

SOME THOUGHTS ON KATHLEEN GOUGH'S CONTRIBUTION TO FEMINIST TEACHING IN ANTHROPOLOGY

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Our contribution to this volume was prompted because the reflections we heard about the theoretical and political significance of Kathleen Gough's work seemed not to give sufficient attention to those aspects of her work that have had the most impact on us: her contribution to a politically engaged yet intellectually rigorous feminist anthropology.

One of the things which we believe it is important to communicate at the outset in our teaching is that anthropology is always and everywhere a political undertaking and that consequently the theoretical models we rely on are prone to ideological blindspots—a point of view that came all too slowly to the discipline.¹ For us as student anthropologists in the 1970s and 1980s, and for the students we now teach, Kathleen Gough's writing and her example help to impress upon us the political consequences of what we do (and do not do) in our research.

As teachers of anthropology charged with interpreting the discipline for our students in the mid-1980s through to the present, we continue to face the daunting, yet crucial, task of capturing the *historical* nature of socio-cultural anthropology. The present context for the teaching of anthropology provides us with opportunities to take theory and ethnography in new and appealing directions, as well as requiring us to negotiate a difficult route through some potentially paralyzing hazards. On the one hand we need to be sensitive to the deeply contentious issues arising from so-called post-colonial contexts, such as the question of voice, of subtle and not-so-subtle forms of domination and of our own role, as white academics, in the reproduction of inequalities. On the other, we must come to terms with the theoretical rifts which have developed between Marxists, feminists and those espousing the newer perspectives

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associated with post-modernism. While these recent developments open up promising avenues for refining the tools of the discipline, they can have the tendency to focus our attention more on the fragmented and complex present and away from a constructive critique of the ways the discipline has evolved through several decades. In this period of rapid and apparently paradigm-shifting change in the discipline, an historical approach to the production of knowledge is fairly easily overshadowed, yet it is essential to our analysis of the present that we recognize the various interpretative lenses through which theories of the past have been brought into focus.

Since neither of us developed subject specialization in South East Asia, the political implications of our research and that of others was most clearly communicated to us through Kathleen Gough's writings about marriage and family, gender and feminist scholarship. For her, the debates surrounding kinship and marriage were not simply intellectual, but were filled with political meaning and consequence as well. In her article on the "Origin of the Family" (1971b) she makes clear that we should not be swayed by our commitment to feminist goals to the point where we distort our interpretations of gender divisions of labour in favour of ideas/ideals of matriarchal societies. As subsequent feminist scholarship revealed, her measured approach and caution were appropriate.

Her "Nuer Kinship: A Re-examination" (1971a) was an important early step in establishing that under certain conditions women were political actors in their own right, rather than being assumed to be, by virtue of their gender, passively under the control of men. To come to this conclusion Gough recognized that in Nuer society, as in others, women do not constitute an homogeneous category, but are differentiated. In this case wealth and attachment to powerful and aristocratic lineages were deciding factors in shaping women's political activity. The recognition of differences between women was a lesson to be learned painfully by future feminist scholars.

Through careful argument "The Nayars and the Definition of Marriage" (1959) presents a definition of marriage which reached beyond the patriarchal definitions then current and in doing so was among the first anthropological challenges to the universality of the nuclear family. These particular articles stand as illustration of the importance of careful review of gender relations in particular contexts.

In her discussions of gender and family relations Kathleen Gough was mindful of the kinds of assumptions and projections that social researchers are likely to reproduce in their research. Most particularly it is in discussions of family and gender where, as over two decades of feminist scholarship demonstrate, research stops and ideology takes over.

For feminist anthropologists like ourselves, this then is the major area of influence that Kathleen Gough has and continues to have. She provides the

tools and examples for the teaching of gender relations and an awareness of the manner in which this particular subject matter has been historically produced within the discipline of anthropology. Yet she also provides us with hope for a feminist politics if we keep in mind her exhortation that we not forget "that the past . . . does not limit the future" (1971b:75). Teaching Kathleen Gough's work on gender and family in the context of the debates current at the time she was writing is teaching feminist anthropology at its best. Politically committed, yet theoretically and empirically balanced, hers is work that several generations of anthropologists, ourselves included, have learned from and taught with.

Note

1. The publication of *Reinventing Anthropology* (Hymes 1969) was one significant mark of healthy reflection and debate in the discipline. Perhaps *Recapturing Anthropology* (Fox 1991) will similarly constitute a new framing of these issues.

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