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# Learning history through textbooks: are Mexican and Spanish students taught the same story?

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## Abstract

Teaching history, compared to other school subjects is characterised from country to country by widely varying content. This has been commented on by both historians (How history is re-told to the children of the world Fondo de Cultura Económica (1981); Clio sans uniform Suomalaineniedekatemia (1992)) and psychologists (J of Narrative and Life History 4 (1994) 295). In this paper, some of the events that occurred in 1492 and their representation in history textbooks have been selected in order to analyse the content of Mexican and Spanish textbooks. These two countries have been selected because it is anticipated that they will offer very different views about these controversial historical topics and some of the characters involved, such as Columbus. The analysis of textbook content indeed showed two different views of the same event by Mexico and Spain. This paper discusses the influence of these views in the formation of different national identities.

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## 1. Introduction

The teaching of history has specific features that make it a very different topic in comparison to other school subjects (Carretero, Jacott, Limón, Lopez-Manjón, & Leon, 1994; Voss & Carretero, 1998). One of these is the age from which history is taught. In some countries, the teaching of history begins at primary school, and

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it is an important part of the curriculum as early as elementary school (e.g. Italy, Argentina, Mexico). In other countries, history is a minor part of secondary education. Important differences can also be found with respect to the number of hours per week devoted to history in relation to the curriculum as a whole. For example, a number of European countries devote much more time per week to history than the United States of America, and the same can be said with regard to the total amount of time per year. These differences are striking particularly since there has been a continuous trend towards similar curriculum contents in recent decades. If a comparison is made in relation to mathematics or natural sciences, it can easily be seen that there are enormous similarities between different countries. Topics such as “energy”, “density”, “fractions” or “proportion” are taught at almost the same age, and almost the same importance is being given to them in terms of hours per academic year.

If we look at the selection of historical content across countries, a number of remarkable differences arise. For example, some educational systems include only a few topics about their national history, while others include the history of different civilisations and some international events. There is no doubt that these issues indicate the importance given to these historical contents by different societies, as much as the conception that these societies have of historical knowledge and of its uses, one of them being educational. Analysing instructional materials such as textbooks is an excellent way to study the above issues. This will be one of our main goals in this paper.

We are assuming that the study of history textbooks offers a broader and more illustrative picture of what happens in the classroom. Of course, we are aware that a comprehensive picture should include not only the study of instructional materials but also the study of what actually happens in the classroom. However, the analysis of historical content from both educational and cognitive points of view is an essential endeavour if we want to examine how students understand and represent historical knowledge.

In the case of history education, there is no doubt that textbooks have commonly transmitted the official historical version that different societies have of their past. Studying how official versions are taught to students in different countries is also very important for our purposes. We have therefore selected a historical topic that has played an influential role in Mexico and Spain — the “discovery” of America. This controversial topic has been selected because of the different and conflicting historical views and interpretations it has generated. The official and Eurocentric version that has been maintained for many years is that America was discovered by Columbus in 1492. In contrast to this “traditional” idea, in the last few years many Latin–American historians have considered this event not as a “discovery” but as an “encounter between two worlds: Europe and America” (e.g. Zea, 1989). Thus, rather than supporting the idea that America was discovered by the Old World — as traditionally stated — Americans and Europeans met and became acquainted with each other. Within this discussion of non-Eurocentric approaches, O’Gorman (1958) has played a very important role. He argues that the idea of America being discovered was the result of an intellectual invention and that America was not really discovered

but instead experienced a complex intellectual, philosophical and historical process. Another brilliant example of a very different approach is Todorov (1982). For him, the year of 1492 symbolises a twofold movement in the history of Spain. In that year, Spain repudiated its interior “other” by expelling the Jews and Muslims from Granada, while discovering its exterior “other” — the new continent that would later be called America (Todorov, 1982).

Despite the different accounts and conceptions of the past, presented above, there is no doubt that the discovery of America has been taught as an essential part of the national history curricula in Mexico and Spain. However, an important question thus arises: to what extent are students of these two countries taught the same story?

One of the well-known social functions of history education has been the production and propagation of an accurate account of the past. Indeed, every country has generated a number of “official” accounts of the past in different historical times and socio-political situations. Thus, the teaching of history has been a matter of great concern for every modern society. There is evidence of how the history curricula in Estonia and East Germany have changed in essence since the socio-political changes that took place in 1990. After the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the USSR, these two societies now represent their past in different ways (Ahonen, 1992). Therefore, it is fascinating to observe how school curricula convey the so-called “discovery of America”, and leads us to compare how historical content is used as a way of fostering and shaping the national identity — or at least a community or group identity. The distinction between “official history” and “unofficial histories” (Carretero et al., 1994) is useful for our purposes as identifying two different ways of representing the past. Thus Tulviste and Wertsch (1994) have analysed how these two types of histories were produced and consumed in post-Soviet Estonia. On the one hand, the “official history” has been spread through the teaching of history in school, textbooks being one of the most efficient tools. On the contrary, “unofficial histories” have been produced by informal education (e.g. oral tradition, religious institutions, meetings and discussions, underground literature, etc.).

According to Wertsch and Rozin (1998), “official history” has three main functions: (a) providing a cognitive instrument for envisioning the nation, (b) enhancing group identity, and (c) fostering loyalty in its citizens. These functions are also very important if we want to understand unofficial histories. For example, as Tulviste and Wertsch (1994) have outlined, unofficial histories in Estonia during the Soviet era served these functions in a more effective way than the official history taught in schools. Nevertheless, there is evidence of how people in Russia, Estonia and East Germany during the Soviet era had learned to manage at least two different historical versions, the official and the unofficial, creating what Ahonen (1992) has termed a “double consciousness”. This is a clear example of how official and unofficial representations of the past could coexist in one society.

Thus, some of the questions we are trying to address in this paper are as follows. What is the official historical version transmitted in the textbooks of Mexico and Spain in relation to the “discovery”? To what extent do textbooks share the same basic story or the same historical version? Do Spanish and Mexican textbooks offer very different historical versions of this event? If so, to what extent can these two

official versions be considered as the Eurocentric official version and the Latin-American non-official one?

## 2. Analysis of textbooks

Before analyzing the different textbooks, let us look at the importance given in both countries to the historical episode selected. As already mentioned, the discovery of America constitutes a relevant historical period in the history curricula of these two countries. If we look carefully at the organisation of the curricula, at primary and secondary levels, we shall observe that, to some extent, this theme serves as a landmark in their national histories.

In the case of Mexico, the national history curriculum is organised around the following themes: prehistory, first settlers of America, ancient Mexico, discovery and conquest, colony, the independence, the consolidation of the Mexican state, the Mexican revolution, and contemporary Mexico. In Spain, the national history curricula comprises the following themes: prehistory, Spain: from first settlers to romanisation, German invasions, Muslims in Spain, origin and expansion of Spanish Christian kingdoms, Spain from the 13th century until the end of the Reconquest, Spain in the reign of Fernando and Isabel, the discovery of America, the Spanish empire, Spain and the loss of hegemony, the 18th century: the illustration era, unity of Spain and the autonomy of its people. In both cases, it can be observed that there is a traditional linear approach in which history covers from the Stone Age to contemporary years. The only historical episode common to both curricula is the discovery and conquest of America.

Moreover, the weight that each country gives to history as a subject is different. In Spain, history is taught alongside geography, and ethic and civic subjects, as part of the social studies curriculum in elementary education, and as a specific subject in secondary education. The same pattern occurred in Mexico, but only until 1991. In 1992, history as a school subject in elementary education has changed. For 20 years, history was taught as part of the social studies curriculum. Nowadays, history is taught as a standalone subject from 4th to 6th grade and beyond into secondary education.

### 2.1. Material

We have selected four Spanish and five Mexican textbooks published in 1994 where the topic of the discovery of America was included (see Table 1). It is worth noting that, in Mexico, this topic is taught from the 4th grade (9–10-year olds) and continues into the 5th (10–11-year olds) and 7th (12–13-year olds) grades. In Spain, it is taught from the 5th grade (10–11-year olds) up until the 7th grade (12–13-year olds).

We have chosen four of the textbooks that are most widely used in Spanish elementary schools for all grades. Specifically, the textbooks published by Anaya and Santillana are more widespread, with schools across the whole country using

Table 1  
Description of textbooks analysed

Title	Age	Grade	Publisher
Spanish textbooks			
1 Ciencias Sociales 5	(10–11)	5th	Anaya
2 Ciencias Sociales Boveda	(12–13)	7th	Anaya
3 Sociedad 7	(12–13)	7th	Santillana
4 Ciencias Sociales 7	(12–13)	7th	Vicens-Vives
Mexican textbooks			
1 Historia 4	(9–10)	4th	Mexican State
2 Historia 5	(10–11)	5th	Mexican State
3 Historia 1	(12–13)	7th	Trillas
4 El mundo en la historia	(12–13)	7th	Trillas
5 Historia 1	(12–13)	7th	Castillo

them. The same is true with Vicens-Vives in Catalonia. The choice of Mexican textbooks has followed a different pattern due to the country's educational policy. Mexican textbooks are published by the Ministry of Education in elementary school (1st to 6th grade), and are provided free to all students. For this reason, two of the Mexican texts analysed here (4th and 5th grades) are state-published. In the case of secondary education (7th grade) the two textbooks published by Trillas and one published by Castillo have been chosen because of their great dissemination at this educational level.

## 2.2. Content analysis

In order to know how textbooks approach the discovery of America, we have carried out a content analysis of the selected texts and the iconographic representations therein. Specifically, the following features have been considered in the analysis of content: (a) some important aspects related to the controversial concept of the discovery of America, (b) the role of Columbus and other historical characters, (c) some of the consequences of these historical events in the two continents.

### 2.2.1. *Discovery of America or encounter between two worlds?*

Firstly, it is interesting to examine how the event has been labelled by each textbook. As we mentioned before, the very term "discovery" has given rise to much debate among historians.

Specifically, we shall consider if the expression "discovery of America" was in the title or subtitle of the chapter. All Spanish texts begin the study of this period with titles that includes the term "discovery", like "The discovery of America", "The great geographic discoveries" or "The discovery of the Indies". On the contrary, in the case of the Mexican textbooks, our analysis revealed that this matter does not appear in any of the five texts. Analysing the four Spanish textbooks, the term "discovery of America" is mentioned two, four, five and six times respectively. However,

the Mexican ones only mentioned it in textbook 1 (twice) and textbook 2 (three times) (see Table 1 for annotations). The Mexican textbooks examined here seem to avoid any mention of this historical event as the “discovery of America”, and instead use terms such as, for example, “The encounter between two worlds”, “The accidental encounter of a new world”, “The European explorations”, (six, six, two, three times and once respectively), which are never mentioned in the Spanish texts. The following extract, from one of the Mexican textbooks, makes clear the idea of “encounter” rather than “discovery”:

Columbus believed he had arrived in Asia. He probably never suspected that he had brought about the encounter of two worlds: the old (Europe, Africa, Asia) and the new one, later called America. From this encounter onwards, communication between these two parts of the earth, which had been separated for a thousand years was achieved. (Mexican textbook 1, p. 49)

The differences between these two conceptions are very clear when the captions in the Mexican and Spanish textbooks are compared (Fig. 1). Although the very same illustration has been found in Mexican textbook 1 and in Spanish textbook 4, the different captions reveal the conception that each textbook has of the event. The Mexican book uses the terms “makes contact” and “encounter”. It also mentions that the two principal motives for the Europeans were to “collect gold objects” and religion. It is important to note the emphasis on taking away goods from America. However, the Spanish caption mentions that the natives offer presents to Columbus, in the most traditional way of describing the “discovery”. The caption also includes the fact that the natives were naked, according to the majority of the popular images of “exotic native”.

### 2.2.2. *Columbus: discoverer?*

As regards the figure of Columbus, it can be said that, despite the great majority of textbooks including a (sometimes detailed) description of his voyages, the treatment given to his character tends to be quite different according to the story being told. Thus, for example, Columbus has a central role as the “hero” discovering America in Spanish texts. Thus, the courage, experience, steadfastness, intelligence and “great intuition” of the admiral are just some of the qualities mentioned in descriptions of his actions, alongside his desire and strong conviction to demonstrate that the earth was round.

In contrast, the majority of Mexican texts avoid any type of personal value judgement of Columbus. Only two references to him were found concerning his experience as a sailor. In contrast, Mexican textbooks pay more attention to Americo Vespuccio as the true discoverer of the New World. If we take into account that Vespuccio was the first to suspect that the land found by Columbus was not Asia but a new continent, we may understand how important this matter is for the Mexicans. This idea can be summarised in the following way: Columbus does not discover America but he rather finds it where he thought Asia would be; Vespuccio meanwhile would be the first to realise that this land was not Asia. The use of this idea in the texts



Fig. 1. Although the same drawing is included in one Mexican textbook and one Spanish one, the captions are different. (a) In this engraving by Théodore de Bry (1528–1599), a Spanish expedition makes contact with the inhabitants of the Antilles. The two principal motives of the encounter for the Europeans were to collect gold objects (as shown in the foreground) and to convert the natives to Christianity, for which purpose the cross is being erected (left) (Mexican textbook 1, p. 49). (b) The engraving by the Flemish artist Thierry de Bry (16th century) represents Columbus's landing on the island that would later be called La Española (Hispaniola). In the background are three ships, and in the foreground Columbus, dressed in the style of the artist's period (second half of the 16th century), receiving offerings from the natives, who are shown naked. The evangelising nature of the expedition is indicated by the scene of the sailors erecting a cross on the beach. (Spanish textbook 4, pp. 208–209).

serves to subtract the recognition from the role traditionally attributed to Columbus as discoverer by “the old World perspective”. Furthermore, the way in which Columbus's arrival in America is described not as a discovery but as an accident is illustrative:

Columbus always thought he had reached Asia; he never realised he had landed on a continent hitherto unknown to Europeans. The existence of a fourth continent began to be known in 1503, with the writings and maps of Americo Vespuccio, after whom it was named (Mexican textbook 2, p. 34).

In the same way, there is a tendency to stress the importance of other navigators such as Nuñez de Balboa as the discoverer of the Pacific Ocean. Mexican textbooks also refer to Sebastian Elcano and Fernando Magallanes as those navigators who truly circumnavigated the globe.

In comparing the view transmitted by different descriptions of Columbus, it is important to note that Spanish texts mostly describe him as a great scientist who, in spite of many obstacles, tried to demonstrate that the Earth was round. In contrast, the scientific objectives of Columbus's venture are not even mentioned in the Mexican texts analysed in this study. Indeed, it could be argued that the opposite is true, and that the textbooks present attempts to destroy the idea of Columbus as a scientist. As an example of this, Mexican textbook 1 includes an illustration showing a Cyclops, mermaids and other fantastic creatures that Columbus believed he had seen on his voyages (p. 460). At the same time, there is a tendency to include maps and information about contemporary knowledge in relation to the spherical nature of the earth. Again we can see the differences between the texts. First, let us look at two Mexican texts, where it is emphasised that the theories of Columbus and his contemporaries were not new:

From the beginnings of 15th century, European geographers and sailors knew that the Earth is spherical. This idea has been maintained by Ptolemy, a Greek wise man, in the 2nd century. However, it was not known in Europe until the 13th century (Mexican textbook 2, p. 136).

From a long time ago, many Europeans knew that the Earth was round. This is an illustration of an Italian book from the 13th century [The illustration represents the Earth being round, and six men are located around it in different positions] (Mexican textbook 1, p. 45)

The Spanish example, below, reveals a very different story. Here, we can observe how the conception of the scientific knowledge that Europeans had of the Earth at those times seems to be very different:

After looking carefully this map, you will realise that Europeans knew very little of the Earth in the 15th century. Many people believed that the earth was flat and only a very few wise men and cartographers had begun to suspect that the Earth was round (Spanish textbook 4, p. 199).

Thus, the idea of Columbus as a genuine scientist who maintained ideas contrary to the knowledge of his times, makes his enterprise more heroic. On the other hand, while Spanish texts tend to describe the hero's glorious exploits in some detail, there is almost no reference to some of the hardships and troubles that he endured later in life. Only Mexican texts refer to his imprisonment after his third voyage, and how Isabel and Fernando (the Catholic monarchs) removed his status as governor of the new lands. Spanish texts only recount the events that make Columbus a hero and omit all events relating to the decadence of the hero, such as his death in complete poverty.

In relation to other historical characters mentioned in the Spanish texts, that the Spanish King and Queen and the Pinzón brothers are the most frequently mentioned. It can also be observed that some iconographic representations of the Catholic monarchs appear in most of these textbooks. But in the case of the Mexican ones, the

more frequent character mentioned is Amerigo Vespuccio, followed by Fernando and Isabel.

### 2.2.3. *Consequences*

Generally, there seem to be two different models of representing the consequences of Columbus's arrival in America in 1492 in the textbooks analysed here: the "cultural imposition approach" reflected in the Spanish textbooks and the "mixing approach" in the Mexican ones.

The central idea of the cultural imposition approach is that the most important consequences were the diffusion of the Spanish culture in America and its imposition on indigenous cultures. As might be expected, this version appears only in the Spanish texts. However, it cannot be maintained that all indigenous culture manifestations completely disappeared, but this is often the idea that tends to be transmitted in such texts: traces of indigenous cultures would seem to have been effectively eliminated. As was the case with the "discovery approach" discussed above, the subjects of this official history are the same in the "imposition approach": those men who discovered a new continent or those who conquered and colonised the New World. It is a story that has no place for American natives as active agents of this great and impressive enterprise. Their "voices" are mostly neglected and rejected. They are simply denied as if they have never existed. They are frequently only referred to as objects, using expressions such as the "conquered territories", the "colonized lands", for example. It is worth realising how these texts contain no information about the socio-economic, cultural or political life of people living in America before Columbus's arrival. This is even more important if we think about the effects of the discovery, how indigenous cultures were transformed by this cultural imposition. In one paragraph entitled "The Hispanisation and Christianisation of the Indians", we are told how native Americans adopted not only the new techniques brought by the Spaniards, such as crops, tools and animals, but "above all they [the Indians] adopted from Spain those elements that would change their identity: its language and its religion" (Spanish textbook 4, p. 233). The following are further examples of this: "Europeans spread their culture. The language, form of administration, laws, art and religion of each mother country were extended to the conquered territories" (Spanish textbook 3, p. 113). "Spain's colonial presence in America lasted more than 300 years, but her cultural bequest remains to the present day. The nations that have arisen from the former colonies speak Spanish, follow the Catholic religion and have many customs inherited from Spain" (Spanish textbook 3, p. 144).

In the same way, in referring to the conquest and colonisation of America, there is a tendency to stress the heroic nature of the actions carried out by a handful of Spaniards in the great expanses of the new continent. Three Spanish texts contain references to the small number of Spaniards in America compared to the number of natives. This fact lends more credibility to the glorious nature of the conquest and colonisation of the new world. The following are some examples:

By the mid-sixteenth century, in less than fifty years, a handful of Spaniards had travelled the length of and colonized an entire continent. (Spanish textbook 2, p. 144).

After the discovery of America, the Spaniards began the enormous task of exploring and colonising the continent. In less than fifty years, Spain conquered extensive areas of North, Central and South America. (Spanish textbook 3, p. 144).

Once the *Gran Conquista* (Great Conquest) had been completed, around 1500, the Spaniards began the painstaking task of colonisation. Over the next two and a half centuries, a group, never very numerous, of Spaniards and descendants of Spaniards would transform a large part of the American continent, converting it into the basis of what is now Hispanoamerica. The Spaniards impose in America their language, their religion, their techniques, their government, their way of thinking. The great mass of natives, whom were always larger in number than the Spanish, largely accepted this Spanish culture”. (Spanish textbook 4, p. 228)

The heroic suffering of the Spaniards is emphasised in Fig. 2. In this drawing (Spanish textbook 4, p. 208) we can see how Spanish troops left by Columbus in “La Española” were killed by the natives. The choice of this illustration is not extreme. It reveals an implicit idea about the character of native people as savages and therefore belonging to a very primitive culture.

In contrast, the other account identified by us emphasises the mixing of different cultures. As might be expected, only the Mexican texts make reference to this idea. In fact, in Spanish texts it is rarely mentioned that one of the most important conse-



Fig. 2. This engraving appears in the book by *Décadas*. It represents, in a quite primitive way, the story of the fort called Natividad, which Columbus built on the island of La Española. When he returned on his second voyage, Columbus found the fort burnt and destroyed, and the men he had left behind had been killed. (Spanish textbook 4, p. 208).

quences of these events was the mixing of very different cultures. The only reference found in the Spanish texts alludes to blood mixing:

The American culture is an extension of the Spanish. Spanish and Indian blood soon became mixed [...] The race, language, religion and thought of Latin American society today is that left by Spanish culture as the inheritance of centuries of common history (Spanish textbook 2, p. 144).

Thus, in the Spanish texts, we have “American culture is an extension of Spanish culture” or “continent of Spanish language and culture”. We are left in no doubt that the Indians, “adopted Spanish civilization”, as was the desire of the Spanish crown.

This Eurocentric vision opposes the Mexican one. In the latter one, far less importance is given to the encounter itself and much more to the mixture of different cultural and racial elements, the consequence of which was the birth of new cultures. The implication here is that the relationship between Spaniards and natives was two-way. However, there is a tendency in the texts to overestimate the importance of this phenomenon of mixing, if we consider that they often fail to mention the presence of a considerable number of indigenous cultures, of approximately ten million native people, that nowadays exist as ethnic minorities.

We found an implicit and sometimes explicit assessment of the consequences of the discovery. On one hand, the Spanish textbooks highlight the positive nature of the cultural imposition. On the other hand, the arrival of the Spaniards is considered by the Mexican textbooks to be a tragedy or drama for the natives. Let us take the following example where the negative consequences of the Spanish arrival are very explicit:

The encounter between the two worlds was devastating for the inhabitants of the New World. The Europeans appropriated the land and forced the natives to work in mines, in construction and on their estates. They imposed their religion and a new way of life. Where they were able to accuse them of rebellion or of rejecting Christianity they felt justified in enslaving them. Moreover, the colonists brought diseases such as measles, typhus, diphtheria and smallpox, against which the indigenous people had no defenses. This led to the death of many “naturals” (as they called the native people). In the first 25 years of the Spanish occupation, the population of the Antilles almost disappeared. Spain and Portugal exploited the resources of America; other European nations would later do the same (Mexican textbook 1, p. 49).

This dramatic view can also be observed in the pictorial representation included in the texts. Specifically, Fig. 3 appears in the Mexican textbook 2 (p. 151) reveals how “the threatening dogs brought by Spaniards show their ferocity and violence” towards the Indians. The choice of one illustration or drawing influences how the textbooks transmit their message. Teaching history also teaches emotions and values.



Fig. 3. The Spaniards brought ferocious dogs an Indian is being attacked by a Spanish soldier's dog. (Mexican textbook 2, p. 151).

### 3. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to analyse the content of history textbooks from Mexico and Spain. Both countries share a very important part of their history in the Modern Era (1492–1789) since the “encounter” or “discovery of America”.

The analysis of the textbooks reveals differences between the two countries in their historical approach. On the one hand, the Spanish textbooks share the concept of the discovery of America, the heroic nature of the enterprise, the importance of Columbus, and the idea of cultural imposition. The whole picture reveals that the Spanish textbooks transmit the discoverers as the “good guys”. In a certain sense, this means that Spanish culture, better and more advanced, was “superior” to that of the natives’. The picture that Spanish textbooks offer agrees with the image of Spain as a great empire where the sun never sets. We cannot forget that the discovery of America was definitive, in allowing Spain to become one of the most influential countries of the time. Thus, the approach offered in Spanish textbooks reinforces the idea of being proud of their past in Spanish students.

The same relationships can be found between the past offered by the Mexican textbooks and their influence in the conformation of the national identity. In the Mexican case, the historical approach is based on the idea of encounter between two worlds according to the mixing concept of cultures. We have said that the Mexican textbooks tried to stress the bi-directionality of the encounter, that is, the similar

status of the two worlds involved. It also seems to de-emphasise Columbus's importance and consequently his intelligence and scientific knowledge. This approach stresses the negative consequences of the Spanish arrival on the natives. Mexican textbooks clearly take the natives' side, while Spanish textbooks take the conqueror's side.

Can these two accounts be considered as the official and the unofficial histories? We think that the two versions are the official history in each country, although this issue is much more complex. Let us explain some previous concepts that will help to explain the relationship between official and unofficial histories. In describing the emergence of Mexico as a nation, two approaches can be found among Mexican historians. On the one hand, the so-called indigenous approach states that Mexico has always existed. On the other hand, the so-called Spanish approach states that Mexico has only existed since the arrival of the Spaniards. These two approaches have been taught alternately in different periods in Mexican history. After the Mexican Revolution (1910–17) these two approaches become incompatible and the indigenous version becomes the official history. From the 1940s to the 1970s, a more conciliatory version of the past emerged that continues today. However, the indigenous tendency is usually present in some way.

What we found in the analysis of the Mexican history textbooks is a "mixed" version according to the conciliatory version of the 1970s. Perhaps, the case of Mexico is similar to that of Estonia, where despite the existence of a clear and open rejection to the official Soviet approach, the unofficial histories were based fundamentally in the official approaches (Tulviste & Wertsch, 1994). That is, the unofficial approach or history contains various counter-arguments stated to refute the basic point of the official history. In the case of Mexico, the history presented in the textbooks, even though different, is not completely incompatible and alternative. There is a tendency to refute some of the basic argument of the official history, such as the very concept of discovery, the figure of the hero, etc. As a matter of fact, the Spanish version can be considered as the official one that influenced the version found in Mexican textbooks.

The so-called discovery of America is not a historical event directly connected to the Mexican culture, taking into account that Columbus never set his foot in Mexican land. Despite this, Mexico celebrates 12 October, the day of the discovery of America, and Columbus is represented in several statues. It is interesting to reflect how Mexican textbooks will describe the colonisation period. The colonisation provokes great emotional reactions among Mexican people. In this case Hernán Cortés, the conqueror of Mexico, is so hated that not a single statue or other representation of him exists. Further research is needed to convey these issues. In Spain, another fascinating matter is that, in the last few years, official and unofficial historical accounts about Columbus's trips seem to be emerging, together with a re-visiting of the role played by Fernando and Isabel in the discovery and in the formation of a national unity. Currently, this only appears in the teaching materials of certain Spanish regions. It will also be interesting to see what historical approach will be adopted by different Spanish communities, for example, in Catalonia and the Basque country

in relation to these matters. These are some topics worthy of research in future studies in both countries.

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