

History and Identity: Education in the Careers of the Teaching Department of Sciences of Education and Humanities of FAREM-CARAZO

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Abstract

This article frames up on the thematic axis of university investigation. It was carried out in the department of Education and Humanities of the Regional Multidisciplinary Faculty of Carazo of the UNAN-Managua, during the second semester of 2014. The goal of the investigation is to explain the sense of national identity that is wanted to be taught in the History of Nicaragua subject. In order to achieve such objective, the didactic triangle was analyzed comparatively: curriculum, teachers and students. Main conclusions were detected that each component assumes stereotypes according to identities, though the subject syllabus follows the regional historiographical trend.¹

Introduction

The teaching of national identity is a very discussed topic among historians, sociologists, anthropologists, pedagogues, etc. For some is the root of the defense of the national sovereignty understood according to the state nation, for some others, it is a topic that attempts against the principles of democracy, respect, interculturalism, tolerance with other nations, etc.

Despite this international debate and specially Latin-American over the topic, in Nicaragua only has been two outstanding works that point out the problem of the identities but at ethnical level, the one of García Bresó (2014)² and Gould (1997)³, both foreigner.

1. It is a historiographic trend born in the beginning of the XX century in France, by Paul Vidal de la Blanche, as a reaction against the positivist school by balancing the relation nature-man-environment, but it is actually the school of the *Annales* that went over most of the century that concluded and made great contributions to regional and local studies. In Latin America, it has been developed especially in Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Brasil and recently in Cuba. In the case of Nicaragua, it is the UNAN-Managua which commenced these experiences in 2003.

2. In one of the scientific article named "Cultural mechanics to keep the identity among Monimboseños of Nicaragua" resulting out of his doctoral thesis "The alienated conscience. Ethnicity in Nicaragua: Monimbo" it explains how the Monimbo culture has kept alive in despite of the alienation stigma and margination. Bresó concluded that ethnical identity is a cultural phenomenon submitted to fluctuations in time, whose higher or lower level of manifestation depends on the pressure done by the dominant culture.

3. Throughout his study: "The myth of mixed race Nicaragua", he questions the transformations of native communities into ladinos, due to the expropriation and privatization of their lands because of the development of the coffee industry in the north of Nicaragua. It shows the history of the native communities denied by Nicaraguan positivist historiography.

However, there is a bunch of books of History and Sociology of national authors that are the based for the teaching of national history in the classrooms both for intermediate level and university, however from a positivist point of view, except the basic text of the UNAN-Managua, written by Romero et al (2010), which is done under the influence of regional studies, but its limitation is that does not abandon the time linearity nor the political administrative division of the state, not understanding the own dynamics of each region.

As for Latin America, the list of investigations is long that concern for explaining the national identity of each country. It can be cited, for example, the studies of Arrollo Chinchilla et al (2014) and Salazar and Salazar (1998) who in their narratives shed light on the building of the national identity from different conceptual and temporal points of view, they talk about the objective, subjective and intersubjective identities to group up the studies done in Latin America.

However, only the study carried out in 2005 by Norabuena and Mancilla is born of methodological proposal done by Chilean students studying for teaching, whose objective is “identifying distinctive traces of the Chilean identity throughout its history and valuing the diversity of proposals and influences that have given shape to the national identity and the current manifestations of this reality”.

Internationally, we find studies done in Spain, that mostly have studied the identity and history binomial in classrooms, for example, Millares, Prats and Tatjer (2014) who studied the elements which limit or contribute to the integration and social cohesion of youngsters in multicultural societies. Another investigation of Millares (Gómez Carrasco y Millares Martínez, 2013), analyzes the persistence of politic history and the culturalistic trends about social history.

In general, the aids done by these investigations and some others not commented due to lack of space, will help understand the conceptions and representations that university students and teachers of the teaching department of education and humanities sciences of the FAREM Carazo, have regarding to their identification with the country, so then stablish the teaching-learning process in classrooms.

Regardless this, it is not possible to go on without clarifying two key concepts for this study: teaching of history and national identity, though it is unavoidable making clear it is not pretended to set dogmas definitions of each one; far from this, it wanted to make a reflection that describes their functions and goals in their context in the upper education.

In this sense, Salazar and Salazar (1998) and Cerutti and González (2008) when studying the identities gather them in three categories: objective, subjective and intersubjective. That is why Talavera, who is also cited by Canela and Moreno (2009) conceptualize the national identity as the subjective feeling of the individual that belongs to a concrete nation, to a unity in which it exists different elements that unify it and make it unique, for example, language, religion, culture, ethnical groups, etc., these are the actual objective elements this feeling of property to a national community is based on. However, the nationalism arose from this feeling, does not make much sense if there is not at least a social proposal, which is restated by Kinloch Tijerino (1999), when he says that “it prevails the belief that the individual possesses a unique, different and incomparable identity and it is that way it is also reproduced”.

Although the national identity has characteristics that define the mentioned authors, but there are another perspectives that have not been analyzed yet⁴: temporary nature, because the identity is dynamic; space, understanding inside the local context; social layers, since it obeys to how the nation is seen from each social group; and culture, because identity cannot be written under the glasses of cultural uniformity or imposed by means of the discourse of assimilation.

4. Authors like Arias Sandoval (2008) and Guevara (2015)

On the other hand, the authors: Funes (2010), Pagés (2002), Saiz Serrano and López Facal (2012) present the goals pursued by history in classrooms. In that case, Funes starts off with the question, what for? and why teaching History? and he answers himself "... there is no homogenous purposes for teaching", for his behalf, Pagés states that "...the syllabus of history and social sciences has tried to instil some values closely related to the ruling ideology" and finally, Saiz Serrano and López Facal write "...create a national identity, spreading a given interpretation of the past, which facilitates the assimilation of symbols and shared beliefs among people".

As can be seen, the mentioned authors –specially Pagés-, underlines the political role of the teaching of history, which has focused on reproducing factual acts, of the history of good and bad ones in which every student takes a stand, he or she feels kind or victim according to the event.

Understanding that the goals of history teaching and the identity are so diverse regarding to teachers, still so homogenous related to the current government is important; but it is also important to remember that functions, objectives and perspectives of both concepts have been defined, that will allow the appreciation of some aspects where these intertwine like meridians and parallels, in order to approach to an explanation of what is taught in the university classrooms, regarding to History of Nicaragua and National Identity.

Method

The investigation is qualitative-interpretative because it analyzes the emerged information of the participants. These express their ways of thinking and see the topic under studied, that besides it had to do with their contexts. This approach was also chosen due to the few investigations done in the country on this topic.

Additionally, it used the constant comparative method to separately analyzed each component of the didactic triangle (curriculum, teacher and teacher), but considering those converging points regarding to the topic of the national identity.

Consequently, the sample is varied, the units of different nature were evaluated: documents and participants. In the case of the first one, the subject syllabus and the observational journal were examined.

As for the participants, four teachers of History of Nicaragua and seventy-seven students of different majors of teaching department constituted this unit.

The tools and techniques used were: *the documental revision*, to examine the syllabi of the subjects with question such as: what is intended to be taught of History? and what for? *questionnaire with open questions* out of a historic atlas of own authorship, which shows the students thirty pictures of personalities, acts and trends of the national history that pretended to know the feeling and the imagination of the students in regard to national identity; the focus group, this technique permits to glimpse the conception of the teachers related to the national identity, as much from the vision of their program as from the vision the syllabus of the subject and finally; *the passive participant observation*, that helped understand the obtained results with contextualized examples.

The used method to analyze data was the theory based on Gasser and Strauss, since through induction it generates explicative theory of an investigated phenomenon. Besides, this method considers the perspective of the case rather than that of the variable. For this research it has been greatly functional, because it permitted defining main categories out of answers of students and teachers, even of the subject syllabus.

Some Results

The subject syllabus: what is intended to be taught.

Despite the fact that the syllabus intends a regional approach, what it does is to split the topics according to the country life's aspects, this program, besides sending a message of national identity, it transmits diverse identities; political, ethnical, regional and in some cases like in the unit II about the National State, it can influence –according to the teacher- on the formation of chauvinism rather than patriotism, in concordance to how it conjugates the concepts: sovereignty-identity-conflict-debate, specifically when referring to border problems of Nicaragua.

In the same way, it continues keeping attention to the most prominent political-military personalities, making them into stereotypes of national identity paying less attention to people as the maker of their own history excepting the last unity (Regions and Localities), which is the closer one to the development of the regional and local historiography intended by the syllabus, but the time provided is reduced, this unit is particularly important, because the student finds him/herself as part of the region and its history, which goes beyond the national scope when the regional reality gets contextualized.

Therefore, in the syllabus a subjective sense of identity prevails, dominated by the political-ideological factor and only presents history sources as objective means of identity.

Teachers: approximation of what is taught about national identity.

Teachers think the most important to teach in the subject of History is the national identity; though, each one tries to use different means such as culture, politics or economy, which coincide with the syllabus structuration, in consequence, they take the unit they feel more identified with and empower it.

The tendency of teachers to teach this content of history in one or another way, does not match to what they themselves consider as most important for students, so they leave it to the end of the course (Regions and Localities), where students can only focus on themselves, because they feel they are protagonists.

The element teacher-syllabus agree on politic personalities, and between teacher-student those are the cultural stereotypes. The duality shown is not discriminatory, it is just that two kind of national identity explanations mix up: the political and the cultural perspective. The political one corresponds to a subjective identity, marked by the political-ideological factor, and the cultural explanation frames up in an objective identity, marked by symbolic elements of culture.

At the same time, another phenomenon happens: teachers who opt for cultural aspects like identitarian symbols, they limit themselves to the country borders and particularly to the Pacific region and who states that politic and economic elements spread the sense of identity with the Latin American region. In any case, not only the intersubjectivity of the national identity, that would highlight the regional history proposed in the subject syllabus, though it is not able to achieve.

Students: approximation of what is learned about national identity

Students identify themselves with cultural stereotypes such as El Güegüense and in a lower level with politic-military personalities and conflicts. However, the most important they have learned in class –according to their answers- is the topic of the conflicts, especially the warlike ones, such as the San Jacinto Battle and the Revolución Popular Sandinista. Possibly, in the syllabus of the subject, nationalism and patriotism are linked to themes like aborigine resistance, border issues, domination

and intervention; explosive combination they exalt “the confrontation and contradiction”.

In their answers, students express that all the topics are important to feel themselves identified like Nicaraguan; although, they see politics and politicians as the harms that damage society; besides they feel alienated from that social class, in other words, their identity is more social or cultural.

There is a clear awareness in the students, regarding to the role of history related to the identity building; what it might not have clear is what kind of identity the History subject intends to construct, reaffirm, or instil. This is explainable, because the syllabus wants a regionalist trend, but most of the identity which wants to teach is political-ideological, on the other hand, students feel more attraction for cultural values, although they remain in the stereotypes, denying consciously or unconsciously “the others”.

Out of this, it can be deduced that students make sense to history-identity relationship, when they seek the profitability of the history knowledge and their own costumes.

Conclusion

1. The syllabus of the subject tries to shape up with a regional approach and it achieves it in the last unit, but it ended up showing a linear history with each aspect of the nation life. It is true the syllabus promotes the national identity, but focusing on political-subjective aspects, related with political personalities and in the resistance fight and national sovereignty defense, rather than the region and its own dynamic.
2. As for the professors and considering they are not majored on History, they assume the aspect of the nation life (cultural, political or economic) of the syllabus they identify themselves with, not taking a Historiographic trend, in this particular case, with the regional and local history. This makes the national identity teaching pay more emphasis on some points than others; sometimes showing subjective identities and in some other cases taking objective identities, missing the sense of wholeness, in this matter, of the intersubjective identity.
3. Students understand national identity by means of a system of stereotypes, especially cultural ones like El Güegüense and in classroom they reaffirm these stereotypes or they complement them with others of politic or economic kind, which have an impact on the denying of “the others”. However, they show the need of feeling more identified with the national history, in its different facets –the closer one to their reality- as shown in the collection of pictures of the album on History used as tool.
4. The sense of national identity that is then being taught, tends for national identity homogenization, paying less attention to the particularity and dynamic of each region. Combined with the syllabus of the subject, ruled by the political-ideological factor, with a great influence of nationalism and patriotism. And on the other hand, the conceptions of the teachers, because they also have a sense of identification with the country emerging to aspects either cultural, political or economic, but in none of the regional cases, it means, the understanding of man-environment-space in its totality and complexity. This determines the lack of coherence in the didactic triangle, related to concept of national identity.

Recommendations

- It is important to share this investigation with the teachers of UNAN-Managua, especially with those who are in charge of elaborating the syllabus and curriculum transformation.
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- It should be published through the means (magazines, congresses, etc.) that allow a theoretical discussion about the investigated topic (history and identity) and the relation with the regional historiography.
- It is necessary to continue with the trainings for teachers who teach History, but the content of these trainings not only should assess the development the syllabus of the subject, but also it should update the knowledge about regional history methodology.
- Revise how the basic concepts of the social sciences are included in the syllabus of History (identity, conflict, peace culture, democracy, etc.) from the regional perspective.

The above asks us two key questions that could generate two possible researches:

- How the historiography in the syllabi of the subject of Nicaraguan History has evolved, at the UNAN-Managua?
- With so many historiographic shall, a didactic especially for the regional and local historiography has to be developed?

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