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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the kinds of visuals that Spanish language textbooks use to legitimize Latino/a culture, noting how different groups are presented and represented by the narratives; how ethnicity, class, gender, age, and sexual inclinations interplay with power relations, and what ideologies weave the textual fabric of foreign language books. It analyzes three introductory college Spanish textbooks: "Que Tal?," "Mosaicos," and "Entrevistas." The paper explores the visual images that have been selected to convey the Latino/a experience. Two of the books depict light-skinned, middle class Latino/as of European ancestry who are working in professions requiring higher education. The few images of dark-skinned people focus on sports or folk customs. The third book, "Entrevistas," offers a variety of pictures that strengthen the notion of ethnic diversity in the Latino/a world. However, although its visuals are diverse, the power to speak appears controlled by people of European ancestry with middle class views and occupations. The three texts present visual images of human relations as neutral, friendly, and peaceful. Women are shown as having out-of-home occupations. The paper concludes that textbooks tend to present versions of reality that embody certain interests, reify certain interpretations and value judgments, and give promise to specific pieces of information while rendering others invisible or distorted. (SM)

REPRESENTING LATINO/A CULTURE IN INTRODUCTORY SPANISH TEXTBOOKS

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Representing Latino/a Culture in Introductory Spanish Textbooks

As a Spanish language teacher, I have been trying for many years to convey the idea that language learning cannot be dissociated from the study of culture. Naturally, when I speak of "culture", I am not referring to a stable or harmonious terrain but rather to a complex space of practices and significations constructed by people in their struggles to make their voices heard in the social space. Trying to put this philosophy into practice in elementary and intermediate language courses is not always easy, in particular for three reasons. First, average students often perceive language instruction as the acquisition of skills exclusively. Second, they do not see language classes as a space for intellectual engagement. Third, almost all of the texts available for college teaching implicitly, and sometimes in very direct ways, confirm the ideas that students bring to their courses by offering simplistic visuals and narratives that rarely encourage students to think critically. The sad reality of teaching Latino/a culture at this level is that both students and textbooks tend to view language experiences as a locus for grammar and vocabulary above anything

else. This serious misconception of the learning process is not surprising as foreign language education in the United States often views language as a tool that is in itself devoid of intellectual value, while at the same time assuming that students need to reach a "higher" level of proficiency before they engage in critical analysis (Kramsch: 93,9). This makes it all the more imperative today to analyze the texts that students use to learn "foreign" languages, with a particular emphasis on the crucial issue of cultural representation. In this respect, I am interested in exploring the following questions: 1.What kind of visuals do texts use to legitimize Latino/a culture? 2.How are different groups presented and represented by the narratives? 3. How do ethnicity, class, gender, age, and sexual inclinations, interplay with power relations? 4. What ideologies weave the textual fabric of foreign language books?

A critical analysis of three introductory Spanish texts currently in use in colleges will allow us to look at these issues in some detail: **¿Qué Tal?**, **Mosaicos** and **Entrevistas**. I would like to begin by exploring their cultural framework, that is, the visual images that have been selected by the authors to convey the Latino/a experience. As I have argued in a previous work, in which

I first examined the latest edition (1999) of **¿Qué tal?**, it is important to first look at the visual representations that build the general architecture of the book, in particular those excluding human beings. **¿Qué tal?** displays a variety of imagery, that I call cultural photos, to render "authenticity" to the text. Kubanet has questioned the concept of "authenticity" when she examines third world representations in West German foreign language textbooks. She points out that the term "authenticity" has little value as every text about the Third World is an interpretation of reality (Kubanet: 202). In **¿ Qué tal?** a team of writers compiled a selection of "authentic" regional wonders, well-known districts, colonial architecture, and pre-Columbian ruins. This selection, however, has nothing to do with "authenticity" but rather with the authors' interpretation of Latino images. A similar criterion appears to be followed by the authors of **Mosaicos** as their visuals also represent their interpretations of tourist attractions, museums, and prominent architecture. The array of fragmented pictures in the two textbooks does not require any emotional or cultural investment from readers. The authors seem to be treating their audience as little more than superficial tourists who travel from one country to the other without any serious engagement with those cultures. However, the

writers of **Entrevistas** do not give prominence to well-known icons but rather emerge as more committed to selecting photos that stimulate class discussions. Five pictures exemplifying part of the sociocultural diversity of the Spanish-speaking world make up the introduction to this textbook. Students discover a mural of "Little Havana" in Miami, a picture of a mosque and a post-modern museum in Spain, followed by a Mayan artifact and an indigenous festival in Peru. The last two photographs represent the memory of a past and the experiences of a present in the life of indigenous people in Latin America. By exploring some of these pictures, learners can begin to comprehend the complexity of meanings and significations invested in Spanish-speaking communities. Though **Entrevistas** also includes some photos of prominent architecture and geographical regions, the majority of the visuals narrate social practices of everyday life. For instance, some paintings show satirical readings of societies, scenes of social inequality, and struggles of daily life. Readers discover that these images are valuable but, at the same time, that their arrangement continues to represent the social universe in a fragmented way. Very few pictures are paired to illustrate social and geographical contrasts in one particular country. For example, there are no photographs of

upper-class neighborhoods next to shanty towns so that students can gain a coherent visual understanding of these societies.

When human beings appear in the three textbooks, it is clear they are intended to re-present "authentic" women and men in the Latino world. To the surprise of a critical eye readers discover that out of sixty-eight pictures in **¿Qué tal?** sixty-two show images of light-skin, middle class Latino/as of European ancestry, well-dressed, living in comfortable homes, or working in professions that require training in higher education. These pictures display an array of college students, professors, doctors, presidents of countries, writers, astronauts, singers, and designers. Dark-skinned people only appear in three photographs and, in the three cases, they are soccer players. Only two images in this book address the African presence. One of them shows the well-known Cuban writer Nicolas Guillén, while the other picture trivializes Afro-Latinos by showing two young men happily dancing in a Panamanian carnival. At the same time, indigenous people, whose presence and contributions to Latino/a culture cannot be overstated, are given an extremely marginal position as they appear only once, on the lower-left corner of a picture, partially covered by a display of textiles.

Mosaicos also tends to privilege people of European ancestry with middle-class experiences. Their images focus on the lives of college students, doctors, executives, and reporters who share with Americans similar tastes in pastimes, clothing, and homes. Indigenous people and Afro-Latinos fulfill a decorative function in the textbook, as none of their experiences are central to the narratives. Only four of the sixty-eight pictures portray indigenous people. One of the pictures illustrates a reading that deals with pastimes in Spanish-speaking societies. Though the visual shows some members of the an ethnic group performing a traditional dance, the text focuses on pastimes for the taste of the middle classes such as dancing in discos, watching foreign movies or going to a bullfight, while vaguely mentioning that some people in Peru may be interested in folk music and dances. No interpretation is offered to clarify who attends these folk dances and what these mean in that specific culture. Another photograph displays an indigenous woman in the background celebrating the Day of the Dead, a celebration tightly linked to indigenous roots. The picture, however, is accompanied by a generic reading that excludes all references to the ethnicity of the participants or to the significance of the festivity. The last two visuals show indigenous

women selling produce. The narrative that accompanies the visuals focuses exclusively on the products sold at open-air markets erasing the historical and cultural meanings of those products in the life of indigenous cultures. Afro-Latinos are only portrayed in two pictures of **Mosaicos.** The first one contains a dark-skinned, working class Puerto Rican family contrasted to a light-skin, middle-class counterpart. The photographs create an excellent space for discussing class, ethnicity, and differences of family life in the two visuals. The narrative, however, excludes those issues and produces an essentialist reading that emphasizes the importance of close relations as the major feature in all families. The ideological flaws here are matched by still another picture in which a luxury cruise is shown packed with light-skin and African Latinos as an example of no racial divide in the Latino world. What the picture seems to be telling us is that many Afro-Latinos are able to reach the upper levels of society without much difficulty, an idea that does not reflect the reality of Latino societies.

The construction of visual images in **Entrevistas** renders a different scenario. The authors have carefully selected a variety of pictures that attempt to strengthen the notion of ethnic diversity in

the Latino/a world, as they are careful to represent indigenous people and Afro-Latinos in their pages. Out of seventy-six visuals seventeen show different backgrounds. The rest of the photographs, however, favor European ancestries. Emphasis has been placed in portraying the African presence in Colombia, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. In these pictures Afro-Latinos have reached middle-class status. Indigenous people represent Bolivia, Mexico, Guatemala, and Peru. In some cases ethnic groups still provide an ornamental function in the textbook while in others, however, they gain in signification and diversity. For example, pictures and texts are successfully intertwined to highlight social and historical meanings in a Mayan piece of weaving, conflicting cultural changes in Guatemalan indigenous adolescents, and the ethnic discrimination of Peruvian women. **Entrevistas**, unlike the other two textbooks here discussed, seems committed to provide a multiplicity of voices of the Latino/a world. As a result, students can begin to gain some cultural understanding of Spanish-speaking societies. For that purpose the authors have incorporated a section entitled "Interviews" with pictures of native speakers whose voices and images are further enhanced in an accompanying video. Again, this section produces mixed results. Though a note warns teachers

that each voice represents only one point of view about the country, most of the thirty photographs that illustrate the interviews are those of people of European ancestry with solid middle-class views and occupations. In other words, visuals of diverse Latinos are included in **Entrevistas** but the power to speak seems to be controlled by one particular group.

Some of the serious ideological shortcomings in these textbooks also evidence problems in the area of representing human relations. As mentioned at the beginning of this presentation, a crucial question, not only for teachers but for students as well, emerges when considering how different groups interplay with each other. By looking at visuals exclusively, images of human relations in the three textbooks appear smooth, neutral, friendly, and peaceful. No signs of conflict are evident, as there is little anger, frustration, or disappointment in their faces. The portrayal of a harmonious and stable imagery seems important to the fabric of these books. Also, some age groups appear more frequently than others. People between twenty and sixty years old are the legitimate representatives of these societies as images of children or aging Latinos are almost non-existent. The exclusion of the two groups may be related to a need, on the part of the authors,

to focus on topics that can interest the primary readers of these textbooks: young adults. Gender roles, however, receive a fairer treatment. Women have not been confined to the role of mothers happily enslaved in the kitchen but rather they are shown having out-of-home occupations. When it comes to showing visuals of the family, however, the three textbooks emerge as solidly conservative in their views. Though **Entrevistas** signals divorce in one of its drawings, none of the three texts dares to show pictures of alternative families with parents of the same sex, for example.

Issues of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and age clearly relate to power relations. As pointed out by Sleeter & Grant (1991:79), symbolic representations are related to power, they are used to confer legitimacy on the dominant status of particular social groups. Photographs in **¿Qué tal? and Mosaicos** represent social groups in the upper layers. By looking at these two books students may assume that Latino/a culture not only legitimizes middle-class experiences but that this particular social group has reached its position in society in a natural and peaceful manner, without any involvement in the wear and tear of group dynamics (race, economic status, religion, ideological warfare, etc.) Few pictures make a deliberate effort to thematize, for

instance, inequity, violence or intolerance. Here peaceful coexistence and middle-class values are presented as directly or indirectly the norm. I believe that by providing cultural images that do not differ dramatically from mainstream America, elementary Spanish students in this country, frequently taking this course as a college requirement, will not be disturbed by uncomfortable or conflicting images. Supposedly, this approach should render them more receptive to the material. The ideological operation in action here is not only transparent but equally paternalistic, as well as disconnected from important realities that should become part of any student's cultural background in today's world.

Textbooks in general often attempt to give the impression of ideological neutrality. As I have discussed above, this is hardly the case with these texts. Visuals, however, are not the only examples that show preferences for certain groups, narratives give evidence of explicit choices as well. **¿Qué tal?**, for example, highlights narratives and information on websites that center only on empirical facts and statistical information about countries. By reading this type of information students get the impression that indigenous people are a thing of the past or that they have only been valuable for lending their names to some countries or to

national currencies. Their presence in the text serves the interest of dominant ideologies who have decided what to use from their cultures, when to do it, and for what purposes. Afro- Latinos, on the other hand, do not fare much better. They are presented in narratives of narrow binary choices: either they have added a measure of exoticism by introducing carnivals in that part of the world, or have been assimilated by dominant European ideologies, as in the case of high-caliber intellectuals like Nicolas Guillén. Their socio-cultural specificity, that is, their historical and social struggles, are nowhere to be found in these pages.

Some narratives occasionally mention words such as "discrimination", "social injustice", "colonialism", "indigenous rights", and "imperialism", a promising appearance with full potential to create a space for discussing, comparing and contrasting different views in a typical class. Clearly, students' language competence should not be of concern since an appropriate combination of visuals and basic control of the language is all that is needed for an exciting dialogical encounter using these terms. **¿Qué tal?**, however, chooses to mention them without presenting any images or sociocultural background necessary to facilitate their understanding. Evidently the main

objective of these narratives is the sequential presentation of dates and facts about individual countries and their representatives without advancing beyond a shopping list of facts. The word "discrimination", for example, appears only once in 418 pages, and it does in the context of Colombia's independence (235) while discussing the unfair conditions that Spain had imposed on Latin America during its colonial occupation. According to the narrative, unfair treatment led Creoles, the "privileged" Latin American group of Spanish ancestry, to fight for their freedom. However, we soon realize that the text excludes all reference to the existence of other social/ethnic groups that, during that period, lived considerably more marginalized lives than those of the Creoles. This almost anecdotal reference to the issue of discrimination may lead students to conclude that the problem ended in the nineteenth century, as few insights encourage discussing the issue in terms of contemporary societies. By failing to promote discourse analysis, the authors consciously, or unconsciously, side with a notion of teaching that places intellectual work outside the introductory level in a foreign language course. Inevitably, students who read this section are encouraged to conclude that present Latino culture is no longer a highly dynamic and conflicting space but rather a

harmonious pool of meanings where there is little confrontation among groups occupying different positions in society.

A variety of "typical" icons such as bullfighting, education, shelters, soccer, religious holidays, particular lifestyles, etc. are also present in the text. Some of the observations are important. For example, there is a discursive analysis of the word "education" in the Latino context. For Latinos, the text argues, the term has to do more with manners than with intellectual preparation. Unfortunately, narratives of this sort are scarce. Those that address soccer and shelters tend to be mostly descriptive therefore missing from the their argument important details about the dynamic and social nature of the two topics. Soccer is an ideal sport to thematize and discuss popular culture, social classes, politics, and seduction. The authors of **¿Qué tal?**, however, exclude any references to these issues and produce a text that mainly emphasizes the popularity of the sport in the Latino world. The same can be said, for example, about the topic of shelters. Differences in houses are mainly constructed around geography, while narratives ignore issues of social class and ethnicity.

The book presents a spectrum of Latinos living in the United States and Canada. The group is wide, ranging from college

professors, psychologists, designers, pop-stars, filmmakers and researchers, to executives, gourmet cooks, and a soccer player. All of them are conferred legitimacy on the basis of their individual achievements, rarely as members of their ethnic communities. We learn that Oscar de la Renta has built a fashion conglomerate, Vicente Wolf arrived from Cuba determined to succeed, and Mary Rodas became an executive at the age of 13 with a company budget of 70 million dollars. With the exception of one doctor, Jose Greer, who is engaged in community health projects, the rest are involved in careers that lead to individual success. We are rarely informed why they emigrated to North America, or about their struggles, contradictions, and disappointments. Sanitized narratives exclude any reference to the role that Affirmative Action may have played in enabling them to succeed, or to the daily struggles that many Latinos have to endure. Most of the passages are constructed around the naïve idea that anybody can achieve material success and prestigious employment in America. Successful Latinos, the narratives never cease to suggest, did the right thing by operating as individuals, hardly ever as members of their communities.

The authors of **Mosaicos** do not fare much better when dealing with similar issues. They have also structured cultural content through different sections and activities. Fragments aimed at informing students about changes in societies often provide essentialist information as no references are made to changing tastes or preferences in different social or ethnic groups. As in **¿Qué tal?**, the information mainly speaks of middle-class choices. When narratives address political issues, facts appear historically decontextualized in some of the texts. For example, a piece on Nicaragua mentions that in 1990 Violeta Chamorro won democratic elections after a long history of economic and social problems (168). Since no previous background on the country is provided, it is impossible for students to understand the specificity of the struggle that led to that election, or to comprehend, in another narrative, the political problems that ended with the Salvadoran Peace Treaty in 1992 (169). Apparently, the message that the texts intend to convey is that social struggles are a thing of the past and that democracies have equalized present Latin American societies, something that could not be further from the truth.

The concluding fragments of each chapter in **Mosaicos** also share with **¿Qué tal?** the serious shortcoming of presenting ethnic minorities essentially in a decorative role within the larger picture of culture. For example, a paragraph on Honduras mentions the African presence and its contributions, but these are exclusively restricted to music, dances, and folklore (169). Important Afro-Latino components in other spheres of life such as education, politics, or literature, are nowhere to be found. One of the readings addresses ethnic diversity in the Latino/a world but ethnicity, in this context, is completely dissociated from power relations. According to the authors ethnic diversity is important because it provides different physical characteristics to the population (80). The text is clearly structured to describe, but not to analyze, whose ethnic features are privileged and whose are marginalized by different cultures. The same passage mentions the predominance of European descendants in Argentina. It fails, however, to tell about the indigenous genocide that facilitated that predominance. The authors, consciously or unconsciously, conclude this section on ethnic diversity by providing factual information about Argentina, a country that has historically privileged European ancestry and marginalized other ethnicities. Other readings narrate standard

topics such as families, houses, sports, religion, music, and health. The section that deals with the Latino family provides a good update on the present status of the middle-class family. It points out changes in the size of the group, the role of women, and the existence of separations and divorces. No reference is made, however, to the possibility of having alternative same-sex families. Houses continue to be defined by location (whether they are in the suburbs or downtown) or by the climate (whether they are located in hot or mild climates). Both, **Mosaicos** and **¿ Qué tal?** eliminate typical working-class and upper-class neighborhoods from their samples and choose middle class homes as a norm for the Latino world. At the same time **Mosaicos** describes people in the Spanish-speaking societies as not only going to the theatre and renting their own movies but also as beginning to install satellite dishes in their homes a ritual that, for the most part, escapes the dreams of the majority of the population nowadays. Narratives that refer to changes in the eating habits of Latinos highlight changes as part of a natural process. For example, the authors see the changes in consumption as the result of the diversity of foods in each country or of the development of new tastes in the population. The text fails to point out not only that people in different classes and

ethnicities vary in their choices, but also that many of them are being forced to reduce their daily consumption because of severe restrictions in their budgets. The introduction of cereal to Latino middle-classes, I believe, is not exclusively related to a change of tastes, as argued here, but rather to an aggressive marketing strategy implemented by American food companies who have either displaced or taken over national food industries. Though the section on sports provides relevant information about the importance of soccer in Spanish-speaking societies, the text fails to reveal its political significance, as a social equalizer in some situations or as a space for liberation/oppression in other political conjunctures. Soccer has the potential of bringing together people of diverse backgrounds. At the same time different groups have used this sport to oppress or liberate the downtrodden. In the Brazil of the sixties soccer operated as a tool of liberation when pro-democratic groups organized soccer games to resist dictatorial forces. On the other hand, a repressive military junta put together the 1978 Argentine World Cup with the purpose of concealing the "disappearance" of thousands of victims of state violence.

Capitalism emerges as the prevailing ideology in both **¿Qué tal?** and **Mosaicos**. In **¿Qué tal?** the wide spectrum of

Latinos living in North America have made it into the system by choosing material success and individual achievement. Pictures and narratives tend to ignore the experiences of those who chose or were forced to choose other alternatives as there are few examples of people with different lifestyles, or individuals who have experieced frustrations, disappointments, or the inability to make ends meet. **Mosaicos** also privileges capitalist practices almost exclusively. A passage on economics begins by providing important information about the difference in opportunities for young people of different social classes. It concludes, however, by forcefully endorsing privatization of companies as a practical solution to improve Latin American economies. Here there is no reference, even in passing, to the massive lay-offs and social despair that privatization has brought to large sectors of the population. By quoting Chile as an example of economic success, the text fails to mention not only who have been the primary beneficiaries of that success but also the political repression that accompanied the materialization of that economic "miracle." **Entrevistas** seems to be less interested in showing successful Latinos or in supporting practices of economic privatization but rather points out the conflicts that capitalist societies share at

present. Passages focus on problems with the quality of life in Bolivia, the breach between the rich and the poor in Mexico, and the disparity between job opportunities for men and working-class women in Chile. This textbook, though it still oscillates between strong ideological constructs and a positive departure towards dialogism and diversity, has made very commendable efforts to place culture in a central position. To accomplish their goals the authors have identified cultural icons in the section "Signs of Identity", have exposed cultural outsider's information in a section entitled "People Think", have introduced a multiplicity of perspectives in an accompanying video, and have also presented the viewpoints of the media in "Readings." Some of these additions are positive developments. The choices making up the segment "Signs of Identity", however, do not differ much from those found in **¿Qué tal?** or **Mosaicos**. Students passively consume factual information about natural wonders, prominent architecture, regional food and dances.

Since the goal of this paper is to analyze selected issues in visual and written representations in these three textbooks, I will not include here any analysis of the multiple voices of native speakers in the accompanying video. I will address, however,

samples of passages that are part of the "Readings" section, and outsiders' views that appear in "People Think." The selections of the "Readings" segment aim at showing students the dynamic and heterogeneous nature of culture. The adaptations of essays and short stories illustrate their point when they address not only divorces but also tensions in marriages, the dominant presence of American food companies in Spanish-speaking countries, problems with the quality of life and the cost of living, confrontations between generations, changes in values, and indigenous marginalization. Though the visual representations of **Entrevistas** by themselves do not fully amount to a coherent picture of cultural diversity, the "Readings" section achieves its goal by presenting a picture of struggles in which people construct meaning from different positions in the social space. For example, the adaptation of José María Argueda's novel *Los ríos profundos* is an excellent example of the power struggle between dominant groups and indigenous minorities in Peru. (427). The section also provides an excellent essay that addresses the tensions that occur between Latino immigrant parents and their daughters born and raised in the United States (332-33). By adapting these essays and stories, the authors of **Entrevistas** are stimulating intellectual

discussions through an analysis of contemporary cultures. Also, though the three textbooks develop a fairly typical list of harmonious topics for their chapters, **Entrevistas** has included three controversial chapters: Between Cultures, Minority and Majority Groups, and the Media where issues of cultural hybridization, ethnicity, and media representation are discussed. The three are pedagogically important because they encourage students to move from monolithic and essentialist notions of culture to the understanding of culture as a hybrid space.

Intimately connected with this topic, **Mosaicos** dedicates one chapter to Latinos in the United States. Their presentation, however, does not move away from a factual description of the main groups that have arrived through several generations. The narrative describes a peaceful array of immigrants, and briefly mentions that some are not recent immigrants. **Entrevistas**, on the other hand, presents the topic of immigration in a much more conflicting way as, for instance, issues of illegal immigration, discrimination, and deportation fill the pages of the chapter. The cultural knowledge displayed by the "Readings" segment is further enhanced by American interpretations of Latino culture, in the section "People say." Though some of the texts are superficially

treated, and the questions that accompany them could be further explored, many of the narratives are informative and intellectually stimulating. The majority of introductory Spanish textbooks point out that Latinos of different genders, ethnicities, and classes greet each other in similar ways. **Entrevistas**, however, introduces greetings in Colombia by making a reference to gender differences and also by contrasting these customs to those of the United States. A segment on Costa Rica encourages students to question the stereotypical notion of social equality prevailing in that country, while another narrative focuses on the cultural experiences of Cuban Americans. The authors have successfully structured these segments to contrast and compare them with the views provided by native speakers in the video. At the same time, cultural hybrids are illustrated in the context of the United States and Peru , while the complexity of defining women, ordinary citizens, and the role of the media in different Spanish-speaking societies is also presented for discussion.

As demonstrated by the issues analyzed in **¿Qué tal?, Mosaicos** and **Entrevistas**, textbooks tend to present versions of reality that embody certain interests, reify certain interpretations and value judgments, and give prominence to specific pieces of

information while rendering others invisible or – grossly – distorted. Looking at culture from a sociocultural perspective urges language professionals to question not only what specific knowledge is taught but more importantly whose knowledge is privileged by the foreign language curriculum. In the case of undergraduate foreign language education it is often the case that the *textbook* plays a crucial role in defining the curriculum. As Michael Apple has pointed out in his seminal work on texts, these "are not simply 'delivery systems' of 'facts'. They are at once the results of political, economic and cultural battles and compromises." (Apple: 91, 2-3). Books assemble through content and form particular constructions of reality, that is, ways of legitimizing knowledge. Some textbooks may highlight certain people by excluding from their pages the experiences and expressions of groups who, for instance, have become marginalized. By now it is safe to conclude that it is not merely coincidental that the great majority of introductory language texts carefully select in their visuals light-skin Latinos rather than mestizos, indigenous people or blacks, for example, which constitute the majority of Spanish speakers today in the world. At the same time, these texts choose textual strategies to "introduce"

and "familiarize" students with the Latino experience which systematically avoid defining specific aspects such as those concerning the treatment of Indian communities and their millenary arts by local ruling classes across the Americas. The sad conclusion is that instead of an intellectually provocative experience in the classroom, students often receive an education based on ready-mades devoid of real connections with specific geographies and historical processes, while on the strength of questionable ideological assumptions. On the positive side it is also true that new textbooks, such as **Entrevistas**, are attaching a growing importance to culture. An examination of popular texts in American colleges today reveals that the scenario is no longer monolithic, that the first steps to change this situation are being taken. This does not necessarily mean that language teachers will follow since, as it is already evident, in many cases new texts are used with old approaches. But the most important fact is a trend that will hopefully contribute to healthy changes in second language teaching. The transitions from **¿Qué tal?** and **Mosaicos,** strongly rooted on racial and ethnic stereotypes, individual achievement, and erasures of social processes, to **Entrevistas,**

committed to diversity, community and a dialogical understanding of reality, seem to point in a promising direction.

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