

THE PROBLEM OF HEGEMONY, FLOWS AND EQUITY IN WORLD ANTHROPOLOGIES

Gustavo Lins Ribeiro

Hegemony

In the year of 1982, the Swedish journal *Ethnos* published an issue, edited by Thomas Gerholm and Ulf Hannerz, dedicated to 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. In the rare occasions 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).

Indeed, anthropologists are aware that the production and dissemination of the discipline happen within unequal power conditions structured by national and global forces. I want to explore this inequality within the “world system of anthropology” rather than within the nation-state level.

Anthropology as a discipline globalized itself in the last 30 years. 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, ironically called “ethnic intellectuals” by Ahmad, who are working for American and British universities as well as a consolidated 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 in which the only imperial center would be the Anglo-Saxon academic world.

There is a need to go beyond the usual approach that looks at the institutional disparities within the world system of anthropology in order to try to understand how hegemony is constructed within our discipline. Hegemony is the silent mode of exerting power that counts on the active consent of the dominated. In the academic world, admiration and scholarship play a central role and they may be the basis upon which academic genealogies and myths are built. Many of these genealogies and myths are taken in different countries to constitute the social foundation of what is taught as the anthropological classics. Nothing wrong

with this if most graduate courses in different countries outside of the hegemonic core included among the mandatory classic readings indigenous researchers. Aren't there Brazilian anthropologists who deserve to be read in Brazil (and elsewhere) as great contributors to anthropological knowledge? What I am aiming at is to say that most scholars outside the hegemonic centers accept their hegemony and reproduce it.

Hegemony speaks English on the global level. Irina Bokova (2010: iii), Director General of UNESCO, considers, in a foreword of the 2010 World Social Science Report, that "social scientific endeavor is also poorer for its bias towards English and English-speaking developed countries. This is a missed opportunity to explore perspectives and paradigms that are embedded in other cultural and linguistic traditions." It is clear that those colleagues who are native of the English language and work in an English-speaking country have an advantage over those who are natives of the Japanese or Russian languages, for instance. We can suppose that the relative loss of global importance of French anthropology may be a result of the relative loss of importance of French as a global language.

Can we de-"babelize" anthropology? In a sense, and this is true for all academic disciplines, de-babelization 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 of 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.

While the linguistic monotony of the global scientific scenario is increasingly acknowledged as a major problem there are few solutions offered so far. UNESCO itself could think of an

electronic international journal that would be a clearing house of articles already published in major social science journals of the world.

Flows

In the beginning of anthropology's global expansion, the flow of a few scholars from the centers was crucial for the establishment of national initiatives and international networks. Indeed, many of these global pioneers (un-)wittingly played the role of founding fathers in different scenarios. The sociological implications of the globalization of anthropology 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. This is the right juncture to try to do something different.

Inequality and 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 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’ seeks to take seriously the multiple and contradictory historical, social, cultural and political locatedness of the different communities of anthropologists and their anthropologies. (2005: 100).

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 it, 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.

But 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 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’s 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.

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 a cosmopolitics. In 2006, I wrote,

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 politics. I view anthropology as a cosmopolitics about the structure of alterity (Krotz 1997) that pretends 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 - 365)

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 pretend 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 equivalency 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 around 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 (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 (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 international 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 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. (2008: 124).

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 which are their interests? Just to name a few of the political problems that may arise.

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 more than 30 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.

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