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## History textbooks, racism and the critique of Eurocentrism: beyond rectification or compensation

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### Abstract:

This article is based on the theoretical framework developed within a research project on the construction of Eurocentrism and, more specifically, on the analysis of Portuguese history textbooks. We propose that the textbooks' master narrative constitutes a *power-evasive* discourse on history, which naturalises core processes such as colonialism, slavery and racism. Showing the limits of an approach that merely proposes the compensation or rectification of (mis)representations, we argue for the need to unbind the debate on Eurocentrism from a perspective that fails to make problematic the 'very idea of Europe'. Accordingly, our analysis of Portuguese history textbooks focuses on three core narrative devices: a) the *chronopolitics* of representation; b) the paradigm of the (democratic) national State; c) the definitive bond between concepts and historical processes.

**Keywords:** Eurocentrism – Race – Racism – Portugal – Education – History textbooks

We need to tell a story about ways in which 'Eurocentrism' as a category for the debate is hiding and obscuring something, obfuscating a debate, prepackaging a debate that thereby never really takes place and becomes, instead, this battle between bureaucrats over slots and curriculum. [...] the only way we get beyond a paralyzing either/or perspective is to take a look at this idea of Europe, the very idea of Europe as an ideological construct (Cornel West, 1993: 120-121).

### Introduction: textbooks and the politics of (mis)representation

History textbooks, the main pedagogic resource used in classroom instruction in many contexts (Foster, 2006), have been a battleground for disputes on national identity and a core concern in the teaching of history, particularly European history and identity (CoE, 1995; 1996; 2001; Pingel *et al.*, 2000; Stradling, 2001). Yet, within these debates, Eurocentrism has not been a key concern and its critique has been often skin-deep: the dominant understanding of Eurocentrism takes it as a *perspective* that can be challenged with the enlargement of national histories (e.g. teaching European and World History) and the validation of other cultural narratives (Soysal & Schissler, 2005).

It is our view that this liberal tale of a 'kaleidoscope' of perspectives has been convincingly deemed insufficient and inefficient, as the mere inclusion of 'other' perspectives is not sufficient to overcome the hegemony of certain narratives. We thus argue for the need to open up the debate on knowledge and power, engaging with the *frames of interpretation* within which such perspectives are to be included. Thus, following Cornel West's argument, this article aims at showing the theoretical and analytical relevance of the notion of Eurocentrism for understanding the ways in which 'race' and racism are rendered (in)visible in the debate on *nationhood*, *citizenship* and *democracy*. We argue that the *effectiveness* of Eurocentrism lies not so much in prejudiced representations of the 'other', but in the *depoliticisation* of power relations that make plausible such (mis)representations. According to Wendy Brown (2006):

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3 Depoliticization involves removing a political phenomenon from comprehension of its historical  
4 emergence and from a recognition of the powers that produce and contour it. No matter its  
5 particular form and mechanics, depoliticization always eschews power and history in the  
6 representation of its subjects (p. 15, original emphasis).  
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11 Our analysis shows that the textbooks' master narrative constitutes a *power-evasive*  
12 discourse. The main discursive formula of this avoidance of 'power and history' is the  
13 *naturalisation* of core processes such as colonialism, slavery and racism, that is, the  
14 *naturalisation* of the *idea* of Europe and of its central role in the development of modern  
15 capitalist world-system, scientific thought and liberal democracy, read as *achievements* within  
16 a progress rationale (Wallerstein, 1997). Focusing on this *evasiveness* is crucial to understand  
17 how Eurocentrism is constructed and reproduced and to challenge the idea that a more critical  
18 pedagogy and history (as well as other disciplines) can be achieved by merely including other  
19 perspectives and versions. Only thus can we overcome the process of critique as a matter of  
20 'false' and 'erroneous' representations, and engage with the power relations that pervade the  
21 production of knowledge and interpretations.  
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35 We conceive of Eurocentrism as a paradigm rooted in what Aníbal Quijano (2000: 533-  
36 539) designated as the (global) 'colonial/modern capitalism' inaugurated with the colonisation  
37 of 'America' in the 15th and 16th centuries, marked by two interrelated processes: the  
38 construction of the idea of 'race' and the establishment of a diversified structure of control of  
39 labour. Eurocentrism, now hegemonic, is a paradigm that organises the production of  
40 interpretations of social reality (past and present), while masking its ideological basis under  
41 the pretence of political and scientific neutrality. More precisely, whereas Eurocentrism is tied  
42 to the modern configuration of 'race' and racism, it produces a frame of interpretation that  
43 masks this history, as illustrated by our analysis.  
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54 This article draws on the theoretical framework developed within a research project<sup>1</sup> on  
55 the construction of Eurocentrism and, more specifically, on our analysis of Portuguese history  
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3 textbooks, taking into account the specific contexts of their production and consumption.<sup>2</sup> The  
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5 project is centred around three moments: 1) Analysis of textbooks and education policy; 2)  
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7 Interviews and focus groups with a variety of actors; 3) Participatory workshops. The project  
8  
9 takes a broad approach to these debates. Avoiding locating schools within a socio-political  
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11 vacuum, the empirical work of the project engages with a diversity of actors operating in this  
12  
13 field of symbolic power relations. In order to unravel such relations we worked on: 1) the  
14  
15 production and dissemination of historical knowledge; 2) the linkages between public policies,  
16  
17 the curriculum and textbooks; 3) the writing and producing of textbooks; 4) the pragmatics of  
18  
19 school teaching; 5) the participation of media and civil society organisations on related  
20  
21 debates. Throughout the research, discussions with these actors were promoted through the  
22  
23 use of qualitative methodological strategies aiming to expand the social impact of the project.  
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27 History textbooks were analysed in a systematic fashion, through the development of a  
28  
29 grid of concepts. A critical approach to content analysis was used, taking also into account that  
30  
31 which was made absent (Apple, 2004a). We analysed the five most popular textbooks in the  
32  
33 school year 2008-09,<sup>3</sup> at Key Stage 3 (Years 7, 8 and 9, for pupils aged 12 to 15).<sup>4</sup> Throughout  
34  
35 compulsory education, history is taught in three different moments, in an increasingly  
36  
37 sophisticated fashion, that is, in a 'spiral curriculum' (Cruz, 2002: 328). Key Stage 3 was chosen  
38  
39 as the syllabus for these school years includes World, European and Portuguese history, from  
40  
41 'prehistory' to contemporary times. Within the syllabus, we analysed in detail the following  
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43 themes/historical periods:  
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47 INSERT ABOUT HERE: *Table 1 - Key themes/historical periods under analysis*  
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51 The text is divided in three sections: first, we examine key debates on education, history  
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53 and Eurocentrism, arguing that current academic approaches have a limited potential. We  
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55 then explore in detail the analytical lines developed from our reading of textbooks, taking into  
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57 account the specificities of the Portuguese context. Finally, we conclude this article by  
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3 considering the limits of compensation and rectification within the frame of Eurocentrism as a  
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5 paradigm.  
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### 9 10 **1. Eurocentrism in textbooks: debates on power and history**

11 In education, debates on Eurocentrism have often focused on representations without  
12 engaging adequately with the relation between knowledge and power. In particular, curricula  
13 and textbooks have been frequently used to study representations of the 'other', in binary  
14 opposition to a 'we' that tends to remain implicit and unquestioned (Hall, 1992). Framed as a  
15 matter of the *absence* of representation and the *mis*-representation of the 'other', such  
16 research has important theoretical shortcomings: it approaches Eurocentrism as an equivalent  
17 to *ethnocentrism* (a mere situated perspective) and it frames racism as 'error' or 'ignorance'  
18 (Lesko & Bloom, 1998). Focusing more on the incorrectness of certain representations than  
19 analysing the frames of interpretation within which they are located, research has failed to  
20 produce critical approaches to core processes such as colonialism, slavery and racism. This is  
21 related, in our view, to a positivist approach to history that frames it as a question of  
22 producing 'balanced' narratives between 'the good' and 'the bad' sides:  
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37 An individual's identity is not predestined; it is always in a state of becoming; evolving in  
38 response to life's experiences. The same applies to national identity. It has been shaped by and  
39 continues to be shaped by shared experiences – both positive and negative, glorious and dark,  
40 admirable and shameful. Multiperspectivity in the teaching of national history focuses on how  
41 people have come to be what they are today (Stradling, 2001: 151).  
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47 Previous research, particularly in the United States following the struggles by the Civil  
48 Rights Movements of the mid-1960s (Apple, 2004b; Foster, 2006), has shown the limits of a  
49 positivist approach based on the addition of multiple voices and perspectives (e.g. Swartz,  
50 1992). Such compensatory approach, it is argued, fails to deal with the power arrangements  
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3 that shape the inclusion and representation of the 'other' in school curricula in ways that do  
4  
5 not challenge the 'master script' (*id.*).<sup>5</sup>  
6

7 This also became clear in our preliminary analysis of Portuguese history textbooks,  
8  
9 particularly the section dealing with the national liberation wars that started in Angola in 1961.  
10  
11 The perspective of António Salazar (a key figure of the authoritarian *Estado Novo* that ruled  
12  
13 Portugal from 1926 to 1974) is contrasted to that of Amílcal Cabral (the founder of the *African*  
14  
15 *Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde* and a leader in the struggles for national  
16  
17 liberation), in ways that fail to challenge the *master* narrative:  
18

19  
20 Doc. 4 Salazar, Discourses, Coimbra, 1957 (adapted)

21  
22 (...) the route followed is defined by a strategy of integration into a Unitarian State, composed of  
23  
24 dispersed provinces and of different races (...) We believe that there are decadent races or races  
25  
26 lagging behind - as one wishes -, in relation to whom we share the duty of calling them to  
27  
28 civilisation.  
29

30  
31 Doc. 5 Amílcar Cabral, Selected Works, Lisbon, 1972 (adapted)

32  
33 To Africans, Portuguese colonialism is hell. (...) Portugal is an underdeveloped country, with 40%  
34  
35 of illiterate people, and the lowest standards of living in Europe. If it could achieve a civilising  
36  
37 influence on any people it would be kind of a miracle. (...) (NH9: 179)  
38

39 In the same page, the textbook features a picture entitled 'Portuguese soldiers captured by  
40  
41 Angolan guerrilla men', in which a group of uniformed soldiers and possibly locals (totalling 15  
42  
43 people) circles two dead Portuguese soldiers, lying on the floor. The war is not contextualised  
44  
45 politically, and therefore Cabral's discourse emerges as a critique of the incompetency of  
46  
47 *Portuguese* colonialism, rather than of colonialism itself. As a result, the legitimacy of  
48  
49 colonialism is never questioned. This illustrates the limits of a multiperspective approach to  
50  
51 challenge the wider power arrangements in which different perspectives are to be  
52  
53 *accommodated*. Whereas addressing relevant issues, it is our view that this construction of the  
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3 debate - as a matter of promoting multiperspectivity and the enlargement of school history  
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5 beyond *the West* - has not challenged Eurocentrism as a paradigm.  
6

7 Arguing that, in much work, Eurocentrism becomes an adjective or a *foregone conclusion*,  
8  
9 we propose to take further the debate and to challenge the idea of the 'multicentred curricula'  
10  
11 as a panacea. In our view, the challenge to overcome the deep-seated Eurocentric knowledge  
12  
13 productions in Western academies is considerable. As Ramón Grosfoguel (2009: 14) reminds  
14  
15 us, we should remain critical of 'an epistemic populism where knowledge produced from  
16  
17 below is automatically an epistemic subaltern'.<sup>6</sup> We therefore reinforce the idea that in 'every  
18  
19 historical period, competing paradigms and forms of knowledge coexist' and that 'the groups  
20  
21 who exercise the most power within a society heavily influence what knowledge becomes  
22  
23 legitimized and widely disseminated' (Banks, 2004: 29). Thus, while by no means implying that  
24  
25 other perspectives and historiographies are not necessary, we argue that any alternative to  
26  
27 hegemonic narratives needs to be framed within its struggle for political legitimacy, scientific  
28  
29 validity and educational relevance.  
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33 The development of multiperspectivity has also been linked, mainly in European contexts  
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35 (CoE, 1995, 1996; Stradling, 2001), to the concern with the transformation of national  
36  
37 narratives,<sup>7</sup> the misuses of history for nationalistic purposes, and particularly with the abuses  
38  
39 of *nationalistic history* – paramount to dictatorial regimes (eventually overcome by processes  
40  
41 of democratisation). In Portugal, illustrative of such debate is the general focus of research on  
42  
43 textbooks on the dictatorial period of *Estado Novo*, which results in taking dictatorships as *the*  
44  
45 *time of the misuses of history* and in constructing as burlesque the excess of nationalism (*e.g.*  
46  
47 Almeida, 1991; Carvalho, 1997; Santos, 2007). For instance, Santos (2007) focuses on this  
48  
49 period to demonstrate how textbooks 'influenced (children's) world visions' (p. 358). She  
50  
51 argues that 'It was, thus, a nationalistic and imperialistic spirit that was being attempted to  
52  
53 inculcate through history' (*id.*). Such approach, albeit unintentionally, paves way to the idea  
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3 that the scientific production of history was unproblematic (*i.e.* neutral, not-biased) both  
4  
5 before *Estado Novo* and following democratisation in the mid-1970s.  
6

7 We thus defend a broader understanding of Eurocentrism that allows for the  
8  
9 contextualisation of textbooks as part of an *epistemology of history*. As Nancy Lesko and Leslie  
10  
11 Bloom (1998) have argued regarding multicultural education, what it is at stake is not so much  
12  
13 the confrontation between different *versions* of history, but rather the production of  
14  
15 *interpretations* which can unsettle positivist approaches to the neutrality of scientific  
16  
17 knowledge and the presumption of irrationality/ignorance lying behind certain ‘judgments’,  
18  
19 such as racism. This perspective can give us an analytical path beyond the ‘too-easy West-and-  
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21 the-rest polarization’ (Spivak, 2003: 39) that merely reproduces a centre/periphery historical  
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23 narrative.  
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## 28 29 **2. Portuguese History textbooks: a ‘race’/power evasive discourse**

30 We consider Portuguese textbooks as an example of the contemporary configuration of  
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32 Eurocentrism, and therefore in this article we engage with the specificities of debates on  
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34 colonialism, ‘race’/racism and nationhood in that context.  
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37 In Portugal, the politics of history teaching and textbooks is rooted in the republican  
38  
39 educational project. Since the second half of the 19th Century, and strongly influenced by  
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41 positivist pedagogy, it constructed a ‘nationalist and colonialist discourse’ with the *hope* of  
42  
43 ‘regenerating’ the country (Proença, 2001: 50-51). Hence political discourses and particularly  
44  
45 republican campaigns over colonial questions, marked by the impact of the 1890 British  
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47 Ultimatum, invested in the imaginary of “Portugal’s golden age [...] equated with the  
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49 Expansion and the spirit of the ‘Discoveries’; an epoch of national affirmation but also of  
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51 scientific pioneering and ‘modernity’” (Vakil, 1996: 44-45). Moreover, colonial discourses and  
52  
53 legislation enacted the thesis of Portuguese exceptionality. This could supposedly be seen in its  
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55 Universalist and humanist colonialism and in the racial *tolerance* of its national *character*. This  
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3 was an argument reinvented by the dictatorial regime in the 1950s (Alexandre, 1999; Castelo,  
4 1998)<sup>8</sup> and since the late 1980s by sectors of the political administration and the academia  
5  
6 (Vakil, 1996).  
7  
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9  
10 These specificities define the particular contours of Eurocentrism in Portuguese  
11 textbooks, while embedded in a globalised hegemonic paradigm of historical interpretation. In  
12 order to systematise our analysis, we distinguished three main lines that relate to (i) the use of  
13 time/space for the construction of a *logical* historical narrative, (ii) the establishment of the  
14 *national state* and the process of *democratisation* as *the* commonsensical representation of  
15 society and politics; and (iii) the tying of concepts and historical processes, presented as  
16 logically bounded, and particularly evident in the notions of 'race' and racism.  
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### 26 27 **2.1. The *chronopolitics* of representation: history as a 'moral success story'**

28 The anthropologist Johannes Fabian used the term *coevalness*<sup>9</sup> to critically analyse 'how  
29 anthropologists use Time in constructing their theories and composing their writings' (2002:  
30 25). Fabian considers that anthropology, as a discipline and as a discourse, has *denied*  
31 *coevalness* through the 'persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of  
32 anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse'  
33 (*Ibid*: 31). In a similar fashion, history textbooks, subsuming the 'other' into a linear narrative,  
34 locate the latter in a radically different time from the 'European', that is, the 'other' remains at  
35 an *inferior* stage of civilisation and humankind's development. This naturalisation of Time is  
36 geographically legitimated: the first *human species* appeared in 'Africa', but the processes of  
37 sedentarisation and of complex social differentiation took place in Egypt (depicted as outside  
38 Africa), the Middle East and Europe (VH7-I). The section 'From the hunter gatherer societies to  
39 the first civilisations' is illustrative. The picture of a man (a peasant) holding a hammer is  
40 described as 'Herding in a present-day village (Niger, Western Africa)', with the following  
41 clarification:  
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3 Similarly to what happened during the Neolithic Age, rudimentary agriculture and herding is  
4 practised in this village. One of the agricultural utensils still used today is the polished stone  
5 hammer. [...] Establish a comparison between the way of life of this population and that of the  
6  
7 Neolithic Age (VH7-I: 22).<sup>10</sup>  
8  
9

10 This understanding of *other* peoples as located in a remote age (i.e. the Neolithic, the Stone  
11 Age) mobilises a temporal device paradigmatic of the modern representation of difference as  
12 *distance* (Fabian, 2002: 16): 'There are still in our present times hunter peoples from the Stone  
13 Age that live in the Amazonia and in some Pacific islands.' (LH7: 17). Regarding *Egyptian*  
14 *Civilisation*, however, the text states that: 'The agricultural techniques of Ancient Egypt are still  
15 used in present times, such as the plug, the construction of dikes and drainage techniques to  
16 distribute water all over the land' (VH7-I: 35). The linear timing locates the 'African village' in a  
17 different time (the Neolithic) and at a different stage of development (*rudimentary*), whereas  
18 'Egyptian *civilisation*' – overlooking that it is in the African continent – is *still* present in our  
19 scientifically advanced societies, as we can appreciate from the enduring use of their  
20 techniques. This thus establishes which society 'qualifies' for the status of *civilisation* and the  
21 location of the people who *still* live in archaic conditions. Following Eric Wolf, this  
22 representation of time and space 'turns history into a moral success story' - that of  
23 *modernisation* which, since the 19th century, has become 'an instrument for bestowing praise  
24 on societies deemed to be modern and casting a critical eye on those that had yet to attain  
25 that achievement' (1997: 12).  
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45 An important consequence of this Eurocentric and authoritarian representation of time  
46 and space is the fixing of certain (racial, ethnic) markers and postures as *belonging to* specific  
47 territories. Accordingly, *decontextualised* images of black people in a suffering/violent posture  
48 are deployed to represent contemporary Africa:  
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53 Regarding Document 4 (picture of starving black children with empty plates in their hands,  
54 waiting for food):  
55

56 - Identify the level of development of the people represented;  
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- Identify the continent where nowadays there is a larger number of countries with the same level of development;
- Relate this level of development to the process of decolonisation;
- Give two examples of NGOs that try to respond to the problems of these populations (NH9: 169).

Students are thus expected to internalise a pattern of recognition/representation, expressed in the following equation:

[black] Africa = failed decolonisation = underdevelopment = required [Western] humanitarian intervention

## 2.2. A paradigm of social, economic and political organisation: the (democratic) national State

The notions of Society and Europe, what do they suggest to you? (VH7-II: 22).

The complex process of the nationalisation as the homogenisation of society (Tilly, 1992; 1994), that is, the constitution of 'the social' as 'the nation'<sup>11</sup> (one community, one language, one culture, in a well-bounded territory) is naturalised and reified in textbooks. This is a crucial feature of those implicit constructions of 'Selfhood' that underwrite the representation of the 'other' because their core narrative authorises a paradigm of political organisation – the democratic national state. This perspective does not only render *invisible* other forms of the political as, more importantly, it *neglects* the political features of different forms of organisation. Accordingly, Africa – with the exception of Egypt – is presented as an empty land with no complex social and political organisation until the Europeans arrived there (Wolf's 'ethnographic present', 1997) and where, instead of nations, 'we' found *tribes or indigenous chiefs*<sup>12</sup>; thus, the notion of 'Africa' only becomes meaningful *when* related to what Europeans and the Portuguese, possessed, achieved and *designated* in that territory:

The objective of the Portuguese in Africa was trade [15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries]. From Morocco to Senegal, they traded with tribes of nomad Moors that lived in the Western Saharan region.

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2  
3 Further south, they traded with the 'Guinéus' ['Guineans'], the designation given by the  
4 Portuguese to the inhabitants of Black Africa (H8: 38).

5  
6 Portuguese history textbooks reify not only the idea of the national-state but also of  
7 Europe. Such historical formations are subsumed under a teleological discourse that makes  
8 sense according to the 'final result', *i.e.* the European Community<sup>13</sup>. For instance, the period  
9 between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries – 'The Barbarian Invasions' – emerges as a time when,  
10 paradoxically, *Europe invades Europe*:

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18 *Europe under threat.* Fear and insecurity. Western Europe was characterised by a climate of great  
19 insecurity since the fifth century, due to the barbarian invasions. This atmosphere was  
20 aggravated with the new wave of invasions that Europe suffered between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>  
21 Centuries. Three were the attacking peoples: the Muslims, the Normans and the Hungarians.  
22 Europe felt threatened and entrenched for more than two centuries (LH7: 128).

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28 The national-state paradigm is presented as the process of both Christianisation and of  
29 democratisation. Significant parts of two textbooks are dedicated to 'The formation of  
30 Western Christianity and Islamic Expansion', from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (VH7-II; LH7),  
31 with subtitles such as 'The birth of Western Christian Europe', 'The Catholic Church in Western  
32 Europe' or 'Europe under threat'. Therefore, the following historical formation and collective  
33 identity is established:  
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42 [White] Portugal = the National State = Western Christian Europe [the Roman Catholic Church]

43  
44 There is a naturalisation of the relation between *society* and a culturally *homogeneous nation*  
45 deployed in contrast to the heterogeneous, nomad (stateless) 'tribes'<sup>14</sup> found by the  
46 Europeans in the African context; this equation is clear in the interpretation of the processes of  
47 independence of the North American colonies: 'The Independence of the United States of  
48 America: all these colonies had common bonds: the majority of the population spoke English  
49 and practiced the Protestant religion' (LH8-2: 16). As the map below shows, the expansion of  
50 the national-state paradigm thus sees its turning point with the 'Liberal Revolutions',  
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3 epitomised by the American and French Revolutions. These processes show the intellectual  
4  
5 interrelation between the Americas and Europe, which combined Christianity and Nationalism.  
6  
7 Political processes in other regions (such as Africa and Asia) are not considered relevant, as  
8  
9 they do not match those 'revolutionary' processes that engendered the ideals of modern  
10  
11 citizenship and liberal democracy.  
12

13  
14  
15 INSERT ABOUT HERE *Figure 1. 'The Liberal Revolutions in Europe and the Americas' (1776-1825)*

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17  
18 (SH8:157)  
19

20  
21  
22 Whereas the 'American Revolution' is depicted as a successful process of nation-formation and  
23  
24 democratisation, the processes of 'Independence' in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Africa and more precisely,  
25  
26 the so called 'Colonial War' between Portugal and the African colonies, are considered not so  
27  
28 much as a political process, but rather as 'Guerrilla Warfare'; the images deployed highlight  
29  
30 the violent character of the guerrilla: 'Portuguese soldiers captured by Angolan guerrilla  
31  
32 troops' (NH9: 179). In a similar fashion, the narrative describes the Portuguese colonisers'  
33  
34 violent behaviour as *defensive*, whereas the 'Angolan guerrilla' is depicted as *murderous*:  
35

36  
37  
38 A generalised feeling of fear among colonial settlers led them to kill many indigenous people,  
39  
40 while some of the latter ran away to join the guerrilla movement. Afterwards, tribes from  
41  
42 Northern Angola murdered hundreds of colonial settlers (NH9: 178).  
43

44  
45 The description of the Angolan guerrilla troops as 'tribes' is important because contemporary  
46  
47 'Africa' is usually described as a failed continent (the failure of national states), trapped in  
48  
49 corruption, poverty and internal violence; for instance, a picture showing a group of armed  
50  
51 black men has the following footnote: 'Internal conflicts in an African country, present days'  
52  
53 (NH9: 162). As argued above, the violent *and* the suffering (black) Africa are two sides of the  
54  
55 same coin, authorising not only certain decontextualised representations of power relations  
56  
57 but also the requirement for Western (humanitarian) intervention:  
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3 Until recently, the history of Portuguese capitalist colonial genocidal practices was written from a  
4 white man's perspective. The West persists in positioning Africa as a continent without human  
5 political solutions, and the mainstream media depicts Africa as a 'red cross' problem. That is,  
6 there is no political solution for the African continent (Paraskeva, 2006: 250).  
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### 11 12 13 **2.3. Racism within the definitive bond between concepts and historical processes**

14 Socio-historical studies have demonstrated that it was in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century,  
15 within the Enlightenment's growing centrality of scientific and empiricist rationality, that the  
16 idea of 'race' entered common usage. At the time, it was used to refer to discrete categories,  
17 empirically observable, according to phenotypical traits (Mosse, 1978; Solomos and Back,  
18 1996; Hannaford, 1996). Nevertheless, we argue that it is crucial to consider that racially  
19 defined discourses and administrations of populations have existed without a clear concept of  
20 'race' – scientifically sustained – that refers to bounded groupings of human beings. The  
21 governing of populations based on racial ideas was already in place in 15th century Iberian  
22 Peninsula, illustrated by the idea of 'purity of blood' in the persecution of New Christians  
23 (Fredrickson, 2002) or in the construction of the category 'Negro' as an equivalent to slave  
24 (Sweet, 2003). This is of great importance for the analysis of Portuguese textbooks regarding  
25 two aspects: on the one hand, the conceptual shrinkage in the understanding of racism  
26 (reduced to an extremist ideology) and, on the other, the establishment of a definitive bond  
27 between racism, 19<sup>th</sup>-century Imperialism and the Nazi regime.  
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45 All textbooks analysed refer to racism for the first time in the period at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup>  
46 century, focused on 'Imperialism and Colonialism' – emphasising the British and French cases.  
47 Subsequently racism is thoroughly discussed as a *prejudice* characteristic of the Italian and  
48 German totalitarian regimes of the 1930s and 1940s (LH9-1; NH9). Racism is only mentioned  
49 again in relation to the 'situation of minorities' in Western societies during the 1950s and  
50 1960s, illustrated by the *Ku-Klux-Klan* as an example of a 'racist organisation' (LH9-2: 46). We  
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3 thus consider that textbooks reinforce a Eurocentric concept of racism that associates it with  
4  
5 'some form of extremism or exceptionalism, rather than something more conventional and  
6  
7 mainstream' (Hesse, 2004: 14; see also Gilroy, 1992). This linkage of racism and racial  
8  
9 discourses to very specific projects, such as 19<sup>th</sup>-century's Imperialist enterprise, locates racism  
10  
11 in the colonial territories while conceiving these as *outside and unrelated to Europe*. Such  
12  
13 approach hinders a broader understanding of 'the interaction between racism as a modern  
14  
15 political project and the European nation-state' (Lentin, 2004: 36), beyond the Nazi State and  
16  
17 anti-Semitism. Following Barnor Hesse, this can be seen as the double bind that operates in  
18  
19 the (Eurocentric) concept of racism:  
20  
21

22  
23 the concept of racism is doubly-bound into revealing (nationalism) and concealing (liberalism),  
24  
25 foregrounding (sub-humanism) and foreclosing (non-Europeanism), affirming (extremist  
26  
27 ideology) and denying (routine governmentality) (Hesse, 2004: 14).  
28

29 Furthermore, it is fundamental to emphasise the historical shrinkage that confines racial  
30  
31 governmentality to the so called 'new Imperialism' (LH9-1: 14) and the Western European  
32  
33 countries 'greed for Africa': 'Europeans considered it was their duty to bring their 'superior  
34  
35 civilisation' to the less-developed peoples. Africa was thus the most desired continent' (LH9-1:  
36  
37 16). The textbooks analysed do not consider racial differentiation and racist governmentality  
38  
39 within the Portuguese and Spanish 'Expansion' and the systems of slave trade and slavery.  
40  
41 Slave trade is mainly depicted as part of the 'circulation of new products' between Europe and  
42  
43 the other continents. Following Ellen Swartz's study of American history textbooks, we also  
44  
45 consider that in the Portuguese textbooks analysed, 'slavery discourse (...) generally serves to  
46  
47 justify and normalise the system of slavery' (1992: 345). Slavery thus appears 'more as a  
48  
49 necessity, not as a choice, implying that slavery was natural, inevitable, and unalterable' (*Ibid*:  
50  
51 345):  
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54  
55 *Portuguese presence in Black Africa*. The climate in São Tomé is hot and damp and the soil is  
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57 quite fertile. The Europeans, however, were deeply affected by tropical diseases, particularly  
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3 malaria, and it was mainly thanks to the African slave labour that a dynamic sugar production  
4 was settled. The two archipelagos [S. Tomé and Cape Verde] became *entrepôts* of the slave  
5 trade. Slaves were acquired in the African coast and thereafter re-exported to Europe and the  
6  
7 American continent (LH8-1: 38, original emphasis).  
8  
9

10 The depoliticised accounts of Portuguese colonialism guarantee the absence of a discussion of  
11 racism and racial consciousness before the emergence of specific racist ideologies and theories  
12 of 'race' in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century; this is key to understanding the prevalence of a discourse that  
13 underwrites the 'good sides of colonialism' in terms of *multiculturalism* and *cultural contact*.  
14  
15 On the contrary, we consider that the historical period characterised in textbooks as the  
16 'Expansion' or the 'Discoveries' was crucial for the emergence of hierarchical racial  
17 classifications and of racist governmentality<sup>15</sup>:  
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26 The sixteenth century thus marks the divide in the rise of race consciousness. Not only does the  
27 concept of race become explicitly and consciously applied but also one begins to see racial  
28 characterization emerging in art as much as in politico-philosophical debates. [...] while slavery  
29 may be explained largely (though not nearly exhaustively) in economic terms, one must insist in  
30 asking why it was at this time that racial difference came to define fitness for enslavement and  
31 why some kinds of racial difference rather than others (Goldberg, 2002: 287).  
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38 Some textbooks focus rather on the 'degrading conditions' under which those enslaved  
39 were treated, stressing a moral narrative on the 'inhumanity' of slavery (LH8-1: 39). Thus,  
40 rather than an articulated discourse on racism<sup>16</sup>, euphemisms pervade a benevolent and  
41 compassionate discourse on 'circulation', 'acculturation' and 'miscegenation', illustrated by the  
42 following passage:  
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49 The practice of slavery, the large-scale transportation of African population to America and  
50 Europe, gave rise to miscegenation (the mixing of races) and sometimes created among  
51 Europeans a feeling of superiority in relation to the indigenous peoples. This attitude, however,  
52 brought about in some European minds, namely members of the clergy, an awareness of the  
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3 need to defend these peoples antagonised by others. Moreover, maritime expansion led to a  
4  
5 broader understanding of Nature (*Ibid*: 39).

6  
7 Racism is (not) named with the euphemistic 'sentiment of superiority', and therefore not  
8  
9 considered as a 'routine governmentality' (Hesse, 2004) structuring society and politics, but as  
10  
11 an 'attitude'. Conceived as an individual disposition, racism can be combated in the same way  
12  
13 some 'members of the clergy' did in those times. This is an example of the deployment of a  
14  
15 moralising approach to speak of racism: challenges to injustice, violent socio-economic  
16  
17 structures are projected as being undertaken by the 'good people', whose immersion within  
18  
19 the colonial ideology is masked. The narrative shifts the focus onto the humanitarianism of the  
20  
21 clergy. Within this humanist take on difference, empathy<sup>17</sup> emerges as the only available  
22  
23 device to approach the 'other'.<sup>18</sup> In the textbooks analysed, empathy is deployed to favour the  
24  
25 identification of the reader with the feelings of the victim – *i.e.* the 'slaves' - facilitating the  
26  
27 cognitive and emotional *understanding* of the victim's suffering.<sup>19</sup>

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30  
31 Write a text to be titled *Living and Working in a 17th-century Brazilian Sugar Mill (...)*

32 Which sufferings did slaves experience, during transport and captivity? Were they truly  
33  
34 considered and treated as human beings? Which moral opinions did – and still does – this drama  
35  
36 elicit? (LH8-1: 97-98).

37  
38 Empathy with the enslaved emerges as a way of sustaining a humanist and moralising view  
39  
40 that evades issues of power/'race' and is incapable of questioning the master narrative that  
41  
42 runs throughout the textbooks, consistent with a view of slavery and colonialism as an *evil*  
43  
44 located in the *past*. The shortcomings of this device are also evident in a section on the  
45  
46 Holocaust, where racism is addressed regarding the participation of Jesse Owens, the black  
47  
48 American athlete, in the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin. Next to the picture of him collecting  
49  
50 a medal, it is asked 'What would Jesse Owens feel when he went to collect his fourth medal at  
51  
52 the podium? Why?' (LH9-1: 159). While the students are invited to walk in his shoes, racism is  
53  
54 framed as something morally 'wrong', happening to individual *powerless* victims. Victims are  
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3 thus presented as lacking any meaningful political action in those historical processes (seen in  
4  
5 the way the history of abolitionism or colonial independencies are told).  
6

7 In the textbooks analysed, the underlying assumption seems to be that teaching students  
8  
9 knowledge about the *feelings* of victims will result in their sympathy and change of attitudes  
10  
11 towards oppression. Yet, empathy alone cannot contest the broader depoliticised narrative  
12  
13 being deployed. Indeed, as Johnson (2005: 44) suggests, empathy may be ‘managed, limited,  
14  
15 and restrained’ in ways that do not challenge subordination. We thus argue that the framing of  
16  
17 the debate within a moral, binary opposition – the good victim vs. the bad aggressor – is not  
18  
19 capable of questioning the structural role played by colonialism, slavery and racism in Western  
20  
21 societies.  
22  
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## 24 25 26 27 **Conclusions**

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28  
29 This question of the ‘encounter of cultures’ [...] became central in the new commemorative cycle  
30  
31 opened in 1986. [...] For what it suggests and mostly for what it attempts to hide, this new  
32  
33 formulation of the ‘encounter’ is a much more demagogical rhetoric move than the former one  
34  
35 [‘discovery’]. [...] Nevertheless, the collective spirit promoted by the idea of the ‘encounter of  
36  
37 cultures’ was positive. [...] this image has functioned as a factor promoting humanistic and anti-  
38  
39 racist values. In any case, a clarification of the memory of the expansion can only result in the  
40  
41 fostering of a more complex and plural approach to history, the same strategy that was explicitly  
42  
43 adopted in 1996. For technical reasons of rigueur, for the adequacy to an ecumenical pedagogy  
44  
45 and, finally, for the ethical sense linked to the duty of amending cultural biases within the  
46  
47 approach to the other (Hespanha, 1999: 18-19).  
48

49  
50 In Portugal, when discussing the teaching of history, it is important to consider the work of the  
51  
52 *National Commission for the Commemoration of the Portuguese Discoveries* (1986-2002),  
53  
54 established to coordinate the activities marking the fifth centenary of the ‘Discoveries’, which  
55  
56 invested in research on historical sources and in the production of pedagogical resources. The  
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3 Commission played a crucial role in projecting a *renovated* portrait of Portuguese national  
4 identity and of *its* colonial history: the reading of the 'Discoveries' as 'inter-cultural dialogue'  
5 and of the Portuguese as 'cultural mediators', thus replacing the New State's version of 'racial  
6 mediators' (Vakil, 1996: 36). Accordingly, we see António Hespanha's<sup>20</sup> assessment of the  
7 Commission's work as embedded in a dominant perspective on the benefits of a 'more plural  
8 history', which is also present in debates on textbooks and school history. As argued  
9 throughout this article, we see multiperspectivity as limiting the possibility of adequately  
10 challenging Eurocentrism and Eurocentric notions of racism. That is, the positivist approach  
11 that proposes 'complexity' and 'clarification' – a more *rigorous knowledge* of the history of the  
12 'expansion', in this case – merely paves way to the balance between the positive and negatives  
13 sides of history and the rectification of wrong, biased representations of the other.  
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26  
27 Understanding Eurocentrism as a paradigm requires considering the enactment of specific  
28 power relations and the devices through which narratives work (e.g. the interplay of notions  
29 like time, place and national-state). A clear example is the deployment of time/space that  
30 conveys explanations of difference as being either 'deficient' (underdeveloped, violent) or  
31 'alike' (part of civilization, achieving independency as national states). This pattern *secures* a  
32 reading of history and particularly of modernity as a tale of 'Europe's' achievements, and thus  
33 of world capitalism and liberal democracy as the inevitable accomplishment of 'being modern'.  
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42 What is at stake is the relation between power and knowledge within the configuration of  
43 core patterns of interpretation/representation/recognition. Albeit in a more sanitised manner,  
44 the failure to overcome rectification or compensation is legitimising colonialism and  
45 naturalising racism.  
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23 <sup>1</sup> The project *'Race' and Africa in Portugal: a study on history textbooks (2008-2011)*, is funded by the Foundation  
24 for Science and Technology (ref. FCOMP-01-0124-FEDER-007554, within the EU programme COMPETE).

25 <sup>2</sup> We are aware that textbooks have a multiplicity of readings and are used in different ways within the pragmatics  
26 of history teaching. Yet our focus in this paper is not on everyday teaching practices but on how textbooks embody  
27 specific politics of representation.

28 <sup>3</sup> Selection of the textbooks in most common usage in schools was based on information provided by the Ministry of  
29 Education.

30 <sup>4</sup> KS3 is the only stage in compulsory schooling in which History is taught separately as a subject, even though  
31 officially there has been a call for its merger with Geography. Currently, history teaching has a 90-minute time slot.

32 <sup>5</sup> The correction of misrepresentations through the use of multiperspectivity has been often uncritically endorsed in  
33 the field of inter/multicultural education. For instance, Carmel Borg and Peter Mayo (2006) treat Eurocentrism as a  
34 matter of 'misconceptions', 'lack of basic knowledge' and 'distortions' (p. 151), despite recognising the limits of such  
35 approach (p. 152) and alluding to the operation of 'Western regimes of truth' (p. 153). Therefore, the challenge is  
36 perceived as a matter of re-centring the 'subaltern' to achieve multcentred curricula (Borg & Mayo, 2006: 158).

37 <sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion on the difficulties in formulating alternative epistemologies see Grosfoguel (2009).

38 <sup>7</sup> Regarding this, the processes of transformation in textbooks and curricula are usually framed as an issue of the  
39 representation of the 'other' (i.e. minorities and immigrants) and its effect on the (national) dominant narrative, in  
40 an 'either/or' perspective (e.g. Soysal & Shissler, 2005: 7), rendering Eurocentrism as the aforementioned condition  
41 of adjective or *foregone conclusion*.

42 <sup>8</sup> Salazar's regime partially drew on Gilberto Freyre's work, enunciated as *Lusotropicalism* in 1952.

43 <sup>9</sup> From the Latin *coaevus*, referring to people and things that exist at the same time, that coexist.

44 <sup>10</sup> All translations are our own.

45 <sup>11</sup> It is important to note that the history of Western social sciences, and more specifically of Sociology and Political  
46 Science, is tied to the configuration of the modern National States; therefore, the conceptualisation of 'the social'  
47 has been equated to that of the national state (Wolf, 1997). For a discussion of the crisis of this mode of  
48 categorisation in the field of sociological theory and analysis, see Pérez-Agote (1996).

49 <sup>12</sup> We have found only one map that represents processes of political organisation in Africa, registered with terms  
50 such as 'African states', 'Kingdoms' or 'Empires' (H8: 38).

51 <sup>13</sup> The numerous symposia and conferences organised by the Council of Europe on the teaching history and history  
52 textbooks since the 1950s have stressed the importance of promoting the 'European dimension of education  
53 through history' (Council of Europe, 1995: 10-11).

54 <sup>14</sup> As Lentin (2008) underlines, at the footsteps of David Goldberg's analysis of Thomas Hobbes' theory of the state,  
55 '[the modern state] stood in contrast to the chaos represented by statelessness. In the context of the 'discoveries',  
56 the territories inhabited by racial others were representative of statelessness. The fathers of European philosophy  
57 all referred to the lives of 'natives', 'savages', 'Indians' or 'Negroes' to exemplify their conceptions of the State of  
58 Nature' (p. 25).

59 <sup>15</sup> In this sense, we consider that some literature seems excessively concerned with the emergence of the idea of  
60 race (as fixed biological differences between human groups) and, therefore, they confine the 'modernity of racism'  
to 18th-century Enlightenment (for example, Lentin, 2004: 4-7), disregarding the particularities of racial  
governmentality before that period.

<sup>16</sup> See also van Dijk (1993).

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4 <sup>17</sup> We make a distinction between empathy - imagining another's emotions or perspectives ('walking in one's  
5 shoes') and sympathy - a shared emotion, including a feeling of pity or contempt that does not require empathic  
6 understanding. Some authors (e.g. Schaap, 2001) use the concept of sympathetic identification as an equivalent to  
7 empathy.

8 <sup>18</sup> The Sofia Symposium on 'History, democratic values and tolerance in Europe' organised by the Council of Europe,  
9 recommended that 'attitudes such as empathy and acceptance of diversity' should be encouraged within history  
10 curricula (Council of Europe, 1995: 64).

11 <sup>19</sup> Luc Boltanski stressed how this 'reflexive device' on humanitarian discourses envisages constructing the 'moral  
12 spectator' (*le spectateur moral*) through the inclusion of her/his feelings within the description of the other's  
13 suffering (2007: 90). See also Sontag (2004).

14 <sup>20</sup> Hespanha was the Committee's chief Commissioner from November 1995 to February 1999.

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**Table 1 - Key themes/historical periods under analysis**

<b>Year 7</b>	From the Hunter Gatherer Societies to the First Civilizations;  The Formation of Western Christianity and Islamic Expansion;
<b>Year 8</b>	Expansion and Change in the 15th and 16th Centuries;  Portugal in the European Context of the 17th and 18th Centuries;
<b>Year 9</b>	Europe and the World at the Turn of the Twentieth Century  From Post-WWII to the 1980s;  Cultural Challenges of Our Times.

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Figure 1. "The Liberal Revolutions in Europe and the Americas" (1776-1825) (RH8: 114)



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