Establishing Dialogue among International Anthropological Communities

The World Anthropologies Network (WAN) provides a forum for understanding the multiple and situated power relationships that shape particular ways of doing anthropology worldwide. It is also a project of intervention to legitimize the voices of other forms of anthropology, one which recognizes these forms as anthropological knowledge in their own right, independent of, yet in conversation with, hegemonic centers of knowledge around the world.

Network participants seek to affect the communicative practices and modes of exchange among world anthropologists through their critical analysis. The aim in doing so is to constantly localize the epistemological, theoretical, methodological and political horizons of the discipline. At the same time we strive to generate conditions for horizontal conversations among anthropologists worldwide. Rather than a project to enrich historically hegemonic forms of anthropology, we hope to create “networked” environments that will allow for a pluralistic discipline that thrives on both its localness and its dialogue across multiple place-based perspectives across the globe.

We criticize the monotonous character of the current international landscape of anthropology and its tendency to reproduce the voices of particular elites around the world. We propose instead that every form of anthropology is local, including those emerging from metropolitan centers. Assuming the singularity and specificity of all forms of anthropology is important, we believe, for the expansion of the discipline beyond its established boundaries.

**Predicaments and Proposals**

One of anthropology’s paradoxes is its claim to be a universal discipline in spite of its Western foundations. The strongest criticisms of this disciplinary tension between universalism and particularism came from those who identified a close relationship between anthropology and colonialism or imperialism. Yet anthropologists worldwide are not consistently discussing the current nature of their practices in light of new realities in our current global political-economy, nor are anthropologists considering the fate of anthropology on a truly global scale.

Rather than leading to the dismantling of standardized forms and practices of anthropology, most critiques of the discipline have resulted—unwittingly—in the very reinvigoration and worldwide expansion of these standards through elite centers of anthropological production. While these criticisms have questioned standard forms of anthropological knowledge and political practices, they have not impinged on the institutionalization of the discipline itself. Furthermore, dialogues between central and peripheral anthropological institutions continue to contribute to the peripheral ones becoming marginalized by or absorbed into the central ones.

WAN differs from past critiques within and outside dominant forms and centers of anthropology in significant ways. We believe that globalization has opened up heterodox opportunities to the academic world, and that through concerted political action more diverse, democratic and transnational communities of anthropologists can develop. At the same time, we do not write from a particular national viewpoint, nor do we wish to advocate for any particular one. Rather, we think that the dominance of some styles of anthropology stems from a geopolitics of knowledge that affects all anthropologists both structurally and historically, and hence encroaches on our own individual experiences within the academic world system. The networks WAN therefore envisions should affect the intersection of personal and institutional practices, working against universal hierarchies of knowledge and towards more critical and inclusive practices of knowledge production.

**Knowledge Production**

WAN focuses on how standard forms of anthropology subordinate peripheral ones, and encourages the development of a system that will provide a forum for those forms of knowledge that elites ignore, disqualify or subordinate through their standard practices. Thus, WAN works against—or at the very least in tension with—the tendencies to standardize or universalize anthropological knowledge. WAN is an attempt to visualize and foster sys-
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