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ANTHROPOLOGY AS COSMOPOLITICS
GLOBALIZING ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY
Gustavo Lins Ribeiro
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Pelo Conselho Editorial:

Luís Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira

SUMÁRIO

Title: Anthropology as Cosmopolitics Globalizing Anthropology Today.

Abstract: For a few decades, anthropologists have been debating the need to establish other international flows and exchanges of scholarly knowledge. It is necessary to analyze, like we do with other globalizing pretensions, the knowledge already accumulated with this debate, its possibilities and constraints. Here the changes in global anthropology are seen in relation to the national level of integration and to hegemonic internationalization which generate structural limitations to the practices of anthropologists, in spite of the existence of a universalizing trend that is typical of the discipline. The notion of cosmopolitics is used to deal with the problems inherent to the pluralist integration of the discipline. The World Anthropologies Network and the World Council of Anthropological Associations are presented as initiatives that aim to stimulate pluralism within global anthropology. Some challenges ahead of this project are also considered.

Key words: world anthropologies; internationalization of anthropology; cosmopolitics

Título: Antropologia como Cosmopolítica. Globalizando a antropologia hoje

Resumo: Há muito os antropólogos discutem a necessidade de estabelecer outros fluxos e trocas internacionais de conhecimento acadêmico. É preciso analisar, como se faz com qualquer pretensão globalizante, o acúmulo resultante deste debate, suas possibilidades e constrangimentos. As mudanças na antropologia global são aqui vistas em relação especialmente ao nível de integração nacional e à internacionalização hegemônica que criam limitações estruturais nas práticas dos antropólogos, a despeito de uma tendência universalizante típica da disciplina. A noção de cosmopolítica é usada para dar conta dos problemas inerente à integração pluralista da disciplina. A Rede de Antropologias do Mundo e o Conselho Mundial de Associações Antropológicas são apresentados como iniciativas destinadas a estimular o pluralismo na antropologia mundial. Alguns desafios para a concretização deste projeto são levantados.

Palavras-chave: antropologias mundiais; internacionalização da antropologia; cosmopolíticas

Anthropology as Cosmopolitics Globalizing Anthropology Today.

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On croit souvent que la vie intellectuelle est spontanément internationale. Rien n'est plus faux. La vie intellectuelle est le lieu, comme tous les autres espaces sociaux, de nationalismes et d'impérialismes, et les intellectuels véhiculent, presque autant que les autres, des préjugés, des stéréotypes, des idées reçues, des représentations très sommaires, très élémentaires, qui se nourrissent des accidents de la vie quotidienne, des incompréhensions, des malentendus, des blessures (celles par exemple que peut infliger au narcissisme le fait d'être inconnu dans un pays étranger). Tout cela me fait penser que l'instauration d'un véritable internationalisme scientifique, qui, à mes yeux, est le début d'un internationalisme tout court, ne peut pas se faire toute seule. En matière de culture comme ailleurs, je ne crois pas au laisser faire et l'intention de mon propos est de montrer comment, dans les échanges internationaux, la logique du laisser-faire conduit souvent à faire circuler le pire et à empêcher le meilleur de circuler (Pierre Bourdieu, 2002)¹.

The process that led to the recognition of the complexity and richness of the multiple realities of today's global anthropological community has a history that requires a twofold interpretive effort. It calls for an examination of how anthropologists themselves have debated the making of a global anthropology as well as a consideration of the main global forces structuring our own worlds.

¹ "We often think that intellectual life is spontaneously international. Nothing can be more wrong than this. Intellectual life is the locus, like all other social spaces, of nationalisms and imperialism, and intellectuals convey, almost as much as anyone else, prejudices, stereotypes, received ideas, and very synoptic and elementary representations that feed from accidents of daily life, of incomprehensions, misunderstandings, and wounds (such as those that may hurt narcissisms if one is unknown in a foreign country). All this makes me think that the setting-up of a real scientific internationalism -- which, to my mind, is the beginning of a real internationalism -- will not happen by itself. In culture as elsewhere, I don't believe in laissez-faire and my goal is to show how, in international exchanges, the logic of laissez-faire often leads to the dissemination of the worst and to the prevention of the dissemination of the best" (Pierre Bourdieu, 2002).

Anthropologists have been aware of the need to discuss the worldwide dissemination of their discipline at least since Alfred Kroeber's well known book *Anthropology Today* was published in 1953. Almost thirty years later, in 1982, Egyptian anthropologist Hussein Fahim edited the volume *Indigenous Anthropology in Non-Western Countries*. Among other goals, Fahim wanted to develop "a world discipline of anthropology" and to promote the "de-Westernization of the anthropological enterprise" (1982a: 138). The book brought to the fore some of the issues that were to be revisited and sometimes presented as novelties in the future. For instance, in the chapter Fahim wrote he laid out a few of the strong ideas that others would unknowingly follow:

"I wish to point out that the need for communication among non-Western anthropologists does not, and should not, imply a call for political alliance against, nor a plea for academic desertion from, the works of Western fellows (...) for it will always be useful, and perhaps essential, to have different perspectives regarding social problems and their solutions, providing that individual interests and views are constructively exchanged. Rather, the task should be conceived of as a positive attempt to (...) share the responsibility of liberating anthropology from domination by any country or group (1982a: 150).

Fahim concluded that the contributions of "Third World anthropologies"

"should not be viewed in terms of just a feedback process for existing Western anthropological knowledge, since this reflects an implicit assumption of the centrality, dominance, and patronship of Western anthropology. Equality and reciprocity should be the key notions toward the development of a world anthropology" (1982a: 151).

In the same year of 1982, the Swedish journal *Ethnos* published an issue, edited by Thomas Gerholm and Ulf Hannerz, geared towards debating "national anthropologies." A critical standpoint about the global anthropological scenario was implicit in a metaphor Gerholm and Hannerz (1982) coined in the introduction to the volume. According to them, world anthropologies were an archipelago in which "national anthropologies" were islands that kept no communication among them but had bridges with "international anthropologies" located in the mainland. On the rare occasions in which some of the islands communicated with each other, they did so via the mainland.

An approach highly concerned with power imbalances was soon to develop. Gerholm himself, in 1995, mentioned the existence of central and peripheral

anthropologies and coined the notion of a “world system of anthropology.” Mexican anthropologist Esteban Krotz (1997) wrote about “anthropologies of the South” while Brazilian anthropologist, Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira (1999/2000) also discussed peripheral anthropologies and underscored the problem of mutual ignorance among them. Japanese anthropologist Takami Kuwayama, in 2004, argued that the United States, Great Britain and, to a lesser extent, France constituted the core of the world system of anthropology. He wrote :

“Simply put, the world system of anthropology defines the politics involved in the production, dissemination, and consumption of knowledge about other peoples and cultures. Influential scholars in the core countries are in a position to decide what kinds of knowledge should be given authority and merit attention. The peer-review system at prestigious journals reinforces this structure. Thus, knowledge produced in the periphery, however significant and valuable, is destined to be buried locally unless it meets the standards and expectations of the core. (2004: 9–10)”

So how do we explain the following optimistic assertion Arturo Escobar and I made in the introduction of the book “World Anthropologies. Disciplinary transformations within systems of power”, according to which “the time is ripe for world anthropologies” (Ribeiro and Escobar, 2006: 24), meaning that the time is ripe for new and more productive relationships among anthropologists on a global scale? Or what did allow Aleksandar Boskovic (2008: 9) to say that “there is no such a thing as ‘peripheral anthropologies’, but many, arising from highly distinct historical circumstances, and functioning under extremely different institutional, financial and intellectual conditions”? Consider also the following affirmation of Brazilian anthropologist Mariza Peirano (2008: 186) about the existence of a new divide in anthropology:

“while in the metropolitan centers it [anthropology, GLR] appears either doomed to extinction or bent into ‘studies’ (feminist, cultural, science and technology, etc.) in other locations anthropology is well and thriving or, if not thriving, at least providing a positive and constructive edge or approach” (2008: 186).

Is this a rebellion in the backyard of hegemonic anthropologies? Is it self-aggrandizement or self-complacency of anthropologists from non-hegemonic centers? The answer would surely vary according to different subject positions within a global

geopolitics of knowledge (for the notion of geopolitics of knowledge, see Mignolo, 2001). But there seems to be more than different subject positions and the politics of locality. There is, for instance, the position of George Marcus (2008: 214) – a well-known US anthropologist – according to which “it (US anthropology, GLR) needs to learn from the experiences of other anthropologies?” Or how would we explain the creation, in 2007, by the American Anthropological Association of a Commission on World Anthropologies?

Two interrelated processes need to be taken into consideration in order to answer these questions. First, the most recent debates on world anthropologies have benefited from the knowledge accumulated on these issues over the last decades. Secondly, the experiences of anthropologists need to be placed within the larger context of the deepening of globalizing processes of the last two or three decades.

CHANGES IN GLOBAL ANTHROPOLOGY

It is true that the knowledge we have of the diversity of the anthropological practice on a global level remains highly imperfect. But it is also true that, today, we know more about other anthropologies than in the 1970's and that international professional networks are now more numerous and more heterodox than before (see, for instance, Fry 2004, on the internationalization of Brazilian anthropology). These are the end-results of macro globalization processes which I will briefly highlight.

The increased expansion of Western university systems all across the globe has turned universities into a capillary mode of organizing the relationship between knowledge and power everywhere. The importance of this trend cannot be overstated since universities and Western modernity confuse themselves, especially when what is at stake is the discourse of science and reason that pretend to be universal. The worldwide expansion of anthropology in the last five decades went hand in hand with the growth of universities. Indian social sciences provide a most productive scenario to see the tensions between Western and non-Western based knowledge (see, for instance, Uberoi 2002, Visvanathan 2006). Anthropologist Satish Deshpande (personal communication) considers universities to be “enclaves of the West” that need to be problematized. Ajit K. Danda rightly considers that it is necessary to distinguish between anthropology as an ‘academic discipline’ and anthropology as a ‘body of

knowledge'. Danda goes on to say that it 'appears as a mistaken notion to assume that the rest of the world was void of anthropological knowledge and until such impetus from the North Atlantic region had spread elsewhere, there was no significant exercise worth the reference from those areas' (Danda, 1995: 23). He exemplifies this with ancient Indian literature going back as far as 1350 BC when the *Manava Dharmashastra* (The Sacred Science of Man) was written.

Whatever the peculiarities of the indigenization of universities and of the disciplines that travelled along with them, the growth of anthropology departments around the world caused a major change of the demographics of the global population of anthropologists. In 1982, Fahim pointed out that anthropologists outside of the core of anthropological production represented a "relatively small portion of the world-wide community of anthropologists" (1982a: 150-151). This is no longer the case. There are more anthropologists working outside the hegemonic centers than the other way around.

The growth of the numbers of practitioners in all continents generated interesting and apparently contradictory results. On the one hand, it allowed for an increase in the worldwide consumption of the literature and theories produced by hegemonic anthropologies. It also allowed for an increase in the quantity of foreign professors working for American and British universities as well as consolidated a global academic regime (Chun, 2008). Brain drain notwithstanding, this sort of emergent global academic labor market seems to imply an assessment of the professional quality of the anthropologists involved. Hong Kong based American anthropologist Gordon Mathews (2009: 6) deems that this diversity has "a curious downside":

"The implicit assumption made by many American anthropologists is that any really good anthropologist, whether African, Indian, Brazilian, Mexican, Chinese, or Japanese, would have left the periphery and come to the center, and would have a position in an American university. There may be the unspoken assumption that anthropologists not in the United States but choosing to remain in their own society are simply "not good enough" to be in the American center. This attitude contributes to and worsens the American tendency not to be interested in anthropology beyond its own shores. This is the case despite the fact that salaries and working conditions may now be better for anthropologists in a number of foreign countries (...) than in the United States"

In the last two decades, there were changes in the positions within the world system of anthropology. French anthropologists would barely maintain they belong to

the core anymore (De L'Estoile, 2008: 113) and the US academic milieu became the real, and for some, unique hegemonic center.

The sociological implications of these changes certainly indicate the presence of powerful centralizing forces rather than a move towards a decentered and more equalized distribution of visibility and influence in world anthropology. But the awareness of a hyper centralization triggers a need to surpass it. Furthermore, the outnumbering of hegemonic anthropologists by non-hegemonic ones has other impacts. It generated, for instance, a series of heterodox alliances, networks and scholarly exchanges. All this was made possible by an increased time-space compression which made international trips more common, international phone calls cheaper and, more importantly, generated the most far-reaching tool of academic communication today: the internet. If in the early 1980's, within the anthropological archipelago, communication among "national anthropologies" had to go through the mainland where the hegemonic anthropologies were located, today this is not really necessary. The internet has prompted a multifarious virtual public space at the disposal of all anthropologists anywhere. At the same time, new political ideologies that were soon to be globalized from the hegemonic centers, especially from the U.S., strengthened tolerance for multicultural politics and identity politics. Cultural diversity and respect for otherness became major values in daily institutional life and in politics.

Politics is a keyword here. As we know, sociological changes need to be accompanied by political thought and action if we want some trends to develop in the right direction. And this is exactly what happened with the world anthropologies project, a political project that Eduardo Restrepo and Arturo Escobar (2005: 100) summarize in this way:

“rather than assuming that there is a privileged position from which a ‘real anthropology’ (in the singular) can be produced and in relation to which all other anthropologies would define themselves, ‘world anthropologies seek to take seriously the multiple and contradictory historical, social, cultural and political locatedness of the different communities of anthropologists and their anthropologies.’”

In the next section, I will present my understanding of a conceptual framework that, in my own perspective, is fruitful to understand the world anthropologies project. Later I will consider two related political outcomes: the World Anthropologies Network and the World Council of Anthropological Associations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework used to think of any transnationalized subject needs to be applied to understand transnational anthropology. In a previous text (Ribeiro 2003), I explored seven sets of conditions that have to coexist if we are to examine “the condition of transnationality:” integrative, historical, economic, technological, ideological and cultural, social, ritual conditions. Perhaps the most important theoretical set was the one I called integrative conditions in order to explore the articulation of several levels of integration. I borrowed the term from Julian Steward who, in the early 1950’s was preoccupied with understanding the relationships between local and supralocal realities (in his case, the influence of national scenarios over local ones). I am aware of the possible critiques that the term “integration” may raise if it is understood in a conservative vein. But my real interest lies in “pluralistic integration” to use the expression Indian linguist P. B. Bandit coined in 1977 (quoted in Uberoi 2002: 127):

“Pluralist integration is ... different from [a] ‘melting pot’ on the one hand and [b] segregation on the other. Melting pot results into complete assimilation with the dominant group, a merger of identity. Segregation results into isolation [or stratification] and the tensions thereof.”

Bandit’s arguments are based on India’s linguistic diversity. Pluralist integration can be understood as the possibility of keeping one’s difference while performing different roles in society: “the assertion and acceptance of identities are reciprocal and mutual. In this way, different social groups can maintain their separateness on the one hand and express their togetherness on the other” (idem). I will come back to the issue of pluralism later.

In sum, I believe that integration does not necessarily mean assimilation and destruction of cultural differences. Furthermore, my own notion of levels of integration is highly influenced by regional analysis conceptual frameworks. For the sake of constructing a visual metaphor, I envision them as a set of concentric circles ranging from the local to the international level. These circles are made up of the local, regional, national and international levels of integration. The transnational level of integration is an exception. In contrast with the other levels, the transnational level of integration cannot be represented in spatial terms because it is impossible to find a real territory that

corresponds to it. I thus represent the transnational level of integration as an axis that traverses the other levels of integration (the typical space of the transnational level of integration is cyberspace, this is why I also discussed the emergence of a virtual-imagined transnational community, Ribeiro 1998).

In our times, all levels of integration are coexistent. They have different powers of structuration according to circumstances and to how intensively social agents are exposed to all and to each one of them. Levels of integration are thus a strong force of identity formation. The results of their work are the fragmented identities well studied by anthropologists in the 1990's.

As any other social actors, anthropologists are exposed to the structuring powers of the levels of integration. Our identities are thus fragmented and circumstantial. Put simply, our frames of mind, social identities and representations can vary from how we and others conceive of our selves in our daily locales to the way we act as participants in processes of nation-building or as scholars in international congresses, or, still, as cosmopolitans interested in global politics. What I am suggesting is that the practice of anthropology is local, regional, national and international at the same time. The construction of a real transnational anthropology is what the world anthropologies project aims at. I should make clear that my own definition of transnational refers to those situations where it is irrelevant or almost impossible to trace or identify the national origins of an agent or agency.

In spite of the coetaneousness of all the levels of integration, there is one level that has a stronger structuring power over anthropologists: the national level of integration. I once wrote that:

“Although anthropologists have long been weaving transnational networks, most of their work—including systems of funding, training and publishing—remain bound within the confines of nation-states. This is mostly because anthropologists keep their allegiances to cliques that operate within these boundaries and partially derive their prestige from being members of national circuits of power. Thus, nation-states remain the primary place where the reproduction of the profession is defined in particular ways. In consequence, there is still a great need for stronger intercommunication and exchange across national borders.” (Ribeiro, 2005: 5-6).

WHY DO WE NEED TO GO BEYOND THE NATION-STATE?

The relationship between anthropology and nation-building is rather complex especially when it involves relations with repressive state elites that wish to transform the discipline into a sort of social engineering. However, in spite of many downsides in the history of anthropological practice such as its involvement with colonial administrations, the Camelot Project and the current weaponization of US anthropology, it is possible to say that, in general, anthropologists have given positive contributions to processes of nation-building. Anthropologists tend to relativize the normalcy of centralizing national ideologies and policies, to advocate a more plural vision of national life, and, in countries where they are politically active, to defend the rights of different kinds of minorities. But whatever may be the case, anthropologists and other social scientists are, in varying degrees, imbued with the idea that they have been historically active in nation-building.

Globalization has brought new tensions between national and transnational ideologies, between subnational, national and supranational levels of integration. The relationships between the social sciences and the nation-states have been challenged from above and from below. In Europe, for instance, the European Union is interested in the role the social sciences may play in building an imagined European community, a supranational entity, while in Brazil, many anthropologists are engaged in an anthropology of “difference-building,” of legitimating rights to ethnic identities and territories, on a subnational level.

If anthropologists have made efforts to contribute to the building of national imagined communities that are more democratic and open to difference, they can likewise make efforts to contribute to the construction of other kinds of imagined communities, including international and transnational ones, where pluralistic integration can be an explicit political goal. Indeed, we need to be proactive in all levels of integration.

I don't see why we shouldn't strive to attain this goal within our own community, within the global community of anthropologists. In order to do so, we anthropologists, like any other political actor that may have a clout in the political realm beyond the nation-state, have to recognize the peculiarities of our insertions in local, regional, national, international and transnational levels of integration and act upon them. My claim is not that we forget the importance of acting on the local, regional and

national levels, but that we clearly add a supranational dimension to our academic and political responsibilities. This task is facilitated by the fact that anthropologists are prone to believe in universal categories and are firm believers in the role of diversity in the enhancement of human inventiveness and conviviality.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

First, and foremost, there is a need to change the established structures of power that hinder other anthropologies from entering into a more heteroglossic and horizontal conversation. This is what I call a need for different conditions of conversability. In light of this, it is necessary to identify how power is globally structured in our own field. In a first moment, metaphors such as the “world system of anthropology” and “hegemonic anthropologies” provide a useful tool to reveal power inequalities but they need to be surpassed if we want to reach new conditions of conversability. It is clear that a dualistic approach to the power structures underneath the geopolitics of knowledge is not sufficient to interpret the complexity of political networking in today’s academic world and is bound to become a political impediment for the consolidation of new alliances on a global scale. It is also clear that many of our American colleagues are our allies in this endeavor and this is not lip service I am paying to the largest and most influential community of anthropologists. Just consider, for instance, the institutional effort the American Anthropological Association is making to insert a “world anthropologies agenda” in its own structure with the creation of a Commission on World Anthropologies in 2007.

However, the recognition that politics is always more complicated than dual oppositions and zero sum games does not preclude the consciousness of the existence of power inequalities and of obstacles ahead. I already alluded to a major obstacle to the construction of a plural integration in global anthropology: the power of structuration of the national level of integration. The transference of symbolic capital from one country to another is not an easy operation, unless, as Pierre Bourdieu (2002: 5) shows, an author can be used in instrumental ways. At the supranational levels, there are equally strong barriers. Think, for instance, of what Bourdieu (op. cit.) called “the International of the establishment” meaning by that:

“all the exchanges that take place among holders of important academic positions: a great portion of translations cannot be understood if we don’t place them amongst the complex networks of international exchanges of holders of dominant academic positions, exchanges of invitations, of titles of *honoris causa*, etc”

Furthermore, we need to go beyond what Benoît de l’Estoile (2008) calls the “gravitational power” of “hegemonic internationalization” that attracts everyone to the center of the discipline, i.e., the United States. Even those anthropologists that have no interest in the international dynamics of the discipline are supposed to read the mainstream international literature of the day, something that most of the time amounts to implying reading the production of hegemonic centers. Publications are also subject to the gravitational power of hegemonic internationalization and, even more sadly, their impacts are almost completely controlled by a single corporation, Thomson Reuters, the policy of which, also known as bibliometrics or “citation-based metrics”, reflects the dominance of English as a global language and creates a global hierarchy that is taken by governmental agencies and others to be an objective picture of the who is who in science (see Brenneis, 2008).

All anthropologists are inevitably part of an internationalized discipline, since they share some canons that are well-known and widely accepted everywhere. But more often than not the dissemination of these canons are a result of the kind of imperial power of the academic center we have been criticizing because either it blocks the dissemination of other canons or promotes the dissemination of a few selected ones. The center, the United States in particular with the power of its academic market – the only real academic market in the world – has become an academic clearing house, a global reception machine of theories and political ideologies. A few of these are indigenized, reach mainstream and are re-exported. The dissemination of postcolonial theories and multiculturalism provides a good example. They are perspectives that were globalized only once they were digested and absorbed by the US academic milieu.

These sociological predicaments lead to the existence of something Dipesh Chakrabarty called “asymmetrical ignorance”, meaning that the margins are aware of the center but the centers do not know of the margins. In order to further develop Chakrabarty’s insight I coined the notions of “metropolitan provincialism” and “provincial cosmopolitanism” (Ribeiro, 2006). Metropolitan provincialism, the narcissistic entrapment of the center, is another challenge for the establishment of new

conditions of conversability. Provincial cosmopolitanism, that is, the awareness and consumption of the literature produced in different locales of the world system of anthropology, provides an inspiration for new modes of academic exchange and, if one believes in the powers of diversity and of cross-fertilization, provincial cosmopolitanism may also lead us to think that creativity is potentially stronger at the margins than at the centers.

COSMOPOLITICS

The plural integration of world anthropologies can be more easily achieved if we do not restrict ourselves to think of anthropology as a discipline and look at it as cosmopolitics. In 2006, I wrote that:

“The notion of cosmopolitics seeks to provide a critical and plural perspective on the possibilities of supra- and transnational articulations. It is based, on the one hand, on the positive evocations historically associated with the notion of cosmopolitanism and, on the other hand, on analysis in which power asymmetries are of fundamental importance (on cosmopolitics see Cheah and Robbins, 1998, and Ribeiro, 2003). Cosmopolitics comprises discourses and modes of doing politics that are concerned with their global reach and impact. I am particularly interested in cosmopolitics that are embedded in conflicts regarding the role of difference and diversity in the construction of polities. I view anthropology as a cosmopolitics about the structure of alterity (Krotz, 1997) that seeks to be universal but that, at the same time, is highly sensitive to its own limitations and to the efficacy of other cosmopolitics” (Ribeiro, 2006: 364).

Although anthropology is surely not only that, I consider it as a cosmopolitan political discourse about the importance of diversity for humankind. In the era of globalization, cosmopolitics proliferate within and without the academic world, some of them in competition with anthropology. Is this a negative scenario for the future of anthropology? Quite the contrary, by looking at anthropology as cosmopolitics we immediately place it within a family of other discourses on alterity that seek to have a planetary reach. In doing so, we are forced to admit a more pluralistic exchange among all modes of interpretation, and not only the academic ones, that wish to answer two quintessential anthropological questions: why are we so different? Why are we so alike? These are basic questions that, I presume, have been raised since the first time human beings had to face people different from them. In a sense, we can say that all peoples have always produced spontaneous anthropological knowledge, to paraphrase Pierre

Bourdieu. Our main issue would be to understand the equivalence and validity of all such formulations.

Looking at anthropology as a cosmopolitics also immediately places us in the realm of politics – tout court. This simple recognition impels us to act politically if we want to change the current state of affairs. And this is what many anthropologists organized through the World Anthropologies Network and the World Council of Anthropological Associations have been doing.

THE WAN AND THE WCAA

The fact that the WAN is made up of individuals gives it more political flexibility in comparison to the WCAA, a network of institutions. Both the WAN and the WCAA are openly directed to fostering pluralism in anthropology and are not “located” in the centers of the discipline. However, several colleagues that are driving forces behind these movements work in metropolitan centers and it is impossible not to mention the role that the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research has played in this universe in many regards (see Diaz Crovetto, 2008, for the importance of the Wenner-Gren in this regard). This only shows how sensitive many anthropologists everywhere are to a project that aims at fostering diversity and heteroglossia.

The World Anthropologies Network started in 2001, has organized several sessions in different national and international congresses and publishes an electronic journal on its website (see the site www.ram-wan.net). The WAN project attracted the attention of practitioners and students from all over the globe but a concentration of Latin American scholars is noticeable. This certainly reflects the fact that several Latin Americans are involved with the creation and maintenance of the network from the beginning, something that has made Spanish a highly present language in the network and in its electronic journal. The World Anthropologies Network relies on voluntary and collective work of anthropologists from different continents. The interaction is facilitated by the internet but also by the political and ideological affinities of its members who sometimes meet in real public space to cooperate in related projects.

The foundation of the WCAA was itself a result of a Wenner-Gren sponsored international meeting that happened in Recife, Brazil, in June 2004, a few days before the 24th Biannual Meeting of the Brazilian Association of Anthropology (ABA). It

brought together representatives from 14 national and international anthropological organizations (see its founding agreement in www.wcaanet.org). A second WCAA meeting was held in 2008 in Osaka, Japan. The WCAA has promoted several sessions and debates in national and international meetings in Argentina, Brazil, England, the United States, South Africa, Portugal, Slovenia and Japan. Issues such as the public image of anthropology and the need to change the global flows of anthropological knowledge have been debated in these sessions. The World Council has grown steadily and, in June 2009, it was made up of 26 members.

Both the WAN and the WCAA define themselves as networks and do not claim to be organizations or institutions of any kind. The flexibility of the network format seems to fit the needs of transnational politics. Both initiatives should be understood in an environment in which national forces and hegemonic internationalism are highly effective. I fully agree with de l'Estoile (2008: 124) when he states that:

“In many ways, ... pluralistic internationalization is much more difficult to achieve than the juxtaposition of national differences of hegemonic internationalization, because it involves ideally both the respect for local specificities and the creation of a *common ground* where a more equal exchange may take place. To achieve this, meeting grounds and forums of discussion have to be so devised as to favor communication over barriers that are not only linguistic, but also cultural, economic and social. In fact, translating utopia into practice involves a form of intellectual activism which demands great effort, while it is much easier to follow routine procedures.”

The effectiveness of pluralism is a power issue. It entails problems that are typical of constituency enlargement. How do we construct broader and more inclusive political bodies? Who are the representatives of the excluded actors? Who are the new brokers/interlocutors and what are their interests? Just to name a few of the political problems that may arise. But there are other problems to be considered.

PRAGMATIC CHALLENGES TO PLURALISM

Language is the first one. In all global and transnational communications we need what Edward Sapir, almost 80 years ago, called an “international auxiliary language.” Can we debabelize anthropology? In a sense, and this is true for all academic disciplines, debabelization is already happening with the role that English plays as the global language. It is a linguistic paradox: to talk about diversity we need to use a same

and common language. It is also something that could be dubbed the linguistic pragmatism of global communication which is historically and sociologically structured. Unless, in a futurist vein, we can count on a universal translating machine, we need a single language in order to communicate across all linguistic barriers. Does this mean, on the international level, the end of the importance of all other languages which cannot compete with English as means of academic communication? I don't think so. Here strong regional languages, such as Spanish, in Latin America, will continue to play an important role. On the national level of integration, major languages, in countries where there are large and consolidated scientific communities, such as in China, Japan, Russia, France, Germany and Brazil, will also continue to play an important role. For each one of us, all this means that being a polyglot is a most welcome skill, if not a necessary one, to engage in cosmopolitan communities of communication.

In order to have a truly diversified global anthropology, we need to tackle with other kinds of pragmatisms. Leadership and institutional efficacy are two major ones. Both the World Anthropologies Network and the World Council of Anthropological Associations exist because of the leadership of several colleagues who donate their time and imagination to a project they believe in. We can only thank them for their valuable effort. But one problem with relying on voluntary work on the international level refers to the power of structuration of the other levels of integration. Most of the leaders of the world anthropologies project are heavily involved with local and national demands that already consume a great part – if not all – of their time and energies. In sum, to participate in supranational initiatives quite often means an extra-load of work for an already overworked group of professionals. Indeed, the organizational problems to be tackled with are time and resource consuming especially when institutions are involved, which is the case of the World Council of Anthropological Associations. Consider, for instance, the costs of convening 25 representatives of associations from different countries. They periodically need to meet each other in face-to-face encounters in order to build more solid personal, social and political ties.

These problems occur in a milieu that has a serious organizational dearth. Only a handful of national associations are strong enough to hire staff, publish books or journals, organize conferences and do advocacy work. Our only international organization, the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, is

basically dedicated to organizing a world congress every five years and is in need of a serious reform in its constitution and goals. Sister organizations such as the International Sociological Association may be a source of inspiration for those who believe that a stronger institutional presence on the global level can be attained.

FINAL REMARKS

At this point, I can ask the most difficult questions. Are the social sciences universal? Are we to have different epistemologies that cannot communicate among each other? It is almost common sense today to admit the Eurocentric character of the social sciences. Eurocentrism, like any centrism, is another power issue. Universalisms that rely on power effects are doomed to be contested. But one thing is universalism the other is incommensurability and lack of validity of different modes of knowledge production. I believe in a cosmopolitical solution for these dilemmas. I think we can find a transnational mode of knowledge production that is not based on the assumption of universality or precedence but is envisaged as a permanent field of contention that allows for the maintenance of our regional, national and local perspectives.

We must also deal with the existence of different kinds of cosmopolitanisms and transnationalisms. They certainly vary according to subjects' political positions and locations. There may be conservative cosmopolitanisms and progressive ones. Transnationalism and global geopolitics may be seen from one perspective in Brazil and from another in India, for instance. In fact, I recently learned in Delhi that Brazil and, for that matter, Latin America as a whole, are not considered to be part of the West. This geopolitical vision unknowingly reflects an Anglo-Saxon perspective that has obliterated the importance Portugal and Spain had in the making of the West and of modernity (see Dussel 1993 and Quijano 1993, for instance). Such a vision provides a clear example of how geopolitical taxonomies are related to histories of power relationships. It also means that Latin American scholars are located somewhere in between the West and the Rest, a fact that I had already intuited when I advocated that a postimperialist perspective fits our geopolitical position more than a postcolonial one (Ribeiro, 2003a, 2008). From this standpoint, provincializing the U.S., for instance, is more important than to provincialize Europe.

The multiplicity of transnational and cosmopolitan perspectives and projects places other challenge to any pretension to universalism. A workable universalist project in the global era is possible if conceived as the mutual acceptance of procedural methods to achieve common goals, to construct exchanges and consensuses that are envisaged as moments of a process rather than as rigid timeless and culture-free solutions and propositions. There is thus a need to engage in processes of exchanges and negotiations of viewpoints among globalized actors located in different global fragmented spaces.

For anthropologists, the possibility of facing the many challenges I mentioned in this piece is open. I believe the World Anthropologies Network and the World Council of Anthropological Associations have already generated other conditions of conversability. The fact that this and other books are being published to discuss the construction of an “interactive anthropology” (Yamashita, 2006), to promote “other people’s anthropologies” (Boskovic, 2008a) or to give more visibility to the practice of the discipline in other world areas and to enhance heterodox dialogues (Ntarangwi, Mills and Babiker, 2006; Yamashita, Bosco and Eades, 2004; Grimson, Ribeiro and Semán, 2004; Skalník, 2002) is a proof of what I just wrote as are the expectations raised by the world anthropologies project as well as the many discussions that have taken place in different occasions and countries (not only the sessions I mentioned before but also conferences such as the South African, in 2008, and the joint Canadian Anthropological Society/American Ethnological Society, in 2009).

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