

GARCÍA GUTIÉRREZ, A. *La identidad excesiva*. Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 2009. (Colección Interdisciplinar de Estudios Culturales; 39). 125 p. ISBN 978-84-9742-837-8

BY MIQUEL RODRIGO-ALSINA

Professor of Communication Theory at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra



## Beyond identity

Antonio García Gutiérrez is professor of journalism at the Faculty of Communication at the Universidad de Sevilla. His work is divided into two distinct stages: the first looks at informative documentation and the second at epistemology, starting with the new century. His publishing career starts with *La memoria subrogada. Mediación, cultura y conciencia en la red digital* (2002) and continues, amongst others, with *Desclasificados. Pluralismo lógico y violencia de la clasificación* (2007), arriving at this current work under review.

To summarise the concept of this text, we can do no better than to quote the author himself "[...] this work echoes risky and convergent proposals, of great epistemological depth, concerning the construction of a new paradigm from which we can consider culture, knowledge, memory or, in this case, identity." (p. 9). Such proposals include the emerging paradigm of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, the complex thoughts of Edgar Morin and the schizoanalysis of Gilles Deleuze. This is not an easy read, mostly because it seeks to break conceptual schemes and traditional ways of thinking. It is important, therefore, to make some preliminary comments.

An uninitiated reader might think this is an anti-modern work, but that would be an error in judgement. This work is modern precisely because of the self-criticism that modernity itself is subjected to and, consequently, it doesn't hide the darker aspects of modernity. As Josep Fontana (2005, p. 88) reminds us "We should not forget that, between 1700 and 1900, in the eras of illustration and modernity, Europeans and their American descendents – white, Christian and civilised – forced the emigration of some 10 million slaves from Africa."

This work isn't anti-identity either. Although it talks of identity, it doesn't refer to all *identities*. "The identity we therefore radically reject is that which comes from authoritative and unchallengeable debates built around individuals who hardly open their eyes to life and is inoculated through instruction via

the family, school, group, community, society, nation, state, world, without a single chance for singular development or divergence." (p. 13).

One last point: beyond the issue of identity, the most important aspect of this work is the epistemological break it proposes. In this respect, given the pure knowledge of classical epistemology, García Gutiérrez (2007, p. 19) continues with his line of thinking in his previous work that "all knowledge is dirty, contaminated by cognitive and non-cognitive elements, by emotions and passions, by vagueness, mixtures, ambiguities and contradictions." His project, which looks at new ways of thinking and declassifying, is frankly important. We should bear in mind the fact that, as Delgado states (2007, p. 200), "Any classifying entity, that's to say a superimposed entity definable by and in itself, does not serve as much to feed the basis of classification but rather constitutes its own product. In other words, it doesn't classify because there are things that need to be classified but because we classify whatever we discover. The difference is not what results in differentiation but rather differentiation creates and reifies this difference."

Looking at the content of the text, we should note that it's divided into two parts. The first includes chapters one and two; the second contains the third chapter of the book. The first part is called "Identity as conflict" and is a lucid reflection on the processes of identity, both their origins and their consequences.

The first chapter, "En torno a lo '*idem.titatio*'", talks about two identity-based geometries, "on the one hand, a pyramidal and vertical identity that's imposed on us by remote unidentified instances, impersonal both in origin and destination piercingly intimate. [...] On the other hand we can think about a horizontal identity, in other words, the identity built by subjects in their interior and exterior transits" (p. 36).

In the second chapter, "Microfísica de la identidad: pertenencias y marcas", the author opposes identity as a tool for oppression and subjugation of the person, without even being aware of this. For García Gutiérrez, "identity is written in the

pre-conscious and only here. If this were not the case, we would be talking about identifications, i.e. groups of belonging assumed by the subject with a greater or lesser degree of freedom and awareness." (p. 52).

In his analysis of the microphysics of identity, the author distinguishes two components. On the one hand, there would be identity-based attributions or labels, such as being Catalan or Spanish. On the other, there would be what is called "organisational categories or marks" (p. 54), which are more abstract and polyvalent, and enjoy an invisibility that ensures the identity will last. These marks are fundamental, since "the marks devise the real identity network that obliges us to remain loyal to a system" (p. 85). The author lists the following marks, while acknowledging that more exist: submission, totalism, totemisation, dichotomisation, resemanticisation *hic et nunc*, coherentism, normality, demarcationism and appropriationism.

The second part of the work is entitled "Declassifying identity" and starts with the third chapter, "Hacia el sujeto desclasificado". The author, referring to a previous work (García Gutiérrez 2007), proposes the strategy of self-dismantling the marks revealed. This concerns declassification but it should be clarified that "Declassification does not look to elaborate individual or differential identities but, instead, singular, solidarity-based identities." (p. 51). Research on the declassified subject does not imply a vacuum. "Such a subject is non-conformist but is not free from belonging. Or brands." (p. 90). The aim is an attitude of openness, of self-awakening, of understanding, flexibility, of metacognitive engagement, of "reinterpreting experience as experience progresses" (p. 93). In this effort to find a new way of thinking, of thinking of ourselves, he proposes a reconstruction of subjectivities through three methods. The first is the desire to declassify ourselves using strategies of self-vigilance, rebellion and escape. The second is reducing the marks' privileges (submission, totalism, totemisation...), "in the certainty that those of us who were tattooed with them can never get rid of them" (p.109). The third method is declassification through passivity (become surprised again by the accepted barbarity), compassion and solidarity

In summary, we cannot ignore the fact that, as García Gutiérrez says (2007, p. 132), "The history of identity and classification has only brought the world suffering, violence, misery and inequality." Social sciences, and not just anthropology, are partly responsible. Sen (2007, p. 236) recalls that "[...] theories can influence social thinking, political action and public policies. The artificial reduction of human beings into singular identities could have a dispersing effect and end up making the world a much more dangerous place." Maybe, therefore, it is necessary to have this "exo-immanent revolution, a revolution both without and within the everyday, without method or model, without nostalgia or hope of anything in exchange for the possible ruptures – in this lies our declassification. That which was always there, untouchable, immutable: language, customs, symbols, coherences, consistencies, moral and ethical principles, the deepest convictions, beliefs, rela-

tionships, feelings, affections and dislikes. All will be offered up to declassification." (p. 114).

As can be seen, García Gutiérrez's proposal is not an easy one: "Choosing the road of self-denial, studying the argument we hate at first sight, fearlessly questioning some principles and breaking the inviolable rules of our symbolic universe." (p. 78). Neither is this the job of the reviewer, because a good review would have to double the number of pages of the work reviewed. This text is brimming with suggestions, debates, thought-provoking material... And this is its immense heuristic value.

## References

- DELGADO, M. *Sociedades movedizas. Pasos hacia una antropología de las calles*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2007. 278 pages. ISBN: 978-84-339-6251-5
- FONTANA, J. *La construcció de la identitat. Reflexions sobre el passat i sobre el present*. Barcelona: Editorial Base, 2005. 142 pages. ISBN: 84-85031-51-2
- GARCÍA GUTIÉRREZ, A. *Desclasificados. Pluralismo lógico y violencia de la clasificación*. Rubí (Barcelona): Anthropos Editorial, 2007. (Colección Huellas, Serie Comunicación y Periodismo; 27). 143 pages. ISBN: 978-84-7658-819-2
- SEN, A. *Identidad y violencia. La ilusión del destino*. Buenos Aires: Katz, 2007. 270 pages. ISBN: 978-987-1283-41-5