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BICENTENNIAL COLLECTION: EDUCATION OR INDOCTRINATION?

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ABSTRACT:

The texts found in the “Bicentennial” book collection have caused controversies in the Venezuelan social environment; while many people believe that the content found in these books is purely political and that the texts are being distributed by the national government with the sole purpose of political indoctrination of young Venezuelans, the National Government and its supporters claim that an effort is being made to make education accessible to everyone by distributing these books for free throughout all the schools in the country. It is important to mention that although the books are free of charge, all schools in Venezuela are obliged by law to teach their students using the content found in these books. Moreover, Professor América Bracho, who coordinates the collection, explains how these books are based on “Tree of the Three Roots”² ideals proposed by the ex-president Hugo Chávez in his Blue Book (2010) literature and are key to understanding the foundations of the MVR2000 political party. In order to take an unbiased critical stance towards the emerging controversies that either criticize or support the content in these books, the following article analyzes one of the texts that was obtained from the collection with the purpose of evaluate whether or not the National Government is attempting to indoctrinate the Venezuelan younger generations.

KEY WORDS

Indoctrination - Imperialism - Education - History anachronistic - Culture - Revolution.

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²Correo del Orinoco interview to América Bracho, available on the website of the institution dated September 29, 2013.

COLECCIÓN BICENTENARIA: ¿EDUCACIÓN O ADOCTRINAMIENTO?

RESUMEN

Los libros pertenecientes a la *Colección Bicentennial* han causado polémica dentro del entorno social de Venezuela. Estas ediciones son publicadas por el Gobierno Venezolano y se distribuyen de forma gratuita y obligatoria en todos los colegios públicos del país. La finalidad de estos textos, según lo expresa el actual presidente Nicolás Maduro es garantizar una educación adecuada para todas las clases sociales y para todas las edades. Desde su entrega a los estudiantes los textos han sido blancos de diversas críticas, especialmente por el presunto contenido idealista y doctrinario de sus ejemplares en ciencias sociales. La profesora América Bracho, quien coordina la colección, sugiere que los libros están fundamentados bajo los ideales del árbol de las tres raíces³. Estos ideales son propuestos por el ex presidente Hugo Chávez en su *Libro Azul* (2010) y además fundamentan los cimientos del partido MBR200. En busca de una postura crítica frente al contenido de estas ediciones el presente artículo analizará uno de los textos de la colección con la intención de evaluar si realmente existe un contenido doctrinario en sus fundamentos.

Palabras clave

Adoctrinamiento - Imperialismo - Educación - Historia - Anacrónico, Cultura - Revolución.

1. INTRODUCTION

The controversy created in Venezuela by implementing the texts of the Bicentennial Collection will be investigated. Criticism of the collection suggests that books seek to change behaviors and sow ideals among young students. For its part, the Venezuelan government says the intention is only to ensure free quality education for the entire population.

The text of the Bicentennial Collection to be discussed in this article entitled: Bolivar: Time and life of the man of difficulties. The book corresponds to the third year of secondary education and its content is intended for students with an average age between 13 and 15 years. About the life and work of the Liberator Simon Bolivar and ideals of emancipation of the Spanish colonies.

³ Entrevista de Correo del Orinoco a América Bracho, disponible en el portal de la institución con fecha 29 de Septiembre de 2013.

For the analysis of the text we start from the premise that the purpose of it is to teach the reader the life and work of a hero of the Republic. Understanding that there is a conflict of opinion regarding the content of the texts, this article will attempt to critically about their possible contents of indoctrination in order to assess their ability to change behaviors in young students.

2. OBJECTIVES

This article has the general objective: To evaluate the ability of the books of the Bicentennial Collection to modify the social behavior in young Venezuelans due to the indoctrination contained in its pages: Case Text time Bolivar and the presence of the man of the difficulties.

As for the specific objectives there are three that concern us:

1. To examine the historical process narrated in the text according to their potential doctrinal content.
2. To establish the educational outcomes projected by the Venezuelan government with the implementation of this teaching method.
3. To determine the capacity of the books of the Bicentennial Collection to modify the social behavior of young students.

3. METHODOLOGY

In a first sense, the article will follow a documentary design because its objective is the study of a specific reality through rigorous analysis of the existing documentation. Through this type of research it will be possible to obtain the information required to make the necessary observations and inferences.

The study will also be of historical nature, since it will focus its research on a fact and specific moment in history: The life and work of the Liberator Simon Bolivar. It seeks to analyze this point in Venezuelan history through the possible intention of the Venezuelan State to modify social behavior by manipulating various historical contexts. Besides, contributions from different authors specializing in the subject were used, which will sustain the arguments issued.

4. RESULTS

As a final result is expected to assess the ability to modify the social behavior by the books of the Bicentennial Collection, answering the following questions:

Does the Bicentennial Collection can modify the social behavior of young readers? What does the Venezuelan government expects with the implementation of this educational project? How was the book "*Bolívar: Tiempo y vigencia del hombre de las dificultades*" determined by State doctrinal intentions?

5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 The story of the historical process in the text:

As for the teaching quality of the text, it must be recognized that efforts were made to adapt the content to an adequate and enlightening understanding of the issues. They are narrated in a very participatory manner, where even this is "you" the reader, apparently in an attempt to create affinity with the student. However, the first thing is obvious, to begin the first chapter, is the attribution is given to the character of Simon Bolivar as a "visionary" able to make some sort of prediction of historical events that we live in the XXI century .

In case the reader wonder what it means to be a visionary? Kindly text defines "visionary" as follows: "Visionary: person able to anticipate a fair vision of the future." (Bicentennial Collection 2012 p: p 13). To this is added a constant and anachronistic comparison of the events of the past with the public policy of the current Venezuelan Government. A sort of justification is evident to the reader of the measures imposed by the government in the last 15 years:

In 1829, Bolivar ordered that the economic benefits of the salt and metal smelting and coining of metals of the territory were handed to the State. This idea of sovereignty for the management of the resources of the current space of Venezuela is present today in Article 12 of our Constitution, which it can be appreciated that it makes reference to mines and hydrocarbons present in the country. "(Collection Bicentennial 2012 p: p 13).

It is convenient to ask ourselves at this time if the narrative work of the historical process in the text is being focused correctly, then as Carlos Aguirre Rojas suggests in his text *The Antimanual of the Bad Historian*, the work of a good historian cannot be anachronistic, much unless it can understand a historical process like another.

"The second cardinal sin of bad historian is the anachronism of history. That is, the lack of sensitivity to the historical change, which assumes consciously or unconsciously that men and societies of three or five centuries or more than a millennium, were like us, and they thought, felt, acted and reacted in the same way that we do "(Aguirre, 2002 p: p 39).

In this sense, one can see from the first chapter of the text an inclination to guide the narrative of the historical context in a certain direction, apparently in order to justify some aspects of the history of Venezuela.

Another element to highlight in later chapters is the fact that Venezuela is presented as a single participant agent in the independence of the colonies clearly closing the globalizing doors to give prominence only to Venezuela in the events of 1810 onwards, in addition It seems to be a conceptual manipulation of terms such as: "Democracy", "monarchy" and "imperialism". These terms without the proper clarification of the teacher could lend to confuse the reader:

As is already known to you, Venezuela was a Spanish colony from the late fifteenth to the early nineteenth century. During this period the metropolis was run by a monarchical system where sovereignty resided in the people, as in democracy in which you live in the present, only that it was exercised by the king, who in turn transferred to his firstborn son "(Bicentennial Collection 2012, p: p 78).

Extracts like these remind us that in the construction of official histories, the collection of historical facts are a result of past events chosen, checked and classified according to specific needs (Halbwachs s / f). Seeing him in this way, we could understand that the need behind the article points again to a justification of the facts through a reconstruction and certainly anachronistic comparison of the past. This comparison ignores essential elements and displays only those convenient to the interests of the state.

In this sense, fragments of the text can be extracted, whose narrative highlights, for example, the exploitation suffered by Indians and slaves in the colonial era. These fundamentals may be responding to the intention of creating a resentment of the reader towards the Empires besides, it revives a conflict and urges to continue it. The arguments seem to use the investiture of the Libertador as legitimation:

Today, this idea of Simon Bolivar is current as today some people of the world are under attack and invasion of other nations seeking to control them and seize their wealth. Therefore, we cannot be indifferent to what might happen in a brother country, if so, how can we expect cooperation or assistance in case to be in a similar situation "(Bicentennial Collection p: p 147)?.

The anachronistic contents are present throughout the text, and add to a conception of linear time, which is not taking into account the different time frames. These characteristics in the development of the narrative shows that the basis of the text is not only, as was assumed at first, teach the reader the life and work of a hero of the Republic. Depending on the first objective for this article, namely: To examine the historical process narrated in the text according to their potential doctrinal content; we can leave the following extract as an illustration for the reader to draw their own conclusions.

The Liberator perceived as a selfish act that the U.S. only focused in govern their own nation and remained indolent before the War of Independence of Central and South America, so that he thought that in the future Americans would try to take advantage of the former European colonies (*Bicentennial Collection* p: p 173).

The above quote is preceded in the text by a rating of "*truly prophetic vision*" by the Liberator who, according to the text, from a time as far as that was able to glimpse a supposed intentions of "conquest" that the current American country has on Venezuela. The text also states that Venezuela is currently in an "economic war" unleashed by the US and urged an active participation of the reader in this conflict.

5.2 Projections of the Venezuelan state with this educational project:

The influence of education and the written broadcast as a medium of communication is a powerful element within the social system, especially as the political purpose of mass communication. An example can be seen in the introduction of the program for the Alma Mater Mission, the UNES, Universidad Nacional Experimental of the Security presents to its students: "*In this way it is radically assumed the political*

dimension of education claiming the political role of educators and teachers - as well as all social actor engaged in an educational- process as subject of change"(UNES 2011 p: p 4).

The allocation to the education system as an engine of social change has been constantly exalted by the Venezuelan government in the last 15 years. Its legislation has been commissioned to strengthen, as we saw in previous lines, a sense of mysticism toward the Liberator as a visionary. The intention behind these actions is to gain legitimacy after the investiture of the Liberator. If the reader thinks that the position of the Article leans to a little neutral view on the analysis, just do a quick reading of the introduction of the text being analyzed, to perceive that the very antechamber of the book claims to have a content of indoctrination . The words addressed to teachers in introducing the same end with the following sentence: "*To start the way toward the construction of the new Republican that our country needs!* (Collection Bicentennial 2012, p: p 3).

The State's intention to form a "revolutionary citizen" is highlighted in the arguments offered by the president of the republic Nicolas Maduro Moros in his statements. However, given the criticism, the president sustains in a somewhat cynical manner that the only intention of the book is to provide free, quality education for all Venezuelans. An interview in 2013 with the coordinator of the social science books Professor America Bracho, will clarify the second objective that occupies this article, namely: To establish educational outcomes projected by the Venezuelan government with the implementation of this method of education.

The abovementioned professor says: " *Our books have a foundation: the Bolivarian education, which is the tree of the three roots ...*" (Bracho, 2013 p: ps / p).

What is the tree of the three roots? Well, as stated by the former president of Venezuela Hugo Chavez in his text *The Blue Book* (2010) The project of the so-called Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela has its philosophical support in the thinking of three Venezuelan revolutionaries: Simon Rodriguez, Simon Bolivar and Ezequiel Zamora. This theory seeks to free the Venezuelan people of inequality, poverty and oligarchic domination that the United States has brought over all Latin America.

The Blue Book points out that the Bolivarian character of the revolutionary process in Venezuela should look at the past in order to try to unravel the mysteries of the future and liberate all the continent from a domination from which it is being the victim. (Chavez, 2010). This ideal was also the doctrinal basis under which the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement 200 (MBR-200) was founded in 1982, where Hugo Chavez and other radicals military follow the communist ideals of Fidel Castro. With the statements from the professor America Bracho it is understood that the education system in Venezuela, is responding to political needs, whose aims are to achieve the communist ideals posed by former President Hugo Chavez and the Castro regime.

5.3 Does the Bicentennial Collection with the ability to modify the social behavior of young readers?

History is much more than a text with pieces of the past. History is multi-disciplinary and historical reality is in constant motion, it is also affected by different factors. It is

our responsibility to keep a critical thinking, to inquire after the knowledge and transmit it to the future generations.

The texts of the collection clearly pursue an ideal and seek to model the minds of young readers. However it is in the hands of parents, teachers and students to give the text the right approach. A critical attitude of the society regarding the text will allow to repel that perverse content. A journalistic investigation by the newspaper El Universal showed as a result that:

The texts cannot even fulfill its indoctrinating intention, because they either are not applied in classrooms or teachers do not know how to use them, or they produce frustration to the children. When we saw the texts of the Bicentennial Collection stowed in a backpack, locked in a showcase, packed without delivering them in a classroom, we only thought of the billions of wasted State resources ". (Aguirre, 2014)

Apparently the content of the texts causes some confusion to the students, in response to the excess of information they are little interested in understanding the message of the book. The speeches in the texts are very powerful, especially when we talk about so young readers and in full formation of their conceptions, however, they must be carried with caution. Professor Maria Elena del Valle in the work titled: Approach to the study of the discourse in the history books: the figure of the hero and of the group (2009) states:

The hero and his characteristics, the facts to which they are associated, the dependence of their action presenting the facts recorded in history, are as previously discussed, elements that give the historic discourse of the manuals a profile and an effect seldom benevolent to the critical learning process pursued by the education and the figure of the group. (Del Valle, 2009 p: p 191).

The best defense against the indoctrination that a twisted ideal wants to convey to our society and to our children, is to sow awareness of a critical thinking in our students and teachers. Besides, we must also remember, as Burke suggests, that the system is constantly changing and we are part of that system with actions that although imperceptible, achieves changes in the long term: "*The system, it is necessary to emphasize, is constantly changing, even if some of those changes are visible only in the long-term perspective*" (Burke 2002 p: p 35). Let us begin now to create change, we too are heroes as Bolivar once was. Lets build the citizen that this country really needs: One able to think and develop his own ideals. The books themselves do not have the ability to indoctrinate, it is made clear with the message to teachers at the beginning of all the texts. Without social support an ideal of this magnitude can never be digested by the social system. Let us not allow our children to be handled, let us fight always to maintain a critical stance before the world.

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