

GENDER AND WOMEN IN ANCIENT HISTORY: AN ANALYSIS IN WORKBOOKS¹

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Abstract

This article proposes a reflection on how gender issues and women's real life stories in Ancient History are present in workbooks used in public schools nationwide, in addition to commenting on their connection with the BNCC and the selection process. To achieve this goal, we have analyzed three different materials from different publishing houses aimed at the 6th grade of Elementary School II, when the teaching on Ancient History is foreseen. Such books have arrived at schools in 2020 and will be used until 2022. The study was carried out using the documentary analysis methodology and was based on gender theories and multiculturalism. During the analysis of the materials, we have studied in which spaces and from what perspectives women are presented in the workbooks, including the contents covered, if there are discussions about the term 'gender' and how images of female figures are used as a pedagogical resource.

Keywords

Women's History; Ancient History; gender; workbook.

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Resumo

O presente texto propõe uma reflexão a respeito de como as questões de gênero e a Histórias das mulheres da Antiguidade estão presentes em Livros Didáticos indicados nas escolas públicas de todo o país, além de comentar sobre a ligação destes com a BNCC e o processo de seleção. Para realizar tal objetivo, foram elencados três materiais, de editoras diferentes, direcionados ao 6 ano do Ensino Fundamental II, uma vez que é nessa etapa que o ensino sobre Antiguidade está previsto. Tais livros chegaram nas escolas em 2020 e serão utilizados até 2022. O estudo foi realizado utilizando a metodologia de análise documental, apoiando-se nas teorias de gênero e no multiculturalismo. No decurso das análises dos materiais, procurou-se estudar em quais espaços e sob quais perspectivas as mulheres são apresentadas nos livros didáticos. Os conteúdos abordados, as discussões, ou não, a respeito do termo gênero, e como as imagens de figuras femininas são utilizadas enquanto recurso pedagógico.

Palavras-chave

História das Mulheres; Antiguidade; gênero; livro Didático.

Introduction

Women and their real life stories were deliberately ignored in academic studies and history books by 19th-century European positivist historians, whose main interest was building and/or consolidating the national identities of their countries, using just documents linked to the State and the Church as historical sources.

At the beginning of the 20th century, a new historiographical movement emerged in 1929 in France, *L'École des Annales*, which represented a paradigmatic shift towards historical science. It changed the focus on an essentially political history to a social history and expanded historical sources and research methods. Although women have not become objects of study by historians at that period of time, the *Annales* paved the way so that it could happen before long.

In the 1960s, several social and academic movements gained momentum, including the second wave of the feminist movement, whose researches seek to understand the core of female subservience and inequalities between men and women. From then on, some historians, particularly female historians, have been studying the female figure as a historical subject.

With the advancement and unfoldings of feminist and historiographic researches throughout the 1970s and 1980s, a new analytical category is formulated: gender. According to Scott (1990), gender implies that female and male are sociocultural constructs engendered from the biological sexes of the individuals, that is, the characteristics attributed to male and female subjects are not natural, being constituted by means of power relations and asymmetries in a given culture.

Nowadays Women's History and gender relations are consecrated and recurring themes in researches not only in Europe or the United States, but also in Latin America and Brazil. Those researches have generated new views on women's roles and experiences in different periods of time and societies, including in Ancient History. Furthermore, gender has become an interdisciplinary category, being used in several studies related to law, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, anthropology, sexuality, sex education, and other fields.

Those reflections raise some questions: how Brazilian History workbooks approach Women's History, and particularly the female figures in Antiquity? Is the gender category worked in school materials? And how?

In order to answer those questions, we have chosen⁴ three History workbooks of different collections aimed at the 6th grade of Elementary School II, since the Ancient History content is part of the curriculum at this educational stage. Such materials were supposedly distributed to all public schools in Brazil in 2020 and will be used until 2022.

The analytical-descriptive study was carried out using the documentary analysis methodology, in which the researcher has an in-depth focus on a certain written document, seeking to prove or not some hypotheses based on his/her theoretical framework (Lüdke; André, 2015). In the case of books chosen, we sought to study how much space women and their real life stories occupy on their pages, and analyze the contents covered, including images of female figures.

The investigation has considered the gender category and theories of the multicultural curriculum, which affirm that hierarchical power relations build the social views that segregate what is considered as “normal” or “positive” from what would be the "Other" or the "negative". So a multicultural curriculum should not only promote contents and methods to develop respect and tolerance for the different among students, but also enable students to understand how differences and inequalities were and are still constituted in human relationships.

However, before deepening the discussions on multiculturalism, it is necessary to conceptualize and understand the different factors involved in the production and distribution of workbooks.

Workbooks: paradigms and discussions

Workbooks are present in Brazilian classrooms since the 19th century and constitute one of the main theoretical, methodological and pedagogical supports for the work of teachers and students. They are essential in public schools, where access to computers and other electronic devices is still far from enough.

Besides their central role in the daily lives of students and teachers at all educational stages in Brazil, workbooks are the best-selling product in the Brazilian publishing market. Distributed nationwide, workbooks are considered as a reliable repository of knowledge and information related to all school disciplines, constituting the main resource when teachers

⁴ The books were chosen among those available in the school where one of the authors worked as a teacher in 2020.

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organize didactic-pedagogical activities and plan the entire school year (Gatti, 2004).

In order to conceptualize and clarify the complexity and the various processes involved in the production and the different usages of workbooks, Bittencourt (2006) points out four central aspects: first of all, workbooks are consumer *goods* whose production is in accordance with the technological evolution and whose commercialization is in accordance with the market logics. The text produced by an author(s) will suffer interference from various agents throughout the manufacturing and commercialization process, including the publisher, graphic designers and technicians, illustrators, proofreaders, and programmers. It is worth noting that, as a cultural object, workbooks impose a way of reading organized by several professionals and not necessarily by the authors.

Workbooks are also a “repository of school contents” (Bittencourt, 2006: 72), that is, they are a basic support where the contents and knowledge seen as necessary by the current curriculum are synthesized and systematized. So they spread vital information on a certain period of time and a specific society to teachers, students and parents. In the process of transposing academic contents to school knowledge, workbooks formulate linguistic patterns and specific forms of communication in the construction of texts with a proper vocabulary, organize concepts and chapters, choose illustrations and other supporting texts, among other aspects (Bittencourt, 2006).

In addition, workbooks are a “pedagogical tool” (Bittencourt, 2006: 72) whose elaboration and usage cannot be dissociated from the curricular methods and structures of their time. In this sense, the didactic material makes the structures and elaborates the teaching conditions for teachers. That’s why there are “teacher’s books” and “student’s books”. The pages of didactic material also include certain pedagogical activities and learning techniques such as questionnaires, exercises, work suggestions, among other tasks that students must perform in order to assimilate the content. Finally, workbooks dictate and suggest how their contents should be applied and taught.

The last aspect pointed out by the author is that workbooks are an important “vehicle for a system of values, an ideology, and a culture” (Bittencourt, 2006: 72). The school manual, like any other anthropic artifact, is a product of its era, an object made and elaborated with a certain intent and that reflects the morals, thoughts and values of its era and society. Thus, it is not a material free of ideological and political positions. In this

sense, the author warns that workbooks may reproduce ideologies and stereotypes of dominant groups.

The production of workbooks involves a very complex web in terms of what knowledge will be chosen to be on their pages by the authors, publishers, the market, buyers and final readers. Between one element and another, the evaluation by the State cannot be disregarded in terms of the possible relations between the product and the consumption, whereas the market logics limits the process of renewing the profile of materials and the dialogue between school knowledge and knowledge resulting from academic references. Thus, the evaluation of workbooks by the State impacts the historical knowledge present in those works (Miranda; Luca, 2004).

Workbooks have become the best-selling product in the Brazilian publishing niche due to the National Book and Didactic Material Program (PNLD), which was implemented in 1985 and expanded in the 1990s and 2000s. It is by means of that program that the Ministry of Education (MEC) evaluates, acquires and distributes workbooks free of charge to all Brazilian public schools of Basic Education, covering all curricular disciplines of Elementary Education I and II and High School⁵ (Cassiano, 2013).

In order to be part of the collections approved by the PNLD, publishing houses register their materials in the public notices issued every three years by MEC. The collections chosen are sent to public schools, and the teachers of each institution have autonomy to opt for books of their choice.

The reviews, selection criteria and the technical data of the workbooks used by the PNLD evaluation committee are available in the “PNLD Digital Guide” on the National Fund for Educational Development (FNDE) website⁶, where teachers from all over the country can find the guide of each curricular component .

⁵ After the implementation and expansion of the PNLD in the 1990s and 2000s, Cassiano (2013) warns that the leading companies in the workbook market, which were mainly national and family-owned, started to be acquired by large business groups. Some of those business groups are foreign, such as the Prisa media group that bought Editora Moderna in 2001, or had some foreign capital, such as the Saraiva group, which incorporated Editora Atual. More recently, Brazilian groups Positivo and Kroton have been growing in the sector of didactic materials and also compete with British Pearson in the domestic market of education systems.

⁶ The website can be found at: <https://www.fnnde.gov.br/index.php/programas/programas-dolivro/pnld/guia-dolivro-didatico>. Access in: March, 17, 2021.

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The most recent collections that arrived at schools were produced in 2020 and are in accordance with the general criteria for selecting the books of all curricular components. According to the Guide, the works selected must:

Be free of stereotypes or prejudices against socioeconomic, regional, ethnic-racial, *gender, sexual orientation*, age, language, religious, and disability factors, as well as any other form of discrimination, [...]. (Brazil, 2020: 11, the italics were ours)

It is worth noting that the evaluating criteria of the current PNLD are based on the Theme Units and Skills contained in the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), which is the guiding document for the contents that must be taught in all schools in Brazil. However, as Souza and Feitosa (2018) point out, the approval of the BNCC degenerated into fierce polemics that led to the exclusion of the terms *gender* and *sexuality* from its lines. It is possible to perceive the reflection of this controversy in the 2020 PNLD History data sheet, which never mentions them. But in the evaluators' final opinion on all the History collections approved by the program, there is the following statement:

In the works approved by 2020 PNLD, the gender issues approached highlight the prominence of women of different social classes e ethnicities in History, although men's actions are still emphasized. (Brazil, 2020: 24)

The evaluators also point out that, by having the BNCC as the main guide to the contents that must be present in the materials, the collections present a certain homogeneity, what prevents teachers from having a variety of contents and pedagogical approaches to select.

Due to the relevance and scope of didactic material for schools nationwide and the importance of working with gender and Women's History contents, it is pertinent to understand how such themes are being addressed in the materials available to schools from 2020 through 2022. Furthermore, as the focus of the analysis is on women in Ancient History, the books analyzed in our study were those of History for the 6th grade of Elementary School II, as mentioned earlier.

The first workbook is part of the Geração Alpha collection, launched by Editora SM, which belongs to Spanish SM Foundation. That foundation is oligopolistic in the Latin American sector of didactic materials and teaching systems, operating in nine countries in the region: Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Argentina and Dominican Republic. According to the SM Foundation website⁷, the publishing house was created in Madrid when teachers from Marianist schools started to

⁷ <http://www.fundacaosmbrasil.org/fundacao/>. Access in: June, 8, 2020.

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publish didactic books in 1918 to supplement their classes. However, the printing branch of *Ediciones SM* - Sociedade de Maria - was founded in 1939 in Madrid. After launching *Revista SM* in 1962, the publishing house has expanded its business to Latin America, arriving in Brazil in 2004.

The authors of Geração Alpha are: Ana Lúcia de Neni, graduated in History from University of São Paulo (USP), MD in Social History from USP, PhD in Social Sciences from State University of Campinas (Unicamp), and professor in the History course at the Federal University of São Paulo (Unifesp); Anderson Roberti dos Reis, graduated in History from United Metropolitan Faculties (FMU/SP), MD in Cultural History from Unicamp, PhD in Social History from USP, and professor at the Federal University of Mato Grosso (UFMT); and Débora Yumi Motooka, history teacher in a private network.

The second book is part of the Inspire História collection, by Editora FTD, which began to operate in 1902 in Brazil. That publishing house also belongs to a Marianist congregation, the Marist Brothers, founded in 1817 in France and present in Brazil since 1897. The founder of the Marist publishing house was Brother Isidoro Dumont who replaced Brother Andrônio, the first author of a FTD book, in the direction of Colégio Carmo. FTD are the initials of Frère Théophile Durand, who ran the French Marianist congregation in 1883 and encouraged the production of workbooks. FTD bought Editora Quinteto in 1997. On the occasion of its 100th anniversary in 2002, the company announced that it had about four thousand works in its catalogue and more than 1.200 employees (Cassiano, 2013).

The authors of the Inspire História collection are: Reinaldo Seriacópoli, graduated in Journalism from Methodist University of São Paulo and in Letters from USP, and art history professor in a private course; and Gislane Azevedo, graduated in History and MD in History from Pontifical Catholic University (PUC/ SP). They are also co-authors of other workbook collections for several publishing houses.

The last material is part of the Escola e Democracia collection, by Editora Moderna, a Brazilian family-owned business that was acquired in 2001 by Spanish Santillana which belongs to the Prisa Group. Santillana also owns other companies in Brazil, such as the Richmond label, Editora Salamandra, Sistema Uno de Ensino, Editora Objetiva, and Avalia. Santillana has connections with the Spanish government and various businesses, while the Prisa Group operates in several countries and nowadays is the leading Spanish media conglomerate. Jesús de Polanco, who ran Prisa until his death in 2007, was one of the most prominent and

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powerful men in Spain. Santillana is an oligopolistic company in the sector of didactic materials and teaching systems in Spain, Brazil, and Latin America (Cassiano, 2013).

The authors of the *Escola e Democracia* are: Flávio de Campos, graduated in History from PUC/SP, MD and PhD in Social History from USP, and history professor at USP; Regina Claro, graduated in History from USP, MD in Social History from the same institution and currently trainer of public school teachers; and Miriam Dolhnikoff, graduated in History from PUC/SP, PhD in Economic History from USP, and history and foreign affairs professor at USP.

It is pertinent to stress that the authors have certain limitations to elaborate the workbooks. Publishing houses establish a number of pages that must not be exceeded in the books and in certain contents. As for the use of images, authors are obliged to accept the ones whose copyright is owned by the publishing houses. When the materials are sent to the publishing houses, texts and images are subject to changes or additions, and authors commonly see their materials again only when they are already completed and printed.⁸

Taking into account the information above, the analysis of the works focused the teacher's book. It has a didactic guide at the beginning with guidelines for the teacher and supplementary texts, in addition to discussing methodological and pedagogical aspects of the discipline. The guide also has information about the organization of the book and the collection. All materials have a copy of history theme units and skills recommended by the BNCC. The didactic guides of each collection are essentially the same every year. It is important to stress that the material of *Geração Alpha* is the only one whose guide has information about Women's History and gender. It contains excerpts from scientific articles on certain historiographical themes, such as those from the text "Estudos de Gênero e História Social", by Carla B. Pinsky.⁹ Most pages of the teacher's book also contain didactic guidelines, supplementary texts or suggestions of activities related to the content approached.

The analysis of the materials involved the following steps: the survey of contents that make up the theme units of the books; the analytical-descriptive research of quotes on Women's History and female images

⁸ Information in this paragraph came from the speech of Professor Ph. D. Raquel dos Santos Funari during the Qualifying Examination of the dissertation which gave origin to this article. She is Doctor of History and author of didactic books and materials

⁹ PINSKY, C. B. Estudos de Gênero e a História Social. *Estudos Feministas*, Florianópolis, vol.17, # 1, 2009, 169-189

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present in each didactic book; a short description of topics in the excerpts about women found in the books; and, finally, the organization of data in a table with the theme units indicated in the works, the names of the materials and the main elements examined.

For a better understanding and visualization of the study, four topics of analysis and their objectives were listed:

- “Images” - to indicate if texts about women are accompanied by images, and if those images are accompanied by analytical and interpretative reflections;
- “Box or part” - to consider if the mentions about the female subject appear in explanatory boxes or parts separated from the content of the book. Most explanatory boxes occupy less than half of the page or are in the corners of the pages, with few lines and “extra” information related to the content. In general, they are found at the end of a theme unit and work as a supplementary activity or text.
- “Social diversity” - to check if the texts about women mention other female subjects than those of the elites or considered “famous”, as well as women from various social and legal groups.
- “Didactic guidelines/supplementary activities” - to point out what contents about women have didactic guidelines, suggestions of activities or supplementary texts aimed at teachers.

These are the aspects analyzed as follows.

How women and gender in Ancient History are represented in workbooks

The Ancient History contents in the didactic books about Ancient Africa mention mainly the Ancient Egypt and the Kingdom of Kush, in Nubia; however, the *Escola e Democracia* book also provides information on other peoples in the region, and the *Geração Alpha* book refers to Nok culture and the Kingdom of Aksum. The three materials mention Mesopotamia and the Sumerian, Hebrew, Phoenician and Persian peoples; Ancient Greece, the Hellenic period, Ancient Rome and the Germanic kingdoms.

Book of the Geração Alpha collection:

- On page 51, an image of the Venus of Willendorf is followed by the explanation that its meaning is still unknown, although there is a hypothesis that it has a religious nature;
- Page 78 has a long text about women in Mesopotamia, in which the authors question the use of the term *patriarchal society* to designate the peoples of that region, as the role of women could vary according to the region, city and social class to which they belonged to. The text mentions some women of the time and is accompanied by the figure of a stone relief with the visual depiction of a priestess. In a corner of the page there is a blue box with information about the low participation of Brazilian women in politics, instructions for students to reflect on the importance of political equality between men and women and the reason why women are still a minority in political positions;
- On page 111, there is a half-page text about the Kingdom of Kush rulers, the Candaces, which mentions the important political role of those queens and also mothers of kings. Next to it is a picture of a relief in a temple, with a scene of Candace Anamilare hitting her enemies;
- Egyptian women are mentioned only in a short excerpt on the page dedicated to activities. This text points out that Egyptian women had a certain social equality, and students are asked to compare the role of Kush's women with those of Egypt and then compare them with contemporary women;
- As for Greek women, the book presents a text by Fábio Cerqueira Lessa, an expert in that topic. However, this reference is in an “extra” content available at the end of a theme unit called “História dinâmica”. In the excerpt, the author compares the lives of the elite women with those of people in the polis. Next to the text there is an image of an amphora representing Greek women in their daily lives and some questions for the students about what was read.¹⁰
- In the excerpt on the Roman family on page 175, the role of the *pater familias* as the householder is emphasized. Only on page 189 there is a brief quote about the roles of Christian Roman women as mothers, wives,

¹⁰ On page 157, after the Ancient Greece content, there are the lyrics of “Mulheres de Atenas”, a song by Chico Buarque; the book advises the teacher to hear the song with the students and compare the situation of Athenian women and women these days.

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and housewives. This piece of information is accompanied by an image of a 19th-century fresco with a Christian woman¹¹.

Book of the Inspire collection:

- The Ancient Greece content mentions that the role of Athenian women varied according to their social position, and the information are similar to those in the Geração Alpha book; the last quotes about women in the book are in “explanatory boxes” entitled “Para saber mais”;
- The first reference is about the Roman female figure¹² and highlights her presence at banquets, supporting campaigns for her political candidates and the organization of protests.¹³ Next to the text there is a fresco and the explanation that it represents the image of a Roman woman with her son, being served by a poor woman. There is also another fresco of Pompeii, with women weaving;
- The second explanatory box provides information about the Germanic female figure, emphasizing that women and men had the same conjugal rights and women were considered as a source of wisdom and knowledge of medicine and religious traditions;¹⁴
- In the Ancient Africa content, there is a text about the Queen of Sheba, who was a very powerful queen of the Kingdom of Aksum. Then there is her image painted in 1875 by Jean Jules Badin.¹⁵ Egyptian women appear in the part “Interpretando documento”, which contains an image of dancers, and students are asked to indicate if, based on the figure, it is possible to infer that Egyptian women had an important role at that time;

Book of the Escola e Democracia collection:

- Egyptian women are mentioned as “powerful”, that is, women of the nobility had a certain prominent role, especially the wives, daughters,

¹¹ On page 191, there is a part entitled “História dinâmica”, which presents an excerpt of a text by the researcher Silvia M. Siqueira analysing female images in Roman catacombs. Then there are some questions for the students about the text and how the author has conducted her research.)

¹² After the Rome content is a text on the Ptolemaic Era in Egypt, which makes a brief mention to Cleopatra and has two visual depictions of her.

¹³ The text explains that Roman women didn’t participate directly in political decisions and their marriages were arranged aiming at their families’ interests.

¹⁴ One of the didactic orientations in this excerpt is that the teacher and the students discuss and compare the situation of Roman and Germanic women, who lived in similar periods of time but in different societies.

¹⁵ On page 101, there are two images of the Queen of Sheba from different periods of time, and the students are asked to compare both.

and mothers of pharaohs.¹⁶ Beside there is a bust picture of Hatshepsut with a beard representing its real power as a female pharaoh. In the part entitled “Olho no lance”, the students are asked to compare the image of actress Elizabeth Taylor playing Cleopatra with images from Egyptian paintings, since visual depictions of the queen as white are recurrent in movies;

- The Athenian women content is in an explanatory box and highlights that they were confined at home and had to obey their husbands. That box also has two pictures of amphorae with images representing women.¹⁷ On page 117 a small explanatory box contains a text about women’s education in Sparta, accompanied by the figurine of a female figure from the archaic period;

- On page 162 there is a box containing some information about what is known about Greek-Roman female philosopher Hypatia of Alexandria;

- The Ancient Africa content refers to Queen Makeda, better known as Queen of Sheba. Next to this piece of information there is also a picture of a fresco of the queen in a church in Gondar, Ethiopia. That content also mentions in an explanatory box the warrior queens of Kush and shows a relief of a Candace pyramid.

- The last two quotes about women in the book highlight the “sexual division of labour” of Pygmy and Bushmen peoples; men were in charge of hunting, while women were in charge of planting, harvesting and taking care of the children and the house.

¹⁶ The excerpt also points out that some women, such as Sobekneferu, Hatshepsut and famous Cleopatra VI, ruled the Ancient Egypt, but this was very uncommon.

¹⁷ In the part “Rupturas e permanências”, the book asks the teacher to listen to the song “Mulheres de Atenas”, by Chico Buarque, with the students. Then the students should compare current women with those from Ancient Athens.

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Table 1¹⁸

Collections	Geração Alpha				Inspire				Escola e Democracia			
	Image	Box/part	Social Div.	DG/AC	Image	Box/part	Social Div.	DG/AC	Image	Box/part	Social Div.	DG/AC
Origins of Human Race	X											
Peoples of Mesopotamia	X											
Ancient Africa	X	X			X	X			X	X		
Ancient Greece	X	X			X	X	X		X	X		
Ancient Rome	X				X	X	X		X	X		
Germanic kingdoms						X						

It is noticeable that some quotes in all three books highlight only the roles of “celebrated” women or those who were part of the elites, while others emphasize only the traditional role attributed to them. However, the excerpts that seek to underline the differences between female figures from different social strata are very positive and show that gender roles gain different nuances when other characteristics and social categories of a people are considered.

Another positive aspect are the excerpts about societies with a certain social equality between genders and the participation of women in politics because such information allows students to reflect on how gender designs can be constituted in different ways, depending on the culture where they are inserted. The strategy of discussing and comparing the situation of women from different societies and different temporalities also enables students to perceive how gender construction is an element of socio-cultural relations.

It is worth noticing that the term *gender* is mentioned only in the didactic guide of the book of Geração Alpha. However, the same material mentions the participation of “men and women” but could have used “both genders”, for example. The book of Escola e Democracia uses the term *sexual division of labour* to refer to the division of functions based on gender, but such terminology is wrong because the word *sexual* has a clear biological bias. The authors could have written *labour according to gender* or *division of labour based on gender*. It is understandable that the authors did not seek to deepen the theoretical conceptions of the word *gender* because

¹⁸ Social Div. Means social diversity. DG/AC are acronyms for didactic guidelines e supplementary activity.

its meaning, as a socio-historical construct of masculinity and femininity, can be too complex and abstract for 6th grade students.

In the analysis of all three books, it was evident that female figures occupy little space on their pages and most texts about them are short. In addition, most quotes are in explanatory boxes or in parts separated from the main content, as if their history was a curiosity or “an add on” to General History. Most images do not have an in-depth explanation, what makes women’s visual depictions merely illustrative.

To deepen the study of didactic books, it is relevant to bring contributions from the perspective of multicultural curricular theories, which can promote reflections on the differences and inequalities present in the approaches of materials.

Gender and Women’s History in workbooks: reflections from a critical multiculturalist perspective

In the workbooks analyzed, the amount of women’s real life stories and gender issues varies, depending on the collection or the book itself. However, in studying materials from a multiculturalist perspective, it is worth asking: is highlighting the differences between women and men throughout history enough so that students can understand how gender inequalities have been (re) produced in asymmetric power interactions? How can we think of “differences” beyond the perspective of “tolerance” and “respect”, aiming at reaching a deeper understanding and deconstruction,¹⁹ since Women’s History is still a secondary theme in workbooks?

Multiculturalism is a phenomenon that has its origins in the United States, where marginalized or subordinated groups, such as Blacks, women, native peoples and immigrants, questioned the curricular and educational structures that expressed the social privileges of a culture dominated by male, white and heterosexual views. Those collectives sought to have their cultures and identities represented and recognized in the country. Multiculturalism has become a powerful political instrument because it has brought discussions about the construction of human differences and

¹⁹ “In deconstruction, an opposition is not destroyed or abandoned, but reinscribed, thus revised and explained by the undoing of the devices which produced it”. (Culler, 1999: 122)

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pluralities, hitherto limited to the academic sphere, to political and social spheres (Silva, 2015).

From that perspective, the differences between human beings are constituted hierarchically through power relations, that is, the “different” can only exist when compared with a “normal”. The social "Other" does not exist alone, but is established on the basis of something that is not him. The “different” is seen as exotic or negative in parallel with the “non-different”, which is at the positive evaluating pole, and such differences can only be constructed when there are power asymmetries (Silva, 2015.) Multiculturalism is interconnected with gender issues, since gender is an element of power relations that also defines the differences and, in this case, the differences and inequalities regarding female and male beings and the association between them.

However, the multiculturalist perspective is not homogeneous. Hall (2003) and Silva (2015) point out the existence of the following currents:

- Conservative multiculturalism: the hegemonic culture tries to incorporate the traditions of marginalized groups into its own;
- Liberal multiculturalism: understands that human differences are constituted through distinct historical and social processes, and that they must coexist peacefully and be united through the process of egalitarian democracy;
- Critical multiculturalism: it can be divided into two fields -- one of post-structuralist inspiration and the other based on Marxism. The first field establishes that the differences are constituted through intentional language and speeches, and cannot be understood outside the linguistic process that relates the “different” to the “normal”. For its part, the Marxist view highlights the role of economic and political structures at the core of the processes that generate inequalities and prejudices due to cultural diversities. Racism, for example, cannot be combated effectively through linguistic changes because that fight also requires structural changes.

A multicultural curriculum with a critical view implies that differences should not be presented or worked in the classroom from the perspective of "tolerance" and "respect" because such perspective expresses a naturalized and neutral sense of differences. However, the "different" and the "unequal" are not innate characteristics of human beings, but are permanently conceived and reconstituted through socio-cultural interactions. Therefore, a critical multicultural curriculum is not only concerned with emphasizing the existence of "difference" but also

questions the processes that lead to the construction and constant reproduction of the "other" in power relations, including the dichotomy between feminine and masculine.

In reflecting on North American didactic materials, Apple (2006) stresses that the pressure exerted by marginalized groups in the United States led to some changes in the curriculum and education but the dominant groups sought to incorporate a conservative and "more moderate" multiculturalism into schools. According to the author, didactic materials have brief references to the history of subalternized collectives in parts separated from the general content, as if they were additions to the hegemonic culture, that is, there are few pages highlighting the past of women, Blacks, Latinos and indigenous peoples. Thus, conservative multiculturalism maintains the status quo of the dominant groups but, at the same time, claims that it is opening up "space" for new social demands; the hegemonic collective uses that strategy to impose a domination logic on the movements that contest it.

For a critical multicultural education that really questions the constructions of "differences" and their configurations through power networks, Apple (2006) warns that it is necessary to emphasize how marginalized groups built the history of the United States and other nations, and how dominant cultures have benefited and still benefit from racist, patriarchal and prejudiced power structures. In addition, it is necessary to highlight the vision of these groups about History, once it is not enough to mention them in "explanatory boxes". Finally, the author states: "Without that part of the story, there is no story" (Apple, 2006: 248).

In analyzing workbooks and their representations of Women's History and gender issues, it is evident that they have many elements of conservative multiculturalism, as both topics are often presented in tiny explanatory boxes, in the corners or footnotes of pages, as if they were "an add on"; they use most of the images as an illustrative resource; they devote few pages for those topics and do not use or conceptualize the term *gender*. In addition, the LGBTQ+ population's history has been completely silenced.

However, some mentions reflect a perspective slightly closer to critical multiculturalism, when they refer to societies where women had a certain social equality, such as the Egyptian society, the Kingdom of Kush, peoples of Mesopotamia, Germanic and Yoruba peoples. Such contents lead students to reflect how the gender construct depends on the culture where it is inserted. It is extremely positive that all the books sought to present contents about African women in Ancient History, even though by means of scarce information.

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The book of the Inspire collection underlines the presence of Roman women at banquets, protests, and political campaigns, although they could not participate directly in Roman suffrage. So students may infer that even though female figures in certain societies had limited social functions, they created other forms of sociability in an attempt to circumvent certain rules.

In addition, contents about societies where women and men had a certain social equality, as well as information on different forms of female experience and sociability, enable students to disassociate the image of Ancient History as a period marked by “women’s oppression or submission”, as if their only roles were to take care of the children and be in charge of the domestic tasks.

Another point that should be mentioned is the didactic strategy of asking students to compare the situation of women from different times with the present, as in the case of the book of the Geração Alpha collection. Thanks to that method, students question gender issues in history and think about their own lives.

The Geração Alpha content about Athenian women highlights their various functions, depending on their social stratum; in mentioning Roman women, the book of the Inspire collection also stresses the same issue. In addition, the book of the Escola e Democracia collection asks students to compare Cleopatra played by Elizabeth Taylor in a famous movie with images of Egyptian female figures, so that they question her whitening. Such contents reveal that social class and race/ethnicity are categories that directly influence gender designs.

Therefore, even though the collections have many components of a conservative multicultural pedagogy, some of their contents used didactic strategies that lead students to measure and contextualize Women's History, in addition to understanding the historical processes of ruptures and permanences circumscribed to power relations, which constitute and build differences and unequal gender determinations.

Final conclusions

In the light of the above, it is noticeable that the books analyzed approach conservative multiculturalism, since few pages address women’s real life stories and gender issues in Ancient History; both topics are found in explanatory boxes, as if they were “an add on” to a supposed General History; another problematic point are some women’s visual depictions

that do not present an analysis to the students, becoming a mere illustrative resource.

However, the workbooks analyzed also have elements of critical multiculturalism, as they bring real life stories of peoples who had social equality between men and women, and contents on various forms of sociability and women's experiences beyond the “wife-mother-housewife” stereotype. In addition, the books make comparisons between different female functions according to their social status in a given society, what has the potential to promote reflections on the intersections of social class and gender.

Thus, even though they have approached the conservative multiculturalist perspective, the materials presented information, contents, strategies, and teaching methods which may promote reflections that inequalities and differences between men and women are not innate, but social constructs generated by asymmetric power relations. And, as cultural constructs, such inequalities can be deconstructed over time by means of a deeper understanding of how they are (re) produced in human experiences.

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