Book Reviews

Edward E. Telles and the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA) (eds)
Pigmentocracies: Ethnicity, Race, and Color in Latin America
Chapel Hill: **The University of North Carolina Press, 2014, 320 pp. $27.99 pbk**

Pigmentocracies: Ethnicity, Race, and Color in Latin America presents the results of an international research project – PERLA (Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America) – which was coordinated by Edward Telles with the collaboration of the book's contributing authors. This work presents new evidence that has the potential to transform the way that Latin American countries perceive themselves and their ethno-racial inequalities. In addition, it proposes a transnational research agenda for ethno-racial relations based on the idea of pigmentocracy, which focuses on phenotypic difference. Given its innovative demonstration that the social hierarchies of different countries are organized by the skin colour of individuals (in a pigmentocratic way), this book should become an obligatory reference in the study of race and ethnicity.

The book comprises four chapters devoted to the analysis of ethno-racial issues in Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and Brazil, as well as introductory and concluding chapters containing comparative analysis. The chapters on Mexico (authored by Regina Martínez Casas, Emiko Saldívar, René D. Flores, and Christina A. Sue) and Peru (by David Sulmont and Juan Carlos Callirgos) are focused more on the indigenous population, while discussions on Brazil (by Graziella Moraes Silva and Marcelo Paixão) and Colombia (by Fernando Urrea Giraldo, Carlos Augusto Viáfara López, and Mara Viveros Vigoya) focus on Afrodescendants.

The main source of information for this project was a survey on ethno-racial issues – primarily ethno-racial classification – with nationally representative samples applied to each of these four countries. *Pigmentocracies* demonstrates important results regarding the means of collection of ethno-racial data, with significant implications for the description of the characteristics of the population of each nation. In applying alternative ways of asking about race and ethnicity, the study was able to reveal social inequalities based on phenotypic characteristics and, more notably, on skin colour (therefore the expression 'pigmentocracy'),

which have been neglected by the ideal of 'mixed nation', shared by the four countries studied.

The comparisons suggest that in spite of important particularities, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and Brazil share some common historical processes. Colonization by Portugal and Spain, for example, was strongly marked by ethno-racial hierarchies, resulting in the subjugation of Indians and the enslavement of Africans by Europeans, as well as significant miscegenation between colonizers and African and indigenous women. In the postcolonial nineteenth century, the local economic, political and intellectual elites – which were almost entirely white – influenced by theories of scientific racism that prevailed at the time, feared that the mixture of races and the large non-white population would undermine development and modernization. Such concerns led these elites to aim to whiten the population of their countries. In the twentieth century, however, with the scientific undermining of racial theories, these states embraced a nation-building discourse that celebrated the mixture of races, or *mestizaje*, disseminating a vision of the *mestizo* nation, homogeneous and harmonious, despite the persistence of racial hierarchies and of the greater social value attributed to whiteness and to the physical and cultural characteristics of European origin.

Since the end of the twentieth century, black and indigenous social movements, with the support of international organizations, have been pushing for public policies to mitigate ethno-racial inequalities, which require the collection of ethno-racial data by governments and research institutions. In response to such claims, many Latin American states have adopted the political perspective of multiculturalism, admitted the disadvantages and discrimination suffered by indigenous and African descent, and recognized their specific identities and rights. However, the analysis presented in the book demonstrates that the ideology of *mestizaje* and the prestige of whiteness continue to impact these societies, particularly in the form of ethno-racial classification and social hierarchies.

While the majority of the population of these countries is considered mixed (or *mestizo*), different forms of classification can overlap. The same individual may be categorized in different ways depending on factors such as who is classifying (self-identification or classification by others), the wording of the question on ethno-racial identity in surveys, and different criteria such as language, ancestry, and phenotypic characters. The authors have a special interest in skin colour, a visible phenotypic feature of continuous aspect that can discriminate between individuals even *within* the same ethno-racial category. To capture the variations of skin colour through the survey, the authors created an innovative colour palette, reproduced on the cover of the book, consisting of eleven skin tones from which the interviewers matched the skin colour of the face of the respondents.

The colour palette was the main instrument used for demonstrating the central theory of the book: the pigmentocracy. According to the theory of pigmentocracy, skin colour is the central axis for the system of social stratification in these Latin American countries, where socioeconomic hierarchies are strongly related to a

colour continuum, ultimately resulting in lighter-skinned people occupying more favoured positions in society, and darker-skinned individuals occupying lower positions. Telles states, 'skin color cut through the cover of *mestizaje* and revealed an unambiguous pigmentocracy in the four countries we examined' (p. 13).

Of the countries studied, Brazil is the one with the strongest correspondence between ethno-racial categories, skin colour continuum, and social hierarchies – contrary to the vaunted ambiguity of Brazilian ethno-racial categories. People with lighter skin colour tend to be classified as white and are at the top of the social hierarchy, above browns (*pardos*) and blacks, whose socio-economic indicators are lower. These findings confirm the 'hypothesis of pigmentocracy', that darker skinned individuals are likely to be poorer than their lighter skinned co-nationals.

In Mexico, Peru, and Colombia, individuals who classify themselves in mixed-race categories (as *mestizo* or mulatto) have higher socioeconomic status indicators, even above those who classify themselves as white. This demonstrates the adherence of the elites to the *mestizo* category, revealing that the promotion of an ideal of homogeneous national identity has achieved relative success. However, the study found that if instead of self-reported categories, we consider the actual skin tone measured by the colour palette, the general tendency is that the lighter coloured people have higher socio-economic status than control populations with darker skin tone, independently of any ethno-racial identities claimed.

Thus, ethno-racial categories were found by PERLA to be less effective in estimating inequalities than the actual skin tone. The study demonstrated that this statement is valid even if we consider the fact that people who identify themselves as indigenous, a category that is often defined more by cultural characteristics than by physical traits, are the poorest. The prevalence of skin colour as an indicator of inequality implies that the indigenous, in spite of being an ethnic group, are racialized in pigmentocratic countries in the same way as the Afrodescendants. The hierarchical and discriminatory attitudes pay more attention to visible physical traits than in socially generated categorical identities. This finding puts challenges to social movements and public policies based on ethno-racial categories.

Despite the obvious and important findings of the study, the authors could have highlighted the significance of ethnicity with more detailed comparisons between indigenous and Afrodescendants in each country, revealing the specific barriers faced by each of these groups. In addition, important heterogeneities in pigmentocracies could be revealed if the authors had explored differences between individuals with similar skin tone. Furthermore, the transnational project of *Pigmentocracies* could have gone even further by including more comparisons with the United States, in a moment when authors such as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva warn that U.S. race relations are becoming increasingly similar to those of Latin America.

That said, *Pigmentocracies* is a turning point that 'colours' and 'transnationalizes' the debate on ethno-racial differences and inequalities, expanding a research agenda on phenotype-based social hierarchies to countries that previously did not have a tradition in this field of study (most specifically

Mexico and Peru). Moreover, the analysis of the empirical results represents a robust rebuttal against the assumptions of the ideology of *mestizaje*, which propagates the supposed racial harmony of the Latin American countries, and is often presented in opposition to the racial segregation of the United States of America.

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Hilary Pilkington
Loud and Proud: Passion and Politics in the English Defence League
Manchester: **Manchester University Press, 2016, 272 pp.**
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The question of what drives activism within far-right groups is a fascinating one. Often caricatured by politicians and the media as being populated by white, working-class thugs, scientific glimpses into right-wing extremist organizations that really get underneath what makes a far-right movement tick, such as Goodwin's (2011) monograph on the British National Party (BNP) or Busher's (2015) study of the English Defence League (EDL) are few and far between. Hilary Pilkington's recent book on one particular anti-Islamist, far-right protest movement – the English Defence League (EDL) – aims to dig beneath the public image of such groups, in order to unearth and critically analyse the self-understandings of the movement and its members. Pilkington lays the gauntlet down for other social scientists early on in the book, however, suggesting that this is only possible if researchers are willing to move beyond the 'contagion of stigma' visited upon researchers who do close-up fieldwork with far-right groups. This, she argues, is necessary in order to overcome impressionistic understandings of such movements and extend the parameters of what we know and understand about such groups.

Whether such a fresh approach can guarantee fresh findings about the EDL is, however, still largely questionable. Of the main chapters that focus on the EDL's core narratives of being 'not racist, not violent, just no longer silent', three serve to confirm existing findings: that there is considerable slippage in how EDL activists distinguish between Islam and Muslims; that the EDL uses claims of non-racism as a strategic device to distinguish itself from other far-right organizations; and that EDL activism is used by grassroots members to resist what they claim to be a second-class citizen status thrust upon them by ethnic minorities and political elites. These themes have already been explored in separate studies by the likes of Paul Jackson (2011), Joel Busher (2013),