

En este nuevo contexto, el *infrarracismo* —siguiendo a Michel Wievior-*ka*—, el racismo interétnico y el racismo político que asoma en los centros y que la autora identifica en los centros analizados constituye un importantísimo problema, que puede contribuir a que los descendientes de inmigrantes interioricen y reproduzcan la situación social de sus padres en la sociedad catalana. Más inquietante aún es que la autora no encuentre en los centros preocupación sobre el racismo por parte del profesorado: «No he encontrado una fuerte preocupación ni concienciación por este aspecto, salvo algunas excepciones. No hay comisiones, profesorado o direcciones de centro que trabajen directamente y específicamente el tema del racismo» (pág. 229). En nuestra opinión, una aceptación pasiva de estas formas de racismo contribuye a la llamada *endogeneización* de la inmigración; es decir, que pese a la existencia de igualdad legal, estos jóvenes crezcan en un contexto de desigualdad real aceptada o interiorizada, en la que los descendientes de inmigrantes sean encaminados hacia una posición futura de *infraclase* en un contexto de pauperización de la clase trabajadora.

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*Making Sense of Race, Class and Gender. Common Sense, Power and Privilege in the United States.*  
Celine-Marie Pascale  
2007. New York: Routledge.

Common sense is defined by the English dictionary as the basic level of practical knowledge that we all need to live in a reasonable way. Even though it may be strange to relate common sense to discriminatory practices, Pascale shows how it is used to naturalize historical relations of power and privilege. She also shows how common sense produces cultural discourses about race, gender and class that legitimate and reproduce inequalities in the United States.

Pascale arrives to several conclusions by analyzing how common sense shapes the definition of race. First, since whiteness comes to stand as the ordinary way of being human in hegemonic U.S. culture, both white interviewees and television shows with white main characters speak as if they do not have race. Hence, whiteness emerges as an un-raced position from which everything else is measured. Second, even though most of the people she interviewed talked about race as self evident there were several contradictions in their interviews and even in their personal experience. When asked about their race they would easily identify themselves with an ethnic group although they did not

know how to define race exactly. Some pointed to skin colour, others cultural background. Furthermore, some of them explained through their experiences how the meaning of race can change from one place to another. They were *Latinos* in the United States and whites back in Mexico. Others talked about their struggle to gain recognition for their racial identity as Native Americans. There were no common criteria about what race was. As a result Pascale concludes that discourses about race do not need to be coherent to maintain the distances between human groups. What is more, common sense produces «race as a matter that requires no thought—which leads people to believe they simply see race.»

Pascale highlights two major social changes with regard to gender that are not exclusively American. First, many gender and LGBT rights, which feminists, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people achieved long ago, are being questioned. «There were nearly three hundred LGBT-related bills introduced in state capitols, 92 per cent were intended to restrict marriage and other civil rights», Pascale underlines. Second, despite the great advances in gender research, the common sense knowledge that provides the basis for public discourse is less linked with academic knowledge than it was decades ago.

The distinction between sex (the biological and physiological charac-

teristics that define men and women) and gender (the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women) was the turning point that made possible the development of public gender policies. Nevertheless, this gender/sex binarity was challenged by postmodern discourses some time ago. Butler's critiques of standard feminism's definition of women are twofold. First, trying to remove biological determinism from the definition of woman, materialistic feminism creates a new social definition based on a supposedly shared femininity. This definition of women and shared femininity as a fixed term is not «merely descriptive, but always normative.» Consequently, the materialistic feminist definition of 'woman' implies there is a *normal* way of being a woman (for example, feeling sexual attraction for men or being a mother). This definition also assumes that there are some essential properties by virtue of which one is either a man or a woman. But according to Butler this sex/gender binarity is false if essential femininity and masculinity do not exist. What it is more; this gender binarity illusion is featured by prevalent power structures. Outside the academic world, not even the distinction between gender and sex seems to have become common sense knowledge.

Most interviewees, newspaper articles, and television shows analyzed

by Pascale did not make any distinction between gender and sex. Furthermore, most heterosexual people talked about gender in ways that mix sex and gender but they also conflate gender and sexual orientation. Multiple sexualities were never concretely visible on television shows and only gay men were suggested to exist. Asking interviewees about their sexual orientation, the possibility of multiple sexualities was enough to bring up homophobia. Gender discourse practices are so powerful that even transgendered people, who experience sex and gender as contradictory, have reinforced the hegemonic discourses about the sex/gender binarity. They describe an inner feeling of womanhood and manhood that transcends their physical and biological attributes. But on the other hand, it seems that people who belong to discriminated groups such as the homeless or ethnic minorities exist without the female gender. There is a contradiction between the qualities associated with these groups and those associated with femininity.

Pascale's conclusions indicate that common sense knowledge about race and gender, as long as it establishes being a white heterosexual male as the normal way of being human, have some points of agreement with modern philosophy theories that construct the concept of citizenship. Sheila Benhabid and other feminist authors claim that modern philosophy about citizen-

ship did not take into account multiple human experiences. In my opinion, common sense knowledge might not be linked with academic work on gender but with other academic fields which do share this *neutral* concept of being human.

Common sense about class operates quite differently. Before Percale's conclusion about class cultural discourses is explained, some American contextual particularities must be understood. First, the gap between the rich and the poor has been increasing for decades. This increasing economic difference and its consequences, not only for the poor but also for the affluent, are not part of routine public discourse. There may be several reasons for this. First, class analysis no longer shapes public discourses in the United States. Second, the U.S is a country devoted to the rhetoric of democratic equality and the philosophy of the self made man. Being poor or rich seems to be a matter of personal attitude quite separate from the economic context. Consequently, the social reasons for economic differences are often among the least noticeable. In fact, most people interviewed do not see class as obviously as they see race or gender. Even when they are quite wealthy they talk about themselves as being middle class. On the other hand, less wealthy people do not pay much attention to issues of class identity and they focus on responding «with features of their

identity that they feel to be more important than class.» Because class position is defined as being «a particular kind of person», regardless of income or assets, class is understood as a voluntary social category, a matter of desire or attitude to move up from working class to upper class. Something you can refuse to do if you are wealthy. The documents analyzed show that being poor or wealthy is the consequence of personal attitude rather than economic context.

For fifteen years, Pascale studied newspaper discourse about homelessness to comprehend the cultural production of class. Studying how the discourses on homelessness changed during the 1980s will help us to understand how common sense discourse practices about class work. In the early 80s, newspapers distinguished between the old poor and the new poor. Old poor people were called *drifters*, *transients*, *vagrants* and *bums*. The new poor, however, were called homeless. They were working class people (families, men, women, and children) who had lost their home because they could not afford to pay for it even if they had a job. Newspapers talked about the new poor as a social problem created by economic changes. Quite soon, around 1983, this public discourse about homelessness disappeared to be replaced by a different one, in which one's personal economic situation was a matter of attitude, free choice and will.

The homeless were created not only by economic crisis but also by drug abuse or mental illness. Furthermore, the discourse about homelessness shifted from having a social and economic focus to being a question of «how our city looks». The *homeless crisis*, all the trouble *homelessness* caused to *people*, was *solved* by adopting new laws and new public policies that did not allow, for example, people to remain in a public building after hours.

Five years later another American feminist author, Barbara Ehrenreich, investigated how some American collective ideas stopped people from understanding their social position. Studying the spread of *positive thinking*, where wealth and poverty are merely a question of personal attitude, Ehrenreich concludes that it is a brilliant ideological system of social control. Everything bad that happens to people is really their fault and it is their attitude that has to change. The economic and social systems have nothing to do with crisis. As in the discourses about homelessness, under positive thinking the victim is to blame.

This discourse assumes class to be the product of personal attitude and has some important social effects. It reinforces the idea of a social system based on economic meritocracy and, at the same time, justifies the gap between poor and rich people in the United States. Finally, this hegemonic dis-

course undermines the capacity for collective identity based on class interests.

Percalé's book, as any excellent book does, not only answers questions that are important if we are to understand our society, but also suggests several new ones: why is common sense no longer linked to academic gender knowledge? If the academic world is not generating the basis of common sense and public discourse, who is? As American television shows have spread worldwide, have they changed local common sense for these American cultural values of class, gender and race? Is it a coincidence that public space has been over controlled to hide poor people in the streets of the U.S and Europe? In a world where fundamental rights are being supported, is it necessary to use fixed identities like in the past to defend social rights? Would postmodern strategies be enough? Hopefully these questions will be answered in Pascale's new book.

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