

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN LATIN AMERICA: GENDER IDENTITY IN THE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT:

This essay explores the notion of gender identity as a dynamic process, modelled by socio-cultural relationships, in the context of education in Latin America. The historical construction of schooling in recent decades is discussed through some documents of UNESCO. As an example of gender inequality within educational proposals, some texts from children's literature will be analysed to highlight the gender stereotypes that still exist in the editorial industry today.

KEY WORDS: Gender identity,
educational policies, literature, childhood

1. EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA

America was the first continent to be subjugated by the European powers, with a presence that lasted more than three centuries and profoundly influenced the history of this area. The European powers took advantage of their superior strategic military and technological capabilities to conquer the whole of Latin America within a century. The interest of the European colonisers was linked to the natural resources of the region. For the Spaniards were interested mainly gold and silver, while for the Portuguese were interested to agriculture with the cultivation of sugar cane and to trade of slaves as labour force. The Spanish and Portuguese colonial experience came to an end in the 19th century: in a few decades, Mexico and the countries of Central and South America achieved independence, while the Caribbean, Cuba and Puerto Rico remained Spanish until the end of the century. Brazil, colonised by Portugal, had a different story. Here, independence was achieved with the proclamation of an empire in 1822, governed by the Portuguese rulers, who had taken refuge there to escape Napoleon. This led to a smoother transition, which gave greater stability to the country, which was spared the war of independence; the Brazilian empire also kept in place the officials of the previous administration. The imperial experience ended peacefully in 1889. For this

Latin America was the product of an idea, and this idea remains at the heart of its vision of the future: the construction of a democratic society. The process by which the continent achieved its independence was inextricably linked to the republican ideal and its liberators dedicated themselves to the realisation of this dream. The historical outcome, however, involved a strange journey of discovery, full of contradictions, interruptions, and reconnections, of sunsets and sunrises (UNDP, 2004, p. 197).

Specifically in education, the availability of educational resources is linked to the action of the state (or the decision to leave this sphere to the private sector); this has obviously influenced not only the quantity of resources, but also the quality of education: Specifically in education, the availability of educational resources is linked to the action of the state (or the decision to leave this sphere to the private sector); this has obviously influenced not only the quantity of resources, but also the quality of education: paradigmatic is the case of model higher education Latin American threatened by the policies that have been established in various countries. Existing social inequality conditions inequalities in educational opportunities: this is most evident, at the individual level, when different forms of disadvantage accumulate (being indigenous and being poor, for example) and, at the level of states, when it is observed that the lowest rates of education are in countries with a high indigenous population. More generally, social stratification in Latin America, with the indigenous element and its various combinations with whites, presents original characteristics, while another



particularity is the high level of informalisation of the economy: it has always been known that educational performance is linked to position in the stratification system or class structure and, more specifically, it is known that the flexibility of work hinders the ability to make plans in the medium to long term.

A document of the *Laboratorio Latino Americano de Evaluación de la Calidad de l'Educación* (ERCE, 2008)¹ states that although there are similarities due to common historical origins, influenced mainly by France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal, “not even two countries have the same structure” (*Id.*, p. 35). Pre-primary education generally begins between the ages of 3 and 4, is not compulsory (except in Mexico) and sometimes takes place at the primary school site. The last pre-school year is compulsory in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay. Regarding the start of schooling, Urquiola and Calderon (2006) report that in most of the region the starting age is 6 and the primary and secondary system overall lasts 12 years, although there are countries like Guatemala and El Salvador where it starts at 7 and countries like Colombia in which overall lasts 11 years². As regards education in the 15-18 age group, there is almost everywhere a technical-vocational branch, which sometimes leads to technical tertiary education. As for tertiary education, which conventionally covers the age group comprising the five years after the end of secondary education, it presents a variety of situations, only some of which can be assimilated to the university higher education model. To test the assessment of education, the 2019 ERCE has developed tests and survey questionnaires to be administered to third and sixth grade students. It is the largest large-scale assessment implemented with the active participation of 18 Latin American countries. Since its creation, the Laboratory has been a regional reference and framework for consultation and cooperation between countries in the field of educational assessment. It has provided technical support for the education and training of teams responsible for national measurement and evaluation systems, it has been a source of access to information on this subject, and it has made available databases for the development of education policies based on empirical evidence.

1 The Laboratory has been working for more than 25 years with most Latin American countries on assessments that measure student learning achievement in primary education. The aim of survey is to detect information on learning achievement and other educational indicators, related various aspects related to the quality of education in a comprehensive sense, and to respond to the challenges of the Education 2030 Agenda. Therefore, the objective of Laboratory is evaluating, exchanges, tests, improves, innovates, and creates a regional synergy for the improvement of learning.

2 Primary education is compulsory, and this is now extended in many countries to lower secondary education; on average there are 9.7 years of compulsory education, but in Argentina and in Chile compulsory education is 13 years, in Mexico and in Peru it is 12 years. The end of compulsory education varies from age 12 to 18 years. Primary and lower secondary education, In a little more than half of the countries, last 8-9 years and it takes place in the same school; in other countries there is greater differentiation based either on the “5+4 years” model or in Colombia and in Peru 5 years in primary education and 4 years in secondary education.



An initial figure on education can be drawn from these findings. Major changes are observed: the illiteracy rate has declined from 71% in 1900, to 47% in 1950 and to 10% for the period 1995-2019.

As to the moment of the decrease in the disadvantage, it is noted that certain countries, specifically the ones which received well-educated emigrants from European Union, had reduced the gap before 1930 and are still the ones with the highest literacy in the area. These are some countries such as Argentina, Chile, Cuba and Costa Rica. On the whole, the countries that entered into schooling at a later date (after 1960) are the Central American ones (Haiti even after 1970): Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua. This is due to a later industrialisation and urbanisation, whereas overall the export-based economies did not lead to many efforts to increase education. While in other countries after 1930 the education of the population started to increase significantly, among them: El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay, Panama, Peru, Venezuela, Dominican Republic and after 1950 also Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia. A trend in the difference between males and females (55% of the group of illiterate people today is composed of females, but this is a matter of their greater life expectancy) reveals that after the initial expansion of the divide in terms of the percentage of people who are illiterate (especially in Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, Colombia, Honduras and the Dominican Republic), there has been some narrowing, but with different patterns in each country. Two groups contrast: for Brazil, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador El Salvador, and Paraguay there was a steady, constant decrease; in the cases for Cuba, Uruguay and Jamaica this actually translated into a greater percentual of females in literacy.

On the opposite, there is one group the countries: Guatemala, Peru, and Bolivia with very high differentials of 20%, even seeming (1995) to increase in the case of Guatemala. In the case of Mexico, the question about gender inequality has remained almost unchanged for decades. In this region, the rural/urban location has made a great divide: in the middle of the century, there was a disparity of about 40% in literacy among the two parts of the countries.

The changes in school attendance over time were accompanied by the reorganisation of school systems. According to Fernandez (2004, pp. 36-39), two sorting criteria can be identified for the different school systems in Latin America: the date of institutionalisation, divided into early, intermediate, and late, and the current configuration, divided into centralised, decentralised and commercialised. In the case of the first variable, history shows that at the beginning of the 20th century Argentina (decentralised), Uruguay (centralised) and Chile (commercialised) already had an institutionalised school system. Compulsory and free education laws already existed (1877: Uruguay; 1880: Argentina and 1920: Chile) with teacher training institutes (the oldest founded in Chile in 1841). At the other extreme, the countries of late institutionalisation, under



the impetus in the 1960s and 1970s of the Alliance for Progress, are Peru, Bolivia and Honduras; other countries of late institutionalisation are Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Paraguay. All these countries now belong to the category of centralised school systems. Fernandez notes, however, that a country like Bolivia, which passed significant laws in the mid-1950s, had no national school accounting system until the 1990s. Countries with intermediate institutionalisation are Costa Rica (since 1943), Cuba (since 1959), Colombia and Venezuela (centralised); Mexico (since 1923), Brazil and Panama are decentralised³. In addition, many countries have constitutionally established clauses that require that quotas from the national budget are set apart for education.

In summary, we reported on the state of schooling in Latin America in the last few decades from which it emerged a progress, although fragmented and slow, to a more appropriate schooling. UNESCO documents contribute to this potential development.

1.1. UNESCO REPORTS

Two UNESCO flagship publications *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* (Faure Report, 1972) and *Education a Treasure* (Delors Report, 1996) raise the question of the need to rethink education and learning for the future. Faure Report, for example, coined the two interlinked notions of learning society and lifelong learning at a time when traditional education systems were being called into question.

In view of the learning society in this Report: education, as we have known it in all forms of societies that have endured for some period of time, has been the privileged instrument through which existing values and balances of power have been maintained and kept in place, with all the implications of both positive and negative character that this process has had for the fate of nations and the course of history. In terms of the experience of teachers, learners, and parents, the social function of educational practice is infinitely complex. The contradictory nature of the basic facts in this situation helps to explain the very different views on the relationship between education and society. Broadly speaking, they can be grouped into four schools of thought.

Idealism, which considers that education exists in and for itself. Voluntarism, consisting in the conviction that education can and must change the world, independently of any changes which may take place in the structure of society. Mechanistic determinism, according to which the form and future of education are directly controlled by and more or less synchronized with surrounding environmental factors. Finally, the school of thought which derives from all three of these, and which postulates that education necessarily reproduces and even

3 There is a long tradition of free education in the region in some states: since 1876 in Uruguay, since 1928 in Chile, since 1934 in Colombia, although this country is now an exception in the region, not formally guaranteeing it by law.

exacerbates and perpetuates the vices inherent in the societies which supporters of this school are currently criticizing very sharply (*Faure Report*, 1972, pp.56-57).

In this Report education should develop in the learner the ability to learn in a variety of circumstances and conditions, on a part-time basis, at home using a variety of media, and in informal settings. The committee was in favour of conceiving of lifelong education - within the overall educational enterprise - as a process and system that begins early in life, includes what are now conventionally considered the school years, and continues throughout life. It is an integration of learning into our work and leisure time. Learning, in this Report, is seen as a process of human growth toward fulfilment as an individual and as a member of many groups in societies.

According to this report, the acceleration of technological progress and social change meant that the initial education received was no longer sufficient for a lifetime. While remaining an essential tool for the transmission of organized knowledge, schools needed to be complemented by other aspects of social life: social institutions, the work environment, leisure, and the media. The report affirmed the right and necessity of every individual to learn for his or her personal, social, economic, political, and cultural growth. It stated that education is the cornerstone of educational policies in both developed and developing countries.

Two current trends are emerging. First, educational institutions are growing in number and becoming more diversified. Second, traditional structures are becoming less formal. These developments are in no way incompatible. The fact that certain school institutions are losing their sacrosanct character may go hand in hand with the maintenance and development of well-knit school structures. Teaching circuits may be extended by increasing the quantity of schools of the existing kind, by setting up schools of a different kind, by part-time teaching and by out-of-school methods, all of which may take place at the same time. From now on, all these paths, whether formal or informal, institutionalized or not, will be acknowledged – on principle – as equally valid. This is the sense in which the terms “denormalization” and “de-institutionalization” should be understood. Each person should be able to choose his path more-freely, in a more flexible framework, without being compelled to give up using educational services for life if he leaves the system (*Faure Report*, 1972, p. 185)

The commission said that society requires the acceptance of the belief that education is life and life is education.

Indeed, in this Report:

Education is both a world in itself and a reflection of the world at large. It is subject to society, while contributing to its goals, and it helps society to mobilize its productive energies by ensuring that required human resources are developed. In a more general way, it necessarily has an influence on the environmental conditions to which it is at the same time subjected, even if only by the knowledge about



these which it yields. Thus, education contributes to bringing about the objective conditions of its own transformation and progress (*Faure Report*, 1972, p. 55).

In short: education follows the laws of every human undertaking, growing old and gathering dead wood. To remain a living organism, capable of satisfying dead wood. To remain a living organism capable of satisfying with intelligence and vigour the requirements of individuals and developing societies, it must avoid the pitfalls of complacency and routine. It must constantly question its objectives, its content, and its methods. As emphasised in the *Faure Report*: only in this way will it be able to contribute to its own democratization, while aware that this does not depend on education alone. It is an enormous task, Conceptually, it presupposes that we cease confusing, as people have more or less consciously done for a long while, equal access to education with equal opportunity, and broad access to education with democracy in education. Following this approach, the *Delors Report* proposed an integral vision of education based on two fundamental concepts: 'lifelong learning' and the four pillars of education - learning to know⁴, learning to do⁵, learning to live together and learning to be⁶.

The Commission affirms its belief that education has a fundamental role to play in personal and social development. The Commission does not see education as a miracle cure or a magic formula opening the door to a world in which all ideals will be attained, but as one of the principals means available to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war.

The *Faure* and *Delors* reports have undoubtedly inspired education policies worldwide. If those reports have laid the foundations for learning education the UNESCO 2020 report, entitled *Inclusion and Education: all means all*, it is dedicated to the theme of inclusion. This Report is part of the *Global Education Monitoring* documents, which since 2002 have been issued by UNESCO to monitor progress in achieving the

4 Given the rapid changes brought about by scientific progress and the new forms of economic and social activity, the emphasis must be on combining a sufficiently broad general education with the possibility of in-depth work on a selected number of subjects. Such a general background provides, so to speak, the passport to lifelong education, in so far as it gives people a taste – but also lays the foundations – for learning throughout life (*Faure Report*, 1972, p. 23)

5 *Learning to do* is another pillar. In addition to learning to do a job of work, it should, more generally, entail the acquisition of a competence that enables people to deal with a variety of situations, often unforeseeable, and to work in teams, a feature to which educational methods do not at present pay enough attention. In many cases, such competence and skills are more readily acquired if pupils and students have the opportunity to try out and develop their abilities by becoming involved in work experience schemes or social work while they are still in education, whence the increased importance that should be attached to all methods of alternating study with work (*Ibidem*).

6 Learning to be resumes the UNESCO report of 1972. Its recommendations are still very relevant, for in the twenty first century everyone will need to exercise greater independence and judgement combined with a stronger sense of personal responsibility for the attainment of common goals" (*Ibidem*).



Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda. The theme of this Report is the implementation of national and international strategies to help all partners involved achieve the inclusion goals. The Report provides an overview of issues related to aspects of inclusion in education, with a focus on those excluded from educational processes due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Focusing on the causes that prevent and hinder the implementation of the right of all to access education systems and paying particular attention to those excluded from education due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Report calls on countries to pay more attention to those who are left behind. It also sends a special message to those who are now rebuilding their education systems after the pandemic. Complementing the online database on educational inequalities (WIDE <https://www.education-inequalities.org>), the Report presents a new, complementary online platform where countries' laws and policies on inclusion and education will be reported⁷. Analysis of data showed that although gender inequalities have decreased in Latin American countries, thanks to the expansion of education and government subsidies given to the poor, they remain in education at secondary and especially tertiary level. As a whole, gender equality remains elusive: sexual violence, insecure school settings, and inadequate health care all affect girls' self-esteem, participation, and retention in disproportionate ways. Sexual coercion in exchange for improved marks has also been documented in countries such as the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama. In Peru, the lack of toilets influences the school attendance of girls in rural areas. Textbooks, curricula, and teachers still reinforce stereotypical views of gender roles in the society. In Peru, boys still get more care, appreciation, criticism, and feedback than girls. Little progress has been made in integrating gender into the teacher education curriculum. The Report data outline the state of school inclusion in 160 countries and are collected in an online database, WIDE - Worldwide Inequality Database on Education⁸. The

7 The Report also includes regional reports focusing on the education systems of countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Regarding Latin America, it was found that: as concerns pre-primary education, schooling has reached very high values, overall, over 61%; the transition rate from primary to secondary is high (94%), well above the value for developing countries (88%). Pre-primary education generally starts between the ages of 3 and 4, is not compulsory (except in Mexico) and sometimes takes place at the primary school site. The last pre-school year is compulsory in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico, Peru, Dominican Republic and Uruguay. As far as starting school is concerned, in most of the region the starting age is 6 years, whereas the primary and secondary system lasts 12 years. Yet, there are countries such as Guatemala and El Salvador where one starts at 7 and countries, such as Colombia, where the education cycle is only 11 years overall.

8 In short key findings from GEM 2020: in high-income countries in Europe and North America, only 18 economically disadvantaged children complete secondary school for every 100 wealthier students; in rural areas of at least 20 countries, mostly located in sub-Saharan Africa, hardly any poor young women complete secondary school; as of 2015, 41% of countries, representing 13% of the world's population, do not have a public household survey that provides disaggregated data on key education indicators; data from 14 countries using the Child Functioning Module suggest that children with disabilities make up 15% of total early school leavers and are 2.5 times more likely to never attend school than their peers without disabilities; in middle-income countries, only three-quarters of pupils still attend school at age 15, despite a 25% increase over the past 15 years; in 2018, one in three teachers in 43 upper-middle-income and high-income countries reported that they did not adapt their teaching to the cultural diversity of their students; in 25% of countries, laws require



database is complemented by a monitoring tool, SCOPE - *Scoping Progress in Education and an online platform describing laws and policies related to Inclusion and Education*, PEER - *Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews*. These data tell us that effective inclusion is still a distant goal globally, even in high-income countries. But the data also show us a progressive improvement, due to the joint effort that most countries are making to offer a better future to their young people. Together with the progress of the education systems, there is a growing awareness that no one should be left behind, that everyone should have the opportunity to access education. International evaluative research is in this perspective the most useful tool for progress: guided by data we can build a more equal society.

2 LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURES

Latin America is not understood as a continent with a uniform culture, but a community in which values and language should be common. While North America is mainly characterized by an Anglo-Saxon culture whose values are common, think of Canada and even more of the United States, Latin America includes the territories of North America (Mexico) but also South America and Central America. In these lands different languages are spoken Spanish, Portuguese, French to a lesser extent, to which are added local languages which are the result of their evolution.

Different dominations, different European colonial presence, different migrations and fusions of people and their cultures have produced very different national and ethnic entities. For example, Brazil has a language derived from Portuguese and there is a very diverse mix of peoples (Portuguese, descendants of African slaves, Italians, Germans, et al.); while Argentina and Uruguay have a majority presence of European emigration where, in addition to the predominant percentage of Spanish, there is a decisive Italian influence of no less incidence and evident result of a massive process of emigration.

The same is true for other areas of this world where the population was formed by the overlapping of different ethnic groups. Added to this is the fact that Latin America is characterized by a very strong state of economic and social backwardness compared to the United States and Canada. Nevertheless, in this complex and varied reality there is no lack of a lively cultural and artistic production appreciated at an international level.

students with disabilities to study in separate environments: in 32 countries, schools and classrooms in socio-economically disadvantaged contexts are more likely to have less qualified teachers; about 40% of low- and lower-middle-income countries did not take any measures to support students at risk of exclusion during the Covid-19 health crisis; about 25% of teachers in 48 education systems report a high need for professional development to teach students with special educational needs; only 41 countries worldwide recognise sign language as an official language; in Europe, 23 out of 49 countries do not explicitly address sexual orientation and gender identity in their curricula.

Among the common elements of this widely varied world, a shared culture of Mediterranean origin (Hispanic or Iberian, and to some extent also Italian) undoubtedly stands out, with aggregating factors that derive as much from classical Greek Latin culture as from traditions and beliefs present in Christianity. It remains problematic, given the vastness of the territory, to define this reality as uniform, given the diversity of cultures and traditions that belong to different states, vast and distant from each other (such as Brazil, Venezuela, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, Cuba). In the 1960's, Latin America was originally made up of countries with a Latin idiom, then realities with a dominant English language were added (Barbados, Jamaica, for example, while Puerto Rico, as a free state, became associated with the United States).

The typical literature of this "universe", in the different national variants, must therefore be framed in a broader cultural vision that refers to other literary traditions, coming from the Old Continent (Europe): the literatures of the "motherland", that is the poems and novels typical of the territories or belonging to the cultural tradition of the same. The authors of this "universe" look to the classical Greek Latin tradition, to the Spanish or Portuguese tradition and also to European culture in general. The region, which is defined "by foreigners" as Latin America, is such in light of those political choices and cultural realities perceived as common and unifying. It is understandable, then, why many authors oscillate between two different axes of understanding and differentiation of the Latin American space: political or cultural. Similarly to what happened in American literature, where, for example, Mark Twain is considered by some critics (such as Ernest Hemingway, also a writer) the first author of a properly North American literature (think of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*) for original settings and themes, in the same way we can speak of a true Latin American literature, when the stories and tales have not only a territorial setting but also take into account social and cultural issues of the new continent, making them interesting and original compared to the European tradition. It is evident that a new continent has the charm of the originality of the needs that characterize the territory, which is considered virgin both in economic resources and in political, existential and cultural expectations. All this is enriched by a theme common to the whole of Latin America: the analysis and description of the strong disparities and contradictions existing in the territory, even in the heterogeneity of the historical-cultural systems of the different Latin American societies compared.

Clearly, numerous cultural contributions of the colonizing peoples have been added to those of the indigenous and African peoples, to a different degree for each of the countries. It is difficult to easily compare or correlate these contributions, which, obviously, gave rise to different cultures and national traditions.



It is not possible to analyse the different literatures present in the territories if we do not take into consideration the original matrix, literature of the “motherland”, highlighting the common dialogic elements and the elements of cultural and thematic antagonism that have characterized their differentiation. Obviously, the considerations on this aspect cannot be exhausted in a few lines, given the broad scope of the topic that is not developed in this analysis. This heterogeneity of the historical-cultural systems presents in the Latin American social fabric, if opportunely compared - even in the contradictions or differences -, can be seen as an added value for any process of critical investigation initiated on literature in its different expressions. This is a literature that sometimes becomes a discontinuity with the cultural tradition of the “mother country” and sometimes a spokesperson or, if you prefer, an “extension” of the literature of origin in another reality. Beginning in the 20th century, the literature of the Latin American continent in its Brazilian and Hispanic-American productions left the condition of secondary literature to become a protagonist on a world level and promoter of existential visions and conceptions, including educational ones, the result of the ethnic mixture that has produced a cultural syncretism that is not sterile, open to dialogue with cultures and traditions of other continents (Moreno, 1972; Carpentier, 1987; Candido, 1997; Cornejo Polar, 2000; Puccini, 2000; Rama, 2001).

2.1. EDITORIAL EVOLUTION: INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME OF GENRE IN LATIN AMERICA

Children’s literature can and must recount reality in its entirety, avoiding stereotypes and simplifications and adapting it to the needs and sensibilities of children. What counts is to be able to establish a dialogue with the reader, allowing him to relive that reality according to a different perspective, through the pages of a text, to facilitate growth and an optimistic re-elaboration of personal and cultural experience, which is followed by the construction of identity. Latin American children’s literature not unlike that found in other contexts, teaches how to read and how to read oneself, insofar as it can allow one to narrate oneself, to find oneself and to find the other in a shared story. It obviously does not have the language of multi-culturalism (simple coexistence of different cultures), but that of inter-culturalism (a relationship between several cultures and directed towards mutual enrichment in terms of values, customs and traditions), since it is synonymous with collective participation and not a simple cultural melting-pot (i.e. a mixture of individuals of different origins, religions and cultures with the result of building a shared identity). Goethe spoke of Weltliteratur (world literature), meaning and imagining the existence of a literature capable of breaking down cultural differences between men, because they act and think in the same way; this discourse is not valid in the Latin American reality, because those narrative contributions that have given rise to different cultures or national traditions cannot be compared or correlated. Brazil, for example, has a cultural development that has little to do with those regions



that are the result of Spanish expansion. Starting from the assumption that every literary production destined for children has its own genesis deriving from different cultural traditions, fruit of a syncretism based on hybridization or contamination, it is evident that an author of literature belonging to the Latin American reality privileges those aspects that are more assimilable or referable to the world in which he or she lives. For this reason, the narrative, in the perspective vision of the various authors, represents, in a selective way in images and emotions, the own identity ascribable to a given territory. Latin American children's literature is varied. In some cases, the oral tradition is predominant and rich and the presence of written production, supported by some publishing houses, is almost irrelevant. In other cases, the opposite is true. This depends mainly on the different literacy levels in the different territories, facilitated by non-profit associations such as IBBY (International Board on Book for Young people), in its different national sections, which aim to promote, in the most disadvantaged and remote territories, the encounter between children and books, clearly defending their right to read and their consequent cultural growth, trying to contribute effectively to the defeat of illiteracy.

Among the publishing houses that publish throughout the continent, we have *Revista Latino americana de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil* (edited in Bogota), *Fondo de Cultura Económica* (Mexican) and *Norma* (Colombian). An interesting editorial project specifically addressed to children was started by José Martí, a Cuban writer of the 19th century, with *La Edad de Oro y otros relatos* (a monthly editorial project dated 1889) with the aim of educating and entertaining Spanish-speaking children in Latin America.

With this magazine, Martí is part of a wider project with civic-political and pedagogical aims aimed at affirming Cuban independence (as we can see from a contribution of this intellectual dated March 25, 1889, dedicated to this theme), starting also and not only from the education of children. His political commitment hinges on the concept that there can be no Hispanic American literature (which in fact is part of Latin American literature) if there is not what he calls a "Hispano-America," that is, a set of independent states (Martí, 1991, XXI p. 163). He also affirms, referring to the necessity of a cultural evolution of his country, that there cannot be great literary works if there are no great personalities. For Martí, literature becomes the "place" in which to construct "symbolic possibilities" of "lasting knowledge", the expression of ideas comparable to "golden seeds", essential for the construction of a national cultural identity (Martí, 1991, VII p. 22). Ultimately, each story becomes an expression of cultural "flowering," of pleasant reading ("recreation"), of birth-divulgation and extension-sharing of ideas ("flowering and communication"). (Martí, 1991, VII p. 22). It is interesting to note how Martí, in the Latin America of the time that had recently become autonomous from Spain, delved into themes related to the world of children



in order to stimulate their creativity, when other economic-political-institutional needs seemed more urgent in a society that was still to be built. It was inspired by editorial models offered by children's newspapers such as *Nouveau magazine des enfants* (founded in 1843 by French publisher Pierre Jules Hetzel).

Martí's editorial project foregrounds the pedagogical question of roles. The male and female behavioural models proposed for the society of the time, reaffirm the centrality of pedagogy with cultural fascinations linked to the European pedagogical tradition and to children's literature according to ethical-didactic perspectives. He promotes the image of America's children: people who will build their identity on freedom of thought, on the quality and elegance of thought, that is, men who are "eloquent and sincere" (Martí, 2008, p. 4; Waldegaray, 2012).

In order to make the argument on the pedagogical question of masculine and feminine roles complete and more comprehensible, but relating it to contemporary times, we cannot avoid analysing the current situation of the feminist movement in Latin America. The protagonists of this reality are indigenous leaders, women warriors and, more generally, political activists, followed, no less important, by women from humble backgrounds, subjected to a series of socio-economic and sexual discriminations (think of the persecution of homosexuality or sexual harassment).

In the twenty-first century, the feminist movement in Latin America is as important as it was in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, albeit with different battles. The advent of democracies, after years of dictatorships, has made it possible to pay attention to relevant issues previously neglected. Hence the sprouting of movements and battles for the defense of women's rights such as *Ni una menos* against feminicide or *Pañuelos verdes* in reference to the legalization of abortion in 2015 in Argentina. It can therefore be said that feminism, inevitably, becomes a movement of social "propulsion" throughout Latin America, transforming itself from a radical counterculture movement to a determining element in changes in government policies and organization of institutional systems (as attested, among many and not isolated examples, by the presidency of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights entrusted to Elisabeth Odio Benito, a declared feminist, attentive to gender issues). Latin American feminism is structured differently from European feminism because it has managed to involve the population in broader reflections where social issues intersect with economic ones. The movement was also able to involve peasant and indigenous women, far from the issue of gender equality, with social battles closer to their existential reality (fight against feminicide, fight against domestic violence, protection of the right to birth planning and free and conscious motherhood).

This evolution of the feminist movement has been possible thanks to the spread of the media and social and every computer means of communication, which have made

social injustices more evident, visible and known to the popular masses. The media made the protests quickly become mass, strengthening feminist battles and movements. It is not accidental, for example, that Mauricio Macri (President of Argentina), was prompted by the movement to take a position on gender violence and to be involved in promoting the discussion of the bill regarding the decriminalization of abortion, which was subsequently approved. In 2018, in Chile, there was a focus on sexual abuse in universities. The examples of battles and overcoming gender discrimination are many. We need only look at the Bolivian and Mexican realities as well.

Ultimately, the Latin American feminist movement does not aim at specific isolated campaigns, but at a broader project aimed at promoting a more general evolution of the social context with the overcoming of economic inequalities, in order to complete the process of “decolonization” to a certain extent still unfinished. The purpose of the narrative, in its variety of proposals, is also to encourage education on gender differences and the plurality of family forms and models, as well as on the autonomy of constructs with respect to traditionally understood parental models, for example. In this sense, the new rewriting of family realities (extended families, parents of the same sex - with children following adoptions -, families structured on cohabitation and not on marriage) has introduced a greater elasticity even in the contents and forms of the “fictional” narrative, proposing unusual “solutions” and narrative plots. It is evident, in general, and not only in the specifically Latin American reality, that the presence of a stereotyped vision of reality, not in line with the needs and changes of society, has been overcome. Hence the increasing attention, in contemporary Latin American children’s literature, not unlike that of the world, to the debate on parental figures, parental functions and gender orientation, as far as the focus of our discourse is concerned, although these three narrative and existential dimensions are closely related.

The idea of the family, according to the modern meaning of the term - a concept surely assimilated also by the Latin American reality - is an “affective and elective” entity, in which being a father or mother is not necessarily anchored to gender; this role depends on the set of feelings, values, responsibilities and ties that found the family itself, reinforced by the functions of protection and care that are normally exercised towards children. By receiving such care, children recognize parenthood regardless of their parents’ sexual orientations, giving the concept of family an even deeper value.

An adequate approach to gender studies that takes account of contemporary reality, where there are inevitable differences, contributes, then, in a certainly constant way, to the rethinking of roles in a given context, in order to attribute new meanings to models imposed and still present in the imagination. In Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, there has been a shift from a predominantly didactic narrative to one that is increasingly



attentive to contemporary reality, with particular attention to themes linked to urban agglomerations, often using a humorous language that borders on parody. The didactic centrality thus gives way to literary play and to a dialoguing openness towards contemporary literature.

These countries had common needs and histories, passing through dictatorship, and strongly supporting the literacy process through the promotion of public educational institutions and the opening of popular libraries. Significant, especially in Argentina, has been the contribution of local publishing houses that have invested in emerging authors.

In Brazil, the process of conquering the status of both reader and writer began at the end of the 1940s. The basic public school, in this context, became the privileged place for the initial process of democratization of the opportunities to use written texts. In fact, historically, contact with the text is varied, while level writing, starting with that intended for the world of childhood, is a privilege of the class in power. Then, thanks to the intervention of the Federal Government and to the action of the publishing industry, as well as that of non-profit institutions (interested in the literacy process) and of local publishing, to which we can add the variety of magazines, texts and books, level writing has gone from being an individualized patrimony of the privileged classes to becoming a collective patrimony.

Not to be overlooked is the literary contribution made by such prominent writers as Monteiro Lobato, Horcio Quiroga, Janvier Villafaña, Maria Elena Walsh (both in Brazil and Argentina). In the mid-eighties, the literary production intended for children in Brazil and Argentina acquired a precise identity. In a specific way in the Argentinean reality, particular attention was paid to world literature, and a positive influence certainly came from European authors such as Gianni Rodari (for the attention given to the free creativity of children, the female models present in his works, the nonsense), Joanne Rowling (for the Harry Potter saga), Roald Dahl (for the attention paid to the failure of the educational system, poverty and human wickedness revisited in surreal environments) and Christine Nöstlinger (appreciated for the themes linked mainly to the issue of racism and inclusion, according to a strongly democratic framework).

Important works intended for children are those of contemporary authors such as Graciela Montes (Montes, 2003), an Argentinean writer and translator who worked for over twenty years at the Latin American Publishing Center, co-editing - together with Delia Pigretti - the children's literature collection *Los tales del Chiribitil*. The Cuban reality is completely different. Its evolution, starting from the Sixties, has been very complex, especially from an aesthetic point of view. In fact, it is characterized by the intersection of different currents of thought, which often end up contradicting, slowing down or deviating from the dominant orientations.



One need only leaf through the issues of the above-mentioned magazine, the *Revista Latino americana de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil* (published in Bogotá), to detect the topics of interest to the Latin American reading public and the dominant themes. For example, if we flip through the pages of issue 11 of the *Revista Latino americana de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil* (from 2000), we look at: to the role of children's literature in Venezuela and Peru (in which case, the culture of the Andean world has managed to preserve its cultural identity, despite "forced" integration with other cultures); to the ever-increasing importance assumed by picture books; to the construction of an imaginary of children's literature in Bolivia through the poetic work of Oscar Alfaro; to the metamorphoses of the character created by Roy Berocay (Rupert) so dear to Uruguayan children. There is no lack of interesting references to the production of Gaby Vallejo Canedo, who acutely recreates the mythology and religion of Latin America, flanking other texts on the same themes with stories set in Bolivia. In these realities, the theme of political violence is present, with a certain recurrence, and therefore a strong denunciation of social injustices. The ecological theme, very dear to readers in Costa Rica, is addressed in several issues of the *Revista Latino americana de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil* and is also evident in the highly appreciated literary production of Leda Cavallini Solano. Students in schools and colleges or preschoolers are recommended, at the ministerial level, the texts in prose or verse by Clara Amelia Acuña, considered the flagship of Costa Rican children's literature. Latin American literature, as a whole, is no stranger to the process of "metafiction," or that form of fiction that, since 1990, has been introduced into the writing technique of literature intended for children in the Latin American world, with the intention of crossing the boundaries of fiction itself, in order to offer the reader those necessary times of "interruption" functional to the reading phase, which allow not to remain bound to repetitive models, typical of the "fictional" narrative of traditional origin, where this writing technique is not at all contemplated by the authors of the narrative plot. It is also worth noting the value attributed to images, in Latin American literary production, where they pass with extreme ability from words to images. An example, in this sense, is offered to us by the illustrations of the Costa Rican Vicky Ramos. For further information on these aspects, we can consult the interesting contributions in issues 12 (2000) and 13 (2001) of the *Revista Latino americana de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil*, here chosen as a sample to highlight some of the themes and writing techniques dear to the editors of the magazines in this sector (dedicated specifically to children's literature) and present in Latin America.

Among other things, a prominent role is given to images by publishing houses such as Ekaré or by editors such as Maria di Mase, who have actively contributed to the creation of a written memory of orality in the world of children's literature in Venezuela. But, of course, words can also merge with magic. In this sense, Gustavo

Roldán's *Dragon* is noteworthy. From a purely pedagogical point of view, we can see how an adequate selection of literary production, also with reference to gender difference, helps to work on the construction of a "divergent" thought, which becomes fundamental for the construction of the critical thought of the child, gradually approaching the understanding of the self and the other. The stereotyped reality with boundaries delimited by an oppressive and apodictic morality crumbles in the face of a path of individualized and divergent thinking, stimulated by the vision and knowledge of the complexity of the society in which one lives, which can only be mortified by the trivialization resulting from stereotypes. The pedagogical approach increasingly affirms the need to overcome pre-established patterns, according to a careful choice of school texts, books or fairy tales. These literary genres favor the construction of the subject's identity, which opens, through them, the cultural horizons of the user, opening his mind to the infinite possibilities of the world around him. In this way, the citizen of the future will be increasingly free from prejudice and conventional choices, very often linked to gender, and will be less and less inclined to perpetrate any form of gender-based violence (Armenise, De Leo, 2021).

Worthy of note are the publications carried out by Editorial Chirimbote, in Argentina, with the *Antiprincesas* series, arrived in Italy with Rapsodia Edizioni. The *Antiprincesas* Series was born in 2015 with the intention of telling real stories - through illustrations - of women who did not submit to a stereotyped role imposed by Society. Each female protagonist, from the Latin American world (e.g. Frida Khalo, the first protagonist proposed by the Series), has the characteristic of being a non-conformist character, faithful to the ideals of justice, truth and freedom according to an alternative imagery outside the usual canons. Nadia Fink turns out to be the author of the internationally successful *Antiprincesas*, *Antihéroes* series, and books intended for children as well as volumes for adults on gender roles and feminism (*Feminismo para jóvenes: Ahora que sí nos ven* in 2018, written with Laura Rosso; and *Infancias libres: Tallares y actividades para educación en géneros*, written with Cecilia Merchán in 2018). In addition to these, there is an edition that references and analyzes the Ni una menos movement (*Ni una menos desde los primeros años: Educación en géneros para infancias más libres* in 2016, written together with Cecilia Merchán).

The discussion on gender roles cannot disregard the consideration of the concepts of masculinity and femininity in different cultures. In fact, addressing this topic means analysing society, putting in order the elements that characterize a given social reality and those common to several social contexts. Obviously, by writing on this subject we end up highlighting the prejudices, which belong to individuals, societies, peoples and traditions, but also the elements of overcoming the same prejudices. The heroines represented here do not have the usual characteristics of the "classic" princesses present

in the stories. The beauty is not external, but an inner beauty that breaks every stereotype giving women an intrinsic and individual value. The moral and cultural qualities take on the guise of a revisited or rewritten beauty, adapted to our times, and assign to women a realism based on their historicity (in addition to Frida Khalo we have Eva Maria Duarte called Evita, The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, Alfonsina Stormi and many other protagonists of the socio-cultural reality of Latin America). Their being “real” and “historicized” makes them a real and concrete model of beauty to be pursued. The readers, through a story mediated by the authors, can choose autonomously which values to refer to and identify themselves with the anti-princesses, who are the closest to women, to whom they would ideally like to resemble. In this sense we can define these picture books as an interactive production. In fact, the purpose that the authors would like to pursue is to encourage an emotionally active reading, more and more directed to the promotion of forms of self-education aimed at emancipation and the birth of personalities with an open mind to all the possibilities that the world offers. These authors, in the end, are mostly politically committed intellectuals, capable of making a reflection aimed at changing society and feel this function as a mission. This reality is almost completely absent in the Old Continent.

There is no lack of male counterparts. Just think of the real stories of two well-known writers such as Eduardo Galeano and Julio Cortázar published with Collana *Antihéroes*. Both Collane intend to modify the stereotypes that have characterized the figure of princesses and above all princes, who are considered secondary compared to the figure of the superhero, endowed, instead, with unusual superpowers (such as that of speech if we take for example the volume dedicated to Cortázar). This is the reason why the Series speaks of an anti-hero-super-hero rather than of a prince. The latter, in fact, is characterized by sensitivity and gentleness and not by superpowers like those possessed by contemporary superheroes, which attract more the childish imagination of our time.

It is in these examples of illustrated books about Argentinean biographies (written by Nadia Fink and illustrated by Pitu Saá) that the visual equipment becomes an effective tool and at the same time a reflection of a specific line of thought. It spreads in the public agora and allows to codify or deconstruct different visions of reality. Evidently, the hermeneutics of images outlines both the intrinsic figurative grammar present in them and the interaction, even complex, that is established between visuality, apparatus, institutions, bodies, and figurativeness; this allows us to effectively reveal the relationship between the iconic object and the cultural geography onto which the iconic object is projected. Now, more than ten picture books have been published in *Antiprincesas* followed by a smaller, but still growing, number of *Antihéroes*.



The same publishing house has also planned a third series for children called *Liga de antiprincessas* aimed at presenting historical characters. Much attention is paid in Latin America to the genre of illustrated books and albums, on the difference of gender and not only, as can be seen by consulting the issues of *Revista Latino americana de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil* (published in Bogotá), as well as the monthly *El Estante infantil* (edited by the Uruguayan writer and illustrator Malí Guzmán). Noteworthy are the editorial projects interested in authors from the entire continent promoted by the *Fondo de Cultura Económica* (directed by Mexican publisher Daniel Goldin) and by *Norma* (Colombian publishing house).

The literary world of Latin America destined to children's literature, specifically for gender difference, offers a considerable variety of proposals that can be understood as an added value and an essential point of reference, truly original, for a global reflection on the educational function of children's literature, not only on the theme of gender difference but also on that of equal opportunities.

3. CONCLUSION

The reconstruction of socio-cultural relationships in Latin America's variegated educational set-up has revealed a still very marked stratification of educational inequalities, especially the *gender gap*. This processes of educational stratification according to gender has been studied both by functionalist-meritocratic authors (from the theory of human capital to liberal feminism) (Alexander, Eckland 1974; Arnot, David, Weiner 1999), as well as by authors with a conflictual orientation (from stratification theory, to social reproduction theory, to other variants of feminism) (Collins, 1971; Bourdieu e Passeron 1972; Holland, Heisenhart 1990), who share the ideal of equal distribution of educational resources among citizens, regardless of biological determinants (gender and race) and social origins. Both approaches assume that education and the institutions in which it is organised (schooling, vocational training) tend to be positive and promotional with respect to the social goals envisaged. Human capital theorists, for example, trust in the ability of education systems to enhance the quality of available intelligence; reproductive theorists argue that, if it worked properly, education would contribute to the neutralisation of class effect and biological difference through the formalisation of universalist principles and the protection of disadvantaged groups. Although profoundly different in their view of social relations, these two interpretations therefore share the idea that educational institutions should be, so to speak, 'neutral' about the gender variable. Anyway, this exaltation of the principle of equality on the pedagogical level is accompanied by criteria and practices that favour uniformity over sexual difference. On the other hand, conflict theorists see relations between men and women as marked by male

domination (Bourdieu, 1998) and consider gender to be an ascriptive factor, which produces inequality in the structure of access to resources, favouring male success and systematically undervaluing female performance. On the other hand, it is the so-called 'gender-focused theories' - especially radical feminism and socialist feminism, which are also to be found in the critical conflictual strand - that point the finger at educational institutions and school curricula, which are seen as inherently masculine. For radical feminists, moreover, the egalitarian ideal leads to the cancellation of the original differences between men and women, when in fact they are irreducible, since they derive from specific biological inheritance. To make up for the social disadvantage of being female and to regain possession of their gender identity without negative prejudices, women have to question current educational methods and practices, which are implicitly sexist (Holland, Eisenhart 1990), become aware of their own specificities and structure separate moments of education with differentiated curricula (Riordan 1990). This "essentialist" conception of gender relations, which leads to the invocation of separatist strategies in education, is criticised by other feminists (Davies 1997), because it would merely reverse the current situation (implicit male superiority) by introducing a new opposition between genders (superiority of the female way of being). At the end of the 1970s, the "essentialist" thought of sexual difference (Luce Irigaray and Diotima) or of "cultural feminism" (with Mary Daly 1978 and Adrienne Rich, 1977, Linda Alcoff 1988) opened new perspectives not only theoretical but also of practices of "separate" socialisation: practices and policies of development of the denied difference. A new feminist pedagogy was created. Feminist pedagogy is here closely intertwined with reflection on difference and its valorisation.

Gender is not simply a derivative of anatomical or biological sex but a symbolic construction, a representation or, better, the combined effect of countless visual and discursive representations that come from different institutional apparatuses of the State, such as the family, school, law, medicine, etc. [...] so far like the constructionist sociologists) but also from the very forms of culture (language, the arts, literature, religion, philosophy, cinema, the media), [...] precisely [...] technologies of gender" (De Lauretis, 1987, p.37).

According to the underlying theoretical approach of the paper the reality of genre lies precisely in the reality effects produced by its representation genre is realised and becomes concrete reality when representation becomes self-representation, that is, it is assumed by the subject as a component of his or her own identity. Therefore, taking up the neologism coined by De Lauretis, "engender", the subject is ingenerated, that is, produced as a subject in assuming, adopting, or identifying with the effects of meaning and the positions specified by the sex/gender system of a given society. In other words, the subject is produced or engendered to the extent that it is the result of gender technologies. Educational models must start from the subject - male and female - and



from corporeality as a condition that is embodied in one's experience, thus considering educational action as directed towards this subject. In so doing, true integration can be achieved in all countries of Latin America. A form of integration stemming from the acknowledgment that the subjects of education, the subjects of civil society, distance themselves from and differentiate themselves from the hegemonic discourse and the dominant cultural formations, including, principally, the ideology of gender, understood as one of the most significant and conditioning macro-institutions. And the way in which it is possible to escape this ideology is to move away from a unitary subject, always the same, endowed with a stable identity, uniquely divided between masculinity and femininity. Instead, the new subject occupies multiple positions, detaches itself from belonging and given knowledge, and builds itself through a continuous and incessant rewriting of itself. Much needs to be done to assure quality education for all. However, the road to this development has begun.

In this thought about gender is rejected the Cartesian idea of the subject as a fixed and self-evident original datum, to represent it as the product of a continuous and constitutive exchange with otherness, in the various forms in which it manifests itself. The subject, from this perspective, intrinsically and constitutively needs the other to become itself. Therefore, the concept of neutrality in the use of educational language in school contexts and in the choice of contents is overcome, not to accentuate the difference between the sexes but to start from that embodied cognition, in which the dialectic self-other is present. This dialectic constitutes the subject, as identity *idem* and *ipse*, sameness and projectuality of being.

The reflection on gender identities is the master way of the educational course to be taken in the education of Latin American countries, in view of achieving the objectives of Education for All and guarantee the rights to an education of equality and of quality.

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