



## **Report**

### **WCAA interim meeting: New Orleans 18 November 2010**

#### **1. Welcome**

The chair, Thomas Reuter, welcomed all delegates, especially those who were attending for the first time, specifically, Robert Akako, of the Pan-African Anthropological Association, and substitute delegates Jeff Sluca, representing New Zealand, and Bella Feldon-Bianco, representing the Brazilian Anthropological Association. All in all, sixteen delegates were attending.

#### **2. Reports from the Organizing Committee**

##### Membership outreach

Setha Low reported that four new applications for membership to WCAA were being processed, with two ready for a vote of admission. The new prospective members include the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore, Israel, Taiwan and Finland. The process for application has been streamlined and information for applicants is now available on the WCAA website. The group discussed the following questions, raised by Setha: For admission to membership, does the vote of all member associations need to be unanimous? So far, this has indeed been more or less the case. The reason why this has been possible is that the organizing committee has carefully vetted and considered applications prior to holding a vote of admission, to avoid incomplete, inappropriate or controversial applications that would likely be rejected, causing embarrassment to all parties involved. What exactly is WCAA's end in gaining new members? The WCAA aims to build a global community of world anthropologies and provide a forum for the discussion and active pursuit of shared interests and aspirations within that community. In order to create a global community, the membership should be as inclusive as possible and we should actively strive to welcome all national and international associations to participate.

A further question is how we should response to applications from countries with totalitarian or militaristic governments that actively interfere with or directly control the national anthropological association, or require anthropologists to provide information or advice (as part of compulsory military service or generally as a citizen) in a manner that is unethical because it facilitates violent intervention and oppression? The discussion did not come up with a fixed rule on this issue. Rather delegates agreed it is better to acknowledge the uniqueness of each case, and consider each case individually through the exercise of the democratic process of admission we have established. The procedure is: the Organising Committee (OC) appoints one member to manage admissions (currently Setha), screens application by way of group discussion, and takes to the members all applications that are appropriate. If the OC cannot agree, the case should

be referred to the members to debate and vote upon. What if there are multiple general anthropology associations in a country? Our policy has been to admit a second association if it is equally or similarly significant, or reflects a separate nationality within a multiethnic nation state.

### Political engagement

Michal Bukowski and Thomas Reuter discussed the recent case of an anthropologist, Marianne Maeckelbergh, being harassed by police in Belgium: she was arrested for filming a public demonstration in Brussels, chained to a radiator, and sexually taunted. WCAA wrote a letter condemning the Belgium police for their behavior, a letter that apparently had a significant effect. Thomas read out a letter from Dr Maeckelbergh, thanking WCAA for its help. Belgium doesn't have an anthropological association, so in this case WCAA acted directly in its letter of protest, rather than working through a national association.

Leslie Aiello asked what the procedures are for WCAA's verifying and confirming rights violations such as this. Thomas indicated that there are no formal procedures—in this case, WCAA wrote directly to Dr Maeckelbergh to obtain her version of events, as well as researching all publicly available sources. In a broader sense, the question is, how should WCAA proceed? What should WCAA do in terms of activism? David Shankland, of the RAI (UK) said that it may be better for WCAA to remain focused on academic issues rather than on broader political activism. Virginia Dominguez spoke of how the most difficult AAA Committee was that on human rights, because of the difficulty of knowing where to draw the line in terms of advocacy, which involves not just anthropology, but rather atrocities around the world. "We're not Amnesty International!" she said. However, if one of our member associations runs into problems, then WCAA should assist. Thomas suggested that political inaction is equally controversial, and that it is a matter of picking battles that are relevant to anthropologists themselves, or where anthropologists have an obligation to act as a result of having privileged knowledge. There are precedents, such as a recent Peruvian massacre of indigenous people, of which a WCAA member had exclusive first-hand knowledge. Leslie Aiello said that WCAA needs a process for dealing with such issues. Michel and Thomas, will work together to consider a more formal procedure, to be presented at the next WCAA meeting. In the meantime, we will adhere to the somewhat laborious but safe procedure of discussing and establishing consensus on a case-by-case basis.

Karl-Heinz Kohl asked WCAA to write a short letter concerning the *Internationales Forschungszentrum fuer Kulturwissenschaften*, Vienna, which has hosted many prominent anthropologists and is now threatened with closure by the government. Thomas said that, as an academic matter, this lies well within our sphere of concerns, and a letter shall be sent. Members spoke of the recent protest over OECD's designation of anthropology as a branch of sociology, and Shalini Randeria reported difficulties in setting up a meeting with OECD representatives, but efforts are ongoing. Virginia said that some plan is needed for what WCAA should take on, even in the academic domain. Thomas said that while helping individual departments threatened with closure might go beyond WCAA's ken, in cases where an entire institute is under threat the WCAA can and should help by lending a sense of international recognition and visibility.

### Website

The WCAA website is now hosted by NomadIT, and is about to enter phase two of its development plan. Thomas stated that we need to make serious decisions about the use of the website. To what extent do we want to provide opportunities for networking between anthropologists of different countries? To what extent should we make space available for the different member associations? Setha Low asked about the possibility of creating a graduate student network among and between the different member association, a “Craig’s list for graduate students.” Different associations have graduate student associations that might begin doing this. This could involve student newsletters and other student initiatives.

Gustavo said that each association needs to update its on-line information regularly. Leslie said that it would be a good idea if messages were periodically sent from WCAA to different member associations reminding them to update. Rohan is working to establish a mailing list for this purpose.

### Forthcoming meetings

Mugsy Spiegel is in charge of organizing meetings but was not in attendance. Thomas noted that India and Chile have been the candidates for the next WCAA biannual meeting. However, the overall cost of flying delegates to Chile is very high; India would be cheaper because of where the majority of delegates are located. There is also the matter of language: the Indian meeting would be in English, unlike the Chilean meeting where most delegates would be unable to present or understand papers in Spanish.

This began a long discussion about language, with some delegates asking whether WCAA needs to be so anglophone, and others maintaining that if the meeting’s panels can’t be understood by most members, then it may not seem worth attending. All acknowledged that language issues are a challenge for all genuinely global communities, no matter how inclusive and equitable they may strive to be. This is difficult to resolve. Meanwhile, there are financial considerations that make New Delhi the more feasible option. There was also discussion as to when the meeting should take place, with March 2012 being discussed as most appropriate.

Meanwhile, preparations for the intermediary meeting in Perth in 2011 are well advanced. Leslie and Mugsy have prepared a panel on ethics, Michal and Thomas have prepared a panel on marginal anthropologies. Delegates can also contribute to other sessions. Instructions will be emailed shortly.

Thomas said that there is the opportunity to hold an informal gathering or a more formal interim meeting of WCAA delegates at any local annual conference providing enough WCAA delegates are attending. He encouraged all national organizations to organize such gatherings at their conferences by sending delegates an invitation. If there is a significant group, the OC will treat it as an interim meeting and provide a formal agenda, otherwise it can be an informal social event aimed at maintaining our sense of community.

### Finances

As was decided in Maynooth, a treasurer is needed for WCAA who for legal reasons must be a citizen of the country where our accounts are held, currently Australia. Greg

Acciaoli has been appointed the new treasurer of WCAA, a move acclaimed by delegates, since he has extensive WCAA experience. His appointment was confirmed.

### **3. Task Forces' Reports**

#### Ethics

Chair of the ethics task force, Leslie Aiello, stated that her staff had conducted a survey of the websites of different member associations, gathering their ethics statements. Once this task is completed, the ethics statements will be collated and posted on the WCAA website. Member associations are not required to have a statement of ethics, and only about one-third of associations do have statements on their websites. Some, like the EASA, specifically refuse to have one, Michal Buchowski indicated, because each national association in Europe already has one, and also because the codification of ethics may be unhelpful. Leslie indicated that simply as a reference, having these different statements would be very valuable for those who do wish to develop an ethics code. These statements will be made available in their own languages, and wherever possible, in English translation.

#### Global Issues

Chair of this task force Virginia Dominguez said that as head of AAA, she was severely pressed for time, and so had asked Chandana Mathur, of Ireland, to serve as co-chair. She had agreed. Carlos Caroso of Brazil met with the Ford Foundation, which seems quite interested in funding one of the global initiatives we had considered in Maynooth, namely the establishment of an "Anthropology Without Borders." The first necessity is a clear mission statement, which the task force is working on. Several versions are now being discussed. What needs to be decided upon first of all, is the scale of this endeavor.

#### Publishing

Chair of the task force Gordon Mathews said that a link had already been set up on the WCAA website, below "member associations", giving links to the websites of the journals published by these associations. Thus far, only a limited number of associations have responded, but getting more information should not be difficult, since these journals already have an on-line presence. Shortly, the portal will be refined to indicate the language of the journal, and also, how much material is available. Some links, such as those of Japan and Brazil, provide access to numerous articles that have been published, while others provide only titles and perhaps abstracts. Another step will be to obtain the websites not just of journals of the different associations that are members of WCAA, but all journals (perhaps listed under a separate, broader category than that of WCAA members). A portal can then be opened that could contain information about virtually every anthropological journal in the world. Once this has been begun, the next step will be to write to each journal—particularly those journals whose content is not available--and obtain a sample article to put online. The ongoing task will be to obtain enough articles from different journals to create a vibrant website of global anthropological publishing. That is the ultimate endeavor of the task force, but it is not yet clear how much this can be achieved. In particular, the task force is considering the option of a WCAA journal of English republications (*déjà-lu*) of significant papers originally published in another language.