Against Hierarchies of Anthropologies: World Council of Anthropological Associations

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The World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA) started in June 2004 when the presidents of a few national organizations met in Recife, Brazil. Its creation as a network open to new members was aimed at increasing international cooperation in anthropology. Relatively small in the beginning, the WCAA now has over 40 members, including international associations, such as the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences; transnational and regional associations, including the European Association of Social Anthropologists; and several national organizations, from the very large (such as the American Anthropological Association and the Brazilian Anthropological Association) and some much smaller (such as the Anthropological Association of the Philippines and the Anthropological Association of Sweden). The Council also welcomes intra-national associations (Asociación de Antropología de Castilla y León is a good example). The WCAA is based on the notion that anthropologies should intercommunicate and cooperate in a globalized world.

As stated in its constitution, the WCAA acts as a forum for communication of news, ideas and knowledge, and as a network facilitating the exchange and flow of information. This includes ethical codes and global discussion about how the profession can best respond to contemporary challenges that are themselves often the product of forces and relations beyond the level of the individual nation-state. WCAA aims to strengthen the circulation of ideas and knowledge by facilitating the dissemination of anthropological work in a multiplicity of languages to improve knowledge of world anthropologies, counteract the hegemony of English-based knowledge production and enable different local publics to learn about the results of anthropological research in their own languages.

The WCAA further promotes scholarly exchange of information and international networks of postgraduate students. It works to improve the profile of the discipline through public engagement, including “broadening anthropology’s presence in the education and public debates on issues such as multiculturalism, cultural diversity and immigration,” and political advocacy. The WCAA issues public statements on themes as diverse as the rights of indigenous and minority groups, on arbitrary acts by states towards powerless impoverished groups, as well as on matters of worldwide professional concern. The latter includes the impacts and potential biases of academic evaluation processes on the development of anthropology and of changes in funding models and the institutional organization of teaching and research in different national contexts that may raise ethical concerns and threat academic freedom.

Above all, the WCAA’s mission is to recognize and debate a diversity of views and perspectives within world anthropologies while also seeking to identify and disseminate common interests and conclusions. These ideas, translated into concrete actions, are realized by different means. First, biennial business meetings are held followed by scientific
symposia. For instance, the last one was held in Delhi in 2012 and the theme of the symposium was “The Anthropology of Global Issues”; the next meeting will take place in Taipei in 2014. Second, workshops and scholarly sessions sponsored by the organization are held at national societies’ meetings. For instance, at the 2012 AAA meeting in San Francisco, a successful and very well-attended session titled “American (Anthropological) Imperialism? An Overdue Dialogue” took place. Our next sessions—“Displacements and immobility: international perspectives on global capitalism” and “Averting a global environmental collapse: the role of anthropology and local knowledge” are planned as part of the 2013 IUAES Congress in Manchester, UK. Third, collective research initiatives are undertaken, such as the comparative report on ethical codes accepted by different associations and prepared by the WCAA’s Task Force on Ethics led by Raminder Kaur. Fourth, special works are published, both as separate books (eg, *Global Anthropologies*, edited by Gustavo Lins Ribeiro, published in 2011) and as special thematic volumes (eg, on “Changing Flows in Anthropological Knowledge”, edited by Michal Buchowski and Virginia Domínguez published in *Focaal* 63 in 2012). A new electronic journal, *Deja Lu*, (eds Gordon Mathews, Gustavo Lins Ribeiro and David Shankland, based on publications originally published in member associations’ journals was launched last January. Fifth, WCAA systematically issues letters of protest against mistreatment of indigenous populations or anthropologists (most recently in Belgium, Brazil and the UK).

It is clear that the conference in Recife was just a starting point for a whole series of events and undertakings designed to implement new institutional policies with a view toward promoting greater visibility for diversity in anthropological production worldwide. It undoubtedly initiated a process bound to deepen international cooperation in anthropology in a more cosmopolitan vein. The WCAA brings the leaders of anthropological associations and anthropologists worldwide together for dialogue on the construction of democratic and heteroglossic communication across national boundaries.

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