

FIGHTING SEXISM IN TEXTBOOKS: AGENDA CONSTRUCTION AND ITS CRITICS

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ABSTRACT

FIGHTING SEXISM IN TEXTBOOKS: AGENDA CONSTRUCTION AND ITS CRITICS. This article aims to describe the creation of an agenda on “sexism in textbooks” at the international and national levels. To accomplish this, it includes a critical review of the literature from the 1960s to the present, with special emphasis on the changes and what remains the same, as well as the tensions detected in the implementation of policies aimed at fighting “sexism” in textbooks.

TEXTBOOKS – BIBLIOGRAPHY – BRAZILIAN NATIONAL TEXTBOOK PROGRAM – SEXISM

Adult concern with the content of books and other supporting material used for forming younger generations is nothing new. Choppin (2004) highlights the importance that was attributed to the “ideological and cultural function” of textbooks “as from the 19th century, with the constitution of national states and the development of the main educational systems within this particular context”. As a privileged instrument in the construction of identity, textbooks “are generally recognized as a symbol of national sovereignty, in the same way as the currency or flag, and in this sense they assume an important political role” (p. 553).

Starting from this viewpoint we carried out our first international reviews of school books, with the aim of eliminating the xenophobic prejudices that existed after the First World War. So, male and female teachers¹ and politicians, in addition to criticizing the “erroneous” images of the “enemies” as portrayed in Brazilian textbooks, adopted a series of initiatives within the Society of Nations that resulted in the preparation and signing, in 1937, of a Declaration on the History and Review of Textbooks (Pingel, 1999). It is in this period (1933) that we come across the first action by the Brazilian government for dealing with the establishment of rules relating to the content of textbooks, in the shape of an agreement signed between Brazil, Argentina and Mexico for expurgating from teaching texts those “topics that recall bygone passions” (Hollanda, 1957). To this end, in 1938 the Brazilian Committee for Reviewing History and Geography Texts was created, within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This Committee was the forerunner of the National Textbook Committee, so initiating the long and intermittent history of Brazil’s public textbook policy, which has included a critical analysis of textbook content and which, since the 1980s, has been known as the National Textbook Program (PNLD).

Analysis of the images of “woman”, “gender relations”, “sexism”, “sexual or gender stereotypes” in textbooks, which began in the 1960s and 1970s, considers the textbook either as the “informant” or “constructor” of minds, in the case of “sexual roles” or “gender identities”, depending on the period being considered. But, all of this did not originate from research groups or teachers, who are interested, above all, in textbooks: it originated from,

¹ From this point on we shall abandon the formula, using out of preference the masculine gender, since the use of the two grammatical genders are not needed to make the meaning clear. [*Translator’s note. Since the English language is not structured in this way this point has no relevance in the text in English*]

and has remained the production of, female academics and feminist activists who are outlining a social problem – condemnation of the “differentiated education” of girls and boys, the “sexist” bias in education – and constructing agendas and political strategies for combating discrimination against women.

This mark of origin permeated both the areas of research and intervention: the “sexual stereotypes” theme was not taken up by the major research area into textbooks in the same way that the textbook studies’ area has had very little impact on academic production relating to “sexual stereotypes”. In our opinion, this “ghettoization” has consequences, in the impact that this mobilization has had on proposals for altering the content of textbooks, as we shall later discuss.

In this article we have prepared a state-of-the-art study on the theme in both international and the Brazilian scenarios. Our focus is to discuss the vicissitudes when it comes to constructing and implementing the academic and political agenda in the fight against sexism in textbooks.

A SOCIAL PROBLEM: HOW TO CONSTRUCT AND FACE UP TO IT

It was undoubtedly the 1970s, with its institutionalization of the new women’s movement, including in academic circles, which saw the start of and brought into the picture the focuses of this new social problem: how to overcome differentiated education for males and females at school and the displaying of sexual stereotypes in the school curriculum and textbooks.

Our bibliography mentions some texts prior to 1970: the one by Child, Potter and Levine (1946), which already noted the over-representation of male characters in North American textbooks; the mention in volume 2 of the *Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir (1960) of feminine passivity in children’s literature; the theses of Mollo (1969) and Rosemberg (1969), in France about textbooks and children’s literature and the thesis of Zimet (1968) about sexual roles over four hundred years (1600 to 1960) of North American reading book history.

The United States offers us a privileged position from which to observe the paradigm change in the focus of education on the socialization process of sexual roles at the turn of the 1960s. In 1968, Zimet pointed out that the textbooks that she analyzed transmitted images of

sexual roles that were little differentiated, less marked than those actually to be found in North American society and that this was harmful, especially to boys who had the worst results in reading. The ideal, therefore, would be to have textbooks that present demarcated sexual role models. Zimet (1968) was even a defender of the educational ideal that prevailed in the West after Rousseau: differentiation in the socialization of behavior patterns between men and women as one of the goals of education. It was only in the 1970s that specific (or differentiated) education for each sex was questioned by feminism (Nielsen, Bronwyn, 2007), which denounced the fraud that was school co-education, which, despite its reach, did not comply with the ideal of an egalitarian education for males and females.

Just three years separate the thesis of Zimet (1968) from the publication of one of the icons of the age, the North American collection, *Woman in sexist society: studies in power and powerlessness* (Gornick, Moran, 1971). In this book, Marjorie B. U'Ren (a professor at Berkley and at the time a member of the National Organization for Women Now) signs the article entitled "The image of woman in textbooks", condemning the fact that men and women did not receive the same education from the educational system.

Their education reflects the role that society expects them to perform. Our society teaches men and not women that they must achieve, progress and create. This deference to men is particularly evident in the school books used by the children in primary schools. (p. 318)

Based on her analysis of 30 books used and recommended for use in the State of California, she observed, in addition to male overrepresentation (75% of the main characters), a female image that is trapped in the domestic situation and devalued in economic activities. Her aspiration was that the books should offer a range of models that girls could choose from. Unlike the emphasis of Zimet (1968) on boys, now girls start occupying center stage. There then arose what Blumberg (2007) called the first generation of studies on sexual stereotypes in textbooks, a trend that spread to all continents.

North American production, both academic and activist, expanded to such a point in the 1970s that the bibliographic review of Kingston and Lovelace, published in 1978, was already able to identify 78 articles that had been published. Of this initial North American production we would highlight the reiteration of the results in the direction indicated by U'Ren (1971), the theoretical and political inclusion of liberal feminism, the diversity of actors involved in publicizing and facing up to this social problem (academia, the feminist

movement, teachers, parents, the State, publishing houses) and the strategies advocated for overcoming the stereotypes, such as changes in legislation, public hearings, publications, the setting up of a lobby, the preparation of a self-regulation code for publishing houses, dissemination of non-sexist bibliographies and book guides. So, North American feminists created a publishing house in 1970 (the Feminist Press), renowned journals (like the *American Journal of Sociology*) made room for the theme in their publications (Weitzman et al., 1972) and distinguished publishing houses, like McGraw Hill in 1972, created guidelines for its employees and collaborators on how to prepare non-sexist material.

In this production the focus falls above all on female characters, the concept-terms prioritized are “sexual stereotypes” or “sexism” (a neologism created at the time, by taking its cue from the concept of racism), content analysis procedures are used and racial and generational perspectives are only considered *en passant*. Few pieces of research at the time analyzed the assimilation of this content by those for whom the textbooks were destined, despite the fact that the studies and contributions offered presupposed a cause and effect relationship (generally linear and immediate) between content and sexual roles (Kingston, Lovelace, 1978). This production was condemnatory in nature and its volume was not exceeded in subsequent decades. In fact, the research we carried out in the database of the Education Resources Information Center (Eric), using the search words *sex-stereotypes – textbooks* for the period 1966 to 2008, located 249 entries, 57% of them prior to 1980.

In Europe, two Italian publications from the beginning of the 1970s are worth highlighting because of their dissemination and the impact they had on bringing the theme into the picture: the book by Elena Gianini Belotti, *Dalla parte delle bambine* (1973) and the one by Mariza Bonazzi and Umberto Eco, *I pampini bugiardi*, from 1975 (published in Brazil in 1980).

Baudelot and Establet (2007, p. 7), in revisiting Belotti’s book, highlight its extraordinary success in Europe and, we would add, in Latin America. Throughout the book, Belotti analyzes the “influence of social conditioning when it comes to shaping the female role from early childhood”. In this process of denouncing the differentiated socialization that existed the focus falls squarely on the girl, the theoretical model is social conditioning, with sexual identity constructions and sexual inequality being generally confused. In two chapters,

Belotti (1973) deals with textbooks and children's literature and discloses, in addition to the European experiences, the activism of North American feminists.²

The book by Bonazzi and Eco (1980), which was especially influential in Latin America, contributed to publicizing the theme and the investigation-denunciation method, sometimes called the "qualitative" method, which consists in supplying snippets of examples that illustrate the situations you want to denounce (Negrão, Amado, 1989). This kind of research, which was relatively frequent in Brazil in the 1980s, was harshly criticized by textbook academics (Freitag, Motta, Wanderly, 1987), which up to a point generated resistance to inclusion of "sexism in textbooks" and other aspects of ideological analysis in this general area and a simplified view of feminist criticism.

In the second half of the 1970s the bibliography expanded internationally, including in Latin America: in Argentina (Prado, 1980), Brazil (Rosemberg, 1975), Peru (Boggio et al., 1973), Venezuela (Calero et al., 1977). In 1977, the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in the Economic and Social Development of Latin America was already proposing, among other actions, modifying "teaching texts in such a way as to respond to the production activities and the daily life of women from rural areas and peripheral urban areas" (Lozano, 1984, p.129).

What is notable in international production is the consistency of the results (Blumberg, 2007): the systematic over-representation of males (adults and children) as individuals treated as universal reference points; stereotypical components in the characterization of adult and child females, either human or anthromorphized in the sense of their passivity, goodness, care and domesticity, as attributes more associated with females, and activity, professional work and discovery, as attributes more associated with males. Despite the fact that the results indicate tendencies, above all, the combative style and the very concepts used (like latent stereotype) emphasized the binary interpretations that crop up in the titles of some of the publications – *Papa lit, maman coud...*, [Dad reads and Mum sows] by Decroeux-Masson

² Becchi and Julia (1998, p. 388) in their historical synthesis about childhood in the 20th century, among the new children's profiles that were emerging, highlight that of the girl. "It was necessary to look at very recent times to see any reflections appearing that start with the perspective of parity between boys and girls and try and identify a specific object of the social context. The book by Elena Gianni Belotti "is considered one of the main stages in this approach, which modifies not only the object of the analysis but its different study modalities".

(1979) –, or in the qualifying expressions used, such as, “the invisibility of women”, a synonym of their under-representation. So we note the use of rhetoric that seeks to convince, as is frequent when delimiting and demarcating new social problems that compete in order to form part of the agenda of priorities in social policies (Hilgartner, Bosk, 1988).

The international women’s conferences of the 1970s and 1980s (Mexico, Copenhagen and Nairobi) legitimized and helped disclose the theme, which began to count on the support of new social actors: the multilateral organizations and international foundations. Particularly important was one of the developments that came out of the Copenhagen Conference of 1980, when Unesco asked Andrée Michel, a sociologist and researcher from the French National Scientific Research Center (CNRS) to produce a summary of the research it had funded some years previously in seven countries: China, France, Kuwait, Norway, Peru, Soviet Socialist Republic of the Ukraine and Zambia. Published originally in French in 1986, the text was translated into Portuguese (1989), Spanish and English and was used as a guide for subsequent national studies, such as those in Central America.

From this text by Andrée Michel (1989) we would highlight the closeness of the results encountered in very countries that were very different from the economic, political, cultural and educational points of view. They were even different as far as concerns the access of women, the manifest and latent stereotype concept, which started to be used as the guideline for content analysis grids, and the textbook alteration proposals. For Michel “the first manifestation of sexism lies in the fact of denying the social reality and diversity of situations, which reaches the point of lending a caricature-like nature to the images and male and female roles” (1989, p. 49), which is the expression of the latent stereotype. So some started expecting that textbooks would suggest new male and female models, even though they might be very different from those found in the social context. This expectation ran right through the subsequent decades.

Defended (and not questioned) by various authors, this perspective is constructed on a shaky foundation, to the extent that even when explained in detail, there is no unanimous agreement about where it is hoped to go with this, because the various theoretical and political trends of feminism refer back to multiple models of gender relations. Despite a lack of studies about the theoretical and political focuses on which this production has been based, there are indications that the dominant focus has been liberal feminism. For example, Clark, Kulkin and Clancy (1999), in analyzing North American production of children’s books, indicate the

penetration of the liberal feminist paradigm introduced by the pioneering study of Weitzman et al. (1972). They back up their assessment by pointing out the emphasis of these studies on equal opportunities and on individual achievement, as well as on the scarcity of references to race, class and age.

As occurred in the United States the condemnation of sexism in textbooks in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia has been accompanied by a series of recommendations and actions for overcoming it: public opinion awareness-building, changes in legislation, competitions and prizes for non-sexist books, self-regulation codes for publishing houses, the formation of teachers and producers of textbooks, in addition to the countless publications, seminars and meetings that have been held. We found no record that there has ever been any systematic monitoring of these activities, along the lines of the strategies used in action-research, as Povey (2004) points out in England; this makes it difficult to build up an accurate balance. Even at the risk of being imprecise, we highlight some of the points that run through this production up to 2000: the active participation of organs of State of the woman condition that were created in different countries in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s and that supported research or an assessment of the changes (Quebec, Spain and France³); studies in country blocs, such as the European Union (Terneu-Évrard,1984), Africa (Brugeilles, Cromer, Loch, s/d) and Central America (Unicef, Unifem, 1990); the changes in national education laws that began to include requirements relating to valuing cultural diversity and the goal of equal opportunities in educational curricula and teaching materials.

Such multiple and diversified initiatives do not appear, however, to obey any systematic plan that has objectives and defined strategies for changing the content, especially at the level of creating texts and images. The focus that is favored seems to be on criticism and condemnation.

In the 1990s and 2000s, in addition to the territorial expansion of research, now reaching Africa, Asia and the former socialist countries, we note expansion of disciplinary aspects and teaching levels in the textbooks we analyzed from those institutions that have been involved in opening up to new themes, with an emphasis on heterosexuality (Temple,

³ Among them, we highlight the extensive research commissioned by the Spanish Institute of the Woman (Gimeno, 1999-2000).

2005) or masculinity (Lorraine, Kimberly, 2000), a change in terminology, which has moved to favoring gender terms and gender bias, and the entry of a theoretical reference point in cultural studies. Furthermore, the theme was strengthened by the prominence given to the gender gap on the international education agenda by the declarations and agreements that nation states have signed over the last few decades (Education for All, Millennium Goals, for example).

This all led to the opportunity to look again at textbooks, evaluating what had changed and what has remained the same. So from the end of the 1980s, there began what Blumberg (2007) calls the second generation of studies on gender bias in textbooks, now starting from a diachronic and monitoring perspective. Generally speaking, these studies show that explicit prejudice was eliminated, but that subtle gender stereotypes persist in textbooks and that there is still a long way to go before they are overcome.

Among the many reviews we shall highlight Povey's (2004) in the United Kingdom, the Latin American ones on Peru (Cabrejo, 2006) and Costa Rica (Umaña, 2006), the French one (Rignault, Richert, 1997) and the international balance of Blumberg (2007).

In his article "Gender dimensions and inequality in school: the impact of identities", Povey (2004) dedicates a topic to analyzing teaching and pedagogic material. Taking as his starting point previous research, she indicates that the Inner London Education Authority (Ilea) "that has a leftist social-democratic tendency, supported various initiatives for promoting non-discriminatory teaching resources" (p. 60), and even created new material. Teachers were involved in these initiatives and they were able to create their own material, with official backing. Other than the impact this made in the sensationalist press and from the right, which unleashed a campaign contrary to this intervention – freedom of the press and censorship were and are also invoked in other countries for opposing actions that fight sexism – Povey (2004) confesses that "it is not easy to assess the impact of initiatives like these that were not planned as action-research". He concludes, however, that contemporary textbook images "appear more inclined to avoid these gender biases" (p. 61).

From France we highlight the report written by congresswoman Simone Rignault and senator Philippe Richert (1997), directed at the then prime minister, Alain Juppé, who had asked them to prepare a balance on the representation of men and women in textbooks. Based on a review of the issue in France, the European Union and in an international context, and through public hearings, which heard various different social actors and from their analysis of

various contemporary French textbooks, the legislators conclude that despite identifying non-sexist books resulting from the initiatives that have been taken since the 1980s, sexist stereotypes continue to exist in French textbooks, albeit somewhat mitigated, it is true. Among the obstacles to overcoming the issue they point to the conservative nature of French society, the fragmentation and interruption of the various initiatives, the dilution of responsibilities, the diversity of actors involved⁴ and the very limits inherent in manufacturing the textbooks, such as curricular parameters, market competition, costs, time and competences.

In Peru, Cabrejo (2006) points to the different legal milestones at the level of international agreements in education, new education legislation and the Equal Opportunities for Men and Women Plan (PIO) of 2000, which open up the possibility for including the gender perspective in educational policies, including the eradication of “sexist content from teaching, thus favoring the transmission of coeducational values at every stage in education” (p. 90). But, when carrying out a review of contemporary teaching material, she notes that although there have been some modifications in the use of language (reference to “boys and girls”), traditional stereotypes persist: women are preferably represented in the private domain, adopting protective or caring attitudes and men are represented in the public domain. Among the obstacles for bringing about changes he points to the way that teaching material is produced, the lip-service paid by governments to “international agreements and pacts” and the reduced interest on the part of the Peruvian feminist movement in “transforming the educational system and which, therefore, has no agenda for dealing with this theme” (p. 106).

The analysis of Umaña (2006) recalls a series of initiatives that have been adopted by the Costa Rican government since 1982, involving the Ministry of Public Education (MEP) and other state bodies; the creation of a commission with the aim of introducing changes in textbooks, but which faced resistance from the MEP itself when it came to introducing them; ratification of the “Convention for the eradication of all forms of discrimination against women”, which generated no specific actions; the participation of the MEP in the Unicef/Unifem sub-regional project (1990) for analyzing textbooks, which resulted in substitution of the book, *Paco y Lola* because its content was highly sexist, and the partial

⁴ The diversity of players is also pointed out by Umaña (2006). It would be better to indicate the contradictions and tensions in the agendas of the players.

alteration of other texts. But, Umaña observes that there were “serious limitations to the MEP driving forward non-sexist language and eradicating the stereotypical images of gender (...) due to the multiplicity of social actors that intervene in the education process” (p. 180). More recently a new series of textbooks, *Hacia el Siglo XXI* [Towards the 21st Century], which tried to adopt non-sexist language, text and illustrations, was vetoed by the Supreme Court because it established the obligation to use these books, which would violate the principle of free competition (p. 180). Umaña (2006) concludes that this theme has ceased being a priority in Costa Rica.

A slow pace of change in textbook content is also indicated in a recent state of the art study by North American sociologist, Rae Lesser Blumberg (2007), commissioned by Unesco. Despite not including it in the bibliography, or even mentioning it, this is an update of the synthesis that Andrée Michel (1989) had prepared twenty years previously. In highlighting the second generation of North American by focusing on what has remained the same and what has changed in textbook content she points out: a much greater prevalence of sexism in textbooks than the parity that is seen in the schooling indices of males and females; resistance to the inclusion in textbooks of the changes observed in the lives of women; the persistence of gender bias in textbooks, despite 35 years of effort to overcome it; the uniform nature of the components of gender bias in textbook content (over-representation of males, the use of the male gender to represent the species, traditional male and female stereotypes in the occupation and domestic spheres, traditional stereotypes in the characterization of features and male and female activities). The text, which includes a series of recommendations, several aimed at development agencies, points to a lack of studies that analyze the impact of gender bias in the life/schooling of men and women and the need to evaluate how significant this is.

From the group of studies that reflect upon the slowness in introducing the changes it is worth highlighting also the Colombian study, *Sexismo y educación* (Faur, s/d) [Sexism and education], which, among other things, reproduces the statements of authors, illustrators and assistants who indicate the difficulties they face in practice when it comes to producing books. In addition to market pressure an illustrator says that:

...people draw more of and better what they know and know how to draw. I know boys' shoes best: and I know the tracksuits they wear in detail. The same is not true for girls' clothes: to solve the situation

they draw girls with high heels and they end up being heels that are out of fashion, which are no longer used. (p. 68)

This takes us back to the inter-generational lag that exists between the adult producers of textbooks and the children who use them: how can adult producers of textbooks (teachers, authors, illustrators, editors, etc), when dealing with children, overcome their own personal history and their experiences of when they were children? How can the “contemporaneous nature of the past” be overcome when adults are producing work aimed at children (Rosemberg, 1985).

At the end of this schematic review of the arts, we cannot fail to reflect upon some of the peculiarities that exist in the treatment of this subject. In addition to lamenting the lack of systematic records of international experiences, which is reflected in how disperse the sources are, we note some points of weakness in this production, such as fragmentation, isolation, discontinuity and gaps. With rare exceptions the theme does not seem to have aroused the interest of activist or research groups for many years. If it had this would allow us to investigate in more depth the theoretical and methodological bases and to monitor the actions taken. From consulting various databases, we note that there is a predominance of authors who have published a single work; few have revisited the theme or remained faithful to it. Publicity channels are often alternative, specific, or secondary and those with the greatest prestige or that would reach the opinion makers in the discipline areas relating to the textbooks under analysis appear relatively infrequently. We note reduced theoretical and methodological debate and internal academic or political criticism, and the teachers and pupils who use the textbooks are rarely listened to; this “listening to” has been penetrating academic and activist production, even within the school context (Müller, 2006).

Likewise, all of the criticism and words of command are notably unanimous: textbooks continue to be sexist and they have to be changed. Apart from some researchers who consider such simplifying research either of little relevance, given just how complex language or textbook policies are, we came across just one author, Diane Ravitch, who criticizes both the North American left and right for banning themes from textbooks that generate controversy in North American society. For Ravitch (apud Harber, 2008), North American textbooks reach the schools already censored thanks to the mobilization of

fundamentalists and leftist movements (the feminist mentions); this is “censure” which ends up producing incoherent content and weakening critical reflection.⁵

TEXTBOOKS, FEMINISM AND EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IN BRAZIL

As occurred in several countries, in Brazil the 1970s marked a paradigm change in the understanding of the social inequalities that exist between men and women, with education being highlighted as responsible for constructing this inequality. As a result, there emerged the command to combat differentiated education for boys and girls. So, in the first public manifestation of contemporary Brazilian feminism, criticism of “sexual stereotypes in schools” was already present and mentioned in the textbooks:

The school itself is not responsible for cultural stereotypes: still, it functions as yet another socialization agency and strengthens them [...] school ideology is far from being in the forefront as far as sexual roles are concerned. The textbooks used by teachers generally portray models of traditional sexual roles. (Mello, 1975, p. 142)

Since then, the sexual stereotype or gender bias that is produced in or carried by textbooks has penetrated academic literature, the feminist agenda and subsequently, as from the 1980s, the federal, state and municipal agendas. The theme became part of the National Textbook Program (*PNLD*), which in 2007 bought 102.5 million books produced by private publishing houses and distributed them free of charge to public and community schools.

As in other countries, outlining this issue as a social problem to be faced up to and resolved and its permanence on the agenda interact with the broader political and social processes. When contemporary Brazilian feminism began the country was living under a military dictatorship, against which brought together as allies progressives from the left, mainly those with a Marxist background, from the churches, from political parties and trade unions and from the so-called new social movements. The agenda of the fledgling Brazilian feminist movement bore the marks of this alliance, with the icon of their demands being the adult working woman (Sarti, 1988). So, some of the themes of the international feminist

⁵ According to the review by John Harber, the book was produced from Ravitch’s own experience during the Clinton government in order to prepare textbook evaluation principles.

agenda were postponed (such as “our body belongs to us”) and others, like the fight against differentiated education, entered the political and academic agendas sparingly. Since then the field of studies about women/gender relations has, to a certain extent, added little value to education, in the same way that education has given little value to studies on women/gender (Rosemberg, 2001).

In this context production about sexism in textbooks, despite having remained on the academic stage since 1975, is also sporadic in Brazil, produced by individual authors, who are not organized into groups that debate theoretical or political differences or monitor what remains and what has changed in textbook content.

One of the peculiarities of Brazilian academic production about the theme, partially arising from the theoretical and political emphasis on how it was constituted and on the alliances that formed the basis of its origins, was the simultaneous attention some studies paid to the perspective of gender, race and generation inequalities (Pinto, 1981; Piza, 1995; Moura, 2007).

Academic production and feminist activism

Three states of the art studies about women/gender and textbooks were produced between 1989 and 2007 in Brazil: Negrão and Amado (1989); Rosemberg, Piza and Montenegro (1990), who discussed textbooks in the broader context of a review of the literature about women and formal education in the country; and Moura (2007) who analyzed production as from 1986 to the present day.

Negrão and Amado (1989), who deal with the period between 1973 and 1986, here called the first period, carried out a study at the request of the then recently-created National Council of Women’s Rights (*CNDM*). The authors surveyed 44 bibliographic references, including articles, communications, theses and books that mentioned the “image of woman” in textbooks, or the aim of which was to analyze it. They highlight: most of the references date from the first half of the 1980s, although production actually began in 1972; relative cover of the whole of Brazil; a large variety of support (number of pages, type of publication, etc.), counterbalanced by the almost exclusive analysis of contemporary textbooks destined for elementary schools. Research that dealt with books for the pre-school (Eluf, 1979), high school (Chaim, 1981), and higher education areas (Ratto, 1989) was rare. There was also little

research that analyzed textbooks from an historical perspective (Reis, 1989), or tracked them over a long period (Pinto, 1981).

Some of the studies were inspired in North American and European literature on sexism in textbooks. The methodological procedures were supported in the analysis of content, in a way that was not always appropriate. Some of the research was based on the work of Boggio et al. (1973) and Bonazzi and Eco (1980), who only deal with sexual stereotype in a secondary way. Some research was anchored in the “Marxist vulgate” (Freitag, Motta, Wanderly, 1987). There is a latent Manichaeism in some of this initial production which is also somewhat awkward in its handling of theories and not at all familiar with the use of so-called objective techniques; in certain academic circles this received the epithet of positivist. Little research dealt with the reception.

The results presented nothing new, given what was being announced abroad: female characters being under-represented in text and illustrations (Pinto, 1981); deserving less prominence than males (Lins, 1983); little individualized, being preferably attributed to undertake family functions (Pinto, 1981) and called by nicknames that are often pejorative when the person is black (Jesus, 1986); frequently associated with domestic contexts (Lajolo, 1982; Rego, 1976; Ribeiro, 1981); their behavior and attributes are predominantly of the passive, fragile, submissive, servile and fickle type (Eluf, 1979; Lajolo, 1982; Pinto, 1981; Lins, 1983); adult female characters are more frequently represented as housewives and mothers, with few of them working outside the home (Rego, 1976; Eluf, 1979; Faria 1984; Nosella, 1979; Pinto, 1981; Ribeiro, 1981, Lajolo, 1982; Lins, 1983); a predominance of domestic and passive female leisure (Eluf, 1979; Ribeiro, 1981; Lins, 1983). The male profile, of a person endowed with intellectual qualities and engaged in intellectual activities, is the opposite of the female (Pinto, 1981). Characterization of individuals belonging to other ethnic-racial segments (Telles, 1987; Pinto, 1981; Jesus, 1986) is evidence of the way stereotypes are exacerbated: the black female individual appears particularly as a domestic servant (Pinto, 1981) with no family (Jesus, 1986); and the Indian woman is portrayed as childish, sensual and unemployed (Telles, 1987).

Among the research the dissertation of Regina Pahim Pinto, *Textbooks and democratization in schools* (1981), deserves highlighting, because of the theoretical perspective it adopted, for the care taken with the methodology it employed and for its breadth of scope. The researcher analyzed 48 reading books indicated for use in the 4th grade

in primary schools in the State of São Paulo between 1941 and 1975. She observed that practically all the indicators that were capable of assuming a position of prominence in illustrations and text favored male characters in detriment to female ones.

Brazilian research into stereotypes in textbooks in the first period were carried out with the aim of explaining and denouncing sex discrimination; they offered a model to explain its argument about how traditional and passive behavior among women was being maintained (almost behaviorist); some of the research contributed to advancing knowledge about schools and much of it served as support for making the teaching profession conscious of the differentiated education of boys and girls. This is why, then, there was disclosure via debates, talks, articles in the press, television programs, videotapes and audiovisual presentations (Rosemberg, Pinto, Negrão, 1985), which can be attributed to the dynamism of the period of political opening and its receptivity to criticisms of traditional cultural patterns, as well as its immediate assimilation of the research results, because they revealed the caricature-like, or almost caricature-like descriptions, that were to be found in the most popular teaching material with teachers. The caricature-like aspect resulted both from the content of textbooks, as well as from the style of the academic and activist criticism, which with very few exceptions sought dichotomies and not trends in the representation of individuals: *Enquanto Adão lia o jornal, Eva lavava a roupa* (Rosemberg, 1986) [While Adam read the newspaper, Eve washed the clothes]. It used a language that might favor a form of distant identification of its female audience with the stereotypes described – what is described in textbooks is at the same time both close and distant from women's own experiences – but that generates sufficient adherence from them that they manifest their indignation.

Regrettably, critical production about textbooks in general (see Freitag, Motta, Wanderly, 1987) practically ignored what was written and reflected on the images of sexual roles. As Negrão and Amado (1989) state, academic disclosure channels were closed and determined by fads and facility solutions. Some of the dissertations/theses that were transformed into books and that became more accessible were perhaps the most condemnatory and, in our opinion, contributed little to consolidating this field of knowledge. Unfortunately, the production on sexism in textbooks also ignored the great debate about textbook policies in the context of teaching reforms and the pedagogic and methodological innovation that was taking place in the disciplines, the books of which they were analyzing.

For example, what possible impact could the innovation that started advocating the plurality of textual gender and an emphasis of orality in the Portuguese language teaching curriculum have on the male and female image?

In analyzing the production from 1980 to 2000, Moura (2007) observes what remains the same and what changes in the treatment given to the theme. The author points out that the theme remains on the agenda of the feminist movement. For example, Farah (1998) identifies “the fight against the discrimination of women in textbooks” as one of the topics that she located in the programs and projects of women’s and feminist organizations of the 1990s. Furthermore, the Feminist Political Platform of 2004 and the National Policy Plan for Women (Brazil, 2004) maintain the requirement that textbooks be assessed, selected and distributed in such a way that guarantees “suitable compliance with criteria relative to non-discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation”, and be monitored, the incentive needed for producing non-discriminatory textbooks and training and developing teachers (p. 57).⁶

At the academic level the author observes the broadening of the disciplines and school levels of the textbooks that were analyzed; the introduction of the term “gender” in substitution of “sex”; and dissemination of the work in feminist academic congresses. Moura (2007) identifies the publication of 20 new theses/dissertations between 1986 and 2006, various talks were given at the biannual congress, *Fazendo Gênero* [Doing Gender], but few pieces of work were presented at the annual meetings of the National Association of Research and Post-graduation Studies in Education (Anped).

So, when we consulted the annals of the annual meetings of Anped (1998 to 2007)⁷, we observe that 2,771 talks and 773 posters were presented, of which 38 talks and 13 posters dealt with textbooks, but only 1 in each category dealt with the theme of sexism in textbooks,

⁶ In 1990, the National Council of Women’s Rights (CNDM) instituted the Nísia Floresta Prize to encourage the production of non-sexist textbooks, but it only conferred an honorable mention because of the poor quality of the proposals received. Among its 11 new action areas, the 2nd National Policy Plan for Women (2008) introduced “Facing up to racism, sexism and lesbophobia” which joined the theme already included in the previous version: “Inclusive and non-sexist education” (CFEMEA, 2008, p. 3).

⁷ Consulted on CD ROM.

even when we used various descriptive keywords in the search.⁸ In addition, we noted a virtual absence of articles published in academic journals. In other words, the disclosure of studies and research remain restricted to a relatively closed circuit. Which textbook producer attends feminist congresses or reads theses/dissertations?

There are gaps in the research. What is hardly dealt with at all are: the way in which teachers and pupils use this material; the difficulties encountered in creating alternative material and what this means for Brazilian society; the counter-current ways in which this material is used; the implications of the fact that the State in Brazil today is the largest buyer of textbooks; and the market profile from the viewpoint of gender.

A summary of the results reported in this research suggests that traditional patterns remain, alongside a weakening of the trends. For example, when Amaral (2004) studies the images of family in textbooks she perceives that both “modernizing and ancient” values coexist; Tonini (2002) understands the “reaffirmation of the masculine-feminine polarity” as a spatial separation that “captures men and women in opposite territories”; when Casagrande (2005) analyzes Math books she reports the continuation of “dichotomized roles” and the “non-incorporation” by textbooks of the “changes in gender relations that occurred at the turn of the millennium”.

Apparently, the break with traditional patterns is more significant in children’s and adolescent literature. For example, studies indicate that some contemporary female authors have created “active and questioning female figures” (Oliveira, 2005) or questioned male domination. But overall Amaral (2004) and Nogueira (2001) indicate that, although it is less marked now, the traditional content continues to be found, such as the under-representation of females and the tendency to associate males with activity and the outside space and females with passivity and the family context.

Some research has made progress in its search for an understanding of the tensions between gender, race and age relations in children’s and adolescent literature: Rosemberg and Piza (1995) indicate that feminist criticism sometimes encouraged the production of “missionary-like, dogmatic texts that, in the defensive attitude they adopt, do not always differ from the more traditional works produced” (p. 611). But, they identify a break that occurred with the work of the renowned author of books for children and adolescents, Lygia

⁸ The descriptive keywords used were: sex, sexism, sexual role, feminism, woman/women, man/men, masculinity, gender relations, gender, discrimination, inequality, stereotypes.

Bojunga Nunes (Hans Cristian Andersen Prize), who manages to include an emancipatory perspective in her viewpoint of both gender and age relations. Piza (1995) finds a paradoxical impact in new Brazilian “children’s and adolescent literature” coming from the pens of white female writers who, in breaking with traditional taboos by introducing the theme of sexuality, do so by creating the black sexualized or sensualized female character, which is an “import” into children’s and adolescent literature of stereotypes of the “mulata” [black and white mixed blood], until then seen exclusively in Brazilian literature for adults.

More recently, within the context of the introduction of Law 10.639/03, which makes it compulsory for elementary and high school teaching establishments, both state and private, to have lessons on Afro-Brazilian history and culture, Souza (2005) indicates that some books for children and adolescents have been published that “have started to present and emphasize aspects of black culture in a positive light, such as *capoeira* [Afro-Brazilian stylized martial art] and the mythology of the *orixás* [African gods]. Situations are found that allow the lives and image of black females to be reflected upon in a positive and creative manner” (p. 199).

Textbooks were also the object of research that looks back a long way and that tries, from a diachronic perspective, to discover what remains the same and what has changed. Pires (2002) analyzed 205 illustrations from 17 Portuguese Language textbooks published in the 1980s and the 1990s, noting that “there are few changes relative to new subject positions for women. What appears in some works is women in modern clothes, working outside the home and performing activities other than housework” (Pires, 2002, p. 116). Casagrande and Carvalho (2006) report their analysis results from 18 Math textbooks, 4 of them dating from the beginning of the 1990s and the rest from 2000, that are for use by the 5th and 6th grades of elementary teaching. They conclude that the textbooks “analyzed do not incorporate the changes in social relations that have occurred over the last few decades, given that the way of presenting the genders in the periods analyzed has differed little” (p. 14).

It is worth also highlighting the research of Silva (2008) on racial relations and Moura (2007) on gender relations, both of whom updated the research of Pinto (1981), by analyzing Portuguese Language textbooks for the 4th grade of elementary school. This allowed for an understanding of what has remained the same and what has changed in the way sexism was portrayed between 1941 and 2003. The research analyzed 1,372 characters, who were identified in text, 626 in illustrations and 120 on the covers, grouped by period according to the initiatives of the federal government as to textbook policy. The authors noted an increase

in female textbook authors, a greater diversity of textual genders in the more recent period (but still predominating in children's literature), a weakening of the patterns of racism and sexism identified by Pinto (1981), and themes included in the feminist agenda (side by side in some contemporary books) that are illustrated with images that are archaically sexist. Furthermore, they noted a reduction in the degree of gender and race inequality. For example, among other aspects, in text they found 1 female character for every 2.3 male characters and 1 non-white character for every 9.7 white characters. It is also worth highlighting their observation that age, race and gender inequalities were less accentuated on the covers than in the illustrations, a difference interpreted as a game of commercial seduction (Table 1). In other words, since the cover is the first contact with the book it functions, up to a certain extent, as its packaging. Moura (2007, p. 153) summarizes their observations: "Such trends have not changed with the passing of the years [...] The inclusion of the gender perspective when assessing textbooks was not enough to change the previous patterns in the configuration of male and female characters".

As from 1996 the textbooks bought by Ministry of Education (MEC) were assessed by the PNLD, which establishes that "books cannot express origin, racial, sexual, color or age prejudices or any other form of discrimination" (Brazil, 1997). How can we understand this resistance to change if the fight against "gender prejudice" is an eliminatory criterion when it comes to purchasing and distributing textbooks by MEC? This question obliges us to look a little more deeply at the national textbook policy.

TABLE 1
SELECTED INDICATORS RELATIVE TO A SAMPLE OF 33 BRAZILIAN
PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE TEACHING BOOKS FOR THE 4TH GRADE OF ELEMENTARY
EDUCATION (1975 - 2003)

1) Distribution of characters as to the characteristics presented in the text, by period								
Period	From 1975 to 1995			From 1996 to 2003		Total		
	Age groups							
Adult + old	429	51.2%	308	57.7%	737	53.7%		
Child+ baby+youth	337	40.2%	68	31.5%	505	36.8%		
Unspecified	72	8.6%	58	10.9%	130	9.5%		
Total	838	100.0%	534	100.0%	1373	100.0%		
Color/ethnicity								
White	408	48.7%	290	54.3%	698	50.9%		
Black+colored+Indian	51	6.1%	21	3.9%	72	5.2%		
Unspecified	379	45.2%	223	41.8%	602	43.9%		
Total	838	100.0%	534	100.0%	1372	100.0%		
Sex								
Male	490	58.5%	322	60.3%	812	59.2%		
Female	241	28.8%	112	21.0%	353	25.7%		
Mixed/unspecified	107	12.8%	100	18.7%	207	15.1%		
Total	838	100.0%	534	100.0%	1372	100.0%		
2) Distribution of characters relative to family and occupation/work, by period and sex								
Period and sex	From 1975 to 1995				From 1996 to 2003			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
Reference to the personality's family	118	24,1%	102	42,3%	72	22,4%	51	45,5%
Reference to the work/occupation of the personality	95	19,4%	36	14,9%	115	35,7%	25	22,3%
Total	490	100,0 %	241	100,0%	322	100,0%	112	100,0%

Source: Reorganization of data initially collected and processed by Silva (2005) and Moura (2007). Processing carried out by Miriam Bizzocchi.

COTEMPORARY BRAZILIAN TEXTBOOK POLICIES AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE

The continuation of sexist patterns in textbooks coexists alongside declarations and actions by the Brazilian government, the aim of which are to give egalitarian treatment to both males and females in education. So Brazil has been a signatory of all the international agreements on the subject and has emphasized, when the occasion arose, that our educational

system guarantees equal access to both men and women. Also notable have been the actions that the federal government has been undertaking and that have led to the introduction of the theme of gender discrimination in education and in textbooks. We identified four main actions, summarized as follows.⁹

1. In 1966 the Justice Ministry, which housed the CNDM, and MEC signed a collaboration protocol to fight discrimination against females in education. This would be included as one of the criteria to be considered when assessing the textbooks bought and distributed by *MEC*, within the context of the system that was being instituted with regard to the textbook policy.
2. One of the objectives of the National Curricular Parameters (PCN, 1997) was to question patterns of gender inequality and to encourage the “behavior diversity of men and women”, “respect for the opposite sex” and “for the varied expressions of feminine and masculine” in schools (Brazil, apud Vianna, Unbehaum, 2004, p. 16).
3. As from 1996 assessment of textbooks included a requirement that takes into consideration “origin, racial, sexual, color and age prejudices and any other form of discrimination” (Brazil, 1997)¹⁰.
4. The National Education Plan (2001) included textbook assessment criteria (in addition to a correction of concepts and methodological aspects) relative to the “appropriate approach to questions of gender and ethnicity and the elimination of discriminatory texts or those that reproduce stereotypes about the role of women, blacks and Indians” (Vianna, Unbehaum, 2004, p. 13).

Therefore, since 1996, sex/gender “prejudice” has constituted one of the criteria for eliminating textbooks from the official Brazilian buying and distributing system. Silva (2008) examined what lay behind these advances in the system for analyzing textbooks, highlighting how social movements became involved with them¹¹. Based on the statements of technicians

⁹ As far as the fight against racism is concerned Federal Law 10,639/2003, which introduced the compulsory inclusion of the History of Africa and Afro-Brazilian Culture in the school curriculum, was complemented by Law 11,645/2008, which also made it compulsory to include local indigenous population studies.

¹⁰ As from 2000 the formulation was changed, substituting the word race for color and sex for gender.

who work in the federal administration, he indicates that the seminars held in the 1980s and 1990s about gender/race stereotypes strengthen the negotiating power of the MEC vis-à-vis resistant publishing houses. Until then it had been restricted to the official processes used for assessing textbooks. With its position strengthened the MEC initiated a new strategy for pressuring publishing houses, by leaking to the press the results of the 1993 assessment, which had found glaring conceptual errors in the textbooks that had been bought by the federal government and distributed to schools. This strategy meant that publishing houses accepted the criteria definition for assessing textbooks and the alliance of MEC with black and feminist movements; since then it has ceased to be important. So, despite clearly announcing in the public bid notices for textbooks the fact that racism and sexism are an excluding criterion, the assessment committees are composed exclusively of university professors who are specialists in the disciplinary areas of the textbooks they are assessing. Therefore, given the peculiarity of the academic production on sexism/racism in textbooks – which remains isolated in the shape of theses/dissertations, which are little produced and poorly disseminated in disciplinary areas as we have seen – it might be supposed that the textbook assessment committees constituted by MEC have no consistent background in racism and discursive sexism, over and above that they derive from their common sense. Furthermore, it is noted that the criteria adopt the term “prejudice” and not “stereotype” (it is forbidden to “disseminate prejudice of origin color, economic-social condition, race, gender and any other form of discrimination”), which can be interpreted as applicable merely to content that openly, and not in a veiled manner, expresses a concept that is unfavorable to ethnic-racial and female segments. For example, does representing female characters mainly in the exercise of their maternal functions constitute an expression of prejudice?

Such questions were posed by Beisiegel (2001) in a study carried out into official opinions issued by the Commission for Assessing Portuguese Language Textbooks in 1998. Analyzing opinions issued by the Commission on books that had been turned down (“excluded”) or that obtained a low qualification mark (“not recommended”), he observes that “regardless of the strictness of the analysis carried out by the teams of specialists”,

¹¹ As from 1996, assessment criteria of the textbooks to be bought and distributed by the MEC have paid particular attention to three types of aspect: conceptual, methodological and “political”; among other aspects the latter includes the dissemination of prejudice.

“stereotypes, discrimination or prejudice” “only exceptionally” underpinned the classification marks attributed. For the author, “with few exceptions [...], the opinions of the PNLD on items about race and gender return to the starting point of the analysis of teaching books of the 1950s and 1960s, limiting themselves only to capturing explicit manifestations of the phenomena” (p. 29).

It was precisely this that we observed in our analysis of Val and Castanheira (2005), specialists in the Portuguese Language, one of them a participant on the Assessment Commission, who point out the quality of the textbooks assessed by the MEC in 2004: “None of the books that was assessed was excluded because it presented prejudice of any type, including linguistic, a fact that in itself indicates that the authors and editors are mindful of this particular elimination criterion” (p. 151). In other words, the sensitivity of the filter applied by the Assessment Commission was considered above good and evil. It has to be borne in mind that, generally speaking, assessment commissions are strict with other criteria, having rejected various titles or attributed low classification marks to them (Val, Castanheira, 2005).

On analyzing the summaries prepared by the MEC (Brazil, 2006) and published in the *Portuguese language textbook guide 2007*, distributed to all schools so that teachers could know the collections and select the books that would be used by their students over a three year period, we found no information whatsoever about the way the books presented there dealt with prejudice, stereotypes or discrimination. In other words, the painstaking description of each collection (five pages for each one) centers exclusively on theoretical, conceptual and methodological criteria related to Portuguese Language teaching-learning, which are, in turn, criteria that are not considered by studies that deal exclusively with sexism in textbooks.

Such procedures, adopted when assessing textbooks, and verification of the fact that stereotypes still exist have driven the claim that representatives of social movements (black, indian and feminist) and of the teachers who use the books should form part of the assessment commissions (Silva Jr., 2002; Brazil, 2004).

But this proposal simplifies the complexity of the mission, given that social inequality does not affect the different social segments in the same way, social movements are not internally monolithic, nor do they share identical agendas or have the same repertoire for understanding stereotypes and discrimination or even for producing books that are free of gender, race and age discrimination and that satisfy everybody. In the case of Brazil the

question becomes more complex when we remember that generations of girls, both white and non-white who have been using these textbooks have, on average, been getting better school results, especially in Portuguese, than white and non-white boys. What assessment proposal relating to the impact of textbooks, as Blumberg (2007) wants, can we put together given these paradoxes? In short, which objectives do we try and achieve when we criticize sexism in textbooks?

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