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Association Business Global Colleagues

Forum on Institutionalizing International Anthropology

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A forum on institutionalizing international anthropology was held during the 2001 AAA Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. Organized by Judith Freidenberg (U of Maryland) and June Nash (CUNY), it evoked a far more profound critique of the existing relations among anthropologists throughout the world than anticipated. The organizers initiated the call with the intention of promoting institutional bases for international exchanges. Proposals included the publication of an international directory, a column in AN devoted to communications among scholars internationally, and notifying members of the presence of international scholars so that colleges and universities might contact them for speaking engagements. We hoped to identify key people in other countries who might become correspondents about anthropological developments in their countries.

Judith Freidenberg initiated the call because her experience as an anthropology student both in her native country of Argentina and in the US made her aware of the parochial boundaries in the discipline in the US. In promoting international outreach through the Society for Applied Anthropology, she became aware of the advantages in making a serious effort to engage in international exchanges. June Nash accepted Judith's invitation to help organize the session, since she hoped to further the initiatives of Sol Tax in internationalizing the discipline. She had worked with him as a graduate student at the U of Chicago in the 1950s, and felt that some of these initiatives should be carried forward in the context of increasing globalization. Her experience working in Latin America and in the US made her appreciate the greater awareness of Latin American scholars to the growing momentum of global integration.

Engaging International Dialogue

The panelists included Richard G Fox, president of the Wenner-Gren Foundation; Rosanna Guber, director of the MA program in anthropology at the Instituto de Desarrollo Economico y Social in Argentina; Ulf Hannerz of the U of Stockholm and president of the European Society of Anthropology; Josephine Smart of the U of Calgary; and George Stocking, Stein-Freiler Distinguished Professor at the U of Chicago.

The participants responded with acute observations derived from their own experiences in internationalizing the profession. Most of them commented on the linguistic problems of communicating in polyglot settings and the consequent dominance of English that almost forced the rest of the world to “enter the sterling zone,” as one commented wryly. Ulf Hannerz, who had perceived that English was becoming the hegemonic language when he served as president of the European Association of Social Anthropology, nonetheless felt that such boundary-crossing created more dense collegial networks among nationals of member countries. He looked forward to multifield projects that would encourage exchanges among anthropologists in different countries.

George Stocking evoked Sol Tax’s visionary role in forging international exchanges through his activities with the Wenner-Gren Foundation. Tax founded the international journal *Current Anthropology*, originated the first international directory of anthropologists and promoted many international conferences. As president of the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Chicago in 1973, he expanded the scope and range of anthropology’s message by arranging for every session to be translated in four languages in a way that rivaled UN gatherings at that time. Richard Fox summarized the headway made by the Wenner-Gren Foundation since then, with its support of both the European Association of Anthropology and the African Association of Anthropology. Josephine Smart remarked on the potential for developing anthropology departments today in the People’s Republic of China, where there are over 2,000 universities with millions of students, but few anthropology departments. Leni Silverstein, lately of the John D and Catherine T MacArthur Foundation, indicated the growing commitment to global studies in granting agencies.

Natives or Colleagues?

Commentators from the floor enriched the discussion, with both practical proposals for cultivating international exchanges to philosophical discussion regarding the kind of exchanges that have occurred and will prevail. Takami Kuwayama of Soka U in Japan pointed to the essentializing assumption among US scholars studying in Japan that people of the same ethnicity/ nationality are insiders and natives, while those of different ethnicity/nationality are outsiders. He pointed out that American, and more generally Western, anthropologists prefer to treat Japanese anthropologists as knowledgeable informants, rather than colleagues with whom they might consider collaborating. This critique was echoed by Eduardo Archetti, an Argentinean anthropologist employed at the U of Oslo who expressed the dissatisfaction that he and his colleagues experienced in having to play the role of a native anthropologist even after earning their degree in foreign departments.

Critiquing US Hegemony

What the panel evoked among the mostly non-US audience was a profound critique of US hegemony in the discipline of anthropology and the perception that most US anthropologists had little interest in the anthropological trends of other countries. In his critique of the forum written for *Anthropology Today*, the British anthropologist Brian Moeran of the Copenhagen Business School faulted the apparent disinterest of Americans in what is happening in the rest of the anthropological world. He pointed out that there is little attempt to solicit articles from foreign scholars in US anthropology journals and that editorial boards often require processing fees that can be exorbitant for foreign scholars with low incomes. Except for a few “stars” who are repetitively cited by US anthropologists, there seems to be little interest in trends in research overseas.

Scholarly Exchange Needed

The reactions of Brian Moeran and others who spoke from the audience underline the need for scholarly exchange because of the growing rift among anthropologists who perceive colleagues from other countries in stereotypical terms. The benefits that can be gained by multiple visions in a global society are essential to carry out the anthropology of the future if we are to survive as a discipline. The initiatives taken by AAA President Louise Lamphere at the 2001 AAA Annual Meeting in cultivating international exchanges included the invited sessions “Initiating Cross-Atlantic Dialogues on Race and Cultures in Anthropology,” with Peter Hervik (U of Oslo) and Ruth Wodak (U of Vienna); and “Re-orienting the Anthropology of the Middle East,” with Andre Gingrich (U of Vienna). These sessions and their foreign guests, whose presence was made possible by the Wenner-Gren Foundation, are a positive direction to pursue in future meetings.

Positive reactions from some of the audience participating in the discussion gave some hope for future dialogue. Shinji Yamashita of the Dept of Cultural Anthropology in Tokyo suggested that we organize an International Business Meeting session during the 2002 AAA Annual Meeting that will draw representatives of anthropological associations of various countries. As a councilor of the Japanese Society of Ethnology, he proposed to inform Emiko Namihira, current president of the society, of the discussions in the session in order to carry them forward. We hope that other scholars will be moved to promote discussion of practical strategies as well as epistemological tensions that are needed to further an international dialogue begun at this forum.

June Nash is Distinguished Professor Emerita at CUNY. She worked on the International Directory of Anthropology as a research assistant for Sol Tax, and has published articles on “Ethnographic Aspects of the World Capitalist System” (Annual Review of Anthropology) and “Global Integration and Subsistence Insecurity” (American Anthropologist, 1994).