Population, Identity and Political Violence
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Conflicts that involve issues of identity--especially for instance, ethnic conflicts--are part of what is arguably one of the most difficult areas of social conflict studies.[1] Particular instances of identity-based conflicts may have their root causes in competition for resources between groups, in basic structural asymmetries in the distribution of power within a polity, or in other factors. Whatever conditions cause or exacerbate them, identity based conflicts involve the intersection of the symbolic and the material in the construction of political realities.

Human populations are the physical embodiment of "The Other." In this aspect they claim power and compete for resources. Under conditions of scarcity of critical natural or social resources--such as fresh water, farmland, food, education, or medical care--internal conflicts may arise (Laughlin and Brady 1978; Homer-Dixson and Blitt 1998). Collectivities of people are marked off from one another by the act of making conceptual distinctions among them (Zerubavel 1991; Zuiker 1996). Such distinctions can rest on small and seemingly trivial aspects of social life, or they may be based in more existentially compelling features, such as language or religion (Nash 1989; Smith 1994). The distinctions that lead to the recognition of separate ethnic groups are at least partially invented.[2] Yet, these differences can be made to seem extraordinarily important and powerful. (For a discussion of the power of symbolically based political action, see Kertzer, 1988).

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When there is strife, the manipulation of the dual material and symbolic nature of ethnic groups can be used as a means for pursuing conflict. In this paper we explore these manipulations in relation to population dynamics. In general, we distinguish between strategies that manipulate the material aspects of population and those that pursue conflict through symbolically charged acts. This distinction is highly arbitrary and mainly useful as an analytical strategy for organizing the empirical material. Thus, those actions that focus on material manipulations are loaded with symbolic meaning while those that are heavily symbolic almost always involve the contortion of the physical characteristics of "The Other."

This typology of population manipulation in ethnic conflict leads to the consideration of many types of collective violence. In reviewing this material it is common to speak of groups. That is, we describe the effects of collective violence on groups of people, almost epidemiologically. This is especially the case for studies that consider the manipulation of material aspects of populations. To fully understand the symbolic power of ethnically based political violence, it is important to recognize that it is individuals who experience and interpret these actions. Once this reality is accepted, it is evident that women bear a disproportionately large burden in ethnically based attempts to manipulate population. (See for instance Jok's (1998) description of gender, health, and militarization in South Sudan.) In this presentation, we first briefly outline some of the ways in which populations are manipulated in ethnic conflicts. Then we will turn to consider some of the ways in which women are most at risk in such situations.

Material Manipulation of Populations in Ethnic Conflicts

Whether fueled by competition for strategic resources or other factors, all collective violence in ethnic conflicts which manipulates population has an underlying eugenic rationale. By this we mean that the logic underlying such violence is that in the end the polity will be, in some way, more fit—for

instance racially more pure, or better educated, or simply more "authentic."

Mass Killings: The most obvious way in which population is manipulated in ethnic conflicts is through mass killing. For instance, the first wave of killing after the 1975 Khmer Rouge consolidation of power in Cambodia left 100,000 to 200,000 dead. Upon entering the city of Phnom Penh, the Khmer Rouge assassinated the majority of the teachers, civic leaders, and students or sent them to be reeducated in special camps or rural life (Hinton 1996:823). Violence was seen as a purifying rite and was explicitly endorsed by the state (Rosenau 1994:308).

In 1983 the entire village of Kraras in East Timor was massacred. Two hundred villagers were burned to death in their homes, those fleeing to the mountains were hunted down in a "clean sweep" campaign, and any survivors were moved to camps in "controlled" areas (Franks 1996:162).

Genocidal violence occurs all too frequently.[3] Various researchers have included among them in addition to the Cambodian and Armenian genocides and the Jewish holocaust, mass killings in Nigeria between 1966 and 1970, the war between North and South Sudan, mass killings in Rwanda and Somalia, and the "ethnic cleansing" in the former Yugoslavia. Indeed, some writers have suggested that genocide occurs often enough in some regions that it has developed into a legitimate instrument of political action (Hayden 1996; Melson 1996; Mirkovic 1996).

Expulsion—refugees and diaspora populations: Forcing people to leave their homes modifies the ethnic character of an area. The flight of large numbers of people, often under adverse circumstances also imposes hardships on the refugees who may face strong threats to their ability to secure the basic necessities of life and be placed in conditions where they experience increases in sickness and death. For instance in July 1994 among Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire the crude death rate rose to one of the highest ever recorded, between 34.1 and 55.5 deaths per 10,000 population per day (Carter and Walker 1997:54).

Institutional support for Jewish immigration, the building of new communities and ideology in Israel all support a demographic realignment in the country (Avruch 1981:35-81). From a Palestinian perspective the uprooting and destruction of rural villages during the 1948 war resulted in the radical transformation of the Arab cultural landscape and its concomitant de-signification (Falah 1996).

Between 1990 and 1996 there were nearly 108 million refugees and asylum seekers worldwide, according to the United State Committee for Refugees (see Table 1).

Instances of forced dispersal, and of the refugee populations and diaspora communities that result, are found through all recorded history. In this century, the world has witnessed the forced deportation of nearly all of the Armenian population of Anatolia. Some estimate that this 1915-1916 expulsion resulted in the deaths of nearly a million Armenians.

Table 1
Refugees and Asylum Seekers, 1990-1996*

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	TOTAL
	5,414,900	5,321,500	5,730,600	5,812,400	5,857,650	5,191,200	3,526,000	36,854,250
East Asia and Pacific	698,900	811,450	502,000	797,400	690,050	640,950	613,100	4,753,850
South and Central Asia	6,330,100	6,900,800	4,715,400	3,899,050	3,319,200	2,809,400	3,112,400	31,086,350
Middle East	3,554,400	2,792,500	2,849,300	2,975,000	3,826,950	3,958,500	4,374,900	24,331,550
Europe	0	120,000	2,529,800	1,952,650	1,775,800	1,805,600	1,895,800	10,079,650
Americas and Caribbean	152,400	118,250	104,250	97,500	120,550	68,400	81,700	743,050
WORLD TOTAL	16,150,700	16,064,500	16,431,350	15,534,000	15,590,200	14,474,050	13,603,900	107,848,700

* after (Carter and Walker 1997:127-128)

The resulting Armenian diaspora is estimated to be nearly two million people living outside of the former Soviet Union (Chaliand and Rageau 1997:85, 89).

Historically so much forced dispersion has taken place that the number of peoples living in diaspora is remarkable. We now recognize: Gypsy, Black, Chinese, Indian, Irish, Greek, Lebanese, Palestinian, Jewish, Armenian, Vietnamese, and Korean diaspora communities, among others (Kidron and Segal 1995; Chaliand and Rageau 1997).

Denial of Food and Water: In the course of prosecuting ethnic conflicts food and other basic resources frequently are used as weapons.

In Sudan, the largest country in Africa, the effects of the brutal civil war between the Moslem North and Non Moslem South has resulted in significant losses in progress from past development efforts and in diminished prospects for development in the future (Ahmed 1988). For example, for the South the war has meant the near cessation of the drilling of boreholes for fresh water after 1985, an exceptionally high infant mortality rate of 180 per thousand, prevalent malnutrition among children 12 and younger, the decimation of the infrastructure for primary and secondary health care in the region, and a general alteration of traditional patterns of reproduction and sexuality (Dodge and Siddiq Abdel Rahman 1988:48-49; Duku 1988:37-44; Jok 1998).

In Zimbabwe from 1978 to 1980 the military carried out Operation Turkey, destroying crops, livestock, and food supplies in order to starve the guerrillas (Sanders 1982). The unfortunate consequence of this strategy was widespread malnutrition of rural children and increased infant and childhood mortality.

Women, Political Violence, and Symbolism

Even when collective violence is addressed toward an ethnic group without particular regard to gender, women bear an undue burden. In circumstances where organized fighting is taking place, men may leave their homes to join with an organized or guerilla fighting force. This frequently leaves

women with increased responsibilities for childcare and the maintenance of collective cultural identity in a setting where resources are limited, and they are exposed to manipulation and pressure from within and outside their communities (Kissane 1997; Jok 1998). Also, it is frequently the case that women carry a kind of special responsibility for their group's cultural identity. This inscribing of identity on women—by circumscribing the modes and range of their action, by regulating their sexuality, or by "nationalizing" reproduction—may be taken up voluntarily or forced upon them. In either case, the result is that women's individual reproductive acts come to symbolize the collective identity of the group (Caplan 1989; Parker, Russo et al. 1992; Hale 1996). As a result, political violence against women becomes freighted with symbolic meanings that go beyond the physical consequences to the individual woman. In this section of the paper, we consider two such forms of ethnic-based, political violence: rape in war and eugenic sterilization. In addition to these brutal appropriations of women's reproduction to nationalist causes, there is in addition a third, less apparently destructive form of appropriation: explicit and implicit pronatalist programs and ideologies that induce women to maximize the number of children they have in order to support their group.

Before proceeding we want to state an important caveat. Although we discuss rape, sterilization and pronatalist strategies as symbolic, these acts are not "merely" symbolic. Indeed they are material in the most ugly manner possible, causing deep physical, psychological and spritual trauma for the affected women (Kozaric-Kovacic, Folnegovic-Smalc et al. 1995; Fischman 1996; Garbarino 1996; Kissane 1997).

Rape and Sexual Torture: Reports of the widespread use of rape as a weapon of ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda captured the attention of and were particularly distressing to the American and other publics (see, for example, *Economist* 1993). In the face of these distressing reports, much attention was focused on rape in war. For the first time, perhaps, there was a widespread turning away from

explanations of rape in war as the expression of the natural instincts of groups of uncontrolled men. This reductionist view is being replaced by a recognition that this kind of rape is perhaps foremost an act of political symbolism intended to have the very real consequences of destroying the physical and psychological existence of the women concerned, and to wreck the culture and collective identity of the group being attacked (Thomas and Regan 1994; Seifert 1996).

The efficacy of these strategies is testified to by accounts of the sequelae of such rape or sexual torture. Psychological studies suggest that women subjected to this kind of sexual violence tend to talk about their traumatic experiences in the third person, and use phrases like "as if." Feelings of distrust, suspicion, shame, and humiliation tend to dominate among these women (Kozaric-Kovacic, Folnegovic-Smalc et al. 1995). This disassociated psychological frame is consistent as well with observations that women subjected to rape or sexual exploitation engage in sexual activities, such as prostitution, that are stigmatized and contrary to the maintenance of group identity (Jok 1998).

Eugenic Sterilization: In situations in which inter-group conflicts and competition exist, and even in settings where such conflict does not result in open violence, women are disproportionately targeted. In some settings this has translated into attempts to control their reproductive capacities without their consent or knowledge. Sometimes such control has been achieved in the context of explicit policies, while at others it has developed as part of a pattern supported by ideological underpinnings in health care. Thus family planning programs become implicated in genocide (Weisbord 1973; Jarrell 1992).

In East Timor, for example, the Indonesian family planning program has been implicated in human rights abuses against women. Recently both the family planning program and the government health system have been implicated in using surgical sterilization and injectable hormonal contraceptives to control covertly East Timor women's fertility. One result is the widespread belief on behalf of the local East Timor

population that the family planning program is used by the Indonesian government as a political tool to threaten the survival of the East Timorese as a national group (Gill 1995; Kissane 1997; Sissons 1997).

Similar experiences are reported, especially by minority groups, throughout the world. Bangladeshi refugees, for instance, were reported as targets of coerced sterilization in India. One report describes the practice of government officials fulfilling quotas by forcing refugees to be sterilized en masse, or to coerce consent with the promise of Indian citizenship (Voluntary Health Association of India 1995). It appears that such eugenic sterilization policies are also especially directed against indigenous peoples and communities of color (Weisbord 1973; Reilly 1991; Jarrell 1992; Asetoyer 1994; *Economist* 1996; Lama 1998).

As with the more overt attacks of organized rape and torture, eugenic sterilization appears to have the multiple effect of traumatizing individual women, symbolically weakening the cultural identity of ethnic groups, and of directly limiting the material aspects population.

Pronatalist Strategies: Recently, researchers using material from Latin America, Europe, and Africa have argued persuasively that the enactment of ethnic, national, religious, or other group identity is expressed importantly through the articulation of norms governing women's sexual and reproductive behavior (Parker, Russo et al. 1992). Among Palestinian women in the West Bank, for example, the high fertility rate contributes to nationalist aspirations and children become potent symbols of national struggle (Peteet 1991:183-185). A similar pronatalist, "revenge of the cradle," strategy has been reported among French Canadians in Quebec (Evenson 1998).

Beginning in 1984, the Singapore government sought to increase the fertility of university-educated women while also providing subsidies for the "voluntary" sterilization of poor and uneducated women and men (Palen 1986). The underlying logic of these kinds of eugenic activities rests on a

common, though confused, belief that manipulation of such socially based variation has direct genetic effects.

Conclusion

During the past decade there has been a sharp rise in the prominence of ethnic conflict and collective violence throughout the world. This has been expressed through dramatic and horrifying ethnically-based violence, such as that in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. As analysts have struggled to understand and intervene in these conflicts they have sought new models for the international system. In this paper we have discussed a number of ways in which ethnic conflict has been used to manipulate the demographic character of regions throughout the world.

These practices range from the overt violence of mass killing to the ideological encouragement of greater fertility. All of these practices are evident through recorded history. The international community has recognized that these practices have important material consequences for the groups under attack. This review shows that rather than being isolated instances, manipulation of populations in ethnic conflicts rely on a eugenic logic and symbolic force. This symbolic force places women at special risk. As we approach the 21st century, the international community needs to find ways to come to terms with the roots of ethnic conflicts and of the power of such conflicts to persist over time. To do so we will need improved understandings of both the material and symbolic ways these conflicts affect population dynamics.

Notes

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[2] Ethnic identifications are only one kind of identity-based group. For purposes of this paper, however, we consider ethnic conflicts to be the clearest form of identity-based conflicts. On the abstract and invented nature of ethnic boundaries see (Hobsbawn 1983; Nash 1989).

[3] We distinguish between genocide by mass killing and genocide carried out through eugenic sterilization, which is discussed below.

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