and are not subject to general rules governing private property. Archeological sites in general, such as shell middens, mounds or any ancient human settlements as defined by experts, are considered monuments.

It is thus forbidden to destroy the sites or to exploit ancient remains for financial gain, as they are considered the property of the Federal State. The Law also covers archeological excavations and the mandatory registration of sites with Brazilian Heritage. Archeologists' reports and the necessary arrangements relating to the housing of archeological material are also addressed. Any export of archeological resources is subject to authorization being granted by Brazilian Heritage. In the 1960s and 1970s, several scholars including Duarte in São Paulo and Father Rohr in Santa Catarina tried to use the law to protect shell middens, but Brazil was under military rule and it was not easy to enforce the law.

Following the establishment of a military dictatorship by the 1964 coup d'état, the humanist approach to the past, so clearly expressed in the efforts to preserve humble shell middens against developers, was first sidelined and later opposed by the authorities. The restoration of civilian rule in 1985 led to growing activity by state assemblies and town councils, now free to legislate on a wide range of subjects, not least resource management. Several states have introduced legislation protecting archaeological sites and establishing state registers of monuments and archeological collections. This is particularly true of states where intense archeological activity takes place, such as São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul.

Town councils have also introduced legislation in this field, and several municipal administrations have introduced town heritage offices. Urban archeology has thus developed and interest in archeological resources revived. A new primary school syllabus introduced in the 1990s emphasized the importance of learning from local surroundings, making pupils' towns the starting point for understanding social life. In this context, archeology can play a special role in enabling school children to learn how natives inhabited their area in prehistoric times. Furthermore, material evidence from the historic and prehistoric period has been used to show that the picture given by documents is biased, and that blacks,

natives, people of mixed complexion, immigrants, migrants and poor people in general, all usually underrepresented in official documents, nevertheless left material evidence that has been recovered by archeologists. Local primary school textbooks are now introducing archeological evidence in order to give children a more complex view of the past, thus enabling them to better understand present-day contradictions in society.

### **3. Teaching and learning about heritage**

#### *3.1 The survey*

In order to diagnose the capacity of Brazilian public education to convey the concept and content of 'heritage' to school students, a survey was conducted among 821 students in cities throughout Brazil. The survey consisted of two questions: the first asked students whether they realized that heritage was public property. The second asked informants to name examples of Brazilian national heritage. The questionnaire was administered to 459 students in the fifth year of elementary school – at the beginning of Brazil's second cycle – and 362 in their eighth year, that is, in the last year of the same cycle. Comparison of the data collected from the two sub-samples allowed us to measure both change and retention of the knowledge acquired.

To ensure that the survey would be of statistical value, it was performed in the classroom for the same duration as an ordinary lesson (i.e. 50 minutes). The questions were formulated in accordance with standard questioning procedures, supplemented with a pilot study. To aid elaboration of the questionnaire, a pre-test was first performed on volunteers aged between 10 and 12 in the equivalent of fourth, fifth and sixth grades. This phase assisted researchers in preparing the final format of the survey with regard to vocabulary used, number of questions, answer choices and response time. Thus, the process of elaborating the survey not only took the recommendations of survey specialists into account, but also sought to adapt the survey to students' needs, by ensuring that questions were comprehensible and could be properly answered. For example, selection of a suitable date for the survey took the order of curricular contents in school history courses into consideration.

The samples of students surveyed were representative of elementary education in both 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. The representative nature of the sample should be understood as operating on two levels. Firstly, from a quantitative point of view, 56% of the students surveyed were 5<sup>th</sup> graders and 44% 8<sup>th</sup> graders, the same percentages as in the census performed by the Brazilian Ministry of Education in 2001. Secondly, the sample is representative of Brazilian social and demographic realities, which were the primary criteria for selecting schools in which to conduct the survey. Indeed, the process for selecting schools in Rio de Janeiro would be a good



example of how social and demographic criteria were applied during the preparatory stage. In Rio, most of the students surveyed attend schools in the northern districts of the city, since it is the most densely populated area. By the same criterion, the sample for Rio state as a whole includes students in both large and small towns as well as in rural settlements. With rare exceptions, the students surveyed came from the middle and lower classes.

The results were analyzed in terms of the students' gender. Nonetheless, since our analysis did not yield statistically relevant variations, this chapter limits itself to presenting the survey results according to level of schooling, which did reveal significant differences in the answers. Although gender did not prove to be a factor in this study, class and ethnic affiliation were, because most of students in the public system are of black origin (Fig. 1). On the other hand, elite (9%) children were not included in the survey because it was conducted in state schools (91% of students).

Before we proceed further it would be useful to clarify the terms used in formulating the questions. The use of the expression 'historic and artistic heritage' was intentional, even though it is now somewhat antiquated in the social sciences (Fernandes 1993, 267) and in the most recent legislation, e.g. in article 216, section II of the present Brazilian constitution, it has been replaced by the term 'cultural heritage'. We used it because the term is still found in present Brazilian legislation (*Decreto Lei*

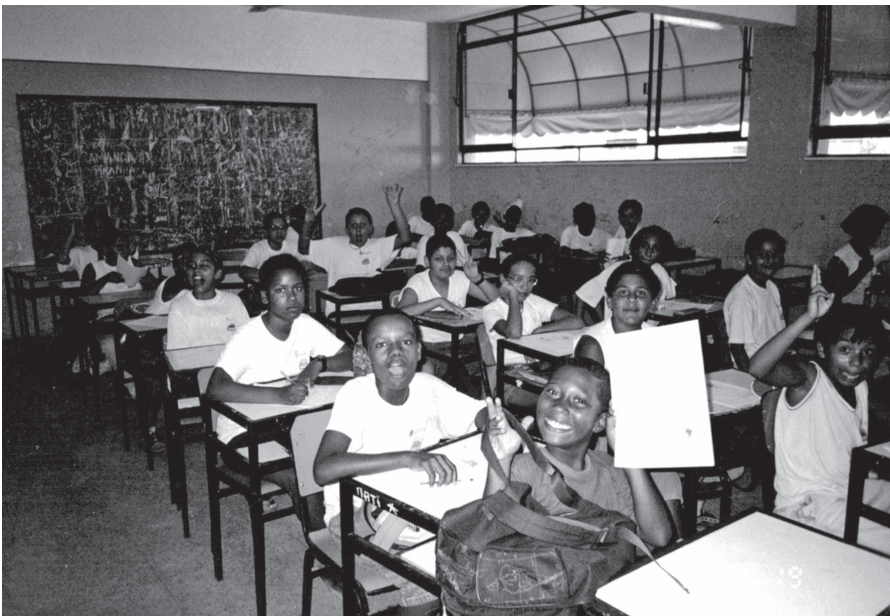


Fig. 1. Photo of a group of students surveyed in the city of Niteroi (Rio de Janeiro state).

n. 25-37) and some textbooks still use it. Moreover, it must be remembered that the term *cultural heritage* is a broader concept than that of *historic and artistic heritage*, since it includes not only human products (material and non-material) but also nature (environment and habitat) (Fernandes 1993, 268). In contrast, historic and artistic heritage is limited to human production, encompassing both architecture and non-architectural heritage (documentary, archival, iconographic, oral, visual and museum). The latter term is more relevant to our questionnaire because of its connection to archeology.

The first question simply and directly asks “To whom does historic and artistic heritage belong?” This closed, test-type question allowed students to choose from five different options: to all, to no one, to the authorities, to the scientists or to the artists who produced the works.

Answers indicate that only 35% of students are aware of the public nature of heritage, i.e. that it is the common property of society as a whole. The remaining 65% of the school children assigned ownership of heritage to specific sectors of society. Twenty-two percent believed that historic and artistic heritage belongs to the artists responsible for producing the works, and another 36% of students were divided equally between scientists and the authorities. This view of national heritage as belonging to a limited group and not society as a whole was significantly higher among students in the fifth year than those in the eighth year (Fig. 2). Of the former, only 28% were aware of the public character of heritage, in contrast with 42% of the latter group. This significant difference would suggest that greater personal maturity and a higher educational level foster better understanding of the linkage between heritage and the community.

In any event, the total number of students who answered the question correctly is fairly low: only one third understood the connection between heritage and society. As we will see later, this failure stems from the ineffectiveness of textbooks in teaching the relationship between citi-

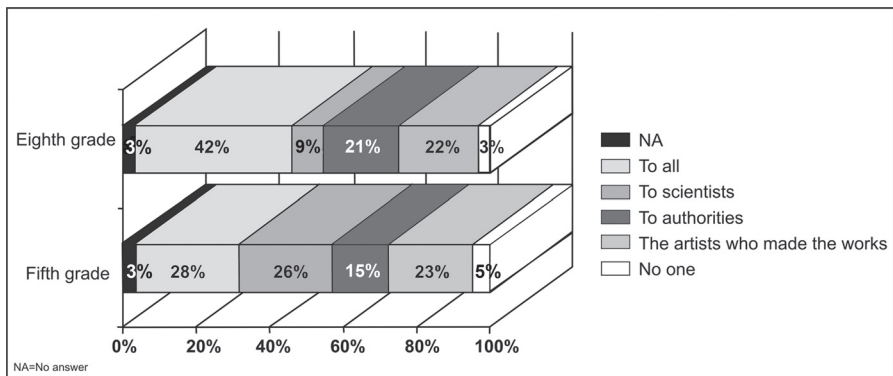


Fig. 2. Graph showing the percentage of social groups to whom 5th and 8th grade students attribute ownership of heritage.



zenship and heritage. If schoolchildren fail to comprehend this link, they will also fail to understand heritage and historic memory as the right of all citizens. Comprehending communal ownership of national heritage means understanding the subject of history as citizenry, and not merely isolated individuals or institutions of power.

Moreover, this lack of awareness by the majority of students reveals a gaping hole in public policy concerning heritage, which should be included in education. This means not only using museums and other so-called 'memory sites' in the learning process, but also including the concept itself of heritage in the curriculum, along with knowledge of students' own heritage and the importance of preserving it (*ibid.*, 273).

Overcoming this inadequacy would contribute to reversing the alarming picture of heritage education in Brazil revealed by the open question in the survey. In this case students were asked to name examples of their national historic and artistic heritage, yet few managed to do so (Fig. 3). Indeed, nearly 60% of schoolchildren did not answer the question at all. Of the 40% who did, an appreciable percentage did so incorrectly (Fig. 4). Here again there was a sharp difference between fifth and eighth grade students as regards the percentage failing to answer the question. In the former group 69% gave no answer, but this dropped to 48% in the latter group. In any event, the percentage in both groups is high, while even most of the students who did produce a response did so incorrectly.

Furthermore, specific examples of historic and artistic heritage almost invariably reflected a historical memory skewed towards the dominant classes and geographic regions and their architecture, which have often become symbols of the country or simply tourist attractions. Such a bias expresses a national identity linked to just one part of society rather than to the citizenry as a whole.

It becomes an arduous task for anyone engaged in preserving heritage to gain the support of the citizenry for their efforts unless citizens

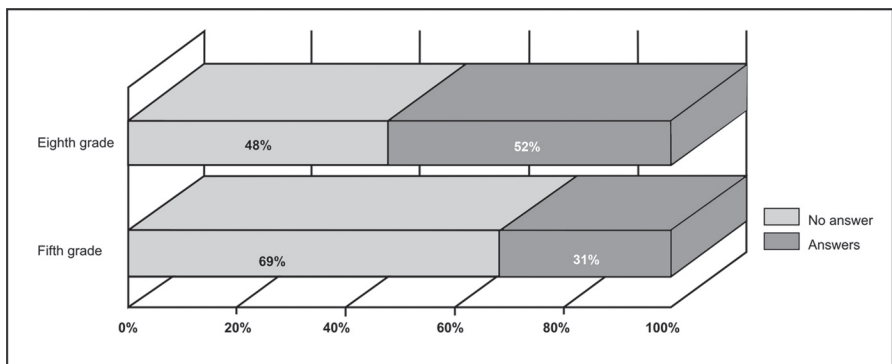


Fig. 3. Graph showing the percentages of students who named an example of historic or artistic heritage and of those who did not.

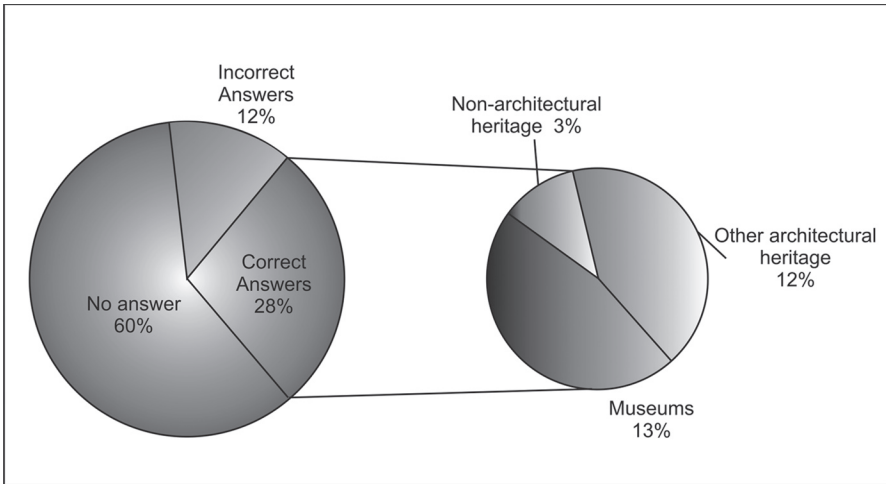


Fig. 4. Pie charts showing the answers and examples cited by school-children in the question about national historic and artistic heritage (percentages are calculated out of the total sample of cases examined).

gain the capacity early in their education to recognize heritage in their immediate surroundings, and develop an awareness that it belongs to them. In other words, the theory and practice of preservation can make progress in society only if that society becomes aware of what is to be preserved.

The most glaring example of such a lack of awareness may lie in the results of tests conducted in two Rio de Janeiro schools. Both are housed in historic buildings (Fig. 5) that have been catalogued by the Institute for the National Historic and Artistic Heritage of Brazil (IPHAN) for pro-



Fig. 5. Photo of one of the schools in which the survey was conducted; the building is classified as a national monument in Brazil.

tection as landmarks. When students were asked to name an example of heritage, most were not only unable to give a specific example, but of those who did, not a single one mentioned the school in which they studied.

General analysis of the survey reveals that roughly 60% of the students were unable to identify historic heritage in any way. Twelve percent did so in a completely mistaken way: in particular, the most common error was to name monuments in other countries, especially the Statue of Liberty in New York or the works of Da Vinci. Only twenty-eight percent of those surveyed answered the question correctly, and nearly a third of these, i.e. 13% of students, made repeated references to museums. This would suggest that some students have become aware of 'memory sites' as part of communal heritage. Nevertheless, the spectacular nature of the container, i.e. the museum, would seem to obscure the importance of the contents. This is the most reasonable explanation for why students who cited museums in their answers, even archeological museums, did not know that their content - the exhibits and collections- also constitute heritage (Fig. 6).

In this regard, the comment by Monteiro (1992, 77) concerning museum collections from past centuries is still valid:

"there is a mechanism of reduction (...) of miniaturization of cultures and peoples, which involves displaying them in ornate buildings so as to better emphasize the power of the culture housing them."

This is why the container, more than the contents, is absorbed and retained in the memory by future members of society.

In fact, only 3% of those surveyed cited non-architectural objects as examples of historic or artistic heritage (Fig. 4), most commonly in references to the royal crowns of the Portuguese colonial era. The other 12%

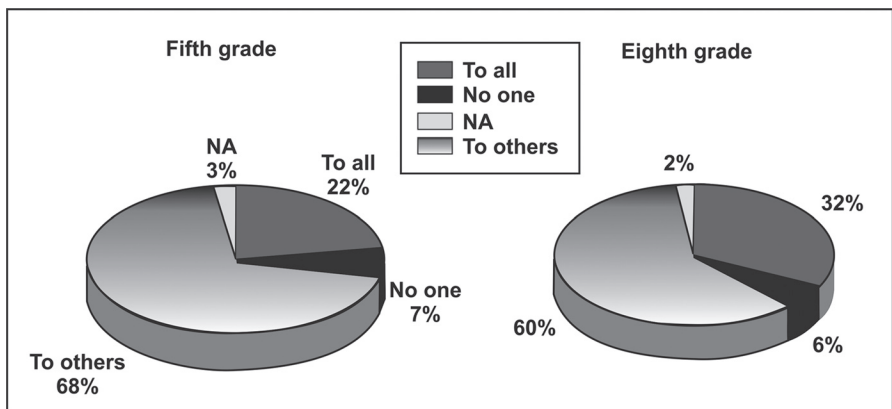


Fig. 6. Pie charts showing the answers (percentages) to the question 'Who owns the objects in archeological museums?'

mentioned landmarks; added to the 13% that specifically cited museums, this means that a quarter of all students surveyed identified heritage as architectural heritage when asked to give an example (Fig. 4). Moreover, the lack of variety in examples of heritage mentioned means that in quantitative terms, tourist attractions gained a prominent place in the answers after museums.

Among these, the most emblematic is Christ the Redeemer, the statue towering over the bay of Rio, pictures of which adorn more postcards than anything else in Brazil. This is interesting because the answer is found not only in questionnaires administered in Rio de Janeiro, as might be expected, but also in several questionnaires from other cities, especially in Natal. This would tend to confirm the divorce of education from students' daily surroundings. In addition to Christ the Redeemer, many answers mentioned a city where the survey was not conducted: the Baroque city of Ouro Preto, nestled in the mountains near what was a major center of Brazilian gold mining in the eighteenth century. In 1980 UNESCO declared Ouro Preto a Heritage Site of Humanity. It should be born in mind that both Christ the Redeemer and Ouro Preto are cultural elements that are specifically products of the white ethnic group: the first is a symbol of their religion, and the second of European cultural and economic ambitions.

Therefore, the absence of references to other ethnic groups is particularly striking, with the possible sole exception of 4 questionnaires – representing barely 0.5% of those surveyed – that mentioned Pelourinho. Originally, the term 'Pelourinho' referred to a place where slaves were tied down and subjected to corporal punishment by their masters. It was usually located on the slave owner's property, far from cities, though for the purpose of making a public display of their power and authority, Portuguese colonizers built a Pelourinho in the center of the city of Salvador de Bahia. The term 'Pelourinho' later became a common way of referring to the city, and more specifically to the quarter in the historic center of

Salvador containing Portuguese Baroque architecture. Given that the quarter was declared a Heritage Site of Humanity in 1985 and has become a major tourist attraction since then, it is difficult to determine whether the students were referring to Pelourinho as a place of punishment or as an example of architecture. The difference is significant, since the latter would again represent the mapping of heritage onto white ethnicity. If this is the case, the few examples named by students as part of national heritage were drawn exclusively from a single sector of society. Since heritage, as a reminder of the historic and aesthetic values of the community, represents what is particular as general or national, the actual heritage learned by Brazilians is a clear instance of a discourse and pattern of representation in which whiteness assumes the value of a neutral element (Torres 2001, 198). This depiction of a determinate social group as embodying common

humanity would serve the function of hiding the relations of power and privilege that have prevailed and that continue to prevail in the history of Brazil.

Precisely because the heritage that is in fact taught is rooted in white ethnicity, it is conceivable that students in the public system, most of whom are of African descent (Fig. 1), are not particularly interested in remembering the examples given by textbooks.

With the aim of testing the hypothesis that students recognize the container but not the contents as public heritage, they were asked the following question: ‘Who owns the objects in archeological museums?’ Students assigned ownership of these objects mainly to specific sectors of society (65%) such as the authorities (23%), professional archeologists (25%) or even the owners of the lands where the items were found (17%), rather than the community as a whole (27%) (Fig. 7). That is, in the overall survey, only 27% of the students were capable of associating the museum heritage with society itself by choosing the answer ‘it belongs to all’. As in other questions, the percentage of correct answers was higher in eighth grade (32%) than in fifth grade (22%). Nevertheless, in both cases the percentage was far below 50% of the students as a body and well below any percentage that might be desirable in terms of heritage education.

### 3.2 Textbooks

The textbook has played such a key role throughout the history of Brazilian public education that it has served, and continues to serve, a function that resembles or even supersedes that of curricular guidelines (Freitag *et al.* 1997). This has been a constant feature of Brazilian education historically, regardless of the political regime or educational laws enacted.

More specifically, both the content of classes given in state schools and the order in which this content is taught generally follow textbooks in a quite literal manner. This may not appear to be significant to those

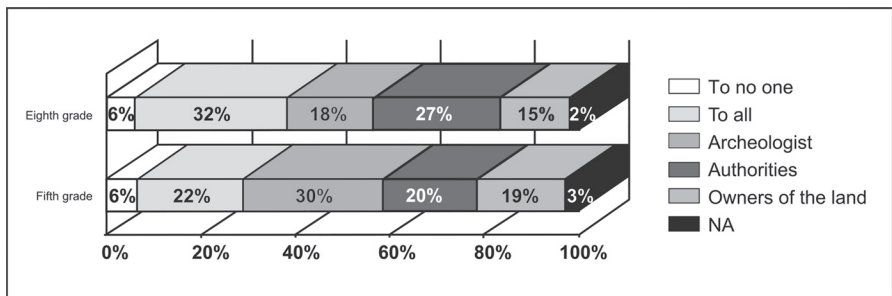


Fig. 7. Graph showing answers (percentages) to the question ‘Who owns the objects in archeological museums?’

familiar with other educational systems, as it would seem obvious for the textbooks in a given educational system to closely match the contents conveyed to students in school.

However, it must be made clear that the textbook cannot be considered merely as one of several elements in Brazilian education conceived as a system and a process. In Brazil textbooks carry much more weight. Indeed, their importance can be seen not only in the educational system itself but also in society at large. This is borne out by data gathered by the Latin American Center for Social Science Research (Centro Latino-Americano de Pesquisas em Ciências Sociais): they found that in cases where middle and lower class Brazilian families have any books at home, some 70% of them have textbooks (Franco 1982, 22)

This predominance means that the textbook is the most important factor conditioning teaching practice, making it the mediator of the student-teacher relationship. For various diverse reasons, such as the inadequate training of teachers, the students' low level of economic resources or even liberal curricula in which the course content is not determined point-by-point, the textbook is the main tool used by teachers to structure and organize their classes. This is generally the case under authoritarian regimes because censorship restrictions do not allow for variations, while it occurs in democratic systems because liberal laws do not determine the course content but only general objectives.

Our survey found a low degree of interaction between formal classroom learning and informal, out-of-classroom learning in Brazilian education. This reality would tend to reinforce the importance of textbooks. For instance, 86% of schoolchildren in both fifth and eighth grades say they have never visited an archeological museum. Moreover, a comparison of different ages found no increase in the number of students visiting museums, as eighth grade students did not report making such visits any more frequently than fifth graders. As very few students visit museums – i.e., archeological museums – it would be safe to assume that such visits, when they do occur, are not school activities. In addition, the fact that there is no observable increase in the number of students making such visits over time would indicate that this lack of interaction is a constant feature throughout elementary education from fifth to eighth grades: that is, museum visits are 'off the map' of activities proposed by educational institutions. Thus, as museums have virtually no impact on public education, being assigned little or no intrinsic value, students' main source of information ends up being textbooks

In light of this context, we believed it vital to analyze the content of the textbooks used by the students surveyed, so as to deepen our understanding of certain aspects of the survey results. Of particular concern were deficiencies in education and the learning processes as regards the concept of heritage. We thus compared the content taught to students with the information they had actually absorbed and retained.



The results led to a seemingly paradoxical hypothesis: students in the Brazilian state educational system use textbooks as the primary educational resource, even though textbooks generally feature an unequal treatment of Brazil's national heritage, and one that clearly favors the heritage of whites.

Considering that most students have black ancestry, such unequal treatment would tend to generate disinterest or negative attitudes towards textbooks, thereby hindering absorption of the information they contain. Thus, most Brazilian students not only fail to remember examples of national heritage featured in textbooks, but are also unable to identify with the examples provided. The result is that they do not absorb the concept of heritage in its most basic sense: the fact that it belongs to all.

Since the re-establishment of democracy in Brazil some two decades ago, and particularly since the coming into office of the present left-leaning<sup>3</sup> Brazilian government, the authorities have sought to correct traditional inequalities in matters of race and culture as much as possible. As regards formal education, and particularly in terms of educational materials, this concern has taken the form of an effort to remove any textbooks that contain discriminatory depictions, stereotypes or omissions against the three main ethnic groups in the country - whites, blacks and indigenous people (see in [www.mec.gov.br](http://www.mec.gov.br) the criteria for the use of a textbook in state schools).

It would therefore be crucial to explain why our analysis found an over-representation of the white ethnic group in textbooks used today in Brazil. In our view, this over-representation is a subtle phenomenon hidden behind the apparent predominance of regionally oriented information, as we shall soon see.

First of all, the issue is to distinguish between genuine regionalism or regional diversity and forms of ethnic stereotyping that promote the cultural, political and economic dominance of some regions over others, thereby serving as a mechanism for presenting certain merely local characteristics as if they were national or universal. We begin from the premise that the predominance in textbooks of information about certain regions over others is intrinsically counterproductive. Among other effects, we would emphasize the lack of interest shown by students who live far from the dominant region, which hampers their learning processes – including the learning of the concept of heritage – and even leads to school failure in the long-term.

Inequality can be seen, first of all, in the illustrations given by textbooks of the cultural objects created by the most important ethnic groups to have played a role in Brazilian history. This inequality is clearly unfavorable towards groups that have been traditionally excluded from political and economic power. In other words, the illustrations in textbooks show few objects created by indigenous or black ethnic groups, whereas white culture is clearly over-represented (Piñón 1993).

The material culture of white ethnic groups is represented above all by architecture from the colonial era, whether religious, military or administrative. Monuments like equestrian statues or fountains are also shown. Such imagery would suggest that the colonial process flowed from the endeavors of a specific group rather than the interaction of several groups.

Precisely because the cultural products of white culture predominate, recent chronology also predominates: that is, the historic past takes precedence over the archeological past. Hence, textbooks display substantially larger amounts of materials left by colonizers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries than of materials from any other era.

In addition to the time factor, this over-representation is perpetuated in a subtler manner through a particular spatial distribution of Brazilian heritage. That is, the vast majority of authors and publishers depict objects located in the southeast of the country: whether a Portuguese military fort, a church or an entire city, the southeast is presented as the locus of Brazilian heritage. Given Brazil's uneven regional demographics, over-representation of one region would tend to exclude multi-ethnic heritage from textbooks.

The case of Ouro Preto is paradigmatic, as a picture of this city illustrates the colonial period in all textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education and Sport for use in the National Textbook Program (*Programa Nacional do Livro Didático*), which is adopted without exception in all public schools.

In particular, we found that every history textbook used in Brazilian state schools in the year 2000 showed a picture of the southeastern city of Ouro Preto. Pictures of certain buildings in the city stood out for their sheer frequency: colonial administrative buildings such as the present-day Inconfidência museum,<sup>4</sup> or churches adorned by the sculptor Aleijadinho<sup>5</sup> were used in textbooks as a depiction of the colonization of Brazil.

Taking into consideration that these books are used by school children of all ages throughout Brazil, it would be safe to say that schools are conveying a homogenous heritage that bears little relation to reality. For example, in contrast to the frequent use of images of places such as Ouro Preto, there is an almost complete absence of illustrations of buildings or other materials produced by the Dutch, who engaged in fairly intensive colonial activities in the northeast of Brazil. Moreover, the architectural 'lavishness' of Ouro Preto tends to generalize one specific colonial reality, since this is the only region of the country in which precious metals were found. The other regions of the country were more closely related to agriculture, or to a lesser extent to port activity, and thus not invested with the same symbolic or mythological value for Brazilian history as Ouro Preto. In short, the generalized use of pictures of Ouro Preto as a prototype contributes to a homogenized description of the colonization process and further reinforces lack of regional diversity. Realities of a purely local na-

ture are disseminated as if they represented the experience of the country as a whole, displacing other imagery or accounts of Brazilian history.

This domination of regional data in textbooks requires an explanation. In our view, such an explanation lies outside the educational system as such, and is rather to be found in Brazilian society as a whole. Among other possible factors, we believe that two deserve special attention:

Firstly, textbooks themselves constitute a regional product. This is due not only to the fact that they are published mainly on the Rio de Janeiro-São Paulo-Minas Gerais regional axis, but is also closely related to the institutions in which most authors are educated (Fig. 8). Of the 29 official history textbook authors, 16 were educated in the southeastern region of Brazil, mainly in São Paulo, either as undergraduates or post-graduates (especially in two universities: Universidade de São Paulo (USP) and Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP). Therefore, what Brazilian textbooks often reveal is a selection of information by authors that tends to privilege their own geographic area.

The second reason for the dominance of regionalism in national textbooks is the history of how heritage has been managed by official institutions in Brazil, as partially reflected in the history of Brazilian heritage legislation (see above). Throughout its history, such legislation has tended

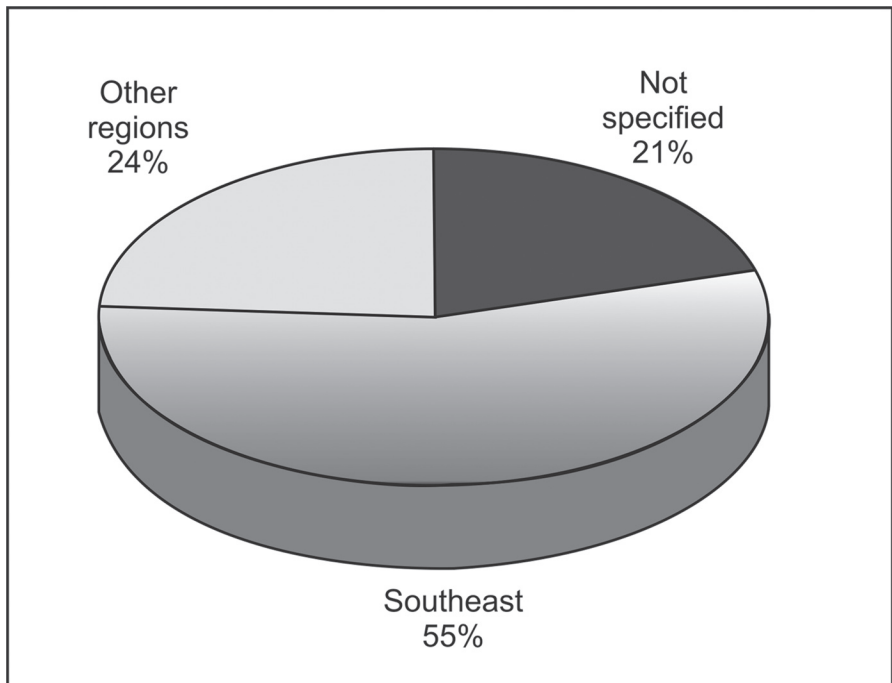


Fig. 8. Pie chart showing percentages of textbook authors according to educational region of origin.

to sanction an unequal quantitative distribution of national heritage in geographic terms: the southeastern regions of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Minas Gerais account for 50.2% of the sites classified as 'tombamentos', historic monuments (Rubino 1996, 99). Regional concentration of the historic and artistic heritage of Brazil should not be surprising if we recall that heritage is not only a portrait of the country's past, but also of its present. It reflects the capacity of certain groups to document, preserve and disseminate their own role in the history of society (Rodrigues 1996, 195).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Our survey revealed shortcomings in Brazilian education concerning the concept of heritage. The most proximate cause is the ineffectiveness of textbooks in teaching the relationship between citizenship and heritage.

However, in broader terms, there is a series of identifiable characteristics of heritage education that are rooted in the processes and institutional structures of Brazilian society at large, as we have seen. Among these characteristics is the minimal linkage between future citizens and national heritage. Because students do not identify with that heritage, they do not recognize themselves as its 'heirs', nor are they afforded so much as the opportunity to come into contact with Brazil's historic heritage in their most immediate surroundings. This can be explained in part by the textbooks provided to students. These focus mainly on the monuments and material culture of a specific region of the country, namely the southeast, which is a pole for economic development and the concentration of wealth, as well as the place of origin of most authors and publishers.

As a result of Brazilian government policy through the Institute for the National Artistic Heritage (IPHAN), future citizens are thus meant to absorb the material culture commonly produced by the white ethnic group, with special attention being given to buildings. As containers of other cultures, special emphasis is placed on museums, but their grandiosity or ornate design overshadows the collections themselves.

Even though black ethnic inheritance is dominant in the population of Brazil, especially among students that traditionally attend state schools, their historic memory is distorted by an education system that requires them to absorb the cultural symbols of the dominant social group as their own heritage. Therefore, the history, archeology and, more generally, nearly the entire historic heritage of Brazil to be conveyed to future generations is reduced to the history of a single social-ethnic sector, casting the multi-ethnic cultural references of the diverse groups composing Brazilian society into oblivion.

The final outcome of this process is the practical annulment of heritage's potential to educate students about past modes of life, and the

superficial use of heritage as a national symbol in the present.

As part of our conclusions, we would like to make some suggestions for future Brazilian textbooks.

Firstly, authors and publishers should devote more attention to regional components of national heritage and seek to achieve a greater degree of equity in quantitative terms. This is not a question of removing images presently used, but rather of including others that might provide a more pluralistic vision of Brazilian history.

Secondly, we would suggest that textbooks include a larger number of illustrations related to black and indigenous ethnic groups. This would constitute a recognition that heritage is not only a national matter, but also a concern of ethnic groups and that these groups, as subjects of history, must have their history preserved and passed on to future generations.

From an educational perspective, the above changes could assist in teaching both the concept of heritage and its concrete expression in Brazil, as they would have the potential to inspire empathy among students, making them both heirs to and participants in Brazilian history. It is crucial that we acknowledge not only different ethnic inheritances from Brazil's past but, most of all, their role in the present. The education system should no longer convey a stereotypical vision of Brazilian history that reflects only certain regional and ethnic realities.

Textbooks should cease to transform regional and heterogeneous characteristics into universal ones, or rather, into national and homogenous ones. The idea of a universal heritage, one that belongs to all humanity, is in fact an Enlightenment idea that is controversial today. Post-modern theoretical frameworks generally contend that heritage must be understood in a fluid context (pace Jones 1997 and UNESCO documents). Thus diversity, not universality, should be the key concept in defining it. Until this happens, and until there is a recognition of a multi-ethnic history and present in Brazil, the education system will continue to resemble certain African systems of old that began history lessons with the words: "Our forebears, the Gaols...."

A change in this direction would constitute an important step towards ethnic equality in Brazilian society. Finally, acknowledgement of multicultural, multiethnic and multi-regional realities in both the past and present would pose no threat to Brazil as a nation, but would instead offer a path to its enrichment.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The survey is part of the unpublished doctoral thesis of Ana Piñón, registered in the Department of Prehistory of the Complutense University of Madrid, Spain and directed by Pedro P. A. Funari and Gonzalo Ruiz Zapatero.

<sup>2</sup> The social position of the indigenous groups is a special case, as some did

not adopt the capitalist system. Thus, individuals belonging to this collective are not subject to the criteria of capital accumulation in determining their social, political or legal position.

<sup>3</sup> The current president, Lula da Silva, is the leader of the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT).

<sup>4</sup> A building in Tiradentes square that once housed the old Casa de Câmara in colonial times, today it is a museum that displays documents and objects of the Inconfidência Mineira, a movement by the Minas Gerais elite against the Portuguese colonial authorities in 1789.

<sup>5</sup> Aleijadinho was a baroque sculptor from the city of Vila Rica, Minas Gerais (1730-1814?), born the child of a Portuguese man and a black slave woman.

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