

**ETHNOCENTRISM IN EDUCATION: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS,
THE CASE OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

by

Orlando Albornoz
Professor of Sociology of Education
Central University of Venezuela
Caracas, VENEZUELA

The Seventeenth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences
Los Angeles, California November 24-27, 1988

© 1988, International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences

Introduction

Ethnocentrism is a self-centered view of the world which is in contradiction to the needs of modern societies. The basic principle of modern society is the non-ethnocentric view of the people. In fact as stated in the proposal of this Conference : "Ethnocentrism is one of the essential values of the dividedness of the world". In spite of the very many efforts done in recent decades to eliminate the negative aspects of this social value, people all over the world keep their faith in viewing themselves as different to the others and in consequence, having more or less of certain characteristics. The dilemma has been for nations all over to have a universalistic view of their societies while keeping alive their own cultural patterns. Education and educational systems are supposed to be the integrative force par excellence. Through education man should become more aware of the irrationality of values like ethnocentrism and for every nation the global man they aspire to educate should share this common values according to which a society is precisely a common ground for a given number of quite different individuals.

This view is accepted all over the world whenever is not international opinion which condemn such societies, where the dominant ideology would propose those men are unequal and deserve unequal education and upbringing, like in the case of South Africa. But without being so explicit, the fact is that many societies that abhor any ethnocentrism in the public political discourse in their social practice, they do accept a rationality according to which a nation and a society end by training people for different views of the world, mainly through accepting ethnicity and social inequality as a rational way of life.

We are to discuss this situation in Latin America and the Caribbean. Before doing so, however, we should do some comments on the role of education in relation to ethnocentrism and ethnicity within the general framework of the concept of nation-building and the concept of social consensus as a necessity for modern society, in spite of the rights of the minorities to keep their specific traits but within a national homogeneous sense of belonging.

Education and nation-building

Nobody knows how people get educated. Historical and anthropological experience, however, can demonstrate the simply fact that man is educated. Meaning by this that people in any human culture, are trained to become able members of each one and different culture. The more developed that society the more homogeneous its cultural and social patterns. Quite the contrary, the more underdeveloped the society the more particular that educational process, particularly in that part of the world that has come to be known as the Third World. In the words of Geertz the less developed a society the more intense refiguration of knowledge is produced in the society, so much, I would add, that in the less developed societies the extreme examples concern cases in which each individual builds a society within himself, isolated and self-sufficient, like those members of any rural society living away almost from any society contact (1).

But society needs integrative mechanism and for this purpose the imperative is the educational process, systematic

or not. In some societies, in fact, most members get their basic common education through non-systematic ways, like in the case of modern Venezuela, where mass media elements like television actually have become the main instrument for teaching common values to the population, more and instead of the school system.

The theoretical assumption is that education is by historical experience that integrative element of every society. The social cohesion and identity are built through the educational process and the main goal and objective of education is to guarantee that every person in a society becomes a citizen, sharing with the rest a set of common values and beliefs. The classical definition of Durkheim comes into mind :

Education is the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him by both the political society as a

whole and the special milieu for which he is specifically designed. (2)

Durkheim spoke about two beings built in each person through education. In one hand the individual being, the person as such, and in the other hand the social being,

"... a system of ideas, sentiments and practices which express in us, not our personality, but the group or different groups of which we are part; these are religious beliefs, moral beliefs and practices, national or professional traditions, collective opinions of every kind. Their totality forms the social being. To constitute this being in each of us is the end of education." (3)

This is, of course, a totally idealistic approach to the operation of educational systems, because historically they do not work to build this homogeneous social being, but they operate otherwise. That is to say, society is a

fragmented experience according to the different lines of the social division and each group in each society generates its own educational system. For this reason, races, social classes and any other group socialize their children in their specific set of values and social practices.

What we argue in this paper, actually, is how in Latin America and the Caribbean in every nation in the region, educational systems do not achieve the goal of the so-called national society. Quite the contrary, we find a multiplicity of societies and within them we find also multiple educational approaches, like the most common ones of the private and the public educational systems, found in most countries with the exception of Cuba and Nicaragua. And in this region of the world, social indicators like race or ethnical groups, social classes, economic sectors, urban and rural living and so forth, divide and multiply the effects of the educational system. In such a way that in fact the dynamics of educational change is very rapid. These days, through the region, the parabolic antenna is spreading to millions of people a vision of a different society, of a different language, and in general of a different education-

socialization.

In this effort to build the social being, no institution is more responsible than the State. The extreme role of this institution is seen in the region in the cases of Cuba and Nicaragua but in the rest, particularly in the plural societies of the region, the State shares with the private sector the organization of the educational system. But the State has the power to control the educational systems and to guarantee that every person in each society becomes, as we said, a citizen, a Jeffersonian view which is almost universally accepted in the contemporary world. So in every modern society, in fact in all nations in the region, the educational system has the goal and objective to train all members of the society into the common cultural and social patterns of that society. Education has a collective action, after all and it is the State responsibility,

"... to remain the teacher constantly of the ideas, the sentiments that must be impressed upon the child to adjust him to the milieu in which he must live. If it were not always there to guarantee that

pedagogical influence be exercised in a social way, the latter would break down into an incoherent multitude of little fragments in conflict with one another." (4)

I have argued somewhere else that the State is actually loosing that struggle in the region in the sense that the State is under siege (5). That is to say that in recent decades the private sector is occupying a larger space in the map of the educational system. But it must be said that contrary to what Durkheim said in that respect the private sector is not a fragmented ideological offer. Quite the contrary, it is a social class appeal to social and institutional cohesion and instead of being a fragmented social space in some cases the only cohesive sector in educational terms in the region is the educational program of the private sector and in this respect, Venezuela could be a good example (6).

But turning to the theoretical aspect of education I would like to stress that contemporary approaches to education all view this system as essential to build that

social being of Durkheim. Another classical thinker, Dewey, when writing about the necessary coincidence of living and learning, made the emphasis that :

We must conceive of them in their social significance, as types of the processes by which society keeps itself going, as agencies for bringing home to the child some of the primal necessities of community life, and as ways in which these needs have been met by the growing insight and ingenuity of man; in short, as instrumentalities through which the school itself shall be made a genuine form of active community life, instead of a place set apart in which learn lessons. (7)

In more contemporary terms, Bruner has made deep analysis of the collective nature of education. His views are somehow opposite to those of Dewey, as far as the school is concerned :

"... it is always the schooling variable that

makes qualitative differences in the direction of growth ... the role of school in establishing context-independent modes of thinking through the separation of the written word from the thing it stands for and the separation of school from life." (8)

But anyhow Bruner makes the essential emphasis that education has a basic approach through which both collective and individual orientation are present in the educational process but any level of learning is always and all the time a social learning, a social integration of the individual into the collective body, the society. Cognitive and value complexes, language and moral growth, any aspect of socializing the individual is a social action and a highly institutionalized one. In this sense the more developed a society the more apart are school and society in the sense that the school becomes a more specialized agent for the training of the person. The contrary, the less developed a society, means a very invisible line between the home and the school, the family and the basic roles of the social

organization of the school and so forth.

Parsons has written about universalistic approaches in the educational process and so on all contemporary authors made the essential emphasis that education is a collective universalistic process that tries to get the individual away from any ethnocentrism. In this sense we may turn in this part of the paper to the relationship between education and nation-building, being this a political process through which a society concerns itself with historical and social identity. And a nation can only be built with the help of the powerful instrument devised by men in order to conform people to norms and rules shared by a given number of persons. That is education and for that political reason the state is the main instrument to make education a workable institution. Precisely in the region we are speaking about the State has allowed itself to loose grounds and so education is under a fragmentary tendency through which particular efforts have become more important, like the example we could make of higher education in several countries in the region (9).

"The new nations", "expectant people", are all trying to overcome "the passing of traditional society" into the

modern world. Education is supposed to be the carrier of this process. The large scale entry onto the world stage of former colonies and developing countries into the educational race for modernization has forced huge capital investment in order to achieve social and human progress. There is an increasing awareness in all countries that education has to play a more efficient role and more demands are made so that educational systems respond rapidly in this contemporary process. Above all in the inculcation of a national identity and the uses of education to train the people needed for development. The whole problem is that there is not an easy formula to do that. Some countries have chosen to improve their educational system by making universal access to the schooling process available to all children, like in Cuba, or to design programs to train abroad the human resources needed for development, like Venezuela tried to do between 1975-80, through the Ayacucho program, an scheme that has slowed down because of lack of capital resources and that has in a way failed in Cuba, where they have found that education is not simply to put the children into the school. The core concept of any plan for educational development is equality but this goal goes often against historical factors that preserve

social structure. That is to say that in spite of all the efforts, educational change is not equal to educational innovation. The latter is easily done, somehow, but to change the social structure is a more difficult step.

But in any case education is crucial for the nation-building process. And a nation has to be built if it is ever going to achieve development. Because otherwise this development is a fragmented experience. And this is what is going on in the region under study. Because a nation means homogeneity and what we have in many cases in the region is the opposite trend, heterogeneity. Venezuela is a case in point and we will turn to that at the end of this paper. In this country of the region, both ethnic and social class differences are working against the need to build uniformity and a modern nation ready for development. The historical ethnic groups are still designing unequal approaches to the necessity of the common man. Social classes keep their social differentiation alive and so they have different outlook to life, with the public and the private educational systems being parallelisms which are severe obstacles for this needed uniformity in values, social expectations and gratification.

We could mention right now how after the last military dictatorship was deposed in Venezuela in 1958, the new government made quick steps to formulate the following doctrinarian approach to education, which is related to this role of education in the nation building process :

The school system is ... the principal vehicle for transmitting to younger generation the major part of the cultural baggage of people, as well as for inculcation of the principles that the society has outlined as norms. If despotism advocates submission and flattery, we must educate for liberty and pride. If despotism acts to separate and to oppose one Venezuelan to another, democracy can only educate for union and mutual respect. If tyranny seeks submission to a discipline of fear, maintained by persecution, democracy can only teach a discipline that results from the enthusiastic attachment to the idea of dignity and respect for man. In Venezuela one must educate for the democratic order, for the

spiritual superiority that the life of that order requires as a fundamental condition, and for the economic organization and productivity that permit us our own control over our natural resources and our heritage. What is important, then, is not only to establish schools, make adults literate, open establishments of technical and industrial learning, facilitate access to middle-level schooling for more Venezuelans or to create universities, since all this is not sufficient for an educational policy. What is really important is the sense of the spirit in which it is done.

But this has been only political discourse, since reality in 1988 would show us how this doctrinarian approach has failed to be achieved, mainly because the social structure still leads Venezuelan society to be as divided as ever, along the lines of ethnical and social classes differences and its educational system is actually adapted to keep this social structure going on.

But still the goal is that education will create national identity and that way help the nation building process. But it is now the opportunity to do some analysis of ethnocentrism and education in the region, through some comments on both ethnicity and social classes.

Latin America and the Caribbean: Education for Ethnocentrism

It is interesting to say that even the most successful educational system in the region, in the sense that the schooling system is more universal, is at the same time quite ethnocentric, because of political isolation. This is the case of Cuba. And one of the most plural educational systems of the region, Venezuela, is also quite ethnocentric because of the differentiation lines of ethnicity and social classes. But in general we say at this stage that there is not, at all, a latinamerican view of the world that could come out of the efforts of the educational system. In fact it is the premise of this paper that in the region education builds in ethnocentrism and local knowledge, particular views of society. This is due to many cases. In some cases because of historical design and in others because of ethnic and social

classes pattern of both cultural and social life well printed in the educational systems.

We may have a closer look at our argument if we discuss the meaning of Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of ethnocentrism. We cannot use the concept employed by Sowell, for instance, when we speak about the region. He could use Ethnic America and that concept is understood as the ethnic situation of what he calls The American Mosaic, where according to Sowell there is no a real "minority" since there is no "majority" (10). This is not the view taken by sociology, which sees in every society a struggle for power and a plus and a minus in this sense. But anyhow if we speak about ethnicity in the region we are referring to internal situation in each of the countries in the region.

In fact, in the region ethnicity and even social classes are not often recognized social indicators. The political discourse in countries like Mexico, with heavy native population, is that one saying or speaking about a melting pot which in fact has never taken place. In Venezuelan census the data is not even collected and the proportion of each ethnic group is a matter of guessing.

Actually in this country no one would recognize himself as "indio" or "negro", but as "mestizo" or "moreno" and as mentioned, the political discourse is about some kind of hypothetical equality according to which race lines have been erased. We will go back to Venezuela later on, but now we would like to make the emphasis that refer to Latin America and the Caribbean as a region with heavy ethnicity and through its heavy ethnocentrism. We are saying ethnicity here as any social group that within a larger social system, claims to possess certain characteristics that put it as different from the rest, being those characteristics linguistic, religious, skin-pigmentation and so forth. In this sense, most countries in the region are heavily on the side of strong ethnic societies.

The most interesting case is the Caribbean itself. And perhaps one of the areas of the world where we could find a major level of ethnocentrism in its educational system. The Caribbean is a world that suffers from colonial and neo-colonial political and ideological environment. Besides the colonial enclaves along the French interest, for instance, we have neo-colonial societies in Puerto Rico (USA) and neo-

colonial societies in Cuba (USSR) with a heavy influence of British in their former colonies (Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago) or the Dutch influence in places like Aruba, Curacao or Surinam. But the whole point I would like to make is how the Caribbean is a real laboratory for ethnocentrism, since what we could call the Caribbean identity is fragmented along the lines of this metropolitan influences mentioned before. In fact one can find in the Caribbean a complex group of one-directional system of thought, according to each metropolitan dependence. And one cannot have ethnicity and ethnical conflicts without ethnocentrism and conflicting views of the world coming from the same society.

On the other hand, we could say that the Andean countries of South America are split societies along the lines of ethnic groups, with heavy proportion of the population coming from native stock, or the case of Brazil, with strong proportion of the population coming from African stock. One would have to make a country by country analysis, but the general idea is that the countries in the region have quite an important ethnic ingredient and this affects their educational systems which are in fact multi-ethnic

educational systems. To understand this situation in the region we may turn to Venezuela, keeping in mind that the analysis could be taken in any other country in the region, in spite of the fact that countries like Argentina are supposed to be free of this ethnic interplay.

Ethnocentrism and Education in the Venezuelan case

Venezuela is an stable political democratic system in the region. After 1958, six national elections have been held to choose the government and a seventh will take place early in December 1988. But this political democracy have not been able to produce a social comparable democratic social system and instead of a modern nation, we find in Venezuela a fragmented society along the lines of social differences - social classes, as well through other social indicators like urban and rural settlement and above all through race and ethnicity. Venezuela does have a national system of education but in the last decade the private sector has managed to occupy a privileged role in the educational arena and due to the crisis of the economy, the private sector of the society is the only one able to keep an educational

program going on, since the public sector tends to collapse both because of financial problems but also because of lack of proper organization and bureaucratic entanglement.

We are not concerned in this paper to ethnicity but to ethnocentrism and education and the analysis we are about to develop now refer to this set of concepts in the specific situation of Venezuela. Of course, ethnocentrism and racism is at the centre of the concept of ethnocentrism and the educational system does reflect the interest of the different groups in any society. In the Venezuelan case there is a national curricula common to all schools in both basic (nine years) and secondary (2) levels of the schooling system. But the interpretation of this curricula is put into practice according to the different access to the resources available. So the private sector will be able to have the capacity to implement all the elements of the curricula, while the public sector will be limited to do so. But before going into that analysis we should explain the characteristics of Venezuelan society, in ethnic and social terms.

Without going into any detailed explanation, Venezuelan society is thought to be a mestizo country. Five per cent of

natives still live very much under the historical conditions prior to the Spanish conquest. Some fifteen per cent of people from African stock are living in rural area very much under the social conditions they were brought to the country. Some thirty per cent of the population is of white origin - European either from Spanish background or from Italian or Portuguese immigration. The latest two having taken place in the fifties and the sixties. The rest is a population of mixed racial integration. But the national history and the political discourse is done as if Venezuela were an homogeneous white society. Because this supremacy has been there since the colonial times and so well entrenched are they in what we could call ethnic power that the whole issue of racism is non-existent, in spite of the heavy racism and racist stereotype. Thus, blacks and natives have negative characteristics while whites have positive ones and so on. Anyway, patterns of racial or ethnic discrimination in plural societies typically give rise to a social hierarchy of groups characterized by differential distribution of power, way of life, wealth, prestige, education, legal rights and obligations, mortality rates and so on.

Venezuela is not supposed to be as rigidly stratified as Mexico and Peru -two of the most stratified societies in the world, including India, with its caste system. But still it is a very attractive example to tackle, because it is thought to be an open society. But whether we like it or not, and not withstanding ideologies of social unity and ideals of universalism, as we quoted before, Venezuela is a society where the educational system and social thoughts are well differentiated along the lines of variables like social class and ethnicity.

The ethnic analysis of the ruling class in Venezuela would show us that the society is white. In fact, anyone looking at the dominant Venezuelan social class would not believe it is a multi-racial society. Blacks and natives are kept outside the power structure, except at the bottom of it. And so everyday life reflects this social discrimination. Place of residence, clubs they can join, beaches they can go to, schools they can attend and so forth reinforce the behaviour of a very racist society. But more than that, the history book and the political dominant discourse is one that praise equality and social integration. When in fact social discrimination is the most visible pattern of everyday life.

The textbooks used by Venezuelan children reflect this political discourse. The historical paradigms manage to write about five centuries of racial and ethnic conflicts as if they had happened in another country, elsewhere. To prove this racism we could take the occupational structure and so the ethnic characteristics of the ruling elite, but we are trying to study the relationship between ethnocentrism and education, in this paper, and what we argue is that views of Venezuelan -as perhaps everywhere in Latin America and the Caribbean, are divided by these discriminatory lines and are not a cohesive national project in any case, the one designed by the white majority and through that power the ethnocentrism of one group is imposed upon the rest of the society. This creates social contradictions and lack of historical and social identity for most Venezuelan, mostly to those of native and African origin. Like in Mexico, children in Venezuela can watch American films, where the "indians" are being eliminated by the good whites or they can see African as servants or in vicious role of violence as they are ordinarily despised in American films, both in movies and television.

Let us take again our main argument, being this the variation in the extent and the form of the educational experience undergone by the distinctive segments of Venezuelan society. We would suggest that educational development in Venezuela is associated with increased differential in the recruitment into schools and in the orientations and motivations acquired by students as well as those who teach them. But in relation to ethnocentrism we will say that the dominant group of the society manages to create the illusion of uniformity through a false ideology of equality.

We could see this in the ethnic selectness of recruitment at all levels of the educational system, but particularly in post-secondary education. But we must say that these observations are impressionistic by nature because Venezuelans refuse to collect data on ethnic issues. Officially speaking, Venezuela is an homogeneous society. What we intend to argue is to cast some doubts about this and to conceptualize Venezuelan society as a typical heterogeneous society along the line of ethnic and social classes differences. The distribution of wealth and income

would be a good indicator of this. According to data collected by the Central Bank of Venezuela, some fifteen per cent of the population get a lion's share of the national income, around forty-seven per cent; with some fifteen per cent of the population living outside the money economy and some sixty per cent obtaining less than the minimum wage. The concentration of wealth in Venezuela is one of the most extreme in the region and this shows in the operation of the educational system, well stratified along these lines of income differentiation and mixed with ethnic discrimination.

The ideological rationality is the capitalistic system developed in Venezuela along the lines of the American society. What Walter Rodney said about How Europe Underdeveloped Africa could be changed to How America Underdeveloped Venezuela, having transferred not only the social system but the racist and ethnic views. Income and ethnic groups are equally represented in the educational system. Recruitment into school and into the occupational structure follows the lines of these variables already mentioned, social class and ethnic background.

This can be seen in the pattern of recruitment into

higher education. And we have to make some indirect inferences about ethnicity and ethnocentrism question in Venezuela from the data collected on recruitment into higher education, because it would be unthinkable to ask a Venezuelan student to identify himself in ethnical terms and they would refuse that they pursue an ethnocentric perspective in life. Venezuelans, for sure, follow the pattern through which the more schooling they have the more universalistic they are. That is to say that nationalism in its perverse ways is a consequence of lack of schooling. On the other hand, the less educated a population the more ethnocentric and stereotyped they are (11).

I have no empirical way to prove that ethnocentrism is the main pattern of thought in Venezuelan educational system and by extension to the region, neither can I prove that recruitment of students into Venezuelan higher education is based on consideration of ethnic groups. But I can prove with the available data the role of social classes toward selection of students and the role of both public and private higher education and by inference demonstrate that the whole set of concepts are inter-related. The chosen, the fortunate

few (12), the elite of the system, are parallel with the mass proportion of Venezuelan population, those who have limited access to higher education and if so to the labour market.

Every year the Venezuelan government applies an academic test to all those willing to come into higher education. Data is published every year with the results of the test and even if the data contains very little social information, we can infer some tendencies on the behaviour of that population of students. The crucial variable is the sector in which the students did their secondary schooling, either public or private. Those who were at public institutions have lower academic background than those who were at private institutions. Those who came to public schooling do choose technical or short range academic careers, while those who attended private institutions can come into more expensive and longer university careers. When asked about their social economic standing those who would continue studies in the public sector say they come from middle classes or even working class background, while those who would follow their studies in private institutions say they belong either to upper or middle-upper social class. The

schooling level of their families correspond to the picture already drawn, with students going into private elite institutions having a high proportion of relatives with higher education level, while those coming into the public sector having a high proportion of relatives with very basic schooling.

It follows that those students going into the private sector of the educational system come also from the private sector of the social system and they do have two main characteristics, so far as we can say : (1) they are members of the ethnic dominant groups of the society (white) -of which they are openly conscious, and (2) they do have an ethnocentric view of their own social and intellectual position in Venezuelan society. In this sense I would say that ethnic sense of domination would be a trait of ethnocentrism and then the fact to belong to the most powerful sector of the society also provides people with ethnocentric vision of life. Those students who we are calling the fortunate few will be white, wealthy, able to have almost all material things they want, linked to the power structure of the society and through that to both the

private labour market and the public bureaucracy. This vision of ethnocentrism provides people with a sense of social arrogance, a sense of social domination and a privileged position in life which is reinforced at all times by the public discourse, either by the politicians or by the commercial propaganda. In a current commercial spot on television a white, blonde female student driving a new car and coming out of a nice villa is seen receiving from her father a gift, a credit card, plus the sentence : darling, you can have it all now! Indeed they can do and they do.

What surprises any scientific observer is the fact that the dominant political ideology in Venezuela has managed to suppress any public discussion about ethnicity and more so about ethnocentrism. This is seen in the fact that very few people would be ready in Venezuela to discuss the ethnic composition of the Venezuelan educational system. But even the most casual observations through schools in Caracas will show the observer the strict ethnic uniformity of the two parallel educational systems, public and private. In the first the mestizo society will be found and in the other the "pure" white Venezuelan population. A good comparative

analysis has been done taking a private university and a department in a public mass university and the findings show that in the first case no students could be found coming from the native or African background, while in the second the social characteristics matched those of social deprivation. They came from very low academic background, their expectations were quite low and their whole social performance was in the low level. They did also have a high ethnocentric vision of life. They were poor and they thought that they had little chances to change their life styles (13).

So variations in educational aspirations by all these variables, including ethnic background, reflect a high mutual degree of ethnocentrism, in both the elite and the mass in Venezuelan society. We could say that there are certain characteristics associated with ethnocentrism, which are social class origin, academic performance in the schooling system, level of schooling of their fathers -speaking about the students, place of residence and so forth. But above all ethnic background, which is crucial in Venezuelan society. This ethnocentrism reflects in educational terms :

(a) Disparities in educational aspirations : To a large extent, demand for post-secondary education is quite variable. Those students coming from upper and middle-upper social class would think about higher education as a rite du passage, a necessary pre-condition of adult life. In fact every student who manage to get a Venezuelan university professional degree is immediately called a doctor, even if the academic degree of that level is almost non-existent in Venezuelan academic life. On the other hand, those students coming from poor background have to come throughout the educational system doing what I call an step-by-step career, meaning they would attend both basic and secondary education in public institutions, then join the labour market, perhaps get married and/or have a family and then eventually return to university studies, in evening sessions and doing their studies in private mass institutions of low quality and low prestige -though the Venezuelan labour market is open to all types of university degrees, it seems to be that private enterprises only hire people coming from the private and public prestigious institutions. But anyhow, in Venezuelan society we find a high degree of disparities in educational aspirations.

(b) Disparities in the occupational expectations : I would not like to stretch the argument but I would say that the Venezuelan occupational structure and the labour market are a consequence of many social factors which have no empirical evidence at all. Only fragmentary observations would indicate the fact that employment in Venezuelan society is linked to ethnocentric vision, to ethnical selection and to an strong attachment to a number of variables like personal characteristics and nationalism -or the lack of it. In Venezuelan newspaper ads it can be seen applications for people of "European" origins to do certain type of jobs, without the slightest claim from any group or person. Others are recruited through ads that specify "good-look", meaning mostly white and "decent" look; even to be tall is an asset in a society where natives and mestizos are very short and so forth. The only ads referring to African background are the masseuses who offer "black passion" as an ingredient of their trade. Truly, to be native or black is a negative qualification in the Venezuelan labour market and this affects ethnocentrism, obviously.

(c) Disparities in the adaptation to the demands of the educational system : As variations along ethnic lines in the demand for education are increased, ethnic selectivity is more likely to result from variations in the adaptation to the demand imposed by educational experience and these demands are both emotional and cognitive (14). For example, Venezuelan students know that to enroll in say architecture means a high level of academic expenditures, even if the public university do not charge fees. So poor students adapt themselves to this academic market by denying themselves the chances to study architecture and any other so called expensive professional career. On the other hand they adapt themselves to take education or any low budget career and accept to be an emotional cripple, doing for life a career of low prestige and low salary. In traditional societies there is a strong differentiation in social organization and in the orientation they impose upon their members. In Venezuela attitudes toward delayed gratification, need for achievement and responses toward power and knowledge vary along ethnic lines, as they do along gender lines and social classes. But information on this matter is scarce and fragmentary. In Venezuelan society it is almost "natural" that natives and

people from African background do not succeed to become members of the intellectual elite. It is also a demonstration of adaptation to diverse educational demands the fact that the public sector of the educational system is completely out of the new learning technologies, like the computer culture. In elite private universities every student will have a personal computer, while at the mass public universities computers are non-existent.

(d) Disparities in subordination-domination attitudes to schooling : This is a very difficult argument to prove, but we believe that the unequal character of Venezuelan society do generate two ethnocentric attitudes, one of subordination and one of domination and these two follow the lines of the public and private sectors of the society, along the lines of ethnic division among the four ethnic groups: white, native, African stock and mestizo. This may certainly produces both satisfaction and frustration among Venezuelan, because the adaptative process to the demands of the educational system are very unequal.

What we have in mind, then, is that educational institutions in Venezuela, and much more so in other

societies in the region, like Peru, Mexico and Brazil, play a role of gate-keeping conditions by ethnic and cultural factors and that this process affects very much the ethnocentric view of people.

Summary and Conclusions

Many observers of the Latinamerican and the Caribbean contemporary scene have argued that educational development leads to a simultaneous modernization of the means and the ends of individual participation in educational institutions. I have my doubts about this predicament. In the region, educational participation is closely related to a number of variables that lead to ethnocentrism as an essential trait of day-to-day life. And this ethnocentrism is an obstacle to development and instead generates a fragmented vision of the world and a non-integrative participation in society. One could argue that with the expansion of educational systems, a fact in the region, ethnocentrism would diminish, since more schooling would produce a more universalistic approach to life. But if schooling is differentiated along discriminatory lines obviously the chances for ethnocentrism are increased accordingly.

I would not like to finish this paper without mentioning the fact that the region may be slipping back in terms of its international contact in the knowledge market. The heavy external debt of the region has obliged many countries to reduce their GNP proportion devoted to education. International books are more expensive than ever, schooling fees are higher in developing countries so students from the region have more obstacles to move along to graduate studies, members of the faculty in universities and other higher education institutions in the region have more problems than ever to move around in academic international circles, their salaries are falling behind high inflation and even high insecurity affects their performance, like in the case of Colombia, where the drugs' lords have declared an open war on the local intelligentsia.

And all this would certainly increase the ethnocentric vision of people in the region. The Parsonian universalistic achievement pattern may still be of hope for the narrow elite in the region, but the mass can only wait to attain an absence in the pluralism of goals and to achieve only a kind of particularistic-ascriptive pattern of social structure.

Perhaps it could be said in the same language of Parsons that the increase in ethnocentrism in the region is a form of social control, perverse as it may sound.

We have taken the example of Venezuela to discuss the situation in the region. However, there is no way to generalize to the region what is or might be peculiar of a given country. Latin America and the Caribbean is a very complex area and it is not easy to discuss their problems in a short presentation or paper like this one. However, we may have shown the relationship between education and ethnocentrism in the region and the main conclusion is that the educational systems in the region are highly ethnocentric oriented, even in so known plural societies like Venezuela. In this country it is fascinating to observe that the natives are still living like in the times of the Spanish conquerors, actually, right now under the American heavy influence, which is an interesting turnover of the growing influence of American sponsored religious groups which are trying to colonize the remaining natives of Venezuela (15). The people from African background are also living under the social conditions they were brought to Venezuela. And for the rest

the political discourse in this society is the mestizo one. A Venezuelan poet gave the clue to this ideology, when he said that in Venezuela "everyone is a little coffee and a little milk". This is fallacious. In Venezuela, as in the rest of the region, almost all countries pay respect and attention to ethnic lines and these barriers have not disappeared with the modernization process, if any. The consequence is ethnocentrism, in this sense an objective obstacle for educational and general development of the region.

NOTES

(1) See by Clifford Geertz Local Knowledge (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

(2) The classic text by Durkheim is Education and Sociology (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1956). This edition is the translation of Talcott Parsons, p. 71.

(3) Idem, p. 72.

(4) Idem, p. 79.

(5) See on this point my own paper "The State under Siege",

presented at the XI World Congress of Sociology, New Delhi, India (1986) and published in Revista Mexicana de Sociología, no. 1, segunda época, January 1987.

(6) Some fifteen per cent of the children coming to secondary school attend private education in Venezuela and around eleven per cent do so in private institutions of higher education. But this is not the crucial data. What is interesting is how people who get professional degrees from private institutions have a stronger hold in the labour market than those with degrees from public universities, except in those professional careers where the public sector has a monopoly, like the health professions.

(7) See by John Dewey his School and Society (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 14.

(8) See by Jerome S. Bruner The Relevance of Education (London: Penguin Education, 1974), p. 64.

(9) For this see the book by Daniel Levy Higher Education and the State in Latin America (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1986). What was inexistent before 1945 is now a common sight in the region, the private

university, either the one dedicated to the mass demand and the one dedicated to the elite.

(10) See by Thomas Sowell Ethnic America, a history (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

(11) An empirical view of this question is in Kalman H. Silvert and Leonard Reissman Education, Class and Nation the experiences of Chile and Venezuela (New York: Elsevier, 1976).

(12) The elite going to school is a very narrow one. I have estimated that in a population of 20 million inhabitants, no more than 25 thousand children are in the middle-upper and upper class institutions of basic and secondary level of the educational system of the elite type. These institutions are practicing a real apartheid social policy, with restrictions applying in a very strict way and taking into consideration other variables than income. In a recent empirical research done in Venezuelan youth I had many problems doing field research in some secondary education institutions that would not allow my team to come into the institutions to apply the instrument. In fact, in some cases we were simply rejected, more so because we were coming from the main public

institution in the country, Universidad Central de Venezuela, seen by them as a too much "left" institution, in the political side. For this see my book La Juventud Venezolana: Inserción y Reproducción (Caracas: Cuadernos Lagoven, 1988).

(13) The data on university students in Venezuela is in Boletín Estadístico, Consejo Nacional de Universidades, published every year. We have used the 1987 edition.

(14) The opposite is found in the African case, by the way, see by Remi Clignet "Education and Ethnicity in West Africa" in Race and Ethnicity in Africa edited by Pierre L. Van Der Berghe (Nairobi, Kenya: East African Publishing House, 1975).

(15) We cannot come into this question but this is a fascinating case of the ideological struggle going on between the "traditional" religious groups -"Roman Christian" and the "modern" ones, meaning the "American Christian". For a view of this problem see by a Venezuelan sociologist, Alexander Luzardo, his book Amazonas: el negocio de este mundo (Caracas: Ediciones Centauro, 1988).