

Diskusija

Some Remarks on Ethnicity and Population Geography from a Spanish Point of View

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At the end of the 20th century, race, ethnic group and ethnicity are re-appearing concepts, but they also present numerous definitions as the Ljubljana Symposium has shown. This re-appearance, besides, is paradoxical in a time when economic, social and, even, political globalisation is the mainstream in our world. Maybe this is why we look for new parameters to base the division of modern global society, and one of them could be the re- assessment of ethnicity.

Nowadays ethnic problems are approached from several social sciences, and among them there are different Geographical branches: Cultural, Political, Social, Population Geography. In the case of the last one, the analysis of several papers, written by Professor Noin for the Symposium, shows that most French works do not study ethnicity (with the exception of two chapters in a work by Professor Noin), and neither do Spanish authors. Said omission could be explained in part by the similarity with the criticized Vidalian concept of way of life, the fear to its confusion with the concept of race and its pejorative geographical connotations, and the wish to separate as much as possible from disciplines such as Anthropology, Sociology and Ethnology. The Anglo- Saxon Population Geography, in special that derived from Sauer, studies ethnicity in a way.

In the most recent British works, so concerned by space and quantitative measuring of demographic events, however, references to hardly measurable ethnic variables do not appear.

In my opinion, the recent recovery of ethnicity studies in Population Geography points out that said sub-discipline pays always attention to the problems arising in its environment. Thus, we have always taken into account cultural factors – and why not ethnic? – in the differential fertility analysis or in the study of migrant flows motivations: now, in our European cultural environment there appears the concern on

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populations's ethnic variations, which are likely to be at the root of some armed struggles and fights between communities, where they stress national and cultural differences, including language and religion, even traditions in food and dress. The senses of belonging and exclusion shift from the social field to the territorial, and there are attempts to build states peopled by the most homogenous communities in a time when all kind of migratory flows are increasing.

The study of ethnic differentiation turns into a meeting point for several geographical branches and in a variable relevant to understand demographical behaviour in many areas.

We have to admit that different elements defining an ethnic group do not have the same weight in all the countries: language as a cultural vehicle; a common cultural heritage; different socio-cultural behaviours to which, some authors add somatic features which lead almost to a symbiosis with race. We have to include the troublesome connection between ethnic group and nationality, an ambiguous concept as well especially when it is related to State.

Within this context, how can we approach the Spanish case? There are problems in the identification of ethnic groups and in the study of foreign communities as groups differentiated by characteristics that in some cases are similar to so-called ethnic features.

First of all, according to the Spanish Constitution, the census can not inquire on race or religion and, therefore, it is not a source of indicators on socio-cultural behaviours. We can refer only to language as the differential element; the Autonomous Communities with another co-official language with Spanish: Catalonia, Comunidad Valenciana, Baleares, Basque Country and Galicia, have statistics on the number of people who speak the language. Those statistics, however, do not say whether the language is the mother tongue or the normal vehicle of cultural communication. Thus there is the risk to include in the same ethnic group, for example, all those people who live in Catalonia, even if some of them had to learn it due to administrative provisions and it is not their usual cultural vehicle, or if they retain the socio-cultural behaviour of their home regions.

According to the Spanish Constitution, Spain is a State formed by different regions and nationalities with a well-defined territory; the problem, however, is to find a correspondence between the regions and nationalities and a possible division in ethnic groups on the basis of linguistic differences. Do linguistic differences correspond with other socio-cultural differences?

Moreover, in some regions there are minority movements that claim a language as a mark of identity, so they try to re-invent dialects that hardly survive in the rural world or in isolated words. That's the case of the *bable* dialect in Asturias and the *fabla* dialect in Aragón.

Consequently, the language can identify ethnic groups as an element implying

cultural differences that can not be assimilated to those characterizing, for example, the gipsy ethnic group, well defined and with a strong sense of belonging in its members.

On the other hand, the identification of foreign communities according to census data where illegal immigrants do not appear, poses the problem of the second and third generations, born in Spain and so registered. Besides, from the point of view of several features that characterize the ethnic group, how can you differentiate them when they have assimilated the language and usage of the host country? If we keep stressing the differences as ethnic, could not an extrem racist and/or nationalist make us reject all the people with a foreign origin?

In conclusion, the study of the possible Spanish differentiation in ethnic groups still needs a number of adjustments, concretely the search of indicators complementing and explaining data derived from linguistic differences.

In the same line, the analysis of foreign-origin communities from an ethnic perspective requires us to reflect on its social implications, due to the rejection felt by some ethnic groups from some minorities.

The Symposium of Ljubljana has opened new ways for Spanish demographers, who till now were not concerned by these issues.