Dedication

Antonio Lauria-Perricelli

This issue is dedicated to Connie Sutton, the extraordinary woman with whom I share my life, who is—among many things—a working anthropologist. The title represents her view of what doing anthropology can mean and what she felt she was doing in her work and teaching. In this issue, we draw on five of the twenty-one papers presented in three panels honoring the work of Connie at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association held in San Francisco in November, 1996. Plans are afoot to publish all the papers presented as a book; thus the five papers in this issue of Identities can be viewed as a sampling from the projected book.

The three panels, organized by Antonio Lauria-Perricelli, Linda Basch, and David E. Sutton, were collectively called “Fight the Power,” with each panel flagging particular aspects of the issues Connie Sutton has addressed:

- culture, power, and gender in the Caribbean: identity, continuity, contestation
- gender, consciousness, mobilization
- transnational and international dynamics: forms of consciousness and struggle

In addition, at the wine and cheese reception held in her honor, colleagues, students, friends, and her son gave testimonies, both humorous and serious, of how Connie touched their lives and their thinking about anthropology. All this was part of a long celebration of her 70th birthday, not her retirement. She continues to teach at New York University.

---

Reprints available directly from the publisher
Photocopying permitted by license only

Printed in Malaysia.
There is something of a paradox in the history of Sutton’s anthropological work that reflects the relationship between Caribbean studies and the changing nature of anthropological concerns. This paradox flows from the nature of Caribbean societies and their position in a changing world. Issues now central to anthropological theory—transnationality, hybridity, the dialectic of movement and rootedness—were of marginal interest to anthropologists when she did her initial research in the Caribbean in the late 1950s and began teaching in the early 1960s. Unlike much of the anthropology of the period, the anthropology of the Caribbean could not escape history or the region’s social/cultural connectedness to places outside the region. Nor could it avoid the issue of massive social inequality and economic exploitation. Here, the social structuralist or functionalist models anthropologists once used to analyze Africa, Oceania, and even the reservation indigene, would not work. Caribbean anthropology could not escape the centrality of slavery in the region’s history, nor its long-standing colonial domination by Europe and/or North America. Thus, you could not be a thoughtful Caribbeanist, like Sutton, without transcending “the region” when it came to analyzing what was being studied locally. It is not surprising then that many of Sutton’s contributions—on transnational socio-cultural systems created by Caribbean migrations, diaspora ideologies and their cultural productions, the dialectics of gender and power, the transnationalization of the 1960s U.S. Black Power movement, and on the importance of Caribbean women to the international women’s movement—all flow from her initial doctoral research in the Caribbean in late 1950s.

In the twenty years or so between her first fieldwork in Barbados, where she studied the impact of the recently introduced trade unionism and mass politics on sugar plantation workers, and the beginning of her research in Africa in the late 1970s, Connie Sutton was one of the people who broke new ground in a variety of areas. For example, she contributed to the analysis of class and race consciousness of sugar workers through careful attention to the micro-sociology of events, such as wild-cat strikes and their place in the wide-ranging, ongoing processes of social and cultural change. Rather than postulating class consciousness as a hypostasized category acquired as people move from one class subculture to another, she saw the Barbadian black working class as simultaneously engaged with the contradictory ideologies of egalitarianism (unity) and status mobility in Barbados’ steeply sloped hierarchy. Second,
because she found herself impressed with the relative autonomy of black working-class women, and with the culturally ascribed power attributed to their sexuality and procreative ability, Sutton early began to consider the ways gender roles are shaped by family and kin systems. This in turn caused her to wonder about the possible African roots of Barbadian family structure and gender roles, an issue she followed up later. In the early 1970s, she disputed the prevailing idea that the subordination of women was a universal. Instead she chose to examine the kinds of power women exercised in different cultures and to emphasize the need to study the culturally defined power dynamics found between women and men living in different historical and cross-cultural contexts. In the late 1970s, she undertook new field research on this question with the Yoruba of Nigeria. Third, she has called attention to the ways the past is remembered and used as people engage in different forms of collective protest and identity politics. She addresses this issue in her writing on the Barbadian sugar workers’ strike, the U.S. Black Power movement, and the recuperation of different pasts by women influenced by feminist movements. She has returned to this issue in her recent field work exploring how Baradians who differ in generation, gender, and social position re-envision their pasts. Fourth, she has had a strong interest in the creole nature of Afro-Caribbean culture and its cultural dualities, both as enacted in code-switching social practices and as producing in the minds of people a bifocal “double consciousness” of values and cultural legacies, the one strand always available to subvert the other. And fifth, there is her pioneering work on the “new migrations,” an interest she claims was cast upon her when nearly a third of the Barbadian villagers among whom she had lived appeared less than a decade after she left as migrants in New York City where she lives. Through her involvement with the New York Afro-Caribbean community, she early saw that migration was a bidirectional process generating intricate transnational social, political, and cultural fields of activity across the borders of home and host societies. Moreover, it was her interest in and involvement with militants in the Black Power movement of the 1960s that led her to write one of the early papers on the transnationalization of this movement, as she witnessed Caribbean migrants repatriating the Black Power movement to their home towns. While grounded in concrete, localized experiences, Sutton’s Caribbean research always transcended the geo-political boundaries of the region. Her theorizing served
to illuminate the growing understandings of an anthropology of complex societies.

Apart from the effervescence of Caribbean studies, which began in the 1950s, there was also what Sutton herself brought to being a Caribbeanist. She is a woman, a dissenter, and a radical. These all marked her contributions. Her many collaborations of this period—rooted in the women's movement and its solidarity, as well as her own socialist beliefs—are important to emphasize, because academic anthropology has been and is highly individualistic in spirit. In the early 1970s, she co-founded, with Eleanor Leacock and Ruby Rohrlich, the New York Women's Anthropology Conference (NYWAC). This organization brought together women graduate students and faculty to discuss and debate what the issues being raised by a fast growing women's movement meant for anthropological scholarship and practice. It also lobbied for changes in curriculum and against discriminatory university practices. By the early 1980s, she was actively involved in the international women's movement and, together with Leacock and Betty Potash, had transformed NYWAC into IWAC (International Women's Anthropology Conference) and achieved for it the status of a non-governmental organization at the United Nations. IWAC's agenda was to create an interface between academic feminist anthropology and the activist international women's movement. These involvements led her to become interested in the study of social movements, and her initial interest here was in the forms and effects of women's collective action throughout the globe, but especially in non-western countries. She constantly stressed the need for feminist anthropology to engage in research that could contribute to the strengthening of the international women's movement. She called for deepening the understanding and appreciation of the differences in background and culture that inform the lives of women around the world, and linking their local, personal experiences with global economic and political issues. Sutton also emphasized the need for feminist anthropologists to analyze the new forms of women's political activity. She herself became most interested and active in women's struggles against the vastly expanded forms of violence—whether against individuals or peoples—that have occurred since the end of World War II and the way these forms link to the huge militarization of the world that has accompanied the globalization of capital.
Still, after so many years of teaching, Connie continues to revamp and renew her courses. She was the first person in New York University’s now prestigious anthropology department to introduce courses on “transnational processes,” “new migrations,” and, with Steve Gregory, “new social movements.” Earlier at New York University, she was the first to introduce a course on the Caribbean and a course on gender and international feminism.

As a theorist, Sutton’s influence has spread to her students and colleagues through many channels and across several generations. She has been a teacher, writer, collaborator, presenter of papers and discussant at professional meetings, and an organizer of international panels and conferences. And as many noted during the reception held to celebrate her, she has always enjoyed talking informally about anthropology—its legacies and problematics—especially in the discussions around her own kitchen table as she prepared dinner for her guests. Many of her interests have been carried forward and elaborated upon by students and colleagues. All of Connie’s contributions, then, form the backdrop for this issue of Identities.