

Oct. 28, 2009

15 ETHNIC IDENTITY, NATIONALISM, AND GENDER

Read: De la Cadena, Marisol, 1995, “Women are more Indian”: Ethnicity and gender in a community near Cuzco.

Smith, Carol, 1996. Race, class, gender ideology in Guatemala: modern and anti-modern forms.

I. Introduction

A. We have noted in class several times that class /ethnicity /race /nation /gender /sexuality intersect, are “imbricated”—conjoined, “interact with and constrain one another”¹

B. Nationality is gendered

C. Ethnicity is gendered

1. De la Cadena’s case in Peru: “individuals construct or contest their ascribed ethnicity within specific social contexts of power and domination based on class and gender inequalities” (p. 331)
2. Recall the reading by Schein: “The Consumption of color and the politics of white skin in post-Mao China”
3. **DISCUSS:** other examples of gendered nation, gendered ethnicity you can think of?

II. Gendering occurs at two levels: on-the-ground situations, and symbolically

A. “On-the-ground” refers to how people actually live; their options, constraints, their material reality

1. Example: limiting reproduction
 - a. Example of Slovenian program to promote sterilizing Gypsy women
 - b. Attempt to limit births of the “wrong” nationality/ ethnic group
 - c. Or the wrong race
 - 1) “Mississippi appendectomies” performed on rural black women

¹ Smith, p. 51.

- 2) Were in fact sterilizations—outright deception
2. And the opposite: attempts to increase births of members of the “right” nationality/ ethnic group/ race
 - a. Piece by Heng and Devan we’ll read for the next class is about Singapore government’s pro-natalist state policies directed at Chinese women, but not Malays or South Asians
 - b. Romania under Ceausescu, the last socialist dictator²
 - 1) Wanted to increase birth rate
 - 2) Contraception and abortion were basically not available
 - a) Like all E. European socialist countries, both women and men were expected to hold full-time jobs; state services to help families with infants and small children inadequate
 - 3) Consequently many unwanted infants were left as foundlings to be raised in state orphanages
 - 4) Horrible conditions; worse was their being given transfusions of HIV-infected blood to “strengthen” them
 - c. Israel³
 - 1) There are more fertility clinics per capita in Israel than in any other country in the world; world’s highest per capita rate of in-vitro fertilization procedures
 - 2) Fertility treatments are fully subsidized by Israeli national health insurance
 - 3) Available to all women, regardless of marital status
 - 4) Gideon Levy’s Ha’aretz article about state pro-natalism (posted at website)
 - d. Greece

² See Gail Kligman, 1998. *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu’s Romania*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

³ See Susan Martha Kahn, 2000. *Reproducing Jews: A cultural account of assisted conception in Israel*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- 1) Highest abortion rate in Europe (Russia's is higher)
 - a) Unlike Romania under Ceausescu, contraception and abortion readily available
- 2) Studied by several scholars⁴
- 3) Decision-making by both men and women was complicated by state policies and propaganda regarding the need to increase the number of Greeks
 - a) Perceive Turkey to be a threat
 - b) And Slavs to the north: the highly conflictive issue of Macedonia as Greek province and as a country
- e. Pro-Russian policies in the USSR
 - 1) Officials had been quite concerned that in the near future ethnic Russians would be a minority
3. Note that states always have a stake in demographics
 - a. For example, Japan is worried about a too-high proportion of older people
 - 1) Not enough workers in the future
 - 2) Not enough stay-at-home wives to take care of increasing numbers of elderly family members
 - b. China's one-child policy: concern with too many people, period
4. But in this class we're concerned with a specific kind of state policy regarding demographics
 - a. How to produce more of the "right stuff" and less of the "wrong stuff" in terms of specific categories of people
 - 1) With respect to nationality, ethnicity, race

⁴ Alexandra Halkias, 1998. Give birth for Greece! Abortion and nation in letters to the editor of the mainstream Greek press. *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 16, no. 1: 111-138; also see Heather Paxson, 2004. *Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and Family Planning in Urban Greece*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- 2) We don't focus on attempts to limit reproduction in "the wrong" social class
 - a) But ethnicity/race usually correlate with social class
 - b) Heng and Devan's piece you'll read for next Mon. shows that ethnicity in Singapore is classed
 - c) But clearly Singapore's policy is mostly intended to result in more ethnic Chinese, not increase numbers of upper and middle class members

B. Second kind of gendering: symbolic

1. What De la Cadena terms peoples' "mental reality"
2. The ideology says there's a fixed bipolar system that assigns people to one and only one category
 - a. But there's also a "fluid, protean, and contingent process by which people attach ethnic labels to themselves or others" (p. 331)
 - b. This benefits men
3. What is the material reality of Chitapampa?
4. Peru went through a land reform—redistribution of land
 - a. Such that the original distinction between "whites" (those that had land) and "indios" (those who didn't), no longer applied
 - b. But the classification remained
 - 1) Evolved into a cultural one—a set of symbols
 - a) **DISCUSS:** what is a symbol?
 - 2) Dress, language, certain skills
 - 3) Racism does exist in Peru
 - a) In the sense of colorism
 - b) But most people are *mestizos*
 - c. De la Cadena speaks of "cultural mestizaje"

- 1) And documents how women are indeed symbolically “more Indian”—in several negative senses
- d. What cultural—ideological, symbolic—processes keep women in that inferior position?
- 1) Familiar notions about inferiority—women linked to children
 - 2) “Weak”
 - 3) Seen to not really “work”
 - 4) Idea that if they were to try to do “real work,” they’d do it poorly, fall ill, and damage their reproductive system
 - 5) If they went to the city, they’d be subject to sexual predation and assault
 - 6) Less likely to be “in process” of losing their indigenous identity
 - 7) So, not only are they “more Indian”
 - a) More of them are, in fact, “Indian”
- C. In many other systems women are supposed to maintain the ethnic difference
1. But the gender inequality is sometimes less apparent, more easily argued away
 2. The Smith piece: in Guatemala indigenous women will wear traditional dress (even when in the U.S.) in situations where men won’t
 - a. And are far more likely to be monolingual
 - b. Celebrated as “Maya mothers,” etc.
 3. In the U.S. and Canada: lots of debates within activist ethnoracial communities about the proper role of women
 - a. Should they organize demonstrations, write leaflets, sign petitions, etc., just like the men?
 - b. Or should they represent the “traditional” culture?

- c. During the Black protests in the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s
 - d. One leader, Stokley Carmichael, said the proper position of women in the movement was supine
 - 1) This means lying on their backs
 - e. Another leader, Eldridge Cleaver, said women's proper role in the Black movement was to be a good wife and mother and raise a new generation of warriors who'll continue the fight
 - f. Elicited a great deal of discussion
 - g. Also there's a debate in the Native American movement: women portrayed as needing to be traditional—bearers of culture
- D. Another example: Mexico
- 1. The very powerful symbol of “la Malinche”:
 - a. A “national allegory” of Mexico involving race, ethnicity, conquest, gender, and sexuality
 - b. La Malinche was *conquistador* Cortez's translator and concubine
 - c. She is seen to personify the cultural connection between the act of sexual intercourse (*chingar*) and conquest, violation
 - d. She is also seen to represent the devaluation of women by men who are shamed for being mestizos—sons of Spanish fathers and socially denigrated Indian mothers
 - e. And to have betrayed her people
 - 2. Present-day gendered Mexican/Chicana identity
 - a. Patricia Zavella⁵ says that the ideology requires women to submit to repression of their sexuality
 - b. Embedded in Catholic-based discourse, institutions, and everyday practices

⁵ Zavella, Patricia 1997. “Playing with fire”: The gendered construction of Chicana/Mexicana sexuality. In Roger N. Lancaster & Micaela di Leonardo, eds., *The Gender Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy*. New York: Routledge: 392-410.

- c. The ideology justifies this with the mythologized actions of one of their sex
 - d. Zavella says that male dominance and the double standard are rationalized in the cultural polemics of *macho/chingón* and virgin/whore
 - e. Ideology of *machismo*: men are jealous, unfaithful, possessive
 - f. Theme of conquest—deflowering virgins, etc.
 - g. With women needing to continually prove their purity, for they all bear the mark of that original betrayal
 - h. Do you see how Zavella’s argument links the ideology—the symbolic level—with on-the-ground gendered relations?
 - 1) Providing justifications for the power asymmetries?
- E. The very frequent theme of “sleeping with the enemy” is gendered and sexed
- 1. It’s always women: collaborators, sluts, traitors
 - 2. Frantz Fanon’s book *The Wretched of the Earth*⁶
 - a. Assigns a vastly different role to Algerian women in the struggle against French colonialism
 - b. Women should remain veiled: the veil is a sign of resistance to the oppressor who wants to unveil them
 - 1) A rape theme
 - 2) Rape symbolizes violation, conquest
 - 3) But what if the woman accepts being unveiled?
 - a) Ideology says she’s a traitor in a way a man cannot betray
 - b) Seen as buying into the colonialist’s ideology

⁶ Fanon, Frantz, 1968 (1961 in French). *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.

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