

*The otherness in history textbooks used in middle school*¹

Gabriela Gonçalves Rosa da Silva¹

¹ Degree in History from UTP, teacher at Colégio Contemporâneo

Eliane Mimesse Prado²

² PhD in Education from PUC-SP, professor at Centro Universitário Internacional UNINTER, eliane.p@grupouninter.com.br.

ABSTRACT

This research analyzed how the otherness appeared in history textbooks. It was verified that the discourse of equality and inclusion was described in handbooks of Brazilian history adopted on 7th grades of middle school. This option arises due to the content presented in that grade. Issues related to *the other* were researched. The sources were the handbooks indicated for the 7th grades in 2008 in the Book Guide of the Textbook National Program and used by teachers. It was concluded that in spite of new methodologies and the innovative discourse there is an ethnocentric perspective about certain events. This is fact often repeated by teachers in their daily practices.

Key words: Teaching of history. Otherness. Textbooks.

INTRODUCTION

The reason behind this research has its grounds on the task of understanding the school reality regarding the teaching of the Brazilian history. For the development of the research, textbooks from 7th grades of middle school were used due to the content concerning the subject. Handbooks indicated by the National Program of the Textbook² (PNLD) for the year of 2008 were selected, and then it was verified which of these handbooks were used in some of the classrooms in state schools of the city of Curitiba. Only six volumes could not be analyzed, since the other titles indicated on the PNLD list were not adopted by teachers.

The discussions between the theory and the practice are extensive, so the proposals set out in the National Curriculum Parameters³ (PCN) for history will be the starting point. The Parameters emphasize the need for the students to develop historical and critical awareness, to be able to "identify, locate, recognize, understand, know, question, dominate and value" the

¹ Title in Portuguese: *A alteridade contida nos livros didáticos de história utilizados no ensino fundamental*. English version by SILVA, Edna Marta Oliveira da. 2014.

² In Portuguese: "Programa Nacional do Livro Didático".

³ In Portuguese: "Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais".

The otherness in history textbooks used in middle school

historical knowledge by influencing their way of life, to the point of identifying themselves as participants of the history. However, in the face of an infinity of themes that comprise this field, and the various possibilities of approaching the historical events, it will be portrayed an issue that it is present in our contemporary society and it is also the target of current historiographical reactions, the otherness. As Tutiaux-Guillon (2007) points out, this theme has been constantly addressed due to the permanent increase of differences. Consequently, it has been considered as discourse the teaching of history as a possibility of debate related to the issues of otherness. The way we analyze the differences, or in what way we notice the "other". But what would be the relevance of this theme for the teaching of history? According to the PCN,

[...] the perception of the "other" and the "us" is related to the possibility of identifying the differences and, simultaneously, the similarities. The current society requests to tackle the heterogeneity and to distinguish the particularities of groups and cultures, their values, interests and identities (BRASIL, 1998, p.35)⁴

In this way, this discussion is justified by understanding that through the teaching of history there is the possibility that the student - as an active subject - can analyze the difference as essential to interpret his/her reality. By means of this perception, between differences and similarities, approximations and partings - which have always been present in history and were able to establish relations and social values - this student can produce historical awareness to the point of feeling constituent of reality by influencing the environment in which he/she lives. (BRASIL, 1998)

The initial years of formal schooling are fundamental to the constitution of the values that will accompany these students during their own history. In this way, we can say that it is assigned to history the role of constituting the memory and the identity of individuals. This importance is linked to the need of developing in students a critical perception about their present and their historical awareness at the same time.

Following the guidelines above, it is clear that the present research tends to analyze how the teaching of history has been developed in school life. It was considered how issues related to otherness have been addressed in the main tool that teachers and students have used, the history textbook. The sources of this research were the books indicated on the plan created by the

⁴ In Portuguese: [...] a percepção do "outro" e do "nós" está relacionada à possibilidade de identificação das diferenças e, simultaneamente, das semelhanças. A sociedade atual solicita que se enfrente a heterogeneidade e que se distinga as particularidades dos grupos e das culturas, seus valores, interesses e identidades. (BRASIL, 1998, p.35)

federal government in 1996, called PNLD⁵. The purpose of this plan was to select, expose and indicate didactic handbooks, and point out the positive and negative aspects of each work, regulated and directed by the PCN, and characterizing them by means of scientific principles and concepts. For this study, the approach was performed through the indications of the Didactic PNLD of history elaborated in the year of 2008, particularly the books corresponding to the 6th or 7th years of middle school. It can be attributed to this age range the starting point for a formalization and constitution of memory and identity, by means of the national history content that is present in the reality of the students.

However, through these reflections, some issues have emerged such as: how does the use of the history textbook by the student occur? Does it allow the student to understand the "other"? With the learning of history, how does the student analyze and develop critical consciousness, capable of contemplating the differences without an ethnocentric and judgmental perspective? How does the student recognize him/herself as a subject of history by means of the memory propagated by the textbook, and respond to the formalization and constitution of his/her identity? An assertion raised by Tutiaux-Guillon (2007, p. 283) in relation to the French reality directs the chances of questions here indicated that "the textbooks still maintain an ethnocentric point of view about the past".

The apparent traditionalism

Since the creation of the discipline of the history of Brazil the intention was to propagate an official memory in order to provide a sense of nationality. This official memory has been frequently used as an initiative to legitimize the constituted state, and it found a source of this spread in the didactic handbooks by recognizing in them traces of the traditional historiography widespread in Brazil from the 19th century. Such tradition that established the writing of history by political and economic bias acknowledged the History of Brazil by means of the legitimacy of state power. The history textbooks remained with this motivation for a long period of its teaching in Brazil. However, in the face of new historiographical perspectives with the New History, the political and economic visions which have ruled our historiography and, consequently, didactic

⁵ PNLD means National Program of the Textbook. ("Plano Nacional do Livro Didático" in Portuguese).

The otherness in history textbooks used in middle school

handbooks, can analyze the history of Brazil within a broader perspective, beyond that one limited by the economic and political structural vision. It was the cultural history that allowed us new approaches to education, but the contents of textbooks remained and resisted the theoretical and methodological changes as much as that they could benefit from.

From the 1970s and 1980s of the 20th century, the teaching of history took new directions. The influence of the New History became part and covered the curricula of the discipline. It can be perceived that the focus of teaching is directly related to the student's reality. According to Oliveira (2007, p. 10), "it prioritizes history to be taught from the student's reality, his/her daily life, the knowledge that he/she brings to the school and, in particular, it breaks with the traditional factual history and commemorative dates".⁶ It appears, therefore, that they are not only a unilateral instrument, but also they have some dynamic characteristics. In other words, not only can the human being be characterized as a political or an economic being, but also as the one who establishes relations with his/her social environment by manifesting him/herself culturally.

With the changes in the curricula, the history PCNs incorporate these new approaches, and thus didactic handbooks are motivated to be in accordance with the guidelines established by these parameters. As it has already been noted, the creation of the PNLD is grounded on the considerations of this document.

In relation to the content of textbooks, the greatest motivation would be to allow the students develop a historical awareness, by breaking with the traditionalist inheritance. In the books listed by PNLD and analyzed for this study, it was verified how this process has been conducted by means of the memory to which it intends to propagate. It could be noticed that there is still some permanence of traditional remnants in the content researched in the history textbooks.

We will begin by using as example the edition of the *Projeto Araribá - História* textbook. This handbook covers the *modus operandi* based on the economic and political traditional structure, which describes the events in a linear manner, the arrival of Europeans in Brazil until the colonial expansion process in the mid-18th century. It addresses fundamental questions of perception of the "other", when it mentions the indigenous and the African cultures covered only

⁶ In Portuguese: "prioriza-se uma história a ser ensinada a partir da realidade do aluno, do seu cotidiano, do conhecimento que ele traz para a escola e, sobretudo, rompe-se com a tradicional história factual e das datas comemorativas."

by the economic issue. They were portrayed only by bias of their "significant contribution" such as essential labor force to the constitution of the Brazilian nation. However, the concept of culture is placed as an appendix within the chapter. Some settings are arranged in the form of text boxes, separated from the body of the text in the chapters. This is noticeable when the issue dealt is about the onslaughts of indigenous peoples. It was established a relation between situations lived in the past and the present days. On the other hand, the African culture appears in different situation from the indigenous peoples. The Africans and aspects of their culture are relegated to spaces of text boxes and mentioned only as an issue exhaustively cited: as labor force. This situation also involves issues that deal with the Africans' resistance against the daily routine during the colonization period.

Another example to be mentioned is the book *História - Das Cavernas ao terceiro Milênio*. This book presents an analysis that differs from the model proposed in the example mentioned earlier, but it is also equally wrong. When analyzing the chapters proposed by the authors, one of them was particularly identified. The chapter deals with the representations of the pre-colonial African culture. The authors make some comments about the different representations of the African continent that reveal traces of its culture. An interesting curiosity is that this same chapter cites briefly the relations with slavery in Brazil and by means of a summary table. The contradiction lies in the fact that in relation to the slavery issue, comments about the relationship between the African culture and the Brazilian people can be identified. This also occurs when the contents address the colonial period in the same way as previously mentioned. So, it can be noticed that when the contents bring to discussion the Portuguese America, the African culture issue is relegated to slavery. It is presented as "additional information", according to the text itself, prevailing from that moment the expression of contents in an economic approach.

Therefore, we noticed that the traditional model insists on remaining in this didactic material used in history teaching while maintaining, as already mentioned, the prospect of a more traditional historiographical trend. In this way, it contemplates the constitution of the Brazilian culture by means of these peoples with concise information that only complements the main text. Then, it is retaken what the role of historiography would be. How can the New History be identified in this didactic material? Or what has been the usefulness of discussions and debates about the writing of History if they do not resonate in the context of its teaching?

As a result, it can be inferred the lack of sensitivity of the authors of textbooks with respect to discussions brought by New History and the suggestions contained in history PCNs. It

seems that only a few passages are suited to the latest historiographical discussions so that they can take part in the list of books reviewed and accepted by the evaluators of PNLD. And it is in this way that the historical memory by constituting in the identity formation of these students is propagated, as Tutiaux-Guillon (2007, p. 284) says that the "[...] adolescence is a period of change; the perception of social standards moves to a collective conception; first with the closest to ensure harmony; then, with the whole society".⁷

Would it be really possible to develop a historical awareness able to analyze and understand the differences by means of textbooks, and relativize them? And consequently, could the critical thinking be awakened? We believe that the answer is negative when we observe the examples cited above. The research presented by Cerri and Ferreira (2007) corroborates this observation when dealing with the women's representations and how they were presented in the history didactic handbooks indicated by the PNLD of the years 2002 and 2005. These authors agree with the approach presented here.

In general, the political and economic aspect continues to be the main line of content explanation and articulation, even if some "news" is incorporated. [...] the women, as well as the poor, the children, the African descendants are still outside, or at most come as an additional part outside of the main text, earning peculiar and exotic status in most times. (CERRI and FERREIRA, 2007 p.83)⁸

Constructing identities with the textbook

We can analyze our assumptions in the light of other perspectives of reflection. For Tutiaux-Guillon (2007, p. 282), we can start from the idea that "the cultural diversity is composed of constructs elaborated by society and, of course, by the school".⁹ If the school collaborates with

⁷ In Portuguese: "[...] adolescência é um período de mudança; a percepção das normas sociais desloca-se para uma concepção coletiva, primeiro com os mais próximos, para garantir a harmonia; depois, com toda a sociedade".

⁸ In Portuguese: "De modo geral, o aspecto político e econômico continua sendo a principal linha de explicação e articulação do conteúdo, ainda que algumas "novidades" sejam incorporadas. [...] as mulheres, assim como os pobres, as crianças, os negros, continuam de fora, ou, no máximo entram como parte complementar, fora do texto principal, na maioria das vezes, ganhando status de peculiar e exótico". (CERRI e FERREIRA, 2007, p.83)

⁹ In Portuguese: "a diversidade cultural são construções elaboradas pela sociedade e, naturalmente, pela escola".

the construction of their students' cultural identity, we will check that way the teaching of history has contributed to the development of such cultural identity.

The history PCNs were the basis for the PNLD in the evaluative sorting criterion of textbooks. We verified the literally definition of education as "to know and respect the way of life of different groups in different times and spaces in their cultural manifestations, economic, political and social spheres by recognizing similarities and differences"; "to respect the social diversity, taking into consideration ethical criteria", or even, "respect for differences and the fight against inequalities". The citations have in common the reflection on the alterity and as the student, the subject of education, can perceive him/herself, observe and learn about the "other", deprived of any prejudiced and ethnocentric characteristics.

However, it is necessary to highlight a particular observation about the textbook *História: conceitos e procedimentos*, which refers to an analysis about the term ethnocentrism in relation to the contents about the arrival of Europeans in the American continent. As mentioned in the title, this concept proposes an activity at the end of each chapter. It is suggested to contemplate this issue according to the perspective of the indigenous people in contact with the Europeans at that time. In addition to clarifying the meaning of the term, the authors propose to find a solution for the events. However, they do not emphasize the student's need of reflecting on his/her everyday life, and linking it to the studied context.

Thus, we retake the same issue previously indicated: how does the student identify him/herself as the subject of history? The other approaches of this handbook suggest discussing - no more surprising - the Brazilian history in the light of an economic and a political perspective, but with some extras and complementary analyses on culture, social organization and everyday life. In their majority, the themes are placed separated from the body of the text, or included in it, dialoguing with the traditional methodological bias.

The representation of indigenous and black people is treated as participants of the economic process of Brazil. The indigenous people served as labor force at first, but due to their resistance, they were replaced by the labor force from the African slaves in the sequence. Despite this, their cultural representations are poorly treated and treated just as curiosity at certain points.

História e vida integrada is another book that presents the same posture as the one previously cited. The authors bet on the traditional historiographical, economic and political discourse. They propose situations of reflection for the student in attachments, text boxes, Revista Intersaberes | v9. n15. Edição Especial | jun. 2014 | p. 82-94 | ISSN 1809-7286

The otherness in history textbooks used in middle school

supplements, among others. What differentiates this textbook from the others is that the representations of indigenous and African peoples are arranged in isolated chapters. The chapter on indigenous people deals with various aspects related to this ethnic group such as culture, the everyday life, relationships and sociability, the customs and traditions. The authors outline a parallel between what was constituted in the past for this people and contemporaneity. And the chapter “The Slavery¹⁰” deals with the African people. From the title, it can be noticed that the participation of African culture in Brazil is confined to the African slave. There are other pieces of information about the culture, the everyday life, the traditions and the resistances, all related to the economic and political “participation” of this social group. Even the parallels established between the present time and the past are related to slavery. Finally, it presents remnants of their culture in the form of additional texts.

The book *História em Documento: Imagem e texto* proposes as a teaching methodology the use of research sources such as images and texts. The idea is to make the student develop his/her analysis under the perspective of a historian. However, due to the use of these sources there should be some kind of complementary explanation to the text. The students as the users of this didactic material do not have the academic training and the necessary clarification to handle historical sources. In this case, they will always depend on the action of the teacher to analyze the contents. It can be also observed a certain tendency from the author to simplify it in the case of certain contents. This is the case of the item about the existing populations in Brazil before the arrival of Europeans. These populations are classified by the author as formed by “egalitarian societies” without the existence of social divisions and without distinction between rich and poor. It is simply ignored the entire plot of social relations present in indigenous social groups of Brazil. There is also the idea of prevailing the “generosity and reciprocity” among the members of each social group as if the harmony was a condition of common spirit among the indigenous tribes and the conflicts were non-existent. By assuming a simplistic posture in relation to the “other”, the “next” is generalized, labeled, and there is a massification process. The eyes are blind to the appreciation and understanding of the complexities.

As the last example, we have the *Encontros com a História* textbook. This material describes the history of Brazil since the arrival of Europeans to the American continent until the

¹⁰ In Portuguese: “A Escravidão”.

mid-18th century. The content preserves the traditional discourse, the economy and the politics, and discusses cultural issues in additional texts. It is recurrent in the authors' speech the relationship between the past and the actions at the present. Thus, the students, users of the material, are taken from a perspective of their own time to a better understanding of the past by analyzing ruptures and continuities in history with contemporary values. However, there are some terms used incorrectly. They sound anachronistic and ethnocentric. An example is to assign the navigation period of the 15th century to the concept of globalization. As if this action were allocated in the existing global at the end of the 20th century. The authors relegate the paramount rule of historiography, the anachronism cited earlier. But even so, the authors demonstrate their misunderstanding about the "other" by means of an ethnocentric assignment, incapable of considering the African culture in relation to the forms of resistance against the black slavery by using use the term "drag's one feet". In this way, they justify all the violence and repression against the "rebel" slaves.

The practice in using the textbooks

From these examples, the hypotheses of the study are retaken with focus on the contents of history textbooks approved by the PNLD which are used in classrooms. Such contents present ethnocentric point of views about the past despite the evidences of a current methodological discourse. This statement is derived from the simplifications in which the subjects are presented in history textbooks. It is understood that the prejudice occurs when something is not fully known, and consequently it does not allow the perception of complexities. Thus, it is worth asking what the teacher's reception in relation to these textbooks has been and how he/she analyzes them as facilitators for the discourse of equality.

It is analyzed the infinity of this problematic, because the contents are not treated fully, and the textbooks only express them minimally in order to be framed in accordance with the curricular proposals. Faced with this picture, how can the teaching of history aggregate basic concepts to students such as the identity or the otherness? What is the true academic formation of the teachers? What are the possibilities of these professionals to expand the minimum content to go beyond the textbooks? These are questions that lead us to other hypotheses. The

discussion involving the otherness is wide. Although the teachers claim that they treat the topic in class, the students do not have the same perception.

Another issue to be addressed is related to the evaluative aspect of the PNLD. As this program evaluates the textbooks, they are studied in detail and the absence of a continuous dialog between the PCN and the items of the mentioned program is identified. Maybe this action can be explained by the fact that the authors of books keep the context related only to the academic sphere, which precludes the understanding of the complexities and realities existing in the school context and in the academic formation of teachers. In this respect, we agree with Cerri and Ferreira (2007, p. 79) who affirm that "university professors are very different from those school teachers, not only due to different formation, but because of the institutional spaces that they occupy, by producing distinct needs and urgencies."¹¹

Final Considerations

This study aimed to analyze the textbook. It could be observed that by means of many efforts between adaptations with the historiographical streams and methodological debates, the textbooks are still insufficient in the production of historical awareness, identity and otherness.

The history textbooks used in the classroom still present remnants from the teaching methodologies of the past decades. They have not been fully modernized, and only the covers, illustrations and some exercises were changed. In the examples used in this study, and in relation to the issues of otherness about the indigenous and the African peoples, it was found that such topics are briefly treated, separated from the main text. The indigenous and the African peoples still appear as sources of a constitution of the economic and political history, from which we know its characteristics due to the interference of European inhabitants. The latter, in their turn, led off the start of the record of our history. This implies the idea that nothing existed before their arrival and that the indigenous peoples were only co-participants in the process of the Brazilian nation construction. The 7th grade students should understand the relationship between the history that

¹¹ In Portuguese: "os professores universitários são muito diferentes dos professores da escola, não só por causa de uma formação diferente, mas pelos espaços institucionais que ocupam, produzindo necessidades e urgências distintas".

is taught with the history that is experienced. These students have the discipline of history not only in the classroom, but as knowledge that will accompany them for the whole life. In this way, it can be seen how important the teaching of history in schools is, and consequently, the level of responsibility deposited in the authors of the textbooks. The authors are able to create, demystify and clarify events according to their interpretations. But the teachers have their share of guilt on this matter, as well as the evaluators from the PNLD. All these individuals present their share in the action to consider the analyzed and approved books, but partially sufficient to meet the demands of the current context. They do not allow ensuring the possibility to build historical and critical awareness. There is an implicit need of students to participate in history. It is the textbook that can offer this possibility.

Thus, it was sought to introduce to the readers a fragment of how it develops the teaching of otherness in the 7th grades in the case of the Brazilian history contents. This problem was approached based on the hypothesis of finding in textbooks something beyond what the tacit reality transmits to us. However, as it can be verified, it is necessary the revision of the published textbooks approved by the PNLD. Discussions on the otherness in formation courses for teachers must be examined in further detail as well as the study and research of this theme in all educational levels have to be encouraged. This is the only way we can contribute to the clarification about the importance of this theme to History.

REFERENCES

BRASIL. **Guia dos Livros Didáticos - Programa Nacional do Livro Didático 2008: História**. Brasília: Ministério da Educação, 2007.

_____. **Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais: História**. Brasília: Ministério da Educação/ Secretaria de Educação Fundamental, 1998.

CERRI, L. F. FERREIRA, A. R. Notas sobre as demandas sociais de representação e os livros didáticos de história. In: OLIVEIRA, M. M. D. STAMATTO, M. I. S. (Org.). **O Livro didático de História: políticas educacionais, pesquisas e ensino**. Natal: EDUFRN, 2007.

OLIVEIRA, M. M. D. Parâmetros curriculares nacionais: suas idéias sobre a história. In: OLIVEIRA, M. M. D. STAMATTO, M. I. S. (Org.). **O Livro didático de história: políticas educacionais, pesquisas e ensino**. Natal: EDUFRN, 2007.

TUTIAUX-GUILLON, N. O Ensino da história e a alteridade na França: algumas perspectivas para reflexão e pesquisa. In: CARRETERO, M.; ROSA, A.; GONZÁLES, M. F. (Org.). **Ensino da História e Memória Coletiva**. Trad. Valéria Campos. Porto Alegre: Artmed, 2007.

Fontes consultadas

PROJETO Araribá – **História**. São Paulo: Moderna, 2008.

BRAICK, P. R. & MOTA, M. B. **História** - Das Cavernas ao terceiro Milênio. São Paulo: Moderna, 2005.

DREGUER, R. & TOLEDO, E. **História**: conceitos e procedimentos. São Paulo: Atual, 2008.

PILETTI, N. & PILETTI, C. **História e Vida integrada**. São Paulo: Ática, 2005.

RIBEIRO, V. & ANASTÁCIA, C. **Encontros com a História**. Curitiba: Positivo, 2006.

RODRIGUES, J. E. **História em Documento**: Imagem e texto. São Paulo: FTD, 2007.