# Proposal for an EASA network on the Anthropology of International Governance

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International institutions have become central to the neo-liberal restructuring of governance both within and beyond the nation-state. Civil society organisations and representatives of indigenous communities go beyond the boundaries of the nation-states to negotiate at the international, national and local levels between the state and international institutions to draw attention to global problems. Anthropologists have begun to examine how various and often contradictory norms are produced and contested at the global scale through complex processes of formal and informal negotiation. The international is enmeshed with local processes, and although it may seek to produce a sense of transcendence, it is always concretely located. Practices of separation and integration are central to this process, as international actors posit themselves as working on a different scale from the local, but also claim a level of expertise about the situation "on the ground".

This network brings together anthropologist who study features of international governance, that all international institutions seem to have in common. Their mechanisms of consultation and control framed in terms of partnership, transparency and accountability create new games of power in the field of ethical politics redefining political conflicts in terms of moral and juridical standards. Tales of 'harmony' reign in the prevalent discourses but they do not necessarily solve the underlying conflicts in reality as they cover up differentials of power, resources and economic interests. International institutions produce reified discourses, global norms and standards that emphasize consensus while creating ambivalence of meaning. Anthropologists analyzing international governance have come to regard its institutions not as confined totalities but as *dispositifs*. that draw in constantly new actors involving them as experts, interlocutors and opinion givers engaging them with forms of calculation, technical reasoning, human "capacity building", and with non-human objects and devices.

Anthropologists proposed to read backwards the documents produced by these institutions, describing them as assemblages of discourses and practices, following their trajectories and histories. Coherent policy narratives in the institutions studied are often produced without a master plan from existing repertoire created in preceding sessions and meetings by a large variety of actors from governments, international administrations, NGOs and corporations. Drafts are tamed until they become acceptable and polite, cleansed from their conflictive elements and rendered "technical". By analysing not only the social life of documents in the headquarters of international institutions but also how they are used in projects on the ground, anthropologists show how seemingly technical issues get re-politicized in the life of the projects. The researchers coming together in this network want to discuss the methodological and conceptual pathways for understanding the mobilizing and normative efforts of international institutions.

The network had its first meeting in Paris in March 2008. The twenty researchers who came

together for this event discussed methodological challenges posed by the study of international institutions: the role of the anthropologist in the institution, how to study circuits of power, the social life of documents and the words institutions use and create. A follow-up workshop was organised for the World Conference of Social Anthropology in Künming which could unfortunately not take place. Researchers who are part of the network will come together again at the AAA meeting in December 2009 in Philadelphia, and a larger conference is planned in Paris in the autumn of 2010. The coordinators organised an exchange of publications of the researchers participating in the network and are currently setting up a small database with short CVs and a lists of publications for each of the 31 members that will be circulated.

The members want to extend the network beyond the boundaries of Europe and involve colleagues not only from the US, Australia and Canada, but also from Asia, Africa and Latin America. It is thus meant to become an EASA network with a global membership.

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