CDU 301.01

INSTINCT, EMOTION, MIND, AND SPIRIT: THE MANY FACES OF ETHNICITY

Sérgio Neves Dantas

I. The Biopsychological Dimension of Ethnicity – The Role of Gender

This section is aimed at contemplating some hypothesis on the genesis of ethnic phenomenon, through psychological and biological explanations. Probative questions that I raise include: Is there an instinctive behavior? Is there such a thing as "natural propensity" for ingroup/outgroup hostility and ingroup solidarity? Can intrauterine union and dependence on the mother be considered as the root causes of ethnic behavior?

With these in mind, I make an attempt to extend some basic theoretical assumptions already taken by some specialists from the field of group psychology, by examining the relationship between gender issues and ethnic dynamics. As we shall see, gender relations play an important role in ethnicity; they lie at the core of phenomena such as group formation and hostility against outsiders, as well as of the definition and preservation of group boundaries and membership. To illustrate and support my arguments I refer mainly to secondary sources: findings drawn upon the study of hunting and gathering societies.

The International Relations Committee of GAP – Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry – on its report n° 123, suggest a strong correlation between ethnic behavior and biology. Essentially, a

...series of psychological perspectives on the relationship, in essence, the continuity, between the individual and the group... a continuity that has its origins in long-forgotten biological union with and dependence on mother for physical survival and physiological homeostasis. The continuity draws upon later developmental stages of gradual differentiation from mother. (GAP, 05).

From this prospect, ethnic behavior is understood within a frame of interrelated trends of human behavior that are drawn on this "continuity between the individual and the group", manifested throughout one individual's life, and passed from generation to generation. It reflects a series of innate tendencies developed from childhood that remain in all of us, throughout adult life.

Characteristic elements of ethnicity such as hostility to outsiders, internal cohesiveness, and group identity, have their counter-parts in early developments on the child-mother relationship. For instance, a sense of weakness, the committee say, starts when the child comes to the realization of the outer world – the others – beyond the mother/child sphere. This explains the tendency, in early ages, to idealize the mother as omnipotent and "to extract from her power and perfections." (07) As far as group behavior is concerned, this tendency finds its expression on the strong sense of community, group attachment, and internal solidarity. Similarly, the child's reaction of feeling uncomfortable with and avoiding the stranger has its counter-part on group disparities and hostility toward outsiders.

But along the spectrum individual-group/childhood-adult life a series of other events determine the course of group behavior. These events can only be grasped through the study of gender.

Gender analysis serves as a bridge to understand these parallel connections between the individual and the group. It also offers a new perspective to understand the genesis of inter-ethnic group behavior as ultimate projections of the relationship between the sexes in a particular given society.

The biological union and dependence on mother, formulated by the GAP, are the root causes of male vulnerability and insecurity and constitute, according to Peggy R. Sanday, the base of male antagonistic and aggressive behavior in inter-sex relationships. (85-86)

The case of the Mundurucu societies, in low land Amazon, is very typical of such a situation. Because it provides us with rich material on gender issues that are useful to the discussion on ethnicity, I present first a brief description of the Mundurucu social life. Later, I suggest some explanations to link these gender-related findings to ethnicity.

According to Yolanda and Robert Murphy, married anthropologists who lived with the Mundurucu, although the status of women is undoubtedly inferior to that of the men, "...the relation between the sexes is not one of simple domination and submissiveness, but one of ideological dissonance and real opposition." (Murphy, 113).

The Murphy's observed that sex roles are well grasped by the understanding of a simple myth involving the invention of the flutes – sacred musical instruments. The flutes are believed to have supernatural power – the spirits of the ancestors – which is extended to those who possess them. In contemporary Mundurucu society, these sacred instruments are taboo for women to see, but it was women, according to the myth, who first discovered them. As far as the myth goes, men took the flutes from the women and then gained dominance. Since then, as Murphy noted,

> the very fact that the women were believed to have once been dominant bespeaks a latent fear that they can become dominant again....Women, as a people, are not inferior, for otherwise the rebellion of the males would have been unnecessary. (Murphy, 117).

Men were able to take the trumpets from women and gain ascendancy for only men can hunt and offer meat to the ancestor spirits. The latter, the native Mundurucu believes, demand ritual offerings of meat in order to ensure fertility of humans and animals. The male ascendancy in today's Mundurucu society is maintained by strict control over the women in all aspects of life. In fact, the dominance of men is manifested through Mundurucu rites and ceremonies and by rules governing female conduct. Women are supposed to act passively toward men, to not look directly at a man, to travel in bands, and of course, as Murphy says, to not "spy the sacred instruments". When a woman violates these roles, she poses a threat to male "superiority", and the control mechanism comes in the form of gang rape.

The maintenance of the dominance of men, Murphy notes, through a number of devices such as male rituals, ceremonies, men's house rules, and gang rapes is a proof of the fragility of their own superiority. " If the men really were all that powerful, they wouldn't need such rigmarole." In short, the motive behind dominance of men is masculine insecurity which is manifested in the form of defensive hostility towards women.

Male vulnerability and hostility to women, is the focus of analysis of a number of other researchers who also studied the Mundurucu groups. Peggy R. Sanday, in her article "Rape and the Silencing of the Feminine" argues that sexual antagonisms and male violent behavior such as rape "...can be understood as a form of silencing or concealing male vulnerability and maternal dependence."(Sanday, 85). Man's insecurity, she says, is rooted in the boy's early dependency – both physical and psychological – of the maternal body. In order to overcome this natural feeling, he resorts to symbolic artifacts (such as trumpets) to recreate the female maternal body under his control. To suppress dependence and insecurity the Mundurucu men resort to the control of trumpets and by ritually performing with them he experiences independence and autonomy. In Sanday's words:

> ...the maturing male must reject part of himself that developed as a natural consequence of maternal nurturing. In doing so, he suppresses his own vulnerability and the knowledge of his body experienced while suckling at his mother's breasts. (Sanday, 86).

An alternative psychological perspective on gender links this need to dissociate from mother with the urge to maintain human fertility. This approach is generally associated with Freud's theory of Oedipal Stage (Craib, 44-51). Freud's theory is based on the development of human sexuality from birth to adult life. This can be an example of what the Committee on International Relations of GPA refers as,

> The process of individualization [that] is constantly subject to fluctuation along a normal progression/ regression axis and forms a prototype for an adult life affiliation/separation function in interpersonal and intergroup relations. (GPA, 05)

Freud argues that there are various stages in the development of human sexuality: the oral, anal, phallic, pre-genital and finally the oedipal stage – the moment when boys and girls mature and become ready for each other. At the initial stages, Craibs argues, "... the sexual instinct attaches itself to the new born baby's needs for self preservation, for food". Both boys and girls desire the mother. Finally, during the oedipal stage, the boy experiences the prohibition of incest to achieve genital heterosexuality. Both requirements, prohibition of incest and heterosexuality, are believed to be driven by social needs. "To allow incestuous relationships would be to allow society to fragment into small self-contained groups. Mother-son incest is particularly dangerous because it is unlikely to lead to the production of a new generation."(Craib, 50).

Sanday's example of Gilbert Herdt's study of Sambia male initiation seems to fit with Freud's hypothesis. Sambia initiation involves ritual homosexuality – a necessary stage for the young to achieve independence from mother, and to mature for adult life. Boys begin to identify themselves no longer with the mothers (maternal separation) but with the masculinity of the bachelors. The final stage of their development is then achieved when boys become adults and ready for heterosexual relations. (Sanday, 88-89).

To summarize, men's needs of gradual separation from mother – from childhood through adult life – create boundaries between the sexes and feelings for inclusiveness and exclusiveness. For the Mundurucu, the primary residence of men, the men's house, is also the place where the trumpets are guarded and kept away from women's sight. The men's house reflects and reinforces the extreme separation of the sexes while it represents a symbol of men's solidarity; men are united against a common threat – the women. To better characterize the "battle of the sexes" in the Mundurucu society, the Murphy's compare it to being carried on *not* by "...individual gladiators... but by armies." They conclude:

> The sexes among the Mundurucu indeed constitute a division of the population along lines of anatomical difference and function.... But the split is more than that. Each sex is a social entity, each has its own internal organization, and each has a sense of solidarity, and a consciousness of its own unity and its opposition to the other.(Murphy, 136).

All these seem to indicate that the developmental stages of the individual can be conceived on the basis of individual-group dialectic interaction, from the uterine phase to group behavior in adult life, as suggested by the GAP. This individual/group interaction can be seen as successive stages of association/dissociation, first from mother, then from women, leading finally as we shall see to the process of ethnic identification. One's ethnic consciousness seems to evolve along the individual-group spectrum in successive stages or levels of identification: maternal-identity, peer-identity, gender-identity and ethnic identity. The creation of boundaries and hostility toward outsiders are, in a sense, ultimate expressions of the separateness between the sexes, and group identification and solidarity a substitute for maternal dependence. Members of the group, as GAP suggest, "...are drawn together by their shared sense of weakness and their demand upon one another– and upon the leader especially – for help against an unfriendly outside world" (GAP, 07).

Still, the last stage – ethnic identification – needs further explanations. As it is suggested at the beginning, each of the trends of child behavior has its counterpart in group behavior. The universal tendency of human behavior to affiliate with the familiar and show fear and hostility to the unknown – the outsider, replicates the child's fear of the outer world (any *other* beyond the mother/child sphere). Membership provides a sense of well being and sentiments of self esteem and the trust of others but also the means for the realization of security and safety.

Due to the constant threat from outsiders, males resort to a variety of ways, ambivalent in their nature, to overcome a sense of weakness and gain power. Primordial dualistic sentiments such as of union/separation and attachment/hostility seems to be at work simultaneously in this process of men's gaining power. At the same time that man resorts to a variety of cultural artifacts to dissociate himself from the mother/woman (to gain independence and control over natural reproductive forces, as described before) he also seems compelled to associate himself with this *feminine nature* to "extract from women, power and perfection" (Sanday, 88).

The Mundurucu men, for instance, assemble with one another through symbolic apparatus – trumpets – which is modeled on female reproductive functions. As Sanday observes,

...this is much more than womb envy. It is male dependence

> on the feminine reproductive model for their masculine
> sense of self, power and control... the trumpet complex
> recreate the feminine in a male image, establishing for men
> a means of escaping from and taking their revenge against
> an entrapping nature, which they perceive as dominating
> them. (87).

In another part the same author also notes that during the Sambia
initiation "...[Sambia] boys learn to give up their dependence on the female
world for the hardened masculine qualities of young men ready for war."
(89). Likewise, the Shavante Initialization ceremony is one of the strongest
examples of such an episode; thus, I describe it in more detail.

To fully achieve his maturity the young Shavante has to perform an
extensive ritual in which the whole tribe participates in some way – including
the women. The ceremony is a form of hostility to women in the form of
rape as part of an extensive men's initialization rite called Wai'a, in David
Lewis words: "A communication of power to the initiated men." (Lewis,
266). This ceremonial rape of women, the author continues, is a necessary
step for the young Shavante to gain power and achieve his manhood.
Bellicosity is the most important symbolic element in the ritual, as an
expression of manhood. In Lewis words, "They have to demonstrate their
ferocity in three ways, by killing Simihepāri (a symbol of fierceness), by
raping the women, and by killing one of their own number." (265).

As Lewis observes, there are two dimensions of this power (or
ferocity):

> the sexual aspect of ferocity – broadly speaking, sexual
> power [and] ...the non-sexual aspect of ferocity,
> aggressive power....The combination of sexuality and
> aggression [the author argues] could hardly be more aptly
> expressed than in a ceremonial rape. (266).

According to Lewis, these two different dimensions of power
resemble Freud's pattern of non-generative power – aggression and
generative power – sexuality. Given the constant threat from outsiders, the
men need to control women in order to communicate these female powers
toward themselves and gain bellicosity. The author associates bellicosity
with Shavante factionalism and hostility toward outsiders. Lewis notes that

there is a strong correlation between ceremonial hostility towards women and strong factionalism. Among societies with severe factionalism, he says, " the Kaiapo have a ceremonial rape similar to the Shavante rite and the Sherente men's societies would ritually threaten the women's society and mime the killing of a woman." (306).

Societies such as the Shavante, Sherente and Yanomamo, extremely fierce peoples, also share strong marks of ethnocentrism as well as a steady sense of community and internal cohesiveness. Conversely, Tukanoan and Tukuna communities, reveal striking contrast, when compared with the previous cases; thus, it may be helpful to examine these cases to test gender and ethnic issues the other way around.

For instance, despite gender disparities, hostility towards women is almost nonexistent among Tucanoan and Tukuna societies and warfare is absent. In fact, Jackson's analysis of the dissimilarities in the relationship between the sexes among distinct Indigenous communities refers to the fact that while fightings and raids are still present among Yanomamos and Shavantes (communities with strong factionalisms), cessation of warfare among Tukanoans coexists with a fair degree of equality between the sexes. Also, ethnocentrism and boundary creation among Tucanoan and Tucuna groups are not so apparent.

This is in accordance with the points already made, but yet, it does not coincide with Jackson's explanations for *internal solidarity*. Among these two groups internal solidarity is not built upon a sense of weakness or fright due to possible threats from outsiders, nor does it arise as an ultimate expression of cohesiveness among each group's sex. Tukuna women's initialization ceremony – the most important ritual in this society – is a good example of the unique pattern in inter-sex relationships and can serve here to ilustrate how gender plays a role in creating and maintaining internal solidarity.

The ritual, which is performed by both the women and men, marks the moment when a girl becomes a woman; in her transformation she becomes fertile and experienced. It is also a moment when the girl experiences the separation from the world of nature and immerses herself in the world of culture – one of maturity. In Bruce Lincoln's words, "From chaos to cosmos or immaturity to maturity."

In contrast to the Shavante men's initiation ceremony, at Tukuna women's initiation, both men and women take active part in every step of

the ritual. They perform the acts together, singing and dancing, and all the preparative for the event are collectively organized.

This is not to say, though, that there is no opposition between the sexes. During the ritual it is the men who suppress the earthly elements of the initiant while the "women give the 'support' of her fellow women.... The man is the instigator of the ordeal.... He is set above the initiant, physically as well as hierarchically. The women are identified with the initiant: they sit as she sits, forming a group."

But despite the fact that gender roles are clearly manifested during the ceremony, Lincoln argues that the overall meaning, symbolism and purpose of the ritual are to permit society to maintain its sense of solidarity. In Lincoln words:

> Although the conflicting claims of men and women to the soul of the initiant are evident at numerous points, participants on the whole act as members of the broader society, rather than as members of one specific sex. Society as a whole is the agent in women's initiation, acting to preserve the stability of the social collectively rather than pursuing the specific interests of either gender.

So far I have suggested that gender lies at the core of a number of characteristic events of ethnicity, such as boundary creation, internal cohesiveness, group attachment and hostility to outsiders. In the following and final part, gender issues are explored to frame different sorts of events involved in ethnic dynamic, those of ethnic-defining mechanisms of maintenance and preservation of access to group membership.

Another component of gender that seems to be implicit in Sanday's arguments earlier discussed, is that man's insecurity due to the *natural feminine* is also associated with his anxious feelings toward the forces of nature; women, because they give birth, are "perceived as closer to the state of nature than men" (Craib, 51). Men, as well as the community at a large, primarily depend on fish or game – resources from the world of nature – for the continuation of human life and culture. Hunting and gathering societies survival hardly depends on the balance between animal and human fertility. Female fertility is necessary to keep the continuation of society, but overpopulation can become a threat to the adequate supplement of game and fish.

These constraints create two diametrically opposing social drives: the need to multiply, in order to produce and reproduce society, and the need to restrain and limit human fertility to avoid imbalances between human population and resources. Eventually, these two driving social needs have to be harmonized. This struggle for balance has been referred to by some scholars as the root cause of the formation of kinship arrangements, group formation, and the foundations of civilization. (Ian Craib, 1990, Bruce Lincoln, 1981).

Levis-Strauss theory of circulation of women provides the basis of many arguments concerning the foundations of civilization and the formation of kinship roles. Ian Craib's accounts on this respect suggest that the reasons for the control over women rest on many facts, including:

> ... the reproduction of the population depends upon the number of women of child-bearing age who are available to bear children. The circulation of women enables the control of this number.... Kinship rules enabling the circulation of women also ensure that if there is a shortage of women of child-bearing age, then those available are enabled to bear children, since they are assigned to a husband; and if there is a surplus, then some will lack husbands and there will not be a population increase which would strain the resources of the society.... Women [also] are more essential to reproduction than men – a society could not survive with a few women of child-bearing age; but it could survive if most men were eliminated and a few kept in a cage somewhere. Again [Craib says], women have to be controlled and circumscribed: the whole system can be seen as built upon womb envy on the part of the inessential male. (Craib, 51).

The case of Yanomamo societies, in the border between Venezuela and Brazil, is relevant to examine this hypothesis and to introduce the subsequent discussion.

Contrarily to the Mundurucu case, the Yanamamo dwellings are not built around the men's house but they constitute a common roof organized internally of a series of individual family houses. The relationship

between the sexes is not governed by a strong opposition, but it is illustrative, as Napoleon Chagon describes it, "...of the strong masculine role and feminine submissiveness." (Chagon, 111). From an early age women are taught to work hard in the household (even more than boys) and to be prepared to marry well before they reach puberty. Contrarily to men, they have no say in terms of their preferences and wishes; their kinsmen make the decision of promising them to some husband. (111-113).

To some extent we may see a woman in the Yanomamo society as an object through which the interests and demands of men are met. Such an object serves also to perpetuate or establish power among enemy tribes since captured women during wars are the most valuable reward for the winning party. Indeed, the capture and rape of women is one of the major justifications for wars and raids. Likewise, demand for women is an important requirement in the formation of alliances and political ties.(146-151).

A hiding dimension on the importance of women in boundaries maintenance and group identifications is associated to what Virginia Sapiro refers as "... focal point of kinship based primary solidarities." (Sapiro, 46). In other words, masculine solidarity is built upon the preservation of kinship roles, as the basic parameter of maintaining social order, and it stands beyond normative notions associated with wars and raids. To give an example from the Yanomamo, when a captured woman has ties of kinship with the aggressors she is not raped. Thus, the precedence of kinship roles, especially the role of the "father"– the headman, the brother, or the husband – can protect women in most cases. Indeed, a woman, Chagon says, can escape from maltreatment in the marriage by fleeing to another village (even an enemy village) and finding another husband, or she can also count on her brothers for protection against a cruel husband. (111-114).

But yet, protection is a relative term. It would be better characterized as the man's protection (or defense) of his own honor and identity. Sapiro's analysis refers to this fact as that "...women continue to represent the privacy of the group", a valuable community possession and symbol for men's sense of honor (46, 40). She continues,

> [women] are principal vehicles from transmitting values
> from one generation to the next; they are bearers of the

community's future generations [and they] are regarded
as particularly vulnerable to defilement and exploitation
by oppressive others. (42).

As the author observes, inter-group conflict can be interpreted as the expression and manifestation of the "politics of honor" through the assault of the women. (40). Community-defining struggles and preservation of group boundaries are thus, articulated through the violation and manipulation of women sexuality. The assault of a woman by an outsider represent, in "symbolic" terms, the assault of one's sense of ethnic identity and belonging, an oppressive invasion of the privacy of the group.

So far I have offered a perspective in ethnicity that looks at the ethnic phenomenon and behavior as projections to the group level of certain biological and psychological traits of human nature. I have suggested that one's sense of ethnic identity emerges as a result of a network of primordial ties derived in essence from biological union with the mother. This assertion was based on some of the theorethical considerations formulated by the Committee of International Relations of GAP at the same time that some attempts were made to check their hypothesis with the examination of group behavior in a number of cases from hunting and gathering societies.[1] In doing so, I also have suggested that much of the theory formulated by the GAP can be complemented with the study of gender. As we saw, gender issues are closely linked to phenomena such as ethnocentrism, boundary creation, and hostility toward outsiders and they also play an important role as explanatory categories in the developmental stages of one's self identification.

Yet, analysis was mostly concerned with the emotional and physical needs of the individual as he or she distinguishes "others" from the mother, during the process of his/her sense of ethnic identity. The rest of this paper deals with more intense processes of ethnic identification directly related to the individual's demands for purpose and meaning in life. These demands are deeper and perhaps associated with the most powerful emotional component of ethnicity.

---

1 It is important to note that any attempt of cross-cultural comparisons involves some uncertainties. Ethnographic work among the many different case studies was done within considerable time discrepancies from one case to another. Particularly to Amazonian societies, it is prudent to observe the fact that they were affected (and are still being affected) by external Brazilian influence in different degrees according to time and location, making it difficult to compare data with some accuracy.

II. The Existential Perspective

The analysis of the psychological and biological dimensions of the ethnic phenomenon presented in the preceding section focused mainly on relevant issues concerning the relationship among individual, group, and gender, as inter-referent categories of one's sense of ethnic identity. Despite the fact that collective categories such as group attachment, internal solidarity, and hostility toward outsiders were used to frame issues, emphasis was given to the *individual*. In other words, efforts were concentrated on explaining ethnicity in terms of the development of the self within the spectrum: individual-mother, individual-opposite sex, and individual-society.

In this final section I complement the preceding analysis by focusing on the *society* as a whole. To some extent, individual inputs (whether male or female) are still considered to explain ethnic behavior, but emphasis is given to the individual while he or she is a participant in the broader society. Society itself is taken as an agent by which one's sense of ethnic identity is engendered, maintained, and reinforced.

In this sense, the emotional depth of one's ethnicity is defined in more abstract terms and can be seen as shaped by collective categories. Some suggested by scholars are "collective origin", "common ancestry", "common kinship", and so on. (Connor, 74). To illustrate, a short yet deep conceptualization of *ethnicity* is given by Hoyt Alverson as,

> ...an essential orientation to the past, to collective origin. Celebrated in rituals, narratives, and histories, ethnicity is the sense of belonging, the submersion of the self in something that transcends self, the "we-ness" of heritage and ancestry. (Alverson, 15).

To a deeper understanding of one's sense of ethnic identification it is important, however, to differentiate ethnic feelings and sentiments, such as those associated with common origin, from the literal meaning that they carry. When we refer to ethnicity as associated with a sense of common ancestry, for instance, this does not mean that all members of a given collectivity are necessarily bonded together by a common progenitor. As E.K.Francis well observed,

> People do not necessarily identify themselves with others or extend sentiments of solidarity to them, simply because

they are "objectively" descended from common ancestors. Precisely the reverse may be generally true: because they are somehow associated with each other, they tend to express this relationship in ethnic terms. Myths of common origin, fictitious kinship, or symbolic identification with a descent group serve to legitimaze and strengthen already existing solidarities. (39).

Group bonds are, in a sense, more "emotional creations" than collective manifestations of biological realities. As Walker Connor adverts, "..it is not *what is* but *what people believe is* that has behavioral consequences." (75).

Shavante societies, for instance, believe that,

... this natural order of things was at some time created and peopled with Shavante who are of cthonian origin. As soon as they emerged from the ground they divided into three clans, which have therefore been part and parcel of Shavante society since the beginning of time. (Lewis, 286).

The Yanomamo believes, as Napoleon Chagon explains, that man was created when "... a chunk of hedu — visible sky — broke off and fell downward." The layer that formed, "...characterized by jungle, rivers, plants...[was then] covered with people", the original humans, that is, Yanomamos. (Chagon, 90-91). And yet, the Nuer and Dinka, Nilotic peoples of the Southern Sudan, explain their common origin as associated with two brothers, two sons of a common deity that eventually migrated and constituted separated ethnic units. (Francis, 16).

This distinction between emotional-based abstractions and actual reality becomes more apparent when ethnicity is the primary focus in the study of nationalism (or ethnonationalism). Walker Connor, for instance, in trying to explain the nature of ethnonational bonds — what produces and distinguishes national consciousness — does not allude to common heritage or common kinship on its literal terms. Instead, he prefers the use of terms as *myth of common ancestry, kinship*, etc. In other words, he stresses

the relevance of distinguishing attitude from facts, of discerning "strict real descendence" from "intuitive sense of consanguinity". In his own words, "It is the intuitive conviction which can give to nations a psychological dimension approximating that of the extended family, that is, a feeling of common blood lineage." In metaphorical terms, "thinking with the heart (or with the blood) rather than with the mind." (94).

Along the same lines, Touraj Atabaki's definition of *nation* includes explanations associated with "...the desire of a people...to be called and conceived of as a nation." (14). Here, it becomes clear that this desire itself is the breeding element of a nation. Such aspiration gives substance to what has no substance on its own so that the nation as imagined community remains alive in people's hearts. As a matter of fact, as Benedict Anderson exemplifies, "...even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." (qtd. in Atabaki, 15).

In short, there is a self-conscious need to create one collective abstract entity – we, the people, the nation, the village – that gives people, in return, a sense of uniqueness, solidarity, and grounds for self esteem. Such feelings are collectively experienced, that is, they constitute common marks, the elements of one's ethnic identity. In other words, belonging to a collectivity is an important factor for the individual's sense of self, or as Alverson puts it, "...ethnic identity...lies at the core of self-identity." (16).

Myths of heritage, ancestor, kinship or faith are symbolic constructs that distinguish self-defining ethnic entities. These myths hold images, values and traditions that are defined on the basis of what people believe to have in common, as a group. I will refer to this way of looking at ethnic phenomenon as the *solidarity approach.*

Yet, another perspective in ethnicity, that I may call *the conflict approach,* explains ethnic identities and myths of common origin *not* in terms of what people have in common but of in what ways they differ from others. A sense of uniqueness is borne not from sentiments of common roots and origins but from the emulation of the antithese. Group distinctiveness and one's sense of identity are constructed and preserved by means of ethnic boundaries which are associated with the need to differentiate from an outsider.

These outsiders, however, are more imaginary constructs than real social entities. Similarly as we have seen for the solidarity approach, ethnic

behavior is essentially built upon "mind creations". The opposition we-they need to be underlined, socialized, and ritualized in order to become real. B. F. Porshnev, in his article " Opposition as a Component of Ethnic Self-consciousness", explains:

> These "strangers"...are invisibly but psychologically present in all the practices of the ethos.... In other words, "we" has no positive definition of its own and is built in the mind only through contraposition to the "they" category. (142-143)

The latter analysis is essential to explain *ethnocentrism*, a group behavior defined, in general terms, as associated with "individual biases towards his/her ethnic group, and against other ethnic groups." (kellas, 05). In other words, differentiation of the ingroup from outgroups and delineation of borders is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the fulfillment of one's sense of ethnic identity . Group members need to exaggerate differences across borders and denigrate the "other" in order to enhance the perceptions of themselves as a distinctive entity. The preservation of one's ethnic identity and self-esteem correspond to the need of nourishing the group's pride and to having an enemy, who is regarded as being inferior. This mutual differential treatment between the two groups is, according to Brewer Campbell, "...likely to take the form of adulation of the ingroup and, in contrast, derogation of outgroups." (74-75).

An interesting assessment on group perceptions and behavior in terms of ethnic distinctiveness and identity is made by Eugeen Roosens. He basically points out that intergroup ethnic perceptions are magnified in direct proportion to geographical and social proximity of this distinctive "other". In his book, intended to analyze the process of ethnogenesis, Roosens observes that,

> The intensity with which a group profiles itself as an ethnic group, and with which individuals stress their ethnicity, generally increases when there is intense spatial-geographical and social contact between groups. The most isolated "traditional group of people is probably the least ethnically self-defined. (12).

All these facts together seem to converge to a way of approaching the ethnic phenomenon in terms of linkages and interconnections between the two preceding perspectives earlier discussed, that is, as a *combination of solidarity and conflict approaches.* There seems to be a sort of symbiotic interaction – mutual interdependence – between groups, that is dualistic and ambivalent in its nature.

Symbiosis, according to Oxford Advanced Learned's Dictionary, means: "The living together of two dissimilar organisms often in mutually beneficial relationship." In the context of ethnic relations this mutual interdependence may take the form of a *looking-glass self* theory[2] projected to the group-level. Individual groups depend on each other for the development of their full self-awareness as ethnic groups. Borders between them can be seen as symbolic mirrors through which the group's own appearance is enhanced by reflection of other people's distinct folkways. But the fulfillment of a group's self-image depends on the effectiveness of this "mirror". The more contradictory and distinct is the "other" the more evident a group self-image becomes. In other words, the full development of one's group ethnic identity requires the creation of enough of a distance and separateness from this distinct "other".

In fact, Touraj Atabaki refers to *group identity* as the "...image by which the group is identified and in terms of which the group can be recognized as reproducing itself in successive generations as distinct from [others]." (15). This image can be forged by any factor of culture (or as a combination of them) as religion, language, territory, etc, as long as it gives the group its distinctiveness, its personality. Consider religion, for example.

To illustrate the strong association of religion with nation, Atabaki explains the significance of the term *mellat* (which means nation) , by using a piece of the poetic work by Safi 'Alishah': " Oh Christian! since you are of the *mellat* of Jesus, You have no connection with the *mellat* of Islam." (16). Likewise, "In the "black North" of Ireland, ...as in the Middle East", Joseph Curran explains, religion is what distinguises "us" from "them", especially for protestants."(148). In addition, as Walker Connor points out, "...the northern, Mahayana Buddhism, common to China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, differs from the more pacifist Theravada (Hinayana) Buddhism of Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia." (137).

---

2 For details about the theory of Looking Glass Self see Ian Robertson, *Sociology*, Worth Publishers, Inc., New York, NY, 1987.

In short, a group self-image and distinctiveness depend upon the creation of a rigid line between the out and in-groups; or, keeping with the "mirror-methaphor", boundaries need to be solid, opaque, and yet lustrous, just like a rigid mirror. Intergroup hostility provides the border with the necessary rigidness and opaqueness; rituals, religion, language, and myths provide the lustrousness, the needed factor of a mirror's reflection, that is, the existential dimension of inter-ethnic boundaries and behavior.

B.F. Porshnnev also make use of metaphors to explain boundaries between distinct ethnic groups. Boundary, as the author sees it, is an imaginary line that represents the unknown, the weird, the exotic; and perhaps because of this, it is also the locus of people's anxieties, awe and respect. Porshnev explains with a generic example from Van Gennep:

> The crossing of any border separating human beings –
> whether the thresholder of a dwelling, an age limit, the
> line between the sexes, between night and day, winter
> and summer, the boundary between the mutual exclusive
> conditions – is regarded as a sacred act, while all that
> lies on either side of any such crossing belongs to the
> real, everyday world. (qtd. in Porshvev, 145).

Porshnev suggests a model of ethnic self-consciousness based on "interethnic borders or lines of contact". According to him, the characteristic of the borders manifests both dichotomy and ambivalence. Two ethnic groups constitute not simply distinct phenomena, separated from one another by the presence of the border, but they are "mutually contradictory... the border unites that which cannot be united." And beyond the border, he continues, the "contrasting phenomena enter upon their own proper existence." (144).

III. Some Final Remarks and Conclusions

As mentioned earlier, the central aim of this essay is to suggest a way of looking at the phenomenon of ethnicity as associated with primordial traits derived from the physical emotional, intellectual, and existential dimensions of human nature. The arguments raised in the two sections were presented as building blocks to suggest that the ethnic phenomenon

can be seen as engendered through successive developmental stages in human life. Each of these stages brings about a distinct dimension of ethnicity in its integral form. For instance, characteristics of emotion and instinctive behavior, described in part one, are mostly concerned with the individual in his/her early life while the latter analysis in part two is focused on the mature individual, whose appeals are based on "ultimate" concerns in human existence – the existential dimension.

Individually, the two sections display distinctive characteristic features of ethnic behavior, yet when analyzed together they complement one another. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the focus of analysis in part one is the *individual* while part two focuses on *society* as a whole. To offer a view in ethnicity that integrates both sections I now return to the *individual* as the primary focus.

Throughout the paper, I have suggested that ethnic behavior displays both characteristics of dichotomy and of ambivalence and that such characteristics are manifested in different levels of one's sense of self, corresponding to the many stages of the individual's life. In this sense, ethnicity can be grasped in general terms as a process – dialectic and ambivalent in essence – through which people transcend themselves by suppressing certain inner realities. The ambivalence rests on the notion that to transcend the self, primordial traits need to be simultaneously destroyed and preserved. The process is analogous to the development of a tree.

As a tree in its developed form has dissociated itself from the original form of "seed", humans need to abandon old traits of childhood in order to become matured adults. But the character of "tree" lies potentially in the seed, and even when fully developed as a tree, the reality of "seed" is still there. Similarly for humans, a natural propensity to grow and develop is present from early life, and in adulthood some features of the child still remain in the individual. To give an example from group psychology, when the committee of GAP describes the process of formation of primordial alliances and "suitable targets for externalizations", it is explained that "...the child has invested something of himself in them ['the other'], including raw feelings directed by early concepts of 'me', 'mother-me', and 'mother.'"(46). In other words, raw feelings of dependence on mother need to be negated, destroyed in their original form, and yet preserved in their essence to assume a new form that corresponds to higher objectives

and demands. As we saw in part one, male antagonisticc and violent behavior towards women can be understood, as suggested by Reeves Sanday, "...as a form of silencing or concealing male vulnerability and maternal dependence." (85). And yet, the character of "mother" is preserved in its original essence, that is, mother as omnipotent, full of power and perfections. To overcome his insecurity and dependence, the Mundurucu male resorts to a variety of ways including the use of symbolic artifacts (trumpets) to recreate the female maternal body under his control (see page 04). Similarly, Shavante and Sherente men's societies resort to myths and rituals to threaten the women's society by miming the killing of a woman, yet to communicate female power to themselves and to gain bellicosity (see page 09).

Feelings and emotions of fear, anxiety, worry, wonder, and awe, which are learned through different phases of the individual's life, produce different levels of needs and demands. In order to fulfill these needs and to achieve an integral sense of self, continuous processes of new identifications take place. Still, these processes involve simultaneous negation and preservation and are based on dual inferences of old-new, present-past, and known-unknown. Ethnicity is this continuous process of transformation, of re-inventing the self through dialectic inferences. Maturing involves simultaneous negation and preservation of old structures to acquire new ones that correspond to higher needs of human spirit. Each of these needs, as noted in the introduction, corresponds to different demands from successive stages in human development and is crystalized in different components of ethnic phenomenon. For example, men's ceremonials and symbols generate manhood identification, gender and internal solidarity, and boundaries/hostility toward outsiders. Women's ceremonial rites also contribute to establishing gender boundaries and cultural distinctiveness as well as to reinforcing internal solidarity and cohesiveness. Likewise, kinship and language are elements of tribal divisiveness, ethnic identification, and reference to outsiders as distinct others – those who do not speak the mother-tongue and do not belong to the same kin.

These needs grow deeper as the individual matures and are perhaps associated with the most powerful emotional component of ethnicity. New associations/dissociations go beyond peer-groups, gender-groups, or groups in general. An individual sense of ethos is structured in terms of multiple realities that go beyond unidimensional conventions in time, space,

faith, and origin. Belonging and identity, for example, can no longer be seen as achieved through membership in a specific group and place, but they can be understood as associated with an individual's urge of "...being somebody in the world...", in order to exist. (Ignatieff, 9-10). These realities can be envisaged within the frame of some of the universal events of human experience, when belonging and identity come from a distant place, as for instance, in *migration*.

Boundaries, religion, sense of place, all are lost in migration; yet, as Gillian Bottomley explains, "... this movement is a kind of methaphor, literally 'a carrying across', in which people are translated and become capable of reinventing the sense of self." (65).

Some of the most interesting accounts on ethnicity, given by Bottomley in the context of migration, is through poetry and stories. To convey a message about migration labor on "...the need to the second generation to escape, to 'be someone', the author quotes a Greek-born Australian poet whose favorite theme is migrant workers. Nikos Papastergiadis's poem, "The New Language" is an example of linguistic forms of expression from migrant workers:

> Me I don't exist I am nothing
> They tell me to pack pallets
> But me I not stupid
> Me I know that really these boxes
> These boxes stamped COLES NEW WORLD
> Me I am building walls – GREAT BIG BROWN COLES
> WALLS
> (and later)
> Me I don't exist I am nothing
> Study Sonny you have a chance
> You must be a someone – anything
> Yes I exist but only for you!   (qtd. in Bottomley, 69)

The following example is also illustrative of the migratory experience and shows us how language, religion, and origin gain a new dimension, bringing color to the phenomenon of ethnicity.

In his national bestseller, Vargas Llosa tells us how his school friend Saúl Zuratas – a Jew, "a perpetual *outsider* " – supposedly becomes a special member of the Machiguenga society, in the Peruvian low land

Amazon. Although not fully confirmed by facts,[3] Llosa describes with convincing arguments Saul's "journey" from the intellectual world of academia to a life in the jungle. In this journey he left behind tradition, faith, and origin, yet, gained meaning, self-esteem and hope, in short, his place in the world.

It may appear weird or peculiar for a Jew to feel as if his "homeland" is in the forest, but yet, the jungle is, in a sense, the place of humankind's origins. Saúl had become a Machiguenga storyteller, as the author suggests, and for the first time in his life he must have been understood, ironically, through a language not of his mother-tongue. This is an example of *belonging* that Michael Ignatieff describes, quoting "Isaiah Berlin's Two Concepts of Liberty", as:

> When I am among my own people, "they understand me,
> as I understand them; and this understanding creates within
> me a sense of being somebody in the world.... People, in
> short, speak your language." (Ignatieff, 10).

Whether or not the fate of Saúl Zuratas can be confirmed, Llosa's story is an impressive characterization of a human being's fulfillment through membership. A kind of membership hardly defined in conventional terms – as forged as a sense of belonging to a specific people, tradition or place. Saul's most genuine membership refers not to being a citizen in Peruvian State or a student in the local university, nor simply an Indian in the forest. His unfeigned perception of accomplishing membership – within the Machinguenga community – is only possible because belonging to this people gives him a sense of being human, belonging to this world.

Yet, Machinguenga's ethnicity, in its most deep dimension, is also structured in terms of a sense of being human and belonging to this world and are elaborated on the basis of a dialectic process of association/dissociation that include: the need to dissociate from the state of nature and to associate with culture, and to be detached from fears and anxieties of isolation, past, and mortality and to associate with unknown realities of the cosmos. For the Machiguenga, to be pure as a people is to keep their

---

3   Llosa's only explanation for the mysterious disappearance of his fellow friend was to suppose that he had in fact abandoned modern life and career to live with the Machiguengas. Considering the author's close friendship with Zuratas and his consistent arguments based on that relationship as well as on real facts, it is only reasonable to believe that such is the case.

tradition, which means to be in communion with the cosmos, as for instance, "by walking side by side with the sun." As a matter of fact, Saúl Zuratas's identification with the Machinguenga's life style and behavior represents more than a coincidence. The Machiguenga themselves, as the Jews, are a people with a sense of being without land ; their collective sense of identity is closely associated with constant migration – a fate to live walking – as it follows in the artistic description of Vargas Llosa:

> Then why...did the men of earth begin walking? Because one day the sun started falling. They walked so that it wouldn't fall any farther, to help it to rise.... When the morning light dawned, the undergrowth was already rustling as they passed; they were already walking, walking, in single file, the men with their weapons at the ready, the women carrying the baskets and trays, the eyes of each and all fixed on the sun. We haven't lost our way yet. Our determination must have kept us pure. The sun hasn't fallen once and for all; it hasn't stopped falling yet. It goes and it comes back, like the souls of the fortunate. It heats the world. The people of the earth haven't fallen, either. Here we are. I in the middle, you all around me. I talking, you listening. We live, we walk. That is happiness, it seems.

The whole process is, in essence, a metaphor, " [a process of] ... understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another." (Lakoff, 05). It involves the creation of new structures and meanings which are built upon the well known, familiar experiences of everyday life. Myths of origin are in a sense human efforts to explain and be associated with the unknown, to have an intimate connection with the sacred and untouchable realities. These associations lie beyond mundane events of life, yet they are structured on the basis of primordial feelings and perceptions from everyday events in life such as birth, kinship, death, and matrimony. The Nuer and Dinka, as we saw, are descended from brothers born from a common god; Yanomamos are ultimate reflections of unknown layers of cosmos and yet they are also part animal and plant, merged with familiar elements of nature.

The following is an example of Machiguenga's collective origin

and ancestry. It also shows us how one people overcame ultimate concerns of death and isolation and gained eternity by associating themselves with the the ancestors – the dead ones – virtually, associating themselves with the very phenomenon of death. The piece is also from Vargas Llosa, a poetic characterization of Machiguenga's mythology.

> Death was not death. It was going away and coming back. Instead of weakening them, it made them stronger, adding to those who remained the wisdom and the strength of those who went. "We are and we shall be," said Tasurinchi. "It seems that we are not going to die. Those who went have come back. They are here. They are us." (38).

In short, throughout one's life spain the human spirit is perpetuated in culture, virtually "...adding to those who remained the wisdom and the strength of those who went." Indeed, the ancestors are all there. They are alive in culture through eternal dialectic correlations as life/death, nature/cosmos, we/they, man/woman, and me/mother-me, that materialize human exigencies of emotion, mind, and spirit and correspond to different dimensions of the ethnic phenomenon.

Ethnicity is thus all these together – a metaphor, an abstraction, a dialectic and ambivalent process in people's mind – and yet, it is what relieves people's anxieties and gives purpose, coherence, and meaning to their lives.

Bibliography

ALVERSON, Hoyt S. "The Roots of Time: A Comment on Utilitarian and Primordial Sentiments in Ethnic Identification" in *Ethnic Autonomy-Comparative Dynamics: The Americas, Europe and the Developing World*, (Hall, Raymond L., editor), Pergamon Press, Elmsford, New York, 1979.

ATABAKI, Touraj. Azerbaijan: *Ethnicity and Autonomy in Twentieth-century Iran*, British Academic Press, London, 1993.

BOTTOMLEY, Gillian. *From Another Place: Migration and the Politics of Culture*, Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, 1992.

BREWER, M. B. and Campbell, Donald T. *Ethnocentrism and Intergroup Attitudes*, Sage Publications, New York, 1976.

CHAGON, Napoleon. *Yanomamo: The Last Day of Eden*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, New York, 1992.

CONNOR, Walker. *Ethnonationalism: The quest for Understanding*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1994.

CRAIB, Ian. *Psychoanalysis and Social Theory: The Limits of Sociology*, The university of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1990.

CURRAN, Joseph "Separatism in Northern Curran" in *Ethnic Autonomy-Comparative Dynamics: The Americas, Europe and the Developing World*, (Hall, Raymond L., editor), Pergamon Press, Elmsford, New York, 1979.

DEPRES, Leo A.(editor) *Ethnicity and Resource Competition in Plural Societies*, Mouton Publishers, Aldine, Chicago, 1975.

EPSTEIN, A. L. *Ethos and Identity: Three Studies in Ethnicity*, Aldine Publishing Company, Chicago, IL, 1978.

FRANCIS, E.K. *Interethnic Relations: An Essay in Sociological Theory*, Elsevier, New York, NY, 1976.

Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, Committee on International Relations, *Us and Them: The Psychology of Ethnonationalism*, Brunner/Mazel Publishers, New York, NY, 1987.

HALL, Raymond L. *Ethnic Autonomy-Comparative Dynamics: The Americas, Europe and the Developing World*, Pergamon Press, Elmsford, New York, 1979.

HOLLOMAN, Regina E. and Arutiunov, Serghei A. *Perspectives on Ethnicity*, Mouton Publishers, Paris, 1978

IGANATIEFF, Michael. *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1993.

JACKSON, Jean E. *The Fish People: Linguistic Exogamy and Tukanoan Identity in Northwest Amazonia*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1983.

KELLAS, James G. *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, St. Martins Press, New York, NY, 1991.

LAKOFF, George and Johnson, Mark *Methaphors We Live By*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980.

LEWIS, Maybury. *Akwe-Shavante Society*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1967.

LINCOLN, Bruce *Emerging from the Chrysalis: Studies in Rituals of Women's Initiation*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1981

LLOSA, Mario Vargas *The Storyteller*, Penguin Books, New York, NY, 1989.

MURPHY, Yolanda and Murphy, Robert F. *Women of the Forest*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1985.

PORSHNEV, B.F. "Opposition as a Component of Ethnic Self-Consciousness", in *Perspectives on Ethnicity*, (Holloman,Regina E. and Aritiunov,Serguei A.,editors), Mouton Publishers, The Hague, Paris, 1978.

ROOSENS, Eugeen E. *Creating Ethnicity: The Process of Ethnogenesis*, Frontiers of Anthropology, Volume 5, Sage Publications, Newbury Park, CA, 1989.

SANDAY, P. Reeves " Rape and the Silencing of the Feminine", in *Rape: An Historical and Social Enquiry*, Sylvania Tommasselli and Roy Porter (editors), Basil Blackevell, NY, 1986.

SAPIRO, Virginia "Engendering Cultural Differences" in *The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism*, (Young, Crawford, editor), The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin, 1993.

STAVENHAGEN, Rodolfo *The Ethnic Question: Conflicts, Development, and Human Rights*, United Nations University Press, Tokyo, 1990.

YOUNG, Crawford (editor) *The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin, 1993.

WAGLEY, Charles *Welcome of Tears: The Tapirapé Indians of Central Brazil*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1977.