

INTRODUCCIÓN

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The World Anthropologies Network project has several years of life already. It has brought together into a fruitful conversation an active and increasing number of worldwide anthropologists. This issue of the WAN Journal is a clear expression of the theme that has been at the forefront in our debates: the history and politics of anthropological knowledge flows. The present moment sets us at a juncture, however, in which we should enhance collaboration between academic and non-academic thinkers and activists, in different locations, through sustained South-South and South-North interaction, through the dissemination of written production, and also through the actual involvement in collaborative teaching and research projects. The question to address at this juncture is: where is the present dynamics of our practice of a World Anthropologies Network leading us in the foreseeable future and how could we contrive its growth?

One of the WAN goals is to enable the development of an active network that through its interactive dynamics produces new forms of knowledge. New complexities of interaction would generate new forms of knowledge. In this sense we envisage a truly creative horizon: the opening of spaces beyond the hegemonic ways of anthropological scholarship would produce the possibilities for asking new questions and imagining other possible ways of understanding processes of human life. The metaphor of the web or net is appropriate in its connective sense of linking separate points (people, sites, questions, knowledge locations and histories), thus opening the avenues of intellectual creativity. This metaphor is also particularly interesting since it indicates an inability to form an enclosed space: the spaces between the links remind us permanently that there is a lot that we always let go, through holes in the web.

One initial idea of the WAN was to problematize the hegemony of US and more generally Anglo-American academia in anthropological knowledge production and dissemination, freeing non-Anglophone anthropologists from compulsory and dependent consumption of Anglo-American theory. This has been on the agenda of some anthropologists for a while. The preoccupation with the political implications of knowledge production is a result of the engagement with radical politics and feminism in the 1960s and 1970s and with postcolonial, identity politics and political ecology issues emerging in the next decades.

The existence of the internet provided a technical instrument that seemed ideal to the development of the connective aspect of the WAN project: to put in touch and enhance interaction with anthropologists worldwide working within different histories and traditions of anthropological knowledge, immersed in diverse political realities and often also working in different geographical areas (many working in their home countries). The internet notwithstanding, the original seed idea for the project was a product of face to face intense interaction among a handful of Latin American anthropologists. A first extension of the network was a result of direct interaction with other scholars in the context of teaching international graduate courses, or of other forms of personal interaction with particular colleagues through other collaborative projects. There was also an attempt to bring together colleagues who had been previously thinking about the issues of power and knowledge production in anthropology. Many of these ideas were discussed in a 2003 International Symposium of the Wenner-Gren Foundation that produced a lively debate. Once again, face to face intense interaction was crucial. Other panels happened at International Conferences such as the 2002 meeting of the American Anthropological Association, the 2004 meeting of the Brazilian Association of Anthropology (ABA), the first Latin American Congress of Anthropology of the Latin American Association (ALA), in Rosario – Argentina (2005), the 2006 EASA meeting in England and a session organized by the World Council of Anthropological Associations in the joint congress of the Anthropology Southern Africa, Pan-African Anthropological Association and the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES), in Cape Town (2006), as well as in the 2007 AAA meeting. These gatherings were extremely fruitful and some of the issues raised by the attendants became papers we reproduce in this issue of the journal.

At the same time, several WAN participants have maintained a lively e-conversation raising questions that have been proposed for debate at more public venues. A website has been developed and is now fully in operation relying on the voluntary work of a small but hardworking group of anthropologists. An electronic journal has been launched and is in its third issue. On the whole three modes of communication have been significant to the WAN project: 1) intense face to face interaction at different venues, 2) continued interaction through e-mail and 3) the website which has been an excellent media of dissemination of our project.

It seems unquestionable that face to face interaction plays an important role in the unfolding of the project, stimulating long term active involvement. The fact that the WAN project has not developed a formal organization structure makes it dependent on the informal self-assumed responsibility of its participants. In the end, the internet's ability to connect and generate growth is dependent on sustained face to face interaction, which is the element that produces a particular form of collective responsibility leading to collective reflexivity. In this connection, the multiplication of venues of face to face interaction is an essential constitutive element of the WAN project. But there is a fourth element that needs to be underscored: the collaborative aspect. In order for the WAN project to pursue we need to produce collaborative engagements with substantive social, political, economic, cultural issues that will enable the production of anthropological knowledge in a different way. Some of this is underway through the creation of graduate programs of anthropology that engage scholars and institutions in different locations. Some collaborative research projects exist that include activist positions. The publication of the present issue, which is being expected by readers in different parts of the world, is another indication of the power of collective collaboration. We want to thank all authors for their cooperation. Eduardo Restrepo deserves special thanks for all the energy he dedicated to this issue. The collective aspect of the WAN project is its main asset and makes it a different attempt of practicing anthropology; it should remain our compass.