



# World Anthropologies

EDUARDO RESTREPO

Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Columbia

Around the turn of the twenty-first century, anthropologists in various countries began to establish a dialogue regarding what would later be known as world anthropologies. They shared a unease about the way that certain disciplinary practices made invisible diverse traditions, authors, and forms of doing anthropology worldwide. The most outstanding contribution of the world anthropologies conversation has been a collective conceptualization of the way in which visibilization and silencing mechanisms operate both in the transnational field of anthropology and within national anthropological establishments. Within this context, these anthropologists have given meaning to concepts such as hegemonic anthropologies, subalternized anthropologies, dissident anthropologies, the anthropological world system, cosmopolitan provincialism, and provincial cosmopolitanism.

The conceptualization of world anthropologies was particularly inspired by the arguments put forth by the Brazilian anthropologist Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira (1999–2000) and the Mexican anthropologist Esteban Krotz (1997) regarding the relations of power within and between world anthropologies. The distinction between metropolitan and peripheral anthropologies in the work of Cardoso de Oliveira (1999–2000), as well as his concepts of the disciplinary matrix and styles of anthropology and their articulation in diverse national formations, enabled a first approximation toward thinking about the difference between anthropological establishments in terms of their place in the worldwide anthropological establishment. Krotz, on his end, proposed the category of “anthropologies of the South,” which certainly calls attention to the forms in which the histories and trajectories of these anthropologies are silenced and made invisible. Anthropologies of the South appear, then, as “anthropologies without history” (in an interesting reformulation of Eric Wolf’s [1982] notion of “people without history”), which were marginalized by what could be considered the politics of ignorance.

Also inspiring for the world anthropologies conceptualization were two articles published in the journal *Ethnos* in 1982: an afterword, written by historian of anthropology George Stocking, and an introduction, written by Tomas Gerholm and Ulf Hannerz. Particularly relevant in Stocking’s article (1982) was his distinction between anthropologies oriented toward *nation building* and anthropologies oriented toward *empire building*, alongside his differentiation of peripheral anthropologies (the secondary metropolitan ones, such as Swedish or Polish; those of white settlements, as in Canada and Brazil; and those of ex-colonies, such as India and Sudan). Stocking provides a historicizing approach to how anthropologies have been configured according to models of alterity that are derived from colonial and imperial practices (both in colonial territories and within the state through internal colonialism) as well

*The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. Edited by Hilary Callan.

© 2018 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. Published 2018 by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.



as an invitation to conduct an ethnography of the multiple articulations of peripheral anthropology establishments depending on their particular interfaces of differences in national formations. The introduction by Gerholm and Hannerz (1982) suggests that a systematic approach to relations of inequality within metropolitan and peripheral anthropologies is needed; the authors also offer a series of arguments regarding power relations in the so-called international anthropology and the inscriptions of the national within anthropology.

To these seminal texts we must add the debates held around “indigenous anthropologies” (Fahim and Helmer 1980) and “native anthropologies” (Jones [1970] 1988; Narayan 1993), as well as the debate regarding a particularly critical moment in US anthropology expressed in the book *Reinventing Anthropology* (Hymes [1969] 1974). Other relevant inputs include the ethnography of anthropological assumptions in the United States, undertaken by Brazilian anthropologist Roberto Kant de Lima (1992), as well as the notion of “anthropologies with an accent” suggested by his colleague Teresa Caldeira (2000). Also worth mentioning is the article written by Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1991) about the “savage slot,” which argued that anthropology fits within a discursive formation and practice that regards alterity as a radical exteriority produced by (and constitutive of) the Western imagination. Finally, and also important for the vision of world anthropologies, is the work of the South African Archie Mafeje (2001), who, by undertaking a rereading of anthropology in postcolonial Africa, developed an original critique that he termed “postmodern anthropology,” which opened up the possibility of thinking of a “postethnological reason” that would require not only going beyond epistemology but also developing nondisciplinary forms of knowledge and representation.

From its inception, it was fairly clear that the set of problems that concerned world anthropologies referred to relations of power within and between different anthropologies that had developed in different countries and regions. Theoretically identifying what these relations consist of and how they operate has been one of the questions that has led to the exploration of the various categories and approaches that define the framing of world anthropologies.

Rather than assuming that “anthropology” exists in the singular, it is historically and ethnographically more productive to consider the existence of multiple anthropologies. This pluralization has as its most important implication the abandonment of the model of the assumed existence of an “authentic anthropology” (which is generally associated with the French, English, and US “traditions”). This model simultaneously implies that its variations should not be understood as dilettante copies that only partially (in a kind of not-yet) and in an unorthodox way attempt to present themselves as anthropology (located outside the “great traditions”). As such, challenging the model implies that the singularity of each one of the anthropological articulations from the various locations must be understood in its own terms and not as an aberration or variation of a predetermined pattern.

It is important to clarify that this singularity is not assumed to be a celebration of nativism or an essentialist epistemic particularism. The concept of world anthropologies is *not* a celebration of particularisms for the sake of promoting a kind of multiculturalism, affirmative action, or identity politics to better “anthropology.” On the contrary,



this pluralization is aimed at decentering the idea of one genealogy, or of a series of trajectories united in a single and happily coherent disciplinary project. This pluralization is not a simple recognition that there are differences between national, regional, and local communities that are consolidated in determined “styles” or “accents.” Difference between anthropologies is not a supplement, an accident, or a derivative of a primordial and transcendent identity. This difference is not an expression of isolation. Rather, it needs to be understood as the result of constant and multiple relations (dialogic and of power) at various scales.

World anthropologies also introduced an analytic displacement into the definitional strategies that aim to confer a normative and transcendent identity to anthropology, toward a historicized and ethnographic approach regarding what have been the actually existing anthropologies (Ribeiro 2014). Anthropology is, as Trouillot (1991) highlights, what anthropologists do. What is done in the name of anthropology and by those who are understood as anthropologists (both by their colleagues and by “society” as a whole) in concrete institutional contexts is what goes on to constitute anthropology.

Therefore, the concept of world anthropologies is premised on the abandonment of an essentialist reading of anthropology to draw attention to the concrete practices (what anthropologists really do and say) as well as the relations that enable (or block) these practices. This implies ceasing to define (normatively) what anthropology (or anthropologies) is, as well as abandoning the temptation to define an object, method, theoretical orientation, or content that establishes an identity for the discipline once and for all. Instead, it requires an understanding of the multiplicity of practices and relations that actually constitute the various locations of anthropological production (Ribeiro 2014).

This density and specificity of practices and relations in concrete locations should be taken into consideration to avoid endless and sterile disputes that aim to abstractly settle the commonalities and differences within and between anthropologies. This “de-essentialization” of anthropologies suggests a research agenda: the investigation of “genealogies” of different anthropologies that are not interpellated by a normative ideal type but that are centered on concrete practices and relations (and not only of those strictly defined as “academic”).

Rather than a homogeneous discipline that is practiced in the same way by all, with identical emphases, agendas, institutional frameworks, and methodological strategies across the world, the anthropological field is characterized by traditions of local, national, or regional anthropological communities that share certain characteristics, emphases, and specificities that, following Cardoso de Oliveira (1999–2000), 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 and US traditions) and regional ones (such as critical Latin American anthropology) but also within national anthropological formations (between “schools,” for example).

This heterogeneity means that a transnational anthropological field can only be conceived as a plurality. However, although being an anthropologist means different things in different places, moments, and collectivities, still anthropologists are interpellated as



such by others. This transnational field is also constituted by a series of criteria for recognition and translation between different traditions (which wrestle with mutual appropriations and disputes), in addition to a set of institutionalized relationships among and within the various national formations.

Finally, this field shares referents with regard to the history of the discipline; a constellation of works, authors, and problematizations that are recognized as “ours”; and, above all, predominant styles of intellectual work (such as the ethnographic perspective or the emphasis on cultural difference).

The various anthropological traditions within the transnational anthropological field are far from being equal in terms of visibility and audibility. Some traditions (and anthropologists) have much more presence than others in this transnational field. Since this transnational field began, in the middle of the twentieth century, these asymmetries in visibility and audibility have created differential conditions for conversability. Therefore, anthropological diversity is more the result of dialogical or power-mediated interactions at various scales than of any imputed isolation.

One of the most relevant conceptual achievements of world anthropologies has been its approach to the relations of power within and between different anthropological traditions (World Anthropologies Network Collective 2003). The first formulations of world anthropologies were proposed in terms of “dominant anthropologies” and “subalternized anthropologies.” Discussions among the members of the world anthropologies network led to a reclamation of the Gramscian category of hegemony in order to think about power relations within and between different world anthropologies, as well as their correlation in subalternized anthropologies. The advantage of the notion of hegemonic anthropologies over metropolitan anthropologies lies in the implied break with the tendency to assume an identity between an anthropological establishment and its anthropologies, as if the latter were homogeneous and as if there were no disagreements and/or relations of power at its interior.

In any metropolitan anthropological establishment (such as that of Britain, France, or the United States), there are hegemonic anthropologies in operation, but these exist alongside multiple subalternized anthropologies that are relegated to that position precisely because of the consolidation of the hegemonic anthropologies. In the same way, in countries such as Brazil, Colombia, or Mexico, the anthropological establishment consists of both hegemonic anthropologies and subalternized ones. Hence, there is no necessary correspondence between metropolitan anthropological establishments and hegemonic anthropologies, nor is there a relation between peripheral and subalternized anthropologies. The concept of “subalternized anthropologies” therefore does not overlap with “anthropologies of the South,” “peripheral anthropologies,” or “native or indigenous anthropologies.”

The advantage of the notion of hegemonic anthropologies over that of dominant anthropologies is that the former refers less to an imposition than to the configuration of terms in which disputes and consent take place, and, hence, there is less erasure of the difference between production and organization. The Gramscian terms hegemonies and subalternization are helpful to provide 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 given national formation, subaltern anthropologies would be those modalities of practicing anthropology that tend to be obliterated or ignored by other modalities that position and naturalize themselves as adequate and relevant ways of conceiving and practicing anthropology.

The establishment and naturalization of canons is one of the effects of the operation of hegemonic anthropologies (Restrepo and Escobar 2005). The question of hegemony is always contested, a permanent struggle for leadership, in a plurality and play of unstable balances. This is not a normative judgment but rather a description of a correlation of forces, a play of visibilities/silences, all of which are present in the notion of hegemony. Thinking in terms of dominant anthropologies suggests that some anthropologies have imposed themselves by coercion, thus subjecting other anthropologies by force. The limits of this vision made the notion of hegemonic and subalternized anthropologies preferable. These anthropologies are found to be closely related not only within single establishments but also, albeit in different ways, between different establishments on regional and global levels. Hence, the concept of the “world system of anthropology” (Kuwayama 2004) draws attention not just to the differences between anthropologies practiced in different countries and regions of the world but also to structural relations of power between them (Ribeiro and Escobar 2006).

The concept of the “world system of anthropology” accounts for structural power relations that operate between different traditions of anthropology: peripheral and central, or metropolitan. Additionally, this category exposes the geopolitics of knowledge that configures the field of anthropology on a global scale. One of the effects of this has been that some anthropological traditions and establishments from the periphery, which are subalternized or dissident, are seen as “anthropologies without history,” while the central or hegemonic traditions and establishments are naturalized as the “history of anthropology,” as paradigmatic incarnations of the discipline. The understanding of these “politics of ignorance” is aided by notions of “metropolitan provincialism” and “provincial cosmopolitanism” (Ribeiro 2014). Ribeiro uses the notion of “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 questioned. In contrast, anthropologists located in metropolitan establishments seldom have any knowledge of peripheral anthropologies (other than those of the country where their “objects” of research are located) and even less often do they use peripheral authors and literatures as interlocutors on par with their colleagues at home. In Gupta’s 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” (1997, 7). This ignorance is precisely what Ribeiro calls “metropolitan provincialism.” As the Colombian anthropologist Lisset Pérez argues, “we know much about official histories, but almost nothing about dissident stories” (2010, 407).

Given that possibilities for communication continue to mushroom and that, at the same time, anthropological establishments are becoming ever more provincial, it is imperative to take up this work. More than ever before, we must contribute toward the



visibilization and positioning of the heterogeneous practices and multiple knowledges of anthropologies and anthropologists across the world.

In sum, the world anthropologies framework advocates for a perspective that assumes the multiplicity of anthropologies through a decentralization, historicization, and pluralization of what is usually understood as a unique and monolithic anthropology. This does not imply an argument in favor of multiculturalism, identity politics, or the relativism found within anthropology, but rather a critique of the epistemic, institutional, and political conditions associated with concrete power relations that maintain certain privileges and naturalize canons.

SEE ALSO: Colombia, Anthropology in; Stocking, George W. (1928–2013); Austria, Anthropology in; Cardoso de Oliveira, Roberto (1928–2006); Norway, Anthropology in; Anthropology: Scope of the Discipline; Israel, Anthropology in; Anthropological Knowledge and Styles of Publication; Brazil, Anthropology in; Africa, sub-Saharan, Emergence of Anthropology in; Hymes, Dell (1927–2009); Chile, Anthropology in; Japan, Anthropology in; Australia, Anthropology in; Argentina, Anthropology in; Wolf, Eric (1923–99); United States, Anthropology in; Germany, Anthropology in; Denmark, Anthropology in; France, Anthropology in; South Africa, Anthropology in; Portugal, Anthropology in; Ethiopia, Anthropology in; Sweden, Anthropology in; Turkey, Anthropology in; Indonesia, Anthropology in; Sudan, Anthropology in; Mexico, Anthropology in; History and Anthropology; Netherlands, Anthropology in; Representation, Politics of; Mafeje, Archie (1936–2007); Spain, Anthropology in; India, Anthropology in; Siberia, Anthropology in; Russia, Anthropology in; United Kingdom, Anthropology in; Postsocialist Europe, Anthropology in

wbiea1378
wbiea1508
wbiea1524
wbiea1527
wbiea1553
wbiea1591
wbiea1603
wbiea1628
wbiea1636
wbiea1640
wbiea1707
wbiea1744
wbiea1754
wbiea1777
wbiea1827
wbiea1844
wbiea1850
wbiea1878
wbiea1893
wbiea1931
wbiea1943
wbiea1974
wbiea1985
wbiea1996
wbiea2020
wbiea2057
wbiea2101
wbiea2115
wbiea2137
wbiea2225
wbiea2231
wbiea2292
wbiea2345
wbiea2355
wbiea2359
wbiea2360
wbiea2368
wbiea2370

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Caldeira, Teresa. 2000. *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cardoso de Oliveira, Roberto. (1999–2000). "Peripheral Anthropologies 'versus' Central Anthropologies." *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 4 (2)–5 (1): 10–30.
- Fahim, Hussein, and Katherine Helmer. 1980. "Indigenous Anthropology in Non- Western Countries: A Further Elaboration." *Current Anthropology* 21 (5): 644–63.
- Gerholm, Tomas, and Ulf Hannerz. 1982. "Introduction: The Zapping of National Anthropologies." *Ethnos* 47 (1): 1–35.
- Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson. 1997. "Discipline and Practice: 'The Field' as Site, Method, and Location in Anthropology" In *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, edited by Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, 1–47. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hymes, Dell, ed. (1969) 1974. *Reinventing Anthropology*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Jones, Delmos. (1970) 1988. "Towards a Native Anthropology." In *Anthropology for the Nineties*, edited by Johnnetta Cole, 30–41. London: Free Press.
- Kant de Lima, Roberto. 1992. "The Anthropology of the Academy: When We Are the Indians." *Knowledge and Society: The Anthropology of Science and Technology* 9: 191–222.
- Krotz, Esteban. 1997. "Anthropologies of the South: Their Rise, Their Silencing, Their Characteristics." *Critique of Anthropology* 17 (3): 237–51.





- Kuwayama, Takami. 2004. *Native Anthropology: The Japanese Challenge to Western Academic Hegemony*. Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press.
- Mafeje, Archie. 2001. "Anthropology in Post-independence Africa: End of an Era and the Problem of Self-Redefinition." In *African Social Scientists' Reflections, Part 1*, 28–74. Nairobi: Heinrich Böll Foundation.
- Narayan, Kirin. 1993. "How Native is a 'Native' Anthropologist?" *American Anthropologist* 95 (3): 671–82.
- Pérez, Lissett. 2010. "Antropologías periféricas: Una mirada a la construcción de la antropología en Colombia [Peripheral Anthropologies: A Look at the Construction of Anthropology in Colombia]." *Boletín de Antropología* 24 (41): 399–430.
- Restrepo, Eduardo, and Arturo Escobar. 2005. "Other Anthropologies and Anthropology Otherwise: Steps to a World Anthropologies Framework." *Critique of Anthropology* 25 (2): 99–129.
- Ribeiro, Gustavo Lins. 2014. "World Anthropologies: Anthropological Cosmopolitanisms and Cosmopolitics." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43: 483–98.
- Ribeiro, Gustavo Lins, and Arturo Escobar, eds. 2006. *World Anthropologies: Disciplinary Transformations within Systems of Power*. New York: Berg.
- Stocking, George W. 1982. "Afterword: A View from the Center." *Ethnos* 47 (1): 173–86.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1991. "Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness." In *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, edited by Richard Fox, 18–44. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- Wolf, Eric. 1982. *Europe and People without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- World Anthropologies Network Collective. 2003. "A Conversation about a World Anthropologies Network." *Social Anthropology* 11 (2): 265–69.





---

**Please note that the abstract and keywords will not be included in the printed book, but are required for the online presentation of this book which will be published on Wiley's own online publishing platform.**

**If the abstract and keywords are not present below, please take this opportunity to add them now.**

**The abstract should be a short paragraph of between 50 and 150 words in length and there should be at least 3 keywords.**

---

### ABSTRACT

World anthropologies should be understood as a conceptualization centered on three main aspects. First, the conceptualization considers anthropologies in the plural rather than in the singular. Second, it focuses on anthropologists' concrete and situated practices rather than on normative and abstract definitions of anthropology. And third, it understands that differences between anthropologies are rooted in relations of power that operate at various scales (global, regional, national, local) and in practices that range from the predominance of certain languages and modes of argumentation to the configuration of particular subjectivities.

### KEYWORDS

Latin American anthropology; theory in anthropology; urban, national, and transnational anthropology; world anthropologies