

Mother tongue: more than a metaphor; a feminine toil on letters

Socorro Corrales Carvajal

Universidad del Cauca, Colombia / scorrales@unicauca.edu.co

Abstract: In line with our internal monologues, which according to Virginia Woolf, are efficient instruments to transmit the flow of modern consciousness, three recent investigations show that the school, in its ontological meaning, should not be distant from the new map courses that mark the word's world and in it, that of women. A world in which also, we the women, have dreamt of that if we know how to read and write, the subjugation and exclusion are only legacies from a well-gone past. One investigation is about the reading and writing behavior of the students who enroll in "La Universidad de Cauca"; the other is about the impact of war on women, which was carried out by La Ruta Pacifica de Mujeres de Colombia; and the third one, co-financed by Colciencias, where I work as a researcher, is called Senses and social uses of reading and writing in Spanish on La Licenciatura de Etnoeducación de la Universidad del Cauca.

Key words: women, monologue, school, modernity, subjectivity.

Resumen: A la luz de los monólogos interiores que, según Virginia Woolf (1971: 13), son instrumentos eficaces para transmitir el flujo de la conciencia moderna, tres investigaciones recientes muestran que la escuela, en su acepción ontológica, no debe estar ajena a los nuevos derroteros que nos marcan el mundo de las letras y en él, el de las mujeres. Mundo en el que, también, las mujeres hemos soñado que si sabemos leer y escribir, la sumisión y la exclusión sólo son rezagos de un lejano bien pasado. Una investigación es sobre el comportamiento lector y escritor de los estudiantes que ingresan a la Universidad del Cauca; otra, sobre el impacto de la guerra en las mujeres, realizada por la Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres de Colombia; y la tercera, cofinanciada por Colciencias, en la que fui coinvestigadora: "Sentidos y usos sociales de la lectura y la escritura en español en la Licenciatura de Etnoeducación de la Universidad del Cauca".

Palabras clave: mujeres, monólogo, escuela, modernidad, subjetividad.

Paradox or historic aporia¹

If we conceive and assume modernity as the par excellence paradigm that has made knowledge be considered one of the intangible capitals in the construction of democracy, it is plausible that we accept that school, in its ontological acceptance, should not be alien to the new courses which lead the world of letters and in it, that of women; a modern world where we women have also dreamt that if we know how to read and write, submission and exclusion are only drawbacks of a far-off past. Although the present, which currently changes into ultra-modernity, in no few occasions and circumstances opposes the dreams to reality and prevents the interior monologue from transcending into society.

Without falling into an apology, a defense at all costs, in this article I try to show our role, the role of women in the processes of familiarization with the linguistic code and, by means of it, being able to access school as a way of equitable participation in the construction and flow of knowledge, in the permanent recreation of reality by means of the utopias to aspire to freedom. I would like, then, to reflect on what reveals itself as a paradox or historic aporia: the access of women to school has been a social claim that nowadays has placed us, fortunately, before gender studies, not that all of these studies imply that all of the discriminations are overcome or that women pretend that gender studies are the social panacea. Let us remember with Edgar Morin (1990) that there is not such a thing as a queen science, or that school and literacy alone solve the large social asymmetries; asymmetries that are delivered to the light in the three researches I am based upon for this article, with argumentations in favor of a reflection far beyond the scholar, yet where school becomes a referent of high cultural esteem.

This is an article, being cooked I do not know how long, which has been food for my thought for some six years, ever since the boom of reading and writing began to settle in the University of Cauca, and as from then, the nascent Group of Reading and Writing inquired on the culture of reading of those who were beginning a major, or those who perhaps did not imagine

¹ Advancement of the research project "Meanings and social uses of reading and writing" (*Sentidos y usos sociales de la lectura y la escritura*), Colciencias code 1103-10-17932, contract 273-2005.

that in such a space of knowledge —the University— they had to be enrolled into a subject that does not or did not enjoy good manners; on the contrary, marked by a sort of weariness that in the school wiped or disfigured the magical nights of a text narrated in the heat of a hearth or beside a town river, that restrained running on the streets and reading any notice we came across. The school thus became the place that fixed said dramatic moment of letting off the maternal hand in order to begin to study. In any case, why in University a subject that already sounded like national history.

Nevertheless, as a good antinomy to reading and writing, as well in a gradual manner, in moderation, with good and steady hand, we granted it a place of honor, and this is one of our greatest teaching challenges: making see, realizing that reading and writing are social practices and not natural neither instrumental procedures. In tune with Walter Ong (1994), reading and writing are the technologies of the intellect which enable knowledge to flow beyond our contexts, our realities to transcend, ancestral knowledge to last, individual audacities to make science and people advance. Nonetheless the professors' challenge — of professing, of having faith in what we do— is even greater. In addition to exaltation, animosity, and recognition that reading and writing are fundamental in the processes of formation, we must accompany, we must guide, we must orient how to know to read and how to know write. In this respect George Steiner (2001: 35) tells us:

If we take our job seriously, we will have to teach to read. We will have to teach it from the humblest level of rectitude, from the analysis of a sentence, the grammatical diagnose of a proposition, the measure of a verse, through its multiple layers of representative means and referential suppositions, to that ideal of complete collaboration between what is written and the reader exposed by Peguy. We will have to learn to proceed, step by step, almost from the dyslexia of the current student's reading habits to that enigmatic act of penetrating elucidation where the meaning of the passage is perceived and as a mater of fact "it is read between the lines", as Heidegger exemplifies in his readings of Hölderlin.

In other words, we should teach to tune heart and hand in order to make flow what is inside, what burns in the head, what beats and too often it is not known how to express it and mainly how to write it. Reading and writing understood as social practices which put the emotional, the cultural, and the intellectual into practice, and that all of this has to be expressed in accordance with the language, such system deemed as simple as we speak it without major problems, and that system is connatural to individual and collective identity. Language is part of our everyday lives; we can change religion, partner, food preferences, political party, however, not our mother tongue. Mother tongue is our second skin, the whispering voice of our conscience; which then implies,

that in order write it is fundamental to find our particular look on the subject we want to write about; it is indispensable, besides, to have strategies to perceive, feel and summarize texts which are going to help us support our statement and discover the logic of our mother tongue; this is to say, that which as a mother originates, shelters and takes in the growth of our ideas, so that we become able to express them with certain clarity, with certain distrustful tone but convincing, with certain effectiveness and affectivity (Arango and Corrales, 2005: 8).

The voice of the mother (the tongue) has placed us in orbit, has placed us in that traveling world of duty, difficulty, responsibility in the school processes.

As an instance, this intellectual necessity of reading and writing, and by and large, of how to make public our thoughts and academic requirements, an intellectual need that is at the time an emotional, carnal and social expression; a chemistry female professor once invited me to a workshop so that I helped a group of youths who wanted to be trained, which I would rather say be premiered, to present their degree accomplishment work and were indeed afraid since they did not know how to do it and the male professor who directed them warned them ironically that maybe they could not give an account for so many scientific terms, as the work consisted in, to a large extent, reading some journals and explain their contents. The result from the workshop was for me an overwhelming affirmation of the

fear we can put upon others when that which prevails is making feel that knowledge grants power of manipulation and not authorship and professional ethics. The female students of said group dare to confess that they sweated much more because they were not taught to speak in public; they also said they had spent nights awake in order to study and ignore what their fate will be; and when they were in front of the male professor they could not modulate, they forgot everything, their legs trembled. This micro-tales make it evident it is that our entire being that which acts when we want to learn. It is a pity that reading and writing were not experienced in this case as marvelous experiences, but as intimidating.

From such an initial reasoning, this is to say, from the aporia or historic parody of valuing and recognizing what we women have meant in societies, of what writing has meant for the peoples' development, which does not mean that all of the discriminations are overcome to be translated as processes of learning more genuine and less dogmatizing, I want to reflect on what for us, women, represent reading and writing as emotional, cognitive, social and cultural dimensions. Dimensions that allow us to set up and outline with our daughters and sons, new ways to relate with each other, to exercise our citizenship, to learn and defend our rights; and to feel ourselves, indulge ourselves and dissent with the letters, with our culture.

Knowing how to read and write does not resolve the historic social injustice toward women, however, it has indeed allowed us to self-value; it does make us think and dream of a world where the physical, mental and social role we women have hold and mainly, achieved, provides us with presence, coexistence, resistance and persistence. Accomplishments and dreams not free from contradictions to see and understand that dissidence, otherness and discrimination are not only in the ethnic, in the religious, in the political; dissidence, otherness and discrimination occur every day: they are at the school, in the neighborhood, at home, in the partner relations, in the book, in the classroom, in each one of us. In words by Agnes Heller (1982: 121): "history became to me the history of the world of life"; eternal proximities that sometimes we do not want to see or in which we have been trained, subtly and unconsciously, to do not see.

Pre-ethnography?: tell me about your life

With this wordplay or concept-play (the ethnography and speaking on our lives) permitted by the intellectual chess: the language I allude to two research possibilities that are foreseen as two methodological options to explore and analyze quotidian life around reading and writing, in the case I am concerned about, women's quotidian life. Ethnography and histories of life are currently research resources with full validity that help us (or at least that is my intention) support, illustrate, back-up, inquire, relate our personal experiences (please continue searching for the verbs that can give an account of what I say) either they are domestic, professional, public or private. Tell me about your life (*Cuéntame tu vida*) was a publication in Cali, Colombia, which in the seventies circulated in Colombia and which I used to sell in a bookstore called El Zancudo (the only one that against the gringo could do nothing). In that space of economic rummage—the bookstore—I fed in a fascinating way my reading spirit. There was no book, before being sold, upon which my hands and eyes had not been set; and it, in an insinuating way told me it had a lot for me. What a pain when someone bought the book that I read and I could not afford, as I handed it I felt as though some part of me left (NB with so many I's and first persons who can interdict objectivity). Reading and writing also contribute to our egotism, yet that sort of egotism is, partly, our subjectivity. According to Alain Touraine (2005: 201), subjectivity is above things the world of individualism, or more precisely, an invocation to personal freedom.

Now, thirty years later and that El Zancudo Bookstore and *Tell me about your life* are just part of the invisible history of Colombia and Popayán, and that reading and writing are social and pedagogical challenges; and I am a professor of reading and writing, I understand what I used to do as I opened the boxes of books: I read the front and back pages, who wrote it, the index, the introduction, the bibliography (in order to learn to order new books, to learn new authors—the language had not yet been feminized, at least for me—) this is what is called cognitive strategies, and whoa! Those initial reading exercises indeed help to work on the text and hence sow ourselves with more doubts and uncertainties, yet above things to learn

whether that book shares with me questions and vital dilemmas. If there is someone who thinks as I do, if someone experiences the same as I do, if when I read and do not find myself in the texts, when my experience is different, singular, I learn that ideas are even contrary to mine, divergent thoughts discover for me, reveal the human complexity and language immensity unto me. From that viewpoint of subjectivity, reading and writing break dogmas and make what we frequently invoke as a condition of democracy evident for us: difference and otherness; new names or new realities?

Tell me about your life, that sort of magazine, if I remember clearly in black covers which I smelt, and still smell of apple, enlightened me ever since and more intensely than the lives of women did not have in the world the same place it has in men's lives. Or rather, the same place was a row and a sort of privileges, we women quite difficulty, were able to aspire. And I say that the magazine enlightened me with more intensity, because at home, before adventuring onto marriage, in spite my four brothers carried out house chores such as ironing, brooming, sweeping, cooking, for instance, were able, without a problem, to leave in the evenings to play and at the weekends to go dancing; something which was not possible for the four daughters, including me.

Tell me about your life, similarly to *The half of heaven: My life* by Isadora Duncan, Simone de Beauvoir with *The woman destroyed*, Oriana Fallaci with *Letter to a child never born*, a book that I do not know why in my initial house I had under my pillow, and when my father found it out I was told off. The books I managed to pay with my scant incomes and that I read in the time clients, no, readers leave for me. During time I stole from sleep, from diapers and feeding bottles, from the small and fortunately rebel Salomé, from Esteban who sometimes reminds me he is no retarded because of my alleged moments of abandonment. They are pillow books which ever since that itinerant and hippy-like school of El Zancudo became my companions unfaithful to that submissive mentality the country tradition inculcated in me.

With and because of the books, as well, I have learnt to understand that prejudices are tesserae of that immense mosaic called patriarchal culture,

yet the more I understand it the less I accept. Or it is because I understand that culture is androcentric I cannot validate it. With this observation I support my civil disobedience upon the American dancer Isadora Duncan (1992: 33), on whom I have taken shelter and inspiration more than once:

I was deeply impressed by the injustice women suffered and relating my readings with the history of my father and mother I decided, for once and for all, to consecrate my life to fight against marriage and in favor of women and their rights to have one or several children when they please without wasting their honor.

This Isadora Duncan's passage and all of the passages I took from my readings, from my experience in the work with women, reinforce that patriarchy is not exclusive of a region. My books, the unfaithful and unconditional books I draw to when I prepare workshops for women to donate them my history and for other women to knit with me a new vision and version of what we women are and want to be. Because of those urge and conviction I am elated that the project Colciencias was conducted by five women, and that the histories of life that I wove was also with two women.

My racking with books has become a passion, my intellectual and emotional caudal. Books and emotions, which nowadays with the research on meanings and uses of reading and writing, are entwined and make me bring back my history, make me see in each student, man or woman, a circular story, an eternal question, a special history that seems like mine or one in the read books, however they are not the same. Each paragraph is made up from that bunch of ideas that sprout from the lived and read histories, that is why I can not boast about originality, I only arrogate to the right to the book and my infinite satiety I enjoy at the marvel of learning and tasting what the letters contain is the content of the world. However, at the same time, it hurts that we do not become aware of that historic verification which has allowed, with so very few signs (alphabet), us to continue fabling, confabulating and telling what we are and look for a better humanity. Because of that lack of awareness-acquiring on the transcendence

of having an alphabet, with writing, we blame it lightly on grammar, on the writing of inhibiting out imagination and our learning.

What has been thus far stated, besides, has allowed me to understand that ethnography is more than a technique; it is an ontological dimension of reality. Ethnography is cultural narrative, it is a multiplied I, it is the I's *ad infinitum*; the wild eyes but camouflaged to observe, to look again. Thanks to ethnography, to the histories of life, I can extrapolate my history, I can narrate what I have heard and lived. All in all, what I have researched is my own history related to many other more histories. Ethnography has left its anthropologic shell and enters into every discipline. Two experts in the topic begin one of their texts with the following reflection:

The contemporary debate on the anthropologic text and on the ethnographic authority has permitted the ontological displacement of ethnography from its foundational conception as a method to its consideration as textualization. This displacement has two implications: in the first place, it has challenged the hegemony of the disciplinary practice based upon the totalitarianism of the methodology and expert narratives; in the second place: it has showed that ethnography is not a neutral intermediary in the process of knowledge but an active agent in the creation of "reality" (Gnecco and Gómez, 2005).

What is more, ethnography, histories of life are melted in personal narratives, in subjective constructions of reality. Jorge Larrosa (1998), one of my favorite authors nowadays, summarizes what I say: we are a mysterious entity that is related to that particular and omnipresent discursive genre narrative is. How the meaning of what we are or who we are depends on the histories we tell and we tell each other, and in particular of those narrative constructions where each one of us are authors and narrators. Personal histories have been recreated and retransmitted in different social practices through what we hear and read are our reason of being. Life is a gigantic and polyphonic narrative conversation, and culture a swarm of histories.

Crossed meanings in researches

This article is a metaphor of the work on the meanings we women provide reading and writing with. A metaphor that crosses and draws the conceptions I glance in the ethnographies and histories of life which are told, transcribed, read and lived. A Metaphor which through reading and writing processes verifies that part of the transformation of women in societies. A metaphor for these histories of life represent, symbolize and knit emotional and social universes (Corrales, 2005: 64).

In the introduction to the report on the research: “reading and writing behavior of the students who enter University of Cauca”, developed in the year 2000 by the Group of Reading and Writing, it is noticed:

For the qualitative analysis of the research, we assume reading and writing as vital meaningful processes, such as social practices and forms of action in human beings’ life through its winding roads or in few cases pleasurable which transcend the school, family, the “boasting”. In any case, the confines of the universe of each of the guys and gals whom we approach through their autobiographies, stories, adventures and misadventures with books (Arango *et al.*, 2000: 8).

In the analysis of the data of the aforementioned research, it is noteworthy:

As one inquires on the educational levels of the mothers we found that 8.9% did not complete the elementary studies; 19.6% accomplished elementary school; 18.5% did not accomplish secondary school; 28.6% accomplished secondary; only 12.5% accomplished university studies and 7.1% has accomplished postgraduate studies. The addition of the first five data shows that 78.6% of the mothers accomplished between complete elementary school and incomplete university studies, whereas fathers show 73.7%; data that make it evident a more educational effort from women.

Said research provide us with narrations of students, men and women, on those who were the people that accompanied them in the process of learning the alphabet and with it, the entrance into the world of books. Let us see two fragments of their autobiographies:

It was my mother who read for me at night. She did not know how to read but had a good memory and could retain ideas and develop in my mind that whole environment where the history of the characters unfolded (*Heriberto, student of Biology*).

I believe nowadays I must thank my teachers, Bernadina and Lilia T., and my mother, the fact that I like reading and writing so much, although during my high school I despised Spanish so much because it was very monotonous and by-heart (*Claudia Margarita, student of Physiotherapy*).

Likewise, on reading and writing, profuse are the testimonies of women in the research “The effects of the armed conflict in the lives of women and their forms of resistance”. A research designed and executed by the Pacific Route of the Women from Colombia (*Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres de Colombia*), during June 2003 and March 2004. This Colombian research was carried out in the departments of Cauca, Putumayo, Chocó, and in the city of Medellin. The objective of the research was to “document”, from a feminist approach the effects of the armed conflicts on the personal, familial and communal life of urban, Afro-Colombian and indigenous women and on their role as social and/or political actresses.

The following part comes from a female indigenous governor, one of the few women who in the year 2000 hold said charge, and who asked for anonymity:

My mother was never able to decide on money. He —my dad— made us all work; we worked cleaning the coffee shrubs and picking in times of harvest, sowing yucca and everything which grew. Mainly my mother, because my father not, my father preferred us to work and be slaves for him and do not attend school, and my mother wanted we to study because it could be useful for us.

Mila the oldest of the five indigenous women who took part in the research and who has a broad trajectory in communal works and has participated for more than 15 years in trainings on women's rights, painfully remembers:

My dad made decisions and said the only ones who had to study were men, saying that women were to do the housework and to serve our future husbands. My memories go until the nine years my mom lived from then on all was my dad. I felt that the intention was that men had to study because women were to serve their husband and that was the reason why he did not allowed us to study.

In this research I did not have the intention to research on what knowing how to read and write have meant for the women and their families; however, for the case of the Department of Cauca, the five interviewed indigenous women coincide on speaking on the subject and also emphasize the desire that their children know how to read and write so that they are not deceived and become able to study, God willing, university, and do not suffer as they did.

As an exemplification and preliminary conclusion, other contributions of the histories of life state what being able to read and write means for indigenous women, and how they insist and make whatever possible so that women become able to study. The following narration is from the youngest indigenous woman who took part in the research on the impact of the armed conflict on the lives of women.

Both made decisions at home, but my mom insisted on education. What is more, I had a godmother who lived in the same town I now live, and she wanted my parents to give me away to her so that she could place me to study, however my parents did not want, even though I did. Of all my sisters I was the most studious, I did not fail a single school year, I reached third grade, but later I was denied the study since there was not enough money to afford it. I have a natural sister in Cali, who has graduated now; she was the one my mom gave away so that she could continue studying and she was given study, and I that studied until third they did not want to give me away

anymore. Nonetheless, my daughters by any means, when they are at school age by any means, I will make them study. Nowadays I put them to write pages and I read everything that falls into my hands and I tell them we women must study to make progress. Although their father is very responsible, it is always me the one who tells him we must be attentive for our daughters to study.

The indigenous woman from Resguardo de Pitayó remembers it was her mom the one who was always attentive so as she could study:

My childhood was not so nice, my dad and mom were a very poor family, they lived with my grandparents, my father's side, I lived more with my grandmother than with my parents, in the two years I lived with my grandmother, she taught me to speak Nasa Yuwe, my mother tongue, and I got back to my dad and mom when I was seven because I had to start attending school and my mom went to pick me up at my grandmother's.

Out of the five indigenous women, one of them self-recognizes as an ex-combatant, and her own words on school:

The money the family earned was very little because neither my mom nor dad lived on a salary but on what the land yielded; they sold that and with that they bought salt and panela. Sugar and rice back then were unknown to us. More exactly, back then they were kind of special, what we ate the most was maize, broad beans, ullucoes, wheat, barley, that which was produced there; virtually what was bought was salt, coffee, and panela. When we grew up the only thing my mom had in mind was to send us to school because she wanted us to study indeed. My mom, I remember she told my dad: "you are a faint-hearted man, be a man", because in life, in spite of being a very good person and all, his only worry was food but he did not say 'the child is now in age to study'.

Despite adversities, among them discrimination because of gender, we women have played an important role in the processes of alphabetic reading; we have motivated to read the world through books, our tales, our experiences. Books and experiences make it possible that memory lives longer and the school referent be present, even in women who did not have

any possibility to study. A referent which begins to be visible valued and modified because of millenary struggles and processes of feminine claims.

Fernando Savater, a philosopher, one of the Spanish intellectuals currently famous, and frequently cited in formal Colombian education, calls one's attention in his book *The Value of educating* (*El valor de educar*) (undated 7) on the fact that teaching, mostly at the elementary level, was until recently, a feminine task, and in spite of historical evidence, the world and its processes are still mentioned more in masculine. Nevertheless, Savater also emphasizes that we attempt to educate well when we, men and women, have been educated so badly. As Savater coins, we educate badly, among other reasons because the biological differences are unequally ranked, they are ranked with the differences of opportunity. I consider this elemental reflection has not been recognized in its transforming effect.

Notwithstanding, feminine incursion in the educational has not taken place in the initial processes of socialization, nor in the elemental educational levels. Nowadays, and long ago, the numbers of women in university give an account of the enormous efforts made to open our ways and train in order to enter into all of the fields and sciences.

In accordance with information from the Ministry of Education (*Ministerio de Educación*), in 2002 there were circa 924181 male/female enrolled students in some pre-degree program, 51.4% were women and 48.6% men. The largest feminine presence in higher education has been a constant in recent years. Between 1988 and 1996 feminine enrollment has been larger than that of males; however as from 1994 the difference between the enrollment rate of men and women tends to decrease (Pérez, 1998). Graduation rates are also higher among women; data from the Ministry show that in 2002, 109369 students graduated from university, 46.3% were men and 53.7% were women. Even if data on enrollment and permanence in higher education favor women, it is also a historical trend to find them concentrated in "typically feminine" majors, this is to say, those related to social service and care for others; the number of male enrolled, on the contrary, is concentrated in "masculine" majors such as engineering. This trend was still present in 2003, when 49% of women were interested in taking social sciences and law careers and 15% in careers such as architecture; 45% percent of men preferred architecture,

engineering, and others alike and 23% opted for social sciences and law (Fuentes and Holguín, 2006: 174).

Paths, trainings to research, to inquire into fields believed of masculine dominion and plagued by stereotypes. In this respect, Silvia Galvis (1996: 110) presents in an interview with the gynecologist Cecilia Cardinal, born in 1942, the following:

I started medicine with my parents' approval but not so for the rest of the relatives which deemed it as a career for men. In the course we were 110 students, and only two women: Georgina de Gaitán, a marvel of a woman, who started married, and me. The reception from the students was excellent, which apparently was not the usual. As a matter of fact, some five women had graduated before and all of them complained about the treatment. I do not know what happened, but my course must have been different because I have nothing to complain about my classmates. They made antics, of course, in the first days we were escorted and applauded from the moment we stepped on the faculty until we took a seat in the classroom, but that was nothing.

Conversely, the professors were absolutely horrible; from the first day, I remember one calling the roll. When he reached Cardinal, Cecilia made an expression of horror and said: A woman! Who are you? I answered back, well Cardinal, Cecilia and he uttered: what you are is an abortion of nature because a woman who enrolls in any faculty of medicine is neither a woman nor anything. I swear that as long as I am professor in this university, you are not going to graduate. He almost did so. He demanded me three times as much as the rest of the students.

Other professors were totally different. They were so indulgent that they ended up treating us as though we were retarded... all in all I cannot say things were so difficult in the school. Real discrimination began to be noticed when I specialized, when I appeared at the call and I ranked second in the score...

As we see, many are the historical resistances we have so as education and language are not sexist. We need that from these facts and discursive referents —language and education— we bet on a communicative ethics in the framework of critical transformation we say formation is; critical in the

sense of shaping criteria for relations, if not harmonious, at least not aggressive, not asymmetric in the valuing and in the actions.

By and large, Magallón arguments (2001), we can say that thoughts and values arise from life, conceived in a broad sense: what we do, love, value, pursue and dream of; the relationships we establish between us, as people, as social groups, as countries, labor, all that makes up a way of living has its reflection and elucidates a way of thinking.

The previous quotations allow inferring that feminine education does not have heavy influences on the transformations of the cultures, since conceptions and visions on women are of underestimation, complementariness, exclusion. We women are not alien to the effect of culture; consequently, also, by means of our mother tongue women and men reproduce what for centuries has been claimed. We women are part of the culture, we are culture. Because of that cultural reason and because we want to foster other ways of being and making, speaking and thinking, many a women raise our voice and propose different mental schemas that take us out of the historical ostracism which the structures of the patriarchal system wanted to put us under. System which by means of the radical feminism of the difference we want to resist. Radical for we will be or are in need to go to the roots of the problems. Resist with Simone de Beauvoir at the front, who supported and spread that by nature we women are not pacific; neither are men by nature violent. Women and men alike are cultural constructions; we are the multiple histories of discrimination and exclusion. What occurs is that men and women are different; differences that have been equaled to inequalities.

The ones of the difference, we, were rather nonconformists, slightly tending to being hippies, those of the difference have grown in numbers such as mushrooms and go sowing the seeds in many small places, where not only is the change of structures and basic rights still sought, but also change in women. It is an agriculturists' policy (that is why we cultivate, because of the culture) [parentheses mine] who toil in the small orchards of the thousand transformations. We sow and sow in the knowledge that it will be fruitful, although we are still invisible (Sendón: 2002: 15).

In virtue of the radical feminism of the difference, we are the very women those who at the fact of becoming aware that it is not convenient to continue being relegated, made invisible, break barriers and schemas. These ruptures must be supported, analyzed, visible and promulgated in the formal and informal educational processes, as part of the new versions of social and political history of the nations.

In the three researches whereupon I support this article, women who have donated their histories, think and dream that attending school and to have a profession guarantee a respectful treatment, vain an illusion! Injustice, regardless the years of study may be many, is still an illusion, a utopia. We need to change from utopias to pragma-topias in order to make our dreams places and territories of emancipating practices. Thus, either we knew how to read and write women's discrimination and exclusion is one of the four large concerns of the world. Nonetheless, reading and writing have indeed permitted generating greater awareness of what this gender discrimination implies; in this sense, the promulgation and defense of women's rights has gained terrain in the social sphere, therefore in the educational one. There is still a long way to go, nevertheless.

Rightfully, in 1995 UN wielded as an element for the analysis of the IV World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, that gender equality would be achieved within another 500 years of resistance, belligerence and training of women in the whole world (Beijing + 5, 2000). Before such a desolating panorama, the question that arose was: why to continue hoisting feminism as the flag of change and equity? Every cultural change is slow, modifying the imaginaries is reached at the pace of a tortoise; it is reached sowing, pruning, and harvesting every day what we are at saying and making: reading and writing are expressions of our makings, of our transformations, as petty as they be.

The monologues or internal dilemmas

In the project “Meanings and social uses of the processes of reading and writing in Spanish language in the Ethno-education Major of the University of Cauca” (*Sentidos y usos sociales de los procesos de lectura y escritura en español en la Licenciatura en Etnoeducación de la Universidad del Cauca*), we started from recognizing and “adopting” that ethnography has a triple meaning: approach, method and text. Consequently, speaking of ethnography, making ethnography is approaching a reality to reveal its relations, tensions and details. It is to achieve narrating, describing, a determinate reality according to the very words and/or conceptions of those who live it. Starting from said description-narration, ethnography is a recollection, a critical, reflexive and ethic analysis that allows the interlocution between that who researches and those who concede having their lives and their histories examined. Hence, ethnography is an inter-subjective process that enables textualizing (documenting) cultural dynamics around a certain experience and/or feeling. To sum up, into ethnography reading, writing and research come together.

Juanita, a student of ethno-education, also co-researcher of said work, has her history of life: “at the moment reading has several connotations for me; on the one side, it is the opportunity to learn, to self-assure, to question myself; on the other side, it is an instant of intimacy with everything I am in relation to what I read” (Vesga: 2006).

In this ethnographic process where numberless histories act, the interior monologue of women arises with strength to become the echo of what we think and desire, however so difficult to narrate. When narrating is achieved it is difficult to be valued without a prejudice, without stereotypes, deprived from the androcentric view, of the repressing purpose or unconscious repressor. Estela, an indigenous female student of the Major in Ethno-education, recalls:

For me it was very hard to learn to speak Spanish, I was constantly punished when I was unable to pronounce the vowels, the letter o, in that moment I was punished. Nevertheless, in spite of everything, learning Spanish was very important for me because I learnt to read and write, as it is when I started grasping what Spanish is, I began to understand other people who spoke in

Spanish; all that we have to live at the school, community, and now at University (Hurtado, 2006).

The previous fragments illustrate possibilities, imaginaries, school practices; they illustrate meanings and social uses of reading and writing. They illustrate, from my viewpoint, the aporias or paradoxes I hereby refer to. Let us think for some time of the dilemma of this indigenous woman to survive the linguistic and cultural isolation. It is with our mother tongue that we communicate what we think, that we express what culture through family, church, community have indicated us. Yet it is also with our mother tongue that we become able to translate other languages, other contexts, sentiments, feelings, contradictions. Virginia Woolf (1971:13) an emblematic writer, not only because her contributions to feminism, but because she was a highlight of letters, of literature; she states that the interior monologue turned out to be an efficacious device for her to probe the darkness of the consciousness and manage to unify it with the data delivered by the external world.

Let us look once again at how Estela alludes, from her interiority, to her mother tongue:

Now as a professor, as I have always liked mother tongue, so that it never ends. Then, I give lessons on mother tongue and as it happened to me, the same happens to the students, because I speak Nasayuwue and they do not understand me; I say well this same happened to me, as you do not understand my Nasayuwue, I did not understand Spanish; I speak two languages, I tell them: look it reads this and that, I tell them in Nasayuwue, but in Spanish it reads this and that. Thus, the students understand; they understand a lot, there one sees help from one another. If I did not know Spanish how I would tell them. Now the strengthening, the ability to read and write is important because I tell tem: look here in Nasayuwue it reads this but in Spanish it reads that, so the students understand easily.

With the professor of Spanish I am attempting to work together to find out how, in which way, so that we have contacts between Nasayuwue and Spanish.

Moreover, Estela stresses in her history of life, in several of her findings which have called my attention. Findings where the meanings and social uses of writing emerge, for instance letters and diaries; these meanings and uses of writing, apparently obsolete, are indeed important. Letters and diaries, despite being disused due to the new technologies, have meant a lot in the feminine processes of communication and socialization. These meanings and uses of writing still survive in the women to speak of their monologues and dilemmas.

Juanita when interviewing Eli Ruby, on her interlocution as a student of Ethno-education and as a co-researcher, marvels at this sudden appearance. “[...] about the diaries, but the diaries, the one by Eliruby, because let’s say, one would think they are from a time that’s bygone and that are rather of urban communities, not of peasant or indigenous communities. It calls my attention, I like that datum as it is now unusual to find a person... who has a diary, who keeps a diary”.

These senses and use of writing illustrate and confirm discrimination, not only because of being women, but also because of professing another religion. The weight of church in the social imaginaries due to its intrusion, especially, in indigenous communities has prevented education in Colombia from having, at least, a laic meaning.

My mom, the parents that did not like their children to attend school as women only learnt to write letters to the guys. Then, my mother told me that her parents never let her attend school. And also the problem was that my grandparents were Evangelic. That time there used to be a monsignor, who looked down on the Evangelic as they were Protestants. He demanded not to receive the Evangelic. That is the reason, my mother told me, why she was not able to study, and as soon as she was fifteen, she met my father and got married and that was it.

In the three researches all too aware there is so much education and times have changed, women lament they (we) are still discriminated because of being women. They cannot believe macho models still persist.

Mother tongue: more than a metaphor

Narration understood according to Larrosa (1998), as a fundamental mechanism for the understanding of oneself and others might articulate a in a philosophically interesting mode certain traditional ideas on self-awareness or personal identity, on the self-comprehension of the subject, and on the educational practices as places where histories are produced, interpreted and mediated. In this order of ideas, one of the argumentations of these narratives, of these researches where the feminine has arisen in the processes of reading and writing, has to do with the fact that we women have had a greater responsibility for the socialization processes of children. Responsibility that have led us, the women, to be those who settle the basic linguistic referents for communication and education; likewise, in the processes of cultural recuperation of the indigenous communities where I have had the opportunity to participate and learn firsthand in the department of Cauca, the indigenous women frequently state that because they have been able to carry their offspring while they perform their familial or communal tasks native tongues have not become extinct. Nonetheless, this empirical fact is not counted as a social contribution for the development of the peoples. This is to say, in modern economic terms, these contributions are still unaccounted for in the state entries.

My inquiries in the three researches allow me to conclude in a provisional manner, as a metaphor of work, that it would not be exaggerated to state that we women are those who are still more attentive to school life and, therefore, we expect that more girls and boys attend school with a previous learning of the alphabetized world. What is more, it is not exaggerated to state that we women are those who are more interested in tracking the route of what it means that women are trained and that more women, men, States and governments understand that the benefits from feminine claims are social benefits that are to the advantage of society in general.

In spite it is more frequent that men take part in domestic life, they have not achieved, for instance, assimilating that doing homework, attending school meetings —called parents teachers associations, but more attended by women—, are minimal expressions yet fundamental of the deep-seated patriarchal concept that homologates the function of giving birth and breast-feeding to the feminine obligation of bringing-up and responding on behalf of the “good familial name”. This inequitable homologation refuses the possibility of fostering masculine referents of tenderness, perpetuating the imaginary and the practice that children discharge upon the mothers the insults, as we are always the ones who tell off, become angry, and worry if that which is required by the school demands and society imposes is not fulfilled.

It is, then, a vicious cycle of repetition and exclusion what we need to dismantle, deconstruct in order to think of a non-sexist education and in a society where the feminine and the masculine are not opposed and counteracted. It is indispensable to become aware that we women are part of the material and symbolic assets, yet this fact does not mean we are linked to the perpetuity of fulfill on our own the familial and educational roles. From this perspective, and if philosophy is love for knowledge, go walking; a philosophy of the language implies, in professional tasks, look at how with the word we build realities, cause doubts, promote changes and challenge the truth as long as we will not become dogmatized, as long as we promote processes of formation, which in a critical, constructive and positive manner, overcome the unsubstantial repetition, the accumulation of information and overseeing of knowledge. Here I am evoking, and revoking as much as possible, that writing in the classroom, by and large, we do it or assume it to qualify learning and not as the exercise and practice to think and rethink, and even vanish, what we believe an unchallengeable, definite fact. When we ask our students an essay they are almost never able to be discrepant. The result is a mere opinion or a sham of criticism, understanding criticism as disqualification.

So, I try, making us of these histories of life, with some tales or research, to contribute to foster that the intimate and undeniable relation of reading, writing and research are unmatched contributions to the processes of

formation. Formative processes where it becomes evident that subjectivity is polyphony and inter-textualism, either the topic or problem is that of the women. Ergo, learning to read and write are deep dimensions that transform and recreate us —be crated again—. Such as the motto of the Group Education Gender and Development of my University, reads, we the women: “We are not what you believe, we are what we believe”.

In the three researches which gave way to this article, the preoccupation of women insistently appears, either they are illiterate, for their children to study; and since we have been women, largely, when we read our children and daughters and accompany from the intuition of learning of their first letters, those who open the world of fantasy, dreaming, education, and small revolutions. Those revolutions that are knitted and unwoven with words, with books, with stories to change, create and recreate.

Bibliography

- Arango, Irma and Socorro Corrales (2004), “La escritura como hecho público: Inmanencia y trascendencia de la lectura y la escritura en la universidad”, lecture presented at III Coloquio Internacional de Currículo, noviembre, Universidad del Cauca [published in revista *RedOnda* del Grupo de Lectura y Escritura de la Universidad del Cauca y la Red del Lenguaje, Nodo Cauca].
- Arango Gaviria *et al.* (2002), *Comportamiento lector y escritor de los estudiantes que ingresan a la Universidad del Cauca*, Grupo de Lectura y Escritura, Informe de Investigación.
- Aristizábal, Magnolia (1993), *Género y discriminación en la escuela. Propuesta de estrategias para su conocimiento y revisión*, Bogotá: PUJ.
- Corrales, Socorro *et al.* (2005), *Sentido y uso social de los procesos de lectura y escritura en español en la Licenciatura en Etnoeducación de la Universidad del Cauca*, research project, Colciencias.
- Corrales, Socorro (2005), “Rutas narrativas de mujeres indígenas en el Cauca. Territorio, tradición, re(presión). Parte de la Investigación de la Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres de Colombia por la paz”, in revista *Convergencia*, num. 37, Mexico: Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México and Universidad del Cauca.

- Corrales, Socorro (2004), “Hechos de palabras: Lo que somos en nuestra profesión de educar”, lecture presented at Seminario La lectura y la escritura en la formación de los profesionales, Santiago de Cali: Cátedra UNESCO.
- Corrales, Socorro (2002), *Que si femenino, que si masculino. Por un currículo que promueva la equidad*, Popayán: Universidad del Cauca.
- Duncan, Isadora (1977), *Mi vida*, Madrid: Montamara.
- Fuentes, Lya and Jimena Holguín (2006), “Reformas educativas y equidad en Colombia”, in *Equidad de género y reformas educativas. Argentina, Chile, Colombia y Perú*, Santiago de Chile: Hexagrama Consultoras, FLACSO, IESCO, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú.
- Galvis, Silvia (1996), “Mi corazón ha estado siempre a la izquierda”, in revista *En otras palabras*, num. 1, Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia y la Corporación Casa de la Mujer.
- Gnecco, Cristóbal and Herinaldy Gómez (2005), *El ojo del etnógrafo*, Popayán: Departamento de Antropología, Universidad del Cauca [unpublished text].
- Grupo Impulsor Nacional “Mujeres por la igualdad real” (2000), *A cinco años de la IV Conferencia Internacional sobre la mujer, Beijing +5*, Lima, Peru.
- Heller, Agnes (1982), *La revolución de la vida cotidiana*, Barcelona: Península.
- Larrosa, Jorge (1998), “Narrativa, identidad y desidentificación”, in *La experiencia de la lectura. Estudios sobre literatura y formación*, Barcelona: Alertes.
- Magallón, Carmen (2001), “El pensamiento maternal. Una epistemología feminista para una cultura de paz”, in *La paz imperfecta*, España: Universidad de Granada.
- Morin, Edgar (1990), *Introducción al pensamiento complejo*, Paris: Gedisa.
- Ong, Walter (1994), *Oralidad y escritura*, Santafé de Bogotá: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Savater, Fernando (undated), *El valor de educar*, Ariel.
- Sendón, Victoria (2002), “El feminismo de la diferencia: Un ejercicio de la resistencia. Práctica epistemológica y política”, in revista *En otras palabras*, num. 11, Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia and Corporación Casa de la Mujer de Bogotá.
- Steiner, George (2001), “Texto y contexto”, in *Sobre la dificultad y otros ensayos*,

Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Touraine, Alan (2000), *Crítica de la Modernidad*, Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Woolf, Virginia (1971), *Flush*, Navarra, Spain: Ediciones Destino.

Socorro Corrales Carvajal. Master in Linguistics of the Department of Education and Pedagogy and member of Research groups on Reading and Writing, and Education, Gender and Development of the University of Cauca, Popayán, Colombia; research lines: language and education, gender and education, gender and culture. Last publications: “Reading as a public fact: Immanence and transcendence of reading and writing in University” (*La escritura como hecho público: Inmanencia y transcendencia de la lectura y la escritura en la Universidad*), in *Red Onda*, revista del lenguaje, Universidad del Cauca; “Network of the language; narrative routes of indigenous women in the Cauca: Territory, tradition. Re(pression)” (*Red del lenguaje. rutas narrativas de mujeres indígenas en el Cauca: Territorio, tradición. Re(presión)*) in revista *Convergencia*, num. 37, Universidad del Cauca and Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México (2005); “Words and representations of women in the context of the Colombian armed conflict” (*Palabras y representaciones de mujeres en el contexto del conflicto armado colombiano*) in *Ruta Pacífica de mujeres de Colombia* (2006).

Sent to dictum: August 16th, 2007

Re-sent: November 6th, 2007

Approval: March 7th, 2008