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Author

Harris, Betty J.

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Betty J. Harris

ABOUT THE AUTHOR...

Betty J. Harris, Ph.D., teaches in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Oklahoma, Norman.

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ETHNICITY AND GENDER IN THE GLOBAL PERIPHERY:
A COMPARISON OF BASOTHO AND NAVAJO WOMEN

BETTY J. HARRIS
University of Oklahoma

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this paper I attempt to crystalize a number of issues which pertain to the economic roles of women in peripheral areas of the world. To accomplish this goal, I draw on my own ethnographic field research among the Basotho women of southern Africa and the Navajo women of the American Southwest. The comparative analysis of women's economic roles in these two non-contiguous regions is guided by and incorporates several dimensions of world system theory. More specifically, included in the analysis are considerations of the interrelationship among, core, periphery, and semi periphery; and the intersection of class, ethnicity, and gender in the functioning of the economic systems of these two societies.

The world-system, as defined by its major proponent Immanuel Wallerstein (1980), represents a cohesive economic system initiated in Europe in the sixteenth century whose tentacles now embrace the entire globe. World-system theory emerged at a time when it was clear that Western approaches to economic development in non-Western countries was not resulting in the economic parity of the latter with the former. In fact, significant underdevelopment was taking place in a number of areas of the non-Western world. World-system theory rests on the relationship between core and peripheral nations with some acknowledgement of an intermediate economic system, the semi-periphery.

In comparing Lesotho and the Navajo Nation, the question of sovereignty emerges because the former is an internationally-recognized, independent country and the latter an American Indian reservation. In the context of the world-system, Lesotho's peripheral status is mediated through the semi-peripheral South African economy. Despite its lack of sovereignty in the American context, the Navajo reservation exhibits features that make it unique and incomparable to other politico-economic entities in the United States. For the Navajo Nation, it is a peripheral area within a core nation with no international recognition. It is also the largest and most populous reservation in the United States.

In comparing Basotho and Navajo women, I am not selecting two contiguous ethnic groups in one geographical context. Instead, I consider women who live in peripheral areas in different parts of the world. What these two groups of women have in common is that a significant percentage of them weave for national and international markets. Adopting such a theoretical approach represents a transcendence of the core/periphery relationship, on which world-system theory rests, in order to explore interperipheral economic relationships.

World-system theorists, more often than not, ignore ethnicity preferring to deal with a more abstract level of analysis. Ethnicity is, in fact, a manifestation of local and regional political economies within the world-system. Major economic shifts can result in the accentuation or deaccentuation of ethnicity. In the context of the core/periphery dichotomy, race becomes a determinant within which ethnicity becomes either a unifying or divisive element.

The articulation between ethnicity and class is an important consideration in world-system analysis. Whereas the world-system dichotomy between core and periphery is reflective of a global class structure of national political economies, there are class structures within each individual political economy. The core nations have the most stratified class systems while the class systems of peripheral nations exhibit very little stratification. In doing comparative analysis in the context of the world-system, questions may arise about parity between two systems being compared.

Returning to the racial dimension mentioned above, this dimension may have some geographical basis as expressed in the North-South dialogue. The countries of the North are predominately European and developed while the countries of the South are predominantly non-European and underdeveloped. Thus, race and geography compound the distinction between core and periphery.

Having discussed the world-system vis-a-vis class, race, and ethnicity, the stage has been set to discuss gender. Ward (1984) reiterates the general consensus of feminist development theorists in their contention that women in peripheral nations have lost status as a direct result of the international development effort in which patriarchal ideologies are often re-enforced. Peripheral economies usually produce one or two commodities preferring to export raw materials to core economies where they are processed into finished products. As a consequence, such economies are heavily service-oriented. In the event that there are exploitable raw materials, male labor has traditionally been used for its extraction.

Whereas men, with the incorporation of peripheral nations into the world-system were drawn into commodity production, women have, to a large extent, been confined to household production. Furthermore, few women are in decision-making positions in government in peripheral nations. Moreover, they tend to be less literate than men. To exacerbate the current situation, women's reproductive activities have resulted in a high birth rate in many African and Asian countries which may pose a further threat to women's economic status. However, in core nations, Ward argues that women are actively involved in both commodities and household production as epitomized in the phrase "the double day."

At this juncture, it is necessary to examine the Basotho and Navajo cases in greater detail.

CASE STUDIES

Basotho

Because of Lesotho's geographical encapsulation by South Africa, it is often mistaken to be a South African homeland. Actually, there is a homeland designated for the Basotho living in South Africa -- Qwa Qwa. One of Qwa Qwa's fragments shares a border with Lesotho. This has resulted in considerable friction between the two groups who have the same ethnicity but different nationalities.

Historically, there were only two major ethno-linguistic groups among Bantu migrants who settled in southern Africa. These were the Sotho and Nguni. In the historical processes that occurred after 1834, a redefinition and rearticulation of these existing groups resulted in their fragmentation into a number of different groups.

In the pre-colonial period, the Sotho had been divided into northern, southern, and western groups with slight modifications in their mode of production according to specific environmental conditions. There was considerable trade among these groups. With the flight of Dutch settlers from the Cape Colony in the Great Trek, they began to interweave among these areas, to expropriate land from Bantu-speakers, and to isolate these groups from each other.

As the indigenous economies were incorporated into the emerging South African economy -- first, through capitalist agricultural expansion; later, through mining -- these areas were transformed into labor reserves. Population groups were further isolated and differentiated. In many instances, they were recruited to work in different industries thereby heightening ethnic competition. Three of the labor reserves, including Lesotho, became British Protectorates near the close of the nineteenth century and gained independence in the mid-1960's. Homeland independence within South Africa began in the mid-1970's. It is clear from the above that as the apartheid political economy developed, a premium was placed on ethnic differentiation and conflict in the black population.

Throughout South African history, the pattern of land expropriation and balkanization of indigenous groups is reflective of national policy towards indigenous people during British rule throughout the nineteenth century and Afrikaner political ascendancy in the mid-twentieth century. There has been a strong emphasis on racial and ethnic segregation whether in the former High Commission territories or homelands or in urban townships in South Africa. However, there has been a consistent policy of black employment in the industrial and agricultural sectors of the South African economy.

As a result of Lesotho's peripheral position to the South African semi-periphery, gender-related issues emerge in the context of ethnicity. Women in Lesotho cannot freely migrate to South Africa to seek employment. Whereas male labor migrants interact with their male counterparts in the South African context, females interact almost solely with other Basotho females. Nevertheless, the families of migrants tend to fare considerably better than the families of non-migrants especially in rural areas.

Women in Lesotho rely heavily on regular remittances from their goldmining husbands. The way that the domestic political economy is oriented, male employment takes precedence over female employment. Thus, women occupy subordinate positions to men in public and private sector employment. It is at the highest echelons that one begins to see some semblance of gender equity (Gay, 1982).

Unlike South African homelands, Lesotho, as an internationally-recognized, independent country, is eligible for foreign aid. Although most foreign aid has been spent in male-oriented projects, in the last decade more aid has been set aside for female-oriented projects. As has been the case with female-oriented projects elsewhere in the global periphery, there has been a heavy emphasis on handicraft production. Types of handicraft production include basket-weaving, pottery-making, knitting, crocheting, and mohair tapestry-weaving. While women possessed some of these skills previously, others were acquired more recently.

Traditionally, Basotho women have been prohibited from herding cattle. Since small stock such as sheep and goats were also herded with cattle, males did all of the livestock herding. With increased migration of adult males to the South African goldmines, herdboys were hired. As a consequence, women have never been heavily involved in herding.

In Lesotho, mercantile capital investment did not become extremely localized to the point that traders wielded unlimited politico-economic power in one particular area. With a century of male labor migration, goods

and services could be procured in a variety of settings. Today, traders and the government both engage in buying raw mohair and wool from individual growers. They then transfer the raw fiber to South Africa to be sold at auction.

Basotho women have engaged in mohair-weaving in the cooperative and factory contexts for the past two decades. Weaving cooperatives have been rather ephemeral since their formation in various communities in the lowlands. Privately-owned factories are located in Maseru, the capital, and in Teyateyaneng, a major town to the north of Maseru. These have been more successful. Weaving factories have engaged in considerable diversification in terms of the variety of woven items manufactured. Also, handicrafts from other parts of southern Africa sold in their outlet stores. Due to the lower rate of South African tourism, both cooperatives and factories rely heavily on merchandise orders from core nations.

Tapestry weaving was introduced in Lesotho in the late 1960's. Prior to that time, Lesotho produced raw mohair solely to be sold on international markets via South African auctions. When tapestry weaving was introduced, machine-spun mohair was purchased from South Africa as there were no locally-produced yarns of weaving quality.

In the late 1970's, CARE funded a hand-spun mohair project. Cooperatives were established in rural areas throughout the country. Spinners would be supplied with raw mohair that was withheld from South African markets. In the early 1980's, LHM has developed a number of organizational problems. At the village level, LHM was perceived as being a company rather than a cooperative. Furthermore, female spinners began to complain about the poor quality of raw mohair. As a stop-gap measure, LHM decided to buy tops from South Africa for them to spin at considerable expense for individual spinners as well as the cooperative. In a feasibility study for LHM, Gay (1985) suggested that each primary village cooperative have its own angora goat herd.

Clearly, Lesotho's mohair industry lacks integration. Some of the tapestry-weaving ventures are cooperatively-owned while others are privately-owned. Rarely do women weave independently because of difficulty in marketing the finished product. The tapestry-weaving industries encourage tourists to visit their outlet stores and to go into workrooms to observe women weaving. The women weave a variety of village scenes composed by Basotho and non-Basotho artists and abstract geometric designs similar to those carved into house facades. Tapestries range in price from \$10 to \$1,000.

In recent years, with the mounting liberation struggle in South Africa, tourism from that country has been reduced to a trickle. Tapestry-weaving industries have had to move aggressively to tap into core markets in Europe and North America.

Navajo

Although the Spanish began to colonize the Southwest in the 1530's, they made uncertain steps towards dominating the Navajo while colonizing their Puebloan neighbors, the Hopi. The Spanish domination of the Hopi led to their expulsion in 1680. However, when they recolonized the area in 1693, the Spanish made an attempt to cultivate the Navajo. They had friendly chiefs installed in the tribe and manipulated the Navajo against the more recalcitrant Apaches in the Gila River area. When it became clear that the Navajo acknowledged kinship ties with the Gilas, the Spanish considered

having them removed from the area. However, the Navajo were not to be easily confined.

There is some debate as to the Navajo's pre-contact mode of production. Some anthropologists suggest that they were hunter-gatherers with a matrilineal bias (Aberle 1961; Lanphere 1974). However, Kelley (1986) postulates a tribal mode of production which became pastoral as a result of the Spanish introduction of sheep and the social upheaval resulting from Spanish colonization.

It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that the American government acquired the Southwest after the defeat of Mexico. Therefore, it devolved upon the U.S. government to vanquish all Native American ethnic groups in the region. However, during the Civil War, the Army faced a severe manpower shortage in "Indian Territory." In the case of the Navajo, in their efforts to stabilize the region, the government ordered the entire ethnic group removed to Bosque Redondo where Fort Sumner was to be built.

The major objective of the Bosque Redondo removal was to convert the pastoralist Navajo into agriculturalists. Nevertheless, they were confined in less-than-exemplary conditions being both poorly-sheltered and poorly-fed. In 1868, five years after their removal, a treaty was signed that permitted their return to their homeland. Each man, woman, and child was given three sheep or goats to start new herds (Debo 1983: 200). Boundary lines were delineated for the reservation which encompassed part of their original territory. However, the area was and is very arid.

The Santa Fe railroad was built through the reservation during the 1880's. This had a profound impact on transportation and communications between the reservation and the outside world. Navajo men assisted in the construction of the railroad, raw materials were transported to market, and Western consumer goods became more accessible. Navajo men had a means of migrating to off-reservation employment and tourists found Navajoland within easy reach. These circumstances provided opportunities for Navajo women to sell their weavings.

Russell (personal communication) suggests that the Navajo were economically self-sufficient, despite capitalist penetration until the 1930's when the government ordered the Navajo to reduce their livestock. It is his contention that this precipitated the underdevelopment process on the reservation despite the fact that the Navajo were able to replenish their herds subsequently. Women have been heavily involved in sheep and goat herding while men have herded cattle and horses.

In the late 1960's, there was a dramatic shift in U.S. policy towards Native Americans. Whereas the previous orientation had fostered assimilation, the new orientation stressed self-determination for Native American tribes. For the Navajo Nation, the political ascendancy of Peter Macdonald to the position of chief of the Navajo Council came on the heels of this policy shift. A former Hughes Aircraft engineer, Macdonald embarked on a program of economic development that would culminate in Navajo self-determination. He sought to more fully explore and exploit the reservation's oil, uranium, water, and timber resources. However, as a departure from the past, the Navajo were to benefit from increased employment opportunities, tribal participation in joint ventures with private enterprise, revenue allocation to local chapters in which resources are exploited, and possibilities for cooperative formation (Iverson 1981). Job creation was more male-oriented. However, in the formation of handicraft cooperatives, females were often employed.

Cooperatives were formed to act as a challenge and a substitute for trading posts providing such resources as livestock feed, gasoline, food, handicraft supplies, and handicrafts themselves. Handicraft cooperatives were more tourist-oriented instead of primarily serving the needs of the Navajo.

Navajo women have engaged in weaving for at least three hundred years (Getzwiller 1984). Through the course of that period, weaving has undergone a metamorphosis in function, style, and technique. Since the 1870's, traders have played a significant role in this process. Nevertheless, Navajo weavers control sheep-herding, wool processing and/or marketing, and the weaving process.

Although some weavers, primarily older women, weave high-quality tapestries for which they demand a handsome price, the vast majority of weavers obtain a meager income from their tapestries. Navajo tapestries range in size from miniature to grandiose, and, in price, from \$50 to \$5,000.

Unlike the Lesotho case, Navajo weaving has not been a cooperative effort. Traders, still having trading posts throughout the reservation, serve as nexuses of American capitalism. In the last few decades, several attempts have been made to form cooperatives among weavers with little or no success. Traders have been adamantly opposed to cooperative formation.

Tourism has not diminished in Navajoland. If anything, it has increased. Visitors to the Southwest, in addition to Navajo and Hopi reservations, have a number of geological and archaeological sites that they can tour. Tourists buy tapestries primarily from traders, however.

Since the 1930's, efforts have been made to introduce cooperatives on the Navajo reservation. However, it was not until the 1970's that a sustained cooperative thrust got underway. The Navajo Wool and Mohair Warehouse markets raw wool and mohair and buys back some yarn to be sold to weavers. Navajo Arts and Crafts markets tapestries, silver jewelry, etc. A highly successful tapestry auction is held in Crownpoint, New Mexico several times a year. More recently, the Save The Children Fund has been allocating funding to the Navajo Nation to form cooperatives among weavers on the reservation. This represents one of the few development projects being executed in a core nation by a core development agency.

There has been a high rate of male migration from the reservation to urban areas of the Southwest and the West. Economic development on the reservation in the 1970's helped to stem the tide of male migration because of growing employment and educational opportunities on the reservation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The comparison of Basotho and Navajo weavers reveals the extent of sexual segmentation of the labor force in peripheral areas. Due to this sexual segmentation, I would argue that the "reserve armies of labor" in which most of these women would be placed are also sexually segmented. Braverman's (1974) characterization of Marxian components of the reserve army of labor are as follows:

1. The *floating reserve* is found in industrial centers where workers float from job-to-job experiencing periods of unemployment in relation to movements of technological and capital;
2. The *latent reserve* is located in agricultural areas in which peasants have to recourse in terms of employment options when new agricultural technology is introduced and, as a consequence, often migrate to cities; and,
3. The *stagnant reserve* is one in which there is only irregular, casual, or marginal employment available and which often results in pauperism for members of the category.

In Lesotho, because of the availability of foreign aid, women in the floating, latent, and stagnant reserves participate in some form of textile production. Whereas factories cater to the floating reserve, cooperatives cater to the latent and stagnant reserves. For women in the latter categories, there is no social welfare system to serve as a safety net against pauperism

By contrast, on the Navajo reservation, at least theoretically, members of all three reserves are eligible for participation in the social welfare system either through the federal government or the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Unlike Lesotho, women weavers are probably represented in all categories of the "reserve armies of labor."

Although foreign aid strategies have fallen under considerable scrutiny and criticism over the last decade, it becomes clear from the above that more communally-oriented development projects are being initiated in Lesotho for weavers despite the lack of integration of these projects. On the Navajo reservation for the last three centuries, weavers have experienced the vicissitudes of capitalist development in the American core. It is, as a consequence, difficult for cooperative efforts to become entrenched in the reservation's peripheral economy.

March and Taqu (1986) suggest that cooperatives introduced by development organization are often based on a Western model. In Western society, women have formed cooperatives in response to industrialization and to the privatization of their lives. These organizations tend to be too large, too formal, and too bureaucratized to motivate non-western women to fully participate in them. March and Taqu (1986) conclude by advocating that some synthesis be effected between the indigenous cooperative model in a given society and the Western cooperative model in order to design a viable cooperative in that context. Nevertheless, it becomes clear in comparing the two cases, that the problem is more fundamentally economic.

A final dimension illuminated by the comparison of Basotho and Navajo women is the periphery-semi-periphery relationship, in the case of the former, and the periphery-core relationship, in the case of the latter. Clearly, the periphery-core relationship experienced by the Navajo is one of intense, but differential, capitalist incorporation. This makes integrated cooperative development virtually impossible. In the case of the Basotho, the periphery-semi-periphery relationship involves less capitalist incorporation. However, it is through core intervention in the form of development aid that cooperative formation has gained inroads into Lesotho's peripheral economy.

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