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World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA)

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The foundation of the WCAA

The World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA) was established as the result of a historic meeting of the presidents of fourteen anthropological associations in Recife, Brazil, in June 2004. The meeting was conceived by Gustavo Lins Ribeiro and funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. The presidents of the national associations of Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, India, Russia, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States attended the meeting. The Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology (JASCA) sent its director of international



relations. The presidents of the following international associations were also present: the European Association of Social Anthropologists, the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES), the Latin American Association of Anthropology, and the Pan-African Anthropological Association.

The initial aim of the meeting was to explore possibilities for greater collaboration between diverse anthropologies. Participants were asked to submit relevant ideas in writing before going to Recife. In his own statement, organizer and then Brazilian Association of Anthropology president Gustavo Lins Ribeiro explained his objectives as follows:

I was invited for a working breakfast in the 2002 [American Anthropological Association] meeting in New Orleans. It was an interesting occasion to meet colleagues working in metropolitan anthropologies. But the issue is how to promote more diversified meetings. Furthermore, besides these much needed informal opportunities to know of other associations' characteristics, I feel we need something more structured. Perhaps the creation of a committee of presidents of associations within the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences would provide for an instance where more concrete articulation could happen. ... Another possibility could be the creation of a website financed by all associations and dedicated to the dissemination of international anthropological knowledge.

Australian Anthropological Society (AAS) president Thomas Reuter voiced similar ideas in his statement, proposing the formation of an "organizational structure on a global scale, such as a permanent council of national presidents." He observed that:

I would like to emphasize very strongly the power a global communication network in anthropology would have. Imagine being able to reach the presidents of all or most national organizations with a single email, and each of them being able to reach all of their members by forwarding that email. In combination with a global organizational framework, such as a council of representatives wherein some matters of shared interest and common interest would be discussed and articulated, this kind of communication flow would have a major role in encouraging and facilitating the creation of global research networks [and] other collaborative projects.

Other delegates made more specific proposals for collaboration in their statements. For example, Canadian Anthropology Society president James Waldram suggested that:

Associations [should] consider multilateral agreements that offer reduced membership and conference rates to paid-up members of other national associations. ... Information exchange could also be facilitated by the establishment of a global "virtual" anthropology association which could act as a clearing house for information on the national associations and ... this organization could be funded on an on-going basis by structured contributions from member associations on behalf of their members. Access to the global association then would be a benefit of membership in the national associations, an important value-added benefit of membership.

These quotes show that the WCAA was an idea whose time had come. There was a lack of an umbrella organization wherein anthropology associations could share their concerns and engage in joint activities. In a rapidly globalizing world, the discipline of anthropology was lagging behind in its own internationalization, despite the fact that

anthropology is fundamentally a global endeavor to study all human cultures in their dynamic development and mutual interaction.

Ribeiro and Reuter met before the 2004 meeting and spent several hours in discussion over the still very tentative proposal to create a worldwide council of association presidents. There was some doubt about whether such an ambitious goal could be achieved, and there were concerns that national associations might fear such an alliance could compromise their sovereignty. In the course of a later meeting of all delegates, however, it became evident that these concerns were misplaced. There was enthusiastic support from the whole group of delegates.

Delegates not only managed to agree on the creation of a council but also drafted and signed a founding agreement, essentially the first WCAA constitution. Ribeiro was elected the first chair (2004–5). The following communiqué (later published on the WCAA website) summed up the aims and goals of the new network:

After discussing several possible mechanisms and initiatives to increase international cooperation in anthropology, participants of the conference wholeheartedly decided to create the World Council of Anthropological Associations. This network is open to new members and has as its primary objectives to promote (a) the discipline of anthropology in an international context; (b) cooperation and the sharing of information among world anthropologists; (c) jointly organized events of scientific debate and cooperation in research activities and dissemination of anthropological knowledge. Besides the fact that anthropologists are always prone to acknowledge the value of diversity, there are other reasons why WCAA is an idea that quickly became a reality. It is based on a democratic vision of how anthropologies should intercommunicate and cooperate in a global era. WCAA represents the recognition that now is the time to start new, more horizontal modes of exchange and dissemination of knowledge among world anthropologies. Hopefully, the 2004 Recife conference was just the first in several events designed to implement new institutional policies with a view to 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. By bringing the leaders of anthropological associations together for a dialogue on the construction of democratic and heteroglossic communication across national boundaries, WCAA seeks to bring about the internationalization of the profession in such a way so as to deal with the challenges of a transnational world. (WCAA 2004)

The new world council met on a regular basis thereafter, holding interim meetings with partial attendance at major anthropology conferences in cities around the world, including the American Anthropological Association (AAA) in San Francisco in 2008, the IUAES in Kunming in 2009, the AAA in New Orleans in 2010, the AAS and the IUAES in Perth in 2011, the AAA in San Francisco in 2012, the IUAES in Manchester in 2013, the AAA in Chicago in 2013, and the IUAES and the JASCA in Chiba City in 2014. Major meetings with close to full attendance were held every two years. Delegates from developing countries or small associations were subsidized to attend these biennial meetings and associated academic symposia (Bristol in 2006, Osaka in 2008, Maynooth in 2010, New Delhi in 2012, and Taipei in 2014), drawing on support from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, voluntary contributions from fellow associations, and generous support from the host organization. The sense of community that has evolved among association delegates has intensified in the course of these meetings, despite a

constant turnover of office holders. Most past delegates have joined the WCAA Advisory Board after the end of their term.

Interim meetings are now held at every opportunity. For example, for the year 2015, such meetings were arranged to take place at the Anthropology Association of Ireland meeting in Cork (March), the IUAES intercongress in Bangkok (June), the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore meeting in Zagreb (July), the AAA in Denver (November), and the meeting of Mercosur Anthropology in Montevideo (December). As a sample of activities at these meetings, WCAA-sponsored panel topics in the year 2014 included: (1) at the IUAES 2014 intercongress in Chiba City, Japan: “Urban Futures,” “Situating Statelessness: Anthropological Perspectives,” and “The Past and Future of the World Council of Anthropological Associations”; (2) at the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth Decennial Meeting in Edinburgh, United Kingdom: “Postcolonial Perspective on the Enlightenment and Ethics”; (3) at the joint conference with the Taiwan Society for Anthropology and Ethnology in Taipei, Taiwan: “Environmental Anthropology: Rethinking Environmental Constraint and Construction in the Human Condition,” “The State of/and Anthropology in Asia,” “Relating Regional Anthropologies to World Anthropologies,” “Making Sense of Contemporary Capitalism: Off Centre Perspectives,” and “WCAA Anniversary Panel: World Anthropologies and the World of Anthropology”; (4) at the Czech Association for Social Anthropology Conference, Prague, Czech Republic: “‘Us’ and ‘Them’ in Postsocialism” (keynote by chair Michał Buchowski); and (5) at the 113th AAA Meeting in Washington, United States: “Spaces of Security: Global, National and Local.”

The founding chair of the WCAA (initially referred to as a “facilitator”), Gustavo Lins Ribeiro, was succeeded by former JASCA president Junji Koizumi (2005–8), former AAS president Thomas Reuter (2008–12), Polish Ethnology Association president Michał Buchowski (2012–14), International Association for Southeast European Anthropology president Vesna Vučinić-Nešković (2014–16), and Irish Anthropological Association president Chandana Mathur (from 2016). Chairs and all other members of the “organizing committee” (executive) are democratically elected by the members of the council. All member associations, large or small, have equal rights, and membership has to date been free of charge.

The council grew slowly over the first few years and then expanded rather rapidly. In 2015, eleven years after its foundation, the membership of WCAA had risen to include about fifty national and international associations. The council thus came to include the elected representatives of the vast majority of the world’s professional associations, who democratically represent tens of thousands of individual anthropologists. Many countries still lack an association and the WCAA has assisted with the formation of national associations in some cases, in keeping with its aim of facilitating worldwide inclusiveness within the discipline.

Significant constitutional amendments were added in later meetings. New governance procedures were necessitated by the growth of the council and were designed to protect and permanently enshrine principles of egalitarianism and participatory democracy. The activities of the council also became more diverse and extensive, some of them managed by designated task forces. For example, the WCAA Advocacy

and Outreach Activities Task Force has initiated the formation of Antropólogos Sem Fronteiras (Anthropologists Without Borders), which became an independent organization in 2014. The WCAA Ethics Task Force, established in 2012, aims to review ethics guidelines worldwide to explore the potential for a universal set of guidelines while also pointing out the main issues that emerge and how they may be productively negotiated. The WCAA has also started the innovative journal *Déjà Lu*, which aims to republish important scholarly works so as to showcase and make more accessible some of the diversity of voices within world anthropologies.

Relationship with the IUAES

Delegates at the WCAA founding meeting in Recife did not regard the IUAES as a suitable platform to achieve their vision of a global association network, though the possibility was raised. For example, Indian Anthropological Society president Ajit Danda observed in his statement that:

[The] International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences with its contemporary preoccupations do[es] not seem to be adequately prepared to undertake the responsibility thus outlined. In fact, they [have] seldom [taken] the national anthropological societies or associations into much confidence.

The president of the IUAES, Luis Vargas, was also present at the meeting. He maintained that:

The Union itself consists of national and institutional organizations in more than 50 countries in all parts of the world, together with some hundreds of individual members. Each country is represented by a delegation numbering not more than six individuals, chosen by the anthropologists of the country concerned, on the Permanent Council of the IUAES. The Permanent Council is the governing body of the Union, each national delegation having a single vote in its decisions. ... Briefly, our Union can serve as a forum for anthropologists and anthropological societies from all countries.

This statement glossed over the evident structural weaknesses of the IUAES Permanent Council. The main issue was that country delegates on the Permanent Council were by no means the elected presidents of the national associations of those countries, but rather persons of diverse nationality selected from among individual members of the IUAES only. Furthermore, the paid-up membership of the IUAES had shrunk to a very small number due to a lack of appropriate procedures. The Permanent Council delegates thus had no democratic mandate to represent the anthropological associations and communities of their respective countries, and represented only the IUAES's own diverse membership. There was also no signal that the IUAES might welcome the creation of a council of association presidents as a way to reinvigorate and re-create the Permanent Council.

Most national representatives on the Permanent Council were unknown as such to their own compatriots outside the IUAES, just as most people would not know the name of the person representing their country in the United Nations, in both cases because they never elected them. The new WCAA had more in common with the G20 meeting

of heads of state, in the sense that its members are well recognized as representatives elected by their national communities. Of course, not all professional anthropologists are members of the national association of their country, but the majority are.

Subsequent reform within the IUAES by a new executive elected at its 2009 Kunming Congress led to a new constitution being ratified at the Manchester World Congress in 2013, which abolished the by then unnecessary and superseded institution of the Permanent Council. The IUAES became a global community of individual anthropologists, and individual members (the General Assembly) collectively obtained the sovereign power formerly held by the Permanent Council. As a global community of scholars, the IUAES is now designed to facilitate closer cooperation among the world's anthropologists, particularly within the thematic networks of "scientific commissions." This is important because WCAA membership is not accessible to individual anthropologists. The WCAA is based on an indirect, internationalist model of representation and is essentially an international council of elected national and regional representatives. The two organizations' structures thus very much complement one another, and together reflect the ambiguity of today's world, wherein Westphalian (nation-state-based) and post-Westphalian (global) forms of association coexist. For the foreseeable future, an internationalist model will remain important, particularly in anthropology, wherein diversity, not just among local cultures but also between local anthropological traditions, is highly valued. The value of this diversity has been widely debated within the WCAA and beyond, giving rise to what is coming to be known as the "world anthropologies" paradigm (discussed in the next section).

Given their different structural designs, the WCAA and the IUAES fulfill different and fully complementary roles vis-à-vis the needs of anthropology as a global and international discipline. The meeting schedules detailed in the previous section as well as a series of joint statements on current affairs show that cooperation has been steadily growing. Talks thus began in 2014 regarding merging the two organizations. A vote in September 2016 by the respective memberships of the IUAES and WCAA agreed to the formation of the World Anthropological Union, with the IUAES and the WCAA becoming separate chambers of this union.

The "world anthropologies" agenda within the WCAA

Postcolonial critiques of anthropology have rightly criticized the discipline's involvement in modern colonialism. This kind of critique has been very beneficial because critical reflection on the history of the discipline has led to greater awareness and honesty. Such honesty gives us the freedom to change. Unfortunately, however, anthropologists' entanglement in hegemonic projects did not end with the global decolonization drive of the post-World War II period or with the reflexive turn of the 1980s, and probably will never stop so long as hegemony continues to characterize world politics. What international anthropology can do, however, and what it is solely responsible for doing, is to eliminate or at least ameliorate inequality within the discipline itself. A debate began in the late 1990s that has coalesced under the heading of "world anthropologies." This debate highlighted that we have, until now, maintained a range of hegemonic structures

of our own within the discipline. Anthropologists must be mindful of what those internal hegemonic patterns are and how they can be overcome.

One hegemony is the twentieth-century dominance of British-American culture, in anthropology and many other fields, based on the preeminence of English as a universal language, which is in turn underpinned by the geopolitically dominant position of an alliance of Anglosphere nation-states under US leadership. Anthropologists have little influence on geopolitical patterns, but these patterns do affect our practice and we are also susceptible to major political shifts. For example, if the unipolar political dominance of the Anglosphere were to come to an end in the course of the twenty-first century, as some international-relations experts have foretold, associated disparities within the discipline (and beyond) may eventually dissipate. Disparities would at least be reduced to a personal advantage of native speakers of English over speakers of English as a second or foreign language, assuming that the use of English as a global trade language were to survive such a geopolitical shift. Such a reduced disparity would perhaps be a price worth paying in exchange for the benefits of having a universal medium for communication among world anthropologies, whether bilaterally or within a global community such as the IUAES. As anthropologists we are well aware, however, that the confinement of anthropology to a single language of analysis, no matter how universally it is spoken, will still constitute a cultural impoverishment and that the discipline and the world will be the poorer for any associated loss of diversity. Our best option here is to promote equity between world anthropologies through translation, giving full credit to non-English-language journals and educating ourselves about the diversity and richness of world anthropologies, with a plural "s." This need not contradict the idea (attractive in other ways) of a universally accessible world anthropology sphere. Perhaps the best possible scenario to aim for here is a dynamic state of unity in diversity within anthropology, whereby unity and equality would prevail in the domain of political economy and diversity would prevail in the domains of culture, history, and theoretical orientation.

A second hegemony in the discipline has to do with ownership of the technical means of knowledge production and is based on the domination of print media by journal and book publishers predominantly based in affluent industrialized nations. Most of these major global publishing houses are now corporately owned rather than controlled by academics. This hegemony of print and online production is being reinforced systematically by a global trend toward the formal quality ranking of publications by government agencies, and indeed the secondary performance ranking of individuals and whole universities on the basis of such publications rankings. This trend is destructive of the principle of equal participation for a number of reasons: highly ranked journals tend to exclude authors from developing countries whose scholarship does not conform to these publishers' style, such journals are too expensive for libraries in the developing world, and their dominance further marginalizes journals that are small, critical, or alternative in some other way.

A third form of hegemony persists in anthropology because there are vast historical disparities in the degree of visibility of different anthropological communities. The unique features of these national and regional anthropologies need to be not only maintained but also appreciated more than is currently the case. There has been an

enormous lack of communication between different anthropologies across national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. A European anthropologist is very unlikely to know very much about Indonesian anthropology, for example, or Philippine or Tunisian anthropology. Those who research in countries with less known national anthropologies thus have a special responsibility to promote it, to cite it, to publish within its national journals, and to collaborate with local colleagues as equal partners, wherever possible.

While these are some major obstacles to the realization of a world anthropologies paradigm, the WCAA and other international and global organizations in anthropology are now seriously engaged with these issues and are making a conscious effort to create a sense of worldwide anthropological community, based on diversity, equal democratic participation, and active collaboration.

It has become much easier to work internationally since the WCAA was founded. Unique national anthropologies are now being showcased by the WCAA at major conferences. In collaboration with the IUAES, the WCAA is in a position to provide better access to knowledge, and also to the means of disseminating knowledge, by using new media technologies according to principles of open access. It is thus through a politically conscious international anthropology that we are at last obtaining the means to reform the discipline by celebrating cultural diversity within the practice of anthropology itself. This is also presenting us with an opportunity to speak with one voice and thus to make representations to other international bodies such as UNESCO, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the World Trade Organization, or to wayward governments and corporations. This is already happening, and for the first time it can happen, because there are fair and transparent democratic structures in place that give anthropologists the opportunity to speak with one voice.

Anthropology is thus catching up with globalization and is no longer a spectator to this historic process. The challenge for the WCAA in the coming years, working together with the IUAES, will be to provide a model of what globalization could be, at its very best; this would be a model of how humanity can come to appreciate its unity, its need to speak in one language, and its need also to speak in many tongues and to think in a wide array of epistemological and cultural frames. Anthropologists certainly do have the training and the professional ethos to be exemplary in the pursuit of these ideals. This capacity is now being put into practice within the WCAA, with the aim of opening anthropology to universal and equal participation. By demonstrating a global consciousness, based on solidarity and equality in diversity, the discipline may help others to realize that peaceful global cooperation is achievable also for the world at large.

SEE ALSO: American Anthropological Association (AAA); Anthropological Knowledge and Styles of Publication; Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (ASA); Australia, Anthropology in; Australian Anthropological Society (AAS); Brazilian Association of Anthropology (ABA); Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA); European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA); French Association of Anthropologists / Association Française des Anthropologues (AFA); German Anthropological Association / Deutsche



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Gesellschaft für Sozial- und Kulturanthropologie (DGSKA); Indian Anthropological Association (IAA); International Association for Southeast European Anthropology (InASEA); International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES); Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology (JASCA); Latin American Association of Anthropology / Asociación Latinoamericana de Antropología (ALA); Pan-African Anthropological Association (PAAA); Postsocialist Europe, Anthropology in; Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research; World Anthropologies

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- World Council of Anthropological Associations. 2004. "The Foundation of the WCAA, June 2004." Accessed March 12, 2017, <https://www.wcaanet.org/events/past.shtml>. Please refer to the World Council of Anthropological Associations' website (<http://www.wcaanet.org>) for more detailed information on past and present activities, panels, and symposia as well as reports on activities, public statements, and a list of current members.