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”.

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 dictator\(^2\)

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. Israel\(^3\)

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


1) Highest abortion rate in Europe (Russia’s is higher)
   
a) Unlike Romania under Ceausescu, contraception and abortion readily available

2) Studied by several scholars

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

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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 Zavella\(^5\) says that the ideology requires women to submit to repression of their sexuality

b. Embedded in Catholic-based discourse, institutions, and everyday practices

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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

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