



RESEARCH

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PESSIMISTIC TRADITION IN VENEZUELAN INTELLECTUAL DISCOURSE AS A STUDY OBJECT. APPROACH TO THE STATE OF THE ART

La tradición pesimista en el discurso intelectual venezolano como objeto de estudio (aproximación al estado de la cuestión)

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ABSTRACT

There is general consensus according to which the Venezuelan reality has been interpreted recurrently from fatalism or pessimism by much of the national *intelligentsia*. This situation allows us to speak of a *pessimistic tradition* traceable from very early in the republican life of the country. The following paper gathers, through documentary research, the main studies that have traced these pessimistic approaches to the national reality from the intellectual discourse; in particular, a group of pieces of research is described that finds in the contemporary intellectual discourse a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy of the national failure when linking it with the negative self-image of the Venezuelan being, the problems of national identity and / or the recurrent national crises. This review brings together, in the first place, the pioneering works of Augusto Mijares (1952) and Luis Beltrán Guerrero (1962); as well as those carried out by Maritza Montero (1991), Thamara Hannot (1996, 1997) and Aníbal Romero (2002), which privilege the content analysis of different texts and give a good account of the pessimistic intellectual discourse that was consolidated throughout the twentieth century in Venezuela.

KEY WORDS: Intellectual discourse - pessimistic tradition - self - image of Venezuelan being - Venezuela 20th century - State of the Art.

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RESUMEN

Existe el consenso general según el cual la realidad venezolana ha sido interpretada recurrentemente desde el fatalismo o pesimismo por gran parte de la *intelligentzia* nacional. Situación que permite hablar de una *tradicción pesimista* rastreable desde muy temprano en la vida republicana del país. El siguiente trabajo reúne, a través de una investigación documental, los principales estudios que han rastreado estas aproximaciones pesimistas a la realidad nacional desde el discurso intelectual; en especial, se describe un grupo de investigaciones que encuentra en el discurso intelectual contemporáneo una suerte de profecía auto-cumplida del fracaso nacional al vincular éste con la autoimagen negativa del ser-venezolano, los problemas de identidad nacional y/o las recurrentes crisis nacionales. Esta revisión reúne, en primer lugar, los trabajos precursores de Augusto Mijares (1952) y Luis Beltrán Guerrero (1962); así como, los realizados por Maritza Montero (1991), Thamara Hannot (1996, 1997) y Aníbal Romero (2002), los cuales privilegian el análisis de contenido de diversos textos y dan buena cuenta del discurso intelectual pesimista que se consolidó a lo largo del siglo XX en Venezuela.

PALABRAS CLAVE: discurso intelectual; tradición pesimista; autoimagen del ser venezolano; Venezuela siglo XX; estado de la cuestión.

A TRADIÇÃO PESSIMISTA NO DISCURSO INTELECTUAL VENEZUELANO COMO OBJETO DE ESTUDO (APROXIMAÇÃO AO ESTADO DA ARTE)

RESUME

Existe o consenso geral segundo o qual a realidade venezuelana foi interpretada recorrentemente desde o fatalismo ou pessimismo por grande parte da *intelligentsia* nacional. Situação que permite falar de uma *tradição pessimista* rastreada desde muito cedo na vida republicana do país. O seguinte trabalho reúne, através de uma investigação documental, os principais estudos que rastrearam estas aproximações pessimistas a realidade nacional desde o discurso intelectual; em especial, descreve-se um grupo de investigações que encontra no discurso intelectual contemporâneo uma sorte de profecia auto-realizável do fracasso nacional ao vincular este com a autoimagem negativa do ser venezuelano, os problemas de identidade nacional e ou as recorrentes crises nacionais. Esta revisão reúne, em primeiro lugar, os trabalhos precursores de Augusto Mijares (1952) e Luis Beltran Guerrero (1962), assim como, os realizados por Maritza Montero (1991), Thamara Hannot (1996, 1997) e Anibal Romero (2002), os quais privilegiam a analises de conteúdo de diversos textos e acabam com o discurso intelectual pessimista que se consolidou ao longo do século XX na Venezuela.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: Discurso intelectual; Tradição pesimista; autoimagem do ser venezuelano; Venezuela século XX; Estado da Arte.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is a general consensus according to which the Venezuelan reality has been interpreted recurrently from fatalism or pessimism. This situation allows us to speak of a *pessimistic tradition* traceable from very early in the republican life of the country. Among the contemporary thinkers insistently linked to this pessimistic discourse - especially since 1936 - Mario Briceño Iragorry, Mariano Picon Salas, Francisco Herrera Luque, Germán Carrera Damas and Arturo Uslar Pietri are usually included. They are not the only ones, but they are the ones most referred and studied by researchers.

However, this pessimistic look deepened during the 20th century; and it has gained strength whenever the country has faced various “crises” (political, economic-social, cultural ...). In those critical moments, intellectual discourse has sought answers. These, in general, link the situations experienced in the country to a *way of being* of the Venezuelan (self-image) which, by the way, is predominantly negative.

The purpose of this documentary review is, precisely, to show the reader the most significant works on the subject. Particularly, to present those pieces of research that, *considering the fact in its historical evolution*, looked for possible answers to the reason of such pessimism. In this sense, the approaches made by Maritza Montero (1991), Tamara Hannot (1996 and 1997) and Aníbal Romero (2002) constitute the backbone of this State of the Art. Rather, a brief reference will be made to the precursor works of Augusto Mijares (1952) and Luis Beltrán Guerrero (1962).

However, this documentary review would be incomplete if we do not first examine certain theoretical constructs, such as *intellectual discourse*, *self-image*, *national identity*, *Venezuelan being* and *pessimism* (one of the constitutive features of the negative self-image of the *Venezuelan being*). Since they serve as a reference framework to fully understand the object of study to which the next pages will be devoted.

2. METHODOLOGY

Following the traditional methodological guidelines of documentary research, first a review of the theoretical postulates that will serve as a reference for the discussion will be carried out. This implies the consideration, mainly, of the previously mentioned constructs, namely: *intellectual discourse*, *self-concept*, *self-image* and *self-image of the Venezuelan*, *pessimism* and *national identity*.

Once the theoretical-conceptual framework in which these terms will be considered has been clarified; the works that make up the research corpus of this study will be described. This review includes those pieces of research that have, as an object of study, the intellectual discourse of much of the Venezuelan intelligentsia throughout the republic, regarding the revision of pessimistic, deterministic, fatalistic tone that strands such speeches and allows us to speak of a *pessimistic tradition* in the national intellectual discourse, with an emphasis on the 20th century. We did not add those studies that include the analysis of the discourse of a particular intellectual, or with a small group of them, or those pieces of research that do not perform a historical “journey” of the subject in question.

This documentary review is based on two precursory works: *The pessimistic interpretation of Spanish-American sociology* (1952) published for the first time in 1938, by Augusto Mijares and “The Pessimistic Maxims”, a brief essay by Luis Beltrán Guerrero published in the First Series of *Candideces* (1962).

Later, Maritza Montero's emblematic work *Ideology, alienation and national identity* (1991), Thamara Hannot's doctoral dissertation entitled *The Nonconformist Look. A critical exploration of the literature of thought in Venezuela* (1996), and the critical essay *Visions of Failure: Intellectuals and Disappointment in Modern Venezuela* (2002) by Aníbal Romero will be described in greater detail.

These approaches have in common the content analysis of intellectual discourse following a historical journey that gives a good account of how that pessimistic look at Venezuela and the Venezuelan *being* was shaped during the republican life of the country; with emphasis on the twentieth century. His review allows us to speak of a *pessimistic tradition* in the way of valuing Venezuela and the Venezuelan.

3. REFERENTIAL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. An approach to the “intellectual discourse”

Before advancing in the documentary review of the national discursive related to pessimism; it is necessary to clarify the conceptual framework in which it is understood, this time, the construct *intellectual discourse*.

Although there are multiple theoretical-conceptual approaches from which one can approach the *discourse*; it will be limited to the one offered, from applied linguistics, by the Critical Discourse Analysis (hereinafter ACD). This is due to considerations of substance, since ACD allows a *constructivist approach to discourse as a space for interaction, construction and interpretation of reality*.

A comprehensive overview of ACD is presented by the linguist and discourse analyst Adriana Bolívar in her article *Critical discourse analysis: Theory and commitments* (1997). As the author explains, ACD has established itself as a multidisciplinary field that considers *discourse* “... a particular way of conceptualizing social interaction and the role that language plays in it, transformed into discourse, that is, *the space in which meanings are built and interpreted*” (Bolívar, 1997, p. 25, italics). This allows us to consider

the discourse of the intellectuals to be a space of dissertation that collaborated in the construction and interpretation of the national reality from pessimism since the republican beginnings.

Starting from this constructivist-interpretative approach to discourse, the social meaning of the "Intellectual" will be addressed². In a current conceptualization of the term, *intellectuals* are considered... "independent" producers "of spiritual values, (...) creators of meaning who take advantage of the most advanced knowledge of the international cultural community in general and of social sciences in particular" (Mansilla, 2003, p. 10). Although how much independent intellectual discourse can be has been questioned, especially if it is associated with certain power structures, and there are even those who have reneged on intellectual activity as such; this definition, of clear constructivist reminiscences, allows the approach to this social group as builders of meanings ("creators of meaning") of the society of which they are a part and whose culture they share and perpetuate through their discourse (in this case, the written discourse).

In addition to the above, it must be taken into account that intellectual discourse, as a discourse, "shapes society and society shapes discourse" (Bolívar, 1997, p. 40). In this regard, constructs such as *Venezuelan being, national identity, national crisis*, all of the being related to intellectual discourse of a pessimistic tone, must be considered social representations that make up the social or collective memory of Venezuelans. At the same time, an active part in the formation of such discourse is the social representations of reality of the intellectuals themselves, who (re)construct, (re)produce, internalize and legitimize such representations; or, they put them in "trial". Do not forget that, for ACD, any discourse involves the way in which *reality is represented* dialogically.

However, at the base of any social representation is the ideology or "belief system", as it has been conceptualized and progressively delimited by Teun van Dijk (1980, 1996, 2003, 2008, 2009). This allows us, following van Dijk, to think of intellectuals as an *ideological group* that is conformed in particular historical moments whose members share a "belief system"; and who, in addition, interpret reality - past or present - in consequence (van Dijk, 2003). Starting from the considerations of the aforementioned

² We do not intend to make a historical reconstruction of the term, nor of the possible social, political and cultural implications that this has brought about, because this would go far beyond the limits of this dissertation. To deepen the topic, the reader can review the works of: Francisco. J. Bobillo (1992); Peter Watson (2006); François Dosse (2007); and Pierre Bourdieu (2008), among others. For an approach from Latin America, we suggest the works of: Carlos Ripoll (1966); Juan F. Marsal (1971); Arturo Roig (1993); and the edition directed by Carlos Altamirano (2008).

³ It is based on the classic conception proposed by Serge Moscovici (1979): "Social representation is an organized *corpus* of knowledge and one of the psychic activities through which men make the physical and social reality intelligible, are integrated in a group or in a daily exchange relationship "(p.18). However, within the framework of ACD, a large part of the work of Teun van Dijk (1996, 2003, 2008) gives particular relevance to the conformation of *discourse as social cognition*, since the *mental* (or social according to Moscovici) *representations* that a social group has of reality and that perpetuates through discourse take place in it.

author, especially the relation between power and discourse, it can be said that, as an ideological group, intellectuals constitute a *symbolic elite*. This, like any elite, has certain “symbolic resources” (knowledge, recognition and social prestige, etc.) with which it exercises or can exercise control over other groups (van Dijk, 2008).

In the terms of this documentary review, it is understood that *the Venezuelan intellectuals as a whole have formed a symbolic elite who has collaborated in the consolidation and perpetuation of the social representations associated with the self-image of the Venezuelan being, and the general perception of perennial crisis and / or national failure that has impregnated their discourse with pessimism* (which can be interpreted as the intellectual exercise of control over the rest of society, or at least its readers and followers because, in the end, this pessimistic conception of Venezuela and the Venezuelan has prevailed) . Their discursive texts (especially essays and opinion articles) can be considered *spaces of discursive construction and social practice* on Venezuelanity from pessimism.

The documentary review this article is about will cover the main works that have been dedicated to record -following a historical journey from sociology, psycho-history, literary sociology or political science- that discursive construction predominantly pessimistic about the national reality, with an emphasis on the 20th century. As mentioned, part of that pessimism is closely related to other constructs, especially with the *self-image of the Venezuelan being*. For it is difficult to positively consider reality, if you do not believe in those who build it.

3.2. Self-concept, self-image and national identity

In the field of developmental psychology, *self-image* is understood as the way in which the person describes himself; that is, those traits or patterns that each individual considers characteristic of his person. Along with self-image, the individual develops their *self-esteem*; that is, the assessment he has about himself. Finally, there is *the ideal self* that implies the *idealized self-image* or should be (Gross, 2004).

These three elements make up the *self-concept* that each person constructs of himself: “The sense of one's own identity and personal value. The concept of ourselves includes all our thoughts and feelings about us in response to the question: who am I? ” (Ríos Cabrera, 2006, p. 371). In short, the self-concept is constructed during the early stages of human development and involves self-image (description: what one is), self-esteem (evaluation: what is valued about oneself) and idealized self-image (idealization: what should be).

If this is transferred to the social sphere, one can study the self-concept of a social group, of a society as a whole and / or of a nation. In the latter case, this would imply the self-image that nationals have of themselves, the degree of acceptance or value that they are awarded (self-esteem) and the ideal to which they aspire to arrive as a nation (should be); all of which would be an important part of the national identity.

The issue of National Identity remains, at least in Venezuela, a recurring theme among scholars of various disciplines and / or sub-disciplines. A detailed reference to this would escape the present review, but yes, some of the definitions given from the social sciences will be outlined.

A classic approach on the subject is given by Maritza Montero (1991), for whom national identity includes "...the set of meanings and representations that are relatively permanent over time that allow members of a social group that share a history and a territory common, as well as other sociocultural elements... recognized as related to each other biographically..." (Montero, 1991, pp. 76-77). He adds: "The national identity would also be one of the forms of expression of social identity"⁴ (Montero, 1991, p. 77).

More recently, Horacio Biord (2014) explains that "the issue of national identity is a formulation that is not only incomplete and unfinished, but generally imposed and manipulated" (p. 191). By "imposed and manipulated", the author understands ideological. Biord explains that the *socio-historical construction* of Venezuelan national identity, like all national identity, includes in itself an ideology that was

... legitimizing a political model, built in different phases that add content or symbols, or can even review or question the previous ones and consequently, how it could have developed throughout the republican history from 1830 onwards, linked first to the star figures of Independence through testimonial versions of political-military history and then through successive resymbolizations that sought to broaden and fix the sense of the Venezuelan's mestizo character and syncretic of its culture and identity until it began to be revised... (Biord, 2014, p. 218).

Following the path traced by Maritza Montero decades earlier, Biord emphasizes three phases of the process of socio-historical construction of Venezuelan identity: a) the "first and primary" phase that had as its epicenter the constitution of the independent nation, that is, it is associated with the social representations born of a foundational, romantic and heroic history of the Independence process; b) a second phase (1883-1983) in which the already created image of the national identity is consolidated. The initial date coincides with the consolidation process of Bolívar as the nucleus of the "identity" ideology of Venezuela based on the leadership of Antonio Guzmán Blanco and throughout the 20th century. However, the researcher himself warns that it is not a homogenous stage; in fact, it divides it into two sub-phases: the initial one (1983-1948) and the late one until 1983. In any case, and even with its nuances, this second phase "corresponds to the progressive reelaborations of that first and primary identity", and probably the fundamental contribution is, at least initially, "... this false identification of llaneras culture and identity, that is, the llanerization of Venezuelan culture"; c) the third and last phase, which extends to the present day, "can be described as the dismantling, precision, and overcoming, if not negation, of the primary and secondary formulations that, nevertheless, still survive and even coexist, generating with frequency, contradictory tendencies" (Biord, 2014, pp. 193-200).

⁴ Social or collective identity is understood as "that part of the self-concept of an individual that derives from the knowledge of belonging to a social group, together with the value and emotional meaning associated with belonging" (Tajfel, 1984, p. 292).

From his reflections, it is interesting to highlight several aspects. In the first place, the author's intention was to systematize the ideas related to national identity that have emerged throughout the conformation of republican Venezuela. Secondly, to emphasize that national identity (of any nation, not only of Venezuela) is an ideological construction that is closely related to power structures that legitimize it. But also, that it is conforming over time and that it can undergo modifications (from the power structures).

3.3. Self-image of “being-Venezuelan”

Part of the discussion on the national identity of the Venezuelan has focused on the attribution of certain features or patterns that make up the self-image of these, generally in contrast to the should *be* or ideal of Venezuelan that the country requires (Montero, 1991).

Like any self-image, that of Venezuelans has been shaped over time, it is difficult to modify and assumes patterns of thoughts, feelings, attitudes and / or relatively constant behavior that have been internalized in the population. In fact, “well-founded empirical studies with an argumentative depth have demonstrated a diversity of elements that, when interwoven, make up a typical Venezuelan culture that goes from everyday life to phenomena of greater abstraction” (Correia and Trak, 2005, p. 15). In general, these studies aim to answer the question: Who are we Venezuelans? These works add different conceptual and methodological approaches, whose detailed explanation will be addressed in future dissertations. For now, it is enough to name those traits that, insistently, have been attributed to the Venezuelan's *way of being*.

Among the few traits of positive character, are: *egalitarianism*, *courage* or *courage*, *generosity*, and *democratic ideal*. In contrast, are attributed recurrently the following negative features: *laziness*, *authoritarianism* (associated with its counterpart, *servility*), *violence*, *belief in chance*, *pessimism* (*fatalism*, *negativism*, *despair*), *liveliness* (*cunning* or *mischief*), *anarchy*, *individualism*, and *ignorance of the historical past*.

These traits or patterns that make up the Venezuelan being have had, in intellectual discourse, an important interlocutor. In fact, long before the empirical studies carried out (referred to by Correia and Track, 2005), the Venezuelan intelligentsia took on the task of conceptualizing what it considered characteristic of the national *being*. And it is precisely this construction from the perspective of the Venezuelan intellectual that will collaborate in the construction of a pessimistic discourse on the potentialities of the country and its people.

3.4. Pessimism as a constitutive feature of “being-Venezuelan”

Etymologically, the term pessimism comes from “fr. [French] *pessimiste*, and this one from lat. [Latin] *pessimus* 'pesimo' and the fr. *-iste* '-ista' (*Dictionary of the Spanish Language*). In its most general meaning, it implies: “Propensity to see and judge things in their most unfavorable aspect” (*Dictionary of the Spanish Language*). Consequently, it

could be said that the discursive construction from pessimism supposes the interpretation of any subject from the most unfavorable perspective possible.

As a negative feature attributed to the Venezuelan being, pessimism has been associated with the fatalism, despair, disenchantment, skepticism, distrust and dissatisfaction of the Venezuelan in relation to the reality that surrounds him:

The fatalistic vision of the world is another of the emotional aspects that appear in the negative description of Venezuelans, in which every action that can occur can only be without value and without results. This negativism turns against individuals and leads to superstition and skepticism: it is to fate, to luck, to those who will attribute all the positive events that affect them (Montero, 1991, p. 145).

Under this Providential sign there is little left for the human being to be "flesh and blood", who must surrender to indolence or passivity. From a psycho-social perspective (specifically, on the emotional level) "... the lack of power and control causes a negative and depressive tendency that degrades, leading to a depreciation of everything that is national" (Montero, 1991, p. 146).

In intellectual discourse, other forces, presences, powers appear to be associated with the loss or lack of control of the Venezuelan over national destiny, for example, as a consequence of economic dependence, or due to the presence of endemic diseases that reduce the quality of life of the Venezuelan, or because of foreign war processes that produce shortages, etc. (Montero, 1991, pp. 146-147). And in general, it has been translated as despair and / or lack of confidence in the potential of Venezuelans to live in freedom and democracy (Romero, 2002).

It is that *insistent pessimism of the Venezuelan the problem* of the doctoral dissertation of Thamara Hannot (1996):

A quick look at the social media, the public platform or any conversation among friends about the slightest matter of collective interest allows us to observe that nothing is good for Venezuelans ...It is as if they lived in a state of nonconformity with everything, and in a permanent struggle of antagonists with themselves (Hannot, 1996, p. 27).

In any case, that pessimism, fatalism and / or hopelessness attributed to the Venezuelan is equally present in the *pessimistic tone* that the intellectual discourse on Venezuela and the Venezuelan (Hannot, 1996). It is this *discontented and hopeless look* on the potentialities of the country and its people that leads to the national interpretation of a large group of Venezuelan intellectuals, especially during the 20th century. It is also part of the investigations of Maritza Montero, Thamara Hannot and Anibal Romero that account for that pessimistic tradition in intellectual discourse that seeks answers to national situations. And finally, the works of these researchers are the subject of the present review and discussion.

4. THE PESIMIST TRADITION IN THE VENEZUELAN INTELLECTUAL SPEECH AS A STUDY OBJECT

4.1. The precursors of Augusto Mijares and Luis Beltrán Guerrero

In 1938, Augusto Mijares's *pessimistic interpretation of the Hispano - American sociology* was published for the first time. In the Introduction to his work, the author establishes the reflective tone that will permeate the entire text. First, it clarifies the meaning of History: "... it is the most alive and direct manifestation of the character of a people, a vast political experience and a set of sociological problems" (Mijares, 1952, p. 7). Read "character of a people" as the "way of being" of that people; History is also "political experience" as "government science in a broad sense", and is "a set of sociological problems" because -although the past is approached- we study problems "of permanent relevance". Thus, according to the author, a sociological-historical interpretation has prevailed over national problems both in America (referring to Latin America) and in Venezuela:

The fact, then, that history and sociology have usurped among us the thought that could have been devoted to other activities, is only a very explicable deviation; and to a certain praiseworthy point, since even the minimum of intellectual interest that was allowed to devote to those national problems was preserved (Mijares, 1952, pp. 7-8).

In this way, the approaches to the colonial past and the first republican attempts until the beginning of the 20th century have been marked by the need to look for the reasons for *being* of Venezuelan society and its actions in certain historical periods. From this relationship, Mijares finds three fundamental lines of sociological interpretation of the colonial period: as a period of vassalage ("obscure and abject"), as "immediate product or simple reflection of Spanish institutions", and finally, as "a period of formation of the nationality; constructive evolution due in part to the Spanish contribution... ". Regarding the process of Independence, the author clarifies that for some, this is a "heroic creation, great improvisation of the liberators", as "contagion of European ideas", or as "collective work and culmination of a process prior to the formation of nationality".

Of these three approaches, the interpretations that have prevailed in the study of the Republic follow: "heir of the colonial vassalage and its fundamental defects: only salvation its ethnic and cultural Europeanization", or, "as a chaotic struggle, to which only the tutelary leader can impose stability and continuity", and finally, "as a period of reorganization of nationality after the crisis of the emancipatory war. "Along with the revision of these three historical-sociological lines, some" related problems "are emerging "As, for example, the value of the Constitutions and civilist aspirations,

anarchy and despotism, the racial problem, caudillismo, immigration, among others (Mijares, 1952, pp. 11-13).

In this work, caudillismo will be the center of its considerations. For Mijares, this has become one of the many edges of that interpretive pessimism of the continental reality and Venezuelan: "... I put special enthusiasm-and I do not dissimulate it-in outlining the refutation of the pessimistic doctrine of caudillismo, which I judge so false as pernicious" (Mijares, 1952, p. 13).

In the first place, he criticizes that caudillismo has been considered, both by foreign thinkers and by nationals, "the typical phenomenon of our social and political customs" (Mijares, 1952, p. 15). With this, it has been ignored how "civil society" has developed "... a tradition of political regularity, of the order considered as governed by law..." (Mijares, 1952, p. 15). In other words, Mijares does not deny the caudillista tradition, but he clarifies that it is not the only or exclusive one in the public life of these countries. For this reason, it considers a serious misinterpretation both of "the men of science" and of the "vulgar" to consider that caudillismo "...is the necessary consequence of our historical heritage and at the same time the exponent and symbol of all our defects and virtues" (Mijares, 1952, p. 16). Since it is associated with authoritarianism, despotism, personalism of the *Venezuelan being*.

In his socio-historical review, Mijares reinforces the idea of a civilist tradition associated with the deliberative autonomy of the councils since colonial times, and how this has been maintained throughout republican history. Likewise, associated with the idea of the caudillo, he criticizes the positivist conception of "Gendarme Necesario" as the only one capable of consolidating peace and progress on American soil; and insists on observing caudillismo as a phenomenon of crisis that responds to certain determined moments. In contrast, he devotes much of his work to reaffirming that the history of political regularity and social consensus that has characterized the Latin American continent is the product of a civilist tradition: "the history of our political crimes is also, on the obverse, the history of that heroic struggle of our civic tradition against the predominance of the gendarme" (Mijares, 1952, p. 201).

In short, the work of Mijares includes one of the few revisions that, from a "scientific perspective", moves away from the positivist determinism that has impregnated the construction of Venezuelanity; constituting a true exception within the continuous negative approaches to the national reality and to the way of *being* of the Venezuelan throughout the twentieth century (Montero, 1991). In turn, it is in itself a revision of the pessimistic tradition, at least in relation to caudillismo and the traits associated with it.

For its part, the First Series of *Candideces* (1962) includes the writings of Luis Beltrán Guerrero, Venezuelan journalist, poet and essayist. In this compilation appears a brief essay entitled "The Maximum Pessimists" which includes emblematic phrases of pessimistic tone that, according to the author, compose "a philosophy of Venezuelan life". But as clarifies, although these maxims could make sense and relate to the national reality at a certain time, they have become "a desolate pessimism" that must be fought "... if you look at another Venezuela, that of the 'lyricists' 'that created sovereignty, that

of the civilistas who have trumpeted the regularity in the transformation of public power and that of the workers who, with the plow, the chisel or the pen, have created material or moral goods" (Guerrero, 1962, p. 85).

In his chronological review of these "obscured radiographs of our individual and social psychology", the author starts with emblematic phrases said or written by relevant characters of the national history during the 19th century. Giving a clear vision of the *psycho-historical look* that has predominated over *being-Venezuelan*. The first, Francisco de Miranda, for whom Venezuela was nothing but a land of "Bochinche!" then he refers to the words of Juan Vicente González, when Fermín Toro died, he exclaimed that "the last Venezuelan" died. It also includes one of the harshest judgments of Cecilia Acosta: "There is no discomfort in Venezuela, no malandanza that attributes us", and the famous phrase of the former president of Venezuela on three occasions, Guzman Blanco: "Venezuela is like a dry leather, which is stepped on one side and rises on the other". Likewise, he finds in the *Solute Thoughts* of Dr. J. M. Núñez de Cáceres (of Dominican origin but who collaborated with the Cosiata movement of 1826), "a source of pessimistic character" on the Venezuelan who tries to accommodate the laws at the whim of the ruler, or that much wants to do, but that in the end, little does; or the words of the Presbyter Nicanor Rivero, one of the editors of the *La Religion* newspaper of the late nineteenth century: "The Venezuelan is not considered free while he is not oppressing others". Or the words of the poet Manuel Pimentel Coronel, "Venezuela is a country without memory" (Guerrero, 1962, p. 86).

The twentieth century maintains this pessimistic interpretation. Guerrero begins the review with the negative sentences on the Venezuelan collected in *Anecdotal Life of Venezuelans* by Eduardo Carreño. Also, the words of the writer Manuel Vicente Romero García in *El Cojo Ilustrado*: "Venezuela is the country of conceited nullities and of established reputations". Likewise, the sentences of the positivists Gil Fortoul ("In Venezuela, the provisional is the eternal, and the Constitution, a book that is reformed every year and violated every day") and César Zumeta ("In Venezuela sending, or not outside of it" , "In Venezuela the laws have first and last name" , " Here the praises are written against, not in favor "); or the maxims of Pedro Emilio Coll ("Venezuela is a sea ...of pods"), or the ideas of Vicente Amengual for whom the national policy was a chicken coop because each one is, at some point, the only rooster that "treads" the hens; or the list of national calamities described by Luis M. Urbaneja Achelpohl in "In this country" (Guerrero, 1962, p. 86).

For Guerrero this pessimism makes up a "popular philosophy" based on certain negative features that have been attributed to the Venezuelan in general. This can only be overcome through reeducation "... for joy, for healthy optimism, based on work and the confidence of the future" (Guerrero, 1962, p. 85). He adds that, although these maxims or definitions of the Venezuelan could be realistic for a certain historical moment, the country needs another popular philosophy, not only more optimistic and

hopeful, but implies trust in men, in institutions, in things and in the words; and leave behind old quarrels, misunderstandings, retaliation (Guerrero, 1962, p. 88) ⁵.

4.2. Maritza Montero and the negative self-image of the Venezuelan in intellectual discourse

As stated in the introduction, one can trace the pessimistic tradition in Venezuelan intellectual discourse from very early on. Among the researches that work on this interpretive determinism, the work of Maritza Montero, *Ideology, alienation and national identity* (1991) is an obligatory reference of the subject. In general terms, the researcher finds that the predominantly negative and stereotyped categorization of the *Venezuelan being*, in whose social construction the Venezuelan *intelligentsia* has collaborated since the 19th century, has become a constant questioning of the national identity, and consequently, in a negative expression of the same (national disability). From a *psycho-social* perspective this has become, among other things, a *hopelessness learned* about individual potentialities and those that, as Venezuelans, can develop. Despair linked to the *way of being* of the Venezuelan.

Now, Montero explains that for 10 years he carried out field work concerning the self-perception of Venezuelans and the negative self-image that has resulted from it. By virtue of which, it was asked when this image was configured, and if it changes or is constant. To answer these questions, the content analysis of various texts (political speeches, sociological, historical and journalistic interpretations of national reality and studies of pioneers of social sciences in Venezuela) produced by a large group of politicians, writers, philosophers, journalists, etc. Venezuelans, who may well be considered intellectuals (in the broad terms already explained) who collaborated, from their discourse, with such a predominantly negative construction on *being-Venezuelan*.

It is a longitudinal study of the psycho-historical approaches that have predominated in the conformation of the self-image of the Venezuelan from the late nineteenth century to the early eighties of the last century. This study, "...covers the evolution of a system of social representations, which expresses an ideology and is the product of a process of alienation" (Montero, 1991, p. 115). Realizing how they are superimposed or imbricated - psychologically, socially and historically - the representations of the *Venezuelan being*, and of the national identity, with constructs such as ideology, ideology of dependency, alienation, learning of despair, among others.

His exhaustive review allows him to distinguish three historical periods in the process of the construction of the Venezuelan being: *The pseudopositive* (1890 to 1900); the second, *explicitly negative* (1901 to 1935); and the third, of *implicit negative predominance* (1936 to 1982).

⁵ This short essay was published in 1962, but written in 1959, a time when profound changes were beginning in Venezuelan society; perhaps, for this reason, the author asked, as a counterbalance to pessimism, confidence in this new period of national history and leave behind old political quarrels.

The *pseudopositive* period had as a referential framework, immediately before, the national project formulated and encouraged by President Guzmán Blanco. Of this period are the works: *Mosaic of Politics and Literature*, written in 1883 but published in 1890 by Luis A. López Méndez; *The President* (1891) signed by Rafael N. Seijas (but attributed to his father, Rafael Seijas) and *The Sick Continent* (1899) by César Zumeta. The summary of this period and the works that represent it is as follows: "The predominant theoretical influence for the time is clearly that of positivism and two explanations coexist: 1) The race factor; 2) The corrupting action of governments" (Montero, 1991, p. 119).

The second period corresponds historically to the autocratic governments of Castro and Gómez (1901-1935). According to Montero, during this period the thesis of racist positivism flourishes, which abounds mainly in the works of Laureano Vallenilla Lanz and Pedro Manuel Arcaya; but that is also found in the works of José Gil Fortoul, Francisco Jiménez Arráiz, Pío Gil, Julio C. Salas, Arístides Calcaño, Rómulo Gallegos and José Rafael Pocaterra. Aspects such as race and geographical determinism are common in this period. Likewise, the figure of the plainsman remains the prototype of the Venezuelan.

And this assimilation of the Venezuelan-type with the llanero is an idea that will persist until the second half of this century [that is, the twentieth century]. Even in the following period, in 1953, there is such an opinion repeated by numerous members of the country's intelligentsia. The fundamental argument, widely developed...: This is the disintegrating effect of the Indian and black blood on Spanish blood, which represents civilization... For all these reasons and under the effect of factors deeply rooted in the biology of Venezuelans, its nature tends to anarchy... To reach civilization, the Venezuelan people need the iron hand of the 'necessary gendarme', the inevitable authoritarian leader. [In short] Venezuelans are ungovernable, violent, disorganized by nature and, therefore, need a strong government, a dictator (Montero, 1991, pp. 121-122).

The third and last period is chronologically the most extensive (1936 to 1982). After the death of Juan Vicente Gómez, the country was open to promising changes, associated with democratic possibilities and modernization. However, from the intellectual point of view, the negative line persists and predominates throughout this third period. Thus, among the intellectuals of that time, and despite the possibilities of change, the shadow of pessimism looms over the country.

Now, Montero recognizes certain nuances in this extended period. Distinguish, therefore, three subgroups. Authors such as Juan Penzini Hernández, Carlos Rangel, Herrera Luque, Abel Sánchez Peláez and Arturo Uslar elaborate a discourse in which a *negative* or *explicitly negative evaluation* of the Venezuelan predominates.

The second line is present in works whose denial of the Venezuelan is done implicitly. In this *implicit negation* "all positive traits are opposed to negative traits,

which is why the beneficial influence they bring with them is erased" (Montero, 1996, p. 125). In this group, the researcher includes the work of Carlos Siso (1953); the results of the intellectual debate around "El ser del venezolano" sponsored by Tierra Firme magazine (1953); the characterization on the "alive" and the "liveliness" of the Venezuelan, presented by Felipe Massiani (1962) and the work of JM Cañizales Márquez, published with the suggestive title: *Así somos los venezolanos* (1977).

Along with these two lines, Montero exposes the *negative critical current*. In this, the author pays special attention to the writing of Germán Carrera Damas, along with the work of Rojas Guardia, Escovar Salom, Roberto Briceño León, Esteban Mosonyi and Juan Liscano. Although it had different ways of expressing itself, in general the authors pointed out by Montero allude to a *national identity crisis* for different reasons. Here is the most relevant contribution of this group:

...is not limited to issuing a diagnosis but also investigates the causes and their veracity, evidencing the need to build an absent identity, to reconstruct what already exists, or to build a new identity based on the interests of a young nation, aspiring to put an end to his situation of underdevelopment (Montero, 1991, pp. 125-126).

Finally, it is worth highlighting as an important exception to this extensive period of negative predominance over the Venezuelan (in its three currents), the work of Augusto Mijares already commented and, logically, his effort to consolidate a different view through the *affirmative Venezuelan* (1970).

In short, during much of the twentieth century Venezuelans they have attended through the speech made by the national *intelligentsia*, to a predominantly negative Venezuelan configuration of your *being*. Self-image constructed from the positivist determinism that has not been completely overcome; and that he has collaborated in that fatalistic vision of the country and the potentialities of its inhabitants. It seems that the intellectuals themselves fell prey to the pessimism or fatalism attributed to the Venezuelan.

Among the conclusions of his study, Montero exposes the following: a) from the *psycho-historical perspective*, which includes from 1890 to the beginning of the 80s, the author gives an account of the negative construction of the self-image; b) this predominantly negative self-image is common to different perspectives and types of studies (psycho-social and psycho-historical), which allows it to confirm the existence of a historically structured social phenomenon that summarizes: "questioning one's own identity and its definition that in the majority of the cases is translated by a negative expression that denotes national handicap and overvaluation of what is foreign, in particular of the countries with which dependency links exist or have existed"; c) how the self-image of the Venezuelan is linked to the formation of the nation, "...it originates, it transforms and it enters into crisis at the rate of the crises and transformations suffered by Venezuelan society"; d) the behavior associated with this way of being of

the Venezuelan is linked to “ideological and alienating situations” typical of contexts of dependency (socioeconomic and political) and underdevelopment; e) the ideological process involved in all the above implies not only an external or macro-social action, but an internal process “by means of which the alienated subjects reproduce and disseminate this ideology” blaming themselves for what they are as a people, or denying their identity, or devaluing as a group; f) and finally, “Ideology and alienation, as social phenomena, have psychological repercussions that are translated in the form of values, attitudes, beliefs, in general: social representations, and in forms of concomitant behavior” (Montero, 1996, pp. 161-163)⁶.

4.3. Thamara Hannot and “the unhappy look”

The researcher Thamara Hannot, starting from Venezuelan pessimism as a problem, analyzes the *writing and culture of pessimism* on an exhaustive tour of the *literature of thought* about Venezuela and the Venezuelan. In her doctoral thesis, *The nonconformist look. A critical exploration of the literature of thought in Venezuela* (1996), the author considered whether intertextual kinship⁷ of the studied works is also traceable in time, a way in which a *pessimistic discourse about Venezuela and the Venezuelan* is articulated.

The corpus of this piece of research consisted of one hundred and twenty-five texts (mostly essays and opinion articles) from a varied sample of Venezuelan authors, all of them well-known thinkers: Fermín Toro, Juan Vicente González, Cecilio Acosta, Rufino Blanco Fombona, Enrique Bernardo Núñez, Mario Briceño Iragorry, Mariano Picón Salas, Arturo Uslar Pietri and José Ignacio Cabrujas. Thus, Hannot covers the Venezuelan way of thinking from the 19th century until the end of the 20th century. The ideas developed by these Venezuelans are related to three fundamental fields of the contemporary history of the country: the constitution of nationality, the emergence of oil and the formation of the negative features that characterize the “way of being” of Venezuelans as a people.

Taking this into consideration, the purpose of this piece of research was to review *the perspective of Venezuela and the Venezuelan*, while assuming the reading of the literary text as a social space and “an instituted world of meanings” (p. 6); in a clear constructivist approach to the discourse of these intellectuals. Discourse-space in which “the meeting of society with the scriptural act” takes place. Since, each analyzed text “...is a mark in the itinerary across that Venezuelan inconclusion, of which those authors give an

⁶ In relation to the psycho-social approach, the ideas expressed in this classic work on the subject are reiterated in later works, worth mentioning: *Negative social identity and socio-economic crisis. A psychosocial study* (1996) and *The construction of the Venezuelan National Identity. Tension and struggle between negativity and positivity* (1998). In the latter, Montero adds the “democratic ideal” as a new and positive feature of Venezuelans, who recognize the weaknesses of the rulers and the representative parties of the Venezuelan democratic system, but defend such a system as the best possible.

⁷ The researcher refers to the way in which, among the analyzed texts, it is possible to establish the pessimistic tone of the writing, the moralizing and / or condemnatory attitude and the dissatisfaction with the national reality.

account and, in turn, contribute to perpetuate" (p. 6). This allows us to characterize them "from the 'unhappy gaze' they produce and reproduce, as 'signs of culture' of the country (p. 6). Later, Hannot states: "We consider that the main texts of thought that have been written in Venezuela at different times have a point in common: the pessimistic tone of the dissertation seems to be related to the critical discourse of authors so dissimilar to each other..." (p. 2).

Finally, in this introductory part of his work, Hannot wonders if said discourse responds to "critical revealing awareness" or "literary rhetoric" that responds to "self-alienating thought" that prioritizes the permanent criticism about ourselves and can reveal "deeper processes", more related to a "way of being" of the Venezuelan people. A way of being that, apparently, reveals a "hypertrophied critical conscience" among intellectuals.

Thus, Hannot seeks answers to two major questions: how is the discourse on Venezuela and the Venezuelan expressed in the literature of thought?, and if, can the way to see the Venezuelan be considered a *sign of culture*?⁸

After her extensive content analysis, the author concludes that

...the Venezuelan "intelligentsia", in almost absolute independence of political ideologies, styles and academies, coincides in its appreciation of the country and its fundamental institutions. In this sense, the thought of Arturo Uslar Pietri and José Ignacio Cabrujas; Mario Briceño Iragorry and Luis Brito García; Adriano González León and Francisco Herrera Luque, cited at random among our most lucid minds sincerely concerned about the development of the nation and the well-being of its inhabitants seem to touch (pp. 31-32).

Similarly, to Hannot, the construction of the Venezuelan in the analyzed texts make up a linguistic network (Noë Jitrik) and are a sign of culture (Jury Lotman) of a "nonconformist look" that, through "pessimistic maxims", is constituted in "the slogans put in circulation within the reach of the ordinary man who refers them and makes them their own, those global elaborations of the Venezuelan writer" (Hannot, 1996, p. 575).

In 1997, Hannot published a short article directly related to her doctoral research: *Writing and Culture of Pessimism*. In it, she takes up the idea that the worked texts should be considered "signs of the country, which write to the country" (Hannot, 1997, p. 423). In other words, the author understands that the selected works are cultural products and, at the same time, they build culture, because, in the end, "culture guides what you have to believe about itself" (Lotman, 1979 cited by Hannot, 1997, p. 423). From the intertextual analysis carried out, and emphasizing how the authors relate to the material reality of the country (according to how each of them "name it"), the author concludes that there are two equally pessimistic visions of the country:

⁸ In the terms set out by Jury Lotman, whose work: *Semiotics of Culture* (1979) is the backbone of his analysis.

In one, the country is the result of a mistake ...it is...an unhappy event. To the other, Venezuela is the set of shortcomings, mistakes or absence of achievements of Venezuelans. The country is the result of the sum of the bad management of its inhabitants (Hannot, 1997, p. 423).

4.4. Aníbal Romero and the vision of “national failure”

In *Visions of Failure: Intellectuals and Disappointment in Modern Venezuela* (2002), political scientist Aníbal Romero states:

The intellectual history of independent Venezuela has been predominantly marked by the brand of pessimism. Pessimism about our potential as a people, about our ability to build a united, prosperous and stable nation, and also about the true possibility that we have of living under a democratic and freedom-respecting regime (p. 1).

Romero alludes to a *pessimistic tradition* in the way of thinking about Venezuela and its potentialities on the part of a large group of national intellectuals. As a corollary of that tradition, this author presents the perception that the country has failed “... in the task of building a nation in which democracy, freedom, and an extended material prosperity prevail stably and solidly” (Romero, 2002, p. 3). Although said author clarifies that “It is quite probable that that pessimistic conviction is not exclusive to our particular intellectual history. But its relevance in Venezuela must be highlighted, as well as its presence, with ups and downs, throughout our independent history” (Romero, 2002, p. 1).

He begins his review with some ideas developed by Simón Bolívar in the *Angostura Discourse*, then he briefly traces the positivist thought of the early twentieth century (especially, he dedicates himself to the thesis of “necessary gendarme” developed by Laureano Vallenilla Lanz). Later, he explains that since the death of Gómez -and despite the fact that the country was opening up to new possibilities- on the intellectual plane “... several of the most lucid thinkers of the Venezuela that began to walk at that time develop a line of deeply pessimistic thinking about our perspectives” (Romero, 2002, p. 5). In this group, the author locates the thinkers Mario Briceño Irragorry, Mariano Picón Salas and Arturo Uslar Pietri.

Romero points out that, from 1936 to 1958, this tone of “deep pessimism” is maintained by the conviction, among other things, that the country lived a perennial crisis that was “in the national soul”. In part, the conception of oil as the “villain of the drama” contributed to this, because national oil was still seen as the villain of the drama, since it promotes “easy” and “corrosive” wealth. It was the thinking, for example, of Rómulo Betancourt and Arturo Uslar Pietri; although the proposals to “get out” of this situation offered by these thinkers and men of action were diametrically opposed (Romero, 2002, pp. 6-9).

Following his journey through fatalistic thinking, Romero summarizes the general perception of the times of fixed point (1958-1998), times of democratic coexistence, as a “resounding failure”, both among the general public opinion and among intellectuals. He notes the latter when reviewing the last years of that *pessimistic tradition* through the works of Ángel Bernardo Viso (1982, 1991 and 1997), María Sol Pérez Schael (1993 and 1997), Germán Carrera Damas (1980, 1983, 1986, 1988 and 1998) and Arturo Uslar Pietri (1989, 1992, 1994 and 1995).

Romero finds that this pessimistic tradition only intensified throughout the twentieth century, culminating in this perception of deep national failure at the end of the century in question. This without forgetting that this tradition has not been homogeneous over time and has had honorable exceptions (such as the ideas expressed by Augusto Mijares, too “optimistic” to Romero).

In his attempt to elucidate this trend in intellectual thinking about Venezuela and the Venezuelan, the author finds that intellectual reflection “seems resigned to admitting a Venezuelan condition deeply sealed by a destiny of uprooting and frustration” (Romero, 2002, p. 4). In other words, that certain constitutive features of our *Venezuelan being*, among them despair (pessimism), lack of historical awareness, authoritarianism and servility seem to be at the base of that fatalistic determinism, of that deep conviction that Venezuelans are called to failure as a nation; at least, in the attempt to maintain and consolidate a democratic and liberal regime.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As the reader will have been able to appreciate, since the precursory studies of Augusto Mijares and Luis Beltrán Guerrero, up to the more complex and detailed approaches of Maritza Montero, Thamara Hannot and Aníbal Romero, one can trace the *pessimistic tradition* that has prevailed in the discursive interpretation of the national reality since the early Republicans, with emphasis on the twentieth century.

Although the object of study is addressed from diverse disciplinary fields (sociology, history, psychology, literature, and/or political science), all reviewed authors prioritized the historical-descriptive reconstruction of the object of study, while they sought answers to the reason for such pessimism. Likewise, all of them reflect on the possible negative consequences that this intellectual discourse, which is hopeless, deterministic and pessimistic about Venezuela and about the *Venezuelan being*, has had.

Reflection with which the writer is consistent; especially regarding the considerations that, on the construction of intellectual discourse, were established in the theoretical frame of reference; that is, if we take into account that the group of intellectuals associated with that discourse can be regarded as a *Symbolic elite* that has collaborated in the perpetuation of this predominantly negative and pessimistic “belief system” (ideology) of the country and its inhabitants, through its discourse. Not in vain, from “The Pessimistic Maxims” re-education from the positive or affirmative Venezuelan is invited.

Finally, it should be remembered that in this documentary review only those works that systematically offer a rather general but exhaustive panorama of this *pessimistic tradition* were privileged. Intentionally, those dedicated to the pessimistic discourse of a particular thinker or a very small group of them have been excluded from this journey; also, the most recent advances that propose not only the revision of this tradition and the theoretical constructs associated with it (such as national identity, self-image of the Venezuelan, etc.) but also propose their deconstruction, and the formulation of new proposals that, from a constructivist-interpretative approach, collaborate in the conformation of new ways of valuing the Venezuelan⁹.

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⁹ Like the most recent works of Roberto López Sánchez *Vicissitudes of identity and national development* (2008); Gianfranco Selgas *The underlying discourse on the personal construction of the Venezuelan. Analysis of the discursive strategies in Marcos Pérez Jiménez's utterances and their influence on the construction of the identity of the current Venezuelan* (2011); and María del Pilar Quintero-Montilla *Psycho-socio-cultural identity in Venezuela: review, deconstruction, re-interpretation and reconstruction of cultural identities and alterities. Ten necessary transformations* (2014), among others.

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