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国立民族学博物館学術情報リポジトリ National Museum of Ethnology

SES no.056; Introduction to Part I

メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2009-04-28 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Keen, Ian メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	https://doi.org/10.15021/00002801

Introduction to Part I

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The chapters in Part I of this volume began as papers given in two sessions of the Eighth International Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies held in October 1998 at the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka. These were the session on 'Ethnicity, Church and State' which I chaired, and the one on 'Identity, Transformation and Performance', convened by Anne Fienup-Riordan. A common theme linked a number of papers presented in the two sessions, namely issues of identity arising out of relations with the state and wider society among hunter-gatherers and former hunter-gatherers. Revised versions of a number of those papers are brought together here, together with one invited paper (Russell Taylor).

The chapters all deal in one way or another with the processes and consequences of political domination of foraging peoples by industrializing nations. They are concerned with several regions of the world: Australia, South India, the former Soviet Union, the Canadian Northwest, the American Plains, and Alaska. The historical and political contexts which form the background of the chapters are somewhat diverse, but there are similarities. Australia, Canada and the United States began as overseas settler-colonies in which Europeans became the dominant majority, subduing and decimating the indigenous populations through introduced diseases as well as force of arms. The colonization by Russia of what became known as Siberia was a somewhat similar process, carried out overland (Forsyth 1992: 1). India presents a different case, in which the European colonizers were a minority, and where foraging peoples became minority groups within a post-colonial nation state. Linking the chapters are themes of ethnicity and identity.

Ethnicity and identity

The concept of ethnicity has come to be preferred as an analytical category, and has largely replaced 'race' (Rex 1983) because of the association of this term with discredited biological theories of race (Fenton 1999: 4). Indeed the preference is so marked, Cowlshaw finds, that even scholarly analysis of relationships framed in terms of race by the actors has been subject to censorship on the grounds that the analysis would perpetuate the reality (Cowlshaw 2000).

Social structural approaches to ethnicity have been concerned with the structure of social groups and categories, their boundaries and their degree of solidarity or corporateness (Barth 1969; Foster 1973; Gedmintas 1989; Handelman 1977). The view that shared descent is basic to ethnicity linked it to kinship theory (Keyes 1976; Francis 1976), including sociobiological theories of kinship (Van den Berghe 1987). Social

structural theories of plural society (e.g. Furnivall 1948) dealt with relations of people of different ethnicity within the same society. An alternative situationist perspective looked at how people deployed identity-constructs in a variety of social contexts (Moerman 1965; Nagata 1974).

Scholars have consistently defined ethnicity in terms of culture (Herskovits 1938; Naroll 1964; Fenton 1999: 6). This creates some tension between regarding ethnicity as a cultural construct, and seeing culture as the main component of difference within such constructs. According to Eriksen for example, ethnicity refers to the social reproduction of 'basic classificatory differences between categories of people who see themselves as culturally discrete' (Eriksen 1993: 11). This seems to omit all those who see themselves as physically distinct.

The link between ethnicity and culture is reflected in constructionism, which emphasizes the importance of definitions and labels, and the power mobilized by those who are in a position to create and sustain those definitions and labels. This power comes into play in relations of domination, and processes of political struggle (Nagel 1994; Fenton 1999: 11-12, 18). The idea that identity and difference are 'culturally constructed' seems to imply that they are intentionally created, reproduced and manipulated for political and economic interest, and are not real. The result is that constructionists are susceptible to the charge of challenging the authenticity of people's identity, as has happened in the case of anthropological commentary on identity in Australia and the Pacific (Thiele 1991; Lattas 1993; Keesing 1989; Trask 1991). In writing about it, scholars are inevitably caught up in the politics of identity.

Reflecting broader trends in social theory, recent approaches to ethnicity have moved away from rather static analysis of social groups and inter-group relations towards the process of identity formation and the drawing of social boundaries. Central to these processes are 'the production and reproduction of culture, of acknowledged ancestry and ideologies of ancestry, and the use of language as a marker of social difference and the emblem of a people' (Fenton 1999: 10). We cannot simply talk of ethnic 'groups', Fenton argues, for ethnic identities are subject to change, redefinition and contestation (p.10). Real or perceived differences of ancestry, culture and language are 'mobilized in social transactions' (p.6).

This variety of approaches and aspects is reflected in the chapters of Part I, which are grouped into three broad aspects. First are chapters on the historical and political contexts within which ethnic identities have been suppressed, transformed and revived. They deal with wider structural relationships between states, their agents, and indigenous minorities, and transformations in those relationships. Chapters in the second group are concerned with cultures of identity, especially the symbols and discourses which express it and the situations within which symbols of identity are communicated. They examine symbols of identity in particular situations, the performance of identity, and narrative styles in communication between indigenous minorities and the dominant majority. Third are chapters which consider labels and identity-constructs deployed by indigenous people, anthropologists and governments, the construction and use of which reflect relations of domination and conflict.

Historical and political contexts of identity

In the first chapter Elena Glavatskaia describes the effects on Khanty identity of the long-term processes beginning in the sixteenth century of Russian expansion into western Siberia and the domination of the Khanty, the imposition of Christianity, and Soviet assimilationist policy. Glavatskaia distinguishes several phases in which industrialization grew, the Russian and later Soviet empire expanded, and the church gained more power to enforce Christianity. She finds that the Soviet State employed the more effective means of assimilation through the isolation of children in boarding schools. This practice, together with the State's actions against indigenous shamanism, was accompanied by a loss of ethnic identity among many Khanty. With the decline of the Communist Party, while many Khanty have assimilated into the Russian majority, ethnic and national identities including Khanty identity have undergone a revival.

Responses to transformations in government policy in India is the focus of the chapter by Christer Norström, who traces changing Paliyan strategies in response to the establishment of a tribal village at the border of a proposed a sanctuary situated in the Palni Hills of southern India. Paliyan have had to change their former strategy of avoiding contact with authorities, and the enjoyment of 'autonomy by default', to engagement with various interests and agencies. Norström traces in detail the conflicts and alliances that followed the growing integration of Paliyans into the regional economy. The high value which Paliyans give to individual autonomy has worked against the degree of group cohesion and representation demanded by development agencies. How this increased integration affects Paliyan identity in the long term remains to be seen.

The chapter by Viktor Shnirelman considers the changing construction of identity among Tlingit people of Alaska. Like that of the Khanty, Tlingit culture was greatly affected by church policies and boarding schools, as well as exposure to mass media and a high value placed upon standard American education among Tlingit people themselves. A particular feature of Tlingit identity has been the continuity of matrilineal clans, maintained in part through the practice of adoption. Shnirelman argues that depending on their background, different Tlingit groups give emphasis to distinct factors in their ideas about identity: genealogical relations, language and cultural factors, or the history of clans and their sacra. Moreover, acculturated Tlingits tend to emphasize pan-Tlingit identity, whereas those with most knowledge of the indigenous culture stress clan loyalty.

These are the broader, historical and structural contexts of identity; the next group of chapters considers the performance and symbols of identity, and the persistence of narrative styles in communication between indigenous and non-indigenous people.

Performance, symbols, and narrative styles

The theme of unity and diversity continues in Lisa Hiwasaki's chapter on the performance of identity among Stó:lo people of British Columbia. Invoking the social theories of Goffman and Blumer, Hiwasaki argues that Stó:lo presentations of identity are diverse performances, involving both performers and audiences. Constructions of identity deployed in a number of settings draw on a variety of symbols: archaeological, historical

and political. Interpretive centers and cultural events are intended to make people aware of the Stó:lo presence and who they are. However, Hiwasaki finds that certain realities are played down in attempts to counter negative and popular stereotypes; managing diversity is important to a unified Stó:lo.

Toshiaki Inoue considers a specific symbol of identity in Alaska, namely bush skills, which the northern Athabascan (Athapaskan) Gwich'in regard as equivalent in significance to Inuit dance and song. Hunting and gathering are a symbol of cultural tradition and a source of cultural identity in opposition to the majority society. Gwich'in now live in a number of settlements while regularly practicing traditional subsistence activities (cf. Feit 1982). While they are dependent on income from village corporations and welfare payments, hunting, fishing and gathering remain important economically and socially. Gwich'in regard their products as 'real foods', which are inappropriate (and illegal) as commodities. In contrast with official definitions of indigenous identity, in order to be Gwich'in it is necessary to maintain a connection in the sharing of these 'real foods'.

The next two chapters turn to continuities in narrative styles, and their importance in relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous people.

In his chapter on the novels of Blackfeet-Gros Ventre writer James Welch, Will Karkavelas examines what he calls 'mediational' text as bicultural dialogue, as fields of discourse that alternate between the Native and the non-Native, and between ways of knowing and static constructs of knowledge. Contrasting the strategies and relations of the indigenous storyteller's listening audience with the Native novelist's reading audience, Karkavelas explains the complex process of hybridization within the contemporary American Indian novel through the process of mediation. It is one that involves a relationship between the Euroamerican frame and an indigenous content to create an agenda for independent local identity in art and being.

Robin Ridington begins with the Native American ideology of hunting in which animals are both fellow persons and adversaries: 'Native American hunting and gathering technology is embedded in social relations that are enacted through discourse and empowered by narrative'. People use narratives to negotiate relations of power between humans and these other sentient beings. Ridington shows that continuities in discourse styles are manifest in literature, and that people from North American hunting and gathering traditions continue to use indigenous modes of discourse and narrative in their relations with the wider society. Narrative techniques have been adapted to the purposes of articulating and negotiating with the institutions of the nation state, including courts of law, through writing and the visual arts.

The names people use to identify themselves and others are a key aspect of identity, and have been central in the construction of legal instruments by governments. The final three chapters of Part I consider the construction of identity by indigenous peoples, governments, and anthropologists.

Constructions of identity

Russell Taylor presents an Indigenous Australian perspective on the construction of identity on the part of governments, anthropologists and Aboriginal people; for him, the notion of an Aboriginal identity is 'an intensely personal concept'. He understands descent and lived experiences to be central aspects of Aboriginal identity; the latter adding great diversity to Aboriginality. Taylor sees identity as emerging out of intercultural interaction and dialogue, but he contends that this dialogue often becomes one that bypasses Aboriginal people. He mounts a plea for the right of Aboriginal people to adjudicate matters of Aboriginality for themselves; the special value of Aboriginal views should be respected in the dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

The settlement of land claims between aboriginal people and the Canadian government has provided a key context for changes, and local differences, in the use of 'tribal' labels such as Dene. Jean-Guy Goulet offers a critical analysis of anthropological and folk concepts of the Athapaskan tribe, in which he examines assumptions underlying anthropological descriptions of Northern Athapaskans, as well as Dene representations of themselves. Goulet shows how categories such as 'Slavey' and 'Dene' have emerged in interaction among indigenous groups and between indigenous groups and outsiders, and have been adopted, somewhat uncritically, by anthropologists. Goulet concludes that as 'inscription devices', maps are instruments used to substantiate claims to be speaking about an observable universe in which people live, and to affirm identities and rights.

Even though similar processes of acculturation, assimilation and revival have been described, issues of land rights and indigeneity distinguish the peoples discussed here from ethnic minorities descended from immigrants. As in North America, anthropologists in Australia have become key players in land claim processes. The final chapter in Part I by Keen considers the implications for native title claims in Australia of anthropological theorizing about relations between indigenous minorities and the enclosing society. Recent changes in Australian law have made it possible for Aboriginal people living in parts of Australia most affected by European settlement to make Native Title claims, as the result of policies and processes similar to those described by Glavatskaia and Shnirelmen. Keen argues that various anthropological frameworks used for the analysis of relations between Aboriginal communities and the wider Australian society, give emphasis to rather different aspects of social relations and processes, so affecting the way in which continuity and change have been represented. These differences have implications for the presentation and adjudication of evidence in Native Title claims.

Questions about transforming ethnic identity in relations between hunter-gatherers and their neighbors, and between hunter-gatherers (or former hunter-gatherers) and nation states, have been of increasing interest in recent CHAGS conferences (e.g. Bogoiavlenskii 2000; Feit 1982; Irimoto 2000; Murashko 2000; Vierich 1982; Widlok 2000), with at least two sessions of the 1998 conference being concerned directly with such issues. Each chapter in Part I of this volume contributes to a particular regional and topical literature, as well as to the growing literature on identity and ethnicity among hunters and gatherers.

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