

# Politics of ignorance in the transnational field of anthropology<sup>1</sup>

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Naiveté is often an excuse for those who exercise power. For those upon whom that power is exercised, naiveté is always a mistake.<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Rather than a homogeneous discipline that is practised in the same way by all, with identical emphases, agendas, institutional frameworks, and methodological strategies across the world, the anthropological field is composed of various traditions of local, national, or regional anthropological communities that share certain characteristics, emphases and specificities which, following Cardoso de Oliveira,<sup>3</sup> constitute differential paradigms and ‘styles’. Heterogeneity has been, without a doubt, a characteristic of the anthropological discipline: it is possible to note significant differences not only between national traditions (such as the French or US traditions), or regional ones (such as critical Latin American anthropology), but also within these national anthropological formations (between different ‘schools’ for example).

This heterogeneity, however, should not be interpreted as a signal of the absence of a transnational anthropological field, for such a field does in fact exist. Nonetheless, the visibility and audibility of different anthropological traditions within this transnational anthropological field are far from being equal. Some traditions (and specific anthropologists) within it are much more visible than others. In fact, we could say that the asymmetries that characterize the visibilities and audibilities of different traditions within this field have created differential conditions for their participation within it. In this article, I shall examine some of the characteristics and mechanisms that produce and maintain even today those asymmetrical visibilities and audibilities of what can be called a ‘politics of ignorance’ both in the transnational field of anthropology and in its national formations.

## The transnational field of anthropology

From an ethnographic perspective, in order to shed light on the transnational field of anthropologies, it is necessary to take seriously the singularity of the various anthropologies that are practised in different parts of the world. In order to understand this singularity it is important to abandon the widely held premise that something like ‘an authentic anthropology’ (which is normally identified with the French, English, or US ‘traditions’) exists, and

that its variations in peripheral countries should be understood as mere copies (mostly amateur) that only manage to appear as anthropology in an incomplete (as in, 'not yet') and heterodox manner. As Mexican anthropologist Esteban Krotz aptly states, these anthropologies '[...] are not reducible to mere "extensions" or "replicas" (imperfect ones at that) of an original anthropological model. Rather, what we have are ways of generating anthropological knowledges that have particular characteristics.'<sup>4</sup> In other words, the singularity of each of the anthropological articulations in distinct localities should be examined on its own terms and not as aberrations or variants of a naturalized, unmarked, and already defined pattern. Now, the purpose of taking the singularity of the various anthropological articulations seriously is to evidence the specific institutional, social, political, and intellectual frameworks in which each of them emerges and transforms. The specificity of these frameworks reflects not only differences in national or regional variants, but also their respective forms of relating to one another as well as their positionality *vis-à-vis* other anthropologies. Singularity, therefore, does not mean isolation or self-absorption.

Therefore, we must abandon all metaphysical or essentialist readings of anthropology (or rather, of anthropologies) in order to focus on concrete practices (what anthropologists really do as anthropologists), as well as the different layers of relationality that enable (or disable) these practices. This means giving up the habit of defining anthropology (or anthropologies) in a normative manner and turning instead to a set of articulating criteria (regarding its objects, methods, theoretical orientations and subject matters) that help us understand the multiplicity of practices and relations that actually constitute *existent anthropologies*. In order to avoid endless and sterile disputes that try to settle the matter of anthropologies' commonalities and differences in an abstract and normative way, we must take into account the density and specificity of practices and relations as they unfold in concrete places. In this way, we can stop seeing the diversity within and between various anthropologies as a substitute for or derivative of a primordial and transcendental identity.

This diversity should not be taken to imply that the various anthropologies are bounded entities that have emerged in isolation and are consequently burdened with incommensurabilities. Their diversity is more the result of the constant, multi-scalar, and multiple relations (dialogical and power-laden) that they engage in, than of their isolation. Even so, by noting the existence of these inter-relations one cannot ignore the specific frameworks that structure the way in which relations, resources, affects, interests, and passions gravitate, and which sometimes hinge on axes such as the nation-state. The point is not to call forth an image of an anthropology that travels to different parts of the world where it adapts to local conditions upon arrival, but rather to recognize that that which we call anthropology in the singular is essentially a superficial, retrospective and disciplining effect of something that has never truly existed. If we move beyond the anthropology manuals that caricature and simplify our disciplinary genealogies, what we see are substantive

differences, tensions, and dispersions within and between the various anthropological establishments.

Even when institutionally articulated anthropologies are circumscribed to the United States, England, and France, as is the case with ‘cultural anthropology’, ‘social anthropology’, and ‘ethnology’ respectively, the disciplinary projects that are at stake in this delimitation are not exactly identical. Suffice it to recall how archaeology and physical anthropology were selectively included or excluded from the anthropological endeavour depending on the tradition in question, or how the central concepts of culture, social system, or structure differentially interpellated each of these traditions. Clearly, homogeneity or consensus have not existed within each of these establishments either, despite the claim that coherent ‘schools’ and ‘theories’ exist.<sup>5</sup>

### Politics of ignorance and hegemony

If we examine the content of courses that teach the discipline’s history we will find that certain European and US authors and discussions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are repeatedly referenced, and that these are generally presented as ‘schools’ or ‘theories’ (evolutionism, historical particularism, functionalism, structuralism, etc.), each with their ‘cultural heroes’. In addition to flattening out the historical densities and heterogeneities of those anthropological establishments,<sup>6</sup> this manner of telling history tends to obliterate or relegate to simple footnotes the disciplinary trajectories of countries in the Third World or the Global South, but also many others in the Global North (such as Japan). As Esteban Krotz has noted, ‘anthropologies of the South’ can be considered ‘anthropologies without history’.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the histories of ‘anthropologies of the South’ tend to appear (when they do appear) as singular trajectories (sometimes of a distinctly amateur nature) inside an unmarked disciplinary matrix that is primarily produced in a few European countries and in the United States. Hierarchies of knowledge are predicated upon hierarchies of social and political power.

The inability to see or hear certain traditions, however, cannot be simply understood as the Manichean ignorance of anthropologists in certain countries of the Global North who have a perverse desire to ignore their colleagues in peripheral anthropological establishments. First, because many of these inability to see and hear peripheral anthropologies are also shared and openly reproduced by colleagues in peripheral establishments themselves. Such that an anthropologist in Colombia, for example, tends to know more of the history, discussions, and authors of US anthropology than of its neighbouring anthropologies in Venezuela or Peru, not to mention those in Asia or Africa. Second, because even within the most visible and audible anthropological establishments of the transnational field of anthropology, there are many anthropological traditions (authors, schools, histories, modalities of anthropological practice) that have also been invisibilized and silenced. What is presented as the anthropology or anthropologies of the

United States (or England or France) within transnational anthropology, or even within the dominant narratives of the same national formation, is in fact the result of a 'selection of tradition' (*à la* Williams).

With these nuances in mind, I would like to point out 'the politics of ignorance' that make structural asymmetries in transnational anthropology evident. The categories 'provincial cosmopolitanism' and 'metropolitan provincialism' suggested by Gustavo Lins Ribeiro and Arturo Escobar are very useful in accounting for these 'politics of ignorance'.<sup>8</sup> They utilize 'provincial cosmopolitanism' to note that anthropologists of peripheral anthropologies generally know and make reference to the history, authors, and discussions of metropolitan anthropologies. If they do not do so, their disciplinary competence can be called into question. On the contrary, anthropologists located in metropolitan establishments rarely have any knowledge of peripheral anthropologies (other than that of the country where their 'objects' of research are located) and even less often do they use peripheral authors and literatures as interlocutors on a par with their colleagues at home. In Gupta and Ferguson's words, 'anthropologists working at the "center" learn quickly that they can ignore what is done in peripheral sites at little or no professional cost, while any peripheral anthropologist who similarly ignores the "center" puts his or her professional competence at issue'.<sup>9</sup> This ignorance is precisely what Ribeiro and Escobar call 'metropolitan provincialism'.

The Gramscian terms hegemony and subalternization are helpful in providing a thick understanding of the dissimilar asymmetries of visibilities and audibilities between traditions and anthropologists of national formations and within the transnational anthropological field. From the perspective of the transnational anthropological field or of a particular national formation, subaltern anthropologies are those modalities of practising anthropology that tend to be obliterated or ignored by other modalities that position and naturalize themselves as the most adequate and relevant ways of conceiving and practising anthropology. I understand subalternizations and hegemonies as the result of multiple and permanent disputes and struggles to position oneself within institutional, discursive, and subjective terrains that define the field of transnational anthropology and the various national formations. Therefore, I do not consider that they are a manifestation of intrinsic qualities of anthropologists or anthropological traditions, nor do I attribute a moral valence of epistemic or political superiority/inferiority due to the mere fact that they are articulated as hegemonic or subaltern at a given moment.

Hegemonies within a given anthropological establishment are not simply forced impositions. Hegemonies are established in the midst of permanent disputes to define the terms, formats, assessments and terrains not only of what constitutes the anthropological field at a given moment, but also of who concretely benefits from the material and symbolic resources that circulate within the anthropological establishment. For that reason, hegemonies are not consolidated and established once and for all, but rather they operate from more or less unstable points of equilibrium and impact specific spheres

that are in turn defined by other potential or incipient hegemonic formations. Hegemonies point to the management of dissent through consent rather than to the creation of consensus, which means that they operate less through agreement than through ways of producing exteriorities and alliances. In this regard, James Clifford notes: 'In its normal functioning, a discipline does not actually need consensus on core assumptions. Rather like a hegemonic alliance, in Gramscian perspective, it requires consent, some significant overlapping interests, and a spirit of live-and-let-live across differences.'<sup>10</sup>

Although hegemonies in anthropology do not simply reflect the hegemonies of the social sciences and humanities, they cannot be entirely disassociated from them either. It is often forgotten that anthropological establishments are constituted through processes of differentiation from, confluence, and tension with other disciplinary establishments and those who decide to embody them (which varies by country or even by locality). Hegemonies within anthropology often reflect broader disciplinary hegemonies, whether in their affinities and alliances or in their counterpoints and contestations. For example, what has been called the 'discursive turn' within the US establishment condenses theoretical disputes that are explicitly associated with hegemonic struggles that cannot be contained within any single discipline. For this reason, it is important to understand how hegemonies move and insert themselves within concrete disciplines in the name of epistemological or theoretical debates. In the US and Latin America, cultural studies, postcolonial theory, and subaltern studies have been particularly visible in the efforts to establish, contest, or defend hegemonies in anthropology.

Moreover, hegemonies that are articulated within a concrete anthropological establishment or between different establishments are not exclusively produced by processes that are inherent to disciplinary or transdisciplinary practices. Rather, they reflect their imbrications with relations of domination, exploitation and subjection that operate in society at large and, in a larger scale, in the geopolitics of the world system. A trivial observation that exemplifies this is the fact that hegemonies mobilize a material dimension, which is made manifest in flows of resources and infrastructures that do not magically fall from the sky to be unequally distributed in a given country or across the world through divine design. The historical and persistent processes that have led to both the accumulation of wealth and the production of poverty, which are unequally distributed across geographic and social space, are so widely acknowledged that I find it unnecessary to point them out here. However, what is usually elided is the concrete details of how these processes, whereby privilege is allocated and reproduced, become tied to the formation of disciplinary hegemonies within anthropology.

What becomes an item of importance for a given anthropological establishment at a particular moment is not merely a theoretical or methodological matter; it is a matter that is crosscut by the interests that produce particular anthropologists as social subjects in a specific place,<sup>11</sup> and by the social sectors that intervene directly or indirectly in the educational and knowledge-production systems in general, and in the anthropological

establishment in particular. The conditions that make it possible for some research projects (and not others) to be proposed, financed, written, published, and cited are created at the intersection of these various interests and the management of the institutional machine (which operates not only at the disciplinary level, but also at the governmental, non-governmental, and corporate registers).

### Naturalizing anthropology

As a discipline, anthropology entails a series of institutionalized practices and modes of production and regulation of discourses. In the academic sphere, these institutionalized practices and power relations configure the production, circulation, and consumption of anthropological knowledge, as well as the production of certain subject positions and subjectivities in subtle ways.<sup>12</sup> These ‘micropractices of academia’ define not only a particular lens of enunciability, authority and authorization, but also anthropology’s conditions of existence (and transformation) as a particular academic discipline. The majority of these micropractices are taken for granted and create an academic common sense of sorts, which results in a blind spot that is rarely treated as an object that merits systematic scrutiny.

Professional training is perhaps one of the mechanisms that most impacts the disciplining of anthropological subjectivities and the internalization of certain modes of what is thinkable and doable. For this reason, an analysis of where, with whom, and how new generations of anthropologists are trained, as well as how they insert themselves in their professional labour, enables an understanding of the dynamics through which anthropological hegemonies are consolidated, confronted, and dissolved. I am referring to a deeper level than the simple formation of ‘schools’ and their unifying figures, although these can also have a substantial impact at certain moments. Undoubtedly, matters of style, but also of prestige and networks that differentially position anthropologists, are at stake in professional training. However, the disciplining of anthropological subjectivities is related to a deeper dimension, that is, to the process that produces disciplinary identities and marks the way in which subjects are disciplinarily interpellated. Similarly, by the internalization of modes of what is thinkable and doable I am referring to the habits of thought and action that are adopted and reproduced by individuals as a result of their professional training—mostly without reflecting on them.

This aspect of professional training helps us understand why US hegemonic anthropologies are being consolidated as *the* hegemonic forms of the global anthropological field. The colossal size of the US anthropological establishment<sup>13</sup> produces the greatest number of anthropologists and attracts a large number of people from across the globe to be trained there. The number of students who travel to the US to pursue doctoral studies in anthropology is steadily increasing. In addition to the sheer scale, it is important to note the self-centredness with which anthropological training is carried out in the US as well as its strong impact on habits and subjectivities.

By self-centredness I am referring to the fact that the bulk of anthropological production in the US establishment discusses and cites anthropologists who belong to this same establishment—or, at best, who publish in English and mostly in Great Britain.<sup>14</sup> For their part, students must take compulsory and optional courses for several years, during which time they are subjected to an intense reading rhythm, oral presentations, and essay and report writing that are not only the object of grade assignment, but also a means to permanently scrutinize each student's performance. Students are constantly tested not only on their grasp of the courses' contents but also on their oral and written argumentation style, which is imbued with an academic etiquette and an entire set of rules that, though not explicit, is nonetheless an integral part of the baggage of expected behaviours.<sup>15</sup> It is precisely here where a disciplinary common sense is inserted and through which the hegemonic anthropologies of the US establishment operate. This results in an increasing influence of US hegemonic anthropologies in places like Colombia, for example, in part due to the mediation of anthropologists who have pursued their PhD studies in the US and now occupy privileged places in the Colombian anthropological establishment.

This figure of the mediator of hegemonic anthropologies is crucial, especially in peripheral establishments. This figure does not require 'having been there' (to turn around the famous expression that critiqued the ethnographic obsession with presence and anthropological politics of representation), although its 'authority' can rely in large part on this, and it is worth noting that not all anthropologists take on a mimetic position *vis-à-vis* the hegemonies of the establishment where they were trained. These hegemonies can flourish in other establishments insofar as they are incorporated into local disputes, a process that tends to result in their transformation to some degree. The relative impact that the mediator has on local establishments—as a key figure for the reproduction of certain hegemonies—is commensurate with the aura of authority that the former is capable of mobilizing, the latter's predisposition to embrace or reject the hegemonies in question, and the place that local establishments occupy within institutionalized relations of power.

Writing about this last point, and referring specifically to anthropology professors, Carlos Alberto Uribe notes that in Colombia it is considered that

one is a 'good' teacher [...] insofar as one is capable of adequately mediating with metropolitan anthropology. This means that being a university professor poses an imperative to act from a mimetic position in relation to the metropolitan centre or centres of knowledge production, and above all, in relation to the tutelary figures of the corresponding lineages.<sup>16</sup>

Yamashita, Bosco and Eades point out a similar situation in Japan: '[...] many Japanese academics adopt as a career-building strategy exegesis and interpretation of a particular theorist for local audiences'.<sup>17</sup>

The correlate of students who travel from peripheral anthropological establishments to pursue graduate degrees in those at the centre is, on the one

hand, researchers whose objects of study are located in peripheral countries and who travel to collect data (be it as doctoral students or as professionals); and on the other hand, the figure of the 'anthropological authority' who is invited to give keynote speeches or hold seminars. Contrastingly, universities and institutions on the peripheries of the world anthropological field limit themselves to training local anthropologists, and at times in an incomplete manner or as a mere first phase in their pupils' trajectories, which must be followed by their rite of passage through the dominant centres where they attain the graduate degrees that will confer on them the necessary credentials and anthropological authority.

Another element that also contributes to the consolidation of hegemonic anthropologies and the attendant subalternization of other anthropologies is an attitude that can be described as a 'peripheral mentality'. This attitude has two positions that are basically two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, there are those who assume a position that is similar to that of those at the centre, looking down on local forms of anthropological knowledge production, and feel called to fulfil the 'civilizing duty' of instructing the 'natives'. On the other hand, there are those who assume the place of the mentally colonized, and dazzled by the avatars and designs of hegemonic anthropologies wholeheartedly embrace them.

Command of the English language must be taken into consideration as one of the primary mechanisms of subalternization of certain anthropological communities. Not writing in English (first and foremost, for the importance of other metropolitan languages such as French in the circulation of anthropological literature is steadily decreasing), or doing it without the necessary competence that involves not only sufficient language skills but also specific argumentative strategies, results in a situation where enormous numbers of academic works remain virtually unknown in Western countries simply because they are produced by Japanese, Chinese, Indian, or Latin American anthropologists who write in their native languages. The empire of the English language (and of certain writing competencies) is an expression of the relations of power that tend to be taken for granted, and that are echoed in the politics of publication and translation.

Specialized journals and the publishing industry are another site where hegemonic anthropologies are constituted and disputed, although not all specialized journals or publishing companies are equally positioned in this regard. What can be roughly described as an unequal distribution of 'prestige' is part of the same mechanism of resource allocation and the result of past disputes that have been projected into the present to position journals and publishing companies differentially. A great deal of the academic production that comes out of hegemonic anthropologies circulates within and between establishments in the form of published articles and books, which is apparent not only in the contents and politics of publication practices, but also in the templates that structure argumentative strategies, the length of the works, the citations, and of course, the language in which they are printed. To give an example of content bias, the journal *American Anthropologist*, which is published by the American Anthropological Association, is based on the



Boasian four-field anthropological model that has become one of the axes of disciplinary common sense in the US and has been maintained thanks to its institutional inertia.<sup>18</sup> One can easily observe how the sheer volume and reach of specialized journals and publishing companies located in metropolitan establishments—especially in the US and the UK—both in their printed and electronic forms, guarantees their prevalence in many peripheral establishments, where they are consumed thanks to the work of mediators and translators. The same is true within any given establishment, even metropolitan ones, where some journals and publishing companies have more visibility and impact than others.

In addition to their impact on the dissemination of some contents and not others, specialized journals and the publishing industry also participate in the consolidation of hegemonies by creating models for adequate argumentative *forms*. These templates of anthropological argumentation differentially position anthropologists, making it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for some to master this skill. As Yamashita, Bosco and Eades remind us, '[. . .] publishing in the West requires mastery of complex theoretical vocabularies and writing styles that are constantly changing, and these are extremely difficult for non-native speakers to acquire and keep up with'.<sup>19</sup> These argumentative forms are equally shaped by disciplinary conferences, which are sites where the use of words and silences is regulated. Yet, given that the reach of these conferences is limited by physical presence—which is not the case with specialized journals and the publishing industry—their impact on the consolidation of hegemonies is limited to outlining and fixing disciplinary contents (and interests).

Finally, when analysing the creation and dissolution of hegemonic forms of anthropology and concrete modes of disciplining, one cannot forget the intricate web of practices associated with the figure of the reviewer. The field where questions of who reviews who, using which criteria and with what consequences, are played out constitutes one of the most powerful terrains where hegemonies are disputed and reproduced, and where individuals are compelled to comply with disciplining expectations. In the US establishment, for instance, this figure of the peer reviewer is omnipresent. In general, the peer reviewer works behind the scenes and, once emitted, his appraisals possess the aura of an unquestionable and irreversible verdict. Peer reviewers intervene in all phases of anthropologists' professional careers, impacting students in training as well as veteran anthropologists; project financing decisions as well as the publication of research results; hiring selection processes as well as decisions to lay off individuals from academic institutions. As a result of all this, anthropology becomes less the labour of a caring craftsman than an occupation that is thoroughly structured by the production logic of the factory.<sup>20</sup>

Hence, as Brenneis has noted, before anthropologists in the US establishment are in a position to write texts about culture (and can take part in debates about ethnographic representations), they must first write funding proposals whose acceptance or rejection is decided upon by peer reviewers.<sup>21</sup> Then, after securing funding and writing about culture, peer reviewers

intervene once more in the publication processes and the institutional recognition of the results. Nor are anthropological establishments in peripheral countries exempt from peer review practices. In Colombia, for instance, these practices go hand in hand with the introduction of an entire set of interventions that seek to corporatize academic production. This results in the perfunctory application of 'quality control' criteria such as specialized journal indexing, and the systematic review of individuals' and institutions' performance. Thus, despite their apparent principles of neutrality, objectivity, and consensus, the use of quality-measuring mechanisms and the 'display' of intellectual production processes become a means to introduce and naturalize the assumptions of hegemonic formations in anthropology.

### **Subalternized anthropologies and technological transformations**

In some ways, doing anthropology today seems very different from what it was just 20 years ago. To point out the obvious, the writing and communication practices of the discipline have been impacted by technological transformations such as the personal computer, the internet, and e-mail. Even for those of us who lived and practised anthropology in a world without these possibilities, it is very difficult to imagine a great part of our daily tasks today without these and other technological prostheses. Writing a paper on a laptop while one does fieldwork, commenting on the research progress of a colleague or a student hundreds of kilometres away, accessing and circulating electronic versions of articles and books, or doing searches in databases in different parts of the world, are all situations that today are part of the daily work of many anthropologists.

The rhythms and scales with which we write, systematize and communicate anthropological knowledge have undergone changes that only years ago may have seemed unimaginable to us. If we consider this dimension of technological transformations, we could state that in recent years an unprecedented situation has emerged in which the technological capacity to visibilize, preserve and communicate anthropological knowledge can be shared with and enriched by colleagues anywhere in the world. An anthropologist in a peripheral country such as Colombia or Angola, by means of a computer station in his or her university or place of work, can technically not only have access to large volumes of information about what his or her colleagues in any other part of the planet are doing, but can also contact and interact with them. At the same time, anthropologists in any part of the Global North can technically access the works of their colleagues who are located in the most distant anthropological establishments and establish direct relationships with them.

Of course, these interactions among anthropologists situated in different parts of the world are not only virtual. Academic events where anthropologists from different countries converge are not a thing of the past. Today, the number, frequency and destinations of anthropologists' travels to attend

activities in which colleagues from other places are participating are greater than ever before.

Given all these technological transformations and interactions, it seems logical to ask whether we might be in the midst of a process that tends towards the configuration of an authentically transnational, heterogeneous, and pluralist anthropological community. We might ask whether these transformations have undermined the old barriers that existed between anthropologies and anthropologists situated in different parts of the world. Although today, like never before, there exists a set of favourable conditions to reposition those anthropologies and anthropologists who have been marginalized from the most visible settings and practices of the world anthropological field, the technological transformations and interactions that are predominant today tend to reinforce existent inequalities among different anthropologies and anthropologists of the world.

As various authors have indicated,<sup>22</sup> one of the mechanisms that has defined hegemonies and subalternizations in the transnational field of anthropology is related to certain linguistic competences. Speaking, writing, and publishing in certain languages (such as English and less and less so in French) has a potential visibility effect that is greater than doing it in other languages (such as Spanish or Japanese). This is not related to the number of colleagues who speak these languages (which neither in Japanese nor in Spanish is insignificant), but rather to the way in which the transnational anthropological field is configured, where a language like English is dominant in terms of the interactions at the settings where colleagues from various places converge. This dominance of the English language in the transnational field of anthropology makes those traditions and colleagues that speak other languages inaudible and invisible, thereby differentially positioning those colleagues that can call English their first language, or that by virtue of their social class—as in Latin America—have learned English in bilingual schools and as a result of regular stays in English-speaking countries of the Global North. It is important not to overlook the fact that this refers not only to speaking English, but also to the academic competences in argumentation style and associated writing practices.

Thus, the technological transformations and interactions do not seem to be diluting the predominance of English in the transnational field of anthropology. In fact, they have reinforced it. The publication of series and anthropological books that circulate on the internet is for the most part in English. In light of this, the politics of translation continue to reinforce the predominance of works produced in English that are then translated into other languages, rather than making it possible to visibilize the writing of anthropology in languages other than English. International meetings similarly assume that all participants speak English. Many of us have witnessed how possible colleagues are ruled out as participants in a given event because they do not speak English, or do not speak English fluently enough. Inversely, colleagues who speak only English or French are routinely invited to universities or institutes in Latin America and provided with simultaneous translation.

For many anthropologists located in peripheral establishments in the Third World—many of whom do not have university or other conventional academic affiliations—gaining access to information that is primarily produced in English is a hurdle to which we must add the availability of equipment, the necessary knowledge to undertake relevant searches, and the fact that many journal databases do not have free and open access, not to mention electronic versions of books. These colleagues then encounter even more difficulties to make their works (which in many cases are never written or published) visible and audible in the transnational anthropological field.

In addition to these obstacles, the visibilities and audibilities of the transnational anthropological field (and more and more so of peripheral national formations) are related to the assignment and dispute of prestige (symbolic capital *à la* Bourdieu) in academic institutions such as universities or publishing houses, which in turn puts a stamp on the asymmetrical distribution of resources and ‘rankings’ of anthropological traditions and anthropologists. In the last decades, despite the technological transformations and the deepening of interactions that I indicated above, prestige has continued to be concentrated mostly in a handful of institutions in the US, England, and less so in France. With some notable differences, these configurations of prestige reproduction tend to reproduce themselves in turn within national anthropological formations. Together (both in the transnational anthropological field and within national anthropological formations), they operate as guarantors of the conservation of certain privileges and the specific or total exclusion of traditions and anthropologists associated with academic institutions of scarce prestige or with institutions that remain outside of the academic establishment altogether.

In sum, the technological capacity to write and communicate anthropology, and to systematize and visibilize anthropological knowledge, tends to reinforce the mechanisms of subalternization of anthropologies and anthropologists in the transnational anthropological field. Rather than favouring the consolidation of a heterogeneous and pluralist transnational anthropological field, a few expressions and modalities of anthropological traditions continue to be dominant.

I agree with Gustavo Lins Ribeiro and Arturo Escobar that ‘[...] our anthropological practices can be much richer if we take into consideration the great variety of anthropological perspectives currently extant worldwide’.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, the transformations that have occurred during the last decades in the transnational anthropological field seem to point towards the reinforcement of numerous limitations to the increased visibility and audibility of subalternized anthropologies. Everything seems to suggest that the transnational anthropological field is still very far from enabling and nurturing the complex heterogeneity of existent anthropologies in the world, and from problematizing the asymmetrical visibilities and audibilities of certain modalities and voices in anthropological practice.

Finally, one could ask the following question. While it is clear that from the perspective of the transnational field of anthropology (or even of the national formations) the presence of subalternized anthropologies would be enriching,

it is not so clear from the perspective of these latter anthropologies whether they would gain anything from simply being incorporated into the transnational field (or into any given national formation). Normalizing subaltern anthropologies in the name of what the discipline should be, or even worse, in order to make them legible to privileged establishments and colleagues (many of which would continue with business as usual), does not make much sense at all.

Although anthropology, in its various expressions, has among its foundational questions the understanding of difference, it seems that the discipline's institutionalization in transnational fields (and national formations) is unable to take seriously the differences within the discipline whenever these differences question the historical and political tendencies that have turned anthropology into a liberal profession held up by academics who seek only to keep themselves employed and work to feed their own careers.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This article is based on a presentation given by the author in a seminar entitled 'The Politics of Knowledge', which was held at Goldsmiths, University of London on 6–7 May 2010. I want to thank Gustavo Lins Ribeiro, Sanjay Seth, and especially Francisco Carballo, for organizing this thoughtful seminar.
- <sup>2</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1995, p xix.
- <sup>3</sup> Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira, 'Peripheral Anthropologies "versus" Central Anthropologies', *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 4(2)–5(1), 2000, pp 10–30.
- <sup>4</sup> Esteban Krotz, 'La producción antropológica en el Sur: características, perspectivas, interrogantes', *Alteridades* 3(6), 1993, pp 5–12, p 8.
- <sup>5</sup> George W Stocking, 'Afterword: A View from the Center', *Ethnos* 47(1), 1982, pp 173–186, p 173.
- <sup>6</sup> George W Stocking, 'Delimiting Anthropology: Historical Reflections on the Boundaries of a Boundless Discipline', *Social Research* 62(4), 1995, pp 933–966.
- <sup>7</sup> Esteban Krotz, 'Anthropologies of the South: Their Rise, Their Silencing, Their Characteristics', *Critique of Anthropology* 17(3), 1997, pp 237–251.
- <sup>8</sup> Gustavo Lins Ribeiro and Arturo Escobar (eds), *World Anthropologies: Disciplinary Transformations within Systems of Power*, New York: Berg, 2006.
- <sup>9</sup> Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, 'Discipline and Practice: "The Field" as Site, Method, and Location in Anthropology', in Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (eds), *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, pp 1–47, p 7.
- <sup>10</sup> James Clifford, 'Rearticulating Anthropology', in Daniel A Segal and Sylvia J Yanagisako (eds), *Unwrapping the Sacred Bundle: Reflections on the Disciplining of Anthropology*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005, pp 24–48, p 27.
- <sup>11</sup> Kant de Lima's analysis of the distinctions between the anthropological establishments in the US and Brazil addresses the articulations between the social and academic realms within the discipline. As the corporate model of universities and other academic institutions becomes generalized, the links between the economic interests of certain sectors become ever more evident. Roberto Kant de Lima, 'The Anthropology of the Academy: When We Are the Indians', *Knowledge and Society: The Anthropology of Science and Technology* 9, 1992, pp 191–222.
- <sup>12</sup> Michel Trouillot, 'Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness', in Richard Fox (ed), *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1991, pp 17–44, p 18.
- <sup>13</sup> For details about the size of different anthropological establishments see Gustavo Lins Ribeiro, 'World Anthropologies: Cosmopolitics, Power, and Theory in Anthropology', *Série Antropologia* 377, 2005, p 59.
- <sup>14</sup> This self-centredness also operates within French anthropology.

- <sup>15</sup> As Kant de Lima shows in his analysis of professional training in the US, many of the modes of argumentation, etiquettes and rules make sense only inasmuch as they are articulated with premises and social attitudes that are very specific to the United States.
- <sup>16</sup> Carlos Alberto Uribe, 'Mimesis y paideia antropológica en Colombia', *Antipoda* 1, 2005, pp 67–78.
- <sup>17</sup> Shinji Yamashita, Joseph Bosco and J S Eades (eds), *The Making of Anthropology in East and Southeast Asia*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2004, p 8.
- <sup>18</sup> For an analysis of the internal disputes within and critical positions of this model, see Segal and Yanagisako, *Unwrapping the Sacred Bundle*.
- <sup>19</sup> Yamashita *et al.*, *The Making of Anthropology in East and Southeast Asia*, p 7.
- <sup>20</sup> Fox, *Recapturing Anthropology*, p 9.
- <sup>21</sup> Don Brenneis, 'A Partial View of Contemporary Anthropology', *American Anthropologist* 106(3), 2004, pp 580–588, p 582.
- <sup>22</sup> See for example Takami Kuwayama, *Native Anthropology: The Japanese Challenge to Western Academic Hegemony*, Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2004; Shinji Yamashita, 'Reshaping Anthropology: A View from Japan', in Ribeiro and Escobar (eds), *World Anthropologies*.
- <sup>23</sup> Ribeiro and Escobar, *World Anthropologies*, p ix.