



Gough with research assistants, and village notables,
Tamil Nadu, 1950s

KATHLEEN GOUGH AND THE VIETNAMESE REVOLUTION: IDEOLOGICAL VOICES AND RESISTANCE

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In the last 15 years of her distinguished career, Vietnam loomed larger than ever in Kathleen Gough's intellectual horizon. She first visited Vietnam for 10 days in 1976, and wrote *Ten Times More Beautiful*. In 1982, she returned to the country for six weeks of research on the Vietnamese socialist political economy, and conducted a three-week complementary study in Cambodia. This project culminated in *Political Economy in Vietnam*. In the last year of her life, Gough planned a major field project in six Vietnamese communities in collaboration with Vietnamese social scientists on the impact of reform on the Vietnamese class structure and gender relations. Gough's intellectual interest in Vietnam grew out of her active role in the opposition to the dominant ideology in the world capitalist system which seeks to marginalize or silence other voices, at times through blatant coercive measures, as in Vietnam during the war (see also Chomsky and Herman 1979; Herman and Chomsky 1988). Kathleen Gough brought to her research on post-1975 Vietnam not only the anthropologist's empathy with the marginalized other, but also a keen intellectual sense of historical dialectics in the modern world system, a perspective partly rooted in her active support for the oppressed victims of world capitalism. Kathleen Gough made notable contributions to Vietnamese studies, although I would also like to suggest that due to the historical and Vietnamese sociocultural constraints on her research, the represented and empowered voices were mainly the officially sanctioned voices from the northern part of the country.

In the context of heteroglossia in the modern world system, Kathleen Gough's sense of historical dialectics in the political economy of the modern capitalist system and her efforts to empower the voice of the victimized other serve to counter the dominant U.S. voice which ahistoricizes and decontextualizes virtually all differences between Vietnam and the West in order to mar-

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ginalize and silence the resistance from the peripheries of the world capitalist system. For example, the hegemonic voice in the U.S. mass media and scholarly circles constantly seeks to situate the relative lack of material possessions in Vietnam during the war and in the postwar era in the American capitalist matrix of meanings, i.e., as a sign of abject poverty and a symptom of a "pathological" socialist system on the verge of collapse. In this ahistorical view, the "ideological blind" of Marxism-Leninism has led to a misdiagnosis of what, in its ahistoricism, it projects as a universal human motivation based on the capitalist calculus of self-gain and profit. More specifically, dominant voices in the U.S. mass media and research circles have frequently cited the annual per capita income of U.S. \$150-200 in Vietnam to reinforce their view on the "folly" of the Marxist experiment. However, as Gough pointed out, the conditions in the present Vietnamese social formation cannot be separated either from the starting point in the French colonial period or from the tremendous havoc that French and U.S. capitalist imperialism inflicted on Vietnam from 1946 to 1975, or from the hostile economic encirclement of the country since 1975. For example, Gough cited the devastation in South Vietnam alone of 10 million hectares of cultivated land and five million hectares of forests and the civilian losses of one million deaths and two million injured persons. In the north, all the railways, bridges, industrial centres, main roads, irrigation systems, sea and river ports were destroyed or seriously damaged during the American war (Gough 1990:3-4). This is not to mention the lasting effects of dioxin in Agent Orange and other toxic chemicals. Despite the earlier and pervasive sense of gloom and doom in the U.S. mass media, since 1989 Vietnam has annually exported on the average over one million tonnes of rice and resumed its pre-war position as a major rice exporter in the world. The Vietnamese national income grew at the average annual rate of 6.4 percent for the 1981-85 period, and 3.9 percent for 1986-90 (Vietnam 1991:5). The frequent citation of the annual per capita income in Vietnam in U.S. media also decontextualizes the meaning of this figure in an economic system in which, for example, the majority of people either own their dwellings or pay little more than a dime a month to the state for rent at the 1991 rate.

I find Gough's comparative data from her research in south India quite informative. Although India had started the "green revolution" earlier and its cultivated area per person (.23 hectare) in 1984 was more than double the Vietnamese figure (.11 hectare), Vietnam produced 55 percent more food grains per person (Gough 1990:105-106). Vietnam also had a considerably higher literacy rate (87% vs. 35%), lower mortality rate (10% vs. 14%) and more doctors (8 vs. 2.7 per 10,000 inhabitants). Gough suggested that it was the difference between socialist and dependent state capitalist development that accounted for the aforementioned differences between Vietnam and India

(*ibid.*:106). In other words, according to Gough, the post-colonial Vietnamese state constructed on the principle of the dictatorship of proletariat had strongly promoted the collective interests of formerly oppressed elements. It had basically eliminated the exploitative class structure and the subjugation of women characteristic of the French colonial and American imperialist periods. On gender relations, Gough emphasized the higher rates of women's labour participation in north Vietnam than in India or Canada (close to 100% vs. 14% and 36%) and of Vietnamese women's representation in decision-making governmental bodies (16.9% of the North Vietnamese National Assembly in 1971 versus 4% in the Indian lower house of Parliament and 9% in the upper house in 1976 and 0.4% in the Canadian Parliament in 1969). Gough also cited the state-promoted increase in the access of Vietnamese women to education, their living conditions and the legal protection of women's rights in Vietnam (1976:chap. 7; 1990:chap. 17). The achievements of the Vietnamese socialist state, consistently marginalized by the voices of capitalism, constitute a major point of convergence between Gough's and her speaking subjects' perspectives. They counter the dominant ideology in North America which attributes the so-called Vietnamese economic "malaise" to the interference of a "totalitarian" state with the invisible hands of the market.

The dominant ideology in the capitalist U.S. also accuses the one-party socialist Vietnamese state of having constantly violated basic human rights and of having sought to strangle the so-called universal aspirations for freedom and democracy. Gough countered the point on human rights with an informed discussion of Hanoi's humane treatment of the officers and officials in the former Saigon regime. It was humane in that none were executed, that most were returned to civilian life within a short period and that they were not maltreated in comparison to the material hardships of fellow citizens (Gough 1978:255; Gough 1990:300-302). Many in the dominant ideological circles will dispute Gough's point that in comparison to U.S. residents, Vietnamese citizens have as much opportunity to vent their grievances to authorities, both personally and through such mass media as newspapers. However, in my research in Vietnam in the late 1980s, I found an increasing openness: newspapers were openly critical of the state's policies (Luong 1989), and both members of local communities and the National Assembly readily challenged authorities on various issues (also Gough 1990:258).

To all informed observers, the Vietnamese economic and political reforms of the 1980s were also responses to pressures from below rather than an emulation of Soviet and Chinese models (*ibid.*:260-262). The open criticisms of state policies in Vietnam, at least in the 1980s, were all the more remarkable in the historical context of constant warfare and hostile encirclement by the U.S. and China. The voices from Vietnam which emerge strongly in Gough's

work challenge the dominant ideology in the capitalist West. They are testimonies to Kathleen Gough's empathy with the other, not as a disembodied object of inquiry, but as a speaking subject whose voice has been both violently and subtly silenced by hegemonic world forces. Gough's empathy and anthropological sensitivity also led her to engage in critical dialogues with Western feminist researchers on the state of gender relations in Vietnam in the past 40 years. In contrast to feminists' premises of individual rights and absolute egalitarianism through a breakdown of the gender-based division of labour, Gough emphasized Vietnamese women's sense of obligations to collective wholes, their acceptance of a certain degree of labour division and their perspectives on their significant gains under the socialist state (Gough 1990:296-300). This strong empathy notwithstanding, Gough also maintained enough of a distance from her speaking subjects to engage in critical dialogues with them on the Vietnamese historical experiences (1990:71-90). Gough pointed out, for example, the episodes of inhumane treatments of fellow Vietnamese and others in Vietnamese history (1990:72), and the problems with Vietnamese historians' conceptions of historical stages (ibid.: 76-90).

In my opinion, it was inevitable that Gough's representation of other voices was shaped by the historical and sociocultural contexts of her dialogues with her speaking subjects. They were not extended dialogues in the standard participant observation context. Her first visit to Vietnam in 1976 lasted only 10 days. The return research in 1982 included dialogues with 45 members of the Vietnamese intelligentsia and conversations with other citizens in chance encounters. It may be an irrelevant question whether, in 1982, Gough requested a more extended field period and the use of the anthropological participant observation method in one or two communities. I believe that at that particular juncture it was extremely difficult for a scholar from the West to gain from the Vietnamese permission for standard anthropological field work. Furthermore, from anecdotal information in her books, her interaction with Vietnamese subjects was also highly structured by north Vietnamese interactional ritualism. Vietnamese interaction with outsiders tended to be highly ceremonial in that the speaker role was initially reserved for authority figures and that it was pervaded with ritual speech (Gough 1977:23, 57). As a result, the represented voices from Vietnam were mostly the official voices of northern leaders and intelligentsia members. In my opinion, this led to an assumption of a *relative* ideological homogeneity in the Vietnamese social formation. It was on the basis of this premise that in her earlier book on Vietnam, Gough was optimistic about the result of a socialist transformation of South Vietnam. By 1982, this optimism had been tempered by Gough's knowledge of the difficulties of the Vietnamese state in collectivizing the southern economy. Gough touched on the historically shaped regional hetero-

geneity of ideological voices in attributing the collectivization difficulties in many southern areas to cadres' inexperience and "the attachment of peasants to commercial farming and private profits" (1990:123-124). However, Gough also suggested that by late 1986, almost all southern Vietnamese cultivators had already joined co-operatives or mutual aid teams (*ibid.*:154, 233, 439). In my assessment, the collectivization of southern agriculture was only nominal in many communities because of cultivators' widespread subversion of state policy in the Mekong delta.

I would like to suggest that the strong incorporation of south Vietnam into the capitalist world economy in the French colonial period and its direct exposure to U.S. capitalism in the 1960s have left their deep marks on the southern Vietnamese ideological landscape with important implications for southern cultivators' responses to socialist development and capitalist hegemony. More specifically, the Vietnamese economic crisis of 1977-78 was exacerbated by the tendency of a large number of southern cultivators to feed surplus rice to their pigs rather than selling it to the state at approximately 12 percent of the market price. In the earlier periods of French colonialism and American intervention, the native armed resistance to capitalist imperialism was *generally* more limited in the south than in the north and the centre, despite the considerably more exploitative class structure in the south. In the French colonial period, the peasantry was most heavily dispossessed of the means of production in Cochinchina (south Vietnam) where at least two thirds of the rural population were landless. In contrast, the percentages of landless labourers in the centre and the north approximated 20 percent. However, in the 20th century, with the sole exception of the 1940 armed insurrection in certain areas of south Vietnam, at no point did the anti-colonial/anti-imperialist armed movement in the south exceed or even approach the intensity of the unrest in the centre and the north. In the pre-World-War-II period, it was in central Vietnam that the 1930-31 unrest posed the greatest threat to the colonial order. During the first Indochinese war (1946-54), the French encountered considerably greater resistance in central and north Vietnam. During the period of direct and massive American intervention (1964-75), it was not in south Vietnam but in the southern part of central Vietnam that the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam developed its strongest roots (Mitchell 1968). In other words, in comparison to the south, north and central Vietnam, despite their lesser degree of class polarization, constitute the areas with both stronger resistance to capitalist imperialism and greater socialist revolutionary potential. I argue in my work that in order to explain the divergent historical trajectories of the different parts of Vietnam in both the former and present eras, we need to examine in depth the historically structured ideological variation in the country (see Luong 1992:chap. 6; cf. Paige 1976; Paige 1983; Gough 1990:83-90).

Despite the constraints of historical contexts and northern Vietnamese sociocultural patterns on her dialogues with Vietnamese subjects and on the representation of their voices, Vietnamese studies in the West are greatly indebted to Kathleen Gough for representing and empowering these voices in a struggle against ideological hegemony in the capitalist world system. Her death was a significant loss not only to anthropology but also to Vietnamese studies and to the larger causes of justice and equality.

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