Many different archaeologies in the same world

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A couple of days after the WAC-5 announcement poster was fixed on the wall of the School of Archaeology of my university, it was carefully overwritten with a marker pen: several items were listed (including visa fee, tickets - first to the nearest US embassy for visa application and then to Washington, registration fees, accommodation), with their corresponding cost in US dollars. The final addition was converted in the total number of monthly salaries needed to attend the Washington conference of the World Archaeological Congress. This graphic statement put forward one of the main reasons for exclusion from WAC-5. A certain number of fellowships were offered to scholars from disadvantaged countries, but it seems to be that many people felt that the cost was too huge to be worth even applying for a partial fellowship.

About one month before the conference, a boycott was proposed by a couple of colleagues as part of the many root-based actions against US military intervention in Iraq. While the boycott was finally decided against, mainly on the basis of differentiating between US/UK governmental policy and WAC-5 organisers, it was clear that nobody was comfortable with the idea of the Washington venue. Jointly, budgetary and political reasons meant that WAC-5, as seen from South America, took place in a rarefied atmosphere. But not only WAC-5 but WAC organisation has to be discussed in relationship to world scale imbalances. Lack of simultaneous translation can be pointed out as one of the historical reasons of little participation in WAC from non-English language areas of the world.

In my opinion, WAC has made important and decisive contributions to contemporary archaeology, and has produced an increase in the participation of archaeologists from badly integrated regions of the world, and could be greatly beneficial both for those regions as for the rest of the world. If WAC is to overcome the limitations imposed by international economical and political imbalances - and not to be another so-called world academic organisation simply mapping out crude international power relations - several actions concerning horizontal participation have to be adopted. The World Archaeological Congress has undergone several polemic stances along its history. As an organisation that declares to be truly oriented to a world scale, and to be involved in the real problems of practising archaeology in the world, it should actively work towards increased participation of those from disadvantaged areas of the world. At the same time, WAC should adopt principles and actions regarding the new international scene of global power and increasing imbalance. WAC-5 highlighted several of these issues (many of which were included in the academic schedule), and organisers and participants should be congratulated for this. WAC retains its potential to increase its contribution to the many different archaeologies in the same world.

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