
Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Rae Bridgman, Sally Cole and Heather Howard-Bobiwash (eds.), *Feminist Fields: Ethnographic Insights*, Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1999, 314 pages.

Reviewer: *Jasmin Habib*

Feminist Fields: Ethnographic Insights edited by Canadian anthropologists Rae Bridgman, Sally Cole and Heather Howard-Bobiwash and published by the independent Broadview Press presents essays about feminism, women in anthropology and feminist practices in the field. In the introduction, the editors write that they set out to attract young and old practitioners and to make the text “friendly to lay and undergraduate readers” by “encourag[ing] authors to enliven their texts with stories and first person narratives to bring tangled theoretical concepts to life” (p. 2).

Though in many ways this is an uneven text, in most cases the writers accomplished their editors’ goals. The best essays offer exceptional insights and are accessible, reflexive, and most importantly for someone reading this text for its methodological contributions, (“ethnographic insights” being the subtitle of the book), they challenge feminists to rethink the study of gender in anthropological terms. The book covers a range of topics in 17 essays, including the role of women and feminism in academia; the problematic representation of women’s practices; the changing social and political economies and their effects on women; the frontiers of women’s organizing and political practices; and reflexive feminism in the “field.” This review will focus on the best of these essays, reflecting my interest in feminist research methodologies.

Most impressive was “Home has Always been Hard for Me” by Susan Frolick who chooses to situate her own privileged mobility in order to gain insight into what can be the disorienting and demanding experience of homelessness and single-motherhood. Of one woman’s struggles, she writes how:

She politicized home as an impossible space wherein she has had an ongoing struggle to find and make a place for herself and her son against barriers of poverty, abuse, homophobic and sexist discrimination, and her own inability to overcome the politics and weightiness of “home” work. (p. 91)

Through her vulnerability as a lesbian, as well as through her poverty, Raine mediates her understanding of home—as a secure place of belonging—as a reality she has never been able to “afford,” symbolically or materially, nor likely will in the future (p. 92).

In her chapter on homelessness, Rae Bridgman adds to her analysis a reflection on the vulnerabilities of the subjects of any ethnographic project, something feminist sociologists who were at the forefront of the development of feminist research methodologies wrote about in the early 1980s but it seems anthropologists still need to be reminded of.

On the politics and problematics of representing—in anthropological and feminist terms—women’s practices, Parin A. Dossa’s chapter entitled “Narrating Embodied Lives: Muslim Women on the Coast of Kenya” begins with this provocative statement:

My purpose is to suggest a frame that goes beyond the listening-telling paradigm of life narratives (Ong, 1995), that seek to address the “crisis of representation” in feminist/subalternist anthropology, but ultimately, remain confined to capturing “words” (p. 157)...[D]espite my painstaking efforts to listen to women’s stories, I was missing out on a critical element: images of women’s bodies at work, engaged in aesthetic and creative endeavours, on the move and in positions of repose. The telling and listening paradigm became inadequate.... (p. 158)

Dossa “returns” to do field work in the village of Lamu in her “home” region, though as she writes, not as a “native”: “[a] ‘native’ stance would be pretentious as my advanced education in the West and my profession as an academic have created cultural and class differences that need to be taken into account” (p. 160). In the paper, she “show[s] that there is no simple equation between veiling/seclusion and women’s oppression and lack of opportunities...[T]hat the veil is one means through which women occupy multiple spaces” (p. 171).

Her conclusions:

Women in Lamu do not consider themselves to be engaged in female-centred subversive activities. To view them in this light would be to impose outside perceptions on their lives and to assume that occurrences in the public male

sphere are more important than private, female-centred activities. (p. 170)

Of women's organizing and their relationship to feminist political practices, in "Off the Feminist Platform in Turkey: Cherkess Gender Relations," Gonul Ertem writes of "Cherkess' women's approach to women's issues" (p. 173). Ertem's argument is that Cherkess women's political positions are informed by their broadly based national struggle within Turkey's "ethnically diverse but ideologically homogeneous national context" (p. 175). Ertem presents a fascinating, rich and historically sensitive account of the cultural and national struggles faced by Cherkess women vis-a-vis Turkey's feminists, asking important questions while giving us the context within which to understand the complexity of women's and feminist's political organizing. She includes in that discussion a most interesting reflection on Cherkess masculinity.

Sharon Roseman contributes to a long-standing—though not always fully articulated—anthropological problematic: the activist role of the anthropologist in the field. In her chapter entitled, "Fixo Ben" (She Did the Right Thing): Women and Social Disruption in Rural Galicia," Roseman writes:

A practice approach demonstrates not only how productive women's disruptive commentaries can be but also how these public discussions can draw anthropologists into local analyses. The women I know in rural Galician villages do not invite me to participate in their intense deliberations about the actions of men...simply as a welcoming gesture. They are enjoining me to participate in the local politics of gender consciousness. (p. 223-224)

A practice approach can be central to feminist ethnographers' attempts to account for women's agency, the structures that constrain that agency and their awareness of these constraints. It can also be used to analyze not only how women's practices are socially disruptive within their local communities but also how we, as feminist anthropologists, can be similarly disruptive in subtle ways in both their and our own communities and in our writings.

In a highly readable and engaging chapter entitled "Gender and Identity Formation in Post-Socialist Ukraine: The Case of Women in the Shuttle Business," Tatiana Zhurzhenko writes:

The transition from socialism to the market-oriented economy accompanied by a revision of gender roles and by the emergence of new models of behaviour. This has resulted in radical changes in the economic strategies and lifestyles of Ukrainian women....The emergence of new identities for Ukrainian women reflects the instability and contradictions of society in transition. (p. 243)

The coverage of the book is obviously broad but it is not comprehensive. Clearly chapter length work cannot encom-

pass all aspects of the research but there are points where more could have been done. The gender analysis in the pieces is also somewhat uneven, and in many cases could be pushed further than the authors do. The strongest essays are those that take up an analysis of gender—rather than simply placing women at the centre of their texts. These are anti-essentialist and concerned to move the feminist project forward through a critique of past feminist works and failures, especially with respect to feminism's failure to deal directly with class and identity politics. Unfortunately, the postmodern influence in anthropology is least successfully analyzed and seems to have been reduced to nothing more than a kind of "New Age" anthropology.

One puzzle posed by the book when read for insights into the practices of feminist anthropology is how to comprehend this subject in a historical and productive way. In this respect, Deborah Gordon's "U.S. Feminist Ethnography and the Denationalizing of 'America': A Retrospective on Women Writing Culture" lies at the centre of the text and deserves attention. In "Pilgrim Souls, Honorary Men, (Un)Dutiful Daughters: Sojourners in Modernist Anthropology," Sally Cole discusses the conflicted relationship that marked Margaret Mead and Ruth Landes' professional lives. This essay points less to any hope for a future of female/feminist support and promotion and more towards what many have sadly experienced: a competitive rather than nurturing spirit between women and feminists in academia.

Though a Canadian-based text, surprisingly little makes it a Canadian volume. I was most disheartened to find that there was no chapter on the history of feminist thought in Canadian anthropology or even any reference to other texts that take up the relationship of feminism to the Canadian academy. There is little about Canadian feminism's mark on anthropology or anthropology's mark on Canadian feminism. I also find it objectionable that a Canadian anthropology text would not include native women or even an explicit critique of feminism or feminist anthropology from a First Nations perspective. It is as though the writers, particularly those writing about First Nations peoples, did not want to *engage* the debate that has raged both between indigenous women and feminist circles in a very public way since the 1980s over such issues as voice appropriation and reproductive choice. One footnoted reference to legal analyst and indigenous rights activist Patricia Monture-Angus who is critical of the feminist movement is surely not enough. This then makes the text especially problematic for it presents (appropriates?) indigenous women's voices only in the context of fieldwork and it then seems that this book was written *despite* this important critique.

Turning then to the practice of reflexive writing, there are wonderful examples of it in the text but overall, I was disappointed. For a number of years now, anti-feminists and feminists alike have questioned the role played by self-reflexive texts in anthropology, many arguing that they are no more than navel-gazing exercises. Sadly, some of the essays

included in the text have sections that are no more than that. This is where feminist work has been least successful it seems to me, not only in promoting the strength of reflexive work but of understanding the importance of a "situated" (Donna Haraway) analysis. "Situated" never meant establishing an egocentric anthropology; when such reflections do little to expand the analyses at hand, they only reinforce the central place of the anthropologist. Much of what emerges with such exposes reveals less about how the world turns or where privilege lies (unless, of course, you choose to read it against the grain). I do not think anyone is at all interested in strictly biographical statements by anthropologists or feminists except insofar as such experiences might reveal *how* they have lived privileged lives (by virtue of their class, status, or geography, etc.) and how theirs is an always-partial perspective. Writing as though all women as women are in a position of marginality seems rather absurd in light of all of the criticisms made by women of colour and indigenous women over the last two decades. This issue really should have been addressed more forcefully in a text published in 2000.

Strange as it might seem for those who think of feminism as a political practice, what is also avoided in the text is politics. Only in Deborah Gordon's work are the political stakes of feminism highlighted. Some hint at political conflicts yet these conflicts seem peripheral to rather than at the centre of their subjects' experiences. In Bridgman's piece on homelessness, there is no discussion of the war against the poor that includes punitive laws against "vagrancy." In Cecilia Rothstein's article on "Who Are We for Them?: On Doing Research in the Palestinian West Bank," Rothstein avoids any discussion of the militarisation of Palestinian women's lives. While conflict may have been "low level" in the years in which she conducted her research, it cannot have been a marginal experience for women who have been living under or, as importantly for some among them, resisting military occupation for more than 30 years.

Overall, however, this is a good collection of essays. There may be few people whose interests are diverse enough to sustain reading the book cover to cover, but it could be read as a report on some of the new areas of research on and about women's place in the world. Students of feminist anthropology will find this ethnographic collection useful and it would be an excellent reader for upper-year undergraduate students alongside a feminist theory text.

Éric Gagnon et Francine Saillant, *De la dépendance et de l'accompagnement. Soins à domicile et liens sociaux*, Les Presses de l'Université de Laval / LHarmattan, 2000.

Recenseuse : *Sylvie Fainzang*
Cermès (Inserm)

Cet ouvrage porte sur une catégorie particulière d'acteurs dans le monde de la santé : celle des intervenantes à domicile, autrement dit de ces femmes qui se rendent chez les personnes dépendantes en vue de les aider dans leurs activités domestiques et dans leurs soins, et qui apportent une contribution à ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler le «maintien à domicile» des individus en perte (provisoire ou permanente) d'autonomie.

Bénévoles accompagnant à un rendez-vous médical ceux qui ne peuvent s'y rendre seuls, aides-domestiques faisant l'entretien ménager de ceux qui ne peuvent plus faire le faire eux-mêmes, infirmières venant changer le pansement des malades, elles viennent compenser leurs incapacités, atténuer leur isolement, compléter ou appuyer l'aide qu'ils reçoivent de leurs proches ou des services publics. Par une description fouillée de leur mission et de leurs activités, cet ouvrage examine le travail des intervenantes qui œuvrent au sein des organismes communautaires, leurs pratiques d'aide et de soin, et les formes de liens qu'elles nouent avec les personnes dépendantes, en vue de cerner la manière dont est gérée, individuellement et collectivement, la question de la dépendance.

Une interrogation fondamentale traverse l'ouvrage : qu'est ce qui motive et assure la pérennité des liens sociaux dans notre société? Une question qui est également au centre des préoccupations des organismes intermédiaires insérés entre la famille et les services publics, et des pratiques d'aide et de soin qui se déploient entre l'aide familiale et les soins professionnels.

L'intérêt qu'Éric Gagnon et Francine Saillant portent aux relations dans les pratiques d'aide et de soin, et aux liens qui sous-tendent ces relations, est lié à leur volonté de relier des expériences individuelles à des enjeux globaux autour de cette question de la dépendance. Dès lors, de nombreuses autres questions émergent : Quelles relations se tissent entre ces intervenantes et les aidés? Quelles finalités sont visées par l'aide et les soins? Dans quelle mesure les pratiques d'aide et de soin ne représentent-elles pas une forme de relation impliquant un nouveau lien de dépendance, avec ses caractères propres?

Pour y répondre, les auteurs de cet ouvrage ont considéré les services et les intervenantes comme des réalités hétérogènes, perméables au milieu, et pourvues de spécificités internes dans leur approche de l'intervention, et ont retenu, pour cadres de leurs enquêtes, des milieux divers (notamment rural et mono-ethnique, urbain et mono-ethnique, urbain et pluri-ethnique).

Avec cette ouvrage, on découvre qu'il existe toute une organisation politique et économique de la dépendance qui