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WOMEN AND THE BIOLOGICAL REPRODUCTION OF THE NATION

Women affect and are affected by national and ethnic processes in several different ways. This chapter focuses on the dimension of this relationship which corresponds most closely to the so-called 'natural' role of women – to bear children – and on its implications for both the constructions of nations and women's social positionings. As Paola Tabet (1996) argues, one cannot dichotomize between 'natural' and 'controlled' reproduction: all so-called natural biological reproduction takes place in the specific social, political and economic contexts which construct it. A variety of cultural, legal and political discourses are used in constructing boundaries of nations, as will be discussed in the following chapters. However, these boundaries are constructed in order to sort people into 'us' and 'them' and stretch from generation to generation. As the biological 'producers' of children/people, women are also, therefore, 'bearers of the collective' within these boundaries (Yuval-Davis, 1980).

This is something which is often ignored in feminist literature. For example, the editorial of the special issue on population and reproductive rights of the Oxfam journal *Focus on Gender*, published ahead of the UN conference on this question in Cairo, states that 'biology, conjugal relations and kinship obligations can override women's freedom to decide their own fertility' (1994: 4). The argument in this chapter is that women's positionings in and obligations to their ethnic and national collectivities, as well as in and to the states they reside in and/or are citizens of, also affect and can sometimes override their reproductive rights.

Before discussing, however, the specific ways which are usually used in various nationalist discourses to construct women as 'bearers of the collective', the chapter examines the intersections between women's reproductive roles and the constructions of nations.

Blood and Belonging

The central importance of women's reproductive roles in ethnic and national discourses becomes apparent when one considers that, given the central role that the myth (or reality) of 'common origin' plays in the construction of most ethnic and national collectivities, one usually joins the collectivity by being born into it. In some cases, especially when nationalist and racist

ideologies are very closely interwoven, this might be the only way to join the collectivity, as those who are not born into it are excluded. The only way 'outsiders' can conceivably join the national collectivity in such cases might be by intermarriage. But even then, as for example was the case in Nazi law, the 'pure blood' can be 'contaminated' even if one-eighth or one-sixteenth is the blood of the others (Jews, blacks). And James Davis, in his book *Who Is Black? One Nation's Definition* (1993), describes the 'one-drop rule' which has operated in the construction of the definition of 'who is black' in the USA.

It is not incidental, therefore, that those who are preoccupied with the 'purity' of the race would also be preoccupied with the sexual relationships between members of different collectivities. Typically, the first (and only) legislative proposal that Rabbi Kahana, the leader of the Israeli fascist party Kach, raised when he was a member of the Israeli Parliament was to forbid sexual relationships between Jews and Arabs. Legal permission for people from different 'races' to have sex and to marry was one of the first significant steps that the South African government took in its journey towards the abolition of apartheid.

The inclusion of a new baby in a national collectivity is far from being, of course, purely a biological issue. In different religious and customary laws, the membership of a child might depend exclusively on the father's membership (as in Islam) or the mother's membership (as in Judaism), or it might be open for a dual or voluntary choice membership. A variety of rules and regulations govern when children born to 'mixed parenthood' become part of the collectivity and when they do not. They can be considered a separate social category, as was the case in South Africa; part of the 'inferior' collectivity, as during slavery; or – although this is rarer – part of the 'superior' collectivity, as was the case in marriages between Spanish settlers and aristocratic Indians in Mexico (Gutierrez, 1995). Social as well as legal conventions are of crucial importance here. A man from Ghana tried in the 1970s to claim his British origin, stating the patriality clause in the British Immigration Act, and arguing that his African grandmother was legally married to his British grandfather. The judge rejected his claim, arguing that at that period no British man would have genuinely married an African woman (WING, 1985).

The importance of 'common origin' as an organizing principle of nations varies. There are some nations, like Switzerland and Belgium, where several specific ethnic groupings constitute the 'nation'. In settler societies, such as the USA or Australia, 'common destiny' rather than 'common origin' might be the crucial factor in the constitution of 'the nation', but nevertheless there would be an implicit, if not explicit, hierarchy of desirability of 'origin' and culture which would underlie the nation building processes, including immigration and natal policies (Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995). While the position of women as migrants, immigrants and refugees can be deeply affected by nationalist constructions of boundaries, differential natal national policies can affect the lives of all women in 'the nation'.

Even when 'common origin' is not the most important dimension of specific nationalist projects, the knowledge of one's 'true' origin can deeply affect one's identity and identification with particular ethnic and national collectivities. Marilyn Strathern (1996a; 1996b) claims that this is a specific Euro-American cultural configuration, as is the notion that conception of a child is an outcome of a single sexual act (rather than of a continuous process of involvement). The fashionable search by adopted children and those born through artificial insemination for their 'true' parents – rather than acceptance of the parents who continuously cared for and nurtured them while they were growing up – needs to be viewed in the light of this western mode of identity construction. An extreme case reported in the British press in 1995 was of a man who was adopted as a baby by a Jewish family and who claimed that he discovered, when papers related to his adoption were made accessible to him, that he was not 'Jewish' at all but an 'Arab' – born as a result of an affair between an English woman and a Kuwaiti man when they were both students in London. Although the man realized that his 'biological' father did not want to have anything to do with him, he became engaged in a (most probably futile) legal battle to be given Kuwaiti citizenship. Membership in an ethnic and national collectivity, as well as in a particular family, was the goal in this search for origin. In order not to allow any ambiguity in this respect, the law in Israel concerning surrogate motherhood declares that the surrogate mother and the 'real' mother have to be of the same religious origin (*Ma'ariv*, 10 July 1996). The attempt in many local authorities in Britain during the 1980s not to allow inter-racial fostering and adoption also assumed an essentialist linear relationship between individual identity, family membership and uncrossable collectivity boundaries.

New developments in genetic engineering, and the identification of a multitude of genes which supposedly determine our moral and social aptitude as well as our chances of becoming ill in specific ways, bring to the fore new, medical reasons for the need for knowledge of biological origin. However, the renewed interest in genetic theories of intelligence (Herrnstein and Murray, 1994) again shows the close interrelationship between such so-called scientific interests and racialized constructions of collectivities.

Funnily enough, people's need for discovery of their 'true' biological origin, and the direct implications this has on their constructions of identities of selves, is happening at the same time that other medical and genetic engineering developments enable transplantations of human – and recently animal (pig) – body parts. This latter development does not seem to affect people's perceptions about who they – and others – are, even when vital and symbolically significant organs, such as the heart, are involved. It seems that in this discourse of biology/identity some parts of the body are more directly linked with identity than others. The moral and legal debates around issues of *in vitro* fertilization and 'surrogate motherhood' prove the centrality in this debate of 'women as wombs' and the commodification of women's reproductive powers, especially those women from lower economic and ethnic positions (Raymond, 1993).

This commodification also has an international dimension in the trafficking of women and of babies for adoption and the horrific trade in foetal and children's organs for research and transplantations (1993: 187). As such, the relationship here is not only between individual people, desperate for economic resources or for children, selling and buying reproductive 'products', but also between less and more powerful national collectivities, with higher and lower national reproductive rates.

Surrogacy and adoption notwithstanding, whether women are encouraged, discouraged or sometimes forced to have or not to have children, or – especially since the development of the appropriate antenatal tests – to have children of a particular sex, depends on the hegemonic discourses which construct nationalist projects at specific historical moments. One or more of three major discourses tend to dominate nationalist policies of population control. They are the discourse I call 'people as power'; the eugenicist discourse; and the Malthusian discourse. In the following sections of the chapter these discourses will be described, although it is beyond the scope of this book to examine closely the actual processes of implementation of these policies and women's responses to them.

People as Power

In this discourse, the future of 'the nation' is seen to depend on its continuous growth. Sometimes this growth can be based also on immigration. At other times, it depends almost exclusively on the reproductive powers of women who are called upon to have more children. The need for people – often primarily for men – can be for a variety of nationalist purposes, civil and military. They can be needed as workers, as settlers, as soldiers. For example, in Japan the government is currently offering a reward of 5000 yen (\$38) a month for each child under school age and twice as much for third children. They are worried as the birth rate in Japan is now the lowest in its history. (There is talk about Japanese women having gone on a 'birth strike' because conditions for raising children are so bad.) TV advertisements exhort people to 'Get a brother (or sister) [*sic*] for your child.' The official reason for this campaign is the welfare of 'the nation': if Japan's population declines it will cause 'labour shortages, sluggish economic growth and higher tax burdens to support social services for the elderly'. This campaign, however, has raised echoes of the coercive 1930s campaign to 'breed and multiply' for the good of the Japanese empire (WGNRR, 1991).

In settler societies, such as Australia, the call has been to 'populate or perish' (deLepervanche, 1989). A certain 'critical mass' of people was seen as crucial for the viability of the 'nation building' process there. Although immigration was encouraged as a quick way to achieve this goal, measures were originally taken to keep 'undesirable elements' out, such as the construed Asian 'yellow peril'. In Israel, also, immigration was highly encouraged to provide people to settle the country. In this case, however, the desired immigration was even

more exclusive – namely Jewish, although it included more or less ‘desirable’ Jewish communities, Ashkenazi (western) and Mizrahi (oriental). However, unlike the sparse Aboriginal population in Australia, the indigenous Palestinian population has been fiercely resisting the Zionist Jewish settlement project, and the military aspect of the ‘nation building’ process has been predominant (Abdo and Yuval-Davis, 1995; Ehrlich, 1987). In order to encourage Jewish women to have more children, a variety of policies have been developed, including child allowances, maternity leave and, for some years after the establishment of the state (following a similar policy in the Soviet Union), declaring an award for ‘heroine mothers’ who had ten children or more.

The ‘demographic race’ with the Palestinians has been prominent in Israel’s history (Portuguese, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 1989). Shimon Peres, in his role as the Israeli Foreign Minister, was reported in the Israeli press (October 1993) to have said that ‘Politics is a matter of demography, not geography’ when explaining his readiness for Israeli (very partial) withdrawal from the Occupied Territories (those occupied since the 1967 war). In other societies in which national conflict exists between two national groupings which compete on the same territory, similar importance has been given to the ‘demographic balance’ – as in Lebanon, Cyprus and former Yugoslavia. In Slovenia, for example, in 1991, the platform of the major party Demos explicitly stated that ‘women should not have the right to abort future defenders of the nation.’ In Poland, one of the arguments for criminalizing abortion in 1989 referred to Poland’s 1920 victory over the Red Army as proof of the need for a large population (Fuszara, 1993). There are also claims that the pressure for finding a solution to the Northern Ireland problem is currently mounting owing, to a great extent, to the fact that Catholics are going to become, before too long, the majority of the population there.

The ‘demographic race’ can take place not only where there is a national conflict on a contested territory but also where an ethnic majority is seen as crucial in order to retain the hegemony of the hegemonic collectivity. Angela Davis describes how in 1906 President Roosevelt ‘admonished the well-born white women who engaged in wilful sterility – the one sin for which the penalty is national death, race suicide’ (1993: 351, quoted in Portuguese, 1996: 33–4). Recently in Bulgaria, with similar concerns, the government has implemented measures to encourage ethnic Bulgarian women to have more children in their ‘demographic race’ with the Turkish and Romani minorities who have a higher birth rate (Petrova, 1993).

The pressure on women to bear more children can also be a national strategy to overcome a national disaster. In Russia, for instance, pro-natalist policies were a direct response to the depletion of the population following the revolution and the civil war (Riley, 1981b: 193, in Portuguese, 1996: 48). Similarly in Israel, pro-natalist ideologies have been connected not only to the Zionist settlement project but also to the aftermath of the Nazi Holocaust in which 6 million Jews died. Not having children – or even marrying and having children ‘out’ of the Jewish community – has been seen as contributing to a

‘demographic Holocaust’. In the early 1980s a senior Internal Affairs Ministry civil servant attempted (but luckily failed) to force Jewish women who contemplated legal abortions to watch a video in which appeared not only the usual ‘pro-life’ movement images of fetuses as murdered babies, but also images of Jewish children in the Nazi concentration camps (Yuval-Davis, 1989: 99).

Of course the height of coercion of women to breed children for the sake of the nation took place in Nazi Germany with the *Lebensborn* programme when SS men were encouraged to father as many children as possible with Aryan women of ‘pure stock’. The men were not expected to marry the women and the children would be brought up by the state (Koontz, 1986: 398–402). The Nazis, however, not only forced certain German women to have children, they forced others not to have them. This has been part of their eugenicist discourse on national reproduction: ‘The struggle of the males for the female grants the right or opportunity to propagate only to the healthiest’ (Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, quoted in Koontz, 1986: 402).

The Eugenicist Discourse

Eugenics, a pseudo-science, concerned itself not with the size of the nation but with its ‘quality’. Concerns about the ‘quality’ of ‘the nation’ have been shared, of course, by much wider circles than self-declared eugenicists. It was concern for the ‘British race’ which Beveridge describes in his famous report as the motivation for establishing the British welfare state system (Beveridge, 1942). Better health, education and housing for the poor have been promoted as necessary for improving the quality of the welfare nations. Eugenics, however, did not concern itself with better nurturing of children, but attempted to pre-empt the quality of the nation via ‘nature’ in the way of selective breeding.

Genetic laws, said racial scientists, would determine the future of the human race; policymakers’ only option was whether to use genetic knowledge to advance humankind or to refuse to allow racial degeneration to destroy the *Volk*. (Koontz, 1986: 150)

While ‘pure Aryans’ were made to breed through a variety of economic and social incentives, a programme of forced sterilization was carried out (until successfully resisted) for the ‘feeble minded’ and other kinds of *Lebensunwurdiges* (‘life unworthy of life’). This type of programme, however, was not a Nazi invention. In 1927, for instance, the US Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of Virginia’s similar involuntary sterilization law, and such programmes were practised in some of the Southern states in the USA formally until the 1970s. Testimonies at the NGO Forum of the UN Conference on Population and Development Policies in September 1994 in Cairo have described contemporary practices (though not official policies) of a similar nature aimed at disabled people in many countries in both the North and the South, and it is probable that genetic engineering will encourage this trend even more in the future.

But eugenistic constructions of national reproduction concern much more than the physical 'health' of the next generation: they concern notions of 'national stock' and the biologization of cultural traits. The Royal Commission on Population in Britain declared in its 1949 report :

British traditions, manners, and ideas in the world have to be borne in mind. Immigration is thus not a desirable means of keeping the population at a replacement level as it would in effect reduce the proportion of home-bred stock in the population. (quoted in Riley, 1981a)

One can see here the origins of the Powellian/Thatcherite 'new racism' (Barker, 1981) in which 'culture' and 'tradition' become essentialized and biologized into notions of genealogical 'difference' and which were at the heart of the 'fear of being swamped by immigrants' with which Margaret Thatcher won her first election campaign in the UK (see discussion in Chapter 3).

The country in which today population policies are formulated in the strongest eugenistic terms is Singapore, where Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew demanded that highly educated women as their patriotic duty should produce children who would be genetically superior, while poor uneducated mothers were given a cash award of \$10,000 if they agreed to be sterilized rather than continue to produce their genetically inferior children (Heng and Devan, 1992). Although not always evident and not seen everywhere to the same extent, differential policies of encouragement and discouragement of child-bearing towards different segments of the population (based on class, ethnicity, 'race' and often all of these) exist in many countries.

Tamar Lewin, for example (WGNRR, 1991), cites a plan in Kansas to pay welfare mothers (many of whom are black) \$500 plus \$50 a year for having Norplant patches (containing long term slow release chemical contraceptives) implanted in them. The programme, which was suggested by a right-wing 'right to life' representative, was supported by an editorial in the local paper 'because of the growing poverty among black welfare mothers'. The USA was the only country in the North to have participated in the full scale experiments on Norplant – but the groups of women to whom it was given were carefully targeted. It is widely known that in many western countries, from Britain to Australia, unsafe contraceptive devices such as the notorious Depo-Pravera injection (long term contraceptive with life threatening side-effects banned in many countries) and sterilizations (including unapproved non-surgical sterilization methods like Quinacrine: Berer, 1995) were given almost exclusively to poor and minority women (*Reproductive Rights Campaign* newsletters, 1981–3).

The Malthusian Discourse

The story is somewhat different in many developing countries (or, as they are sometimes called, the countries of LACAAP: Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the Pacific) where there is a fear that the

unchecked continuous growth ('explosion') of the population might bring a national (or international) disaster (Hartman, 1987). There the population control policies are primarily aimed at reducing the rate of growth overall. Women are often the 'captive' target population for such policies. In Brazil, for instance, it has been reported that 45 per cent of women who undergo Caesarean operation end up being sterilized (Bradiotti et al., 1994: 144) and such stories are common elsewhere. In India, during the 'emergency period' in the 1970s, sterilization policies were primarily aimed at men. This is considered to be one of the main reasons for the consequent defeat of the Congress Party in its strongholds in the next election, and as a result women became virtually the only targets of population control policies. While there are specific annual target numbers for women's sterilizations, especially while they are in hospitals giving birth, male vasectomy has virtually disappeared (oral report at the 1994 UN Cairo conference).

Thomas Malthus, the British clergyman turned economist, predicted before 1800 that the planet would not be able to support for long the human population, which grows much faster than global food resources. His explanation for this was that human population grows each generation at a geometrical rate, while the food supply grows only at an arithmetic rate. Only human misery – caused by poverty, famine and pestilence as well as wars and slaughters – would keep the human population size under control. As Hartman (1987: 13–14) comments, however, Malthus was wrong on two basic counts. Firstly, population growth can be slowed down and eventually stabilized by the voluntary choices of individuals and not just by 'natural' disasters. Secondly, Malthus greatly underestimated the capacity of the planet to feed its growing human population and the consequent very different relations between human production and reproduction rates.

However, Malthusian-type prophecies continued to be heard periodically, although they became increasingly more focused on Third World countries. A very influential book in that respect was *The Population Bomb* which came out in 1968, written by the Stanford University biologist Paul Ehrlich. Focusing on the rate of population growth in the Third World combined a racist fear of being 'swamped' by the non-western 'others' with an easy let-out explanation for guilty western liberal consciences for the persistence of poverty and a low standard of life in Third World countries in the post-colonial period. Most importantly, however, Malthusian discourse has not just been an ideological discourse but has become a cornerstone of population policies in many Third World countries themselves, as a major strategy to try and solve those countries' economic and social problems. There is a fear of the destabilization of the economic and political system if the balance between the supply and demand for labour power is seriously threatened as a result of 'uncontrollable' growth in the population.

The country which has gone furthest in this respect is China. While during the 1950s Mao saw the people as part of national power and resources, a total reversal of policies took place in the 1970s. Severe measures were taken so that most Chinese families would not have more than one baby (some

minority and rural families were allowed two children if the first child was a girl). In their extreme form, punishments for evading these measures have involved unemployment for the parents and exclusion from education of the child. The effects of these policies, however, have been quite uneven, partly as a result of differential policies and partly because state control has been most effective in cities and in central areas of the country. This has produced a demographic shift, skewed towards backward rural areas and minority groups, and there are signs that as a reaction China is now turning to more eugenic policies of population control, in which 'China will use abortions, sterilization and marriage bans to "avoid new births of inferior quality and heighten the standards of the whole population"' (quote from the official New China News Agency, *Washington Post*, 22 December 1993). There have also been reports that harsh population control measures have been taken against communities such as the Tibetans (Lentin, forthcoming).

The effect of Malthusian policies is often highly gendered. Where there is strong pressure to limit the number of children, and where male children are more highly valued for social and economic reasons, practices of abortions and infanticide are mainly directed towards baby girls. There are rumours about villages in China and India in which certain age groups, born after Malthusian policies were enacted, are 100 per cent male. Female babies are also often the ones which are more easily available for international adoption.

The 'national interest' behind severe population control measures in the South, however, often is not the result of an internal governmental initiative but is induced from outside because of the North's (especially the USA's) perception of their own 'national interest'. A CIA report leaked a few years ago described the effects of high birth rates as leading to 'political instability in the 3rd World which in turn would create security problems to the US' (WGNRR, 1991). Thus, the Reagan administration gave \$3 billion for population control as part of its 'development' aid – three times the total amount spent for this purpose under Johnson, Nixon, Ford and Carter (although, owing to the Christian right's pressures, they banned any aid which would have supported abortion services). The US Agency for International Development (USAID) has given money for family planning purposes to 95 countries – including all the 45 states in sub-Saharan Africa (all), and also notably Mexico and the Philippines, despite the fact that, as Elizabeth Sobo remarks (WGNRR, 1991), the population density of people in Africa is one-tenth that in Europe.

In the New World Order, the World Bank is playing a key role in the formation of population policy by virtue of its leverage over other forms of development finance. Thus, population control measures can become part of the 'structural adjustment' package. There is high pressure on women (and it is almost always only on women – who are an easier 'captive audience', usually after they give birth, especially by Caesarean section) to be sterilized or to use other long term contraceptives from IUDs to Depo-Pravera, Norplant and Quinacrine. Sometimes the means used are more subtle. Apparently USAID has given \$350,000 to one of Nigeria's top musicians, King Sunny

Aid, to sing about family planning and having fewer children (he, of course, has twelve children himself). This is part of the \$35.4 million Five Year Program of the Population Communication Services Center at Johns Hopkins University for improving response in 'culturally appropriate ways to influence family planning acceptance and use' (WGNRR, 1991). The policy makers must have understood that somehow they had been getting it wrong. This was clearly illustrated when I visited Egypt in 1980 and saw Cairo covered with huge family planning posters showing a family of a man, a woman, a boy, a girl and a transistor radio, in reaction to which my taxi driver commented: 'the poor fools – who is going to look after them when they are old?'

The Social Context

This remark of the taxi driver is important because it draws our attention to the social context in which these policies are taking place. It is important to note that often there is a serious conflict between collective national and individual interests in terms of the number of children one has. When there are no welfare structures to look after the elderly and the ill, it is crucial for people to have enough healthy children to support them. Moreover, when there are no developed public health services and the rate of infant mortality is high, there is a real interest for the women to become pregnant as many times as possible. As Hartman (1987: 8) has pointed out, there has never been a case where the rate of population growth has gone down where the rate of infant mortality has not gone down as well. This is especially important to remember in times of structural adjustment policies, because at the same time as they create pressures to cut the rate of population growth, they also cut funds for public health care and the support required for women to bear and rear healthy babies. As Sonia Correa (1994: 7) reports, a massive international campaign by the reproductive health and rights movement succeeded in shifting the political agenda for the UN Conference on Population and Development Policies in Cairo (September 1994), so that its resolutions spoke no longer just about family planning and contraceptive services but about reproductive health. This would also encompass maternal and child care and the prevention of cancer and sexually transmitted diseases. And although there is a great distance between formal UN declarations and their implementation, this shift in the public political discourse is all for the good.

The absence of public health and welfare infrastructure is not, however, the only social factor which needs to be taken into consideration, as the fierce resistance to women's reproductive rights by the Vatican/Iran fundamentalist alliance during the Cairo conference can attest. For them and other religious leaders the ability of women to control their own bodies is seen as a direct threat to their authority, and very many women would hesitate to take any action which would be interpreted as a betrayal of sacred religious and customary laws. It is important to stress in this context, however (as will be elaborated in Chapter 3), that rather than being a result of 'intrinsic' and

'essential' religious imperatives, religious authority is being invoked in order to legitimate conflicting positions concerning women and their reproductive options (Makhlouf Obermeyer, 1994).

Moreover, in social and cultural systems where the social value of women (as well as, usually, their ability to exercise some social power, especially when old) depends on whether or not they have sons, the number of children that women bear can depend on much more thorough and all-encompassing processes of social transformation, especially in relation to what Sonia Correa and Ros Petchesky (1994) have called women's social rights. Processes of globalization – economic, political and social – also create contradictory pressures on women's fertility. On the one hand, there is more pressure on women to go out to work, and often through international aid organizations there are more contraceptives available. On the other hand, rising ethnic and religious fundamentalist identity and political movements tighten control over women and increase opposition to any reproductive rights in the name of 'custom and tradition'.

In addition to the overall context, however, we need to look also, as Rani Bang and Abhay Bang (1992) point out, at the immediate effects the usage of high-tech contraceptives can have on women's lives. In societies where so many women suffer from gynaecological conditions anyway – which are not taken care of when they are sterilized or implanted with Norplant – their physical discomfort largely grows. And in cultures where women, when they are bleeding (and Norplant, for example, often causes frequent bleeding), are prevented from carrying out ritual tasks, and their husbands cannot have sex with them, this can also have serious ramifications on their lives, including being deserted or divorced by their husbands, as many testimonies at the NGO Forum of the Cairo UN conference have brought to light. These testimonies also included cases of women whose husbands left them because of the after-effects of an early menopause once the Norplant has been removed; so the physical side-effects can be long term as well as short term.

It is important to remember that it can also be non-governmental formal and informal groupings, both religious (like the Catholic Church) and national, which exert pressure and sometimes force on women to have or not to have children. For example, there has been strong pressure on Palestinian women to bear more children for the national struggle, as a Palestinian woman told me: 'We need to have one son to fight and get killed, one son to go to prison, one son to go to the oil countries to make money and one son to look after us when we are old.' Yasser Arafat is reported to have said that 'The Palestinian woman who bears yet another Palestinian every ten months . . . is a biological time bomb threatening to blow up Israel from within' (Portuguese, 1996: 311).

On the other hand, the prospect of children born out of wedlock, and even worse, outside the 'proper' religious and national boundaries, can be considered as bringing shame on the family, and women who are suspected of 'fraternizing' with 'the enemy' might be severely punished. The reports on Bosnian children born of war rapes who have been abandoned in hospitals

and orphanages because of the shame to the family and the ethnic group is another case in point (see the discussion on war rapes in Chapter 5).

Concluding Remark: Reproductive Rights, National Reproduction and Feminist Politics

As discussed in the introduction, women's membership in their national and ethnic collectivities is of a double nature. On the one hand, women, like men, are members of the collectivity. On the other hand, there are always specific rules and regulations which relate to women as women. This is especially important to remember when we consider the political implications of the ways women are constructed as biological reproducers of 'the nation'. In spite of the fact that usually, if not always, in the sex/gender systems in their societies men are dominant, women are not just passive victims, or even objects, of the ideologies and policies aimed at controlling their reproduction. On the contrary, very often it is women, especially older women, who are given the roles of the cultural reproducers of 'the nation' and are empowered to rule on what is 'appropriate' behaviour and appearance and what is not and to exert control over other women who might be constructed as 'deviants'. As very often this is the main source of social power allowed to women, they might become fully engaged in it.

Most of the feminist discourse which relates to 'reproductive rights' of women tends to relate to women in individualistic terms, as does the slogan of 'women's rights as human rights'. As Correa and Petchesky (1994: 109–10) argue, critics of 'rights' discourse have pointed out that the value and meaning of rights are always contingent upon the political and social context, are indeterminate and are dependent on the social categories and collectivities to which people belong. Specifically in relation to women's reproductive rights there has been a growing concern during the last few years among 'women of colour' that the co-option of such slogans by international agencies and the Right is part of a 'demographic war' which, if not completely genocidal, is aimed at stunting the growth and power of black and Third World people (for a summary of the debates see Petchesky and Weiner, 1990). But not only them. As Roza Tsagarousianou (1995) argues, banning abortions (as well as controlling other reproductive rights of women) signals the treatment of women as state property. On the other hand, these anti-individualistic concerns can become co-opted by nationalist and religious fundamentalists who object – as was the case in the 1994 UN Human Rights Conference in Vienna – to any international constitutional guarantees for women's reproductive rights, as interference in the collective human rights of their nations which include the right to follow their own 'culture and tradition'.

The implications of some of the above concerns will be explored in more detail in later chapters. There is no space here to fully develop a framework for feminist politics on reproductive rights which might take account of the above pitfalls. However, such a framework would take account of the fact that

women are not just 'individuals' but are also members of national, ethnic and racial collectivities as well as of specific class, sexuality and life cycle positionings. Women are not just individuals, nor are they just agents of their collectivities. 'Reproductive rights' campaigns should take account of the multiplexity and multi-dimensionality of identities within contemporary society, without losing sight of the differential power dimension of different collectivities and groupings within it (see Chapter 4).

Such campaigns should also recognize that 'culture' is never an essentialist and homogeneous body of traditions and customs, but a rich resource, usually full of internal contradictions, and a resource which is always used selectively in various ethnic cultural and religious projects within specific power relations and political discourse (see Chapter 3).

In sum, 'reproductive rights' should be seen as a vital part of the more general struggle for women's emancipation. This in turn should be seen as a vital part of the more general struggle for the democratization of society, which should take into account the different positioning of people in the society (see Chapter 6).

För referenser, se
nästa sida

3

CULTURAL REPRODUCTION AND GENDER RELATIONS

'Culture' has come to play a central role in both analyses and ideologies of national and other collectivities. Carl-Ulrik Schierup has even claimed that

a general 'culturization' of the political language has taken place. Here, strategies of dominance as well as those of rebellion become increasingly phrased in the culturized terms of ethnic particularity. This takes place in manners that often act to displace the articulation of more general cleavages contained in the constitution of modern society. (1995: 2)

Aleksandra Ålund in her succinct way has summed it up as 'the cultural has colonized the social' (1995: 319).

Indeed, Verena Stolcke (1995) argues that 'cultural fundamentalism' has come to replace racism as the primary discourse of the Right, and a leftist feminist like Renate Rosaldo (1991) has been looking to 'cultural citizenship' as the solution to political issues at local and national levels. In the aftermath of the Cold War, identity politics, which started to emerge as a means of political empowerment among marginalized groupings such as blacks and women, has merged with national and international policies of multi-culturalism to become a new hegemonic discourse.

In this culturalized discourse, gendered bodies and sexuality play pivotal roles as territories, markers and reproducers of the narratives of nations and other collectivities. As will be examined in this chapter, gender relations are at the heart of cultural constructions of social identities and collectivities as well as in most cultural conflicts and contestations. Feminism has raised our awareness of such processes taking place as well as of resistance to them.

This chapter looks at 'the location of culture' (Bhabha, 1994a), cultural diversity and cultural changes. Within that it examines the ways gendered discourse and gender relations are articulated. Although, as will be argued below, 'culture' is dynamic and includes notions of diversity and change, for presentation purposes I discuss different aspects of culture separately. In the first part of the chapter the notion of 'culture' is examined as well as its relationship to the notions of 'civilization', 'ethnicity' and 'identity'. The chapter then moves to discuss the ways cultural difference has been related to notions of 'otherness' and boundary management. Racism, assimilationism, multi-culturalism and hybridization are some of the constructs with which notions of cultural difference have been incorporated into contestations and struggles of power relations. The chapter assesses the ways notions of manhood and

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