

INEQUALITIES ARE STRONGER THAN EVER. AN INTERVIEW WITH EVELYN NAKANO GLENN.

Evelyn Nakano Glenn is a Professor of Gender and Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. In addition, she is a founding director of the research Center for Race and Gender at the same university. She was elected President of the American Sociological Association for the academic year 2009–2010.

Her lifelong scholarly research has focused on the dynamics of gender, race and class in processes of exclusion and discrimination. She has fundamentally contributed to the feminist analysis of the co-constitution of gender and racial inequalities which she has applied to her research on racial and gender division of reproductive labour, both paid and unpaid, and production and reproduction of exclusion within American citizenship. She has published several books, including *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (2002) and *Issei, Nisei, Warbride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* (1986). She also co-edited the volume *Mothering: Ideology, Experience and Agency* (1994) and edited *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters* (2009).

Zuzana Uhde: You earned a Ph.D. from the Social Relations Department at Harvard and your dissertation was on experimental social psychology. How did you become interested in gender sociology and in feminist theory? Are there any special events that motivated this shift in interests?

Evelyn Nakano Glenn: You have done a lot of research. The Social Relations Department at Harvard was an attempt to be interdisciplinary. It was the brainchild of Talcott Parsons, Gordon Allport and some other people who wanted to create a relationship between social structure and more individual social psychology. So it incorporated sociology, social psychology, clinical psychology and social anthropology. This was the initial idea, but then there was a disciplinary tension, and subsequently it broke down. My undergraduate work there was in social psychology, but students in our programme got some exposure to the other disciplines through interdisciplinary seminars, and I did take a seminar by Talcott Parsons, who at that time was one of the most eminent American sociologists. But nonetheless I really didn't go into sociology until after I finished my degree and I got my first job at Boston University. The timing of that was in the early seventies when second-wave feminism was coming to the fore. This was before the development of women's studies as a field, but there was some ferment going on in various sub-fields like history or sociology, bringing women in who were absent at that point. I started collaborating with a colleague at

Boston University, Roslyn Feldberg, and we started doing some research and also teaching in the area of women at work. We started doing studies of women in clerical work which was highly feminised field and we developed notions about how different occupations became feminised and then what are the impacts in terms of wages and status. When we taught the first course, Women at Work, there were almost no materials on women of colour, there were maybe a few things on Afro American women but none on Asian American women. So I started doing some oral history interviews with Japanese-American women. I was aware that there was a whole history of domestic service in San Francisco Bay area, where my family is from. My paternal grandmother, I discovered during the course of the study in fact, had been a domestic worker in Alameda, California. So that's how that whole thing had started. I also got involved in various Marxist feminist groups which grew as a reaction to a male-centred Marxist leftist movement and theory. The jumping-off point was Engels's work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, where he talks about productive and reproductive labour, through which women had gotten marginalised initially in settled agrarianism and ultimately under capitalism. Most of us were doing labour studies and a lot of us were doing research on housework, both paid and unpaid. So in a sense my interest grew out of that movement, part of that was the social movement and part of that was the movement in the academy.

Zuzana Uhde: This leads me to my second question. You have been part of the feminist breakthrough into sociology. Today you are the director of the Center for Race and Gender at UC Berkeley and you are also the elected President of the American Sociological Association. What do you think is the important message of this struggle that contemporary feminists working within the field should keep in mind?

Evelyn Nakano Glenn: That's a good question. Certainly in terms of my own development, it is the women of colour critique of feminism and feminist theory in the humanities as well as the social sciences. I was also part of that whole reaction. I had a fairly solid Marxist feminist orientation, but I also became involved with women of colour scholars, particularly a group led by Bonnie Thornton Dill, an African American sociologist who is now the head of the Consortium on Ethnicity, Race and Gender at the University of Maryland, the only other research centre in the USA that focuses on intersections of race and gender, Elizabeth Higginbotham, Cheryl Gilkes, who was my colleague at Bos-

ton University, Ruth Zambrana who's a Puerto Rican, and then myself. Bonnie got The Ford Foundation grant to start meetings, where we basically started by reading novels. The question was how do we do analysis across groups, what do women of colour have in common? African American women scholars were studying African American women, Latina scholars were studying Latinas, and Asian American scholars were studying Asian Americans. But we were looking for a comparative basis. We built on people like Robert Blauner, who talks about communalities among black in Afro American Latinos constituting internal colonies in that kind of model. And we were actually pretty early in terms of turning to work on racial formation, race as a social construction as formulated by Michael Omi and Howard Winant.

And this collaborative approach also applies to my engagement in the Center for Race and Gender. The formation of the Center was the result of a movement and the Ethnic Studies strike of 1999 at UC Berkeley. I think basically it's all the importance of a social movement, it is a collective enterprise; it's not an individual achievement but rather my involvement in the movement. So I do think that it is always important to keep in mind that whatever progress we have made is because it has been a part of the collective struggle. And I think there is always backsliding. The struggle is never won. For example, sociology as a field has become more feminised. At this point I think over 50% of graduate students in sociology are women. Nevertheless, they are still under-represented, particularly in the so-called top departments such as Berkeley. And I think there is still hostility toward feminism and toward certain types of racial ethnic scholarship, which are seen only as identity politics. In some areas I think there is still a discomfort with sexuality studies. I think there is still a struggle, especially at those so-called elite levels. But, for instance, W. E. B. Du Bois is an example of the idea that sometimes the most influential or later an influential and important work takes place on the margins because the centre tends to be very status quo oriented. Today, W. E. B. Du Bois is an iconic sociologist as well as writer; the major research award in the USA was named after him starting in 2007, although he was never given a teaching position in a white institution. He taught sociology very briefly at Atlanta which is historically a black university. But his scholarship on Black Reconstruction, which put blacks at the centre of the story, was basically trashed in a review in the *American Journal of Sociology*.

Zuzana Uhde: And what do you still has to be done?

Evelyn Nakano Glenn: I think there is still a tension between more disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches. I think the disciplines are artificial constructions; the disciplines try to carve out certain aspects of social reality. Contrary to Burawoy, I think there is no such division between economics doing the market, political science doing power and the state, and then sociology doing civil society.

In fact, I don't think you can do good 'sociological work' without taking into account the market and power. On the contrary, in terms of looking at particularly substantive areas it is much better to have a broader framework. So I think that these disciplinary lines really need to be re-thought. But within the university there are fiefdoms and people fight to maintain those fiefdoms. I think that moment when I was in Social Relations Department was a particular moment historically and has now reverted back to the traditional departments at Harvard.

Zuzana Uhde: Throughout your work you have been elaborating an integrative framework for the intersection of gender and race, which you called the 'social constructionist approach to gender and race', taking into account both cultural meanings and material relations arising from gender-racial social structures. How do you understand the co-constitution of gender and race?

Evelyn Nakano Glenn: Actually there is a problem in the vocabulary, in the terms we want to think about it. We used to talk about intersectionality and more recently we have been talking about co-constitution. When it comes to the term intersection it is problematic in the sense that gender and race still sound like independent categories which only come together at some point. And that intersection is usually thought of in relation to understanding the situation, experiences, and lives of woman of colour, in other words, only for those whose gender is not male and/or colour is not white. I think that co-constitution is a way of trying to say that these categories are never truly independent. They are always constituted together, which is advancement in thinking. The problem is similar to that of the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy for Marxist feminism. And we ended up saying capitalist patriarchy. Or the relationship between sex and gender. Gender is originally a grammatical term, as opposed to sex, and there was an attempt to separate sex and gender, to say that gender was culturally constructed meanings that build on sexual differences. And then there is Judith Butler and other people who come with the notion that sex is also a social construction. There is still a debate going on about what is the relationship between those terms. And with race there was also originally that sort of notion of it as being biological or certainly recognisable physiological differences. But then it was pointed out that race is a social construction rooted or built upon what might be called a physical difference. I think that the usefulness of that idea of social construction is by pointing out that there were always cultural and other meanings functioning as organising principles within institutions. I think it was a useful idea to talk about race as a central organising principle of an institution.

So you can talk about gender and race in relation to institutions not just in terms of individuals or individual bodies. So you can have social organisations that incorporate race and gender as a part of their social structure. I think that

has been useful in terms of connecting the cultural and material relations – the cultural meaning and also social relations and institutional arrangements, which are much more material relations, both structured around race and gender. I think this notion of co-constitution is trying to get at an even deeper level, saying that they are never totally separate, and for analytic purposes we have to be able to trace the way in which they are together.

Zuzana Uhde: At the beginning of the 1990s you wrote an article about the racial division of reproductive labour, which became a classic in feminist sociology. By way of elaborating the intersection of social history and individual lives to uncover the dynamics of structural forces and human agency you have analysed the way in which race and gender inequalities are systemically embedded in the structure of modern society. On the example of racial division of reproductive labour you concretised your more general approach to the co-construction of race and gender. Could you please summarise your argument?

Evelyn Nakano Glenn: I think the area of reproductive labour was very productive in terms of thinking about that co-construction of race and gender. It's an area of work that is clearly gendered and a lot of it was the starting point for the Marxist feminist analysis that I mentioned earlier. But at the same time the Marxist approach was looking at racial divisions of labour and the institutionalisation of separate labour markets, which keeps certain types of labour very cheap. And then Marxist feminists tried to bridge the gap between productive and reproductive labour and pointing out the ways in which women's responsibility for reproductive labour disadvantages them in the labour market and vice versa. So there is a kind of connection between productive and reproductive labour. I thought that the focus was much on the way in which reproductive labour is feminised, but what was missing was explicit recognition of the way in which reproductive labour was also divided through the racial division of reproductive labour just as there was a racial division of the market labour. And that was historically a very important division that in some sense created this interdependence in the lives of white women and women of colour, which is also cross-class based. White women were able to fulfil the ideal of 'angel of the household' because so many black women were forced to earn a living by hiring themselves out as servants in white households. It's identifying this historical pattern. I think that was an interesting breakthrough.

I think it's still relevant in terms of understanding things like the transnational division of labour and the transnational division of reproductive labour where women from the global South perform the reproductive labour in the global North. And very often the idea is that women from the global South are especially suited or talented in providing reproductive labour or care labour because they come from traditional cultures, where women take care of the elders.

Certain constructions of Third World femininity are used as a way of justifying or rationalising this particular arrangement. Historically that's always been the pattern in the USA, but it's now becoming the pattern throughout Europe. Each country has particular countries they tend to draw their care workers from, like we draw out from the Philippines and Latin America. And there is another part of it. Domesticity has been reproduced as a part of the private realm and so it mimics family relation. It gets really complicated, just like Afro American women have had other people to take care of their children so that they could go to do domestic work, women migrants who do care work if they have children have to have either relatives or even poor women to take care of their children. So, you know, I think it's still very relevant, it's not necessarily this traditional racial relation that has existed in places like the United States of America, but it's a First-Third world phenomena. And there tends to be lighter and darker people, you know, in that sense.

Zuzana Uhde: Recently you completed a new book entitled *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (Harvard University Press, 2010). Could you please expose your line of argument and tell us how it is connected to your previous research?

Evelyn Nakano Glenn: Originally I was interested in a relationship between race and unfree systems of labour like slavery, debt bondage, peonage. And particularly the exploitation of women of colour, their caring labour within these contexts. In a plantation system men do field work, sometimes women do too, but women are also recruited into doing domestic labour or other kinds of care labour. And so there are two streams I tried to trace in this book. One is that of unfree labour regimes. The other is the domestic realm, marriage and family relations. Women's feeling of obligation or social expectation to provide caring labour for parents and so forth is very often spiritualised or stated in terms of the altruistic love. But nonetheless it's very codified in the law of social policy in the various ways where family members are expected to take care of other family members without pay. And then especially wives do it for their husbands, children and their parents. But basically it was a principle in common law that the women were supposed to provide services, the labour of women completely belonged to the husband, he basically owned it and so he could also contract out for her, her earnings would belong to him. 19th-century reforms, such as the Married Women's Property Acts and the Married Women's Earning's Acts, then led to a conflict with this sort of marital obligation. What happened in that period and really up until the mid-20th century is that earnings and other issues were ruled by courts to not actually affect a man's whatever right to the wife's labour.

So this is shown in legal cases of two kinds. The first is where the husband and wife sign a private contract that she takes care of him and in exchange he will leave her this

property. You know they sign this contract, if he doesn't do what he promised and she goes to court, and then the court goes: well, there can't be any contract because she was obligated by reason of the marriage relationship to provide that labour, so therefore, you know, there is no consideration, OK. And then the other one is where the wife becomes, let's say she's injured in an accident or something like that, then, according to the courts, the man, the husband, is the one who has the right to sue for the loss of his wife's services. Like if she becomes disabled from a paying job she could sue for the loss of her ability or money. But as far as her labour at home is concerned, she is not the party that can sue, he is the one, you know. So some of that has become sort of gender neutral, where wives can sue for a husband's, the loss of a husband's services, or whatever. But nonetheless they, you know, all that sort of social politics, like for a long time in England, I'm sure there are other examples, if an elderly person had a daughter who was living nearby, then he was not entitled to home-health services, because the daughter was supposed to provide it for free. Researchers have found that when women talk about caring for a husband or a disabled relative, they express a strong sense of duty or obligation.

In many ways women's private caring has become intensified with deinstitutionalisation as a way to save on health-care costs. In the US there has been a trend to release patients to go home even if they are dependent on respirators or need chemotherapy. The equipment is installed in the home, and a family member has to administer therapy and monitor the equipment. Being responsible for a technology-dependent family member is extremely stressful, requiring constant vigilance. So there're a lot of ways in which a family's members are put in the position of having to provide that labour. They may kind of want to do it, but really they have to do it to ensure that their relatives survive.

So one of the central issues for me was the question why is it that caring labour is so devalued, so that when it is done for pay it's very low pay. And there has been a huge expansion of homecare for humanitarian reasons on the one hand – the disabled or the elderly should be allowed to live in their home instead of being in institutions – and for monetary reasons on the other hand – it's cheaper if people get cared for in their home than if they're put in institutions. So there is a convergence of people who advocate for the rights of the elderly and the disabled to live independently and the medical power system saying that it is desirable because it's a lot cheaper. In the USA there is still a discomfort about mixing an allowance or pay for services and family care. Only individual states like California do allow relatives to be paid out of state funds. However, most disabled people are provided with personal care through the Federal Medicare Program, which does not allow payment to close relatives. They can pay only an outside person, even though a lot of times they can get a relative to provide better care. And then there are people who are doing caring

work for pay, who don't get decent wages and benefits. And usually the way that has been explained is that because it's in this private sphere of the home it is treated as though it is the same as unpaid labour, you know, and can't be regulated.

My argument is that the low value of caring labour has grown out of two historical streams: that of marital-family relationships in which wives/mothers/daughters are obligated to provide caring services, and of unfree labour systems that tracked female slaves, colonial subjects, and indentured workers into performing caring labour for others. Today, much paid caring is performed by racial minority women and immigrant women. The devaluation and low pay of these women's labour needs to be understood as growing out of both historical streams. The fact that it takes place in the private home leads to the conclusion that therefore you don't have to pay too much, but it is also tied to older notions of unfree labour, where certain groups of devalued people are expected to provide those services or forced to provide those services. So I think to really explain this whole situation with these paid care-givers you have to look at both of those streams.

Zuzana Uhde: The feminist struggle for the recognition of women's contribution to the well-being of others and the indispensable role of caring activities and homemaking went hand in hand with other feminist agendas along the lines of the famous feminist slogan 'the personal is political'. The mainstream media present a picture of a working mother who has always a shortage of time as a Pyrrhic victory of the feminist movement. Much less publicly discussed is the fact that this is not at all what feminists have claimed. You are also engaged in the debate about rethinking the concept of care and outlining directions for change with respect to crises in care in modern capitalist societies. What is the cornerstone of your idea of a *caring society*? What might the ideal care arrangement in our societies look like?

Evelyn Nakano Glenn: I actually wrote the last chapter of my new book on this whole idea. I was looking at this largely within the USA context where everything has been marketised and there is pretty minimal larger societal or state responsibility for providing care. This means that the model is still based on the family.

Usually the focus is on adequate care for those who need it. But the question is who is going to provide it, and that part is often overlooked because it's treated as a status obligation derived from the family relationship to another person as opposed to the contractual relationship. Basically the idea of choice, that everyone has the right to choose whether or not to provide that care, needs to be part of any solution.

I think therefore that there has to be a notion that people do have a right to care but that it is not necessarily the obligation of particular persons who have a certain standing with that person to provide it. Maybe a lot of people will

choose to do it, but the other problem is that if they choose to do it there shouldn't be a huge penalty. Like giving up their career, their independence, etc. So I think, obviously, a caring society has to provide choice and has to provide adequate compensation in various forms to those who do provide the caring labour. They should be recognised for the societal contribution. In other words, in the USA most welfare benefits or what might be called social citizenship rights derive from paid employment. Equally, caring for somebody should be seen as a sort of fulfilment of the citizenship right, just as being employed. So ultimately care has to become a collective responsibility.

There has been a disability rights movement claiming that people with disabilities should have the care they need to live on their own and that they should have control of their care. So they have fought for the right to get the allowances and to hire the care-givers, hire and fire rather than having the state send somebody over. But again the problem is that it has been put in a market model, the ultimate freedom that they have is as a consumer. But I think there has to be a balance between the choice of care-receivers and that of care-givers. And there have to be certain labour rights standards that would create at least certain minimal conditions for care-givers.

We still have the divide between money and love, but I think that people are certainly capable of holding multiple ideas in their mind and it's not an either-or choice. Just because you have this sort of paying relationship with somebody doesn't mean that you don't also have an affectionate bond with that person. Does being paid mean that the affectionate bond is weakened? Spouses who receive allowances in California say that they see the allowances as recognition that what they do is worthy and a contribution to society, rather than that it's quid pro quo. (In truth, the payments are quite modest.) The discomfort with allowing payment to family members for providing care is because the market model so dominates societal thinking. As a result, we make an extreme differentiation between the public and the private. The public is seen as competitive sphere with no morals and values. Then the private is seen as altruistic sphere of love where individual needs are recognised. Because of the whole romanticisation of the private sphere there is a kind of fierce protection to try to keep the monetary relation out of there. But instead, let's think about the issue the other way, that some of the 'private' morals should also be part of the public realm.

Zuzana Uhde: Let me ask you another question. Today we can say that there was an important democratisation of gender roles in Western societies but still we cannot speak about full gender equality. Average women's salaries are still lower than those of men, it is still women who struggle more to combine family and a professional life, violence against women is still a thorny issue in our societies. Moreover, it seems that what was gained was not for everybody, as there are

still huge inequalities along the ethnic-racial and class lines among women. How could you explain the persistence of these inequalities and problematic tendencies despite the efforts of feminist activism within academia and civil society?

Evelyn Nakano Glenn: Obviously we haven't quite succeeded. These struggles seem to be never over, you are making some gains but then there are some steps back. I think the problem is that larger economic power, power distribution, really hasn't changed very much. In the last eight years, especially in the United States of America, there has been a huge increase in economic inequality, and there are more people who are outside the whole system, who are not incorporated into either civic or economic life. There is a huge expansion of the prison industrial complex. So I would say that there has been a marginal redistribution, but that those larger inequalities are even stronger than ever. At some level there is marginal equalisation along the middle class; women have more access to politics, governmental or state offices, and in terms of capital or finance. In another words, if you look at how much wealth men and women have, there is some progress. But there is still extreme racial and also gender differentiation. Earning differences between blacks and whites have decreased, but there are still huge disparities in wealth, that is, accumulated property. Thus blacks are less able to pass on their socio-economic status to their children and future generations. Women who have wealth tend to have it through family connections. And if you look at who actually controls financing, banking or politics, not much has changed.

Zuzana Uhde: This leads me to my last question. In the light of the contemporary economic and financial crisis, which delegitimises the neoliberal ideology and sharpens social inequalities generally and also among women, what do you see as a major task for feminist activism and research?

Evelyn Nakano Glenn: That's a huge question. I mean feminist activism is successful in changing things around the margins and maybe in the university, but it has not penetrated into larger social structures. I think at this point maybe we've gained enough understanding and we have enough numbers to be able to tackle different parts of broader issues rather than those just specific to women. I think feminist activism should join other types of movements to get into larger structures, to attack the basic structural issues and systemic economic inequalities. I think that feminism needs to make collaborative efforts with other movements to work on different issues. Those strategic alliances with different movements will differ depending on what particular issue they address. And the feminist movement should make sure that gender and women's interests are a part of the agenda from the beginning.

Zuzana Uhde: Thank you for your answers.